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**1086.    Ms C V King (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

Whether any research has been conducted to look at an alternative curriculum to be incorporated into schools; if not, why not; if so, what were the outcomes?

**Response**

Yes: The Department is constantly working towards aligning the curriculum to the demands of the 4th Industrial Revolution hence Robotics and Coding are being introduced. Marine Sciences and the Occupational stream for schools of skill, special schools and mainstream are being finalised. School communities where robotics and coding are currently piloted have welcomed the Department's direction, which is towards improving skills.

Since 1998, there have been several waves of curriculum reform in South Africa as we moved from the old curriculum inherited in 1994 to Curriculum 2005, to the National Curriculum Statement, which in turn has been revised several times. Throughout this time, curriculum reforms have been based on substantial research and the work of a wide range of curriculum experts.

For example, in July 2009, a Ministerial Task Team, consisting of researchers and academics, was appointed to investigate the challenges experienced with the school curriculum. Following the Task Team’s wide-ranging recommendations, a re-packaged curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (NCS), supported by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for the various subjects and phases, was launched in schools, commencing in 2012.

It is therefore fair to say that as a matter of historical fact, South Africa has experienced many years of research into alternative curriculum and this research has had the outcome of curriculum reforms that were subsequently implemented in schools. This continues to be the case.

Much of the curriculum research being done by scholars across the country, some of which is in collaboration with the DBE, is focused on specific subjects, phases or even topics and pedagogical approaches in the curriculum. It is important to understand curriculum research in this way, as focused in its application on specific subjects, phases and topics, rather than in the first place being seen as an overall government system or policy. The challenges experienced in mathematics in the FET phase may, for instance, be very different from those experienced in Foundation Phase Home language literacy, and may therefore require a completely different type of curriculum revision. This work done by external researchers, done through work commissioned by the DBE or done by entities like Umalusi, continues to feed into curriculum revisions.

Another relatively recent curriculum research project which is worth describing is the 2017 implementation evaluation of the National Curriculum Statement that was jointly commissioned by the DBE and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. This evaluation concluded that the NCS and CAPS documents themselves were broadly supported, even if further improvements were still possible, but that the larger challenges were around factors affecting how the curriculum is implemented in classrooms. Factors such as lost teaching time, weak content- or pedagogical knowledge amongst teachers, and gaps in instructional leadership at schools were identified as common challenges to effective curriculum implementation. This evaluation is available on the DPME website:

<https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/evaluations/601>

Although much research is needed on how to achieve better delivery of the curriculum, there is also research into alternative approaches to parts of the existing curriculum. For example, the department is closely following the “Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education pilot” being run by the Eastern Cape Department of Education. This project is piloting the use of mother-tongue instruction (isiXhosa in this case) beyond the Foundation Phase. Based on the experience with this pilot the department is eager to explore the possibility of encouraging mother-tongue instruction in grades beyond the Foundation Phase. Although such an approach would not really be in conflict with the existing curriculum, it is not a widespread practice in our schools and a supportive environment would need to be created to facilitate the widespread adoption of this approach. The Incremental Introduction of African Languages Policy is another example of a new policy, which is being introduced while informed by research, so as to reform the curriculum.

Another study that investigated a type of alternative approach to what is prescribed in CAPS was the 2014 impact evaluation of a Reading Catch Up Programme (RCUP). This programme, which was first administered as part of the Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS), was based on a recognition that many grade 4 learners whose first language is not English do not reach grade 4 having sufficiently mastered all the learning intended to be achieved through the Foundation Phase curriculum for English as a First Additional Language (EFAL). The RCUP programme therefore spends one term of grade 4 going over topics and vocabulary that is actually covered in the Foundation Phase curriculum in order to help children catch up to the level required for grade 4. Unfortunately, the results of the impact evaluation were that this programme did not significantly improve English reading outcomes compared to grade 4 schooling as usual (Fleisch et al, 2017). Nevertheless, this study does present an example of the sort of research into alternative curricular approaches that the department is eager to engage with and would encourage researchers to pursue.

The DBE website has a research repository which includes a special theme on curriculum research, although this merely includes a selection of reports commissioned by DBE or done internally, and is by no means representative of all curriculum research that has been done. The research repository is available here: <https://www.education.gov.za/ResearchRepository.aspx>.

Bibliography

Fleisch, B., Taylor, S., Schöer, V., & Mabogoane, T. (2017). Failing to catch up in reading in the middle years: The findings of the impact evaluation of the Reading Catch-Up Programme in South Africa. *International Journal of educational Development, 53*, 36-47.