

Lesotho integrated curriculum: Using Professional Learning Communities to monitor the challenges in the implementation

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Abstract: Globally, various studies highlight challenges in the implementation of most new curricula. Lesotho introduced the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum as a response to the examination-oriented curriculum that had been in place for some time. This study aims to explore the challenges experienced by school leaders, who are responsible for supervising the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum. Informed by Change Management theory, we situated the study within the interpretive paradigm. Furthermore, we opted for a qualitative research approach and a Participatory Action Research design. This study was conducted in a rural primary school using a Professional Learning Community to monitor the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum. Data was gathered from seven participants, comprising three senior teachers and four teachers who were at the entry level of their teaching profession. To generate data, participants were asked to reflect during scheduled meetings. Ahead of these meetings, participants were required to review the official teaching and learning books, as well as integrated curriculum-related documents at different intervals. To make sense of the data, we thematically arranged it. The findings revealed that in monitoring the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum, school heads face challenges such as a lack of suitable time for monitoring curriculum

enactment, learners' absenteeism, an inconsistent assessment mechanism, large class sizes, and teachers' negative reactions towards classroom visits. The current study calls for the Ministry of Education, policymakers, and universities to create more time for training and engagement prior to implementing any new curriculum, and to ensure manageable class sizes.

Keywords: Professional learning communities, monitoring, integrated curriculum, participatory action research, change management theory.

1. Introduction

There are ever-increasing demands from today's globalisation forces that necessitate a review of education policies in every country. Lesotho is no exception; in 2009, it developed and published the education policy known as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (2009). This policy conceived the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum, which was implemented in primary schools in 2013. The curriculum is expected to be "integrated," in contrast to the siloed subject compartments that resulted from colonisation and an examination-oriented approach. In the following sections, we will examine the rationale behind Lesotho's Integrated Curriculum, as well as the successes and challenges related to its implementation.

1.1 The rationale behind Lesotho's integrated curriculum

According to Raselimo and Mahau (2015), the integrated curriculum aims to connect school life with community life and everyday experiences. It was developed because the previous curriculum did not align well with the goals of expanding access to vocational skills training, promoting lifelong learning, addressing the high unemployment rate, alleviating poverty, and tackling climate change and environmental issues—challenges pertinent to the 21st century [Ministry of Education and

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Training (MoET), 2009]. Furthermore, the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum emerged as a response to a curriculum that emphasised content and teacher-centred approaches. Learners were expected to be passive recipients of knowledge, while the curriculum also reflected the perspectives of the colonisers. In contrast to the previous curriculum, which presented various challenges, the Integrated Curriculum encourages active participation from learners and centres the learning process around them. Additionally, learners are expected to be exposed to entrepreneurial opportunities while still in school. This implies that the focus should not only be on cognitive skills but should also include the assessment of other skills, such as art and sport. Assessment should not be solely summative; rather, it should be formative, evaluating learners in various domains and thereby broadening the modes of assessment.

1.2 Successes and failures of the implementation of the Lesotho's integrated curriculum

Successes in its implementation include the fact that some learners display creativity following the entrepreneurial approach of the curriculum (Kurata et al., 2022). Failures include issues such as the lack of monitoring of the curriculum's implementation, insufficient professional development programmes and support for teachers, content overload, a need for a stable network and internet access, scarcity of resources, and overcrowded classrooms (Kurata et al., 2022). The curriculum is intended to support individual learners (learner-centredness), while the reality on the ground presents a different picture, as teachers in classrooms often have far more learners than the prescribed learner-to-teacher ratios. A further challenge is the emphasis on "integration." This integration has not been maintained well, especially as one transitions from lower primary education to senior primary and secondary education (Ralebese, 2023). Some teachers tend to revert to old pedagogical approaches when implementing the new curriculum. Other challenges include the assumption by policymakers that teachers in Senior Primary and Secondary education will always collaborate for the sake of integration, when this may require skills to ensure ongoing interaction among teachers to promote integration across subjects. Furthermore, some later studies by Mohoebi (2023), Tankiso-Mphunyane (2023), Mohoebi et al. (2024), and Ramatea and Govender (2025) highlight the lack of resources as a hindering factor.

Some studies focused on the implementation of this policy recommend that effective monitoring providing evidence is essential (Khechane, 2016). In addition, Raselimo et al. (2015) pointed out the need for effective implementation and constant monitoring by the central inspectorate, which can be facilitated through the devolution of power to principals and heads of departments. As indicated above and in the subsequent sections, some studies have been done on the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum. However, they recommended monitoring but did not focus on it, which is a gap this current study intends to fill.

Given the above scenario of both opportunities and challenges, there is a need to explore how monitoring has occurred during implementation or the challenges faced in the process. How is the monitoring of the curriculum taking place? Beyond pilot schools, *how has monitoring been executed?* Given the concerns regarding monitoring implementation, what approach can be employed? In the next section, we will discuss monitoring, and further challenges in the implementation and monitoring of the curriculum will be highlighted.

1.3 Monitoring the implementation of the curriculum

Mngomezulu (2015) indicates that monitoring encompasses checking on individuals, observing their activities both in classrooms and outside, reviewing their work, and assessing how they perform. This definition underscores the primary function of school heads, as the core business of teaching and learning should take place within the school. Bush and Glover (2016) affirm that the closer leaders are to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to make a difference to students. Educational reforms require school principals to monitor the implementation of the

intended curriculum as envisioned by policymakers (Ralebese, 2019). In Lesotho, this responsibility is outlined in the Lesotho Education Act (2010), section 21(f), which mandates that they ensure meaningful teaching occurs in the schools they lead. To engage in monitoring activities, school heads must review several schoolbooks and visit teachers while they conduct their work. Maringa (2016) asserts that these books provide school heads with information regarding how and where teachers are in their implementation of the curriculum. Monitoring is crucial because the implementation of a new curriculum often faces various challenges that impede effective execution, particularly when teacher training has been limited (Rakolobe, 2017).

Some studies indicate that when Lesotho's integrated curriculum was implemented for the first time, teacher training was conducted over only one or two days (Selepe, 2016). Tankiso-Mphunyane (2023) also highlights the lack of teacher training as a significant issue contributing to the challenges in implementing the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum. Similarly, earlier studies warned that the implementation of the policy might be hindered by the short time frame allocated for training school heads (Raselimo & Mahau, 2015). Ralebese (2019) and Nhlapo et al. (2019), in their studies, found that inadequate in-service training and insufficient knowledge and information on the new curriculum were root causes of the challenges in implementation. The situation for school heads was even more concerning, as they relied on teachers who had received prior training (Ralebese et al., 2022). This reliance posed a risk, as supervisors (principals) depended on supervisees, which should not have been the case. The question then arises: how can we expect school principals to monitor the implementation of a curriculum that they themselves have not been trained to implement? This situation resembles putting the cart before the horse and expecting the horse to lead.

In the following paragraphs, we will explore some of the challenges faced by school heads when monitoring the implementation of the curriculum in Lesotho, as well as in two other countries: South Africa, given that Lesotho is landlocked, and the United Kingdom, due to Lesotho's colonial history.

According to studies on curriculum implementation, one of the most common challenges experienced by school heads is the absence of suitable time for monitoring. This lack of time was also highlighted by Samanthe (2018) in his study conducted in South Africa during the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. As outlined by Douglas and Carolyn (2018) in the UK, it is sometimes difficult for novice school heads to balance the time needed to complete their paperwork with the monitoring of teaching and learning. Studies conducted in Lesotho reveal similar issues regarding time. For example, in a study conducted in Maseru on the monitoring of the Lesotho integrated curriculum, findings indicated that principals tended to spend little time on curriculum and instructional tasks, while dedicating more time to managerial responsibilities (Ralebese, 2019).

Another challenge that hinders the monitoring of the new curriculum's implementation is learner absenteeism. Mestry (2019) pointed out that rural South African children do not attend school regularly because they are compelled to work on farms, and their parents do not encourage school attendance. Similarly, absenteeism contributes to low educational achievement, as stated by Esther et al. (2021) in their study conducted in the United Kingdom.

The monitoring of an integrated curriculum is also challenged by inconsistent assessment mechanisms. Khechane (2016) revealed difficulties in how assessments have been conducted in some schools. Matsaba-Mabea (2019), in her study on the constraints hindering assessments, found that some grades have assessment packages to guide teachers, while others do not; even those with packages comprise low-order questions, and teachers' items are not moderated. In the South African context, Mazibuko (2019) argues that assessment can expose challenges and gaps in curriculum coverage. It would therefore be proactive for Heads of Departments (HOD) to manage and moderate assessments, as well as the marking of learners' work. In the UK, the challenges of assessment are compounded by a lack of understanding of formative assessment, with teachers often struggling to grasp the principles of pedagogical theory (Black & Wiliam, 2018).

In South Africa, large class sizes and overcrowding are factors that constrain the implementation of the CAPS, as there is a need to train and prepare teachers (Molapo, 2025). Douglas et al. (2018) assert that in the UK, large class sizes in rural schools challenge principals, as they are required to fulfil multiple roles and unique responsibilities that extend into the community. Lesotho is not so different from these countries. Raselimo et al. (2015) and Ralebese (2023) revealed that monitoring the implementation can be hindered by large class sizes. It is difficult to manage and monitor the work of learners in large classes (Phosisi, 2019).

The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) (2012) states that, in the integrated curriculum, school heads are no longer to be the sole administrators but also individuals who observe and support teachers while they teach in classrooms. This supports Bush and Glover (2016), who argue that classroom observation is crucial for enhancing teaching skills, implying that teachers should be observed during instruction. However, a remaining challenge is teachers' negative reactions towards classroom observation. This is corroborated by a study conducted by Ralebese (2019), which found that teachers primarily do not view classroom observation as contributing to their capacity for instructional curriculum learning. In South Africa, it is difficult for the SMTs to determine how many visits should be conducted due to unclear policy, and teachers perceive this as infringing on their rights (Mngomezulu, 2015). In the UK, Ingai et al. (2018) found that classroom observation presents a challenge for preparing teachers for 21st-century classrooms.

Given the aforementioned challenges of monitoring the implementation of the curriculum, we pose the question of whether there is an alternative way to monitor the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum. In the next section, we will discuss Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

1.4 Professional learning communities

PLCs are a group of people who share and critically interrogate their practices in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inductive, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting way (Mahimuang, 2018). Ceresto (2015) outlined that PLCs assist teachers and their leaders in integrating their knowledge, helping teachers interpret curriculum documents, understand the content, and use curriculum resources.

In developed countries, PLCs are mandated by the Ministry of Education and are often employed during the introduction of major curriculum reforms to support teachers' curriculum and pedagogical knowledge (Bellibas et al., 2017). Campbell (2017) asserts that in PLCs, teachers and school heads work collaboratively as a team, focusing on content knowledge and understanding of curriculum reform by closely working together to reduce isolation. PLCs are also conducted through meetings, and teachers should meet regularly to improve established goals and assess their progress (Brown et al., 2018). While some studies have been done on the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum, we could not find studies that explored the monitoring of the implementation of this curriculum using PLCs. This leads to the following question: What role can PLCs play in monitoring the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum? In line with the gap indicated, this paper aims to use PLCs to explore the challenges of monitoring the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum.

In harmony with the aim of this paper, as indicated in the preceding statement, the research question is:

- What are the challenges of monitoring the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum as experienced through the PLCs?

The importance of this question lies in formulating recommendations to improve the monitoring and implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum.

2. Change Management Theory (CMT) as the Theoretical Framework

Mestry (2017) indicates that CMT was developed from Kurt Lewin's force field model (1951). Lewin's force field states that organisations are held in quasi-stationary equilibrium by driving forces (Queen Mary, 2014). The main argument of CMT is that change is necessary, and people are at the centre of this change. This implies that people should be engaged regarding the necessity of change (Cummings, 2016; Sarayreh, 2013). Furthermore, even after change has occurred, efforts should be made to ensure that people are supported in embracing the change. Additionally, Hussain (2016) elaborates by indicating that CMT is a process of transforming school organisational practices into new behaviours that support a shared vision and achieve institutional goals.

According to Mestry (2017) and Ricco (2024), Lewin's force field model consists of three stages: *unfreezing*, *movement*, and *refreezing*. To elaborate on these three stages, Mitchell (2013) and Ricco (2024) explain them as follows: the first stage of *unfreezing* occurs when change is needed, implying that this is the time when organisations realise there are challenges regarding the implementation of an integrated curriculum and need to make a change. In this case, the organisations should break down the existing situation (*status quo*) and begin to develop new ways of doing things (Blomqvist, 2017; Ricco, 2024). Blomqvist (2017), Mitchell (2013), and Ricco (2024) continue to explain that the second stage of *movement* is when change is initiated; this is similar to the current situation when the process of implementing the integrated curriculum is executed, and the driving forces compete with the restraining forces. The third and final stage, *refreezing*, occurs when equilibrium is established, according to Mitchell (2013) and Ricco (2024). Furthermore, according to Antwi et al. (2014), *refreezing* takes place when an ideal state has been achieved through the change process. In respect to this study, this means the aims of implementing the integrated curriculum are achieved. These are forms of activities that organisations can perform to ensure sustainability over time (Nwisagbo et al., 2025).

Critics of Kurt Lewin's CMT argue that the model is too mechanistic and oversimplifies the nature and dynamics within organisations. Change is also not linear, as organisations and institutions possess their own dynamics (Cummings, 2016; Sarayreh, 2013). We find this theory relevant as it addresses change. Similarly, the Lesotho education system was undergoing a change to implement the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum (2009).

3. Research Approach and Design

We opted for a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2009) contends that qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, with data typically collected in the participants' setting. Data analysis inductively builds from particulars to generate themes, and researchers make interpretations of the participants. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is used as the research design for this study. Kemmis (2014) describes PAR as a social process of collective learning aimed at individuals and collective self-formation, realised by groups of people who come together to change the practices through which they interact in a shared social world (Kemmis, 2014). Benjamine-Thomas et al. (2018) and Lekha (2025) conclude that PAR involves cycles of planning for change, acting or observing, and reflecting on the processes and consequences. Further details regarding the implementation of PAR are included in the following sections.

3.1 Settings

The study was conducted in a small rural primary school in Botha-Bothe, one of the northern districts of Lesotho. The school was conveniently selected due to its proximity to one of the researchers' locations. Like other primary schools in Lesotho in 2013, the Ministry of Education and Training mandated this school to implement the integrated curriculum. When this was put into practice, the body responsible for designing and training teachers employed a panel of teachers to train other

educators in a week or less on how to implement the integrated curriculum. As a result, some crucial aspects were not adequately addressed (Tafai, 2017).

3.2 Participants

The study was conducted with seven purposively selected participants, identified by the staff as key individuals for forming the PLC team due to their ability to provide essential information about monitoring the integrated curriculum (Maxwell, 2012). This group included three senior teachers and four teachers. The four teachers were given the pseudonyms Participant 1, Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 7. The three senior teachers were labelled Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 6. We aimed to ensure that all seven grades were represented.

3.3 Procedures

Benjamin-Thomas et al. (2018) point out that PAR involves cycles of planning a change, acting or observing, and reflecting on the processes and consequences. In planning this study, the PLCs team identified activities that required attention and set a timeframe for the anticipated changes (MacDonald, 2012). They planned to monitor the following documents to determine how the Lesotho integrated curriculum is implemented: lesson preparations, attendance registers, assessment books, learners' exercise books, and conduct classroom observations. As Brown et al. (2018:54) show, effective PLCs occur through meetings, and teachers should meet regularly to assess their progress. Monitoring of these documents was conducted over five months through several meetings. In the first meeting, the PLCs team divided itself into two groups. One group monitored the documents of the lower grades, while the other group monitored the documents of the upper grades. Each group checked one document every Friday for three consecutive weeks, and then, in the fourth week, the teams reflected on their work. The process of reflection allows everyone to be involved and to share and interact with others (Jacobs, 2016, p. 49). During reflection, the participants learned more about the challenges of monitoring an integrated curriculum. In the second month, they checked another document, namely the attendance registers, every Friday for three consecutive weeks; again, in the fourth week, they held a reflection. The process progressed until all the planned documents, as well as the activity of classroom visits, were monitored and reflected upon. The focus then shifted to assessment books, learners' exercise books, and conducting classroom observations. Lastly, they reviewed all the printed and electronic integrated curriculum documents to share and enhance their knowledge and skills.

3.4 Data collection

Kemmis et al. (2015) indicate that after planning, the researcher and the co-researchers must proceed with the plan. In this regard, the PLCs team used a focus group to collect data. A focus group is a crucial technique for studying ideas generated by a group of people who are experiencing the same problem but have different experiences and knowledge (MacDonald, 2012). The PLCs team agreed on the documents to be monitored and audio-recorded the discussions during the reflection sessions. They also used diaries to take notes during classroom visits. Finally, they reviewed all the printed and electronic integrated curriculum documents.

3.5 Data analysis

McMilan and Schumacher (2014) outline that data analysis is inductive and involves sorting the data into categories, allowing patterns and themes to emerge and relationships between categories to be identified and studied. In this study, data were analysed using thematic analysis. The research team transcribed the audio recording and then read each transcript several times to extract meaning from the large dataset. The data were subsequently organised and prepared into predetermined categories through a careful line-by-line reading and rereading to gain a sense of the whole transcript (Creswell, 2009). The raw data were coded to develop themes.

3.6 Ethical consideration

This article is part of one author's postgraduate study dissertation, which broadly explored the use of PLCs to monitor the implementation of PLCs. The current paper specifically aimed to use PLCs to explore the challenges of monitoring the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum. Ethical clearance was obtained as part of the main author's postgraduate studies, with Ethical clearance number UFS-HSD2020/1645/21. Mertens (2010) indicates that the starting point for PAR is the territory that encompasses human rights and social justice. The ethical obligation of those conducting research is to respect the individuals involved and affected, as well as to uphold their integrity and humanity (Kemmis, 2014). In this respect, ethical clearance and permission to conduct the study were obtained from the university and the Ministry of Education before participants could be recruited and informed about the purpose of the study. The participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary. Lastly, we informed the participants about anonymity and confidentiality, explaining that we would use pseudonyms and keep the information confidential, using it exclusively for the purpose of the study.

4. Results and discussion

The following challenges emerged as themes from sorting and categorising the audio-recorded data: the absence of suitable time to monitor the implementation of the curriculum, learners' absenteeism, an inconsistent assessment mechanism, class size, and class visits.

4.1 Absence of suitable time

The PLCs team found that monitoring the implementation of the integrated curriculum by reviewing teachers' lesson preparations, schemes, and records of work done is significant. However, it requires scheduled and appropriate timing to avoid interfering with school activities. The following statements confirm this:

(Participant 3) *"It is fine that we check, but the lesson preparations and schemes of work are submitted too early in the morning while we have not already recorded the week's work in the record book. Besides that, there is no assessment book when it is time for assessment. The assessment book is submitted to the monitors."*

(Participant 2) *"It is like they may submit during the day around ten o'clock (10:00) morning."*

(Participant 4) *"The time is 10:00, it is time we have to record the work done for a week, so the two sessions clash"*.

The excerpts highlight that the participants unanimously agreed that monitoring the implementation of the integrated curriculum is crucial, although this is hindered by the lack of suitable time allocated for monitoring the new policy's implementation. Both Participants 3 and 4 pointed out conflicting activities that are scheduled to take place simultaneously. Previous studies have reported similar issues. For example, Ralebese (2019), in his study conducted in Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, argues that school principals tend to spend little time on curriculum and instructional tasks, while dedicating more time to managerial responsibilities. The lack of suitable time was also identified by Samanthe (2018) in his study conducted in South Africa during the implementation of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement. He found that teachers did not have adequate time to collectively engage in the implementation process. Regarding the issue of time, Douglas and Carolyn (2018) found in their study in the UK that it can be challenging for novice school heads to balance completing paperwork with monitoring teaching and learning. CMT comprises three stages: unfreezing, movement, and refreezing. The challenge of lacking suitable time that PLCs experienced corresponds to the unfreezing stage, which is when change is necessary (Mitchell, 2013). Blomqvist (2017) outlines that, typically, when change is about to occur, social forces either promote or inhibit

change. Specifically, the driving forces promote change, while the restraining forces, such as time constraints, act against it.

4.2 Learners' absenteeism

MoET (2009) stipulates that learners should always attend school, as the new policy emphasises teaching and learning methods that foster creativity, independence, and resilience among learners. However, the PLC team in this study on monitoring the implementation discovered that this initiative has not been successful due to learners' absenteeism. This is reflected in the comments below:

(Participant 3) *"In my classroom, there is an absenteeism of one child who, since Grade 1, used to be absent from school; I tried to talk to his parent but he did not change. He still disappears"*.

(Participant 5) *"I too, have the children who used to be absent called Uzi man and Polo man."*

(Participant 7) *"There is a tall boy in grade 7 who also disappears along a week and that affects teaching and learning. As a result, the production will be bad at grade 7 end of the level assessment."*

The participants' comments above demonstrate that absenteeism is a challenge that constrains the implementation of the integrated curriculum. Pierre du Plessis and Mastry (2019), in their study conducted in rural South African schools, posit that one of the challenges in rural schools is that children who do not attend school regularly are forced to work on the farms. Their parents do not encourage them to attend school; as a result, learners who do not attend often find the curriculum irrelevant to their lives. In the United Kingdom, Esther et al. (2021) found that absenteeism contributes to lower educational achievements. However, many studies indicate that it occurs more frequently in secondary schools than in primary education. In this study, the challenge is significant to the extent that even senior learners in the Intermediate phase are problematic. This restraining force pushes in the opposite direction of change (Nwisagbo et al., 2025). According to Blomqvist (2017), this requires the organisation to conclude that change is necessary.

4.3 Inconsistent assessment mechanism

MoET (2009:19) states that CAP 2009 is a policy that conceived an integrated curriculum emphasising formative or continuous assessment. This formative assessment requires learners to be evaluated daily, weekly, fortnightly, and quarterly. In this study conducted through the PLC, participants raised a challenge regarding inconsistent assessment mechanisms:

(Participant 4) *"I organise the questions while learners are doing a task, but because they are weekly, I try to vary the questions and use different levels. We try to change the wording of the instruction and most questions are relevant to those we use along the week as some of the learners are slow learners and may still find hard to respond correctly even though it is not their first time to meet the same questions."*

(Participant 3) *"We are still using something like item bank although there are no higher order questions. We use the questions that we used along the week for weekly assessment."*

(Participant 1) *"I give them the same questions I asked them throughout the week; I just vary somewhere to see how much they learned. Some learners are struggling, so they will not make it when you ask difficult questions."*

The above excerpt reveals a challenge related to assessment. It seems that the mechanism through which the participants compose assessments for learners may lack important aspects, such as the application of Bloom's taxonomy, which serves as a criterion for differentiating between low-order and high-order questions. Raselimo et al. (2015) highlighted similar findings of inconsistent assessment. Furthermore, Matsaba-Mabea (2019) argues that the assessment of the integrated curriculum is hindered by the absence of assessment packages. Some grades are guided by

assessment packages while others are not; those with packages consist of low-order questions, and teacher item books are not moderated, serving cognitive skills more than other competencies. In South Africa, assessment faces challenges due to gaps in curriculum coverage, and Heads of Departments (HoDs) must moderate the assessments (Mazibuko, 2019). In line with Change Management Theory (CMT), Asnan et al. (2015) outline that in this context, the organisation experiences an unfreezing stage, necessitating a transition from equilibrium to a new level. This challenge of an inconsistent assessment mechanism requires action rather than a passive approach, as it represents restraining forces that must be considered when implementing change (Queen-Mary & Mtapuri, 2014).

4.4 Class size

As per MoET (2012), an integrated curriculum requires teachers to provide positive comments when marking learners' exercise books, clearly state the identified problems, and give advice on how to improve. Teachers should avoid vague statements such as 'good' or 'can do better,' as these do not indicate the strengths or weaknesses of the learners. This implies that this style of marking increases teachers' workload. This is reflected in the participants' statements below.

(Participant 2) *"We continue to check them, including the lesson preparations, but after increasing their number to five, I realised that they become many when I monitor them together with the teachers' files."*

(Participant 6) *"There is no exact number; sometimes I see four, other times I check five of them, they become many due to a large number of learners."*

(Participant 7) *"Really, the activity of including learners' exercises while monitoring increases our work, so it becomes worse when monitoring large grades such as 4".*

The participants show that after the agreement to increase the number of learners' exercise books to be checked, they encountered a challenge in monitoring learners' exercise books due to a large class size. The large class size increased the number of learners' exercise books that needed to be monitored. As indicated by Raselimo et al. (2015) and Ralebese (2023), monitoring individual learners' progress would be constrained by large class sizes, as there are many learners in some schools. A high number of learners in one class makes it difficult for teachers to mark and monitor the work of learners (Phosisi, 2019). In South Africa, Molapo (2025) also found that overcrowding and large class sizes were factors that constrained the implementation of the CAPS, as it is necessary to train and prepare teachers to implement the new curriculum. The large class size presented rural principals with a challenge in the United Kingdom because they work within a tight social community that expects them to fulfil multiple roles (Douglas et al., 2018). Authors of CMT, such as Hussain (2016), suggest that to change the quasi-stationary equilibrium stage, people may increase the striving forces for change or decrease the status quo.

4.5 Classroom visits

Classroom visits are a strategy for monitoring teaching and learning. MoET (2012) stipulates that school heads are no longer merely administrators in the integrated curriculum; they also monitor and support teachers in their classrooms to ensure the new curriculum is effectively implemented. The excerpt below illustrates the experiences of the participants during the classroom visits:

(Participant 2) *"I have seen that teachers react negatively toward classroom visits".*

(Participant 3) *"Learners lose concentration as it was their first time seeing us in their classrooms."*

(Participant 1) *"I also, as a teacher, get confused when I am teaching and being watched by someone since I performed it in Teaching Practice".*

The participants indicate the negative reactions of both teachers and learners during classroom visits. The excerpts confirm that monitoring the implementation of an integrated curriculum is constrained by challenges associated with these visits. During a classroom visit, school principals encountered negative perceptions from the teachers, who primarily do not regard them as capable of providing instructional support for the curriculum (Ralebese, 2019). This perception was also noted by Mngomezulu (2015) in his study conducted in South Africa, which found that school heads are reluctant to conduct class visits because teachers view them as infringing on their rights, with negative feedback often reflected in their body language. The challenges of classroom visits have also been observed in the United Kingdom, making it difficult to prepare teachers for 21st-century classrooms (Inga et al., 2018). In terms of CMT, Nwisagbo et al. (2025) argue that positive attitudes should be fostered to suppress negative attitudes and cultivate a positive culture.

5. Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

Participants presented various challenges they encountered with the implementation of the Lesotho Integrated Curriculum. Firstly, there are activities that conflict with the time available to monitor this implementation. Learner absenteeism is the second challenge that makes it difficult for teachers to implement the curriculum. It can be argued that learners who are consistently absent from school lack the connection from one lesson to the next, as they miss some lessons due to inconsistent attendance. Thirdly, assessments should vary from low- to high-order questions. Teachers find that some learners struggle and end up only giving them low-order questions. Fourthly, the curriculum aims to encourage teachers to offer individualised attention to learners. This is not easy because of large class sizes. Lastly, both teachers and learners do not appreciate class visits.

There are limitations to this study. Firstly, we used a qualitative research approach. As such, our findings cannot be generalised to other areas in Lesotho or even outside Lesotho. Secondly, only seven participants were part of the PLC. Therefore, other PLCs might have different experiences. Notwithstanding these limitations, our findings have added perspectives from other areas in Lesotho that could not be covered by some previous studies. The use of PLCs also adds another dimension to our research, as they occur over a particular time interval rather than being a one-off event.

The participants recommend that when the new curriculum is implemented for the first time, school heads and teachers must be provided with training on how to deliver and monitor the implementation, as they are the individuals on the ground where curriculum implementation occurs. Training these individuals develops their skills, knowledge, and capacity in aspects such as assessment. Training teachers on how to assess learners is crucial for a constant assessment mechanism, as well as providing them with assessment packages in advance to create uniformity in school performance. Learners should also be informed of the curriculum's requirements that necessitate their consistent presence at school to avoid absenteeism. Lastly, it is significant for the responsible Ministry to review the educational policies governing teacher-learner ratios and those designed to visit teachers while they are teaching in the classrooms, to address challenges related to large class sizes and mitigate negative responses towards classroom visits.

6. Declarations

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