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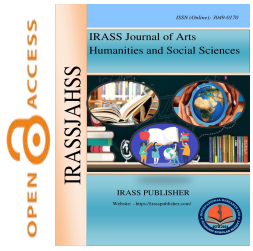

Organisational impediments hindering the smooth delivery of classroom action research in initial teacher education in Zimbabwe

Wilson Banda[1*], Symporosa Rembe[2], Hedwick Chigwida[3]

[*1] Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe

[2] School of Further and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare, South Africa

[3] Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe

Corresponding Author Wilson Banda

Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The study was part of a larger investigation on the implementation of classroom action research in Zimbabwean teacher education colleges. The study sought to unravel overarching impediments hindering the development of action research skills and competencies in the identified institutions. The research impetus was that despite teacher research being embraced by curriculum change literature as pivotal ingredient of initial teacher education and development, globally, the Zimbabwean situation pointed to the contrary in implementation. The study was a between methods concurrent triangulation design that utilised the mixed-methods approach. A purposive sample of 64 teacher educators and 76 preservice teachers were utilised. Data were collected through multiple instruments, namely: semi-structured questionnaires, document analysis, focus group discussions and interviews. SPSS version 20 software was used to analyze quantitative data. Qualitative data were analysed though content analysis. It emerged from the study that the delivery of the research process was tainted with a plethora of organisational impediments that needed intervention by all educational stakeholders.

Keywords: Classroom action research; curriculum; impediment; initial teacher education.

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INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwean Government reconstructed many educational reforms at the attainment of political independence in 1980. The reforms encountered diverse success stories. One such reform was the adoption of the 2-5-2 initial teacher education and development model in primary school teachers' colleges with emphasis in research methods tuition, aimed at the production of more reflective teachers. However, the way classroom action research (CAR) was being implemented in most teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe seemed to have been shroud in a plethora of shortcomings. Several grey areas were evident about the CAR experiences pre-service teachers underwent. For instance, the researchers observed with concern, as external examiners that year-in and year-out, dozens of Professional Development Studies' (PDS) prospective distinction pre-service teachers faltered on the last hurdle, mostly due to low percentage pass-marks obtained in their final year CAR projects. The problematic phenomenon was echoed by numerous reports produced by the University of Zimbabwe Department of Teacher Education (UZ-DTE) chief examiners (Bwerazuva, 2013; Matimati, 2006). Questions thus arose on whether CAR project writing was complex, intricate or phobia abound. Furthermore, colleague lecturers belittled the CAR delivery process calling the projects no research at all. It was against this background that this study sought to establish overarching impediments to the smooth delivery of CAR in selected Zimbabwean teacher education colleges and proffered tentative curricular intervention measures.

REVIEWED LITERATURE

Classroom Action Research Conception

Classroom action research (CAR) conception appears quite problematic. Different authors seem to have different definitions thereof. However, convergence appears on the major themes for the process. Brown (2002) posits that, relatively, CAR resembles the major assumptions of adult learning, as it provides a disciplined process of critical reflection, meaningful experiences, and self-directed inquiry. Emphasis on systematic action denotes that CAR is a cyclical step-by-step process. According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), CAR gives pre-service teachers the opportunity to explore problems that bedevil their day-to-day instructional responsibilities and triggers them to come up with tentative educational solutions. CAR is perceived to be a collaborative initiative that calls for educational practitioners to work as a team in designing the best strategies in finding a solution to problems in their classrooms. The overarching purpose of CAR implementation is to refine the current teaching practice.

The terms CAR, teacher research, self-study or practitioner research are often used as synonyms (McNiff and Whitehead,

2002). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state that CAR combines diagnosis, action and reflection on somehow problematic classroom issues that have been singled out by practitioners. The identified classroom issues should not only be problematic but capable of being changed through a self-reflective process of critical inquiry that is systematic and is eventually made public. The overarching perception is that CAR is systematic, intentional, and critical inquiry carried out by the teacher (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). Simms (2013) emphasises that CAR is often not a one-man band. The process often uses collaboration and collective problem-solving strategies aimed at changing organisations or organisational practices. It is also contextual or situational. In view of the foresaid, CAR is an educational inquiry in which a teacher systematically, intentionally, and critically investigates an educational problem that besets one's day-to-day practice of teaching. CAR thus empowers the researcher to ultimately produce some beneficial changes to instruction (Berg, 2007, McNiff, 2010). It uses a cyclical action–reflection model of inquiry. The cycle, in brief, involves problem identification; systematic data collection; reflection, built into practice and analysis of findings. Ultimately, discoveries are disseminated to enable the sharing of results with colleagues, administrators, the community, and the profession (Kosnick and Beck, 2000). The CAR process, according to Ginns, et al, (2001:129) "empowers teachers to examine their beliefs, explore own understanding of practice, foster critical reflection and develop decision making that would enhance their teaching and help them assume control over their respective situation." CAR is thus reflective inquiry conducted by teachers about own classroom practice. It is practitioner inquiry that enables teachers to reflect systematically, intentionally, and critically. It should be appreciated that there is a diversity of interdependent types of action research, and it would be awful to spend valuable time and energy arguing over who are genuine action researchers, in relationship to imposters.

World Overview on Impediments to Implementation of Classroom Action Research

Despite acknowledging that CAR fosters self-improvement of teachers' instructional skills and competencies, educationists concede that the process faces a series of impediments in its implementation (Hine and Lavery, 2014b). CAR critics have put forward a plethora of major impediments against the research genre. These are summarised as time related; inadequacy of funding; questionable research credibility; paucity in basic research skills and competencies; conflicts between researching and teaching roles; non-generalisability of action research results; messy data presentation and rather confusing rhetoric (Hine and Lavery, 2014b; Waters-Adams, 2006; Ellis, Armstrong and Smith, 2010).

Time Inadequacy

Time inadequacy is echoed as one of the worst impediments to conducting action research. Engaging in CAR requires an increase in commitment time to an already overwhelmed teacher. The observation is consolidated by Cochran -Smith and Lytle (2009) who lament that unlike other professions such as engineering, medicine and law which are organised to support research activities, most research in teaching is done on the go with very little time for say data collection, reflection, literature review or sharing of research findings with colleagues, let alone other significant stakeholders. This is attributed to the argument that teaching is a profession of time scarcity. Classroom practitioners are often already overburdened professionals, taking into consideration the high volumes of marking loads, lesson preparations, lesson evaluation and the administration of remedial tuition to deserving learners. Teacher research, no doubt, would require more rigour, space and time which appears scarce. Involvement in research would thus be perceived as an unnecessary burden. One informant in Ellis (2012: 285) states, "For the ordinary teacher at the coalface, I think they are grossly overworked that they barely have time for anything, let alone the reflective (CAR) cycle." However, considering the benefits both a teacher and learners accrue through classroom-based research, not being available for such an empowering endeavour is a lost opportunity. In that view, it was the object of this study to establish the extent to which time paucity was pervasive in CAR implementation in Zimbabwe.

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding was one other major impediment to the conduct of CAR abound in literature. Research funding was more systematic, deliberate, and popular in developed countries, particularly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states. In such economies, funds were channelled towards classroom inquiry. For instance, Ellis (2012) reports that the Australian Government's Quality Teaching Programme has considerable effect to the conduct of classroom research as teacher researchers were handsomely incentivised for the commitment. Such teachers were funded to share their research outcomes with teacher colleagues in and around their employment region. Zimbabwe being a developing economy, one would be interested in ascertaining the central government's enthusiasm in funding classroom inquiry particularly in initial teacher education and professional development (ITEPD).

Research Credibility or Trustworthiness

Classroom action research is carried out by classroom practitioners with the desire to find immediate intervention measures on issues bedeviling their practice. It is thus conducted by interested parties, making it rather skeptical to accept results thereof without a pinch of salt. Waters-Adams (2006) observes that this has led to criticisms of the credibility of the research process. There are often accusations of inevitable researcher bias in data gathering and analysis. However, the justification for action research counters this criticism. Consequently, it follows that this study had to check on the extent the reviewed ITEPD research projects were devoid of teacher prejudice.

Unfamiliarity with CAR Methods

Action researchers are known to explore what may constitute inadequate research methods. The scenario of 'on the job' training and consequent *ad hoc* planning has led to accusations by CAR critics of prodigious unreliability in data gathering. However, in some instances, unreliability becomes inevitable. Nonetheless, the methodology only makes sense in the presence of verifiably reliable data gathering. From this perspective, action research advocates such as Waters-Adams (2006) claim that flawed or not, the process provides the most reliable access to practice since action researchers draw strength from the notion of commitment, that is, from the drive to improve on their practice. It is here stressed that an action researcher must be committed to rigorous examination and critique of his or her practice. Carr and Kemmis (1986) in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) liken the commitment to the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* - the disposition to act truly and rightly. Phronesis is underscored to be the only fixed element in CAR as all else might change. In practice,

the principle is known to be difficult to implement since the disposition to act truly and rightly cannot be measured easily. In that view, CAR continues to be battered by its critics. The critics argue that it is difficult to ascertain the rigour of action research.

Non-generalisability of the action research results

The other predominant shortcoming for CAR is that action research projects are circumstantial. It is argued that contextual results are not generalisable. Although this is true to some extent, conclusions drawn in a different context can always be tried out by other people in their own practice, to see if they work for them (Hamilton, 1981 in Waters-Adams, 2006). Broader dissemination at times ensures that the study may influence beyond its scope. In that view, Melrose (2001) notes that some degree of generalisability may be attained if appropriate dissemination strategies are adopted.

Research Phobia

Educationists concur that there are two sides to any research results (Nunan, 2006). The output may either be positive or negative. In some instances, there would be no results at all. Surprisingly, mainstream journal publications rarely share studies whose research findings were inconclusive. If a teacher was to report inconclusive research outcomes, she would be labeled a complete failure. Due to such fear of being branded incompetent, teachers tend to play it safe and avoid possible embarrassment. They keep themselves to the core duty of teaching, leaving the pedagogical research opportunity to university professors. Furthermore, CAR only becomes research when outcomes thereof are made public by way of a paper presentation, project report or publication of a journal article. Failure to do that renders the effort mere reflective teaching.

Complexity of Action Research Representations

Beside the fore stated research phobia, visual diagrams on the action research process are of varying complexity. The representations are often quite messy, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, that a novice researcher tends to be put off before giving it a try.

departmental heads, and teacher educators, may still thwart their

Figure 1: Action Research Spirals (McNiff, 2010:16)

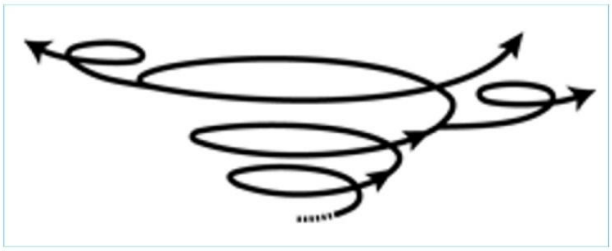
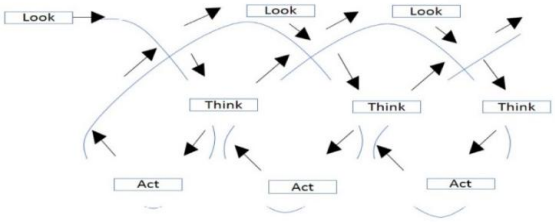


Figure 2: Action Research Helix (Stringer, 2014)



The representations give the impression that CAR spiral is without end. They give the impression that by engaging in CAR one would be chasing a historical ambition. Neapolitan (2000) posits that this could be the reason why most education leaders and teachers demonstrate lack of knowledge and understanding of what classroom action research entails. Such complex representations may lead to mystification. Since the understanding of any research initiative is like a ripple in a pond that starts from the centre of influence and cascades to the sphere of influence, one would expect education leaders to have a clear grasp of the process and its specifics before converting novice preservice teachers hence this study; to ascertain the teacher educator factors that foster the delivery of CAR in ITEPD.

Entrenched CAR Attitudes and Culture

Despite the complexity of CAR conceptualisation, there are several other barriers which might prohibit CAR from being successfully implemented. Such impediments include sheer resistance by teachers themselves (McNiff, 2010). Most teachers are alleged to view research relatively, as an elitist activity, usually, characterised by hard-core analysis of statistical data. Consequently, they would rather stay in their comfort zone of teaching, rather than waste time chasing the curriculum reform ambition. McNiff (2010:21) however, condemns such negative attitude and exhorts that 'while it may be true that individual practitioners cannot completely change the world, the little change they make as researchers, each one a small bit at a time, eventually result in realisation of considerable change'. Even in circumstances where CAR may be embraced by teachers, negative attitudes by senior education leaders, for instance, school principals,

Confusing Rhetoric of Action Research

The works of educationists in the preceding century, such as, Dewey (1933), Habermas (1970), Carr and Kemmis (1986) or Winter (1987), according to Waters-Adams (2006) show that behind strategies for teachers to systematically, intentionally, collaboratively, and critically examine their practice, there is always intense methodological and epistemological debate. The notion that actions research has been embraced as the most probable way to research classroom practice has remained the subject of criticisms. The persuasion is criticised for relying heavily on skills of self-critique which all teachers are assumed to develop over time. This is viewed as the hubris of Carr and Kemmis (2005), according to Waters-Adams (2006). The author claims that there is little evidence of Carr and Kemmis' familiarity with the practical world of teachers and the real problems which teachers face. Waters-Adams (2006) is further enraged by the level of prescription in some sections of action research literature. Attack is made to categorize classroom-based research into various kinds, namely: technical, practical, and emancipatory. These, Waters-Adams (2006) argues, are supposed to reflect the levels of involvement of participants, the amount of critique possible and, consequently, the quality of the knowledge derived from the process. For example, for action research to be emancipatory, it must, for a start, be collaborative. The above rhetoric on CAR categorisation is too prescriptive. Furthermore, one may be justifiable to observe that the bashing of the Carr and Kemmis' (1986) conception of CAR comes mainly from academics who might also claim their model of action research as the rightful one.

The critique could have been motivated by the desire to outdo one another.

Conflict between Teaching and Researching

Another impasse associated with the implementation of CAR is the incompatibility between teaching and researching. A teacher might embark on an instructional inquiry on a needy area but realises that the research hinders one's teaching or the achievement levels of learners. For instance, a teacher might focus on investigating the impact of subjecting learners at a particular grade level to high-order questions in the teaching of interactive comprehension in English as a Second Language. Much time would certainly be spent by both the teacher and the pupils on the selected reading strategy. Consequently, the success of such an endeavour may result in the neglect of other curricular activities. This would certainly not go down well with the teacher's immediate supervisor and parents.Additionally, teaching and researching are viewed to be at conflict to be the core mandate of a teacher. The primary role of teachers is believed to teach and not to research. Foster and Nixon (1978) in Brown (2002) argue that the teacher's role is too intricate to include a strong research component. Consequently, this study intended to explore the extent to which such perceptions were held by coalface preservice teachers and teacher educators in the Zimbabwean context.

METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by Mixed Methods Research approach, drawn from the adopted pragmatism paradigm. It utilised the between-methods concurrent triangulation (BMCT) design owing to its associated merits. The design denotes the simultaneous use of qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection within a single study, with the findings complimenting one another on data interpretation. The design's merits are summarised by Guba and Lincoln (2011) as enabling researchers to be more confident of their research results; stimulating creative ways of data collection informed by what works; thicker and richer data are collected that are viewed from multiple lens and may lead to integration of theories. By virtue of its comprehensiveness, Denzin and Lincoln (2009) posit that BMCT serves as the litmus test for competing world views. Meanwhile, it should be underscored that BMCT was not confined to data collection but cut across the entire research continuum from design stage, data collection and analysis stages. The design attempted to decipher CAR implementation impediments prevalent at two Zimbabwean teacher education colleges. The two institutions had long established tradition on CAR as the requisite component of initial teacher education and development curriculum. A purposive sample of sixty-four teacher educators and seventy-six preservice teachers was used. The targeted lecturers and final year student teachers were assumed to have the ability to answer questions that required description and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Multiple data sources were used in this study, namely: semi-structured questionnaires; semi-structured interview schedules, focus group discussions and analysis of several CAR related documents. Such polyangulation (Johnson, 2011; Stringer, 2014) provided the researcher with the opportunity to discover paradoxes and contradictions on how the CAR curriculum was implemented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Time Inadequacy

Research respondents perceived that the initial teacher education course in Zimbabwe was quite demanding, considering the professional responsibilities candidate teachers were imbibed in, such as, scheming, daily detailed lesson planning, pupils' assessment, and evaluation of the daily lesson plans, among other key result areas. The time scarcity concurred with the observation made by one respondent in Ellis (2012: 285) who states, "For the ordinary teacher at the coalface, I think they are grossly overworked that they barely have time for anything, let alone the reflective (CAR) cycle." This consolidates the assertion made by Neapolitan (2000) that classroom practitioners are believed to be already overburdened, taking into consideration the high volumes of marking loads, lesson preparations, lesson evaluation and the administration of remedial tuition to deserving learners. Research findings revealed that pedagogical core tasks, particularly during teaching practice, were given much priority at the expense of tasks related to CAR projects. Research work was often left until the eleventh hour. As a result, most student teachers did their project work under immense pressure. This compromised their CAR achievement levels and the general preparations for their final-year examinations.

The contact time for research lectures was abnormally little. Student teachers had less than 14 hours of research theory traceable lectures. Expecting them to benefit from such experience was a misnomer. The inadequacy was exacerbated by that more often lecturers would not turn up for the scheduled lectures. This may be deduced as some attitudinal challenge that required urgent intervention. To compensate for the lost time, some PSA lectures were sacrificed which was not healthy for the ITEPD curriculum. Additionally, the reviewed research lecture schedules had notable degree of negligence by the teacher educators. Lecturers-in-charge (LICs) and Heads of Departments (HODs) complained that since there were involved in several other middle-management responsibilities, they found themselves squeezed on time for CAR projects' supervision. Coupled with the relatively heavy supervision workloads, plus several other key result areas, the lecturers lamented that they were on a tight fix regarding time. As a result, their overall efficacy as educational professionals was compromised.

High CAR supervision load

Research findings revealed that CAR supervision load was quite heavy. It was predominantly 5 to 6 student teachers per lecturer. The load was exacerbated by the fact that several student intakes ran concurrently. In isolated instances, there were abnormal loads of more than 10 student teachers per lecturer. Most of such overburdened lecturers were LICs as they had to take on board all student teachers who had problems with their initial project supervisors. Such heavy CAR supervision loads certainly compromised the general quality of the ultimate research projects. It was not unusual that some glaring errors went unnoticed by the supervisors. The high CAR supervision load was in contrast with the situation obtaining in most high achieving education systems. CAR supervision was not the sole responsibility of teacher educators in such nations but was shared with mentors at the identified professional schools (Darling-Hammond, Wei and Andree, 2010).

Paucity of basic classroom action research skills and competencies

It was apparent that most teacher educators and student teachers had a serious paucity of basic research skills and competencies. They lacked in-depth knowledge of research concepts, such as, statement of the problem; how to articulate meaningful tenets of an abstract; research questions and related research objectives. Literature review was mere collection of 'all literature' on the subject in question despite its fit, concentrating more on definition of terms. Additionally, overarching deficiency was on research statistics knowledge and statistical analysis packages such as MINI TAB or SPSS. The student teachers' computer literacy left a lot to be desired. They were not familiar with the basic research skills such as the automatic creation of table of content or table of figures using Microsoft suite. A significant number of lecturers conceded that they were not clear on what name to give to the research they were supervising. Everything that a teacher educator and her supervisee agreed upon seemed to carry the day. This further confirmed the subjectivity abound in the projects' assessment. Additionally, this confirmed the observation made by Rogan and Grayson (2003) that curriculum implementation is not an all-or-nothing position, hence the diverse ways and levels on curriculum implementation. However, some good practices emerged that fostered reflective practice and teacher research in general.

Funding

Adequate funding plays a significant role in determining the success of any curricular initiative. This explains why ITEPD in most OECD states is deliberately funded, mainly from the fiscal. Such economies regard education as a public good. In high achieving nations, such as, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Netherlands, according to Darling-Hammond, Wei and Andree (2010:2), "… candidate teachers ... receive 2-3 years of graduate-level preparation for teaching, completely at government expense, plus a living stipend.'' In Sweden, on one hand, a professional development programme called 'Lifting the Teachers' was instituted in 2007. The programme, according to Darling-Hammond, Wei and Andree (2010, offers a grant to both in-service and preservice teachers to undergo a tuition-free compulsory CAR projects. In the case of in-service teachers, they are also offered a support of 80% of a teacher's annual salary. In developing economies such as South Africa, candidate teachers are provided with several scholarship and bursary opportunities (Rossouw, 2009). Funding is via bursaries, such as, the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme; a Provincial Education Department (PED) Bursary; a National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa (NSFAS) Bursary and bank loans. However, the aforesaid funding options in South Africa are not free lunch. Recipients are expected to make repayment thereof at a competitive interest rate. In contrast, ITEPD and classroom research funding in the studied Zimbabwean teacher education institutions was close to non-existence. Expenses directly linked to the student teacher, such as tuition fees and day-to-day subsistence and pocket money, were catered for by the student teachers' spouses and other family relations.

Similarly, teacher educators scorned the absence of research funding for their low educational research appetite. They proposed that teacher education institutions should be assisted financially such that they would practice what they preach. The prevalent situation where educational research funding was channeled to universities' education faculties was unsustainable. The practice further authenticated the public notion that proper educational research was the prerogative of university professors. Furthermore, teacher educators bemoaned that the profession was low paying such that their zeal to put extra effort burned out quickly over the years resulting in unprecedented low lecturer morale and attrition. Consequently, peripheral ITEPD components such as CAR tend to suffer. The teacher educator's basic salary upon entry into ITEPD lectureship, at the time of the study, hovered just on the poverty datum line of approximately, US$550.00 per month. The impediment concurred with the observation made by Mani and Uma (2010) that lecturer morale impacts directly on delivery of lectures, lecturer effectiveness and their leadership prowess, as well as student achievement levels. The findings were consistent with numerous studies that were conducted in developed countries, particularly those in the northern hemisphere. For instance, the USA National Centre for Education Statistics discovered that favourable workplace conditions were positively related to lecturers' job satisfaction. Asikhia (2010) avers that teacher educators should be motivated to be productive. Since lecturers are arguably the most important professionals in institutions of higher learning, it was disturbing to note that the bulk were discontented with their salaries and general working conditions. In the absence of sound teacher educator incentives, one would not expect much in the delivery of services, particularly in curricular areas that are regarded as second class such as the CAR component.

Shoddy Eloquence in English-as-a-Second Language

Data from the analysed research projects showed that the student teachers' English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) competency, generally, fell far below the language prowess expected of prospective teachers. The finding was in consonance with the assertion made by the Indian authority that language proficiency of the teacher needs to be enhanced (National Council for Teacher Education, 2009). The language deficiency contrasted with the espoused 3Cs (creativity/critical thinking, communication, and collaboration) that every 21st Century classroom practitioner is enjoined to possess. The language eloquence deficiency made reading the bulk of the project reports rather heavy. It explained why student teachers blindly copied and pasted raw ideas from textbooks and research sites. As a result, their critical voice was glaringly missing in most of the analysed small-scale research projects. Furthermore, the mixing up of tenses was predominant in the analysed CAR projects. The projects were further tainted with a gamut of grammatical, punctuation and typographical errors. The shortcomings were attributed to the admission of candidate teachers with weak O-Level passes. In mitigation, it was suggested that the recruitment of candidate teachers should be more transparent and done in sync with well-defined admission criteria. In addition, colleges should desist from admitting candidate teachers with weak O-Level passes. Overall, it was underscored that instructional language should assume great importance if student teachers are to soundly articulate their CAR projects. Besides, according to the National Council for Teacher Education (2009: 30), "A teacher talks, explains, translates, guides, instructs, cautions, motivates, encourages, illustrates, and plays various other roles. All of these imply an appropriate and context-specific use of language". This makes the teacher's language proficiency a critical factor.

Negative attitude towards classroom research

Despite the utility of CAR being readily embraced, it was regarded as a peripheral component of the teacher's core mandate.

For instance, at College X, the research lectures students received were 'untraceable.' No course-work files were even in place for external assessment. It appears the lecturers' negative attitude towards CAR was unconsciously passed on to student teachers. For instance, it was alleged that a significant proportion of the student teachers did not take their research component seriously, particularly when they were in teaching practice. Most students, as a result, reneged on the scheduled progress-check timelines. In addition, the protégé did not respond to the supervisors' comments. They relied on information from colleagues and research projects submitted by former intakes. Additionally, lecturers lamented that lack of adequate training in action research on their part made implementation of the research component worrisome.

Discordant student-lecturer relationship

The discordant student-lecturer relationship was a recurrent problem highlighted by a significant proportion of the student respondents, although overall, most project supervisors were said to be quite supportive. Students expressed displeasure that more often they were subjected to serious swearing and ridicule. This was attributed to the fact that lecturers expected the student teachers to have covered most of the requisite research skills and competencies during research methods lectures in their first residential phase. The supervisors did not acknowledge that student teachers learn gradually and at different rates (Brush and Saye, 2002) and that they too require scaffolded instruction. Larkin (2002) opines that what the learner can do should be matched with the level of help to be provided. This implies that learners should not be ridiculed but aided in overcoming their learning obstacles. The assistance, however, should not prevent learners from participating in the learning process. It implies that whenever a learner is found wanting, s/he should be afforded individualised CAR assistance. There was also a need for students to consult a supervisor in say pairs or small groups to avoid being subjected to alleged professional abuse. Furthermore, lecturers should regard student teachers as rational adults who should be treated as such. It was evident that teacher educators required familiarisation on andragogy, that is, principles of adult learning (Kearsley, 2010), acquired through say some post-graduate diploma in teacher education.

Other student-lecturer relational issues brought to the fore were allegations of sexual harassment or misconduct. Students were quick to point out that allegations of sexual harassment were difficult to confidently pin-down although dismissing them out-rightly would equally be false pretense. Students urged college executives to come out clean and publicise standing sexual harassment policies and the associated corrective structures. The findings concurred with those made by Muzenda (2014) in her study of the delivery of the clothing and textiles curriculum in Zimbabwean universities. She observed that students lamented that their supervisors used vulgar words and made sexually suggestive advances which made them uncomfortable to work with some male supervisors. Students were, however, reluctant to report the purported abusive conduct, possibly for fear of victimisation. The non-reporting agreed with the global trend where female students allegedly fear reporting any form of harassment fearing unknown vengeance by the perpetrators or non-action by those delegated to protect them (Reese and Lindenburg, 2005).

CONCLUSION

It emerged from the research findings that CAR implementation in the studied Zimbabwean teachers' colleges was intertwined in a series of impediments that need to be intelligently circumvented by both teacher educators on their individual capacity and policy makers, at both local and national levels. The overarching impediments included time inadequacy; funding scarcity; paucity of basic classroom action research skills and competencies on the part of some teacher educators; high CAR supervision load; shoddy eloquence in English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) by the student teachers; negative attitude towards classroom research by both teacher educators and student teachers; and discordant student-lecturer relationships. The lecturers' performance in assisting student teachers in their CAR projects, on the one hand, was slightly satisfying owing to several lecturer factors and some other organisational shortcomings that needed re-conceptualisation. The research informants cited lack of in-depth knowledge on the part of the lecturers on the different research types and the nature of CAR projects they were expected to supervise. Resultantly, it would be foolhardy to expect protégé to outperform in CAR when their 'mentors' were equally not thick in their conception of CAR. The research knowledge paucity was exacerbated by the limited contact time lecturers had with the supervisees. Furthermore, low lecturer motivation could not be ruled out, particularly, in a period where the nation's public servants' paydays kept on being postponed and negotiated monthly. The study revealed that it was wrongly assumed that all lecturers had operational capacity to effectively supervise the diploma in education CAR projects. The teachers' colleges had little CAR continual professional development initiatives meant to keep lecturers abreast with the curricular standards expected of a novice teacher researcher. As a result, novice lecturers remained at sea on how to best manoeuver, particularly those in expressive arts who were mainly non-degreed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the fore stated research findings, the following recommendations were made:

a. Teacher educators should be subjected to stage specific professional training and experience,

b. Beginner lecturers should be engaged in systematic and deliberate CAR induction programmes, superintended by experts in classroom practice and not mere desktop researchers who have little clue on the goings-on in the contemporary classrooms,

c. Lecturers' CAR supervision load should be reviewed downwards to allow effective and meaningful supervision,

d. More contact time should be made available for research theory lectures and research methods component should be a stand-alone ITEPD course with specialist lecturers,

e. Some uniformity and objectivity on the marking guides should be realised to avoid the noted subjectivity where CAR projects that one lecturer would rate as mediocre would be rated by another as distinction material,

f. Effort should be made in teacher educator preparation to familiarise prospective candidates with principles of adult learning, guided by the dictates of andragogy,

g. There is need for possible upward review of the ITEPD qualification from Diploma in Education to say Bachelor's Degree in Education or equivalent qualification, as has become the norm in the developed world and fast developing economies such as South Africa, and last,

h. Deliberate funding of ITEPD should be made from the fiscus, with

emphasis on production of reflective teacher researchers or classroom practitioners.

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