

Contextual Factors Obstructing the Effective Implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy in the Lesotho Education Sector

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ABSTRACT

Policy implementation is the most crucial phase in the policy-making cycle. If not implemented, policy aims and objectives cannot be achieved, and the quality of education can subsequently not be improved. The Lesotho Ministry of Education (MoET) adopted the Curriculum and Assessment Policy, 2009 (CAP 2009) to localise its curriculum. With this curriculum, MoET intends to make education relevant to Basotho and improve equal and equitable access to quality education for all Basotho. However, a persistent policy gap caused by failing to implement the CAP 2009 effectively renders this curriculum ineffective. MoET now plans to replace CAP 2009 with a new curriculum called the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBCEP), which is intended to close the implementation gap witnessed with the CAP 2009 and counter the contextual factors that led to the failure of CAP 2009. In this article, we argue that the Lesotho education policy context obstructed the implementation of CAP 2009. We, therefore, explore certain contextual factors that negatively impacted the effective implementation of CAP 2009. We argue that the persistent policy gap regarding the implementation of CAP 2009 results from a policy process that is not sensitive to or does not reflect the unique Lesotho education context. Findings suggest that poverty, rurality, HIV/AIDS, corruption, and political instability severely hampered the effective implementation of the CAP 2009. Following this, specific recommendations are made to improve and ensure effective curriculum implementation within the Lesotho education sector.

KEYWORDS

Lesotho education; policy implementation context; corruption; HIV/AIDS; policy gap; political instability; poverty.

INTRODUCTION

Policy implementation happens within a particular context, which variously affects the outcomes of a policy. Education policy is supposed to advance the quality of education and serve as a beacon of hope for economic growth and the improvement of the lives and livelihoods of people (Ramappa & Jagannatham, 2010). Education policies should, therefore, be effectively implemented for their aims and objectives to be achieved and for society to benefit from them (Khan & Khandaker, 2016).

In Lesotho, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) envisions an education system that would contribute towards prosperity, alleviation of poverty and a better quality of life for the Basotho. However, indications are that the effectiveness of the Lesotho education is influenced by a policy implementation context that obstructs and inhibits the effective enactment of policies and the subsequent realisation of these ideals. Evident is poverty, which in Lesotho is mainly “perpetrated by the rampant ineffectiveness of the education sector” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2007, p.79). The government of Lesotho also opines that the failure of the education system to produce positive results in poverty alleviation is caused by “skills mismatch [that] exists where educational institutions have not provided skillsets required by labour markets” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2017, p. 54). Because of these failures and inconsistency in education policy implementation, Khoboli et al. (2013) refer to the probable policy gap in Lesotho education. Such a gap exists when policy fails to achieve its intended aims and objectives.

In 2009, MoET adopted the Curriculum and Assessment Policy 2009 (hereafter CAP 2009), which aims to make “education... accessible, relevant, efficient and of the best quality” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2009, p.2). However, teachers in Lesotho schools experience challenges implementing this curriculum (Chabana, 2017; Selepe, 2016), resulting in ineffective implementation. Ineffective implementation of the CAP 2009 jeopardises the quality and relevance of Lesotho education. Whilst some factors obstructing its effective implementation are inherent to the CAP 2009, others are found in the context within which the CAP 2009 is implemented; this is because policy implementation is very much context-specific (Khan, 2016), and context influences policy implementation to the extent that if not regarded, it can become a significant barrier to implementation. More so, only focusing on general solutions to policy failure without acknowledging the context of a policy can lead to incoherent implementation efforts (Viennet & Pont 2017).

In this article, we argue that the ineffective implementation of the CAP 2009 and the subsequent inability of the Lesotho education sector to improve the quality of life of the Basotho is the result of a policy gap created by education policy processes that are not responsive to the unique Lesotho education context. Therefore, this article explores possible factors obstructing the effective implementation of the CAP 2009 in the Lesotho education sector.

Research on education in Lesotho and the CAP 2009 are abound (Chabana, 2017; Chere-Masopha & Mothetsi-Mothiba, 2022; Dungey & Ansell, 2020; Makumane & Ngcobo, 2020;

Raselimo & Mahao, 2015; Raselimo & Thamae, 2018; Selepe, 2016). However, we could not trace any research on the context of policy implementation in the Lesotho education sector. This paper contributes towards policy implementation studies by amplifying the policy implementation context of Lesotho and the possible impact on the effective implementation of the CAP 2009. We do this by explaining the concepts of education policy and policy implementation. Thereafter, we investigate the concept context, highlighting the Lesotho educational context and the factors of poverty, HIV and AIDS, political instability, corruption and rurality as factors inherent to the Lesotho education context, which obstruct the implementation of the CAP 2009. We conclude with a discussion and some recommendations to contribute to effective policy implementation in the Lesotho education sector.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we followed a qualitative research approach, which builds on a conceptual framework informed by the concepts of policy implementation, corruption, HIV/AIDS, political instability, and poverty. A desktop study provided the primary and secondary sources used, and data was collected through a literature review. Data were gathered through a careful and complete reading of literature relevant to Lesotho education and other topics that we considered relevant to the study. Legislation and policies such as the Constitution of Lesotho, 1993; the Education Act, No.3, 2010; the Education Sector Plan 2016-2026; and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy 2009 were also analysed. These documents were purposively selected because of their pronouncements pertaining to the nature of the context that should be created to ensure effective policy implementation within the Lesotho education sector. Because these documents are publicly available, no ethical approval was required. This paper adheres to ethics requirements. No data was falsified or fabricated, and the authors referenced all sources reflected in this paper.

The Concepts Policy and Education Policy

Understanding what policy implementation entails requires conceptual clarity of the concept. Khan (2016, p.3) defines policy as "...the guide to action, and it connotes a broader framework to operationalise a philosophy, principle, vision or decision, mandate, etc., which are translated into various programs, projects and actions." For Hill and Hupe (2014, p.4), "policy involves behaviours as well as intentions, and inaction as well as action." Policy is, therefore, a directive and a guide aimed at achieving particular aims and objections; it also articulates certain behaviours (or non-behaviour) that the government regards as in the public interest and for the public good.

Education policy is "... the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of an education system" (Bolaji et al., 2015, p.57) or "the actions taken by governments in relation to education practices, and how governments address the production and delivery of education in a given system" (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p.20). Therefore, education policy focuses on improving the quality of education as a public good. As such, it articulates governments' educational aims

and objectives and how to achieve them. The CAP 2009 is an education policy that spells out the Lesotho government's educational aims and objectives. As such, it wants to address Lesotho-specific educational needs, hoping to improve the quality of education in Lesotho and the lives of the Basotho. However, policies are of no value if not effectively implemented.

Policy Implementation

Well-written policies lose their value if they are not implemented (Khan, 2016), and merely approving and adopting policies does not warrant accomplishment if they are not effectively implemented (Cerna, 2013). Policies are effectively implemented when their "designed and planned development goals and objectives are realised" (Ikechukwu & Chukwuemeka, 2013, p.62). Therefore, Policy effectiveness refers to the extent to which policy aims and objectives are achieved.

The word 'implementation' means to 'carry out, accomplish, 'deliver', fulfil, produce, 'enact', 'realise, 'change' or complete' (Cloete & Wissink, 2000, p.166; Viennet & Pont, 2017). Policy implementation, in particular, is described as being 'iterative and political' (Viennet & Pont, 2017) and 'complicated' (Signé, 2017, p.12). Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) consider policy implementation as a procedure of interaction between setting goals and actions geared to realise them. For Yaro et al. (2016, p.3), it represents "routine governmental processes of putting the government's targeted goals into action, which is usually done by government agencies or its officials in accordance with the stipulations of Law."

Education policy implementation is particularly defined as the phase of the policy process in which the decisions taken by the government get executed throughout the education system (Viennet & Pont, 2017). This execution is carried out by "politicians, pressure groups, civil servants, publicly employed professionals, academic experts, journalists and in some cases, ordinary people that the policy directives are bound to affect" (Hill & Varone, 2017, p.5). Since policy implementation fills the 'gap between policy promises and policy outcomes', it is inextricably connected to the entire policy process and links policy production and policy practice (Carr, 2007; Taylor et al., 1997). Therefore, considerations about the context within which a policy is implemented should be a fundamental part of every stage of the policy process.

The Context of Policy Implementation – An Important Determinant of Policy Success

Policy is not made in a void but within a particular setting (context) (Chakrabarty & Chand, 2016). The same context that gives rise to a policy influences its implementation. As such, policy implementation cannot be removed from the complex, multifaceted and multileveled context (Hudson et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 1997) within which it is developed. Policy, therefore, does not just emerge from nowhere, as if there are no contextual factors that influence its development, its content, or the environment within which it is destined to function.

The policy implementation context refers to the elements that institute the setting in which education policy implementation takes place (Viennet & Pont, 2017) or the "realities of a specific and dynamic environment" (Fox et al., 2006, p.8). This context can be a policy's institutional, social, economic, political, cultural, international, political or legal setting (Cerna,

2013; Cloete, 2011; Cloete & Wissink, 2000; Tereza, 2019). Demography, institutional settings, existing policies (Viennet & Pont, 2017), and historical and various conceptual dimensions functioning at global, regional, country and local levels (Mthethwa, 2012) all constitute the context. The political values and public mood also determine policy context at a given point in time, the structure of the government and national and cultural norms (Chakrabarty & Chand, 2016), as well as the “underlying ideologies and assumptions” (Armstrong et al., 2016, p.7). These factors create a nuanced, complex, multifaceted policy implementation context when added together at a particular time and within a specific setting.

Therefore, the policy implementation context is a product of the socioeconomic, socio-political, cultural, environmental, global, philosophical and ideological conditions within a particular geographical space and to which a policy should respond. These factors should constantly be reflected upon, and if not considered during the policy process, these “contextual factors can derail otherwise ideal implementation practice” (Signé, 2017, p.12).

Contextual factors can change at any time, making the policy context fluid. More so, this context is also determined by governance theory. To this effect, is it especially within a top-down policy implementation theory that context is disregarded? For Signé (2017, p.13), this theory “...neglects prior context and political aspects, as if implementation were only a matter of administration, depending only on the availability of resources”. Effective policy implementation depends upon validating and considering a combination of economic, socio-political, organisational, cultural, ideological and attitudinal factors. Disregarding policy context can severely impair the implementation of a policy. Therefore, effective implementation of the CAP 2009 requires that the Lesotho policy implementation context be validated.

We subsequently explore the Lesotho education policy implementation context, firstly from an ideal policy perspective, and thereafter, we highlight poverty, HIV and AIDS, political instability, and corruption as current contextual factors inherent to the Lesotho education context and which define the context within which the CAP 2009 is being implemented. We opted to focus only on these factors because of their prevalence, their persistence and their severe influence on education in the country and the literature on education in Lesotho (Dhemba & Nhapi, 2020; Dungey & Ansell, 2020; Hlojeng & Makura, 2020; Lekhetho, 2021; Rakolobe & Teise, 2020; Thaanyane, 2019). Whilst we are focusing on these factors only, we validate and appreciate the significance of other factors contributing to the complex context within which Lesotho education policies are supposed to be implemented.

The Ideal Lesotho Education Policy Implementation Context

Lesotho “is a democratic country, guided by the Constitution of Lesotho (1993)”, (Constitution of Lesotho, 1993: Chapter 1), which creates the Constitutional context for implementing education policies. The Constitution (1993) states that:

Lesotho shall adopt policies aimed at promoting a society based on equality and justice for all its citizens regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion,

national or social origin, property, birth or other status (Kingdom of Lesotho, 1993, Section 25(1), (2); 1993: Chapter III, Section 26(1)).

Therefore, all education policies in Lesotho should be underpinned by the principles of equality and justice for all Basotho. In line with the Constitution, the Lesotho Education Act 2010 (Section 4(2)) promises to create a context that will “promote the education of the people of Lesotho ... and ... act in the best interests of the learner and his or her education at all times” (MoET, 2010: Section 4(2), (a) and (e)). Informed by the Education Act 2010, the Education Sector Plan 2016-2026 aims “[t]o enhance the system that will deliver relevant and inclusive quality education to all Basotho effectively, efficiently and equitably” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016, p.22). Promoting and enhancing education as well as serving the learner’s best interests suppose that education policies will be implemented in a context conducive to effective policy implementation and regarded as significant for policy implementation. We contend that these policy ideals can, therefore, only be realised through the effective implementation of policies that are aligned and responsive to the Lesotho education policy implementation context.

The Current Lesotho Education Policy Implementation Context

Lesotho education is a joint venture between the government, churches, and the community (Mateka, 2014). Most Lesotho schools (approximately 90%) belong to the church, with the government and the community owning the remaining 10% of schools. This distribution of ownership resulted in a tripartite partnership between these entities, with Lesotho education being described as a ‘three-legged pot’ (Mokotso, 2016). Despite this, the education system is centralised, and it remains the responsibility of MoET to manage education and to regulate and provide training in the education sector by pronouncing education policies and curricula (Moshoeshoe, 2023). Within this structure, education is “characterised by conflicts and power struggle for control between the government and the churches as school proprietors” (Khama, 2018, p.29).

In addition, Lesotho education also experiences challenges with overcrowded classrooms, high student-teacher ratios, insufficient teaching and learning resources, frustrated teachers’ high levels of poverty (World Bank, 2019), and inaccessibility to the internet (George & Kolobe, 2014). Particular contextual factors such as poverty, rurality, HIV/AIDS, corruption, and political instability, which are prevalent and persistent in Lesotho, contribute towards these conditions, and they, therefore, negatively impact the effective implementation of the CAP 2009. In what follows, a more detailed discussion of these factors is given.

Poverty

Correa et al. (2017) opine that policies cannot yield successful results if a country is economically poor. The UNDP (2002, p.10) defines poverty as “a state of economic, social and psychological deprivation occurring among people or countries lacking sufficient ownership, control or access to resources to maintain minimally acceptable standards of living.” Lesotho is gripped in poverty. “Measured in 2017/2018, Lesotho had a poverty rate of 27.3% based on the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per person per day (in 2011 purchasing power parity

terms) and a Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality, of 44.6% (Boko et al., 2023, p 4). The 2019 World Bank Report further claims that “poverty in Lesotho remains higher than several other lower-middle-income countries [also], since 2015, the economy has not grown in per capita terms from political instability” (World Bank, 2019, p.16). Poverty in Lesotho remains persistently high because of a lack of access to quality education. In its Lesotho Country Analysis Working Document of 2017, the Lesotho government acknowledges that poverty in Lesotho is caused by a “lack of education [and] high unemployment, no clear policies to tackle unemployment [and] subjects taught in schools [that] do not respond to unemployment” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2017, p.5).

So severe is the impact of poverty that Thaanyane (2019, p.403) observes that:

For Lesotho’s education system to truly respond to the needs of the poor and contribute to wealth creation in communities and society at large, like other countries, it has to take the issue of poverty into special consideration in the planning of educational services.

Poverty variously influences the delivery of education and the implementation of curriculum; this is because “in rural areas of Lesotho where children often have to walk long distances, they do not attend school unless they know that a school meal is waiting” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2015, p.3). Poverty has, therefore, a direct impact on education as it is likely to cause absenteeism that may escalate to learner dropout. A study by Hlojeng and Makura (2020) also found a relationship between academic underachievement and poverty in Lesotho schools.

Rurality

For Neille and Penn (2015), rural areas are defined by a lack of basic services, low literacy levels, high unemployment levels and limited access to education. Similarly, appalling conditions are found in rural schools. Rural schools lack basic and necessary resources. Learners travel longer distances to schools; teachers display low morale; teacher quality is poor; educational advisers hardly visit schools; learner enrolment is low; learner absenteeism and dropout rates are very high (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Teise & Barnett, 2021), and learners not living in supportive environments (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). More so as Jakubowski (2022, p.3) lament that in the context of American schools, “infrastructure in many of the rural areas lacked broadband access for the internet.” The situation be even worse for poor developing countries.

Lesotho comprises two distinct geographical areas: predominantly the rural highlands and the urban lowlands. The rural population of Lesotho is estimated at 58% of the entire Lesotho population (Government of Lesotho, 2018), and a large percentage of the rural population appears to be either poor or extremely poor (Morojele, 2012). The Lesotho Assessment Report (World Bank, 2019) shows that poverty levels are highest among people living in rural areas, the less educated, the unemployed and large families; this is typically the situation in rural areas of Lesotho where most of the people are poor, illiterate, unemployed and dependent on farming.

Rurality poses several challenges to effective policy implementation in Lesotho. According to the World Bank (2019), education outcomes in rural areas of the country have been inadequate, which is evident from the slow progression through the school system's poor scores in the international educational evaluation (the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring of Education Quality [SACMEQ]); uneven progression across districts to the highest school grades; and poor performance at the highest levels in the school-leaving examinations. Maine, (2022) also found that in the rural areas of Mohale's Hoek, parental involvement in the education of learners experiencing barriers to learning is poor because of parents' low level of education, poverty, poor communication, and time constraints. School attendance in rural schools is subsequently poor, and learners drop out of school to help bring income to households (UNDP, 2015). Poor living conditions, shortage of appropriate accommodation, inadequate classroom facilities and school resources, and lack of access to basic services such as water, leisure activities and public facilities also serve as constraints to attracting teachers to rural areas (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008).

In addition, multi-grade teaching is typical of rural education. With multi-grade instruction, the same teacher teaches learners of different grades (and subjects, ages) in the same classroom (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Joubert, 2010). A similar situation is found in Lesotho, as teachers in rural schools are exposed to multi-grade teaching, which is not supportive of the implementation of CAP 2009. Also, Beukes (2006) posits that teachers generally have a negative attitude towards multi-grade teaching, indicating that they are likely not to promote quality education when faced with multi-grade teaching.

HIV/AIDS

HIV and AIDS is a significant problem affecting many countries worldwide. Lesotho has the second highest HIV and AIDS prevalence globally (Ministry of Health, 2014), and many Basotho are affected by HIV. In Lesotho, the age group 15-24, which comprises mainly young people of school-going age (Maraka, 2020), is primarily affected by HIV and AIDS. So severe is the impact of HIV and AIDS on the Basotho that it was declared a national disaster. In addition, a national policy framework informs governments' response to the HIV and AIDS scourge.

The MoET developed the Lesotho Education Sector HIV and AIDS Policy, 2012 (LESHAP 2012) to curb the spread of HIV and AIDS through education. However, Rakolobe and Teise (2020) claim that despite the development of LESHAP 2012, HIV and AIDS infections remained high in Lesotho and continued to affect young people negatively. Rakolobe (2017, p.120) found that "HIV/AIDS negatively affects the education of Lesotho and that of the Basotho children [resulting in] adverse poverty and an increased number of orphans, and absenteeism from school." As such, HIV and AIDS continue to impair education provision in Lesotho. Both the Lesotho Education Sector Strategic Plan 2005-2015 and the Education Sector Plan 2016-2026 identified HIV and AIDS as one of the significant challenges that are negatively affecting education attainment in Lesotho (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016; 2005), also because of its impact on teachers in particular. Teachers and health personnel are equally concerned about learners'

health brought by the seemingly increasing HIV/AIDS statistics among this group of young people (Malibo, 2021). Education is considered crucial in the fight against HIV and AIDS (Coombe, 2002), and if the education system is not used to fight HIV and AIDS, “Lesotho will for a long time struggle with this epidemic” (UNESCO, 2013, p.7).

Corruption

Corruption can be defined as the misuse of public authority for personal gains or as an act of malfeasance by government officials for personal enrichment while performing tasks entrusted to them by the public (Shumetie & Watabaji, 2019). In general, corruption is the request or the demand and reception of unjustified benefits by people in positions of power, such as in governmental positions, and it is common in the context of political instability. Corruption takes up the form of bribery, extortion, embezzlement, and fraud. Shumetie & Watabaji, (2019) opine that the underdevelopment of Africa and the widespread political instability on the continent leads to high rates of corruption as politicians, leaders, and public servants illegally collect wealth using public office for private gains.

Lesotho is politically unstable, and corruption is equally rampant in Lesotho. Regarding corruption in the world, Lesotho ranks 99 out of 180 (Transparency International, 2022). In 2020, Lesotho ranked 83rd, and in 2021, Lesotho ranked 96th. There appears to be a significant decrease in public perceptions about corruption in Lesotho. Corruption in Lesotho resulted in the collapse of the 2015 coalition government (Rapitse et al., 2023); it continues to skyrocket (Mokotso, 2019), and numerous public officials have in recent years accused of corruption (BTI, 2022), suggesting that corruption is a persistent problem in the country. Interestingly, however, it is “very common for public officials who are suspected of being involved in corruption to be transferred to another ministry or fired without due process” (BTI, 2022, p.14). Corruption inappropriately hurts people experiencing poverty by diverting funds intended to provide basic services (Lesotho, 2014), thus promoting inequality and injustice and discouraging investment and economic growth.

Corruption seriously affects education and education policy implementation and so hampers progress and development in education. George (2017) blames systemic educational inefficiencies on corruption. For example, the salaries of newly employed teachers were diverted to “ghost teachers”, leaving these teachers without salaries for months (Kabi, 2018).

Political Instability

Political instability is defined as “a situation or process whereby a society is steeped in overt and covert conflicts which in turn pose serious threats to its social fabric” (Matlosa, 1997, p.93). Political instability prevents the implementation of coherent policies (Barugahara, 2015). More so, the frequency of political instability accompanied by massive corruption gives rise to deep-rooted underdevelopment and poverty in Africa (Shumetie & Watabaji, 2019), and it leads to high cost of living, and poverty.

Lesotho’s political landscape since independence has been characterised by political instability (Rakhare, 2019), which has negatively affected the country’s development. Mokotso

(2019, p.1) confirms that “[t]here is sufficiently prevailing consensus that Lesotho has never experienced a stable democracy ever since political independence.” According to Lekhetho (2013a), Lesotho, with its relatively homogeneous population, has always experienced one form of political unrest and conflict ranging from power struggles and military coups to post-election disturbances. From 2012 to 2018, Lesotho held three national elections impelled by votes of no confidence against Prime Ministers (Institute for Peace and Security Studies, 2019; Mohlamenyane, 2018). This period was also marked by various coalition governments, which contributed to the political instability in the country.

This instability was also experienced in education, where from 2012 to 2023, Lesotho had nine (9) Ministers of Education, which resulted in a lack of direction and continuity in the Ministry. Ministers and Principal Secretaries are political appointees bound to vacate their positions when a government collapses. Therefore, the continuous change in government can be expected to result in a change in Ministers and Secretaries, which will inevitably negatively impact education and the implementation of the CAP 2009.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy, 2009

Since its independence in 1966, Lesotho has tried to adopt a national basic education curriculum that is localised, contextually relevant and meets the country’s local needs (Rakolobe, 2022; Raselimo & Thamae, 2018). In 2009, Lesotho finally introduced and implemented the CAP 2009 as a localised curriculum (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015; Selepe, 2016). With the CAP 2009, MoET explicitly attempts to improve Basotho’s quality of life and address the socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and HIV/AIDS that the country faces (Ralebese et al., 2022). It also wants to correct the wrongs in the education sector. Hence, it aims to “tackle the low-performance standard revealed by recurrent surveys and assessments and to address the remaining high levels of repetition and dropouts” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2009, p.29), which was supposed to do by determining the nature and direction of the national curriculum and its objectives; monitoring quality, relevance and deficiency of basic and secondary education; aligning the assessment methods to what is taught; integrating curriculum and assessment functions to strike the necessary balance between the two; and to proposing a fully localised secondary education curriculum and assessment (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2009).

With the implementation of this curriculum, the MoET wants to meet local needs and context-specific challenges. However, achieving these aims and objectives depends on how effectively this curriculum is implemented. In general, it seems as if the education sector experienced difficulties with the effective implementation of the CAP 2009. Selepe (2016) found that teachers in Lesotho schools are not effectively implementing the CAP, 2009. Chabana (2017) also indicates that teachers experience frustrations and challenges regarding the implementation of the CAP 2009.

It therefore seems that the lack of a clear implementation plan for the CAP 2009 is negatively impacting its implementation, affecting teaching and learning in Lesotho schools. The Lesotho education system is often criticised as ineffective, as evidenced by students’ high

wastage and failure rates, particularly in the Grade 12 school-leaving examinations (Lekhetho, 2021; World Bank, 2019). In the words of Raselimo and Mahao (2015), the good intentions of the policy seem not to be realised and are creating problems instead of the envisaged solutions.

Furthermore, Chere-Masopha et al. (2021, p.288) opine that one of the factors that impede the effective implementation of CAP 2009 can be attributed to the fact that:

The type of teachers that is required for the successful implementation of these changes should have been exposed to the similar type of curriculum implementation either through teacher education and /or in-service professional development.

It therefore appears that the policy implementation failure of CAP 2009 cannot be blamed on classroom teachers alone, as they too are influenced by the policy implementation context. The lack of prior training for the teachers has, therefore, contributed to their inability to implement CAP 2009 effectively. Ralebese et al. (2022) reiterate this view, claiming that principals lack the skills and knowledge to support the effective implementation of CAP 2009 in their schools despite having attended training on integrating the curriculum.

DISCUSSION

The effective implementation of any education policy requires sensitivity, appreciation, and validation of the context within which that policy must be implemented. To ensure the effective implementation of the CAP 2009, the unique ideological, political, social, cultural, institutional or economic context that drives and influences the context within which Lesotho education policy is to be implemented should always be considered. The Lesotho education context is characterised by various socioeconomic ills such as poverty, rurality, HIV and AIDS, corruption, and political instability. These ills render education and education policy implementation problematic. Poverty directly influences the implementation of policies such as the CAP 2009, and for Paudel (2009), the intended results of a policy cannot be achieved in the context of poverty.

Many schools in Lesotho are located within rural areas where more than half of the population resides. Teaching in these areas is hampered by typical rural conditions such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, lack of resources, lack of qualified teachers, etc. All these factors, in one way or the other, negatively impact the implementation of the CAP 2009. Kaphe (2017) confirms that a lack of resources in rural areas where poverty is high is the cause of poor implementation of the CAP 2009. Lekhetho (2021) also links Lesotho's poor quality of secondary education to weak primary education in under-resourced rural primary schools where teachers are still unqualified and multi-grade and ineffective teaching are widespread.

The implementation of the CAP 2009 is further hampered by multi-grade teaching in most of Lesotho. In the context of multi-grade education, teachers are confronted with significant challenges as they must teach two or more age groups simultaneously and possibly more than one curriculum subject in the same class (Taole, 2014). Lekhetho (2021, p.872) confirms that "poor children living in the deep rural, mountainous areas are particularly affected

by weak learning in the early grades.” The fact that large parts of Lesotho are rural also creates teacher shortages in these areas. It, therefore, becomes difficult to cover the curriculum without a certain minimum number of teachers (World Bank, 2019), severely impacting the effective implementation of the CAP 2009. It results in learners “being educated to perpetuate the same illiteracy and lack of skills that bind their parents to a lifetime of poverty” (Joubert, 2010, p.59).

The Lesotho government acknowledges that teaching and learning conditions due to resource shortages within the Lesotho education sector negatively affect teacher morale (World Bank, 2019). Since teachers are primarily involved in implementing education policies, the overcrowded classrooms, high student teacher ratios, and insufficient teaching and learning resources that are so characteristic of Lesotho education will necessarily negatively influence effective policy implementation in schools (Lekhetho, 2013b).

Furthermore, context specificity makes it difficult, if not impossible, to borrow and use policies from other countries without making the necessary adjustments. More specifically, Western policy cannot be used to solve problems within an African context. The CAP 2009 is regarded as a foreign policy because “curriculum practice in Lesotho remains largely Euro-American centred” (Chimbi & Jita, 2022, p.141). The CAP 2009 is likely not to be relevant to the Lesotho context. The government acknowledges the disregard for Lesotho’s unique context as it observes that “external consultants were primarily used for the formulation of strategic policy documents” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016, p.27). These policy documents are subsequently “not domesticated, and lack the customary, social and political background of [Lesotho]” (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016, p.28). To ensure effective policy implementation, “the theory must fit the context,” and the actual “policy must respond to the actual situation” (Human, 1998, p.49). A mismatch between policy theory and policy context, especially in Lesotho, where Basotho’s hope of a better future is pinned down on its education, can only mean disaster to the nation and the country.

Corruption is linked to and made possible by political instability. Therefore, one can expect corruption to flourish within a context of political instability, such as the case in Lesotho. For Ali (2006) and Ménard et al. (2018), corruption is a significant obstacle to proper policy implementation. For Ikechukwu and Chukwuemeka (2013), it also affects a policy’s content and quality. Corruption cripples the education sector as money destined for the delivery and development of education gets embezzled. Within a corrupt and politically unstable context, learner stationery, libraries, schools, infrastructure, feeding schemes, learner transport, teaching and learning support material, and whatever is needed to ensure the effective delivery of the curriculum cannot be provided.

Little or no knowledge of the factors impacting policy implementation affects the policy’s logic because context affects policy implementation (Weimer & Vining, 2005). Hence, effective policy implementation requires an intense awareness of policy context. The CAP 2009 is, therefore, destined to fail if its implementation is politically inspired and to score political points, with no regard to its responsiveness to the Lesotho education context and the extent to which

it will indeed solve Lesotho-specific problems. Since policy development and policy implementation are inextricably linked, contextual factors impacting effective policy implementation should be reflected and considered during the policy development process. Policy, therefore, does not fail at the implementation stage. It is destined to fail if the context within which it is supposed to be implemented is not considered right at the policy development stage. Therefore, ensuring the effective implementation of the CAP 2009 MOET needs to realise policy implementation is a “complex change process rather than the execution phase of policy-making” (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p.10).

CONCLUSION

In this article, we argued that knowledge of the Lesotho education policy implementation context is paramount for effective implementation of the CAP (2009). We foregrounded poverty, rurality, HIV and AIDS, political instability and corruption as some of the most pertinent and persistent contextual factors of the Lesotho education policy implementation context, which influence the effective implementation of the CAP 2009. In this way, we make a novel contribution to policy implementation studies, as no previous research highlighting the importance of the Lesotho education policy implementation context could be located. An important insight from this article is that the new curriculum called the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP), which MoET plans to introduce to replace the ‘ineffective’ CAP 2009, will also become ineffective and fail to yield the anticipated changes if the Lesotho education policy implementation context is not acknowledged. The LBECP is not responding to that context. This study implies that MoET should develop an understanding and a validation for the education policy implementation context of Lesotho and reflect that already at the policy’s inception. A complete policy implementation plan reflecting all contextual factors and their possible impact on the policy and how to mitigate that impact should be developed at the initial stages of policy development. Since context can change, constant monitoring of the policy implementation context should be necessary in every phase of the policy process to assess its effectiveness and to effect changes to the policy to suit the changing context.

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