

Teacher Perception, Practices, And Attitudes Towards Approaches To Learning

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Abstract

The ways teachers organise learning in classrooms vary. While some teachers emphasise deep processing of information and meaning making, encouraging deep approaches to learning, others focus on students' processing of information in the shortest possible time, encouraging surface approaches to learning. The purpose of this study was to examine the teacher's perceptions, practices, and attitudes towards approaches to learning. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis were used to collect data. The findings showed that teachers distinguish deep approaches to learning as those in which students can apply newly learned information for a longer period of time and develop as critical thinkers and problem solvers. The study also showed that teachers prefer surface approaches over deep approaches to learning. Teachers focus on students completing activities in the shortest possible time and memorising facts. Much emphasis is placed on students' remembering the materials taught in classrooms and replicating them when probed in exams. While teachers feel it is vital to engross students in deep approaches to learning, many factors avert them from accomplishing this. One of the distinguishing factors is the curriculum itself. Teachers are not content with the ever-changing nature of the curriculum, which takes place virtually every year. This study calls for greater teacher professional development and judiciously planned curriculum reforms.

Key words Approaches to learning, Deep approaches to learning, Surface approach to learning, Teacher perceptions, Teacher practices, Teacher attitudes

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning conducted in classrooms must enhance the students' knowledge, skills, and attitude. As this occurs, there is constant interaction between the learner, the teaching process, and the context in which it is organised. The type of interaction leads to the learners' approach towards their studies. Biggs (2003) defined an approach to learning as the student's intention to begin a task and the processes utilised for its continuity. There have been a lot of studies that have investigated how people learn (Asikainen & Gijbels, 2017; Biggs, 2003; Struyven et al., 2003; Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Hussin et al., 2017; Lucas, 2001; Lubin, 2003; Malhi, 2013; Rozgonjuk et al., 2020). These studies have consistently found that deep approaches to learning have the greatest impact on students when they are able to optimise their potential, reason things out, develop higher-order thinking, and foster self-directed and life-long learning. Despite this proving a successful strategy in

classroom teaching, approaches are utilised where students are engaged as passive learners and are focused on completing their tasks, memorising the materials taught, and reproducing them when probed in exams. This paper addresses teachers' perceptions, practices, and attitudes towards approaches to learning. It is thought that there is a discrepancy between what teachers think and what they do in their classrooms when it comes to how they teach.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The proponents Marton and Sajlo in 1976 came up with two approaches that influence students learning outcomes in the classrooms (Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2007). These include the surface approach and the deep approach to learning.

Surface approach to learning

Students are often required to process as much information as possible in the shortest possible time. This is done in order to make them pass

their examinations. This type of emphasis leads to a surface approach to learning. The surface approach to learning refers to an approach whereby the student learns enough to enable him/her to pass the examination or meet the minimum requirements for that period of study (Biggs & Tang, 2007). The surface approach to learning is connected to the traditional mode of teaching in which information is imparted from teacher to learner. The learners are involved as passive recipients of knowledge. Ramsden (2003) states that "Surface learning has nothing to do with wisdom and everything to do with aimless accumulation." Children faithfully reproduce fragments of torpid knowledge to please teachers and pass examinations without much understanding (p.59).

The surface approach to learning refers to students learning by memorising and reproducing the study materials' factual contents without seeking further connections, meanings, or the implications of what is learned (Birenbaum & Rosenau, 2006; Gijbels et al., 2008). This is further supported by Biggs and Tang (2007), who postulate that the surface approach arises from an intention to get the task out of the way with minimum trouble while appearing to meet the course requirements. "Low-level cognitive activities are used when higher-level activities are required to do the task properly" (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 14). According to Alink et al. (2018), when the students cannot fully comprehend the skills, they are involved in a surface approach to learning.

Certain learning activities are often organised for the purpose of task completion or study. The surface approach is based on an extrinsic intention to the real purpose of the task (Biggs, 2003). Rote learning without understanding in order to reproduce the material subsequently is one of the most common strategies associated with surface learning (Ibid). Teaching that induces surface learning does not produce effective learning as it is based on memorisation and regurgitation (Kabouha & Elyas, 2015).

Learning must truly reflect students' understanding and processing of information into knowledge. However, when a surface approach to learning is utilised, it results in a superficial level of knowledge that lacks depth towards understanding. When the students cannot comprehend the author's point or remember information as disjointed facts, they are involved in a surface approach to learning (Biggs, 2003).

Contrary to the surface approach to learning, where the learner can interpret the meaning of the text, they are involved in deep approaches to learning.

Deep approach to learning

When students are engaged in learning, meaningful experiences must be provided to them. These meaningful experiences represent deep approaches to learning. A deep approach to learning is defined as one in which the students aim to understand the subject matter and seek meaning (Lucas, 2001). Students frequently convey their intrinsic interest and enjoyment from their lessons when creating meaning (Brali & Divjak, 2018). While utilising deep approaches to learning, the students adopt strategies that enable them to relate ideas to their own experience, distinguish the evidence from the argument, identify patterns and principles, form hypotheses, and relate their learning to other subjects and topics within a subject (Ibid). The deep approach arises from a felt need to engage in the task appropriately and meaningfully so that the students can utilise the most appropriate cognitive activities for handling it (Biggs, 2003). To support this, Biggs further states, "When students feel the need to know, they automatically focus on underlying meaning, main ideas, themes, principles, or successful application" (p. 16).

While facilitating learning, teachers expect students to grapple with as much information as possible. Deep approaches to learning epitomise students' engagement in learning approaches that emphasise integration, synthesis, and reflection (Laird et al., 2008). Effective learning environments are characterised by promoting deep approaches to learning (Ibid.). Deep approaches to learning tend to improve student learning outcomes. This is supported by Ramsden (2003), who states that students who use deep approaches to learning tend to perform better and are able to retain, integrate, and transfer information at higher rates than students who don't. Deep approaches to learning represent effective independent learners (Wilson and Fowler, 2005) and involve higher-order thinking and students' active engagement aimed at meaning-making (Mystakidis, 2021).

In order to make the subject matter meaningful to the students, the teachers must have the necessary intention to engage eloquently and aptly during their studies. In deep approaches to learning, students must regard the course content as something worth getting to know and

understand (Biggs & Tang, 2007). When students use deep approaches to learning, they undertake appropriate higher cognitive activities (Biggs, 2003), and have positive feelings for the subject matter they are engaged in. They feel challenged, have exhilaration, interest, pleasure, and realise its importance (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Students' engagement with deep approaches leads to improvement in their learning outcomes. A deep approach is expected to ensure that a student has a more comprehensive grasp of the subject being studied (Ibid). Similarly, Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2017), Gilbels et al. (2008), and Tynjala (2008) posit that when students are involved in deep approaches to learning, they acquire and apply their knowledge efficiently, think critically, analyse, synthesise, and make inferences. The idea of a deep approach to learning is linked to looking for meaning in the task and putting together different parts of the task into a whole (Ibid).

Deep level processing focuses on the underlying meaning of the information (Laird & Garver, 2010). Biggs (2003) and Tagg (2003) posit that deep-level approaches are characterised by a personal commitment to understanding and are implemented using various strategies. These strategies include reading widely, drawing on multiple resources, discussing ideas, reflecting on the process of learning and applying knowledge in real-world situations. In deep approaches to learning, students engage in academic activities that reflect a personal commitment to strive for a greater understanding of the material and foundational concepts (Ibid.). The use of student-centred approaches in classrooms improves the students' cognitive and practical abilities, leading to deep approaches to learning (Wang & Zhang, 2019). With deep learning, the student approaches learning to understand and construct meaning from what is taught in classrooms (Filius et al., 2018).

The approaches embraced by a student result from the student's predisposition, the form and nature of the teaching and learning environment, and the curriculum that is practised in the classroom (Richardson, 2005). When students adopt a deep approach to learning, they characteristically display an obvious intention to: develop their own understanding (Biggs, 2003); acquire highly structured knowledge (Biggs & Collis, 2014); develop a capability to advance their own and others' ideas to new situations (Ramsden, 2003); and manifest a highly developed assimilation of knowledge

(Biggs, 2003). A "deep approach" is associated with the intention to comprehend and to activate conceptual analysis (Entwistle, 2001). Zeegers (2001) states that deep approaches to learning will positively influence learning outcomes. This is reinforced by Biggs and Tang (2003), who state that when courses are constructively aligned, it encourages students to engage in deep approaches and discourages students from surface learning activities. Deep approaches to learning make students more active in class, which leads to better grades (Chung et al., 2020; Han & Ellis, 2019; Zainuddin, 2017).

III. THE PRESENT STUDY

The way teachers perceive different approaches to learning often varies from the actual practices in their classrooms. The study aimed to investigate teacher perceptions, practices, and attitudes towards different approaches to learning in classrooms. Specifically, the study aimed to find out (i) how teachers perceive different approaches to learning in their classrooms, (ii) how teachers apply different approaches to learning in their classrooms, and (iii) what the teacher's attitudes towards different approaches to learning are.

IV. RESEARCH SITES AND CONTEXT

Fiji is an archipelagic nation located in the heart of the Pacific Ocean between the equator and the South Pole. It comprises around three hundred and thirty islands, of which about one third are inhabited (Briney, 2016). The structure of the Fijian education system is divided into primary school, secondary school, and higher education. There are seven hundred and thirty-seven (737) primary schools in Fiji. Due to the geographical location of Fiji, remoteness and isolation are essential considerations. The Ministry of Education, Heritage, and Arts (MEHA) continuously faces challenges in providing curriculum materials, professional development through workshops, and access to the internet and communication services to remote schools. The geographical features that are coupled with the isolated position in the Pacific make its location a significant challenge in the delivery of education to its children and people (Tikoisuva, 2000). Like the other Pacific Island countries, Fiji has a centralised approach to curriculum development (Chand, 2015; Koya, 2015).

The independent system of education practiced in Fiji today has evolved significantly from the external colonial system on which it was initially

based. Since the adoption of the Fiji National Curriculum Framework (FNCF) in 2013, the current education in Fiji adheres to the outcomes-based approach. As a result of this approach, students are better able to achieve significant learning outcomes in different ways and at different rates. Teachers are also allowed flexibility to develop different teaching and learning programmes to suit the needs of the individual students and facilitate learning through constructivist (student-centred) approaches. In OBE, teachers can also make a clear and detailed assessment criterion that helps students learn (Phelps, 2014).

V. RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Research design

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used in this study. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that describes the meaning of a lived experience of a phenomenon for several individuals (Finlay, 2012), which in this case are the perceptions, practices, and attitudes of teachers in utilising different approaches to learning in their classrooms.

Participants

The participants in this research study were purposefully selected. The research sample was spread over four educational divisions (Eastern, Western, Northern, and Central) around the country. For each division, three (3) teachers from three (3) different schools were identified as research participants, making a total of twelve participants for the study. The researcher contacted the headteachers by phone, discussed the study and the approval from the MEHA, and confirmed whether the school had a year-eight teacher who had been teaching the same class (Year 8) for at least the last three years. This was verified to exclude any new graduates and avoid the inclusion of inexperienced teachers with the year 8 curriculum and teaching. Once the headteachers confirmed that the Year 8 teachers in their schools met the defined criteria, permission was sought from them to conduct the research in their schools. The participants were approached by phone and email, and the study commenced only after they completed a written consent.

Data collection

Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis were employed as data collection strategies. The data collection took place between March and April (Term 1 of the school academic year). Before entering the classrooms and carrying out the observation process, the researcher had clearly articulated the features to be observed to himself and the participant in order to better understand the approaches to learning in classrooms. A number of lessons taken over two days were observed and recorded. The total number of lessons observed for each participant was ten. Before the observation began, an observation protocol was developed. The observation protocol included capturing the classroom arrangement, studying the lesson plan, and capturing the lesson conducted. This also included teacher delivery. The time allocation and the methods of introduction, teaching and learning activities, and assessment components were also noted in detail. The information from the observations made was recorded through observational field notes, photography, sound recording, and collecting and organising documents. The field notes that were being gathered were recorded on the site during the study. The researcher also sought clarification from the participant at the end of each lesson to evaluate the participant's feelings about the lesson and get feedback on what went well and what could have been done better. After the observations were made, the researcher slowly withdrew from the classroom, thanking the participant and informing him/her about the use of the data and their accessibility to the study.

Interviews were also conducted with all the participants. An interview guide was prepared to ensure optimal use of the agreed interview time. In order to understand the effectiveness of the guiding questions, the questions were piloted with a teacher who was not part of the study. The feedback from the pilot testing provided further editing guidance, such as potential prompts for the interviews. All the twelve interviews were conducted in a quiet location in the school library, where the researcher and the participants could hold a one-on-one question and answer session. The interviews were conducted in English. Each interview, which was audiotaped using a digital voice recorder, lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim. Each transcribed interview was given back to the participants within two

weeks so that they could correct or change their transcript responses.

While several documents were available in the classroom, the researcher was careful to consider only those documents that would provide the necessary data the researcher was interested in. The researcher was also very careful about the quality of the data rather than the quantity. As the researcher was interested in exploring the approaches to learning, the syllabi, teacher's workbook, examination register, examination file, lesson plans, and lesson notes were explored. These were considered adequate to provide a holistic picture of the planned data to be collected. The analysis of all these documents was recorded as field notes. The analysis was done simultaneously while the observations were made in the classroom.

VI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings are presented after considering the research questions. The use of verbatim quotes supports these. While analysing the data through direct quotations, much emphasis was paid to include only one or two quotes from the respondents. Quotes are accompanied by labels of participants (Guest et al., 2012; Pitchforth et al., 2005) to give the reader a better sense of context and avoid disclosing the true identity of the participant.

Teacher perception of deep approaches to learning

When asked what constitutes deep approaches to learning, participants were unanimous in their view that concepts must be taught in a manner through which the students can use the knowledge for a longer period. One participant reported that students should be engaged in activities that are meaningful to them and can use the knowledge in real-life situations (TC). Other responses in describing deep approaches to learning include:

Deep approaches to learning are simply those that focus not only on knowledge part of the concept, but more in-depth such as analysis, evaluation and other parts that would lead to lifelong learning in students (TB).

A deep approach to learning makes the students understand the concepts taught. It is not just to remember to be reproduced in the exams (TC).

In their accounts on how they promoted deep approaches to learning, some of the typical responses from the participants were:

Deep approaches to learning are promoted through contextualising the content to suit the needs of the students. The information is passed to the students using examples that the students are familiar with and meaningful to them. Relating information to students must take into consideration their prior knowledge. A concrete to abstract approach needs to be considered (TF).

Deep approaches to learning enhance student engagement with their subject. As such, it's important to ensure that the environment the students are learning in should be conducive to learning. It is necessary to use a variety of teaching instructions to promote understanding. A variety of teaching methods and resources need to be used to suit the needs of the different learners. Thorough background checks need to be made to analyse the learning needs of the students to provide the best (TG).

While it was interesting to note that majority of the participants have a strong desire to promote deep approaches to learning in a variety of ways, various factors hinder their capability to promote deep approaches to learning. One of the participants remarked that the ever-changing nature of the curriculum, where changes to the curriculum are made too often, hinder their efforts in promoting deep approaches to learning. One of the other participants commented:

At the moment there are a lot of factors. You look at the teacher's workload and the curriculum. It's not designed to promote deeper understanding. Because every now and then, curriculum changes. Like in 2015 and 2016, we were given one curriculum in 2015 when we adjusted the students to that; in 2016, it changed. There was a new syllabus altogether, and now we don't know if the 2018 syllabi will change or remain the same because things change. And then the overloading of teachers. like currently this week. This week we are celebrating Library Week and Constitution Day, and then we have dental visit on Monday, so time is not there, so there is overloading of teachers

and then the demand for other things like 100% pass rate, so all these things definitely hinder, but nothing can be done (TE).

Another interviewee remarked:

The focus to date has been on a 100% pass rate, where every child is expected to pull through irrespective of their abilities. As a result, the teacher has to direct the child's learning routines and thinking skills to get the best results, rather than get feedback on the students' own ideas and thoughts. Ideas and correct responses are drilled for the best results. Children are not given the freedom to select and attempt questions based on their strengths in particular skills. Due to all these, children learn under pressure and do not enjoy learning. Also, trying to meet deadlines makes it challenging to go at the child's pace, which compromises their learning and understanding (TF).

The participants were unanimous that it is not only one or two, but several factors hinder them from promoting deep approaches to learning in their classrooms. All of them agreed that factors such as the teacher's workload, time constraints, juggling teaching responsibilities with solving classroom behavioural and discipline problems, curricula overload, exam-oriented curriculum, demand by headteachers to conduct several trial tests, unanticipated school events that arise, school context, and large class size hinder them from implementing deep approaches to learning.

Teacher practices using deep approaches to learning

In focusing on a deep approach to learning, teachers hold differing views regarding implementing the topics in their classrooms. For example, in order to cover the topic 'Measurement' in class; one participant remarked:

Measurement will be covered in Term 2 as this topic is difficult with many formulae involved. Doing in term two means it will be fresh in children's minds for exams (TA).

Another participant commented:

I finish the most difficult topics like Measurement in term one, and the easier topics are covered in term two. I finish difficult topics in term one because term two is full of extra-curricular activities

and the students easily get tired. So, it is easier to do the easier topics in term two (TF).

Surprisingly another participant provided the third alternative and commented:

I cover the syllabi in the order prescribed by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts. I don't make any changes to it (TC).

Teachers' observation revealed that most Basic Science experiments are neglected, and the subject is only taught once or twice a week. The participants blamed the non-availability of chemicals for not conducting experiments in class. The participants expressed that the students were asked to memorise as they skipped the experiments where resources were not available. The participant's responses illuminate this point:

At places, we don't have resources. We just explain. Students just try to memorise (TD).

When we talk about Basic Science, some chemicals are required that are not in our school, so we just leave the experiment. I do my research and bring it and give it to the students. The answers are given to the students (TA).

During interviews, the teachers expressed that doing experiments is a waste of time. One of the interviewees remarked:

I allow students to carry out an experiment if I know according to their ability for e.g. Some experiments, to tell the truth, is just a waste of time, doing this and that. That experiment if you do it in another method, children understand because at the end of the day we are drilling the children to understand something. We know that experiments solely defy the mind of the child, but from my point of view, some of those experiments are just costing a lot of time and space. Only the experiment that I know that a child is supposed to experiment on, then I can put that experiment (TG).

Teacher attitude on deep approaches to learning

While there is a desire to encourage deep approaches to learning by the teachers, the interview data revealed that when it comes to

personal ethos, teachers are uncompromising. For example, when a participant was asked if experiments were conducted to promote deep approaches to learning, the participant specifically talked about the experiment on the dissection of the toad and expressed:

Like now with my Basic Science, there was only one experiment that was not actually done that is the dissection of the frog. We could not do it here because we do not have proper Lab and facilities. I somehow cannot kill any animal. School culture is such you cannot kill a frog, even though it is part of the syllabi. Because we are not allowed to kill animals and I personally also believe dissecting that frog it will not help us in any way because we have not given that particular animal any life and how can we take the life away from that animal and basically that animal will die after that (TC).

VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Teacher Perception of deep approaches to learning

The study found that teachers describe deep approaches to learning as one where students can use the acquired knowledge for a longer period of time. Teachers also stated that through deep approaches to learning, they are able to enhance all levels of cognitive development, enabling the students to develop into critical thinkers and problem solvers. These results seem to be consistent with other research which found that deep approaches to learning epitomise students' approach to learning, emphasising integration, synthesis, and reflection (Laird et al., 2008), and that students are able to acquire and apply their knowledge efficiently, think critically, analyse, synthesize, and make inferences (Gijbels et al., 2008; Tynjala, 2008).

The study revealed that teachers, through the use of different activity setups, greatly influence the learning approaches utilised by the students in the classrooms. These either assist the students in meeting the planned intended learning outcome or end up using lower learning activities to complete the task. The teacher's influence and the learning approaches used by students are consistent with previous research by Wang et al. (2013), who discovered that students adjust their learning in response to classroom instruction. The finding also broadly supports

the work of Richardson (2005), which found that the approaches adopted by a student result from their predisposition, the form and nature of the teaching and learning environment, and the curriculum that is being practiced in the classroom. One stimulating finding is that while teachers feel that it is essential to engage students in deep approaches to learning, numerous factors avert them from accomplishing this. One of the most distinguishing factors is the curriculum itself. Teachers are not satisfied with the continuous nature of curriculum change, which happens almost every year. This prevents them from fully committing to the prescribed curriculum, assuming that it would change again. The findings of the current study do not support the previous research of Beane (1995), which found that the curriculum must be characterised by visible connections between purposes and everyday learning experiences. Changing the curriculum too often does not achieve this. Perhaps the Ministry of Education, Heritage, and Arts should make a concerted effort to develop a relevant and responsive curriculum and commit to it for a number of years before a review is initiated. In this way, the teachers will understand that the curriculum is there to stay for some time and, as a result, will do their best to effectively implement the curriculum in their classrooms, enabling deep approaches to learning. Otherwise, teachers will not fully commit to it when curriculum change is too regular and await the subsequent curriculum initiatives.

The teacher practices towards deep approaches to learning.

The most obvious finding to emerge from the study is that teachers place a lot of emphasis on the importance of students scoring high marks in exams. This results in students memorising the materials taught in classrooms and reproducing them when probed in exams. The students learn without much understanding. These results contrast with the findings of Lucas (2001), which found that in deep approaches to learning, students aim to understand the subject matter and seek meaning out of it. However, the results are broadly consistent with the findings of Ramsden (2003), who found that surface learning has nothing to do with wisdom and everything to do with aimless accumulation, Gijbels et al. (2008), and Birenbaum and Rosenau (2006), that surface approach to learning refers to students learning by memorisation and reproducing the factual

contents of the study materials without seeking for further connections, meanings, or the implications of what is learned.

The results of the study revealed that in most cases, the connection between prior learning experiences and learning outcomes is not considered by the teacher. The findings are contrary to earlier studies conducted by Hwang et al. (2014), which established that learning is more effective when students are encouraged to connect new knowledge with their previous experience; and Biggs (2003), which found that in order to promote deep approaches to learning, teachers should encourage students to know, instil curiosity, and build on the student's prior knowledge. When teachers pick up a book, they begin to teach the contents as they have a lot to complete in terms of the syllabi within a set timeframe. Perhaps it is vital that strategies such as concept mapping and cooperative learning are encouraged. Concept mapping would help connect new knowledge with prior knowledge and would promote critical thinking amongst the students.

The results of the study also indicated that after engaging students in activities, teachers are too anxious about getting the activities completed. This is contrary to the study conducted by Biggs (2003), which found that deep approaches to learning arise from the student's felt need to engage in tasks appropriately and meaningfully. These results are likely to be related to the expectation by the teachers to cover the three-term prescribed syllabus in two terms. Covering lessons slowly would mean that teachers would not be able to complete the syllabi as there are too many other commitments primary school teachers are expected to meet considering the disturbances in class. The curriculum, which is considered the blueprint for pedagogical practises in the classroom, must be adequately planned with relevant and adequate content so that teachers do not need to rush through them. The curriculum must include fewer topics but should be well thought out.

Teacher attitudes on deep approaches to learning

The results of the study indicate that there is a lot of frustration amongst the teachers in meeting deadlines to complete the syllabi, prepare several trial tests, and celebrate many activities in schools. The constant reminders and demands from the headteachers to attain a 100% pass rate often frustrate the teachers, enabling them to adopt a surface approach to learning. The

students are prepared to pass their exams rather than understand information with meaning. The findings of the study do not support the previous research of Howie and Bagnall (2013), where they found that deep approaches to learning ensure that students have a comprehensive grasp of the subject being studied and Zeegers (2001), who found that deep approaches to learning have a positive influence on the learning outcomes of students. Perhaps it is high time that school activities are well planned, the leadership continuously up-skills and supports their staff towards best performance and all teachers place equal emphasis on the learning outcomes of the students rather than the exam class teachers focusing too much on examinations.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Many people and organisations are set to benefit from this study. These include the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA), the policymakers, the teacher training institutions, the teachers and the students.

The research would assist the MEHA and policymakers understand the teachers' perceptions, practices, and attitudes when the curriculum is implemented in classrooms. The findings of the study could assist the MEHA and local curriculum developers in planning, developing, and implementing the curriculum. It would also guide the MEHA to up-skill, support, and monitor the teachers' performance so that they can teach better. The MEHA will even better understand the need to provide smaller class size, equip schools with necessary resources, and provide a continuous professional development that meets the needs of the teachers. The curriculum developers and the MEHA will also understand that curriculum planning is vital and would avoid unnecessary or too frequent changes.

A teacher who is inspiring and informed has the most significant influence on student achievement. It is vital that close attention is paid to how training and support are provided to the new and experienced teachers. This study could inform local teacher training institutions about the need to prepare teachers for the changing circumstances due to the advancement of new knowledge, technological innovations and globalisation. Teacher training institutions must understand that their programs need to emphasise the mastery of the subject matter and pedagogical skills and provide many opportunities for student teachers to spend time

in actual classrooms under the leadership and direction of an experienced teachers.

This study will benefit the teachers, as various support programs to develop them further will be created by the MEHA. The teachers who are already in the field for some time will be provided regular opportunities to learn from each other. This will assist them in keeping up to date with the new research on how students learn, emerging technological tools used in the classroom, and the new curricula resources used in classrooms.

The students will be the primary beneficiaries when the curriculum is well planned. This will result in improved student learning outcomes.

IX. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The study found that teachers delineate deep approaches to learning as one where students are able to use the acquired knowledge for a longer period of time. Teachers also stated that through deep approaches to learning, they are able to enhance all levels of cognitive development enabling the students to develop into critical thinkers and problem solvers. However, what teachers advocate and what they practice is entirely different. Teachers place a lot of emphasis on the importance of students scoring high marks in exams. This result in students remembering the materials taught in classrooms and replicating the same when probed in exams. While teachers feel that it is vital to engross students in deep approaches to learning, numerous factors avert them from accomplishing this. One of the most distinguishing characteristics is the curriculum itself. Teachers are not content with the nature of the ever-changing curriculum happening virtually every year. This distorts the teachers from fully committing to the prescribed curriculum, assuming that it will change again. The study further revealed that classrooms must support higher-order thinking skills in students in the form of problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking. However, the actual teacher practices on the ground fail far too short in achieving those outcomes. Several factors prohibit teachers from utilising deep approaches to learning. These include the ever-changing nature of the curriculum, teacher workload, and the demand by the leadership for a 100% pass rate, overloaded curriculum where teachers are more concerned about coverage and try to rush through to complete the syllabi, and students encouraged to learn through rote learning.

Notes on contributors

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