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National Curriculum Development: Should Teachers be Engaged in Developing it?

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ABSTRACT

This literature review aims to address teachers' jointly roles as curriculum developers and how educational policy makers can embrace teacher enactment to better develop curriculum in action out of student learning experiences. However, the concerns are naturally predisposed to the top-down tiers to design curriculum. A top-down curriculum also tends to be focused on organizational needs. Subsequently, the need for teachers to overcome their pedagogical challenges is constrained by curriculum adaptation. Moreover, this literature review revealed that education authorities should explore appropriate teacher curriculum approaches to better enhance the implementation. This is followed by policy makers to provide knowledge for teachers to develop teachers' skills and concepts in addressing their students' learning needs. Therefore, this literature review is expected to address the challenges to provide equal accesses for better education enhancement across all levels and settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The success of designing and implementing national curriculum development can significantly depend on teacher enactment, as teachers inform ideas and practices into real classroom settings. Engaging teachers in the early stages of designing the curriculum can also enhance their perspectives and understanding of knowledge reformation. From this notion, the conception of teachers as curriculum developers and practitioners could be an alternative movement to improve better education quality. However, little is known about offering to establish teachers' expertise and knowledge in designing and developing national curriculum. This is in part because the approach, which is a top-down approach, in some educational settings does not utilize teachers' perceptions, understanding and experiences to design national curriculum. Moreover, engaging teachers' voices to design and develop national curriculum development requires teachers to obtain intensive knowledge in expanding and transforming subject matters into the provision of better student outcomes. Although the enactment for teachers to promote national curriculum development is still being examined, teachers' roles, in the contexts of educational policies and practices, should be considered to reform better student outcomes. Therefore, this literature review will discuss teachers' roles and engagement in national curriculum development from different educational contexts.

2. METHODS

The research method used in this literature review involves the following steps. Firstly, the identification of relevant educational contexts from different countries or educational systems is conducted. These educational contexts are selected to encompass a wide variation in the roles and engagement of teachers in national curriculum development. Next, a search for relevant literature is carried out through academic databases, scholarly journals, policy reports, and other sources. This search is conducted using appropriate keywords related to the research topic to gather articles, studies, or documents that discuss the roles of teachers and their engagement in national curriculum development across various educational contexts. Subsequently, the most relevant and high-quality literature is selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria. The selected literature is then critically analyzed, and the emerging findings are synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the roles and engagement of teachers in national curriculum development across various educational contexts.

In synthesizing the findings, the differences and similarities in the roles and engagement of teachers in national curriculum development within different educational contexts are identified and analyzed. This enables a deeper understanding of how teachers are involved in curriculum policy formulation, adaptation to student needs, and addressing pedagogical challenges. The findings from this literature analysis are presented systematically through a structured exposition to obtain a comprehensive overview of the roles and engagement of teachers in national curriculum development across various educational contexts. By employing this research method, it is expected to provide valuable insights into best practices, challenges, and policies that can support the roles of teachers in national curriculum development, as well as their implications for more effective learning at the national level.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Teacher Engagement in Curriculum Development

Teachers should participate in designing curriculum democratically through professional collaborations with educational researchers, curriculum developers, educational policymakers, and superintendents to achieve better quality education. Kobiah, (2016) conducted a descriptive survey research design through questionnaires for 342 teachers and interviews for school principals to establish their perspectives of being involved in selecting and implementing the secondary curriculum in Kenya. The study found that there is significant progress in developing the curriculum due to the teachers' participation. However, one major issue of the study concerned about the top-down approach issued and authorized by the government. Similarly, Alnefaie and Gritter, (2016) investigated teachers' cooperation in Saudi Arabia towards the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum development. The findings showed that the teachers' initiatives were constrained and neglected by the Ministry, as the top-down framework is the center of the curriculum reform. Subsequently, the significant challenge to improve teachers' participation is on how the bottom-up approach can facilitate and engage teachers in developing and designing the national curriculum. Grappling with the top-down tiers in curriculum development, the debate as to promote teachers' curriculum engagement is mainly focused on whether implementing the bottom-up approach can embrace the enactment to create curriculum in action. Bolghari and Hajimaghsoodi, (2017) thus investigated the bottom-up framework as an action research model to reform teachers' involvement in curriculum development in Iran. Bolghari and Hajimaghsoodi found that the model should be applied within collaboration among teachers, educational experts and policymakers because teachers should carry out their teaching and classroom research at the same time. From these above-mentioned studies, it can be implied that comprising the top-down and bottom-up approaches should be examined through classical humanism to understand current educational issues relating to the lack of teachers' voices and marginalisation to appeal teacher rights in developing the curriculum.

Teachers should be entailed significant knowledge of developing curriculum to overcome their daily challenges and attain the goals in supporting the government. Mouraz et al., (2013) examined Portuguese teachers' roles in local curriculum development. Mouraz distributed self-administered survey questionnaires for 214 teachers across Portuguese primary and secondary schools. Mouraz found that there are three critical categories of teachers' roles in curriculum design knowledge: (i) teachers as local implementers of curricular regulations, (ii) teachers as collaborators and (iii) teachers as pedagogical practitioners. Moreover, the research finding resulted that the success of teachers' involvement in developing curriculum is emphasised in the forms of practical actions. Although this study recognised the crucial roles and skills of teachers in the curriculum development, Huizinga et al., (2014) examined three critical gaps of teachers' abilities in designing and developing the local and national curriculum, which include (i) the significant competencies in constructing curriculum, (ii) expanding pedagogical content and (iii) promoting curriculum consistency. Huizinga thus suggest that there are four proposed conceptions in improving teachers' skills to develop curriculum, which include (i) supporting teachers to enact the design processes so that they can apply their teaching contexts, (ii) providing more supports from different governmental stakeholders and experts, (iii) focusing on enhancing teachers' knowledge in pedagogy, and (iv) highlighting curriculum conceptual frameworks and assessment guidelines to promote teachers' opportunities in national curriculum engagement. Understanding these gaps and suggestions, researchers

have shown an increased interest in examining teachers' skills in curriculum engagement. McFadden and Roehrig (2017) investigated the influences of teachers' involvement in the US integrated Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) curriculum through Teacher Design Teams (TDT) approach. The research focused on two TDT groups funded by the STEM Education Professional Development (PD) project in three large school districts. McFadden and Roehrig found that teachers should be assisted during the processes of collaborative curriculum design. Also suggest that teachers learn alternative skills that are guided and drawn upon by expert designers. However, it has previously been observed that there are crucial issues of the PD implementation. Petrie and McGee, (2012) examined one of the PD programmes, which was Physical Activity Initiative (PAI) for supporting and positioning teachers as professional learners in ten schools in New Zealand. Petrie and McGee found that the compromises and time constraints of the programme were delivered negatively, as the PD advisers needed to offer more context-specific programmes for teachers to be principled and practised in their classroom settings. Although extensive research has been carried out on PD, there should be more comprehensive studies on reflecting the unique needs of schools and teachers' skills to promote their engagement in developing the curriculum. Therefore, the research findings may have been more applicable if PD could align teachers' skills and knowledge in developing the curriculum, selecting the contents and designing the assessment with the national curriculum standards.

Teachers and school leaders should be encouraged to accurately align and emerge the local and national curriculum standards and assessment based on teachers' teaching contexts to provide better quality learning for students. Investigated the curriculum reformation in 270 schools in Hong Kong educational settings, which is regulated with the major supports from school leaders and teachers (Cheung and Wong, 2011). Then obtained, gained data through group interviews and surveyed questionnaires from different stakeholders. The study resulted that the mediation and support from school leaders and teachers to develop district and national curriculum made significant changes in the learning and teaching strategies, assessment and learning diversity. This study was extensively in examining the implication of teachers' roles in developing the curriculum of the Greek educational contexts (Tsafos (2013). His found that the bottom-up approach in developing curriculum allows schools to be turned into a research laboratory for teachers and school leaders. It is because they view curriculum development as an effective way to enhance and meet society's needs. Moreover, Nasser et al., (2014) conducted a study of the teacher-developed curriculum alignment in nine primary schools in Qatar education settings. Nasser et al found that the teachers make substantial efforts to align their teaching materials with the curriculum standards. Wijngaards and Merx, (2018) also conducted two similar studies to examine national curriculum alignment and school leadership. Batiste et al., (2015) found that the teachers agree with the school leadership's vision to support their capacity to implement the curriculum changes. However, these previous studies should have predominantly considered the challenges in aligning the national curriculum standards with various learning objectives and classroom activities for teachers and school principals. Short-term studies such as these could not necessarily show subtle changes over time, as teachers' perceptions about the relationship between school leadership and national curriculum may be related to the understanding of the curriculum changes. The curriculum alignment should also emphasise the solutions to tackle the hindrances of the students' learning experiences, as the co-construction is substantially generated between teachers and students' classroom experiences. Moreover, these studies indicate that the school

leadership, curriculum alignment and bottom-up approach have a significant impact on developing the national curriculum. Therefore, this more current paper, bottom-up framework, adds much to the existing literature in this area.

Teachers should be independent professionals and have their flexible autonomy to develop their curriculum to enhance their students' abilities. Australian Curriculum Coalition (2010) cited in Brennan (2011) states that teachers need to develop their ownership of the curriculum if it is to be meaningful and effective. Also emphasises that teachers are the primary centres of curriculum development, as they cannot only be regarded as the implementers of a syllabus. However, previous studies have failed to consider the unique complexities faced by teachers. Chan (2010) examined the processes of educational policy implementation in Hong Kong. The study found that the teachers are distracted with their parts, as the independent professionals and educators, and are generally passive in the implementation. Moreover, the teachers and schools are required to comply with complex indicators and standards decided by the government. This study is extensively supported by Ormond (2017) by investigating the challenges of teacher autonomy in curriculum decisions in New Zealand. Ormond found that there are three critical challenges for curriculum design making such as suitability for assessment, balancing breadth and depth and managing students' interests. Moreover, Alfrey et al., (2017) on their qualitative study about a Take-Action programme which was constructed by Critical Inquiry Approach in two schools in Melbourne, found that curriculum and policy are rarely organised due to the insufficient support from teachers and school leaders. On the other hand, previous studies have been challenged by Viirpalu et al., (2014), surveyed to investigate Estonian teachers' experience and autonomy in using and developing curriculum that was divided into three parts: general education curriculum and its development, experiences in utilising curriculum and respondents' preferences for oppositional curricular solutions. Viirpalu found that 80% of the Estonian teachers received adequate preparation for participating in curriculum development, while 65% of the teachers faced a significant impact on the development of their school curricular. As the evidence shows that teachers have their flexible autonomy in designing and developing the national curriculum, a consistent empirical picture is missing. Henceforth, the study would have been more useful if it had presented current observational approaches to national curriculum policy to support teachers and schools to evolve and specify relationships among various levels of government.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the critical conception of engaging teachers in the local and national curriculum development has mainly been studied in most educational settings. The existing studies primarily demonstrate the approaches to promote teachers' knowledge to develop a curriculum based on their school settings. Although there is much in the literature that pertains to the methods of engaging teachers' skills and expertise in designing curriculum, there should be more current research papers that extensively examine the bottom-up approach as a conceptual framework to acknowledge teachers' perspectives in implementing the national curriculum. Moreover, the research papers should deliberately present the government's current structures, whether they allow teachers to be the foremost curriculum designers or not. Further research should also investigate intensive and practical solutions to overcome the challenges for teachers to participate in curriculum design. In addition, it should also highlight critical and empirical data for educational policymakers to promote teachers to be involved in developing a national curriculum.

Therefore, intensive future studies on engaging teachers in curriculum development would be beneficial.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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