

# The Degree of Fidelity of the 2007 Education Reform Implementation

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the study was to investigate how 'faithfully' teachers were implementing the 2007 Education Reform in Ghana. From the Central and Western Regions in Ghana, 129 basic school teachers were surveyed. Only descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The study found that basic school teachers were practically constrained to implement the curriculum as planned. Therefore, degree of fidelity of implementation of the 2007 Education Reform was not impressive. Accordingly, it is recommended for the adoption of an eclectic stance as a combination of the approaches to implementation will elicit a more viable result.*

## Introduction

It is not uncommon to find policies, programmes and projects developed put into practice. For a successful delivery of every developed curriculum there is the need to implement it thoroughly in all the target areas for its coverage. Three main approaches to curriculum implementation are employed: fidelity, adaptation and enactment. Depending on the system of education, as noted by Snyder, Bolin and Zumwalt (1992), an approach is adopted to implement educational programmes that are operational in such school systems.

Since Ghana practices the centralised school system, it adopts the fidelity of implementation in delivering its educational programmes. Therefore, there is no gain saying that the 2007 Education Reform is implemented by fidelity of implementation.

Although some scholars in curriculum opine that no consensus exists on what exactly constitutes fidelity of implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Scheire & Rezmovic, 1983), Cobbold (1999) sees fidelity as how "faithfully" teachers put the curriculum into practical use in accordance with the programme mandates or dictates. Fidelity is the extent to which curriculum is delivered in accordance with its tested design. Implementing a programme by fidelity implies delivering the programme as it was implemented in the research that provided evidence of its effectiveness.

In the light of this, the Basic School teachers in Ghana are expected to implement the Basic School curriculum, part of the 2007 Education Reform, as planned with minimum degree of deviation. Fidelity of implementation of the Basic School curriculum makes it possible for all Basic School students in Ghana to undergo common learning experiences. Thus, the idea of fidelity of implementation of the Basic School curriculum is promulgated by its ability to enable students to transcend their immediate cultures in order to learn languages and cultures of other societies; making adequate consideration for social cohesion for unification of heterogeneous societies; and providing occupational balance to enable the student acquire a wide range of employable skills. All this is geared towards enhancing uniformity in students' learning.

However, fidelity is not absolute but a matter of degree. It depends on enabling conditions to support its success rate. The extent of teacher involvement in the production of the curriculum document to be implemented is one of the key factors. Because the Basic School "curriculum knowledge is primarily created outside the classroom by experts who design and develop the curriculum innovation" (Snyder et al., 1992, p. 404), its delivery might not be appreciable. Most Basic School "Teachers *might* acknowledge the existence of programmes,... or *curriculum* but in practice they *might* often feign what needs to be done to comply with ..." (Barnes, 2005, p. 2,) (emphasis added). They might harbour concerns about implementing the wisdom of some other persons as contained in the curriculum document. As a result, the centrally developed Basic School curriculum might be manipulated by the Basic School teachers to suit their peculiar school or classroom situation. Although in principle they are encouraged to approximate the ideal centrally developed curriculum almost all teachers often deviate from it.

Thus, fidelity of the Basic School curriculum implementation is fraught with many challenges which limit its ability to achieve its theoretical objective of ensuring a significant degree of compliance to programme directives. Given the differences in school contexts, the level of involvement of Basic School teachers in the development of the Basic School curriculum; Basic School teachers' current skills and knowledge level; availability of required instructional materials; and the level of Basic School teachers' motivation, it is doubtful if such teachers would be "faithful" enough to implement the Basic School curriculum as planned.

### **Context**

The implementation of any programme or innovation has never been without impediments. Albeit, there are some other factors that facilitate it. Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein identified five factors that inhibit curriculum implementation (Snyder et al., 1992). They include:

1. Teachers lack of clarity about the innovation;
2. Teachers lack of skills and knowledge needed to conform to the role model;
3. Unavailability of required instructional materials;
4. Incompatibility of organisational arrangements with the innovation;
5. Staffs lack of motivation.

Basically, these barriers can be categorised into three. Thus, the problems associated with the teachers' professionalism; those that are administratively oriented; and those problems that are associated with the change itself.

### **Method**

This was a descriptive study that surveyed the extent to which Basic Education teachers are making use of the 2007 Education Reform. Based on convenience, 150 classroom teachers were selected from the Cape Coast study centre of the Institute for Educational Development and Extension (IEDE). These are teachers who are in the field and thus are expected to adopt and implement the reform. To obtain the necessary data to address the issue, a 26-item closed-ended questionnaire measured on a 4-point Likert scale was used to survey 150 respondents. Out of this, 133 completed and returned the instrument. The 4-point scale representing "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" were crashed into only two; thus only into "Agree" and "Disagree".

### **Results and Discussion**

The results and discussion is presented in three parts to address three thematic issues about the state of the reform. This has been presented in accordance with the context of the study.

#### ***Teacher Professionalism***

The study analysed the extent to which professionalism affected how basic school teachers are implementing the reform. Teacher professionalism is operationalised to comprise teachers' skills and knowledge and the level of teacher motivation which influences their conduct in classrooms.

#### ***Teacher Skills and Knowledge***

The extent to which basic school teachers' skills and knowledge supported the delivery of the Reform were investigated. Table 1 presents summarised results of the responses gathered. It was found that a majority (61.1%) of the respondents teach without using the syllabus as the basic guide. Although some basic school teachers (52.2%) use the syllabus, some (F=87) consider the demands of the syllabus too difficult to meet. Yet, others (79.6%) also seem not to be so confident in themselves to be able to implement the reform. This is shown in their quest to receive in-service training packages to help them to understand and implement the reform. Some basic school teachers (F=78), however, use defensive mechanisms such as the difficulty level of the syllabus being too high so as to displace their inability to implement it as planned.

**Table 1: Extent of Teachers' Skills and Knowledge to Support the Reform**

	Agree		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%
I do not teach the topics in the way they have been arranged in the syllabus	69	61.1	44	38.9
Some of the demands of the new syllabus are too difficult to meet	87	77	26	23
I need in-service training on the new syllabus to help me understand and use it	90	79.6	23	20.4
Some of the topics in the syllabus are above the level of the pupils	78	69	35	31
I do not teach all the topics in the syllabus	54	47.8	59	52.2

The current skills and pedagogy that basic school teachers possess does not the implementation of the Reform. Basic school lack the skills needed to carry out the implementation to achieve 100% success rate. But if a programme is not delivered as designed, its outcome (i.e. impact on students) is likely to be changed, diminished, or eliminated outright (Snyder et al., 1992). Thus the findings of the study is consistent with those of Bauman, Stein, and Ireys, (1991), and Moncher and Prinz, (1991) that lack of training has engendered the diminished confidence and shear unresponsive skills of basic school teachers to deliver the Reform.

**Teacher Motivation**

Teacher motivation and reinforcement has been identified as a potent force in eliciting teacher compliance to planned programmes. In this regard, the basic school teachers' level of motivation in implementing the 2007 Education Reform was explored. The results of the responses obtained are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Staffs lack of motivation**

	Agree		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%
My current salary discourages me to teach wholeheartedly	52	46	61	54
The single-spine salary scheme will boost my morale to teach better once it is implemented	85	75.2	28	24.8
Teaching is boring	18	15.9	95	84.1
I will quit teaching once I get a better employment	41	36.3	72	63.6
I am concerned about how my students perform	103	91.2	10	8.8

Patently working in anticipation of the promised Single-Spine Salary Scheme (SSSS), a majority (75.2%) of basic school teachers hope to have their morale boosted once it is implemented. In spite of this, quite a generous majority (54%) are content with their current salary level. They, therefore, seem not to be perturbed about the apparent inequity they long have been crying over insofar as their conditions of service was concerned. It is quite clear that basic school teachers are intrinsically motivated to teach because out of the teachers surveyed, 95 (84.1) of them do not consider teaching as boring. Yet about 24% of those who considered teaching as not boring are now ready to quit teaching once they get a better job. This is quite contradictorily inconsistent. Almost all the teachers surveyed had their students' welfare at heart. Accordingly, it could be deciphered that the basic teachers are mainly humanitarian; just sticking to their professionalism and disregarding their conditions of service to demotivate them.

This is quite consistent with a number of research findings (Fraser, 1992) that many teachers enter teaching to help young people learn, that their most gratifying reward is accomplishing this goal. Accordingly, it could be said that the work-related factors most important to Ghanaian basic school teachers are those that allow them to practice their craft successfully. Although Myers and Myers (1995) observe that this kind of attitude is predominant among beginning teachers, by the close of the first year of teaching many of them realize that their dream is only a mirage. Many starting teachers hope for intrinsic rewards and as a result, in spite of the challenges they may face sacrifice their leisure time to accomplish a task. Yet in the absence of some kind of extrinsic motivation, the most intrinsically motivated teacher might become disillusioned if the salary cannot buy bread or pay rent.

Johnson (1986) provides further that teacher motivation is based on three theories of motivation and productivity. These are expectancy, equity and job enrichment theories. The logic behind expectancy theory is that individual basic teachers are more likely to strive in their work if there is an anticipated reward that they value, such as the single-spine salary, than if there is none. Equity theory provides that the basic school teachers

might be dissatisfied if there are no justly compensation for their efforts and accomplishments; and finally job enrichment theory advocates that workers are more productive when their work is varied and challenging.

This condition will propel the teacher to work assiduously towards the achievement of or meeting the stated or desired goals in order to maximize income as justified by the expectancy and equity theories. Even the most intrinsically motivated teacher will become discouraged if the salary does not pay rent or buy bread. Occasionally, such adjustments are necessary.

**Administrative Challenges**

Bureaucratic procedures have hampered the execution of the good workable programmes such that their fruition has become a mirage. As a result, the views of respondents were sought on how administrative arrangements support or infringe on their ability to implement the Reform. The responses are compartmentalised into two parts each addressing organisational arrangements and the availability and provision of materials that support the delivery of the Reform.

**Table 3: Organizational arrangements**

	Agree		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%
I do not keep to the time table recommended by GES	50	44.2	63	55.8
The environment within which my school is sited does not support academic work	62	54.9	51	45.1
My students academic background influences the way I teach	97	85.8	16	14.2
Mostly, I am unable to complete the lesson for the period	62	54.9	51	45.1
I am unable to cover the entire syllabus before the academic year ends	68	60.2	45	39.8

Most basic school teachers (55.8%) are 'faithful' in using the recommended time schedules in delivering instructions. Yet, most of them consented that the school environment decides the extent of curriculum implementation. Apparently, the depth of instructional success in basic schools is highly dependent the students' background. For the basic fact that basic school teachers are unable to complete the lesson for a period or the entire syllabus for the academic year, the aim of the basic school curriculum is defeated. The plan as outlined in the curriculum document is therefore not practically realistic. Hence, there will be varying degrees of implementation of the curriculum. Ordinarily, teachers' quest to cover the entire curriculum in order for them appear *honest* in the system might preclude any attempt to incorporate any such virtues, not so included in the curriculum yet perennial, in their lessons for students to internalise them. Such an act is forbidden in the basic school curriculum for that amounts to digressing.

The quest of fidelity to achieve uniformity let it fail to recognize that there are some unplanned learning outcomes that are desirable. Such learning outcomes may lack any prior pre-specification but result in the learning process. As Taba (1962) puts it "A limited concept of school learning limits the idea of what is expected of it" (p. 158). This often leads to parochial view of the basic school curriculum and education as a whole. Bondi and Wiles (1979, p. 114) noted that "... [Fidelity] is not yet sophisticated enough to serve as an absolute guide to practice" (emphasise mine).

**Table 4: Availability of materials**

	Agree		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%
I do not have the teachers' handbooks that accompany the new syllabus	60	53.1	53	46.9
There are teaching and learning materials to support instruction	30	23.5	83	73.5
Even though I need teaching and learning materials for my lessons I teach without them	65	57.5	48	42.5
Textbooks on the new syllabus are not available	50	44.2	63	55.8
I do not have a copy of the new syllabus	35	31	78	69
I use documents other than the syllabus and teachers' handbook to prepare my lesson plan	56	50	56	50

Close to half (F=60) of the teachers surveyed do not have the copies the teachers' handbook that accompany the syllabus. It was therefore not surprising that most (73.5%) indicated that there are instructional materials. For that matter most (57.5%) teach without the necessary supporting materials. Thus they use other materials in lieu of the recommended text. This might stem from the lack of support materials for the delivery of the 2007 Education Reform. The actual and anticipated flow of funds (Bishop, 1985) to promote the implementation of the change is paramount to ensure a steady appreciation of the change by the implementing agents. However, the use of such informal curriculum may thwart the goals of the planned curriculum goals.

However, the limited use of the curriculum document could be attributed to the limited involvement of the teachers when planning and developing the curriculum. Teachers are considered as the implementers of the change (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The curriculum cannot achieve its aims or be fairly evaluated unless the teacher implements it in a manner in which it was intended. Accordingly, the degree of implementation of any curriculum is partly hinged on the extent of teacher participation in the ideation and production of the curriculum which in turn reinforces the clarity of such change. But teachers' role in the process of planning and developing the curriculum is that of a consumer who makes use of the wisdom of programme developers. This means that the limited involvement of teachers in the planning and development process of the change is a potential limiting factor to the success of the change. Table 5 summarises the survey results on the extent to which the change was clear to the implementing teachers.

**Table 5: Clarity of the reform**

	Agree		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%
Elements in the new syllabus are not clear to me	59	52.2	54	47.8
I do not use the teachers' handbook that accompany the new syllabus	43	38.1	70	61.9
I am unable to strictly use the new syllabus	51	45.1	62	54.9
The old syllabus is better than the new syllabus	46	40.7	57	59.3
Some of the topics in the syllabus are above the level of the pupils	78	69	35	31

It was almost a split decision when teachers were asked about the extent to which the reform was clear to them. Quite a generous number of teachers (61.9 per cent) do not use the teachers' handbook to guide their practice. This attitude or practice might result from their apparent lack of reading, understanding and applying the content of the guide favourably. Coupled with this is teachers' apparent disinterest in the employment band use of the teaching syllabus which is considered as the basic guide for instructions. A majority (57 per cent) could not decipher the improvement that the new syllabus is making. Ordinarily, this state of affairs betrays teachers' gross lack of clarity of the Reform. This notwithstanding, the absolute majority (n=78) of the teachers surveyed attested that the difficulty level of the curriculum is above level of understanding of the pupils they teach. This might sound a bit suggestive, yet connotes a negative implication that once teachers perceive such concepts as difficult they might not make any conscious effort teach the 'unlearnable'. It is the learning tasks that seem unclear to teachers. If teachers had rather been appreciably involved in the planning and development process of the curriculum, they would have understood those topics better and thus made positive attempts to help their students learn the supposedly 'difficult'.

Teacher involvement in curriculum construction is shrouded in the mystery of promulgating their interest and advancing their views on how the curriculum should be. According to Martin (in Handal & Herrington, 2003), curriculum implementation approaches that do not consider teachers' beliefs have a temporary life. Incorporating teacher beliefs is a sure way of inspiring teachers' enthusiasm and winning their trust for the curriculum adoption. Notwithstanding, granting unwarranted liberty to teachers without any control measure might lead to an abuse of freedom.

## Conclusion

Fidelity is a matter of degree rather than an absolute phenomenon. Achieving the exact outcomes of the basic school curriculum is therefore not possible. The fact that sympathizers of the approach tolerated some margin of deviation of the outcomes (Fullan, 1991) of a programme is an indication of fidelity of implementation's failure to be practicable in Ghanaian diverse school environments. Therefore, there is the need for the adoption of an

eclectic stance in delivering the basic school curriculum as a combination of the approaches to implementation will elicit a more viable result.

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