

Middle leaders leading the LOF implementation: Perceptions from a Maltese State Middle School setting.

by Whitney Cremona.

My name is Whitney Cremona and I am currently a Middle School teacher of English at Maria Regina College. I have recently graduated with a Master of Sciences in Educational Leadership course from the University of Leicester. My Masters degree was carried out following the award of a Tertiary Education Scholarships Scheme (TESS).

My research study focused on the personal experiences of middle leaders who have been engaged in the LOF (Learning Outcomes Framework) national curriculum change, a change that started taking place in 2018 and is still undergoing implementation in Secondary school years. The study also explored teachers' responses regarding their experiences working with and being supported by middle leaders throughout the implementation process. Through an analysis of these perceptions, implications for the roles of middle leaders were explored, along with opportunities and challenges faced by participants and their responses to them.

Overall, the study suggests that there is broad support for the LOF curriculum among the participants. However, a difference can be noticed between the responses of Heads of Departments (HOD) and Subject Assistant Head (SAH) participants. While HODs expressed being involved in the process of the LOF, SAH respondents show that consultation and involvement in their cases were minimal. Additionally, it was expressed that there was a lack of teacher consultation and involvement, which contributed to the level of resistance to change experienced throughout the implementation.

The study also highlights the challenge of lack of time that middle leaders have for collaborations and discussions on the curriculum with their teachers. This stems from a workload that is barely manageable without the added stressor of a major curriculum change, as well as teachers' large workloads. This lack of time in turn makes practicing effective professional learning community practices, such as collaboration and teamwork, difficult, despite the clear evidence that both middle leaders and teachers understand the benefits of such practices.

While the LOF's intentions were praised, participants questioned the full impact of these changes, in particular, because of the stalling of the implementation process in Secondary year groups and a lack of monitoring opportunities due to Covid-19 protocols. Without being able to fully monitor the implementation, participants are unable to get a clear picture of whether the LOF is being implemented as intended at the classroom level and its effect on the quality of teaching and learning.

Finally, the study exposes a global lack of awareness of middle leadership roles during curriculum implementation and their effect on the classroom. This study thus highlights the criticality of middle leadership roles to the success of any national curriculum. Additionally, middle leaders themselves are encouraged to be conscious of their own capabilities for leading change and seek leadership development when there is a need. Apart from being of timely importance in the Maltese local context, this study also contributes to the overall understanding of middle leadership and change in educational settings.