

# Evaluating the Feasibility of Implementing the Revised Curriculum of 2013 in Secondary Schools of Central Province, Zambia

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**Abstract:** *This study evaluated the feasibility of implementing the revised curriculum of 2013 in selected secondary schools in Zambia's Central province. The study sought to establish how the implementation process was unfolding amidst feasibility challenges faced by the schools. The study mainly used qualitative approaches and the study sample was drawn from Mumbwa district comprising 7 deputy head teachers, 15 heads of departments, 8 heads of sections and 25 subject teachers. Questionnaires were administered to teachers and interviews were held with administrators. Both primary and secondary data was collected. The study revealed that the implementation of the revised 2013 curriculum was poorly conducted as most educators' perception and conversancy on the policy was below expectation. Teachers exhibited readiness to take on the task but were disadvantaged by lack of orientation or retraining. The study recommends that in order to improve the implementation process, funding to the education sector must be improved. There should be compulsory orientation on the revised curriculum and retraining of teachers, mandatory inclusion of methodologies that suit competence-based education in the teacher education colleges and universities and availing of all educational policies and plans for curriculum to all stakeholders.*

**Keywords:** Competence Based Curriculum; Revised Curriculum; Policy Evaluation; Feasibility

## 1. Background

Studies on Zambia's educational systems have revealed that the educational system has not fully produced the desired outcomes. Recommendations were brought forward to change from the content based curriculum. The Zambian education system has been grounded on, to a competence-based curriculum (CBC) also known as outcome-based education (OBE). MOE (2014) states that the curriculum which has been in the school system has been what founding fathers had put in place after the country's attainment of independence. Due to passage of time and changes in the social, economic, political and technological life of the nation, the school curriculum became, in many ways archaic and required serious attention. The content-based curriculum was therefore, seen as orienting learners toward white-collar jobs which have however become very scarce in Zambia. This prompted most African countries Zambia inclusive to make attempts to change from a content-based curriculum to a competence-based curriculum in order to cope with environmental realities (Taasisi ya Elimu, 2013). Therefore, in the years preceding 2013, the government revised and adopted The Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (ZECF) 2013. The rationale for this change was to make the curriculum more effective and responsive to societal needs by providing relevant knowledge, skills and real-life competencies for the learners (Kakupa et al., 2017).

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Ever since the framework was launched in 2013, there has been no provision for official information about its progress that is, considering the feasibility needs that influence its implementation process because as indicated in the framework, it could only be reviewed after ten

years. Whether the curriculum is yielding desired results or not, may not be known until a decade later. Therefore, this study sought to have a current understanding of the revised curriculum's performance with regard to stakeholder's perceptions, availability of feasibility needs and the prospects of its successful implementation.

## 3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the feasibility of implementing the revised curriculum of 2013 in secondary schools of Mumbwa district.

## 4. Research Questions

- 1) What are the perceptions of school administrators and teachers on feasibility needs in relation to successful implementation of the 2013 revised curriculum?
- 2) To what extent are the feasibility needs available in the selected schools.

## 5. Significance of the Study

The findings may provide an insight on how the revised curriculum is performing in secondary schools in a peri-urban setup as Mumbwa district. The findings may be of great help to teachers, administrators, curriculum developers and other stakeholders involved in the curriculum development process and by applying mitigation measures as a result of issues raised in the study. Additionally, the knowledge acquired may help the funders and interested parties to determine whether it is worthwhile to continue to spend on this curriculum implementation or not.

## 6. Review of Literature

### Policy Evaluation

Policy evaluation is the last part of the policy analysis process. Brownson (2009) propagates that policy evaluation applies evaluation principles and methods to examine the content, implementation or impact of a policy. Evaluation is the activity through which we develop an understanding of the merit, worth, and utility of a policy. He further states that policy evaluation, like all evaluations, can serve important purposes along the entire chain of the policy process, including documenting policy development; documenting and informing implementation; assessing support and compliance with existing policies; demonstrating impacts and value of a policy; informing an evidence base; informing future policies; providing accountability for resources invested. While all evaluations encounter challenges, some are particularly relevant to policy evaluation (Brownson, 2009).

### Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) or Outcome-Based Curriculum (OBE)

Competence-based curriculum (CBC) or Outcome-based education (OBE) is an educational theory that bases each part of an educational system around goals (outcomes). By the end of the educational experience, each student should have achieved the goal. There is no single specified style of teaching or assessment in OBE; instead, classes, opportunities and assessments should all help students achieve the specified outcomes (William, 1994). Competencies are skills essential to begin practicing in life. They combine appropriate supporting knowledge and attitudes and are performed reliably in a natural setting without assistance Chamber (1993). The United States Department of Education (2018) asserts that competence-based strategies provide flexibility in the way that credit can be earned or awarded and provide students with personalized learning opportunities. This type of learning leads to better student engagement because the content is relevant to each student and tailored to their unique needs. It also leads to better student outcomes because the pace of learning is customized to each student. Mosha (2012) states that a curriculum that is competence-based contains the specific outcome of statements that show the competencies to be attained. In other words, it exposes the learner to relate theoretical understanding with practical knowledge. Expected behaviors or tasks, conditions for their performance, and acceptable standards are shared with students.

USDE (2018) further states that by enabling students to master skills at their own pace, competence based learning systems help to save both time and money. Depending on the strategy pursued, competence-based systems also create multiple pathways to graduation, make better use of technology, support new staffing patterns that utilize teacher skills and interests differently, take advantage of learning opportunities outside of school hours and walls,

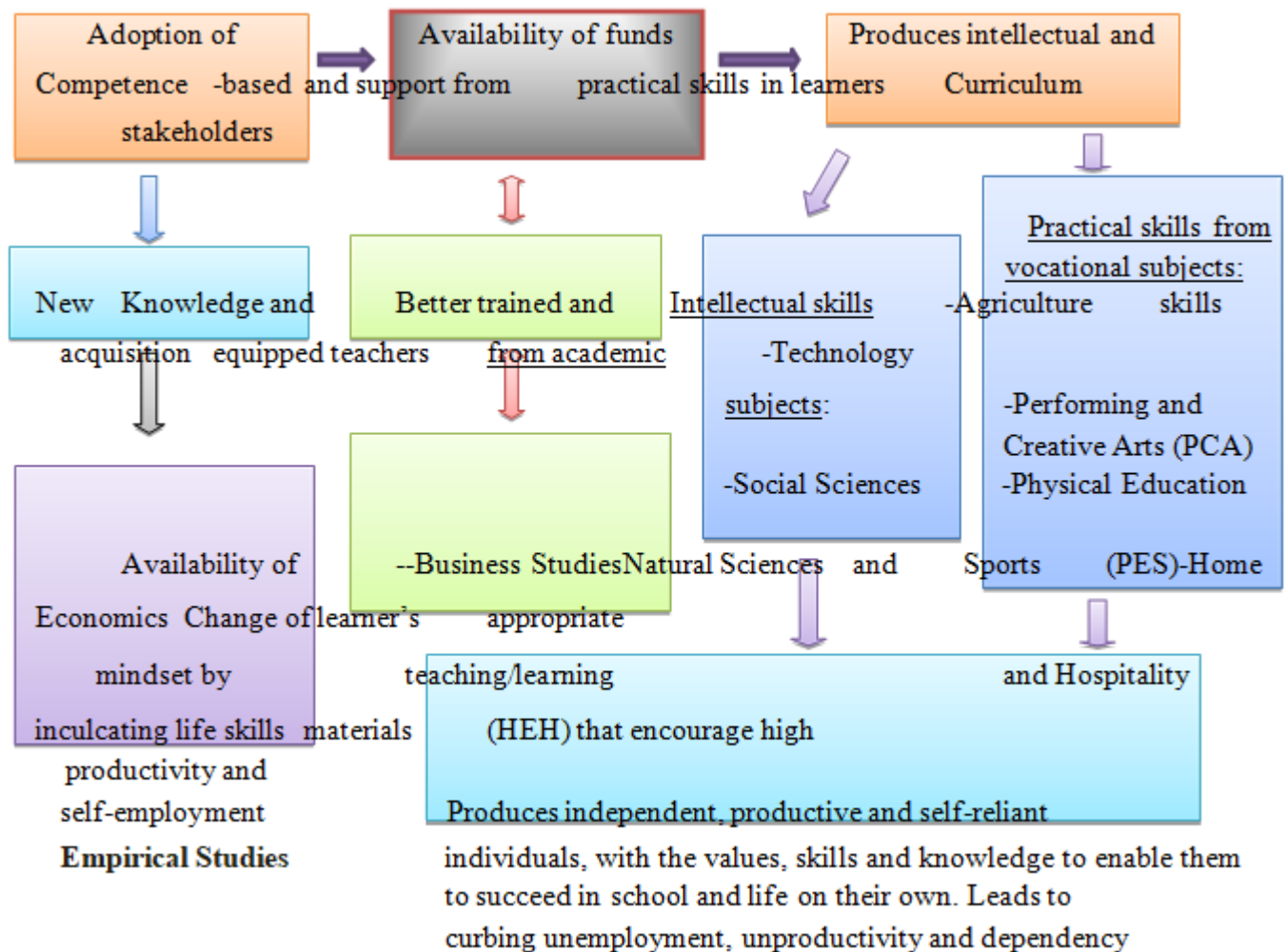
and help identify opportunities to target interventions to meet the specific learning needs of students. Each of these presents an opportunity to achieve greater efficiency and increase productivity. The purpose of CBC is to promote learners to grasp and achieve a presetting ability; each individual learner's behavior in the learning process is of concern. Consequently, a competence-based curriculum capitalizes on competence based learning which focuses on understanding the concepts, skills and attitudes which in turn calls for changes in teaching, learning and assessment approaches (Posner, 2004). CBC also requires teachers to incorporate new teaching approaches that encourage learner to discover, question and explore what is being taught to them. Chambers (1993) asserts that rote and stereotypical single rooted procedures do not demonstrate competence. Students must show understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject.

## 7. Theoretical Framework

**Systems Theory:** This theory tries to explain how public policies are developed and implemented. The theory states that public policy (educational policy included) is the response of the political system to demands that arise from its environment. The political system often referred to as the state government that makes authoritative allocations of values, operates in an environment comprised of other systems such as the social system, economical system, and the biological system (Anderson, 2003). According to this theory, public policy is made when there is an input from the outside environment, which is the people that are governed, into the political system. The community is a stake holder whose demands are adhered to. Therefore, what could be said as the demand in this scenario is the need to make the curriculum more effective and responsive to societal needs by providing relevant knowledge, skills and real-life competencies for the learners and to produce appropriate attitudes and applicable knowledge which could influence economic development. This theory further states that when such demands are made, the political system responds by taking appropriate action called the outputs. These could be policies, laws, rules, financial and judicial decisions. In this case, this theory is applicable in that as the society (environment) demands the solutions to bad skills and attitudes, it puts across the inputs. The political system (the government) responds by putting across the outputs, that is, competence-based curriculum.

## 8. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was drawn from common practices of policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation as propounded by Dunn (1994). The various influences and conditions are illustrated, with input from the researcher, in the following diagram: Figure 1.1.



Source: Author 2020

Chambers (1993) found that content-based approaches were incomplete for curriculum designs. He recommended a competence-based curriculum and the need to search for a national curriculum that would suit the local needs. Kakupa et. al. (2017) argued that implementation of the competence-based curriculum may not work because of lack of proper resources. He recommended a combination of content and competence-based curriculum. Nambela (2016) found that teachers did not possess the knowledge and skills needed to successfully implement the revised curriculum of 2013 in Kitwe district secondary schools. She recommended retraining of teachers and improved funding to the educational sector. Lauglo et. Al. (2012) found that Botswana's successful implementation of the CBC was attributed to heavy investment in education through provision of teaching and learning materials. MoGE (2016) Educational Statistical Bulletin states that Zambia is not ready for the vocalization. It further states that lack of facilities would negatively affect the education system.

Mulenga and Kabombwe (2016) revealed that most lecturers in teacher education colleges and universities had scanty knowledge of what was taught in primary and secondary schools. They found that teachers were not trained to utilize competence-based approaches. They recommended that teachers and lecturers be retrained to handle competence-based approaches. Cunningham J. et

al (2016) provides some insight into the design process of a competence-based program by suggesting that developing a competence-based program requires the participation of industry professionals and employers.

## 9. Methodology

The most appropriate research design was a survey as there was more than one institution involved. The study used a mixed method approach which involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. The population comprised a selected number of teachers, learners, and head teachers in the seven selected secondary schools in Mumbwa district, Central province. The total sample size was 55 respondents. Purposive sampling was used, and selection was based on respondents having worked, taught and learned under the 2013 revised curriculum. The researcher administered semi-structured questionnaires to teachers, conducted interviews with the head teachers and held focus group discussions with the learners. Quantitative data was expressed using Microsoft excel while qualitative data was analyzed using the thematic approach by identifying and linking the major themes.

## 10. Presentations of Findings

Feasibility in this regard was attributed to local needs assessment, human resource, teaching and learning materials, finances and environment. The questions were, are there skilled and trained teachers to take up the task? Was a local need-assessments conducted? Is the environment conducive for teaching and learning to take place? Is funding adequate and steady and are teaching and learning aids available and provided promptly? Adequate preparation considering resources required for implementation is one of the most important steps to take before undertaking major reforms such as curriculum change. While the policy may be working well in other countries, there is no reason to believe it could work the same way in Zambia because there are many differences countries have in terms of economic circumstances (Kakupa et al., 2017). The feasibility of a successful implementation of this revised curriculum depends on skilled human resource, local need assessments, how conducive the environment is, subject content relevance, teacher-pupil ratio, steady funding and provision of teaching and learning aids. Below are the findings of this study:

**Funding:** Finances are obviously the ultimate solution to most of the challenges and issues raised in the findings to do with the effective implementation of the revised curriculum. Results show that all administrators unanimously stated that funding to schools was very poor, leading schools to start venturing into various activities such as poultry, gardening, running stalls etc., just to raise some extra income. This finding is consistent with the argument advanced by Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019) that funding to the education sector has been reducing since 2015. Administrators also complained of the recently announced reduced user fees, to K200 for day schools and K1200 for boarding schools' country wide, stating that the reduction adversely affected the running of schools. In mitigation, in April 2019 the Minister of Education urged all schools to embark on compulsory production unit in agriculture as a way of fundraising. The Minister stated that some government schools did not wholly depend on government funding but did embark on various ventures to sustain their school activities citing an example of Kaoma Secondary School. The minister in his address added that this dependency on government funding made some head teachers ignore self-reliance measures and preferred to depend on collection of schools fees which they kept hiking indiscriminately. However, the participants in the study stated that this affected the teaching and learning negatively.

**Training:** Retraining or orientation of teachers means exposing the implementers (teachers) to ideal and modern

methods of administering lessons using competence-based approaches. When asked whether they had received in-service training or orientation relating to the smooth implementation of the curriculum, 11 teachers, representing (22%) agreed while the majority 37 representing (78%) denied having been trained or oriented.

**Staffing:** The administrators stressed that teacher staffing was fair but the availability of skilled teachers in the vocational subjects was still a challenge. Some departments such as the languages and social science departments in some schools were overstaffed while departments such as mathematics, natural sciences and those with vocational bias were understaffed.

**Local Needs Assessment:** Needs-assessment is a very important activity in any policy implementation process in that it gives an insight on what prerequisites ought to be in place for an effective policy implementation (Kakupa et al., 2017). Results show two (2) administrators assented that local needs assessments were done at their school while 5 respondents denied experiencing such an activity.

*"The bottom line is that some of the challenges raised could have been avoided if certain prerequisites were put in place before hand in this school, "* said a respondent.

It is therefore imperative that needs assessments were conducted with experts in all schools before embarking on this very important exercise.

**Subject Content Relevance:** According to the informant from the district office, new syllabi and books that were in line with the revised curriculum were introduced to all schools. Ironically, the contents did not meet their expectations hence most subject contents were queried by the teachers (implementers). Results show that most of the teachers (58%) agreed that there was a problem in the subject contents. What this meant was that serious subject content review was not done or was done hastily, without paying enough attention to details. Results further revealed that the worst hit department with irrelevant content was the social science department, where three subjects namely; geography, history and civics were combined to form one subject called social studies, followed by natural sciences and expressive arts departments. Therefore, teachers in these departments did categorically state that some books that were procured for the purposes of the revised curriculum had errors and misleading information. Most teachers recommended that the said books be immediately withdrawn from all schools as they could be detrimental to the smooth implementation of the revised curriculum of 2013.

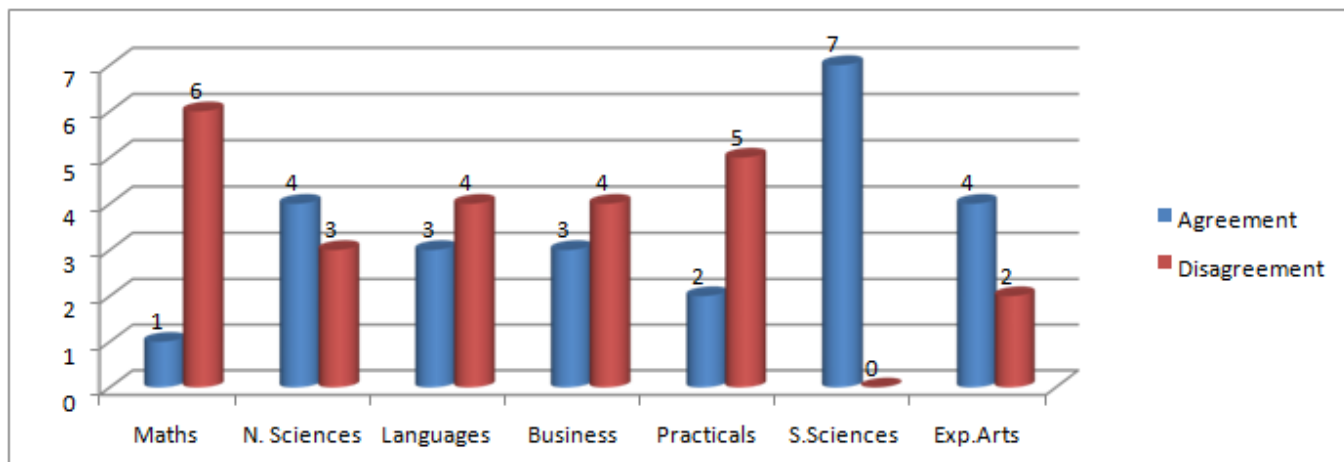


Figure 4.4: Tabulation of department vs. views on subject content relevance.

Figure 4.4 above has revealed that all the teachers in the social sciences department did agree that there were irrelevant topics in their subjects. When asked to comment further, some respondents condemned the combination of geography, history and civics at junior secondary school level as being misplaced. However, the majority of mathematics teachers indicated that their subject content was fine, followed by practical-subjects department, business and language departments. On the other hand, the majority of natural sciences and expressive arts teachers felt that there were irrelevant elements in their subject contents as shown above.

**Teacher-Pupils Ratio:** On the pupil-teacher ratio, 6 teachers (12%) described the pupil-teacher ratio as poor while 19 respondents (40%), described it as fair. 18 representing (38%) and 5 respondents, representing (10%) described the pupil-teacher ratio as good and very good respectively. This shows that a lot needed to be done to improve the ratios. Competence-based teaching requires proper attention for each learner in order to harness the intrinsic abilities from them. Lam (2011) asserts that the effort to identify “learner” as an important agent in the learning process, their interest and characteristics are taken into consideration, and learning should build on

prior knowledge so learners understand how to construct new knowledge from authentic experience, to support active participation and engaged learning. This is obviously not workable if the pupil-teacher ratio is huge.

**Availability of Teaching and Learning Materials:** 84% of the teachers described the availability of teaching and learning materials as fair to poor while only 16 % stated that availability was good and excellent. Results also show that all the schools had received teaching and learning materials in the last four years but the said materials were not very helpful, because they have a lot of errors and misleading information. The departments that mostly complained of poor availability of teaching and learning materials were Social Sciences, Business and Mathematics while the rest stated that they had adequate materials. Furthermore, deputy head teachers also asserted that teaching and learning materials were not so adequate in their schools. The study however showed that some teachers were innovative enough to come up with their own ways of creating teaching and learning aids especially through the use of the internet and other electronic gadgets. This problem was also found by Nambela (2016) in her study in Kitwe.

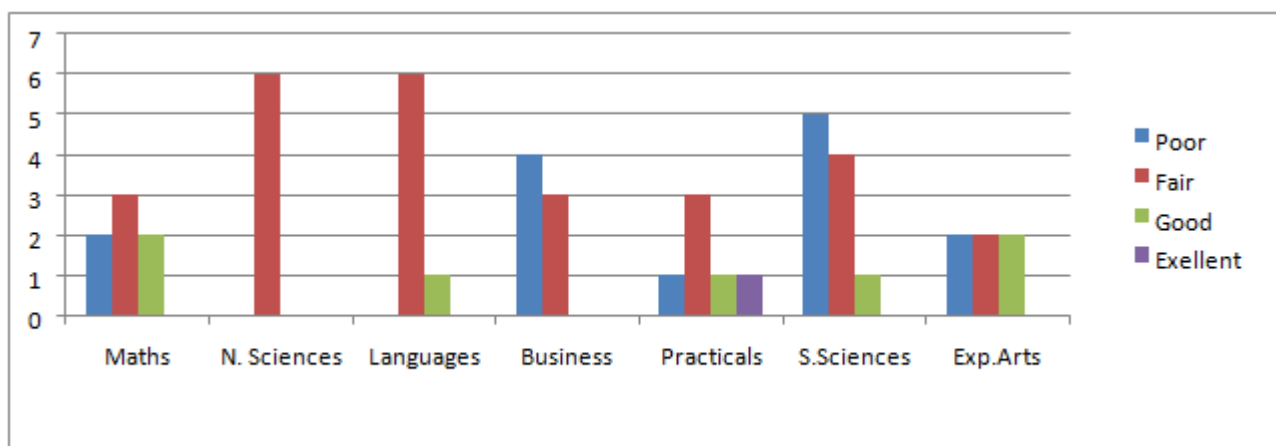


Figure 4.7: Tabulation of Department vs Teachers' Description of material availability

Source: Author 2020

**The Physical Environment:** The environment also influences how effective an educational policy can be

implemented. A particular respondent stressed that there was not enough room to accommodate some subjects

especially in the vocational pathway. For example, school D offers a pathway that includes music in the expressive arts department. Given the nature of the subject, there are cases when the music played during the lessons would have to be loud and end up disturbing the whole school. The ideal situation is that the school should have a soundproof room specifically meant for the subject. Due to lack of space or room, this was not the case in this particular school. Therefore, teaching the subject did prove to be very difficult both for the teacher and the learners. Another respondent stated that their school adopted a pathway that includes agriculture sciences, but the biggest challenge was space and water sources. If the environment was well assessed, schools would have adopted pathways that would be convenient with their physical environment.

Findings further showed that administrators indicated that teacher staffing was fair but having skilled teachers in the vocational subjects was still a challenge, because these subjects were introduced without adequate teachers being trained. It was further observed that some teachers were underutilized due to the influence of career pathways. For needs-assessment, two (2) administrators indicated that there was such an activity while 5 denied receiving any officers doing feasibility studies at their institutions. Administrators also admitted that government funding to their institutions was poor which made the acquisition of teaching and learning materials very difficult. Generally, as revealed by the findings of this study, the feasibility of implementing this policy was generally poor because many pre-requisites of curriculum development and implementation were not considered.

## 11. Conclusion

A competence-based curriculum was introduced in Zambian schools in 2013 through the revision of the school curriculum. This was done in order to help learners develop competencies that would help change their mindset from seekers of white-collar jobs after school, to self-reliant and productive citizens. Learners are not just expected to acquire academic knowledge, but also skills, values and attitudes that would prepare them for the labor market. Literature has shown that Zambia is not the first country in the world to attempt the competence-based education approach, several other countries have switched to this approach and the curriculum implementation seemed to have been successfully done. This study was carried out to evaluate the implementation of the revised curriculum.

The findings of this study have revealed that the implementation of the Revised Curriculum was not being done adequately due to factors like lack of a needs assessment and situation analysis before embarking on the revision of the curriculum. Furthermore, the implementation is being hampered by lack of adequate funding to the schools, inadequate teachers, inadequate teaching and learning materials and above all lack of orientation and sensitization for teachers of the revised curriculum.

## 12. Recommendations

The MOE should improve the process of implementation of the competence-based curriculum by:

- 1) Increasing funding to schools so that adequate teaching and learning materials can be purchased.
- 2) It should allow schools to choose their career pathways from academic and vocational respectively to avoid wastage of teaching and learning materials and closing down some departments.
- 3) The MOE should ensure that policy makers who work with Curriculum Development Center consult teachers in the initial policy formulation process as a way of creating a sense of ownership among teachers because they are the implementers of the curriculum.
- 4) The MOE should do a major curriculum review not just a revision in order to come up with a curriculum that will be relevant to the needs of society.
- 5) More teachers should be trained in the newly introduced subjects such as computer studies, technology and other vocational subjects.
- 6) The MOE should always ensure they do both a needs assessment and situational analysis before embarking on a curriculum review or reform.

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