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## MANAGING CURRICULUM CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION IN GHANA: DOES GENDER MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN TEACHER CONCERNS?

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### ABSTRACT

*The concerns that teachers express about a curriculum change determine the extent to which they implement that change. A "Stages of Concerns" model developed by Horsley and Loucks-Horsley (1998) identifies seven stages of concerns (awareness, informational, personal, management, consequences, collaboration and refocusing) through which teachers pass when managing the implementation of a new curriculum. Designed within the Stages of Concerns model, this study investigated the concerns of primary school teachers as they implemented a curriculum change in Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to find out the concerns of male and female teachers and to determine whether there were any significant differences in the concerns expressed by the two groups of teachers about the change and its implementation. Data were gathered from 316 primary school teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. Group profile analysis indicated that male teachers had low collaboration concerns but high management and consequence concerns while female teachers had low informational concerns and high personal, collaboration and refocusing concerns. ANOVA results established a statistically significant difference between male and female teachers' concerns at the management stage, with female teachers having more management concerns than their male counterparts. Implications for implementing future curriculum change are drawn.*

### KEYWORDS

Curriculum change, curriculum implementation, reform, teacher concerns.

### INTRODUCTION

In September 2007, Ghana introduced an educational reform that brought changes in the curricula of Basic Schools (Year 1-9). In the primary school (Year 1-6) new subjects such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), French Language, Creative Arts, and Citizenship Education were added to the curriculum. New curriculum materials such as syllabi and textbooks were introduced; and daily contact time increased from four and half hours to five hours (Cobbold and Ani-Boi, 2011). These changes were aimed at helping pupils to acquire the foundational skills for inquiry, creativity and innovation; develop the ability to adapt constructively to the changing local and global environment; develop good citizenship skills to enable them participate in national development; and develop the skills and aptitudes of assimilating new knowledge (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS), 2004).

Any change in curricula comes with new demands on the part of the teacher and naturally the success of any reform effort depends highly on the teachers' role. Emphasizing the importance of teachers' role in curriculum change implementation, Marsh (1997) states that curriculum change starts as a plan but it only becomes a reality when teachers implement it with real students in a real classroom. He explains that careful planning and development are obviously important, but they count for nothing unless teachers are aware of the product and have the skills to implement the curriculum in their classrooms.

Since teachers are the critical agents for bringing changes into their classrooms, the teachers themselves should be the major focus of analysis and source of evidence regarding the implementation of curriculum change (Leung, 2008). Teachers' concerns should be of high priority in determining the success of any change effort. Lack of such consideration for teachers may affect their attitude toward programme implementation. Therefore, there is a genuine need to determine teachers' concerns in managing the implementation of the curriculum change in primary schools in Ghana as a curriculum improvement endeavour. A recent study which investigated such concerns found high personal and management concerns and low informational concerns among the primary school teachers (Cobbold and Ani-Boi, 2011). What remains unknown is whether the concerns expressed by the teachers are related to their gender. Such a research focus is very important in view of the fact that in Ghana there is unequal proportion of male and female teachers at the basic school level, with male teachers constituting about 53 percent. Besides, in Ghana females are perceived as less competent in many fields of endeavour, including teaching. Since teachers' concerns in implementing curriculum change are related to their level of competence, it is important to find out whether the two issues – low representation of females in teaching and public perception of female competence – play out in the concerns that teachers express about managing the implementation of the new curriculum. The thrust of the current study was, therefore, to ascertain if teachers' gender makes a difference in the type of concerns they express when implementing a curriculum change.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the concerns male teachers have about implementing the new primary school curriculum in Ghana
2. To examine the concerns female teachers have about implementing the new primary school curriculum in Ghana
3. To determine any differences in the concerns expressed by male teachers and those expressed by female teachers

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What concerns do male teachers have about implementing the new primary school curriculum?
2. What concerns do female teachers have about implementing the new primary school curriculum?
3. Is there a significant difference between the concerns of male teachers and the concerns of female teachers about implementing the new primary school curriculum?

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis based on the third research question was formulated for the study:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is **no** significant difference between male and female teachers in the concerns they have about implementing the new curriculum in primary schools.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Marsh and Willis (2007) posit that curriculum change is a generic term that encapsulates both planned and unplanned alterations in an instructional programme. It includes restructuring of the curriculum itself; class regrouping and organization; the use of new curriculum materials; changes in teaching practices; and changes in beliefs or understandings of how the curriculum affects learning (Fullan, 2007). Leung (2008) argues that teachers may apply various approaches to implementing a curriculum change, and that the critical factors for success include teachers' competence in teaching the new curriculum, further professional

development of teachers, enhancement of teachers' capacity in curriculum planning, and collegial team working in schools. For Brady and Kennedy (2003), managing the change process requires school collaborative cultures, which include improving teacher effectiveness, creating professional confidence and responding to change. It can be argued that teachers' response to change is a function of their reaction towards the change, which is expressed in the various concerns they have about that change.

Therefore, one research domain that has been studied extensively in connection with curriculum implementation is teachers' concerns. This body of research has shown that teachers' concerns influence their attitude towards a reform and their attempts to implement it (Cheung, Ng and Hattie, 2000). The concept of teacher concerns was introduced by Fuller (1969) to describe the feelings, perceptions, frustrations and motivations teachers have as they move through different stages of their development. According to Fuller, teachers' developmental concerns manifest at three levels: self, task and impact concerns. Self-concerns relate to the teachers' anxiety about their ability to take over the new demands in the school environment; task concerns refer to the daily duties of a teaching job, especially in relation to limitations posed by time, large class size and the lack of resources. Finally, impact concerns deal with teachers' apprehension concerning students' outcomes.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) of curriculum implementation (Horsley and Loucks-Horsley, 1998) extends Fuller's (1969) conceptualization and identifies seven stages of concerns: awareness, informational, personal, management, consequences, collaboration and refocusing. The first three stages constitute self-concerns, the fourth relates to task-concerns and the last three represent impact concerns. According to the model, the feelings, perceptions, frustrations and subsequent questions, uncertainties and possible resistance, or the satisfaction and motivations teachers may have as they become involved in the implementation of an educational change, tend to follow the above stages. Initially, teachers have little knowledge of the change but may not want to learn about it (awareness); later on they are concerned about their ability to respond to the requirements of the change (personal) and they show their willingness to learn more about it (informational). Self-concerns gradually decrease and teachers focus on the processes and tasks of using the innovation (management). Finally, teachers overcome task-concerns and focus upon the effects of the change on students' learning (consequences) and how to make the programme work better by actively working on it with colleagues (collaboration); they also seek out new and better ways to implement the programme for success (refocusing). Low concern at any stage means that the teachers are least concerned in that they have what it takes to meet the challenges of that stage while high concerns implies that teachers lack the knowledge, skills and dispositions required for meeting the expectations of that stage.

## REVIEW OF RECENT STUDIES

The construct of stages of concerns has been used to study the implementation of curricular changes in the form of innovations or reforms. Recent studies in this domain include those that investigated teachers' concerns generally and those that related teachers' concerns to variables such as teaching experience, gender, subject taught and school type. Studies that investigated teachers' concerns generally found that most teachers have high personal and collaborative concerns (Sun and Cheng, 2007), high management concerns (Cheng and Ng, 2000; Christou, Eliophotou and Philippou, 2004; Morris, Junjie, Fong-Lok and Timmy, 2008), very high concerns about informational and personal issues (Charambous, Philippou and Kyriakides, 2004; Liu and Huang, 2004; Yang and Huang, 2008) as well as high "impact concerns" – consequence, collaboration and refocusing (Leung, 2008; Liu and Huang, 2004). Generally, the research evidence indicates that teachers initially express self-concerns but this decreases with in-service training, and task and impact concerns increase (Goldsmith, 1997; Vaughan, 1997). Also, teachers' concerns in succeeding stages are influenced by their concerns in preceding stages (Charambous, Philippou and Kyriakides, 2004).

Relating teachers' concerns to specific demographic variables, Cheung and Ng (2000) found that Hong Kong teachers' stages of concern about implementing the Target-Oriented Curriculum were affected by their experience with the new curriculum and the type of school they teach, but not with their subject areas. The study by Lau and Shiu (2008) also showed that teachers' teaching experience had a significant influence at the refocusing stage. In contrast, another study involving primary school teachers implementing Information Technology in Kuwait found no significant differences in the concerns of teachers with different levels of teaching experience, but found significant difference between the concerns of male and female teachers at the management and refocusing stages (Alshammari, 2000). This latter finding about teachers' concern in relation to their gender was confirmed by Fritz and Miller (2003) who concluded that the teaching concerns of student teachers differed in terms of gender. Roxie (2005), however, did not find significant differences in teachers' concerns with respect to teaching experience and gender.

Thus, it appears from the research evidence that the relationship between teachers' gender and their concerns about implementing curriculum change remains inconclusive and needs further investigation, especially in Ghana where not even a single study in this direction has been conducted.

## METHODS

### DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The study involved 153 male and 163 female teachers who were randomly sampled from a total population of 678 primary school teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis of the Central Region of Ghana. Data were collected using a 35-item Stages of Concerns Questionnaire developed by Hall, George and Rutherford (1986). The questionnaire had seven sections representing the seven stages of concern, with each section having five questions. This was adapted, pre-tested and administered to the teachers in their respective schools. The adaptation involved substituting the words 'curricula change/reform' and 'school' (words commonly used in the educational sector in Ghana) for 'innovation' and 'faculty' in the original questionnaire in order to make the items clearer and more understandable for the Ghanaian teachers. Secondly, though the original instrument had five sequential statements under each stage of concern, these statements were mixed up until after data had been collected. The reason for altering the order of the statements was to avoid giving the respondents any clues that would make them select responses that did not represent their real situation.

The pre-testing involved 60 teachers selected from a district in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It was done to re-establish the validity and reliability of the instrument because of the minor changes made to the original instrument and the fact that it was being used in a different setting. The pre-test result established the following Cronbach's alpha co-efficients for the seven sections of the survey: awareness concerns (.83), personal concerns (.83), informational concerns (.83), management concerns (.83), consequence concerns (.83), collaboration concerns (.82), and refocusing concerns (.83). The overall Cronbach's alpha reliability co-efficient was .83, meaning the instrument had high reliability (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000).

In completing the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to indicate the level and intensity of their concerns about the implementation of the new curriculum by checking, for each item, one of 4 response categories: 0 – Irrelevant, 1 – Not true of me now, 2 – Somewhat true of me now, and 3 – Very true of me now.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed in three stages. Firstly, group profile analysis was done to categorize the various items into the seven stages of teacher concerns. Secondly, percentile means for the stages of concern – awareness, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration and refocusing – were calculated for male teachers and female teachers. This was to help determine the teachers' stages of concern with respect to their gender. Thirdly, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for any significant differences in the concerns of male and female teachers. The results of the analyses are presented and discussed in the sections which follow.

## RESULTS

### PERCENTILE MEANS OF MALE TEACHERS' CONCERNS

Results of group profile analysis using percentile means are presented in Table 1 and illustrated graphically in Figure 1. The results indicate that male teachers have their first and second high concerns at consequence (79.0) and management (69.0) stages respectively. This means the teachers were still grappling with issues about the impact of the new curriculum on their pupils' learning; they were also not certain of the procedural and task requirements for implementing the



change. The lowest concern recorded by male teachers was collaboration (47.0). This means the teachers saw the need to work together to make the implementation successful, and were doing more in that direction.

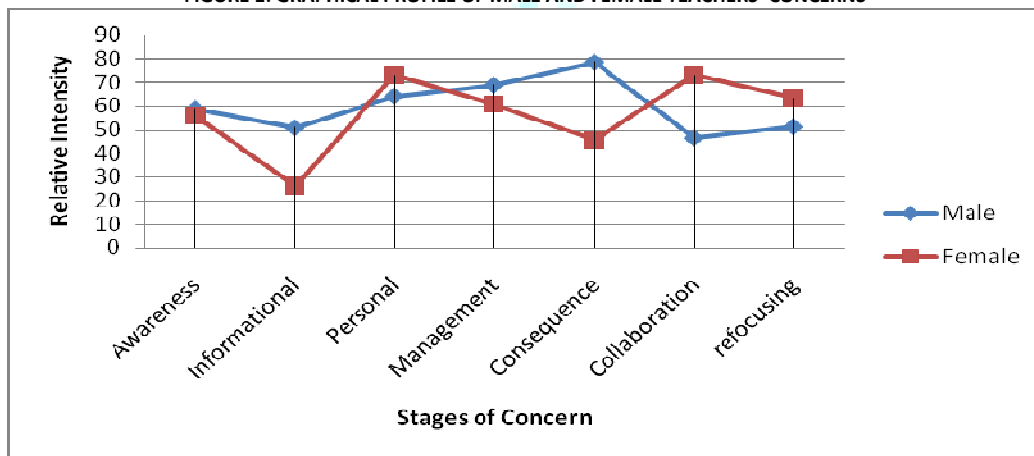
**PERCENTILE MEANS OF FEMALE TEACHERS' CONCERNS**

Female teachers recorded their first high concerns at both personal (73.0) and collaboration stages (73.0) and their second high concerns at refocusing stage (63.3). High personal concerns means that female teachers doubted their ability to respond to the requirements of the change and high collaboration concerns implied that the teachers perhaps did not see the need to team up with colleagues to manage the change or were not clear about ways in which they could do this. Consequently, there was little urge on their part to seek out new and better ways to implement the change for success (high refocusing concerns). Finally, female teachers had low informational concerns (23.6), implying that they were much more willing to learn more about the new programme.

**TABLE 1: PERCENTILE MEANS OF MALE AND FEMALE TEACHERS' CONCERNS**

Stages	Aware.	Info.	Person.	Manage.	Conseq.	Colla.	Refocus.
Male	59.0	51.0	64.2	69.0	79.0	47.0	51.4
Female	56.0	26.3	73.0	61.0	46.0	73.0	63.3

**FIGURE 1: GRAPHICAL PROFILE OF MALE AND FEMALE TEACHERS' CONCERNS**



**TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS**

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 alpha level was used to test the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers in the concerns they have about implementing the new curriculum in primary schools. Gender is the independent variable here because it was presumed to influence teacher concerns (the dependent variable). The results are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: ANOVA FOR GENDER AND TEACHER CONCERNS**

		Sum of Squares (SS)	Deg. of Freedom (DF)	Mean Squares (MS)	F	Sig.
Awareness	Gender	24.743	1	24.743	2.745	.099
	Residual	2830.801	314	9.015		
Informational	Gender	1.726	1	1.726	.141	.707
	Residual	3833.945	314	12.210		
Personal	Gender	.057	1	.057	.007	.934
	Residual	2633.120	314	8.386		
Management	Gender	64.268	1	64.268	4.486	.035
	Residual	4497.970	314	14.325		
Consequence	Gender	1.698	1	1.698	.152	.697
	Residual	3512.669	314	11.187		
Collaboration	Gender	13.117	1	13.117	.725	.395
	Residual	5681.501	314	18.094		
Refocusing	Gender	9.363	1	9.363	1.290	.257
	Residual	2278.371	314	7.256		

p = 0.05

Analysis of variance found that there was a statistically significant difference between male teachers' and female teachers' concerns at the management stage (F=4.486, p < 0.05), but there were no statistically significant differences between male and female teachers' concerns at the other six stages of concerns: awareness (F=2.745, p = .099), informational (F=0.141, p = .707), personal (F=0.007, p = .934), consequence (F=0.152, p = .697), collaboration (F=0.725, p = .395) and refocusing (F=1.290, p = .257). The difference between the management concerns of male teachers and that of female teachers suggests that primary school teachers' sex might play a crucial role in their ability to manage the changes brought about by the 2007 curriculum.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

One finding from the study is that male primary school teachers have high concerns at consequence and management stages, but low concerns with regard to collaboration. This means that male teachers' apprehensions were on the impact of the 2007 curriculum change on pupils, and how to best use available information and resources, including time, and plan activities to achieve the desired impact. These concerns pose a greater threat to the implementation and the institutionalization of change in any form (Fullan, 2007). Low collaboration concerns of male teachers suggest that they did see the need to work with other teachers and schools regarding the implementation of the change. Given the individualistic and isolationist culture in most Ghanaian primary schools, this is surprising and points to the emergence of communities of practice in the study schools. Such school collaborative culture, Brady and Kennedy (2003) emphasize, are important in managing any change process.

Female teachers had high concerns at personal, collaboration and refocusing stages, though they expressed low informational concerns. Having high personal concerns indicate that female teachers were worried about effects of the change on their roles and responsibilities, and about their capability to meet the demands of the change. Not surprisingly, they had not developed interest in coordinating and cooperating with other teachers (high collaboration concerns) in order to maximize their efforts to use the new curriculum. Unlike their male counterparts, female teachers were not interested in sharing their experiences about the change with other schools and teachers and to also tap experiences of colleagues in order to reap the benefits of the change. This is contrary to

popular opinion that women generally like to discuss things that pose a challenge to them with other people. Perhaps the female teachers felt inadequate to meet the numerous requirements of the change, as reflected in their high personal concerns, but did not want other colleagues to be aware of this inadequacy. Female teachers recorded refocusing as their second high concern, implying that they had ideas about the change and how to improve upon its use. This was reflected in their expression of low informational concerns, which means female teachers had enough information about the reform. This may have been possible through their efforts to share ideas about the reform with other teachers.

The statistically significant difference in the management concerns of male and female teachers found in this study has also been reported by another study (Ashmmari, 2000) which investigated the concerns of primary school teachers implementing Information Technology in Kuwait. In a study of student teachers using internet-based communication to teach agriculture, concerns expressed were also found to be dependent on gender (Fritz & Miller, 2003). Similar studies, however, found no differences in teacher concerns with respect to gender (Hall, George and Rutherford, 1986).

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

By referring to the findings of this study, several significant implications for the implementation of new curriculum in Ghana can be drawn.

First, it was found that male teachers have high concerns at management and consequence stages and low concerns at collaboration. Given the research evidence that collaboration among teachers is important in managing any curriculum change process (Brady and Kennedy, 2003), school heads should develop and nurture this culture in their schools through school-based curriculum development and peer observation of teaching. Once this collaborative culture has been accepted teachers can utilize it to advantage when implementing new curricula.

Second, it was found that female teachers have high concerns at personal, collaboration and refocusing stages and low concerns at informational stages. Thus, together, both male and female teachers have major concerns regarding the tasks and impacts of implementing the new curriculum. The tasks refer to issues of efficiency and time demands of implementing the new curriculum, and the best use of relevant information and resources, scheduling, time and organization. The impacts refer to the consequences of implementing the new curriculum for pupil learning, the collaboration of teaching the new curriculum among teachers, and the refocusing of the teaching approach to improve the implementation process. These findings suggest the need for policy makers to provide on-going and quality support to cater for the authentic professional needs of the teachers as they implement the new curriculum.

Finally, the study found a statistically significant difference in the management concerns of male and female teachers, with the latter having more management concerns than the former. Differences in management concerns of teachers imply differences in their levels of efficacy to teach the new curriculum (Charambous, Philippou and Kyriakides, 2004) and suggest the necessity for differentiated workshops to address separately the management concerns of male and female teachers.

Generalization of the findings of the present study to all primary school teachers in Ghana may be limited by the fact that only teachers in one district – the Cape Coast Metropolis – were included in the study. However, by highlighting the major findings, it is expected that the study will exercise an impact on policy makers and implementers in their efforts to achieve curriculum change in primary schools. Some researchers recommend that a “systematic monitoring of teacher concerns by the government is necessary during the process of curriculum change; with the aid of information about teachers’ stages of concern, change agents can design effective interventions” (Cheung and Ng, 2000). The present study provides critical insights for such monitoring with a view to reviewing the progress of change and proposing actions for continuous improvement. Moreover, the study adds to the scanty literature on teachers’ concerns about implementing curriculum change with particular reference to the Ghanaian context.

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