
Analysing the perceptions of Education Stakeholders regarding the Curriculum and Assessment Policy of 2009 of the Ministry of Education and Training

By

Mosotho J. George (PhD)
National University of Lesotho
Roma, Lesotho

A Critique of the Dialogue by the Education Stakeholders with the
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Introduction

The academic year 2017 became tumultuous after the Grade 7 students had completed the PSLE examinations, which according to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy 2008 of the Ministry of Education were not supposed to be written, especially by those students who attended the schools that were piloting the new primary education curriculum. This curriculum prescribes that there will not be any examinations for the pupils at the primary level. The uncertainty was precipitated by the circular from the Ministry of Education and Training *instructing* the schools that the same students should not leave school after what was ordinarily perceived by the schools, parents and pupils as terminal assessment marking completion of the primary school education – primary school leaving certificate examinations.¹ Following the uproar of the citizens, Transformation Resource Centre (TRC) organised a dialogue bringing together different stakeholders to engage with the Ministry of Education and Training in addressing some of the issues pertaining to this Policy and the dilemma faced not only by the primary school leavers but also the post primary schools relating to not only admissions but also how to assess the two different groups of students.

The Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Education and Training introduced a new Curriculum and Assessment Policy in 2008 dubbed education for individual and social development with the aim of improving the basic education. The curriculum review was done reportedly “...with the purpose of making education at these levels accessible, relevant, efficient and of the best quality.” Indeed these are noble causes that warrant curriculum review as they are among those cited in literature which include those considered to “mostly border on political, social, economic and external influences such as globalisation.”² Among the prominent features of this curriculum is the abolishment of the traditional form of assessment through tests and percentage scoring of the tests and examinations. This is reportedly done because this traditional assessment method is believed to traumatise those pupils that do not pass the tests/exams, especially failing of certain subjects that are traditionally used as must pass subjects such as English, Maths and Science that most students find very difficult.

¹ Ministry of Education and Training, External Circular Notice No. 13, Transition from Primary to Post-Primary Schools from 2018 School Year, 2017.

² Chirwa G, Naidoo D, Curriculum Change and Development in Malawi: A Historical Overview, Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, Vol 5 No 16, 2014, 336-345, Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n16p336

Stakeholder participation is generally argued to be vital in “...eliciting concerns and developing evaluative criteria” that would lead to wide acceptance of any new system or any restructuring process and/or product. Among key stakeholders that need to take active part are different experts that usually provide the data base and the functional relationships between options and impacts; while on the other hand, citizens are the potential victims and benefactors of the newly proposed system.³ They are the best judges to evaluate the different options available on the basis of the concerns and impacts revealed by the experts and more experienced stakeholders such as advocacy groups, NGOs, etc. Participation of all key stakeholders leads to positive perceptions of the intervention and makes for better implementation of such as the time of implementation.

Perhaps it is prudent to introduce the perception in order to establish a common understanding of the context. Perception is defined as own sense-making or an attempt to respond to new challenges and reconcile these challenges with existing assumptions.⁴ It could also be defined as a way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. This is a very important aspect that influences accepting, resisting and/or totally rejecting any change. No matter how important an intervention is, if it is not perceived positively, it is bound to face some degree of resistance if not total rejection and usually the result is failure to see the benefits of such an intervention.

There are few articles in literature that have sought to critique this curriculum trying to extract the scholarly information out of it, trying to understand its essence and rationale. Raselimo and Mahao (2015) concluded “...that although the new policy creates opportunities for personal growth of learners and economic development in Lesotho, there are threats and challenges, which can be detrimental to its successful implementation.” They however did not necessarily stress whether the creation of opportunities they referred to was the one inscribed in the policy or that they believed that the policy can indeed create this opportunities. This manuscript discusses some of the views shared by the participants in the dialogue hosted by TRC on Friday 26th January 2018 in Maseru Lesotho. This dialogue was attended by some education advocacy groups and the then Deputy

³ Renn O, Webler T, Rakel H, Dienel P, Johnson B, Public participation in decision making: A three-step procedure, *Policy Sciences* (1993) 26: 189. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00999716>

⁴ Hoang T, Perception, Curriculum, and Subject Matter: Reforming Instruction, California State Polytechnic University, access. 03 Feb 2018 from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ940687.pdf>

Minister and current Minister of Education and Training Honourable Associate Professor Ntoi Rapapa.

The curriculum aspects as presented by the ministry and argued by the stakeholders

The presentation by the ministry introduced the policy and stressed some of its positives. Since these issues are clearly articulated in the CAP 2008 document, I decided to hit straight at the policy document lest I leave out some of the important aspects that the stakeholders, or I as an interested party are interested in. Stakeholders mostly shared the same sentiments as those that I will argue in the latter section of this piece. Perhaps one can highlight the emphasis that the ministry made that this curriculum is here to stay and all that is left for the stakeholders is to embrace it and enable its smooth implementation. It is meant to address the issues of “good schools and bad schools” on the basis of performance which is directly linked to the admission policy of the so-called “good schools” that only admit top performers and expel such students when they fail their Junior Certificate (JC) exams. This in a way was shared by the stakeholders as a positive step indeed.

Interestingly, the ministry did not accede to any deficiencies in the policy as it is despite the conflicting events during the year in question (2017) culminating with the Minister’s circular. For example, the pupils set for the examinations and were subsequently asked to stay afterwards until the school session elapsed; the issue of admission of these pupils from the two different streams in the post-primary schools, teaching and assessment of these groups of pupils from different backgrounds have not been duly addressed. The ministry only conceded to the poor advocacy of the program which prompted one in thinking, advocacy does not address the merits and demerits of the issue rather only make it known. Making poison widely known does not make it any less poisonous!

Among these are the objectives as clearly spelt out in the introduction of this piece as such I will not delve much in them.

The author’s views and interrogation of the Curriculum

My assessment will be based on the issues/questions posed to the participants of the dialogue and a bit of some of the issues that I also deem important as a stakeholder working in higher education sector. As state the curriculum review was done reportedly "...with the purpose of making education at these levels accessible, relevant, efficient and of the best quality." Perhaps one can underscore all these aspects and analyse them individually.

1. *Accessibility.* Accessibility in itself does not seem to be effected by this policy as a new phenomenon given the prior policy of free primary education policy had already made primary education accessible. One could ponder whether this in principle was not meant to address the dropout rate issue by ensuring that no pupil drops out from the frustration of not successfully completing each year of study, or simply put failing classes. This in itself compromises quality so much that it has a potential to render education useless. A glance at the neighbouring South Africa, in order to appease the wider citizenry, the Ministry of Basic Education dropped the pass mark to 30%, 10% below that of Lesotho. One quick thought on the implication of this. Imagine a doctor who misdiagnoses 70% of his patients and only correctly diagnose only 30% being admitted into the medical council to practice. The limitation of this policy with regard to accessibility is that it seems to assume basic education as less important than later stages of education.
2. *Relevance:* relevance is a very broad term and very topical in higher education. In this context, one wonders whose relevance was being considered in this policy. The policy has reportedly "juxtaposed" the following five learning areas: *Linguistic and Literacy; Numerical and Mathematical; Personal, Spiritual and Social; Scientific and Technological; and Creativity and Entrepreneurial.* While this may be a good idea, one wonders whether the teachers have been duly trained in this area. This is important in that one study found that some of the primary school teachers had never passed mathematics at any level of study yet they are teaching mathematics at primary school following the completion of their primary teaching qualification at the training college Lesotho College of Education.⁵ Apparently Lesotho is not alone in this

⁵ George MJ, Kolobe M, Moru KE, Exploring the dynamics of Mathematics and Science Education at Primary School Level in Lesotho, National University of Lesotho

quandary, it is reported that about 9% of Grade 6 teachers cannot pass a Grade 6 maths test.⁶ Without training teachers in these subjects, it is only a wishful thinking that the teachers will be able to impart these noble purposes. Besides, the same subject areas have always been there. One would have thought of more subjects such as sports, technical subjects e.g. woodwork, etc, that are not yet offered currently. However, these would require more training of the teachers and at best require employment of new teachers as such delay implementation which looks somewhat interestingly rushed.

Relevance as it has been stated earlier is a very complex issue. There are two issues that need to be debated exhaustively, whose relevance is this being touted here? Is it that of pupils' strengths or the country's developmental needs? At a glance, it is seemingly the former – that of pupils' strengths rather than the country's developmental needs. While focussing on pupil's strengths is very beneficial for such students, one wonders if at such a low level of brain and intellectual development, it would be possible to identify pupils' potential. What about the slow developers? This idea of focussing on individual achievement of the pupils, such as being able to “wipe off mucus from their nostrils” and treating it as a measure of academic development, rather than a set minimum standard of development has been argued by stakeholders, interestingly including the parents, as one big weakness of this curriculum.⁷

Supposing this curriculum were to be fully implemented as planned, one can only fear that some pupils that are slow developers could easily get lost as focus is directed towards their early demonstrable talents such as dancing ability while such a child could later develop potential to get into other areas that this country desperately need such as science, technology and engineering. It is also difficult to believe that at this early age it is possible to discern the needs of the country as such it is inconceivable that this curriculum could be responsive to the needs of the country when the same pupils proceed to the traditional secondary schools.

⁶ Jansen J, Pass rate not whole story, The Herald, Friday, February 9, 2018, access. 09/02/2018 from <http://www.heraldlive.co.za/opinion/2018/01/11/jonathan-jansen-pass-rate-not-whole-story/>

⁷ Staff Reporter, When a curriculum is seen as poison, The Post Lesotho 02 February 2018 accessed online 13/02/2018 from <https://www.thepost.co.ls/local-news/when-a-curriculum-is-seen-as-poison/>

3. *Efficient*: Efficiency is defined as achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense [Oxford Online Dictionary, n.d].⁸ The take home message about efficiency is obtaining the desirable result with less spending monetarily, time-wisely, and otherwise. One can only wonder what efficiency was being referred to here! Could it be the efficiency of teaching and learning? Efficiency of progression to higher years? Saving the spent in the basic education resources? As it is currently, the ministry indicated that the budget for the ministry is about 30% of the total national budget of the country. Could the efficiency captured here refer to the throughput, i.e. the number of pupils that complete the system? Of course the number and not necessarily quality, could also be defined as efficiency. While quantity is good, one should also not falter and ignore the importance of quality. And there two are not always mutually exclusive or mutually inclusive.

One can easily draw a parallel in this issue to the case of South Africa, perhaps not so identical, but very similar in most respects. This system of employment of continuous assessment system was introduced in post-apartheid South Africa and dubbed Outcome-Based Education (OBE); and was out-rightly rejected when that crop of students entered tertiary education. It was then realised that the products of that OBE were not adequately trained for the tertiary education. Despite the rejection and reversal of the system, recently the South Africa's Department of Basic Education, equivalent to the Ministry of Education and Training in Lesotho decided to lower the pass mark to 30% in some subjects at the basic education level that includes both primary and secondary levels,⁹ as opposed to the 40% widely accepted (which by any standards is already too low)!¹⁰ Imagine an aeroplane engineer whose only 40% aeroplanes can be air-borne out of hundred! Or a medical doctor who can correctly diagnose 4 out of 10 patients. As though this was not bad enough, the pass mark was reduced even lower in mathematics to 20% reportedly to "...keep children moving through the country's struggling school system";¹¹ and

⁸ Oxford Online Dictionary, access. 09/02/2018 from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/efficiency>

⁹ Nsele S, Education mulls lowering pass marks for junior years in high school, The Witness, 2017-07-05 13:45 accessed on 09/02/2018 from <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/education-mulls-lowering-pass-marks-for-junior-years-in-high-school-20170704>

¹⁰ Wedekind V, NSC Pass Requirements - A discussion document for Umalusi on the NSC Pass mark, Umalusi, Pretoria South Africa, ace. online on 09/02/2018 from http://www.umalusi.org.za/docs/research/2013/nsc_pass.pdf

¹¹ Chutel L, Instead of teaching students to be better at math, South Africa has dropped its passing mark, Quartz Africa, December 09, 2016, accessed online on 09/02/2018 from <https://qz.com/859222/south-africas-education-department-reduced-the-pass-mark-for-mathematics-to-20-in-schools/>

this, somewhat undeserving, is still termed *pass mark*! One wonders if the same is not already happening, if there is no standard assessment carried out to ensure that all schools are teaching to the same level, then one can easily draw a parallel.

Let us still remember that at all levels, there is still some threshold of the basic knowledge that is acquired and some that is not acquired even when the pass mark threshold is set higher. This almost automatic progression has been cited as “pushing pupils to the next grade....trying to save costs” by the National Teachers Union of South Africa.⁹ This union declared this process of pushing pupils plainly just bringing the standards to the pupils instead of making the pupils rise up to required standards.¹² Of course saving money can indeed be defined as efficiency!

Some interesting scenarios were presented to drive some points raised by the stakeholders. Imagine playing high jump where it is progressively lowered so everyone could jump, where will it end? Would it still be called high jump? Do we still need to send children to school or they can still go and look after the cattle and work in the fields? There are still plenty of skills that can be acquired therein. The author bears testimony to this as he was a sheepherder while growing up, and was able to diagnose those sick, those on heat, those about to give birth, which medicines for different sheep diseases, etc without being taught that in class. So if the curriculum only demands one to show acquisition of some skill or another then they can progress, one wonders what would then be used as a measure for each academic level e.g. Grade 1 or Grade 3.

One cannot but share the bewilderment why the policy and decision makers did not think of training teachers appropriately instead of turning to dropping the pass mark or as it is the case now, remove the assessment. Imagine getting into an aeroplane and once seated, the pilot announces he has just completed his/her training although never been assessed for ability.

¹² Wicks J, Child K, Pass mark debate highlights need for teacher development in maths, Times Live, 04 July 2017 - 07:19 accessed Online on 09/02/2018 from <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-07-04-pass-mark-debate-highlights-need-for-teacher-development-in-maths/>

Could the efficiency refer to the teaching and learning process? If that is the case, then the formative assessment envisaged herein should be applauded. However given the numbers of the pupils in the schools at any particular level, high pupils/teacher ratio, it would be almost impossible for the teacher to attend all the pupils according to their individual abilities or needs without the rest of the class. Indeed this is lamented by most primary school teachers. Besides, if the number of teachers and their qualifications are still what they are today, the detection of special talents and its nurturing will remain a just a dream.

Perhaps this new curriculum was aimed at assessing the students in the subjects that they have potential in. One then would rather say assessment should be kept where it is acceptable, and then the overall pass is determined differently so that quality is not compromised. This can easily be achieved through the subject groupings without compromising other important aspects of life that make well-rounded citizens. All these changes are made in order to improve the pass rate and not the quality of education and they are referred in some quarters as political pass rate.

4. *Best quality*: Firstly if one were to define the terms to begin with; *best* means of the most excellent or desirable, unsurpassed, the absolute limit of excellence; while *quality* is defined as the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence, a distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something. Therefore with this in mind, one can interrogate this curriculum. At the glance, this looks like it is a bit far from achieving better quality (not to mention best) than the current curriculum. This question came strongly from the stakeholders: How does this policy ensure quality? While acknowledging the mentioning of the different forms of assessment, the practicality on the ground leaves much to be desired. The over generalisation of only three success/attainment levels by the pupils' characteristic of a triangle representation which could be generalised as 0-33, 34-66 and 67-99% in broad terms, makes it difficult to judge between pupils who are close to the margins of each sector, hence makes the assessment quite subjective. In other words it is not easy to distinguish between a 75% pupil from the 65% pupil.

Of course the author does not believe that examinations can afford quality, but it is certainly a means of ascertaining quality. Without the examinations, especially those set externally to the school where teaching happened, there is high likelihood that the assessment could be highly subjective. Examinations could be too subjective when teachers/schools want to be perceived as “good” teachers/schools. Consequently, the national examinations have always served as a standard tool upon which learning across the board can be measured without which there is no other standard tool to assess uniformly the achievements and competencies of pupils from different schools and regions.

One can easily conclude that without the examinations especially national examinations, the pupils could progress through the stages with no assessment and quality assurance. Assessment by the teachers can sometimes be too subjective, hence a need for externalised examinations for different competencies. Therefore one can conclude that this assessment policy certainly fails to distinguish and ensure quality. This is in agreement with Chirwa and Naidoo that argued that the risk of overdesigning the curriculum include loss of conceptual sequence and learning progression path.¹³

Other important aspects that came through the deliberations

In presenting this section, I have only picked issues that have a direct connection with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy of 2008 (as appearing online) or 2009 as in the hardcopy version. I have posed the issues deliberated in question forms for ease of presentation and also since most were actually presented in question form by the participants. Most of the issues in this section were indeed brought forth as questions. Where possible I will highlight the views of the stakeholders and conclude by expressing my own views and express whether I agree or disagree with those views from the other stakeholders.

1. *Were there any consultations prior to implementing this policy?* Or perhaps one can even ask another question relating to the formulation of the curriculum, not only its implementation – were different stakeholders consulted? This was one of the questions posed by the organisers

¹³ Chirwa G, Naidoo D, Curriculum Change and Development in Malawi: A Historical Overview, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol 5 No 16, 2014, 336-345, Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n16p336

of the forum. To ensure public and stakeholder participation, King et al (1998) advises that "...improving public participation requires changes in citizen and administrator roles and relationships and in administrative processes" as well as moving away "from static and reactive processes toward more dynamic and deliberative processes" [King et al, 1998].¹⁴ The circular issued by the Minister with so many issues points towards the lack of consultation and awareness by the key stakeholders, namely, teachers, pupils and parents.

The "instruction" also suggests that these stakeholders were perceived as not having accepted this policy; hence the minister had to use his powers to *instruct* these stakeholders. King et al,¹⁵ further argued that in the context of conventional participation the administrator (in our case, the Ministry) plays the role of the expert, thus maintaining the centrality of the administrator while publicly presenting the administrator as representative, consultative, or participatory.¹⁵ In this case the citizenry is relegated to the "client" of the professional administrator (ministry) and is presumed to be ill-equipped to question the professional's authority and technical knowledge. This approach is reported to be "ineffective and conflictual" as consultation "happens too late ... after most decisions have been made" [King et al, 1998].¹⁵ King concludes with a strong statement that

"Administrators need to examine their basic assumptions and practices regarding power. They need to become cooperative participants in the discourse, moving from a self-regarding intentionality where the goal is to protect self, promote self-interests, and hoard power, to a situation-regarding intentionality where power and community are grounded in the needs of the issue or situation."

Educating the nation should be the priority rather than the current attitude that make many to wonder if the current curriculum is not inspired by personal ambitions or some going as far as asking if this curriculum is not perhaps borne out of one of the theses by the officials in the Ministry.

¹⁴ King C, Feltey K, O'Neill Susel B, (1998). The Question of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration. *Public Administration Review*, 58(4), 317-326. doi:10.2307/977561

¹⁵ White OF, McSwain CJ (1993). The Semiotic Way of Knowing and Public Administration. *Administrative Theory and Praxis* 15(1): 18- 35.

My summation of this issue is that it seems there were not adequate consultation or if at all any were ever held. One could also wonder whether even all the officials in the Ministry were aware of what was to happen judging by the confusion in the ministry during that time – the students wrote the exams. Does the ministry have only one hymn book? Is the entire ministry cognizant of the events and policies? If so why did the pupils have to sit for the exams? And the circular states that “...there are no more national primary school leaving...” yet the pupils sat for the exams; then who set and distributed these exams to the schools? Another interesting aspect adding to the conundrum is that the officials from the ministry did not attend the meeting, which leaves one wondering whether there could be a feeling of uncertainty in the officials.

2. *Why does the decision for a pupil to repeat have to be made by the parents?* Or alternatively, what is the prudence in this determination? The current curriculum encourages that both the teacher and the parent sit and determine whether the pupil should proceed to the next level or not. One wonders what happens when parents are not sufficiently enlightened to discern between a deserving student and a non-deserving of progression. This was perceived as a way of shifting the blame that has been traditionally the purview of teacher and not of the parents. The stakeholders felt that this will make the pupils blame their parents if such a decision is made. It was further argued that some kids would end up detesting their parents and it will further make it difficult for parents to encourage the children to go further with their studies given that such children would be blaming their parents for not being allowed to proceed with classmates.

There was an argument that pupils could get traumatised if their parents are jailed for failing to take them to school in line with the law that stipulates that primary education is compulsory. The same trauma can happen when the said pupils are told that the decisions to repeat classes were made by their parents... a shift of the blame to the parents and away from the schools. This also assumes that the parents will have the same understanding as the teachers about assessment which is not necessarily the case.

3. *Have the secondary schools been prepared for absorption of these pupils from different schools? Are they ready to admit all of them? How will the tutoring in the post-primary schools work after admitting pupils from different backgrounds? How will the assessment be carried out in post primary level? Is the same trauma about ‘failing a test’ not being felt at this level? Will this not incite violence from these pupils when they are faced with this perceived monster – test/exam at this level? This is a plethora of questions and concerns of the stakeholders! Of course this paper will not provide answers for all these questions; rather it presents a possible scenarios*

Since the policy and the instruction from the ministry instructs that each secondary school admits children from its catchment area, an example was made of an area with about 10 primary schools and one secondary school. Assuming that each primary school has an average number of pupils at 20, this already translates to about 200 Form A students! For a classical example presented that secondary school had a capacity of only one classroom for Form A, what happens to the majority of the students? While one is not certain about the population in schools, one can only extrapolate from the fact that traditionally, about 2/3 of the Grade 7 pupils proceeded to secondary schools which leaves about 1/3 with no space. Assuming that this policy gets implemented further into the secondary education; one can only ponder what will happen at tertiary? Without even attempting to answer the issue of numbers, how will tertiary institutions determine those eligible to enrol for which programmes? This is a big mystery that needs to be addressed by all stakeholders lest the problem is shifted to the tertiary sector or the HEIs.

4. *Why is it that the ministry introduces so many changes in the curriculum, sometimes even before assessing the performance of the prior curriculum? For example, even before the LGCSE could have been implemented for five years there is already introduction of A-level that is surely going to disrupt the LGCSE. There is already a talk about extending primary education to 10 years and secondary trimmed to only two years. What informs these decisions or policy directions? Are these intended for the improvement of the education system? How so, if at all that is the reason? How will this impact higher education? All these questions are never answered during the engagements between the ministry and higher institutions. Not to mention that there seems an interesting scenario where the examining body, ECOL has turned*

to be the driver of the curriculum not just the examiner at the expense of the NCDC. While the author is not privy to the relationship between the two sister institutions, what is evident from the regular occurrences suggests some potential overstepping of the prescripts of each body.

5. *Where was this curriculum and assessment policy borrowed?* The common Sesotho expressions *thebe e sehelloa ho e 'ngoe* and *tsela e botsoa ba pele* acknowledge that not every change starts from scratch but rather sometimes these are copied from those who have tried and succeeded in such. This question was asked with some going as far as asking the ministry if this was not just an academic thesis being tested on the country's curriculum. The importance of this copying is that Lesotho is not an island, it is located in the region that is trying to harmonise education and qualifications to enable mobility within the region. The question then becomes, are all the countries in the following this curriculum? How does Lesotho fair with these countries if the response is negative to the first question?

While acknowledging many Sesotho expressions and idioms such as *mphe-mphe ea lapisa motho o khonoa ke sa ntlo ea hae* and *ntlo ea monna e mong ha ena boroko* (that both loosely translate to “one cannot pride over (or enjoy comfort in) someone else's property/qualities”) as they appearing in the document, one can only throw some caution that as one builds their own houses they should be cognizant of their neighbours lest they build their walls so high they get lost from their neighbours and they suffer alone in the times of grief. Lesotho needs to consider her neighbours as curriculum is being changed lest the graduates of the system get locked out of the international community. Education needs to be universal in as much as it has to be contextual to the needs of a specific country.

6. *Advocacy and dissemination of the policy:* It was stated by the ministry that this new curriculum and assessment policy was not adequately disseminated as the public gatherings that were supposed to be conducted to “sensitise” the parents and general public never took place. Here the author has deliberately inserted the inverted commas to stress the word “sensitise”. Sensitisation does not incorporate the views of the other parties upon which sensitisation happen. It is a one way process from those who know more to those who know less or do not know at all. This sensitisation implies that stakeholder did not know everything

about the syllabus, or at least the implementation of the assessment policy since the stakeholders lamented the assessment policy, not necessarily the curriculum content. Could it be that they know the contents? This remains a question for another day!

Regarding the issue of advocacy, or sensitisation, the author strongly believes that advocacy does not necessarily address the merits or demerits of the curriculum. A poison remains a poison no matter how much it is publicised! Advocacy about the policy should not only deal with convincing the public for acceptance but rather address all issues around the entire system. It should be more about consultations involving all major stakeholders such as higher education institutions, teachers training institutions not only the Ministry and parents as it is apparent from the dialogue. It sounded like the public gatherings would for sensitisation were more intended to the parents rather than the wider public in general. As it has been deliberated earlier, it is important to involve all stakeholders when designing or reviewing any curriculum, not only for acceptance but for the general ownership of such a curriculum or policy. It becomes easy to implement since each sector knows its part as it would have suggested it at the inception.

Conclusions and recommendations

The curriculum in itself may not be that bad, but all dimensions have to be covered and all stakeholders involved in the conception and formation of the policy, not at the implementation stage as it is evident currently. Removing the examinations as well is not necessarily a bad thing given that some of the best schools are said to “drill” the students for examinations instead of teaching them for knowledge acquisition and development as individuals. There is anecdotal evidence to corroborate these allegations given that the larger percentage of repeating students at the university level come from the so-called best schools. Those coming from the not-so-good schools always go through the university education once (whenever) they get admitted.

Before concluding this piece, perhaps one could make a recommendation that could have been considered in response to the issue of “best performing schools” versus the “not-so-good schools”, namely using the quota system admissions. Rather than admitting the students based on the catchment area, the instruction could possibly be modified to admit Form A students according to

the national PSLE pass rates as much as it is practically possible in a specific geographical area. For example, most towns' schools perform better than rural schools; consequently, the town areas would determine their regional pass rate in order to distribute the prospective students in that region so that the entire spectrum (third class to first class passes) is covered and that the student population is uniform, at least from the inception. Then the "good" versus the "not-so-good" classification would be valid.

In conclusion, this piece introduced a couple of points for consideration by the general public. It has not attempted to respond to any questions, but rather presented the scenarios that are possible for the country to ponder about. However, one can only conclude that the curriculum and assessment policy as it stands, given all the circumstances, is not suitable for the country as it has a potential for dire consequences to the future of the pupils that are taking it. It is further recommended that the ministry should consider remedial actions sooner rather than later, as the curriculum is rolled out. Otherwise the trend that is slowly being observed of those who can afford to send their children outside Lesotho continues with the drain of financial resources out of the country as the citizenry loses confidence in the education system. Sadly it is the poorest that will be hardest hit since they can only at best afford the public schools in Lesotho.