

**ARTICLE**

# Loose couplings in teacher education and national education reforms: towards a framework of building response capabilities

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**Abstract**

Worldwide, teachers are regarded as important stakeholders in implementing education reforms, in particular curriculum reforms. In 2009 the Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training introduced a new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Framework which advocated the shift in educational paradigm, resulting in introduction of new subjects. The introduction of educational reforms by governments assumes corresponding changes in other educational sectors, in particular changes in teacher training curriculum to prepare their graduates for new changes. This paper evaluated the extent in which teacher training institutions changed their curriculum in response to the new policy framework. The study used Bachelor of Education (Primary) (BEP) offered by the National University of Lesotho (NUL) as a case study. This study was located within the complexity theory, which suggests that organisations are very complex and can never be fully controlled or tightly coupled. A discourse analysis was applied to interpret textual data that had been derived from document analysis and interviews with BEP programme head, dean of the faculty of education and a member, to understand how teacher trainers made sense of national reforms and their impact on teacher education programs. The study observed that BEP programme did not respond to the changes taking place within the national school system as guided by the policy. Lack of coordination between the central level and teacher training institutions was observed as the main reason. It was also observed that intra-coordination mechanisms within the NUL were weak. Based on these findings, a framework of building response capabilities is suggested.

**Key words:** complex theory, loose coupling, teacher education, curriculum, National University of Lesotho

**1 | INTRODUCTION**

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) introduced a curriculum and assessment policy framework in 2009, to guide curriculum and assessment reforms at basic and secondary education levels. The policy ushered a new educational paradigm shift, namely, integrated

curriculum. The introduction of integrated curriculum as a new paradigm was premised on the philosophical stance which repositioned education as a strategy which socialise learners into social life, by attempting to break the silo mentality normally portrayed by disciplinary boundaries. The policy regards curriculum integration as an educational design strategy which saw life as a whole, with no

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compartments as has been historically reflected by school subjects. The policy saw knowledge production and problem-solving as central to the goals of education extending beyond disciplinary constraints. Along with this view, the banking model of education was to be discouraged in that education should go beyond the “acquisition of certain knowledge to developing skills for personal and social development” but should “enable learners to become able citizens in the society while still in the learning process” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009, 22).

This orientation has far reaching implications on teacher education curriculum. Logically, the consequential changes in teacher education training programmes would be anticipated. The Minister of Education and Training reinforced this expectation when officially introducing the policy. She stated that:

As a matter of urgency, teacher education institutions are urged to review their training programmes so as to ensure that they are aligned with this policy (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009, ii).

This study set out to evaluate how teacher education institution in Lesotho has responded to changes in national school curriculum. In particular, it aimed at answering the following questions:

1. To what extent do teacher education programmes in Lesotho respond to national education reforms?
2. What factors contribute to the (un)responsiveness of teacher education curriculum?

## 2 | THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Lesotho has two higher education institutions (HEIs) which train teachers. These are Lesotho College of Education (LCE) and the National University of Lesotho (NUL). The LCE offers diploma certificates for both primary and secondary education levels teachers. On the other hand, the NUL offers degree programmes for both primary and secondary education levels, bachelor of

education certificates. In addition, the NUL offers postgraduate certificates in education, Master's and Doctorate certificates. Both institutions are public HEIs, receiving subvention funding from the government, through the MOET (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016). The NUL is the oldest HEI in Lesotho, its origin dating back to 1945 (National University of Lesotho, 2015). On the other hand LCE traces its origins from 1975 (Lesotho College of Education, 2017). However, the current study used the NUL as the case study. + Lesotho education structure consists of, Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), basic and secondary education, technical vocational and higher education. Lesotho has adopted a ten-year basic education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005, 2016). The first seven years of basic education pertain to primary education level while the last three years is junior secondary level (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016). Generally, secondary education refers to the last years of post-basic education, Grades 11 and 12 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016). These last two years lead to Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary of Education (LGCSE), modelled according to the British International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) (Examinations Council of Lesotho, n.d). The current education reform is leading towards combining the last three years of basic education and Grade 11, leading towards LGCSE as opposed to five years, namely three years of basic education and two years of secondary education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016). Grade 12 will lead towards Advanced Subsidiary (AS) certificate (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016). The LGCSE certificate leads to either Technical Vocational Education and Training qualification (TVET) , diploma and degree certificates, depending on individual career aspirations. Both basic and secondary education curriculum innovations and development are centrally managed by the Ministry of Education and Training, through the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC). All curriculum development activities such as curriculum development, instructional development materials, curriculum dissemination strategies, to the name the few, are coordinated by

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the NCDC. As a matter of curriculum development policy, the NCDC uses curriculum collaboration model, where all relevant stakeholders are involved in curriculum decision making strategies, through different panels. Panels' representations are drawn from from teachers , teacher training institutions, schools' inspectorate and examinations sector. According to Nketekete (2001) this representation was intended to enhance effective implementation of curriculum. Nketekete (2001) further identifies two levels of representations, namely, policymaking level and professional-technical level, which ideally enhance effective coordination and collaboration among key stakeholders in curriculum-making processes. Policy-making level provides the vision and resources necessary for the support of the development of curriculum, while the professional-technical engages in the design and development, implementation and evaluation of the new curriculum (Nketekete, 2001). The panel system, managed by the NCDC, represents professional-technical level. The policy-making body currently is Education Advisory Council (EAC) which has replaced the National Curriculum Committee (NCC). According to Lesotho Education Act 2010, one of the functions of EAC is to “advise the Minister on school curriculum and curriculum materials (Section 29(1) (a)). Teacher training institutions are represented in these bodies (panels and EAC).

### 3 | LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *The centrality of curriculum in teacher training institutions*

HEIs in Lesotho, like anywhere else, is expected to supply high level manpower for the developmental needs of Lesotho (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005, 2016). Lesotho regards teachers as the most important human resource input in education system (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005). The government's expectation justifies the reason for the existence of HEIs, in this instance teacher training institutions, compelling the government allocation of financial resources towards HEIs. The ability of HEIs to supply appropriate and suitable manpower for the

national needs is bound up in the form, structure and conception of knowledge that makes up the higher education curriculum (Radnor, 1994). The centrality of curriculum in transforming HEIs or in bringing the much needed changes in society have been emphasised globally by national policy prescriptions (Shay, 2015; National University of Lesotho, 2015). Thus, curriculum review has been seen as a pertinent strategy in promoting socio-economic development not only globally but also in Lesotho. Lesotho Government has always regarded education as a key strategy in providing competencies and skills crucial for addressing socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, HIV/AIDS and reduction of vulnerability, environmental degradation and adapting to climate change, promotion of peace and democracy (Lesotho Government, 2012; 2018).

From the forgoing, it can be argued that policy makers see curriculum as crucial for addressing national needs. From the academic side a number of views have been advanced related to the concept of curriculum. Rosenmund (2000) holds the view that curriculum must first answer the question on the nature of society being developed. In answering this question Rosenmund (2000) identifies two main processes which are followed in answering the question. These are curriculum processes and curriculum-making processes (Rosenmund,2000). Curriculum processes involve the activities of selecting available knowledge from the society. Such a choice is based on the conscious selection observed from the emerging needs of the society – hence the employment of the qualification “socially available knowledge “ (Rosenmund, 2000,600). Rosenmund (2000,600) captures curriculum process as part of the development of a society which moves toward the future, which is itself aware of the movement, and which is seeking to come to grips with given stocks of knowledge and given conditions.

On the other hand curriculum-making processes are regarded as deliberate attempts or strategies which a society follows as it develops itself. Curriculum-making processes “are rooted in societies' awareness of their own development and in their weighing of knowledge and contextual conditions

around this development” (Rosenmund, 2000,602). Thus curriculum-making processes consist of structures and procedures created to channel the curriculum process (Rosenmund, 2000). Inundertaking these processes two major perspectives have been documented from literature. These are narrow technocratic and broader perspectives (Cornbleth,1988; Montero-Sieburth, 1992; Akker, 1998, 2009). Cornbleth (1988, 85) explains the technocratic perspective as follows:

Technocratic conception views curriculum as a tangible product, usually a document or plan for instruction in a particular subject. The detail of the curriculum product ranges from a brief outline of topics to student materials (e.g., readings, worksheets, transparencies) and a teacher guide including directions for teaching and testing.

Key activities leading to the final product within this conception include specifying learning objectives to be obtained by students; selecting or creating and arranging the subject-matter content, activities, and materials; devising means of assessing students' attainment of the specified objectives; and providing directions for the intended use of the curriculum product (Cornbleth 1988, 85).

According to Cornbleth (1988) following these steps, usually discrete, suggests the exclusion of contexts to inform the development and implementation processes. Ifanti, (2007, 72) argues that curriculum cannot narrowly be viewed “as a syllabus embedded in a pedagogy,” rather it should be seen in relation with broad issues such as, “change, power, culture, knowledge, policy.” Thus curriculum should represent these issues translated to the needs of learners within broader environmental contexts (Ifanti, 2007). The broader understanding of curriculum sees it as a system and calls for its understanding within the broader environment (Montero-Sieburth, 1992; Akker, 2009; . Alexander & Hjørtsø, 2019). Cornbleth (1988) refers to the social, political, economic and democratic conditions as potential contexts which influence key curricular decisions. These provides nominal context which influence curriculum decision-making (Cornbleth, 1988).

Akker (2009) concretises this thinking by identifying different levels which inform curricular decision making. These are nano, micro, meso, macro and supra levels. Using Akker’s different contexts and the possible application in Lesotho, Table 1 provides a summary of sources of curricular decision making.

**Table 1:** *levels of curriculum decisions*

Level	Description	Examples
Supra	International and regional	SADC Protocol on Education, Education For All Goals, Africa 2063 , Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Macro	System and national	National Strategy Plan; Education Sector Plan 2016 – 2026; Curriculum and Assessment Policy 2009; Revised Lesotho Qualifications Framework 2019
Meso	Institutional	NUL Strategic Plan 2015-2020
Micro	Classroom, lecturer	Course outline and synopsis, course module and textbook
Nano	Learner, individual	Individual plan for learning

Table 1 above demonstrates variables and environments that reflect the complexity of curriculum planning, which institutions should be mindful of. Teodoro and Estrela (2010:621)(citing Ball, 1994 and Pacheco, 2002) admonish that curriculum policies should be understood as products of multiple influences and interdependencies, the outcome of a process of bricolage which reveals the interests, values, principles, and rules that, at any given moment, are (or are not) dominant. Teodoro and Estrela (2010, 633-634) capture the essence of policies, as an authoritative determination of values; they represent a prescriptive, operational, and intentional rhetoric and they bring together a complex and heterogeneous set of crucial elements. They should be understood as a ‘system’ or a ‘culture’ in that they cannot be taken as simply isolated facts related to administration.



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### *Teacher training model*

The curriculum offered by teacher training institutions is meant to prepare teachers for the world of work, namely teaching. Teaching by itself is regarded as complex (Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009). Grossman et al (2009, 272) note that its complexity emanate from the fact that it is regarded as a profession and every effort is geared towards gaining a professional status.

Research has been evolving to understand the professional development of teachers ranging from knowledge specifications as provided by different subject matter (Grossman et al 2009). There has been a suggestion that teacher education curriculum should move away from two-prong strategy of foundations and methods courses, which have formed the basis of teacher preparations from time in memorial (Grossman et al. 2009). Grossman et al. (2009, 274) distinguish between the two that:

Foundations courses are meant to provide the ‘foundational,’ which often meant disciplinary knowledge for teaching. Such knowledge would include knowledge of learners and learning, from educational psychology; knowledge of the purposes of school, taken from history and philosophy of education; and knowledge of school and classroom structures. Methods courses have generally included the courses most focused on practice, including courses related to the teaching of particular subject matter, classroom management, and assessment.

The purpose of foundation course is to provide framework upon which teachers may make decisions on teaching and learning, by drawing from psychology, philosophy and sociology (Grossman, Smagorinsky & Valencia, 1999, quoted by Grossman et al. 2009, 274). On the other hand method courses are intended to provide tools for teaching specific courses (Grossman et.al. 2009). A number of problems related to this type of curriculum organisation has been highlighted by Grossman et al. (2009, 275). First, it has been blamed to contribute to the fragmentation, by separating the theoretical knowledge and teachers’

practical work in classrooms. Second, courses become the focus of studies rather than preparing teachers for their work. Finally, it does not adequately prepare teachers for their practical work in the classrooms.

### *Understanding teacher training curriculum within complex theory*

Looking at curriculum from the perspective of complexity theory elucidates the complex nature of curriculum and its related processes. Lowell (2016) observes that complexity theory (CT) came to popularity because the other theories such as system theory could not account for dynamic, non-linear and multi-faced interactions within organisations. Though initially developed within science related fields such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology and also social sciences such as Economics, it has found its place in other fields such as education, business and policy making to name a few (Lowell, 2016; Mason, 2008; Chae, 2012; Macintosh & Wilkinson, 2016). Mason (2008) argues that the theory is suitable for studying environments, organisations or systems that have various integral parts or constituents which interact in various ways. Central to the CT is the emergence of properties and behaviours exhibited by different elements forming part of the environments and organisations (Horn, 2008; Mason, 2008). In subjecting curriculum of teacher training institutions through the CT lenses we should uncover the properties and behaviour of different environment and organisations, moving beyond understanding the constituent elements of organisations. This provides rich contexts for responding to what society needs. Mason (2008,38) argues that in essence, the whole becomes, in a very real sense, more than the sum of its parts in that the emergent properties and behaviours are not contained in or able to be predicted from the essence of the constituent elements or agents.

Horn (2008) introduces pattern formation as an important perspective to complexity. The pattern indicates a movement as marked by growth, change or learning (Horn, 2008). By very nature curriculum

processes leads towards change or transformations of a sort. Thus, CT provides opportunity to see how organisations draft their own movement towards change (Horn, 2008). Macintosh and Wilkinson (2016) observe different behaviours that organisation exhibit as they interact with their environment in grappling with changes. identify three types of properties and behaviours exhibited by these constituent elements within an organisation or environment as they interact. They observe the process of emergence, which is reflective of behaviours of lower-level elements in a system, organisation or environment. They further observe that systems, organisation or environments are inclined to modify their internal structures as they adapt to or manipulate their environment. They refer to this process as self-organisation. Ultimately the elements within the environment, system or organisation co-evolve, as they respond to changes in other elements ( Macintosh & Wilkinson, 2016). The interactivity of various elements brings the notion of levels or degrees reflecting complexity. Mason (2008, 37) portrays this characteristic in this manner:

Once a system reaches a certain critical level of complexity, otherwise known as critical mass, a phase transition takes place which makes possible the emergence of new properties and behaviours and a momentum whose inertia is significantly increased. A certain critical level of diversity and complexity must be reached for a system to achieve a sustainable autocatalytic state—that is, for it to maintain its own momentum in a particular direction. This model posits the phase transition as a fundamental law of increasing complexity, but the specific details of this phase transition—when and how it occurs, what properties and behaviours emerge—are contingent on specific contextual factors and are probably unique to that particular context.

Applied within the field of education, agents and structures “include teachers, students, parents and other community leaders, the state and its education departments, economic structures and business organisations” (Mason, 2008, 44). Thus change

implementation is:

not so much a consequence of effecting change in one particular factor or variable, no matter how powerful the influence of that factor. It is more a case of generating momentum in a new direction by attention to as many factors as possible (Mason, 2008,45).

The relationships (complexity) between these elements raise the issue of couplings (Nir, 2021). Couplings may either be loose (weak) or tight. From the ordinary linguistic form, Weick (1976, 3) sees coupling as “connection, link, or interdependence.” He is however, of the view that the definition may be too simplistic, missing out the essences of the concept. Weick (1976) suggests the using of imagery in understanding the essence of coupling. Going beyond just the ordinary usage of the concept, he suggests that “coupled events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness” (Weick, 1976, 3). In portraying this dichotomous nature of coupling, as either tight or loose he observes the imagery as follows:

[I]n the case of an educational organization, it may be the case that the counselor's office is loosely coupled to the principal's office. The image is that the principal and the counselor are somehow attached, but that each retains some identity and separateness and that their attachment may be circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual affects, unimportant, and/or slow to respond. Each of those connotations would be conveyed if the qualifier loosely were attached to the word coupled. Loose coupling also carries connotations of impermanence, resolvability, and tacitness all of which are potentially crucial properties of the "glue" that holds organizations together (Weick, 1976, 3).

Paino (2018, 1120) conveys the same understanding in that a loosely coupled situation would exist when “principals and teachers are tied to one another, but retain a relatively great degree of independence.” However, “if principals exert a great deal of influence over teachers’ classrooms, then the

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schools are more tightly coupled” (Paino, 2018,1120). Glassman (1973) (quoted by Weick, 1976, 3) introduces variables as coupling factors to systems, organisations or environments. Accordingly, if “two systems have either few variables in common or share weak variables, they are independent of each other” (Weick, 1976, 3). Weick (1976, 4) identifies coupling mechanisms to systems as the technical core of the organization and the authority of office. This categorisation is similar to Mintzberg (1979) operating core and strategic apex. Thus technical core of an organisation refers to elements such as technology, task, subtask, role, territory and person, and the couplings are task-induced while authority task relates to positions, offices, responsibilities, opportunities, rewards, and sanctions and it is the couplings among these elements that presumably hold the organization together (Weick, 1976, 4). Thus, Paino (2018,1120) refers to coupling “as how closely formal organizational structures (e.g., policy) are related to the real technical activities occurring within the organization.”

A number of contexts which demonstrate loose and tight couplings within the field of education have been observed by theorists (Paino, 2018; Weick, 1976). Weick (1976) identifies eighteen contexts. However, it has been observed that educational reforms are normally not compatible with loose couplings since they assume rational world void of implementation constraints (Corsi, 2020). Spillane, Parise and Sherer (2011) identify three types of couplings, namely, tight coupling, loose coupling and decoupling. Tight coupling represents a situation whereby different elements are responsive to, but not distinctive from, each other. On the other hand, loose coupling refers to a situation when different elements are responsive to, but distinctive from, each other. Lastly, decoupling is when different elements are distinctive from, but not responsive to each other.

Applying the theory of loose couplings to Lesotho education system in 1995, in particular the primary schools, Meyer (1995) made interesting findings which are universal to other education systems. Meyer (1995, i) observes that education organizations “are likely to be plural, complex, fragmented and inconsistent.” This view leads to

the existence of dichotomous situation in that “organizations are likely to be internally uncontrolled or coordinated,” leading to decoupling (Meyer, 1995, i). While this may appear to be a shortcoming, Meyer (1995) argues that this may be advantageous for the survival of the organisations. The complex nature of Lesotho education has been observed from the influences of multiple sources such as churches, parents, government and donors. The multiplicity of sources has created plural and inconsistent environments which have resulted into vertical and horizontal decouplings. This has further caused a gap between policy practice and intentions, at different levels of decision making.

From the foregoing, it has been established that institutions operate within the complex environment as the results of their relationships with other organisations forming systems with. In the same manner, the tasks they are expected to perform are complex, as they form systems and subsystems. Complexity and loose couplings theories provide a theoretical lens upon which we can understand how organisations, systems and environments relate. Loose couplings within the context of complex theories highlights the dialectical nature of leadership practice within organisations demonstrating that coupling is multidimensional (Paino, 2018). This observation assist researchers in understanding why institutions, especially education, remain unresponsive to changes advocated by education policies (Paino, 2018). Different typologies of loose couplings been identified among individuals, subunits, organizations, between hierarchical levels, between organisations and environments, among ideas, between activities, and intentions and actions” (Orton and Weick 1990, 208, cited by Paino, 2018,1121). Rasche (2012) reiterates the situation of co-existence between tight coupling and loose couplings. He further argues that loose coupling logic highlights the organising processes underlying the interplay between specialization and integration, by identifying not only the weakness but also the strengths of coupling. Exploring the strengths of couplings “helps to understand the interplay of interdependence and independence between different governance of actors (Rasche, 2012, 681).

## 4 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 | Methodological framework

The study employed discourse analysis to interpret textual data derived from document analysis and interviews with the members of the Faculty of Education, to understand how teacher trainers make sense of national reforms and their impact on teacher education programmes.

The primary units of analysis were Curriculum and Assessment Policy 2009 and the National University of Lesotho BEP. The choice of the BEP has been influenced by the fact that the programme focuses on experienced teachers who were already serving in schools, and had already been certificated or held teaching diploma certificates. In addition, the programme was offered through distance mode, which is the direction the University is taking. The choice of BEP provided opportunity to assess how the programme prepared teachers to function effectively in the field, as the programme was a continuing professional development programme (CPD) (National University Lesotho, 2020). The programme has one coordinator. Interviews were held with her, the Dean of Faculty of Education and a member of the Faculty of Education who had been part of the programme development.

### 4.2 | Data collection and analysis

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy became the primary source of data collected. To collect data from the interviews and policy document and programme documents, the following guiding questions were used:

1. Does the programme make any reference to different levels of curriculum (Supra, Macro and Meso levels)?
2. Which values, skills and principles are promoted by the policy document?
3. How does the programme address values, skills and principles advocated by the policy document?
4. How does the programme address national goals of education?
5. How does the programme espouse the emerging educational paradigm shift?

### 6. How is the teacher training being modelled?

Interviews with the three participants we held using Whatsapp call because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviews were based on structured and semi-structured questions. The interviews lasted between 25 and 30 minutes. However, interviews with the programme coordinator lasted for five minutes since it emerged that she was recently appointed to the programme.

## 5 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study intended to determine the extent to which teacher education responded to national education reform. The results and discussions were organised around three major contexts: responsiveness of teacher education; organisational experiences and factors contributing to (un) responsiveness.

### 5.1 | Responsiveness of teacher education

Responsiveness of teacher education was inferred from six main questions identified in section 4.2.

#### 5.1.1 | Reference to different curriculum levels

Curriculum levels provide contexts which curriculum change should be based on. Teacher education institutions exist to respond to social needs which are articulated by different curriculum levels especially Meso, Macro and Supra. These levels constitutes what Cornbleth (1988) refers to as nominal context. The BEP was analysed to determine whether there was any reference to Curriculum and Assessment Policy and Education Sector Plan 2016 – 2026 (Ministry of education and Training, 2009; Ministry of Education and Training, 2016).

The BEP document is structured as follows: Introduction, Establishment of the Programme, Programme Structure, The Curricular Strategy, The Curriculum Structure, Assessment and Progression,



Objectives of the Programme, Entrance Requirements, Degree Structure and Course Synopses. From the analysis of the different sections of the document there was no reference made to the three levels (Meso, Macro and Supra). The programme document did not even refer to the National University of Lesotho Strategic Plan, which theoretically the programme should be implementing it. Further, the Lesotho Education Sector Plan 2016-2026 sees Pre-service, In-service and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers as vital in bridging the gap in teacher supply and quality as necessary to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4. The programme document regarded BEP as a continuing professional development programme (CPD), building upon diploma programme from Lesotho College of Education (LCE). Despite this acknowledgement, there was no evidence of spirality between the LCE diploma programme and BED programme. Further, the programme document did not refer to Lesotho Education Sector Plan 2016-2026, which provided policies for education provision. It has been observed that the Plan stipulated a number of objectives related to teacher training, which could have served as significant input in informing the programme.

### **5.1.2 Coverage of values prescribed by the policy**

From the literature, curriculum policy represents an ideological curriculum (Akker, 1998). The Curriculum and Assessment Policy 2009, reflect the ideological curriculum, by outlining the vision and values which education should promote. These variables should be promoted by educational institutions at different levels of education system. Teacher training institutions should build teachers with capabilities to promote these in national school systems.

The Curriculum and Assessment 2009 identifies a number of values which the education system should promote. Such values are contextualised within different contexts. For instance the policy states that “the education system should foster relevant and positive social attitudes and civil values and as a self emancipation tool from ever-threatening harnesses of poverty, needs and diseases” (Ministry of Education & Training, 2009, 4); “the inculcation of

the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Basotho society” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009,7); “Educational programmes shall incorporate cultural values and activities that are compatible with individual and social development” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009, 9).

It was observed that the programme document did not cover values other than in specific courses, namely, Curriculum Studies in Science and Religious Education. In the course, Curriculum Studies in Science, values are covered as a topic and appears as follows “ Apparent conflicts between cultural values and scientific attitude” (National University Lesotho, 2020).

### **5.1.3 Linkages between programme goals and national goals**

The programme identified six objectives. There was no indication of any linkages with national education goals and policies, and with strategic goals of the NUL. The key action verbs of the programme objectives were “raise”, “motivate”, “equip”, “train”, “enable” and “create.” Further, there was no indication that these objectives were supported by content or activities suggested in the programme. There was no indication of linkages between what the programme purported to offer as opposed to what the students had gone through the diploma programme of LCE which it claimed to be building upon. Curriculum and Assessment Policy 2009 provided education goals and curriculum aims for basic education level. The programme did not refer to these.

### **5.1.4 Adoption of education paradigm shift**

The major paradigm shift introduced by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy was the introduction of integrated curriculum, through the use of curriculum aspects and learning areas. In addition, the policy moved away from banking model of education, by adopting the pedagogy that empowered learners to be active participants in social issues. The programme did not make reference to this shift. Further, curriculum in schools had shifted to the concepts of learning

areas. These were Linguistic and Literary, which covered English and Sesotho, Numerical and Mathematical, Scientific and Technological, Personal, Spiritual and Social and Creativity and Entrepreneurial Learning Areas. There were no longer traditional subjects offered at basic education level. Despite, this shift, the BEP still adopted the old subject nomenclature. The programme offered subjects such as Religious Studies and Social Studies, the subjects which were no longer offered in schools.

### 5.1.5 *Teacher training model*

The programme was referred to as CPD. It had also introduced the aspect of subject teaching. The introduction of subject teaching was based on old subject based curriculum ignoring the current learning areas approach. The programme acknowledged the importance of foundational, applied and reflexive competences forming the basis of teacher education. This framework was not clearly indicated within the programme itself. However, the overall observation was that the model followed Grossman et al. (2009) observation on foundation and methods orientation. This framework had always formed the framework of teacher training strategy by the NUL follows, namely, educational foundations courses (EDF) and subject-based teaching courses (Language and Social Education – LASED).

## 5.2 **Organisational experiences**

The findings from documents analysis reflected that the BEP programme had not responded to the curriculum reform brought about by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy. In order to understand why there were poor linkages between the programme and national needs as reflected through policy documents, interviews were held with lecturers from the Faculty of Education (FE). Interviews were held with the coordinator of the BED programme, Dean

of FE and a lecturer from the department of LASED. The inclusion of a member from LASED emanates from the fact that, members from LASED have been visible during the reform activities of MOET. They were members of subject panels that were involved in developing curricular for different learning areas. The involvement of the Dean in the study emanated from the fact that deans were academic leaders of the faculties. From the interviews, it emerged that the coordinator was new to the office of the coordinator and hence could not provide insightful information about the programme.

From the two interviews it was noted that the BEP Primary programme was introduced by the Institute of Education (IE). The IE was responsible for primary in-service education. However, IE had been integrated within the FE. The programme was developed to respond to the long standing needs of training primary teachers beyond a diploma level. To illustrate the dire need of getting certificates beyond diploma level, teacher would take up any course from outside Lesotho, irrespective of its relevance to the Lesotho situation. This saw qualifications such as Associate of College of Preceptors (ACP) and Licentiate of College of Preceptors (LCP). Despite the recognition of the programme's response to the needs, the FE was reluctant to associate itself with the programme, to an extent that the first cohort of graduands could not graduate as planned as the IE could not present the examinations results to the Senate. One interviewee made the following observation:

The NUL, through the Faculty of Education did not want to offer BED Primary Programme and it further blocked attempts by the National Teacher Training College (NTTC), now LCE, to offer the programme. NTTC being it affiliates could not do so as the decision was supposed to be made by the NUL. Some of us thought it was an opportune moment to partner with NTTC and re-brand as School of Education so that degree programmes could be offered.

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To address the graduation impasse of the first cohort of BEP, establishment of an ad hoc committee to normalise the introduction of BEP programme into the FE. The committee did succeed in normalising the programme and the graduands managed to graduate. During 2020, the programme was restructured. Given that some members of the FE, mainly from LASED participated during the reform processes at the national level, it emerged that the information was shared among LASED member. However, it emerged from interviews that the former BEP coordinator was informed about the reform processes necessitated by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy.

### 5.3 Factors contributing to (un) responsiveness

From the evidence emerging it was clear that loose couplings between the FE and IE existed. IE was able to introduce BEP programme. In this way loose couplings worked in favour of IE until the FE wanted to control the programme through instituting an ad hoc committee to take control of the programme. The loose decoupling between IE and FE to a certain extent was advantageous given that FE was not ready to introduce the programme. Thus the graduands of the programme benefited from acquiring degree certificates irrespective of whether the programme responded to the policy. This meant improvement in their salaries. IE was able to maintain linkages with schools and teachers, while internally there was lack of coordination and great ineffectiveness, between IE and FE (Myer, 1995). Thus, the apparent power struggle between the two sub-units contributed to unresponsiveness of the programme to the university strategic goals and national policies.

Further, the internal loose coupling between LASED and EDF became obvious as LASED participated in national reforms but no effective strategies were put in place to share information and work together to improve the quality and relevance of the programme. These departments were part of FE, which was mandated to provide training for teachers at both basic and secondary education levels. In order to legitimize the programme IE based itself on the age old needs of the teachers and introduced programme. This

reflect the inconsistent environments operational within the curriculum system. On the one hand the programme responded to the qualification needs of teachers while on the other the national needs as reflected by the policy and education sector plan were not catered by the programme. Different actors, environments and systems were not considered in designing the programme.

## 6 | Conclusions

The paper highlighted the significance of looking at teacher education within complexity theory, by analysing their linkages through loose coupling theory. The overall conclusion was that teacher education was highly decoupled from the national needs, system and environment, while on the other hand was weakly organised internally, within the FE. The theories provided the opportunity of looking at a phenomenon, teacher education, in its entirety, within a system (curriculum levels), environments education sector, sub-units such as FE, IE, EDF and etc. Looking at different issues from complex and coupling theories could provide a better strategy of dealing with strategic weaknesses of higher education such as lack of strong managerial authority, lack of good governance and lack of an organisational culture.

It is important to espouse the the broader view of curriculum reform as a managerial processes of translating environmental systems (internally and externally) into an educational programme. It is thus significant for course leadders to understand couplings at different levels, institutional, systems and activities so that they can effectively manage educational programmes and ensuring their responsiveness to the needs of different stakeholders. Course leaders should not only be conversant with curriculum undertaking but be empowered with leadership and managerial capabilities.

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