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ARTICLE

Critique of the Subject Advisor's Contribution to the Poor Academic Performance of Learners in Selected Schools of Alfred Nzo West District

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ABSTRACT

The topic of Subject Education Specialists (SESs) to assist subject teachers in the Alfred Nzo West District (Maluti Circuit Management Center and Matatiele Circuit Management Center) is a cause for concern. This study aimed to investigate and elucidate the disparity between policy directives for teacher support and their actual implementation in schools, where SESs struggle to fulfill their obligations. Poor learner performance displayed on the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) on an annual basis prompted this investigation. This study adopted a qualitative research approach underpinned by the interpretive paradigm to explore the complex dynamics between Subject Advisor interventions and learner academic performance. The study employed qualitative techniques, case study design, interviews and observations, which are necessary for a thorough understanding and for methodological triangulation. A purposive sampling framework was used in selecting 30 teachers from two Circuit Management Centres (15 from Maluti and 15 from Matatiele). Participants included Foundation Phase/EFAL teachers, Sesotho and isiXhosa home language teachers, and Mathematics teachers in the Intermediate. Sampling was designed to be inclusive, regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Data were gathered using semi-structured and unstructured interviews, case study, and observations, and the credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis were confirmed by a pilot study. The findings demonstrated that SESs frequently lacked the subject-matter and pedagogical competence needed to support subject instructors, leading to

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poor learner outcomes. The proposals include ensuring merit-based selections, bolstering SES professional development, and providing adequate funding for effective curricular support.

Keywords: Subject Education Specialists; Socioeconomic Status; Attitude; Content Knowledge; General Education and Training

1. Introduction

Teacher development must innovate and shift from course-based training to a continuum of collaboration and exchange among teachers, schools, and education systems in order to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4, which focuses on inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education [1]. Generally speaking, underperforming employees are expected to deliver unsatisfactory outcomes. The low contributions of Department of Education officials, such as Senior Education Specialists, can be compared to the meager production of school teachers. The existence of inexperienced educators poses a major threat to South Africa's educational system. Not only do half of South African fourth graders struggle with reading for meaning and writing, but they also struggle with basic math. This has been justified by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) report of 2021. The findings revealed that 81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for understanding in any language, up from 78% in 2016. This means that only 19% of South African Grade 4 children could read for understanding in any language in 2021 (all 12 languages were assessed) [2]. Regulations mandate that school districts form collaborative partnerships with school principals and faculty to provide them with expert advice and assistance [3].

The education system in South Africa has undergone significant changes since the end of apartheid in 1994. Despite efforts to transform the system, numerous challenges persist, impacting the quality and accessibility of education for millions of students. Examples of this include the ever-evolving organizational structures of education authorities, as well as the shifting policies that were more symbolic than useful [4]. Nevertheless, despite this changing environment, educational goals and objectives still need to be met. Only when people in a position to assist in achieving these goals and objectives are prepared to handle the evolving circumstances will they be successful. To achieve the above, teacher development must be at the core. The education sector undergoes both quantitative and qualitative changes as a result of the dynamic process of teacher development, which generates new information, attitudes, beliefs, and cultural values.

According to Oyuntsetseg and Ariunzul [5], teacher development offers ways that can influence teachers' growth and exchanges thoughts and information on improving teachers' performance and schools. One method of advancing teacher education in areas like subject or technological expertise is through in-service teacher professional development. The professional development of educators who are currently in the classroom is known as in-service teacher training. To put it another way, practicing teachers have the chance to learn, unlearn, and relearn through in-service teacher training.

Successful teaching and learning take place when educators receive adequate training and support [6]. The positive effects that school leaders can have on learning and learner outcomes have been solidified by research based on instructional leadership. This body of evidence demonstrates that individuals in high leadership positions have an indirect impact on learning and learner outcomes because other members of the organization mediate their influence. According to the data, teacher leaders and middle leaders are more likely to have a direct impact on students due to their proximity to the teaching and learning processes. In conclusion, effective school leaders prioritize leadership for learning over all other considerations [7].

Additionally, due to political and other issues, the South African education system has many substandard employees, which makes it difficult for the system to fully accomplish its goals. The majority of appointments are made in accordance with the ruling party's political deployment policy (African National Congress), which is detrimental to other departments because a trial-and-error method is used [4]. This misconduct persists because it is driven by cronyism, corruption, and nepotism, despite the department's qualifications.

The aforementioned unethical behavior is not exclusive to the Department of Basic Education. Principals, Teachers, Chief Education Specialists, Deputy Chief Education Specialists, Subject Education Specialists (Subject Advisors), District Directors, Director-Generals, and Deputy Director-Generals are all selected to maintain political conformity[8]. The Department of Education established the topic of Education Specialists (sometimes called Subject Advisers or SES) to relieve topic educators of the burden of continuously performing poorly[9]. Today's South African education staff must maintain the relationship between the district office and the schools and have a clear grasp of their roles and responsibilities for teachers to be more effective in carrying out their duties to improve teaching. Consequently, the study also aimed to ascertain whether curriculum policies were understood and implemented, and whether subject advisers' opinions on departmental programs had evolved.

2. Related Literature Review

2.1. Description of Subject Advisors and Their Roles

The Senior Education Specialist, also known as a Subject Advisor, collaborates closely with teachers to oversee curriculum coverage, moderate examinations, supervise curriculum implementation, and support subject-specific training and enrichment activities[10]. Despite this clear mandate, Subject Advisors often face systemic obstacles that prevent them from offering effective support, such as high school-to-advisor ratios that limit meaningful classroom interaction and insufficient resources that restrict their ability to visit schools regularly[10, 11]. According to research, when Subject Advisors can visit schools, their contacts are often limited to compliance checks, such as monitoring how SBATs are being implemented, rather than providing significant instructional support[12].

Policy imperatives on curriculum implementation and support, teacher development, and guaranteeing equity and inclusivity within the educational system have a major impact on Subject Advisors[10]. A piece of legislation on the employment of educators stipulates that the Subject Advisor facilitates the delivery of curricula and advises institutions on the creation and implementation of policies. To help teachers manage and implement the curriculum, subject advisers are expected to collaborate closely with them. There is a policy on the organization, roles, and responsibilities of education districts, which highlights the significance of Subject Advisors' roles in assisting teachers and guiding them toward high-quality teaching and learning[13]. This is accomplished by fostering positive relationships, which need Subject Advisors to perform several tasks. Subject advisers are expected to support curriculum implementation, help teachers expand their material expertise, and provide relevant teaching and learning resources in order to enhance teaching and learning performance[10]. Many officials in the education system have an obligation to support good teaching and learning in schools.

The Department of Education in South Africa has made sure that those in charge of assisting with classroom education are employed[14]. Local schools and the National Provincial Departments are mediated by district authorities in the district office. They make sure that written policies are implemented.

Subject Advisors are pivotal figures within the educational landscape, serving as crucial intermediaries between policy directives and classroom implementation by guiding educators on pedagogical approaches and curriculum delivery[15]. They are expected to foster professional development among teachers, ensuring that instructional practices align with contemporary educational standards and address the diverse learning needs of students. Their responsibilities encompass offering continuous professional development, facilitating assessment accommodation, and closely monitoring interventions for learners at academic risk[16].

However, challenges such as feelings of isolation and insufficient guidance among novice academics can impede the effective execution of these roles, particularly in open distance and e-learning environments, where support structures are perceived as inadequate[17]. Inadequate resources further undermine subject advisers' effectiveness by limiting their ability to offer thorough assistance and carry out successful curriculum plans[18]. Large teacher-to-student ratios and a lack of resources frequently limit advisors' capacity to offer tailored assistance, which has a negative effect on overall academic results. Additionally, several teacher professional development initiatives in South Africa have failed in the past because they were not guided by an awareness of the

knowledge that educators need. It was found that teacher training was ineffective because of lack of knowledge by facilitators and insufficient training time[19]. This is comparable to the position of mediator that Subject Advisors play in South Africa[20].

The importance of Subject Advisors in helping schools align with departmental objectives and facilitate goal attainment is highlighted. Additionally, the Department of Basic Education purposefully assigns subject advisers to help with district planning that focuses on giving schools curricular support in order to provide students with increasingly high-quality education. Ngubane[21] argue that empowered Subject Advisors are crucial change agents in difficult, uneven, and dynamic situations. To promote techniques for improving learning, the districts are essential. Once more, Subject Advisors are required by Soobrayan[22] to enhance the accessibility and procurement of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSMs) for classroom use.

All these departmental resources must be readily available and effectively utilized since they serve as a tool for instructing and empowering teachers in their local schools, particularly in rural and township areas. Diko et al.[23] suggest that subject advisers are responsible for internal evaluation and examination procedures in addition to overseeing curriculum implementation. Diko et al.[23] additionally asserted that DBE is inadequate in carrying out its leadership, policymaking, and monitoring duties to improve learning quality and ensure quality continuous education. The duty of supervising and supporting the implementation of the curriculum in their respective subject areas falls to DBE staff members who serve as subject advisers. In a similar vein, school inspections serve as both an external monitoring of instruction and a method for evaluating the quality of education. School boards play a key role in educational governance to improve school inspections. They must ensure quality, keep an eye on outcomes, and step in if necessary. School inspections are widely used in many countries to evaluate and enhance government control over school quality. However, few empirical studies have examined the contextual factors that influence the perceived usefulness and applicability of school inspection criteria to improve China's educational standards[24].

Instead of providing pedagogical mentoring, subject advisers in the Alfred Nzo West district frequently contribute to low learner performance through inefficient, infrequent, or solely administrative support. High advisor-to-school ratios, a lack of classroom-based mentoring, and insufficient subject core expertise are major problems. This deprives educators of the tools they need to raise student performance in topics like science and math, particularly in rural schools.

It was emphasized that a Subject Advisor's primary responsibility is to make sure instructors are trained in curricular knowledge and instructional techniques so they can succeed academically. Additionally, the study demonstrated that Subject Advisors were aware of their role in facilitating instruction and learning through curricular implementation. Support and development are the key ideas that kept coming up. Thus, a Subject Advisor's primary role is to support teachers and schools in achieving effective teaching and learning[25]. The democratic government invented Subject Advisors as a way to facilitate efficient curriculum delivery in classrooms. There is still a gap in the way of their operations that needs to be filled so that teaching practices can always be examined, allowing for the provision of resources and support services to teachers.

Education specialists are professionals who work with subject teachers to provide and maintain professional growth and support. They were introduced in South Africa with the intention of giving subject instructors expert advice on pedagogy, methodology, and content understanding. In order to increase instructors' ability to improve students' academic achievement, they must also spread knowledge on how to apply best practices in teaching and learning[13].

In order to increase the efficacy of topic instructors across a variety of disciplines and the academic accomplishment of their students, topic Education Specialists were employed to offer content understanding and pedagogical skills. However, the ongoing drop in Grade 12 scores and the poor reading and writing skills of General Education Band students have raised several concerns among educators over how SES affects subject instructors' performance. The issue is whether the SESs are giving subject teachers the professional support and direction they need to improve student achievement in accordance with the justification for their employment. In South Africa, the Subject Advisors' training seminars are the primary means of providing help to educators. Subject advisers at the district level frequently provide this help by visiting schools, holding workshops, and keeping an eye on curriculum coverage. Research, however, shows

a discrepancy between policy aspirations and reality, with support frequently biased toward secondary schools (FET phase) as opposed to elementary schools and occasionally restricted to administrative compliance rather than pedagogical improvement.

According to De Clercq and Shalem [26], most South African studies show that teachers do not receive adequate, appropriate, and/or comprehensive support in the classroom. Support for South African teachers dealing with curriculum reform was uneven, fragmented and, for many teachers, simply non-existing over twenty years ago. DBE also stated that district officials' school visits do not concentrate on areas of support in the Annual Performance Plan 2014–2015.

Abbott et al. [27] are of the opinion that high-performing countries like Finland, Australia, Japan, and the United States have made significant investments in professional development, teacher training, teacher induction, and teacher development, with some of these countries placing special emphasis on school collaboration. A continuum of support is outlined in two important policies in South Africa: the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy and Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education. These policies emphasize early intervention strategies and specify the roles of teachers, administrative staff, and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) in providing academic and social support. The DBE assigns Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) and Learning Support Advisors (LSAs) within the DBST to help learners who face obstacles to enable successful implementation. LSAs are specialist district officials with an extensive understanding of these policies and teaching credentials. Their main responsibility is to supervise LSTs and provide education on policy implementation and compliance. LSAs enable parents to support their children at home by assisting educators in providing tailored support [28].

Additionally, primary school teachers in Australia are increasingly becoming subject specialists, with subject advisers concentrating on improving subject-specific pedagogy and switching from generalist teaching approaches to deeper subject expertise. In these nations, there seems to be a noticeable shift from off-site to on-site support. School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs), which concentrate on learner diversity, pedagogical approaches, and removing learning obstacles, are frequently used in China, Thailand, and Turkey.

2.2. Inadequacies Faced by Subject Education Specialists Regarding Inclusive Education

Subject Education Specialists in South Africa face challenges related to insufficient training, heavy workloads, limited resources, and ambiguity in inclusive education policies. These constraints make it difficult for advisors to provide effective support to teachers, particularly in implementing inclusive practices due to factors like a lack of professional development, poor infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified personnel [29]. SESs often lack the necessary pedagogical training and skills to support inclusive education, including adapting curricula to meet the diverse needs of learners [25]. Differences emerge in policy implementation globally, such as the Comprehensive School Act (476/1983) in Finland, which provides clear directives and guidelines for educators to follow [30]. SESs must navigate policy ambiguity and a lack of clear guidelines, which complicate their role in ensuring schools are inclusive. Furthermore, SES's face the challenge of supporting teachers who may have inadequate training or hold negative attitudes towards inclusive education, hindering the promotion of inclusive practices in the classroom [31].

The combined effects of these challenges mean that advisors are often unable to provide the necessary support to teachers to effectively implement inclusive education strategies. The challenges faced by Subject Advisors contribute to inconsistent and ineffective implementation of inclusive education policies across different schools and regions. Ultimately, these challenges create barriers for learners, making it difficult for them to receive the support they need to fully participate in the education system [32].

Subject Education Specialists are expected to facilitate professional development programs and workshops for teachers to build empathy, awareness, and the skills needed to support LGBTQ+ students. Ongoing training helps educators stay updated on best practices for fostering inclusive education and managing difficult conversations with cultural sensitivity. By promoting an inclusive school climate, Subject Advisors contribute to a broader environment where LGBTQ+ learners feel a sense of belonging and safety, reducing instances of bullying, absenteeism, and long-term psychological trauma [33]. Overall, Subject Advisors are crucial in ensuring that all learners, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can access education in a safe and

affirming environment, as emphasized in resources like the DBE's Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Schools.

2.3. Lack of Pedagogical Content Knowledge by Subject Education Specialists

Certain Subject Advisors view their role as being focused more on monitoring syllabus coverage than on assisting teachers in enhancing their teaching methods, which demands robust Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). During school visits, many Subject Advisors primarily focus on monitoring progress, reviewing documents such as curriculum trackers and annual teaching plans, and verifying compliance with administrative requirements, an approach that teachers often perceive as merely a "tick-box exercise." Both educators and advisors have viewed their supportive role as simply overseeing the progress in syllabus completion. Subject Advisors typically do not dedicate substantial time.

The transition from solely ensuring compliance to providing active pedagogical support and classroom modeling by Subject Advisors is a pivotal focus in education. Their purpose is to support development by providing coaching, mentoring, and improving teaching strategies, rather than concentrating solely on ensuring policy compliance. Traditionally, Subject Advisor visits were predominantly centered on supervision and ensuring compliance.

2.4. The Shift to Pedagogical Support and Instructional Leadership

Recent best practices and research recommend transitioning to a more supportive and instructional leadership approach. The aim is to deliver targeted, practical feedback and professional growth opportunities that meaningfully enhance teaching and learning within the classroom. SESs should regularly conduct brief, low-stakes classroom visits to gain insight into real classroom dynamics and pinpoint specific areas requiring support, rather than remaining idle in their departmental offices. An essential strategy involves advisors demonstrating effective teaching methods in the classroom, illustrating to teachers how to apply specific instructional approaches like the flipped classroom model or constructivist learning.

A key strategy is for advisors to model effective teaching strategies in the classroom, showing teachers how to implement specific pedagogical approaches, such as the flipped classroom model or constructivist learning, rather than just explaining the theory. SESs and Departmental Heads can collaborate with teachers to plan lessons and formulate strategies on curriculum-related issues, which acts as a form of professional development. Subject Advisors are expected to run workshops to unpack new curriculum policies and provide ongoing professional development, which can be enhanced by linking theory to observed classroom practice. By moving from a "policing" role to a collaborative and supportive one, Subject Advisors and Department Heads can significantly enhance teaching practices and, in turn, improve learner achievement.

The instructional leadership of Subject Advisors (also known as Senior Education Specialists or Curriculum Implementers) is a critical function in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in schools. This role extends beyond mere compliance monitoring to actively supporting and developing teachers' pedagogical practices [13].

Policies related to inclusive education require Subject Advisors to help ensure that all learners, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, have equal access to learning opportunities and that barriers to learning and development are overcome. Policies aim to ensure equity in education expenditure and support between and within provinces, with a focus on providing more resources for the poorest schools. These imperatives collectively shape the multifaceted role of Subject Advisors, requiring them to be instructional leaders, mentors, administrators, and change agents within the educational landscape [34].

2.5. Theoretical Frameworks

This study is underpinned by Instructional Leadership Theory and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). Instructional leadership involves interactive practices by education leaders to manage both teaching and people within schools. Particularly in schools with limited resources, school administration and leadership play a significant role in determining the quality of instruction and learning. However, the perception and assessment of leadership, as well as its correlation with student outcomes, may differ across countries and within specific regions [35].

Pedagogical Content Knowledge emphasizes the inte-

gration of pedagogy and content knowledge, enabling teachers to effectively translate subject knowledge into teachable concepts. Its relevance here lies in SESs' limited content knowledge, which constrains their ability to impart expertise to teachers effectively [36].

3. Methods, Procedures, and Techniques

This study adopted a qualitative research approach underpinned by the interpretive paradigm to explore the complex dynamics between Subject Advisor interventions and learner academic performance [37]. The reason to select or choose qualitative research is because of its purposeful conversation between a researcher and a participant, which is designed to explore subjective perspectives, experiences, feelings, and motivations regarding a specific topic. Data were collected through unstructured interviews, case study, and observations with educators to gain in-depth insight into the nature of support provided and the perceived impact on learner outcomes. The interviews were conducted face-to-face for one hour per participant in their respective schools.

Research that aims to collect extensive descriptive data on a specific occurrence or setting to better understand the subject under study is known as qualitative research. As a result, it focuses on how people or groups perceive the world and how they interpret it, considering their experiences. Shingange [8] defines qualitative research as describing things based on personal experience. Because the purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' opinions of the assistance provided by SESs in the GET of Maluti sub-district, the researcher employed qualitative research methods. Intricate details regarding phenomena like sentiments, thinking processes, and emotions that are challenging to extract or learn about through more traditional methods can be obtained through qualitative methods.

4. Research Design

4.1. Research Sample/Participants

In survey research, sampling is the practice of using a subset of a population to represent the complete population. In certain cases, data sampling methods aid in providing clarification. In order to reflect the complete vast scale with more realistic prices and schedules, the sampling uses a smaller number of individuals with representative qualities. As a researcher, you have to decide which people to include in your sample list and how to select those who will most accurately represent the population. One technique you may use to decide how to proceed is sampling. Researchers utilize sampling methodology, a statistical technique, to collect data and analyze the population.

A purposive sampling framework was used, selecting 30 teachers from two Circuit Management Centres (15 from Maluti and 15 from Matatiele). Participants included Foundation Phase/EFAL teachers, Sesotho and isiXhosa home language teachers, and Mathematics teachers in the Intermediate and Senior Phases. Sampling was inclusive of gender, race, and socio-economic status [38]. Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted.

4.2. Data Collection

The researcher physically interacted with respondents because "the best way to enter a person's life world is to participate in it" [39]. This phrase appears in various academic papers and dissertations; it is often implicitly attributed to the foundational thinkers of phenomenology, with Alfred Schutz as a primary source for the concept of the "lifeworld" in the social sciences. The researcher explained to participants what was expected of them. The interviews, case study, and observation were used as data collection instruments.

4.3. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) is the systematic process of organizing, coding, and interpreting non-numerical data such as interview transcripts, videos, or field notes to identify themes, patterns, and insights. Preliminary analysis involved categorizing personal data, followed by counts and percentages of respondents for statements on SES support. Furthermore, data were broken down (coded) into segments and assigned labels (codes) to identify important concepts.

4.4. Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research ensure findings accurately represent participant experiences

and are rigorously conducted. This has been achieved through the use of more than one data collection tool (triangulation) and a pilot study.

5. Findings

Results show that SESs frequently lack the content expertise necessary to successfully support subject teachers. Poor classroom outcomes are the result of this insufficiency, which also affects teachers. The Action Plan 2014 (Goal 16) states that SESs are responsible for the substantial teacher capacitation that is required. According to survey results, only six teachers thought SES support was good, two thought it was very poor, and 22 out of 30 instructors thought it was poor. The efficacy of professional support was limited by the poor SES content knowledge indicated by many teachers. Diagrammatic study showed that merit-based appointments are rare and SES appointments are primarily political.

Below is a diagram that depicts how SESs are appointed in the CMCs mentioned above (**Figure 1**). At the apex of the diagram are the SESs who are appointed on a political basis with a lack of content knowledge. Moreover, some are appointed on a merit basis, though their number is minimal.

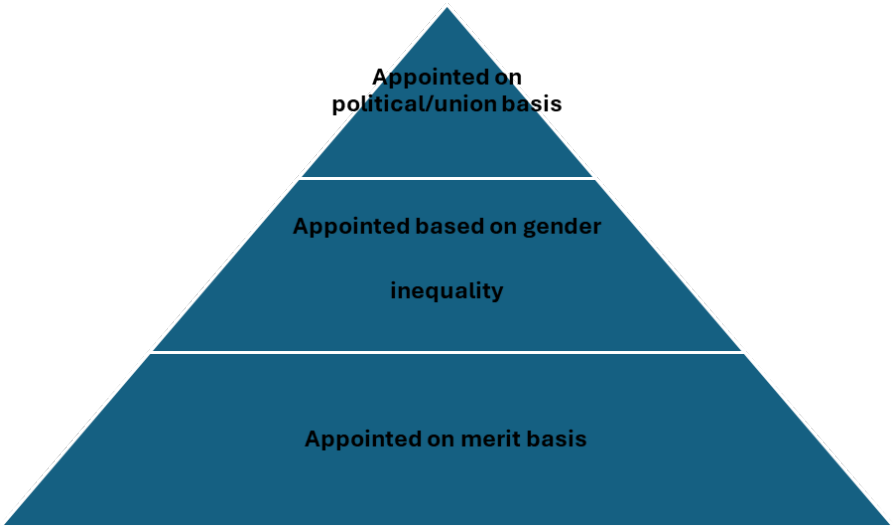


Figure 1. Appointment of Subject Specialists.

6. Discussions and Recommendations

The findings reveal that the Subject Advisors in Alfred Nzo West schools were unable to fulfil their core mandate of strengthening educators' content knowledge and guiding curriculum delivery due to overwhelming workloads and resource constraints, which aligns with broader observations that high advisor-to-school ratios severely limit the capacity for meaningful instructional support. Specifically, the disproportionate allocation of Subject Advisors to primary schools compared to the Further Education and Training phase results in significant neglect of foundational learning phases, where the stakes for long-term academic success are highest. This systemic neglect of foundational phases is compounded by the absence of specialized Subject Advisors for certain learning areas, which leaves teachers without the necessary guidance to align classroom activities with curriculum requirements and ultimately compromises the quality of learner outcomes. Furthermore, the prioritization of compliance-driven activities over instructional leadership exacerbates these challenges, as advisors are compelled to focus on administrative accountability rather than the deep pedagogical engagement required to improve teaching quality. Consequently, the limited time available for school visits, often amounting to only a few hours per school annually, renders it impossible for Subject Advisors to establish the sustained professional relationships necessary to effect measurable improvements in teaching and learning.

The lack of specialized Subject Advisors for specific learning areas exacerbates this systemic disregard for foundational phases, depriving teachers of the direction they need to match curriculum requirements with classroom activities,

ultimately lowering the caliber of student outcomes. Additionally, these difficulties are worsened by a preference for compliance-driven activities over instructional leadership, which forces advisers to prioritize administrative accountability over the in-depth pedagogical involvement needed to raise teaching quality. As a result, subject advisers are unable to build the long-term professional connections required to make quantifiable gains in teaching and learning because of the short time allotted to school visits, which frequently amount to only a few hours per school per year. One participant said, "We have never seen our Subject Advisor; we don't even know if it's a male or female," highlighting the dearth of reliable support systems available to educators. Teachers in certain schools report a total lack of visibility into topic advisors.

Furthermore, a major obstacle is the competency of Subject Advisors themselves, since many are assigned to support subjects for which they lack the necessary subject specialization or pedagogical training, forcing them to learn "on the job" rather than offering professional advice. Because teachers are reluctant to follow advice from those who are thought to lack the requisite authority or depth of knowledge, this lack of experience damages the advisory service's reputation and erodes teacher confidence. Teachers' own hesitancy about the expectations and extent of the advisory role contributes to this separation and makes it more difficult to build fruitful professional connections. A barrier to successful information transmission is the ensuing lack of trust and professional synergy, which inhibits the collaborative engagement required to address complex pedagogical challenges and enhance learner performance.

The study highlights the detrimental effects of political interference in the appointment of education officials, undermining competence and accountability. To enhance performance, recruitment of SESs should be based on merit and relevant classroom experience rather than political affiliation. Furthermore, continuous professional development and proper resource allocation are crucial for improving curriculum support at the district level. Political interference in SES appointments undermines educational quality. Recommendations include:

- Merit-based appointments of SESs with subject expertise.
- SESs for Foundation Phase should be experienced Foundation Phase teachers; high school SESs should have high school teaching experience and deep subject insight.
- Appointing Departmental Heads, Deputy Principals, Principals, or distinguished subject teachers ensures managerial competence.

There should be a well-designed model for appointing quality SESs in the district to benefit subject teachers and learners at school. SESs for the Foundation Phase should be teachers teaching in the Foundation Phase, and SESs for high schools should be teachers teaching in high school and having a deeper insight into the subject they are appointed to assist with. It is encouraged to appoint a teacher who is a Departmental Head, a Deputy Principal, a principal, or a distinguished teacher in the subject in question. The recommendation of the aforesaid is derived from the premise of managerial skills expected in dealing with school-based teachers, and which the previously identified personnel might have.

7. Conclusions

This study underscores the urgent need to reconfigure the Subject Advisor role from a compliance-driven accountability paradigm to a support-focused model that prioritizes instructional leadership and sustained professional development for educators. Such a transformation requires establishing structured communication frameworks and enhancing cross-functional coordination among curriculum, circuit management, and assessment units to ensure synergized support through integrated planning mechanisms. By fostering reciprocal accountability where district officials and school management teams share responsibility for learner outcomes, the education system can move beyond fragmented bureaucratic oversight towards a unified approach that centers on collaboration, coherence, and capacity building. Future research should investigate the specific mechanisms by which district-level strategies can be effectively aligned with school-level instructional needs to address systemic inequalities in under-resourced schools. These mechanisms must address the disconnect between Subject Advisors and Heads of Departments, as current operational structures often bypass HODs despite their critical role in instructional leadership.

Furthermore, the study concludes that limited monitoring and inadequate pedagogical competence among SESs significantly contribute to poor learner outcomes. Improv-

ing the education system requires appointing qualified and experienced SESs through transparent, merit-based procedures. Additionally, sustained funding and targeted professional development initiatives are necessary to strengthen district-level curriculum support and improve the quality of classroom instruction. Educational operations must be in the hands of educationists, not politicians who know nothing about education or the education system, or the department of education must be depoliticized.

Notwithstanding the support requirements, some obstacles include a dearth of standardized resources, limited direct instructor involvement, and a strong reliance on compliance monitoring rather than instructional assistance. Whole-school evaluation (WSE) and targeted programs are also used for assessment; however, systemic problems, such as administrative costs and resource constraints, limit the effectiveness of subject advisers.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board. The study poses no risk to participants. The methodology used is fully anonymized datasets where individuals cannot be traced.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is therefore not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this work, the author used Quill Bot to paraphrase a few paragraphs. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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