



# Assessing Teachers' Views on the Impact of Teacher Unions on Curriculum Development and Implementation



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## ABSTRACT

The thrust of this study was to assess the teachers' views on the impact of teachers' unions on curriculum development and implementation in schools of OR Tambo Inland Education District. The government of democracy in South Africa necessitated the design and development of curriculum to be a transformed and inclusive curriculum offered in learning institutions such as schools, colleges and universities irrespective of the colour, gender, disabilities, race, and religion of the registered learners. The rationale for the design of a transformed and inclusive curriculum was crucial to redress the imbalances of the past apartheid which was characterised by or with segregated curriculum on the basis of colour, disabilities, and gender. The researchers adopted a qualitative approach, making use of the case study research design. Data were collected from a sample of ten purposefully chosen secondary schools, with one teacher serving as a participant from each secondary school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with 10 teachers of the selected secondary schools. A thematic approach was used to analyse the collected data. It emerged that the stakeholders like teachers, principals, teacher unions, and communities, were marginalised in curriculum development by Department of Basic Education officials. The marginalisation of teacher unions has a negative impact on the implementation of the curriculum by teachers. Collaboration of stakeholders like teacher unions, researchers, and book-publishers to mention a few, in curriculum planning and development by DBE is the key to the success and implementation. The study outcomes encourage the training on and usage of technological skills for online meetings by stakeholders.

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## INTRODUCTION

Democracy in South Africa necessitated the transformation of segregated education systems that existed and were adopted in schools prior to 1994, to have a single curriculum irrespective of colour, race, and religion. The development of new curricula is a common occurrence in countries across the globe.<sup>1</sup> This implies that all countries have a curriculum transformation agenda to improve their economic, social, educational, technological, and political mentality and standards. The design of a transformed and

<sup>1</sup> John M. Rogan and Diane J. Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation with Particular Reference to Science Education in Developing Countries," *International Journal of Science Education* 25, no. 10 (2003): 1171–1204.

inclusive curriculum was crucial to redress the imbalances of the past. It should be noted that South Africa as an African country was not an exception in thinking and embarking on its curriculum transformation, especially after the receipt of their independence from oppressors who created segregated curricula to oppress Africans through education.<sup>2</sup>

After gaining independence, the Algerian government thought of and embarked on curriculum reforms for relevant curricula to be offered in learning institutions such as schools and universities as well as colleges.<sup>3</sup> One of the reasons for curriculum change is to cater to the modernisation countries face in their quest to meet their social, economic, historical, and political demands. It should be noted that the world is in the fourth industrial revolution (4<sup>th</sup>IR) and the curriculum should be set to meet societal, political, technological, and global economic demands. This means that the graduates from universities and colleges and school-leavers from schools should possess responsive attributes like acceptable morals, impactful knowledge, entrepreneurial basic research and technological skills, coding, and robotics, to mention a few, to improve the economy and living standards of societies. For these few attributes mentioned to be developed, there is a need for commitment on the part of learning institutions like schools, universities and colleges and the involvement of other stakeholders as well as relevant resources to offer a transformed, responsive, relevant, technological-infused, and impactful curriculum to their clients i.e. learners, parents, communities, government, and businesses.<sup>4</sup>

In simpler terms, the curriculum offered in learning institutions such as schools, universities and colleges should be subjected to continuous reviews to check its suitability and responsiveness to prepare the learners and graduates holistically to become future-ready for purpose and fit in meeting and addressing the pressing societal needs. Furthermore, it should be noted that involvement and empowerment of human capital are imperative for the education system to be effective. In this research, the curriculum is regarded as a tool for making the learners acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. Kara regards the curriculum as academic content that must be taught or offered in schools, universities, and colleges to empower and produce school leavers and graduates with relevant and impactful knowledge, requisite skills, and positive attitudes as well as desirable morals or values.<sup>5</sup> This view is affirmed by Delgado who argues that any change in organisations especially in learning institutions depends on human resources that is teachers and or lecturers in higher institutions.<sup>6</sup> From experience, the involvement and contribution of teachers in curriculum development is one of the critical ingredients if the curriculum is to be embraced and successfully implemented by teachers. It is considering this background that Alsubaie postulates that the success of curriculum development rests mostly upon the collaboration of teachers as implementers with other stakeholders like unions, communities, parents, government, business sectors, and any interested parties to the quality, relevant and responsive education system of a country.<sup>7</sup>

Alsubaie cautions the Department of Basic Education (DBE) officials as sponsors and or custodians of education in countries that if the government alienates the stakeholders like parents, teacher unions, teachers, and learners to mention a few, in curriculum development, such a practice is a recipe for failure and paralysis of the education system.<sup>8</sup> The research objective of this study is thus to assess the teachers' views on the impact of teacher unions on curriculum development and implementation in schools of OR Tambo Inland Education District.

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<sup>2</sup> Fatima Bouchikhi and Barka Zine, "Higher Education in Algeria: Achievements and Challenges-1963 to 2017," 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Bouchikhi and Zine, "Higher Education in Algeria: Achievements and Challenges-1963 to 2017."

<sup>4</sup> Molise David Nhlapo and Lokesh Ramnath Maharajh, "Engaging Foreign Curriculum Experts in Curriculum Design: A Case Study of Primary School Curriculum Change in Lesotho.," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 5, no. 10 (2017): 1741–47.

<sup>5</sup> Mehmet Kara, Volkan Kukul, and Recep Çakır, "Conceptions and Misconceptions of Instructors Pertaining to Their Roles and Competencies in Distance Education: A Qualitative Case Study," *Participatory Educational Research* 5, no. 2 (2018): 67–79.

<sup>6</sup> P. Delgado, "The Role of Teachers' Unions. Observatory of Educational Innovation," 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Merfat Ayesh Alsubaie, "Curriculum Development: Teacher Involvement in Curriculum Development.," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 9 (2016): 106–7.

<sup>8</sup> Alsubaie, "Curriculum Development: Teacher Involvement in Curriculum Development."

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Mafisa asserts that teacher unions are intended to work in partnership with the DBE for the amelioration of education through the involvement of their members in taking part in many departmental endeavors to improve the quality of education.<sup>9</sup> The influence of teacher unions on their members could be negative or positive in making the latter implement or not implement the designed curriculum. It is why now most organisations find it working for them to achieve the set goals as experience has shown that if they are marginalised in policy formulation, they could influence their members to oppose and not implement such policy. It should be noted that Mafisa did not leave out the fact that teacher unions do have similarities in terms of advocating for the rights of their members.<sup>10</sup> Developed countries like Canada and the United States of America to mention a few, are cited as having teacher organisations that advocate for their members' rights and they also greatly focus more on ensuring that the quality of education is not compromised.<sup>11</sup>

It is also evident that even in developed countries such as Germany, teacher unions play a crucial role in influencing their members to embrace and implement school policies.<sup>12</sup> The German Ministerial of Education incorporates the teacher unions for any policy formulation.<sup>13</sup> By extension, the resistance of teachers to embrace and implement such school policies is extremely limited if they ever occurred because they believe that they had been represented by their unions in such decision-making in producing the school policies. It should be noted that there is a mixture of feelings in people about involving the unions in any reforms. Some people view unions as agents to spoil and disapprove of the occurrence of change. Such people feel threatened by the existence of unions in their sites while others embrace them for their desirable influence and the major contribution, they make to the functionality of the organisations such as schools. Carlson conducted a study that paints a negative image of teacher unions in the context of education reform.<sup>14</sup> His research findings showed that in the United States of America (USA), a local teacher union rejected proposals for contractual provisions that introduced staff development programmes that were meant to enhance the teachers' understanding of the curriculum and unleash their full potential in the execution of their duties. This conduct is not peculiar to the teacher organization cited by Carlson, and it is not exceptional to the USA.<sup>15</sup> Generally, teacher unions are perceived to be antithetical to educational change and advancement. It should be noted that in the United States, authors such as Cowen and Strunk opine that one of the teacher unions' roles is shaping education policy.<sup>16</sup>

In Germany for example, it is noted that teacher unions' presence and decision-making are recognised by the government to promote the adoption of curriculum and policies to enhance learning in schools.<sup>17</sup> These authors divulged that teacher unions are one of the important stakeholders for decision-making in German education policies.<sup>18</sup>

In developed countries like Germany, teacher unions are recognised for their contribution to the education system. This means that under-developed and developing countries should learn from developed countries to cope with the challenges prohibiting the success of the responsive and impactful curriculum to be adopted in schools. It is evident that teacher unions play almost the same role globally when it comes to supporting their members against the department. Thus they need to be involved from

<sup>9</sup> Lekhotla James Mafisa, "The Role of Teacher Unions in Education with Specific Reference to South Africa," *Gender and Behaviour* 15, no. 4 (2017): 10553–66.

<sup>10</sup> Mafisa, "The Role of Teacher Unions in Education with Specific Reference to South Africa."

<sup>11</sup> Mafisa, "The Role of Teacher Unions in Education with Specific Reference to South Africa."

<sup>12</sup> Rita Nikolai, Kendra Briken, and Dennis Niemann, "Teacher Unionism in Germany: Fragmented Competitors," *The Comparative Politics of Education: Teachers Unions and Education Systems around the World*, 2017, 114–42.

<sup>13</sup> Nikolai, Briken, and Niemann, "Teacher Unionism in Germany: Fragmented Competitors."

<sup>14</sup> Deven Carlson, "No Child Left Behind, National Ambitions, and Local Realities: Implications for Social and Emotional Learning.," *American Enterprise Institute*, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Carlson, "No Child Left Behind, National Ambitions, and Local Realities: Implications for Social and Emotional Learning."

<sup>16</sup> Joshua Cowen and Katharine O Strunk, "How Do Teachers' Unions Influence Education Policy? What We Know and What We Need to Learn. Working Paper# 42.," *Education Policy Center at Michigan State University*, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Nikolai, Briken, and Niemann, "Teacher Unionism in Germany: Fragmented Competitors," 124.

<sup>18</sup> Nikolai, Briken, and Niemann, "Teacher Unionism in Germany: Fragmented Competitors."

the beginning to avoid opposition and criticisms when teachers are to implement and follow the proposed curriculum.

In Spain, for example, all occupation standards are reviewed every five years, and this process leads to changes in curricula. In several countries, a review of vocational qualifications may be requested by Vocational Education and Training providers, employers, and professional associates. In places like Latvia and Germany organisations have the right to introduce new curricula. This assertion seems to suggest that professionals are trained as per their qualifications and used to review progress before changes in the curriculum. Therefore, implementers become aware of changes in the curriculum beforehand. Each sectoral centre of expertise is given a right to review the curriculum and qualifications structure for which it is responsible. This activity is overseen by a management board set for business, education, and trade unions. The responsibilities regarding curriculum development are allocated to institutions in different countries. By extension, it means management is making sure that all is in order as the overseer of the developments. If that could be the position in South Africa, teacher resistance could be avoided. In Poland, the working groups that prepare and change curricula are represented mainly by educationalists; the social partners usually participate during the consultation phase.<sup>19</sup> In simple terms teachers are placed in front to lead other groups to attain success in the development and without their involvement outcomes may be sour.

The recent literature on educational studies offers contrasting views on the role of teacher unions in the improvement of the standard and quality of education. Cowen and Strunk argue that teacher unions have a political and legislative influence on educational policy that favours their members and their perceptions in issues that relate to educational matters.<sup>20</sup> For example, in South Africa, teacher unions were instrumental in influencing the teacher Performance Management Development System (PMDS) which has a direct influence on teacher salary progression. This simply shows that teacher unions were initially formed as political bodies fighting for the rights of their members against the employer, they were formed to pursue a struggle that was based on political freedom. In South Africa for instance, there has been resistance from the teacher unions whenever the (DBE) introduces a new curriculum.<sup>21</sup> For instance, under the then Minister of Education, Sibusiso Bengu, the Department of Education (DoE) introduced what is popularly known as the Outcomes Based-Education (OBE). Both Kader Asmal and Naledi Pandor, subsequent ministers of Education respectively, took the idea of OBE forward and this was further moulded into the National Curriculum Statement despite the resistance they faced.

The role played by teacher unions in the development of the curriculum becomes more political, and the statement is further supported by Dowden that curriculum is always part of politics.<sup>22</sup> Education affairs at the national level lie with both the government and unions.<sup>23</sup> The government is represented by the DBE which develops policies and teacher unions represent teachers who have the role of implementation. Govender agrees with this assertion and posits that the formulation of policy and curriculum development for schools has become the responsibility of government policymakers and policy specialists, while the implementation of curriculum development is perceived as the responsibility of teachers.<sup>24</sup>

Msila has however argued that some of the findings of studies conducted by researchers divulged that some schools, circuits, Education district offices, and Departments of Education of countries find themselves in toxic and dysfunctional situations because of the involvement of teacher unions in education-related activities.<sup>25</sup> There is literature that supports the successes and dysfunctions in

<sup>19</sup> Ireneusz Białecki, Maciej Jakubowski, and Jerzy Wiśniewski, "Education Policy in Poland: The Impact of PISA (and Other International Studies)," *European Journal of Education* 52, no. 2 (2017): 167–74.

<sup>20</sup> Cowen and Strunk, "How Do Teachers' Unions Influence Education Policy? What We Know and What We Need to Learn. Working Paper# 42," 10-12.

<sup>21</sup> B. M. C Masumbe and I. A Cotzer, "Curriculum Change in South Africa: Past and Present Scenarios," *Journal of Educational Studies* 5, no. 2 (2006): 208–28.

<sup>22</sup> T. Dowden, *Understanding the Curriculum: Netherlands* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Vimbi P Mahlangu and Victor Justice Pitsoe, "Power Struggle between Government and the Teacher Unions in South Africa," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 2, no. 5 (2011): 365–71.

<sup>24</sup> R. Govender, *Understanding the Curriculum* (The Netherlands: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Vuyisile Msila, "Teacher Unions, Schools and Success: Opportunities and Contradictions," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 21, no. 3 (2022): 263–80.

schools' activities and education systems because of the involvement of teacher unions. There is a belief that those who doubt the importance of teacher unions in school-related activities have the potential to make schools disruptive and ungovernable.<sup>26</sup> When schools are ungovernable, it is likely that the teacher's and school management teams' relations, quality of education, communities' contribution to schools' operations, and learners' academic performance to mention a few, are negatively affected.

Msila is also of the viewpoint that when teacher unions collaborate with other school-related stakeholders in transformations and decision-making in a meaningful manner, they tend to contribute satisfactorily and optimally to the best interest of the schools, principals, teachers, parents, learners, and government.<sup>27</sup> This assertion seems to suggest that from the onset, teacher unions should be encouraged to actively participate in affairs to enhance the quality of education. If they are truly involved, they could play a vital role in influencing, promoting, and advocating for curriculum development amongst their teachers to embrace and adopt it.

In a study conducted in Tanzania by Chale, the findings revealed that political organisations influence the success or failure of the curriculum development process.<sup>28</sup> It is evident that the collaboration of teacher unions with other stakeholders of education such as Department of Education curriculum officials, teachers, and school management teams (SMTs), businesses and any interested parties (AIPs) in the field of education through their dialogues and roadshows could contribute to the ownership and success of curriculum development. It is emphasised by Alsubaie that collaboration and feedback are important for the success of curriculum development.<sup>29</sup>

By extension, the collaboration of stakeholders including teacher unions are the key factors to strengthen and align the curriculum to meet the country's societal needs. From the researchers' point of view, it can be noted that their feedback, insight, and experiences in the curriculum development processes could enhance the engagements and discussion to yield good and acceptable outcomes.

Similarly, Obilo and Sangoleye contended that the task of implementing any curriculum successfully lies with teacher unions, and teachers' participation because they are the custodians of knowledge, interact with texts and the learners, and understand the constraints and opportunities within the schools.<sup>30</sup> In the South African context, it is argued by Govender that professional unionism could potentially contribute to more effective education service provision.<sup>31</sup> This implies that when teacher unions agree with other stakeholders in curriculum development, there are more opportunities for teachers to deliver the designed curriculum optimally, efficiently, and effectively to the best of their professional capacities. The lack of agreement in decision-making amongst the stakeholders in curriculum development should be regarded as one of the factors that could cripple the actualisation of a responsive and impactful curriculum.

Molapo and Pillay have affirmed that for an enhanced curriculum to be achieved by countries, the collaboration of Department of Education officials with teacher unions is imperative.<sup>32</sup> This implies that when there is connectedness and dialogues amongst the stakeholders involving teacher unions who are the representatives of teachers, the efforts to come up with a curriculum that is owned and embraced by all parties are likely to occur. Molapo and Pillay argue that the work of improving educational affairs at the national level lies with both the government and the teacher unions.<sup>33</sup> From the researchers' point of view, it means that when teacher unions support the curriculum as proposed by the government to change to meet the social, technological, and economic demands of the countries, there are very few chances for the teachers to divorce themselves from embracing and adopting such curriculum where their

<sup>26</sup> Msila, "Teacher Unions, Schools and Success: Opportunities and Contradictions."

<sup>27</sup> Msila, "Teacher Unions, Schools and Success: Opportunities and Contradictions."

<sup>28</sup> Wilford Chale, "Teacher Participation in Curriculum Development Process: Views of Teachers from Selected Primary Schools in Mwanza City" (The Open University of Tanzania, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Alsubaie, "Curriculum Development: Teacher Involvement in Curriculum Development."

<sup>30</sup> Princess Ijeoma Obilo and Solomon Adebayo Sangoleye, "Curriculum Implementation and the Teacher: Challenges and Way Forward," in *A Paper Presented at the 9 Th National Conference of the School of Social Sciences, AIFCE, Owerri*, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Logan Govender, "Teacher Unions' Participation in Policy Making: A South African Case Study," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 45, no. 2 (March 4, 2015): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2013.863070>.

<sup>32</sup> Moyahabo Rodgers Molapo and Venitha Pillay, "Politicising Curriculum Implementation: The Case of Primary Schools," *South African Journal of Education* 38, no. 1 (2018): 1–9.

<sup>33</sup> Molapo and Pillay, "Politicising Curriculum Implementation: The Case of Primary Schools," 2.

teacher unions were part of its design. It can be concluded that from the literature reviewed above, the involvement of teacher unions in curriculum development is critical for it to be successful.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The researchers employed Rogan and Grayson's Theory of Curriculum Implementation.<sup>34</sup> This implementation theory focuses on how teachers apply the new curriculum and factors that affect their implementation, hence the researchers chose it. Teacher development in this theory is the most crucial factor in the success of any curriculum reform which is unavoidable.<sup>35</sup>

Rogan and Grayson believe that the effective implementation of a curriculum can be determined through three constructs.<sup>36</sup> The first construct is the Profile of Implementation (POI). This construct focuses on classroom interaction, the methods of teaching, and various ways of assessing the learners.<sup>37</sup> The second construct, namely the capacity to innovate (CTI), focuses on the physical resources, teachers' factors, learners' factors, and the school ethos and management.<sup>38</sup> The last construct is Outside Agencies (OA) and deals with the support to implementation that emanates from the outside of the school environment. This may relate to officials from the Department of Education, staff professional development, communities, teacher unions and external support to teachers, principals, and learners.<sup>39</sup> This research, however, is looking at the involvement, and participation of the stakeholders like teacher unions who are to play a prominent role in curriculum development and implementation as outside agencies. The use of this theory is relevant for this research because basically, the researchers are looking for the views of teachers on the impact of teacher unions on curriculum development and implementation and how the union is impactfully playing a role in curriculum development and implementation. The third construct in this theory, which is the Profile of Outside Support is mainly intended to describe the action taken by organisations outside the school and changes that could be made by their involvement in curriculum development and implementation.<sup>40</sup> Execution of changes in a classroom or learning environment solely depends upon the responsibility of teachers and they must receive various support from the communities and other organizations.<sup>41</sup>

Given that the research focuses on teachers' participation in curriculum development, this theory offers a robust framework for examining how external support structures, such as teacher unions and community organizations, influence teachers' ability to contribute meaningfully to curriculum reforms. The theory's focus on teacher development is especially pertinent, as it aligns with the study's objective to explore how teacher involvement in curriculum development enhances their sense of ownership, accountability, and commitment to the educational process.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The researchers adopted a qualitative research approach using a case study design. The research involved a case study of schools in the Mthatha Magisterial District which forms part of OR Tambo Inland Education District. The researchers settled on this research design because it involves a research plan that journeys to gather data, analyze the collected data, and deduce meaningful findings for generating feasible and pragmatic solutions to the identified problem. The teachers working in 10 purposefully selected secondary schools from different circuits sampled secondary schools in OR Tambo inland education district formed the population for the study. Each secondary school was represented by one teacher as a participant in this research. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with the 10 teachers. A thematic approach was used to analyse the collected data.

The permission to conduct the research in selected schools with teachers was sought through writing and submitting letters to the Eastern Cape Department of Basic Education, school principals and

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<sup>34</sup> Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation..."

<sup>35</sup> Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation..."

<sup>36</sup> Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation..." 1186.

<sup>37</sup> Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation..."

<sup>38</sup> Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation..." 1186.

<sup>39</sup> Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation..." 100.

<sup>40</sup> Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation..." 4.

<sup>41</sup> Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation..."

teachers who are executive representatives of teacher unions. The informed consent forms were issued to selected teachers who were representatives of executives of teacher unions to fill in their information as a means to commit willingly and voluntarily that they accepted to participate in this research. Upon the receipt of permission to conduct the research, face-to-face meetings with one-on-one were conducted to clarify to them the research objectives and data collection processes. They were ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the information they shared to avoid being identified by the readers.

All the sampled secondary schools with grades 8 to 12 happened to be odd numbers in the list OR Tambo education district was selected with the intention and purpose to choose their teachers as participants to participate in this research by reflecting their experiences and opinions in an articulative and expressive manner pertaining to the phenomenon being investigated.

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, content analysis was employed to analyze the responses collected through interviews which were conducted face-to-face with ten teachers who have a minimum of ten years in their employment in the Department of Basic Education. Content analysis helps the researchers to look at and identify similar responses from different angles.<sup>42</sup> The following steps were performed to analyze the collected data. The researchers started by familiarizing themselves with the data by playing the tape recorder and reading the notes taken during the interview sessions. Secondly, codes for similar responses were developed and refined from the collected data to produce statements having the same meaning. The content was generated from statements with similar meanings from those responses. The content was then regularly reviewed to check their correlation to the responses to the research questions to establish meaningful findings. The narratives were then presented with the support of primary and secondary sources.

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

It was found that the involvement of teachers is of paramount importance in curriculum development. Out of ten participating teachers, only nine responded to this question. Of the nine participating teachers, to answer this question, six of them have agreed that teacher unions should be involved in the curriculum development and implementation. T1 answered in this way, *“Yes, the teacher unions are the teachers’ mouth.”* and T4 said, *“Yes, it is of paramount importance to involve teacher unions because they can encourage their members to implement curriculum changes.”* T6 replied, *“Yes, they are the voice of teachers.”* T3 replied, yes, *“teacher unions need to voice their opinions.”* While T7 said, *“Teachers unions must be involved because unions are teachers.”*

However, teachers often face challenges such as limited time, insufficient resources, and a lack of professional development opportunities. These obstacles can hinder their ability to effectively contribute to curriculum design. The influence of teacher unions on their members could be negative or positive in making the latter implement or not implement the designed curriculum. It is why most organisations find it working for them to achieve the set goals as experience has shown that if they are marginalised, they could influence their members to oppose and not implement such. It is reflected in the participant (T4) who said, *“Yes, it is of paramount importance to involve teacher unions because they can encourage their members to implement curriculum changes”*

Additionally, balancing administrative tasks with teaching responsibilities can further complicate their involvement. It was also found that teacher unions invite teachers to face-to-face meetings only to be told what to do and how to do it. T4 said, *“The union used to call us for something that has been decided about us as teachers without having informed us.”* This often leaves teachers feeling frustrated and undervalued, as their input and professional expertise are not acknowledged. Many feel that their autonomy is being undermined, which can lead to decreased motivation and job satisfaction.

It was revealed teachers feel threatened by the existence of unions because the unions often cooperate with the government more than their members.

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<sup>42</sup> Kobus Maree, *First Steps In Research* (Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2007).

Some teachers even express a sense of disillusionment with the union's role in advocating for their needs. There was a consensus from all the participants that there are educational, social, and economic benefits to the involvement of teacher unions in curriculum development and implementation.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following section discusses the implications of findings that emerged when analysing the collected data from the participating teachers who are full members of teacher unions. Mafisa asserts that teacher unions are intended to work in partnership with the DBE for the amelioration of education through the involvement of their members in taking part in many departmental endeavors to improve the quality of education.<sup>43</sup> The influence of teacher unions on their members could be negative or positive in making the latter implement or not implement the designed curriculum. It is why now most organizations find it working for them to achieve the set goals as experience has shown that if they are marginalized in policy formulation, they could influence their members to oppose and not implement such policy. This view is reflected in the assertion made by participant (T4), *“Yes, it is of paramount importance to involve teacher unions because they can encourage their members to implement curriculum changes.”*

It should be noted that Mafisa did not leave out the fact that teacher unions have similarities in terms of advocating for the rights of their members.<sup>44</sup> Developed countries like Canada and the United States of America to mention a few, are cited as having teacher organisations that advocate for their members' rights let alone that they are also greatly focusing more on ensuring that the quality of education is not compromised.<sup>45</sup>

The parents, communities and government are not convinced that the lost time for holding the face-to-face meetings organised by teacher unions is repaid by means of engaging their members to catch up with teaching is ever advocated for and monitored so that the content is taught to its completion. This observation was also echoed by one of the teachers who participated that they do not feel comfortable and convinced about their involvement since teacher unions finalise everything without them whereas they are expected to implement the curriculum developed. In other words, teachers do not have faith and confidence in teacher unions. Teachers complain that teacher unions invite them for face-to-face meetings only to be told what to do and how to do it. To confirm this claim, T6 said, *“Unions decide to call us teachers to a meeting and tell us the expectations by the department of education in terms of changes made and that we must implement the curriculum developed calling that empowerment and development.”*

From the researchers' views, when the teacher unions feel recognized and accommodated as key stakeholders in policy-making, they could make it effective by their insights, and professional expertise as teachers and further influence their members to embrace it for implementation as they have represented them in dialogues or debates about the formulation of such policies.

The findings revealed that teachers feel threatened by the existence of unions because the unions often cooperate with the government more than their members. Teachers therefore feel threatened by the existence of unions because they worry that their voices and concerns are overshadowed or diluted by the collective bargaining power of the union. They also fear that unions negotiate on their behalf without considering their individual needs and preferences. Finally, teachers feel that the union's close relationship with the government leads to a perceived lack of autonomy and independence in decision-making processes. To confirm this claim T7 said, *We feel that our voice and concerns are overshadowed in the bargaining process. T8 Unions are fully supporting the government in the bargaining process without involving us as teachers in the curriculum development.”*

Due to this trend, the role played by teacher unions in the development of the curriculum becomes more political, this confirms Dowden's view that the school curriculum is always part of politics.<sup>46</sup> According to Govender, the formulation of policy and curriculum development for schools has become

<sup>43</sup> Mafisa, “The Role of Teacher Unions in Education with Specific Reference to South Africa,” 71.

<sup>44</sup> Mafisa, “The Role of Teacher Unions in Education with Specific Reference to South Africa.”

<sup>45</sup> Mafisa, “The Role of Teacher Unions in Education with Specific Reference to South Africa.”

<sup>46</sup> Dowden, *Understanding the Curriculum: Netherlands*.

the responsibility of government policymakers and policy specialists, while the implementation of curriculum development is perceived as the responsibility of teachers.<sup>47</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, it is recommended that unions should be consulted and the unions in turn should collaborate with teachers on the implementation of curriculum changes. Unions should also support teachers by providing resources, training, and guidance. Unions should advocate for teachers to ensure that they are adequately compensated and supported. For example, unions can negotiate for increased professional development opportunities for teachers to help them effectively implement curriculum changes. They can also work with school administrators to create a supportive and inclusive environment for teachers as they navigate these changes. Additionally, unions can provide legal support and representation for teachers who may face challenges or pushback during the implementation process.

It is recommended that unions should be open to hearing their teacher's ideas and opinions before making decisions. Unions should provide teachers with resources and support to help them implement the changes. Unions should further ensure that all teachers have the necessary training and resources to implement the changes. For example, unions could organize regular meetings or forums where teachers can openly express their ideas and concerns. They can establish mentorship programs or provide professional development opportunities to help teachers acquire the skills and knowledge needed to successfully implement any changes in their classrooms. Additionally, unions can advocate for adequate funding and resources from educational authorities to ensure that teachers have the necessary support to effectively carry out the proposed changes.

It is recommended that unions actively involve teachers in the curriculum development process to ensure that their voices and concerns are heard and represented. This can help create a more inclusive and collaborative bargaining process that considers the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders involved. For example, unions can organize regular meetings or forums where teachers can provide feedback and suggestions for the curriculum. They can also establish committees or working groups that include teachers to actively participate in the decision-making process and contribute their expertise. By involving teachers in curriculum development, unions can ensure that their voices are not overshadowed and that their concerns are considered during the bargaining process.

## CONCLUSION

The marginalisation of teacher unions has hampered the implementation of the curriculum by teachers. For the education system to be effective, teachers and lecturers must be involved and empowered to teach the curriculum and produce school leavers and graduates with relevant and impactful knowledge, requisite skills, and positive attitudes. Alsubaie postulates that for curriculum development to be successful, teachers must collaborate with other stakeholders like unions, communities, parents, government, business sectors, and any interested parties to the quality, relevant and responsive education system of a country.<sup>48</sup> As good as teachers' views sometimes contradict the issue of involving teacher unions when the curriculum is developed, teacher union is teachers' mouth piece positively or negatively. Teachers are subject to what the union agreed upon. If the teacher union accepts changes by the Department of Education, teachers become compelled to do the same. It is then under this view that teacher unions should also play a prominent role in curriculum development and implementation by being part of the discussions and resolutions. Teachers' unions should be consulted to ensure that their views are taken into consideration. They should be involved in the decision-making process and given the opportunity to provide feedback. Their input and expertise should be valued and respected. Ultimately, teachers' unions should be seen as important stakeholders in curriculum development and decision-making.

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<sup>47</sup> Govender, *Understanding the Curriculum*.

<sup>48</sup> Alsubaie, "Curriculum Development: Teacher Involvement in Curriculum Development."

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