Facilitative Actions That School Heads Performed to Help Teachers to Adopt Zimbabwe's Implemented Primary School Performance Lag Address Programmes (PLAP) Innovation

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Abstract

The key role of conducting facilitative interventions that School Heads as instructional leaders should play during the initiation of a new curriculum is all too often neglected. This study sought to investigate the facilitative actions that School Heads performed to help teachers to adopt Zimbabwe's implemented primary school Performance Lag Address Programmes (PLAP) innovation from the perspective of teachers. Following the mixed methods research design, the researcher used the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to collect data. The study involved a purposive sample of 100 primary school teachers who had converged at the Midlands State University as the researcher's students on the BEd Block Release study programme from 100 schools in the Midlands Province. The study revealed administrative as opposed to instructionally-based and knowledge-oriented facilitative actions as the most prevalent interventions that most teachers indicated were performed by their School Heads to initiate teachers into this innovation. The majority of teachers indicated that their School Heads engaged in a wide array of facilitative actions towards this innovation to an insufficient extent. They applied a little degree of intensity of seriousness in initiating their teachers into this innovation by trivializing instructionally-based and knowledge-oriented facilitative interventions. It is recommended that School Heads create collaborative communities of learning among teachers about how to get conceptually ready to implement this new innovation.

Keywords: Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP), adoption, facilitative actions

1. Background of the study

In 2014, Zimbabwe introduced the Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP) curriculum innovation to remediate slow learners in the Grades 4, 5, 6 and 7 English and Mathematics curricula. While this curriculum innovation sounds plausible, it is conceived against the backdrop of a history of ingenious innovations world-wide that have not resulted in real change in classrooms due to the general trivialization of the adoption or initiation phase of the curriculum change process (Fullan, 2001; Sakulsumpaopol, 2010). The pivotal role that School principals, play in either making or breaking the innovations in the initial stages of implementation especially during the stage of installing or adopting new programmes has been acknowledged in the literature (Taylor, 1987; Fullan, 1993). In Zimbabwe curriculum innovations such as the Political Economy of Zimbabwe and Education with Production (EWP) faced a natural death despite their potential usefulness because the Ministry of Education instituted slapdash introduction of these innovations without adequately initiating users for implementing them (Jansen, 1991). The key role of conducting facilitative interventions that School Heads as instructional leaders should play during the initiation of a new curriculum is all too often neglected. Thus the extent to which the new PLAP curriculum innovation receives facilitative support from the school Heads during its adoption particularly from the perspectives of the teachers, is not yet known.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In this study, the Adoption Model propounded by McNeil (1981) informs this academic engagement. The Model views the School Head as a facilitator of curriculum change and innovation who initially performs the role of salesperson and later, a training role with his or her school personnel who in turn train others to master the new curriculum. This multiplier effect is manifest in the School Head's initiative to drive his or her senior members of staff into marketing the new curriculum in the school through the conduct of staff development seminars with the forerunners of the innovation who in turn appraise others of the mechanics of implementing the innovation. McNeil's (1981) Model views curriculum implementation as a slow, gradual process of learning among members as they progress through the three phases of adoption, institutionalization and teacher use. What really counts as precipitating factors that frame and shape the acceptance, installation and institutionalisation of a new curriculum seems to be the facilitative actions and decisions that a school principal takes to initiate staff into the demands and specifications of the innovation. The school principal's collaboration with staff in building up the momentum for the acceptance, installation and facilitation of the innovation for its use and continuation has been documented as a *sine quanon* for sustained educational change (Berman, 1981; Badugela, 2012). By means

of orientation sessions, demonstration lessons and staff development programmes, a school principal can intervene to get the staff committed to a curriculum innovation and accept, install, implement and institutionalize it into a school's routine repertoire of educational practices. In consonance with this notion, Sakulsumpaopol (2010) and Badugela (2012) underscore the need for school principals to embrace the idea of building a shared vision among the staff by finding the expertise, skills and tacit knowledge that his/her teachers possess. Sakulsumpaopol (2010) contends that principals are under increasing pressure to become more involved in the mission of student academic achievement than playing the routine school management role. Taylor (1987) underscores the role that school principals should play as instructional leaders and leading change agents by way of clarifying to teachers the new behaviours that will be required of them with the advent of the use of new materials, new pedagogies and role changes and new attitudes attendant to the curriculum innovation.

2.1.1 The School Principal's facilitative actions and their influence on adoption of a curriculum innovation.
During the curriculum change process phase of adoption- the process that leads up to and includes a decision to accept or proceed with an innovation (Berman, 1981; Fullan, 2001), school principals play a pivotal role in making or breaking the new innovative idea by their actions, perspectives about the educational change and interventions (Taylor, 1987).

Berman (1981) presents several functions that a school principal performs in mobilizing the implementation of an innovation which include: developing an image of what the school intends to achieve from attempting the innovation; planning the preparation of materials, the assignment of staff, the allocation of resources and setting objectives and the generation of internal and external support for the innovation. Taylor (1987) recognizes the primacy of school principals' facilitative actions and interventions during the adoption of an innovation. He specifies them as taking the initiative to establish his or her school as one which provides the required learning needs of the students, in this case the remediation needs of students who are lagging behind in English and Mathematics and taking the initiative to get the support of parents for the innovation - PLAP programme. The principal also communicates his or her belief that this innovation, will make a big contribution to school improvement and student achievement. He or she defines the role of and assigns staff to the position of a senior member of staff who will continuously monitor the programme and support the teachers who will regularly report to him or her. He or she also organizes a series of information and discussion sessions in order to clarify what the new programme entails, specifically with respect to the knowledge, skills and changed behaviours and attitudes that are required by the teachers (Taylor, 1987). Research evidence attests to the positive outcomes that some attempts at educational change have yielded from school principals who took it upon themselves to work as crucial change agents by first of all garnering support from their subordinates and convincing them of the need to try out the change right from the onset (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000). Sakulsumpaopol (2010) states that studies in some Thai schools revealed considerably positive change efforts by teachers whose school principals tried to initiate staff into educational reforms by instituting readiness interventions in their schools. This finding contradicts with the observed tendency to mandate change by most Thai school principals who simply announced the new innovation to teachers at a staff meeting and sent some of them to staff development workshops. In the conviction that using their position of power to announce the innovation would automatically lead to change in educational practices, most school principals often leave teachers to their own devices, much to the infuriating result that nothing much in the direction of desired educational changes occurs in most schools (Blignaut, 2007, Fullan, 1993; Sakulsumpaopol, 2010). Conversely, studies have shown that in schools where school principals were oblivious of their role as educational change leaders centrally responsible for curriculum implementation leadership, teachers have often been unable to overcome the "implementation dip"- the early difficulty in a reform effort that goes with new educational practices, thereby exhibiting curriculum resistance (Fullan, 2001).

2.2 Summary
Viewed through the lenses of Mc Neil's (1981) Adoption Model of educational change, the literature has cast the adoption of a curriculum innovation as an activity that underlines the primacy of school principals' roles as facilitators of change by assuming the central agency of acting as salespersons who market the new innovative idea to its implementers as well as capacitate them to use it as desired by its designers. The value of the numerous facilitative actions that principals perform in driving teachers to accept, install and start implementing an new educational idea has been emphasized by several scholars in the literature (Berman, 1981; Fullan, 2001; Taylor, 1987; Sakulsumpaopol, 2010). While Hargeaves (2000) and Fullan (2001) highlight the benefits that accrue in schools where principals take emboldened early interventions to direct teachers in the enactment of an innovation, Sakulsumpaopol (2010) enlightens us of the negative outcomes that accrue in schools where principals do not take such facilitative actions. It therefore remains to be established in this study what sort of facilitative actions school Heads take and to what extent they do so in order to assist their teachers to adopt the PLAP innovation.

3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to establish the facilitative actions that School Heads took to facilitate the adoption of the PLAP programme in some Zimbabwean primary schools.

4 Objectives of the study

1) To establish the prevalence of some facilitative actions that school heads take towards assisting teachers to adopt, accept and install the new PLAP innovation from teachers' perspectives.
2) To determine the extent to which school Heads take facilitative actions necessary for the adoption of this innovation from the teachers' perspectives

5. Statement of the problem

In the context of Zimbabwe's centralized system of curriculum development in which pre-ordained curriculum innovations are imposed on teachers through mandates, it is important to inquire about the extent to which school heads initiate teachers into the PLAP innovation. The general neglect of the adoption stage of curriculum implementation reported in the literature and the dearth of research on this curricular issue in Zimbabwe's primary school system warrants this investigation. This study seeks to solicit views from the teachers themselves as frontline users of this innovation regarding the prevalence and extent of facilitative actions that their School Heads take to initiate teachers into the PLAP programme.

6. Research Methodology

The study followed the mixed methods research design which involved the combination of   quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. With a view to complementing quantitative findings from the descriptive survey data (Creswell, 2003), and obtaining a fuller understanding of the teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon under study the qualitative design was incorporated into this study. The study involved a purposive sample of 100 primary school teachers who had converged at the Midlands State University as the researcher's students on the Block Release BEd Study programme from 100 schools in the Midlands Province where the researcher had obtained permission to conduct it. This allowed each participating teacher to report on the facilitative actions of his/her School Head. The researcher used a closed survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews for collecting data. Data from survey questionnaires were analysed using MS Excel and presented on tables of information. Analysis of data involved the calculation of the frequency distribution of the responses to questionnaire items in order to obtain a general picture of the participants' perceptions ad experiences. Along with descriptive statistical presentation of data was conducted a narrative description of the findings from the interview data which incorporated in-vivo quotes for purposes of obtaining in-depth, detailed explanation of the participants' experiences and perceptions that could not be obtained from quantitative data.

7. Findings and discussion

Data collected through questionnaires and interviews are presented below.

Table 1: Prevalence of School Heads' Facilitative actions (N=25)

FACILITATIVE ACTION	N	%
Setting vision on innovation with teachers	12	48
Assigning teacher leaders for technical assistance to fellow teachers	10	40
Allocating resources to teachers for the innovation	16	64
Clarifying teaching of the innovation to teachers	7	28
Assisting teachers to accept innovation	16	64
Initiating and conducting demonstration lessons with teachers	7	28
Providing teachers with technical assistance to master instructional techniques	10	40
involving parents in implementing innovation	14	56
Helping teachers to use the curriculum materials	5	20

Data in Table 1 above shows that teachers indicated that the most prevalent actions that school Heads took included allocating resources to teachers (64%), assisting teachers to adopt positive attitudes towards the innovation without forcing it on them (64%) and involving parents in implementing the curriculum innovation (56%). Small numbers of teachers indicated that their school Heads paid attention to assigning teacher leaders to provide technical assistance towards the implementation of PLAP to fellow teachers (40%), clarifying teaching of the innovation to teachers (28%), initiating and conducting demonstration lessons with teachers (28%), providing teachers with technical assistance to master instructional techniques (40%) and helping teachers to use curriculum materials (20%). During the interviews, most teachers (3 out of the 5 teachers who were interviewed) reported that their School Heads did not have time to sit down with them to map out a vision with specific

reference to the PLAP innovation as it was encompassed in the overall school vision. They said they had never had any time when their School Heads clarified to them how to remediate the slow learners using the new PLAP approaches as this was also strange to them as Heads. It emerged from the teachers' views that School Heads lacked the time and knowledge to conduct demonstration lessons.

One teacher stated thus:

It is not common to find our School Head getting involved in teaching matters with us teachers as she is always busy with her administration. For her to find time to sit with us and discuss matters about teaching of all subjects, me I have never seen her do that. As for vision I think she uses the mission statement of the school. I can say what she does to facilitate the PLAP for us to implement it is to give memos to remind us and to monitor and supervise.

Responding to an interview question to substantiate the practical actions that his School Head took to help teachers to come to grips and start mastering how to implement the innovation, another teacher said:

Personally I can say my Head really sources materials for us like more textbooks for the earlier grades as I can say teach the slow learner who is in grade 5 to do grade 4 work and even grade 3 work. So I need more textbooks. Again he gives teachers more exercise books for remediation. But to help us teachers to master the techniques of doing the remediation as per PLAP, I have never got such help.I don't think the Head can ever get the time for dealing with this programme to clarify its methods.

Another teacher who was responding to the question on whether his School Head made any effort to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to enact the PLAP innovation said:

To be honest I don't think my head himself has any knowledge about how this new way of remedial work is done. He does not have time to come to classrooms for that. So to me.. he does not give me knowledge about the methods of how to do PLAP. In most cases he just sees my PLAP documents and stamps it, that's all. I can say the head seldom discusses with us about this thing, maybe because we are busy in our school.

It can be discerned from the foregoing questionnaire and interview findings that the prevalent facilitative actions that School Heads took tended to involve administrative tasks, while little prevalence occurred with instructionally-based facilitative support to help teachers conceptualise the innovation during its initiation phase of implementation. Surprise findings related to the prevalence of facilitative actions (i) included provision of curriculum materials (ii) supervising and monitoring teachers which also tended to be more inclined to administrative than instructionally-based, knowledge-oriented facilitative actions. Generally, teachers attributed this situation to a lack of time, the School Heads' concern with administration and work pressure. It is a positive development to discover that good majorities of teachers indicated that their School Heads took the facilitative actions of allocating resources to teachers, assisting teachers to adopt positive attitudes towards the innovation without forcing it on them, and involving parents in implementing the curriculum innovation. These actions can serve as factors that propel teachers into getting oriented to the innovation as they incentivize them into getting committed to its implementation. Interestingly, when coupled with the incentives cited above, the supervision and monitoring of the implementation of this innovation by School Heads that some teachers reported in this study underlines the value of combining pressure and support as a leadership strategy that School Heads used for propelling teachers into accepting, installing and enacting an innovation.

Several teachers (52%) indicated that their School Heads did not pay attention to setting up the school vision with teachers on this innovation but considered it encompassed in the school vision. This generalization suggests that in the absence of a vision peculiar to this innovation, teachers are "radarless" in their educational change efforts towards it. In concert with Taylor's (1987) observation, it is difficult to mobilize teachers into accepting the innovation, getting them initiated into the knowledge, skills and changed behaviours and attitudes that are required by the teachers without a vision that gives them direction. In view of the fact that generally teachers felt that their school Heads did not engage in facilitative actions of an instructionally-based and knowledge-oriented nature to support teachers to conceptualise the pedagogical underpinnings of this innovation, it can be deduced that teachers were left to their own devices to enact this innovation. They were left to either "swim" or "sink." This finding contradicts with the need for school principals to try to initiate staff into educational reforms by instituting readiness interventions in their schools (Sakulsumpaopol, 2010).

In order to obtain a fuller picture of the facilitative actions that School Heads took to initiate the teachers into this innovation, answers to the research question on the extent to which the School Heads took the actions were sought. Triangulated questionnaire and interview data on this question from teachers is presented in Table 2 below and the accompanying narrative description of the interview data.

Table 2: The extent to which School Heads took facilitative actions (N=25)

RESPONSES	No extent		Very little extent		Little extent		Considerable extent		large extent	
FREQUENCY	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Setting vision with teachers	13	52	3	12	2	8	4	16	3	12
Assigning teacher leaders to assist fellow teachers	14	56	4	16	2	8	2	8	3	12
Allocating resources to teachers	8	32	3	12	3	12	5	20	6	24
Clarifying teaching of innovation	11	44	3	12	3	12	4	16	4	16
Assisting teachers to accept innovation	7	28	6	24	5	20	3	12	4	12
Providing technical assistance to teachers	10	40	5	20	3	12	2	8	5	20
Conducting demonstration lessons	15	60	3	12	3	12	2	8	2	8
Helping teachers to use materials	13	52	3	12	3	12	5	20	1	4

Data in Table 2 above shows that generally majorities of teachers indicated that their school Heads engaged in the wide array of facilitative actions to an insufficient extent. By implication most teachers indicated that their School Heads took the various facilitative actions to mobilize their teachers to start implementing this innovation with a little degree of intensity of seriousness with ratings ranging from no extent to very little extent to a little extent. Various facilitative actions received insufficient extent of attention in order of their magnitude from the least seriously attended action as follows: conducting demonstration lessons (84%); Assigning teacher leaders to assist fellow teachers (80%); helping teachers to use the materials (76%); setting vision on this innovation with teachers (72%); assisting teachers to accept the innovation (72%); providing technical assistance to teachers (72%); clarifying the teaching of this innovation (68%) and allocating resources to teachers (56%). The fact that the facilitative actions that teachers indicated as being trivialized by School Heads constitute instructionally-based and knowledge-oriented interventions suggests that School Heads were not empowering their teachers with facilitative support in the form of knowledge and pedagogical skills to get them ready to implement the PLAP innovation. The lack of serious attention paid to the foregoing facilitative actions resonates with the low prevalence of the same actions registered and reported earlier in this study.

Interview data on the extent to which teachers thought their School Heads intervened in mobilizing teachers to accept and install the innovation revealed a similar scenario. One teacher stated thus:

They don't take these interventions seriously. If they did they would always be doing staff development with us… But you seldom find them discussing about this programme with us to help us. How can I say the Head is really paying serious attention to PLAP when they also don't seem to know how it is done? If a person does not know about a new programme how can he help you?

The attribution of School Heads' lack of serious attention to several facilitative actions to their lack of knowledge and a general indifference towards facilitating its implementation mirrors most School principals' propensity for emphasizing administrative roles at the expense of instructional and curriculum change leadership roles identified in the literature (Fullan, 2001).

Conversely, the very same facilitative actions that a minority of teachers indicated were being given intense attention by School Heads painted a promising picture. School Heads who paid serious attention to the actions seemed to be cognizant of the need to capacitate their teachers with the knowledge and skills to implement the innovation beforehand and help them evolve from initiation through implementation to institutionalization. They seemed to be taking heed of the interventions such as setting the vision with teachers and clarifying the enactment of the innovation that Berman (1981) identified as catalytic in the implementation of an innovation.

8. Conclusions and recommendations
8.1 Conclusions
The purpose of this study was to establish the prevalence of some facilitative actions that school heads take towards assisting teachers to adopt, accept and install the new PLAP innovation from teachers' perspectives and to determine the extent to which school Heads took facilitative actions necessary for the adoption of this innovation from the teachers' perspectives. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

• Majorities of teachers indicated that the prevalence of facilitative actions that their school Heads took to initiate teachers to implement the PLAP innovation was higher in the interventions inclined towards administrative tasks.

• Most teachers indicated and intimated that their school Heads tended to place less serious emphasis on

knowledge-based or instructionally- related interventions to initiate teachers in implementing the innovation.
• The majority of teachers indicated that their School Heads engaged in a wide array of facilitative actions towards this innovation to an insufficient extent.
• School Heads applied a little degree of intensity of seriousness in initiating their teachers into this innovation thereby trivializing instructionally-based and knowledge-oriented facilitative interventions.

8.2 Recommendations
Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were made:
• School Heads should be educated on the importance of adoption as a crucial passage of implementing a new curriculum innovation at school level.
• School Heads should position themselves more boldly as drivers of actual implementation of the curriculum along with routine administration of the school.
• School Heads should institute orientation sessions to get teachers ready for implementation of the innovation.
• School Heads should create collaborative communities of learning among teachers about how to get conceptually ready to implement this new innovation.

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