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# Narrating the Lived Experiences of Life Orientation Teachers: An Interpretive Phenomenology Study

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**Abstract.** This study seeks to explore the lived experiences of Life Orientation (LO) / Life Skills educators in the Further Education and Training Phase (FET). The aim of this research was to determine the lived experiences of teachers during the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in LO. This qualitative study employs an interpretive phenomenological design by merging the transformative learning theory of Mezirow and Bandura's self-efficacy theory as a framework. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with seven purposely selected LO teachers. The findings revealed that teachers experienced their training as effective, leading to continuous professional teacher development, and were able to mitigate the challenges encountered during the implementation of CAPS. Insights from these initial teacher narratives may inform collaborative efforts between the Department of Basic Education and Higher Education Institutes, whereby student teachers should be included in the initial stages of implementing change in the curriculum. The study concludes that the phenomenal aspects that determine effective curriculum implementation are well addressed at schools. It was suggested that to effectively implement CAPS at schools, the DBE should establish compulsory training for teachers to accumulate Continuous Professional Teacher Development points.

**Keywords:** life orientation; live experience; narrative; professional development; interpretive phenomenology

## 1. Introduction

During the last twenty years, progress has been made to raise the levels of education. Globally, improvement in the quality of education was specifically introduced by the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, "which ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all". The Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's

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mission aims to *build peace, eradicate poverty, and drive sustainable development*, good and unbiased delivery of instruction and working towards means for learning and beyond by 2030, is vital (UN, 2023). This notion is well recognised, but education in South Africa faces many challenges related to teaching and learning. The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was initiated as an imperative to establish a quality education system for all through transformation within a democratic era. However, implementation of CAPS took place at a time when teachers lacked sufficient subject content knowledge, had inadequate training and were in many instances, faced with overcrowded classes.

The CAPS document (DBE, 2011) emphasises four fundamental subjects as compulsory for learners in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. Life Orientation (LO) is part of the fundamental subjects. Initially The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2011) determined that LO would not be examined and would be regarded as a continuous assessment subject. This implies that continuous assessment should include different forms of assessment to accommodate the diverse group of learners. Therefore, learners would complete their subject content before the start of their final year-end examination. Learners from Grades 10 to 11 would write provincial common assessment tasks, while Grade 12 learners would write a National Common Assessment Task. Nationally, the DBE determined a common date, which implies that learners would write the common assessment task on the same day.

However, the common assessment task has been changed to formal summative assessment or examination. This was a strategic move to emphasise LO as a critical subject that should be included in the National Senior Certificate Examination. Thus, LO has become one of the core subjects for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) and thus has the same value, if not more, as the other school subjects to be included as a final examination. This move positively influences teachers and learners' perceptions regarding LO (Seherrie & Mawela, 2021). It also has an impact on the admission point scores that are used as a yardstick by higher education institutions to determine whether learners are eligible to be admitted for their courses.

The broader definition of Life Orientation refers to "the study of the individual, environment, and society; how learners are equipped with skills, knowledge, and values to be effective citizens who can make informed decisions; how responsible they are about the environment, citizenship, social interaction, recreation, and physical activity as well as careers choices" (DBE, 2011, p. 8). The term 'Life Orientation' does not appear in the literature outside the South African context; the closest seems to be 'Life Skills,' as used in some African countries. Related topics found in the South African curriculum include the social studies learning area (Chinese Taipei), citizen education (Czech Republic, England), standards of citizenship (Columbia), and civic and ethics formation (Mexico) (Schulz et al., 2010).

The rationale for including LO as a fundamental subject in the school curriculum was primarily to transform students into successful citizens (DBE, 2011). Initially, the subject content posed a challenge to LO/Life Skills teachers since they had not

been trained to teach the subject with all its varied topics (Seherrie & Mawela, 2022). Several contributing factors have given reason for carrying out this research and to delve into the areas that could also be seen as a stumbling block for effective curriculum implementation. LO teachers needed to have been up-skilled to develop lesson plans relevant to the context of learners. Therefore, training would have benefitted LO teachers to become equipped with the latest knowledge and skills required for the task (Swarts et al., 2019). In practice, however, this was not the case. A number of studies have found that teachers lacked adequate knowledge and skills to ensure the implementation of an effective LO curriculum, ambiguity for the subject principles, their frame of reference for implementation, and practices needed for effective teaching (Diale, 2016; Hartell et al., 2013). This discrepancy may be attributed to the lack of professional training and experience to facilitate the subject.

The shortage of well-trained and experienced Life Orientation (LO) teachers has compelled the Department and schools to use teachers without relevant training and knowledge in the subject. The rationale for seeing these teachers as competent for instructional content delivery was due to their previous experience in subjects such as Educational Guidance, Religious Education, or Physical Education (Stroebel et al., 2019). Teachers who had attended a two-to-three-day HIV/AIDS and LO workshops, which were used as a yardstick, were considered competent to teach LO (Prinsloo, 2007). This emphasises a fundamental educational difficulty, notably the challenges teachers and district administrators have when implementing a new curriculum due to a lack of subject content knowledge (SCK) among teachers. (DBE, 2011; Diale, 2016).

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of LO teachers. To answer this aim, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What are LO teachers' views on training regarding continuous professional development?
2. How did LO teachers experience subject advisors' role during curriculum implementation of life orientation?
3. What were the challenges that LO teachers experienced during the implementation of the subject?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 In-service Training through Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**

Provincial and district subject advisors plan 'in-service training' workshops as an important strategy to enhance teachers' continuous professional development (CPD). This initiative is to empower and re-skill teachers with the required subject content knowledge. CPD refers to learning opportunities in formal settings both within and outside the workplace, including workshops and seminars, mentoring, and work shadowing (Browne et al., 2022), self-efficacy (Makopoulo et al., 2021), and developing conceptual understanding (Binmohsen & Abrahams, 2022). Based on this strategy, school principals are expected to guide and provide further instructional leadership to teachers to improve implementation and learning in the subject (Mukuna & Aloka, 2020). CPD has been highlighted as an organised and professional process, with the ideal to significantly improve performance, subject content knowledge, praxis, and learning (Darling-

Hammond et al., 2017). As mentors and coaches, subject advisors must also develop expert teachers to strengthen them in their specific areas of expertise through the development of SCK and PCK. These expectations tend to expose teachers' vulnerability and lack of training or continual professional development and trigger emotions of helplessness (Diale, 2016). However, training must not be seen as an add on because intensified workloads add pressure, effect teacher's effectiveness and take time away from important teaching duties such as group discussions or giving feedback to learners (Lopez, 2017). CPD is the cornerstone for meaning, improvement, and transformation of professional practice (Krutka et al., 2017; Whitworth et al., 2018). During the training of teachers on implementing CAPS, teachers felt that it clarified content by offering clear objectives, skills, and specific content areas (Du Plessis & Marais, 2015). This implies that the curriculum provides well-defined guidelines regarding pacing, sequencing, and coverage of the curriculum. Teachers must have extensive topic expertise to guarantee that students thoroughly comprehend and interpret the material (Kleickmann et al., 2013). Dithale and van den Berg (2024) confirm that it is the responsibility of teachers to improve their skills and knowledge acquisition to advance their own circumstances. Supported by subject advisors, CPD will bear the fruit of continuously investing in professional development initiatives to transform teaching and learning in schools.

An important suggestion of the Department was that subject advisors should support principals and teachers in enhancing teaching practices in schools (Smith, 2018). This initiative was to work hand-in-hand with principals to establish in-service CPD training as a vital strategy. Professional development over a longer period is beneficial for teachers to learn about their instructional practices, which includes follow-up training that focuses on subject-matter knowledge and reflection (Mouton & Malumbete, 2023). This is achieved by training teachers every quarter in their clusters to prepare them in advance for the following quarter. They are informed using circulars about the dates of the workshops and the content to be trained on. Monitoring and evaluating are some of the core duties of subject advisors which include evaluating teachers' work to verify whether the required learner outcomes have been met. This is done to assist principals with the continuous professional development of teachers, which is considered highly beneficial when well-designed and sustained over a longer period, which aligns with Dhakal et al., (2024), who suggests that CPD can be effective if it is extended over a longer period. This extended duration allows teachers to deeply engage with new concepts, practice, and refine their skills, and receive ongoing support and feedback and should mitigate Govender's (2018) reference to the dissatisfaction experienced among teachers about the quality and quantity of professional development.

## **2.2 The role of LO Subject Advisors**

A subject advisor is a person who is employed by the Department of Basic Education with subject or phase specialist knowledge and skills that demonstrate in-depth content knowledge and pedagogy (DBE, 2011). The role of subject advisors is to support curriculum implementation at schools (DBE, 2020). They are entrusted to support and oversee the curriculum at schools and have the responsibility to conduct school support visits. This initiative aims to raise the

quality of education for better quality of teaching-learning at schools (Deliwe & Seabe, 2022; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Smith, 2018). Furthermore, these roles as postulated in “The Policy of the Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of Education Districts” (DBE, 2018), among other responsibilities, are to monitor curriculum implementation in the relevant subject, moderate examination papers and memoranda, moderate school-based assessments, monitor progress and practices of teachers, conduct training and cluster workshops, and provide school support. Departmental circulars are used to inform teachers about the content training workshops.

LO subject advisors as senior education specialists, are specifically tasked to support teachers in CPD programmes and to develop their subject content knowledge (SCK) and skills. Stephan and Motlhabane (2020) assert that sufficient SCK and PCK are imperative for subject advisors so that they can support and develop novice teachers, and in particular LO teachers. Gama’s (2015) argument is supported by Stephan and Motlhabane (2020) that teachers who lack strong SCK in the subjects they teach, may struggle to effectively address students’ questions and clarify any misunderstandings related to the subject matter and experience, cognitively challenging learning scenarios. Although findings of recent research have shown that in-depth SCK has become a prerequisite for teachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to respond competently to the challenges and needs of learners, they must be skilled in both SCK and PCK so that learners can thoroughly understand and interpret the content (Kleickmann et al., 2013). As a result, it remains the obligation of the LO subject advisors as senior education specialists to ensure that teachers possess a deep understanding of the subject matter to effectively teach it in a way that enables learners to comprehend the new information (Seherrie, 2020). Jita and Mokhele (2014) regard subject advisors as experts from the Department to provide subject-specific guidance and support to teachers. Akinyemi et al., (2020) posit that it is important to establish positive relationships among teachers as well as build trust among them. With high levels of trust, teachers will feel safe, which will assist them to freely discuss the challenges they experience in the classroom. Yulianti et al., (2022) support collaboration relations between the teachers and the principal. This allows trust to grow and create a platform on which duties and responsibilities can be distributed within the school. Therefore, subject advisors are tasked with supporting principals in this regard. The CAPS serves as a compass to guide curriculum depth and breadth, which indicates that teachers’ compliance refers to content coverage and assessment practices as required and prescribed. In sum, the onus relies on subject advisors to assist teachers and to ensure that they understand how best to teach the subject according to the LO annual teaching plan (DBE, 2011).

### **2.3 Challenges life orientation teachers experienced**

On initial implementation of LO in schools, teachers were insufficiently prepared and lacked proper qualifications to effectively teach LO, which includes a wide range of study areas and topics. Muller and Hoadley (2019) observe that, due to the lack of effective in-service training and pre-service programmes, teachers have had no opportunity to observe or take on new practices beyond those offered from their training college experiences. Stroebel et al. (2018) argue that the changes in

the Physical Education (PE) curriculum and its implementation within the post-apartheid education system led to significant challenges in the delivery of PE in South African schools. As a result, the role of LO teachers was created without assessing whether the teachers or the Department were adequately prepared to implement LO effectively in the classroom. The theoretical aspects and practical components of CAPS were not well integrated, leading to inefficiencies and adverse perceptions among teachers. These challenges contributed to quality education, and it was further influenced by teachers who have been allocated additional subject periods to fill up their timetables (Modiba, 2017). Since LO was a continuous assessment subject and did not depend on examinations only, some teachers used the subject teaching periods to revise examinable subjects (Gudyanga et al., 2015), which resulted in the inadequate application of allocated time for LO. In the same way, this has caused instability in the subject and has undermined the effective implementation of Life Orientation to achieve its statutory, and transformational goals in many schools (Diale, 2016). The LO teachers' position in the classroom has been exacerbated by poor and insufficient training, inexperienced teachers, and a lack of resources (Burnett, 2020; Joubert, 2023). These statements corroborate the view that teacher training, and resources have been neglected with focus being placed on strengthening Mathematics and Science subjects (DBE, 2015). Additionally, Hartell et al. (2013) concluded that even with adequate SCK and skills, teachers would still find it challenging to implement the curriculum effectively. Consequently, teachers have faced numerous difficulties, including the issue of large numbers of learners resulting in overcrowded classrooms.

Overcrowded classrooms are not only a prominent feature locally but are also a global phenomenon (Hachem & Mayor, 2019). A crucial challenge is the exponential increase in learner numbers, a scarcity of specialist teachers, and not enough funding, which negatively impacts what is being called 'the ideal class size' of about fifteen to twenty students per class (Hachem & Mayor, 2019). Additionally, teachers with big class sizes or limited access to materials may find it difficult or time-consuming to include practical instruction into their lesson plans (Murangira et al., 2024). Teaching in overcrowded classrooms is a challenge to many teachers as they find it challenging to create conducive teaching and learning environments (Marais, 2016). Moreover, with the limited physical space and large class sizes, they encounter various obstacles such as instructional delivery and adequate discipline (Iqbal & Khan, 2012; Meier & West, 2020).

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework is a structure that researchers can use to comprehend the significance of a study, the problem statement, the kind of literature to collect, the collection and analysis of data and the discussion of the findings (Osanloo & Grant, 2016). In other words, a theoretical framework refers to the structure that supports the theory of the intended study, expressed by experts to give a hanger to data analysis and the interpretation of results (Hassan, 2024; Kivunja, 2018).

This study foregrounds a dual frame; the transformative learning theory (TLT) of Mezirow (1997) and Self-Efficacy Theory (SET) of Bandura (1977). Within the TLT, FET LO teachers interpret and reinterpret their experiences of in-service training

and reflect on their praxis. Given the TLT, LO teachers require the ability to reflect on their assumptions, which are the result of years of socialisation and experience within the classroom context. This form of learning entails shifting mental models or worldviews and how LO teachers believe that this is the only way to learn (Mezirow, 2000). Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (SET) (Bandura, 1977) is conceptualised as "a personal judgment of one's ability to execute a course of action required to attain a desired outcome." Thus, SET determines teachers' engagement in coping behaviour and the duration of their encounter of obstacles. This implies that the effect LO teachers experience during the CAPS training and the implementation thereof, is determined by the interpretation of their performances or outcome expectancies (Bandura, 1977). The sampled LO teachers' lived experiences are captured in negotiated and co-constructed knowledge and practices (Isidro, 2018; Brau, 2020).

This study's focus is on how FET Life Orientation teachers narrate their lived experiences during the implementation of CAPS. Moreover, the TLT (Mezirow, 1997) supports LO teachers' interpretation and how they objectively focus on their views and values and thus, are able to take transformative action. Given the latter, it is argued that the multi-theoretical frame supports FET LO teachers narrating their lived experiences in the subject.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

Research methodology is a systematic way to solve a problem and consists of a research design and methods consisting of broad design features, as well as various procedures and steps in research (Farooq, 2019).

##### **4.1 Research Design**

A research design is an action plan with guided steps of how the problem that has been identified and discussed is going to be investigated with regards to data collection, its measurement and analysis (Khanday & Khanam, 2019). Based on Heidegger's (2010) work, as well as that of African scholars, the interpretive phenomenological approach seeks to understand a phenomenon through the participant and researchers' experiences and reflections, as in this single case design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Husserl, 2019; Koopman, 2018; Van Wyk, 2022). The phenomenological approach helps create an environment where the researcher can generate data with those who have experienced the phenomenon. It studies the world through the way it is experienced and appears in consciousness from a situated, embodied position in the world (Smith et al., 2022). The use of interpretative phenomenological research design focuses on the interpretation and understanding of the participants of the phenomenon from their subjective lived experiences as LO teachers and the meaning they attach to the phenomenon. It requires researchers to cultivate a phenomenological attitude consciously, involving being attuned to the lived experiences of others. The central tenet of phenomenology is understanding subjective consciousness to gain direct knowledge through the voices of the participants (Qutoshi, 2018). The choice of the interpretive phenomenological approach was based on its ability to enable research participants to share their personal narratives and experiences freely and authentically without any alteration or censorship. The interpretive approach assumes that reality and knowledge are context-bound and depend on

the interpretation of the participants (Homes et al., 2022). Therefore, this single case study design focuses on the lived experiences of FET Phase LO teachers in the Northern Cape Province (De Vos et al., 2011; Seherrie, 2020).

#### **4.2 Population and Sampling**

The population of this study consisted of teachers from secondary schools in one province in South Africa. The sample of seven teachers from secondary schools were chosen for this investigation. To comprehend the phenomenon under investigation, the researcher used a purposive sampling strategy to select specific individuals from the population which consisted of secondary school teachers. The researcher chose this method to specifically select well-informed and knowledgeable participants who could offer valuable information about the studied phenomenon. These teachers have been teaching LO since the implementation of the CAPS in 2011. This implies that these teachers have extensive subject knowledge and teaching experience which showcases their knowledge and skills. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique that researchers can use to select a sample of units or subjects from a population (Etikan, 2016).

#### **4.3 Data Collection Instruments**

Data collection is the process of collecting and measuring information in a systematic way that afford an individual the opportunity to answer research questions and evaluate outcomes (Ori, 2021). A qualitative approach was adopted to collect data through face-to-face semi-structured interviews in which the interviewer and participant engage in a formal dialogue. Under this type of interview, the researcher prepared an 'interview guide' consists of questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation. The focus of the interview was on teachers' teaching experiences during the implementation of CAPS (Kabir, 2016).

#### **4.4 Analysis of Data**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The qualitative data was inductively analysed and were based on categories and sub-categories that emerged. Interview data was independently transcribed, coded manually, and condensed into meaningful units (Miles et al., 2014). Thereafter, themes were identified according to a manual thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Two researchers worked independently and analysed the data together, through critical discussion, and arriving at a consensus. As the interviews had been recorded, participants were able to listen and discuss the recordings to complete an audit trail. This was ensured through a thorough explanation of the research to participants, along with the context of the research. Concerning respondent validation, participants were invited to comment on the interview transcript and whether the final themes and concepts created adequately reflect the phenomena being investigated (Noble & Smith, 2015). These qualitative validating approaches or credibility measures were adopted to ensure trustworthiness in this qualitative research study. Qualitative research quality is based on trustworthiness and is supported by forms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These elements were considered and adhered to achieve trustworthiness in this study. Additionally, these four criteria determining the



qualitative research study's credibility, accuracy, and value. Credibility was also ensured through engagement with the research participants in the field. After the data were transcribed and analysed, the transcriptions were returned to the participants for member checking, scrutiny, and elaboration if they felt this to be necessary. All participants responded that they were satisfied with the analysed data. Any form of bias that could influence the findings of this study was attended to. This methodological process would offer complete insights into the views, and challenges of LO teachers when narrating their lived experiences during a cooperative learning environment.

#### **4.5 Ethical Clearance**

Ethical clearance was obtained from a South African university's Ethics Committee. Permission to conduct the study at the selected schools was granted by the Northern Cape Department of Basic Education. Before each interview, which lasted 30 minutes, the participants were informed of confidentiality and anonymity and that if they felt uncomfortable about the interview, they could withdraw from the study.

### **5. Findings**

The findings are presented through three themes that emerged from the data related to FET LO teachers' lived experiences in the subject, namely, (i) teachers' experiences during CAPS training and their perceptions on the quality of training during the implementation of CAPS; (ii) teachers' views on the role of the subject advisors during training; and (iii) challenges LO teachers experience during CAPS implementation. The themes are discussed below:

#### **5.1 Life Orientation teachers' views on training regarding continuous professional development.**

##### **Theme #1: Teachers' experiences during CAPS training and their perceptions on the quality of training during the implementation of CAPS.**

Teachers [Participants (p)] outlined their experiences during their training differently, firstly expanding on their teaching experiences and their training sessions throughout the three-year term.

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they had attended any training and then to elaborate on their satisfaction with the training:

*P2 "No. I have never received any formal training in Life Orientation, only in Physical Sciences, this does not make you feel good about it. It was because I have taught Physical Science and Life Orientation and I have to choose between the subjects ... This for me was very positive and developmental".*

*P5 "Yes, I have received training. In Life Orientation the training was positive. I do not think that more can be done in terms of training ... it empowers you".*

*P7 "More training is needed. I am not so confident yet in teaching Life Orientation, but I can do with my one year of teaching experience and teaching the subject as well. The subject has many components and that is my biggest concern".*

It is evident from the above responses that some participants did not receive training; however, those who did, were satisfied with the training as it assisted them in their practice; however, a concern raised is that LO is comprised of many different topics which cross many subject fields.

The participants acknowledged the importance of training to up-skill themselves to cope with the implementation of CAPS and improve their practice. Subject Advisors, as subject supporters, should ensure effective curriculum implementation and overall improvement at schools. Teachers were asked to respond to the quality of training from the Provincial and District departments of education: This is how they explained their experiences:

*P1: "The training was powerful and effective ... and it was facilitated by the departmental official and the provincial coordinator. (Elaborate on experience) My experience up till now is good, but I have developed a lot. Whatever content you are teaching, is skills-based. This is the difference with the previous curriculums which were based on content rather than skills."*

Participants were made aware of the change from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centre approach where the focus was on skills development. Training, held regularly through the year, was in-depth with content being explained as well as the skills aligned with the content:

*P5: "The training was at the district office and the facilitators were the district officials and, in some cases, the lead teachers were involved. They took us through the content of the year, quarter by quarter whilst we worked out lesson plans to prepare ourselves for implementation. The packaging, repackaging, and sequencing of the content were explained. What was interesting was the depth and the scope of the content although there was no limit to how broad you can go."*

*P2: "I have come on board with CAPS during the subject committee meetings that the district office of the ... Department of Education was having once per quarter, except the last quarter of the year. School support visits have included one-on-one session of the content of CAPS. This training was done after school hours on-site."*

Teachers indicated that the training had focuses on the sequence of the curriculum, the development of lesson plans allowing teachers to be creative in their development according to their specific context. In summation, the overall feeling was that teachers who attended with workshop sessions and school-based felt more confident with the development of their knowledge and skills to implement the curriculum.

## 5.2 Teachers experience on subject advisors' role during curriculum implementation of life orientation.

### Theme #2: Teachers' views on the role of the subject advisors during training

Training given by the subject advisor contributed to how teachers are equipped to teach the curriculum. The question posed was: How do you perceive the role of the subject advisor during training? The responses of the participating teachers were as follows:

*P1: "The Subject advisor provides different scenarios to be applied with the relevant content in the ATP and my subject advisor has good content and pedagogical knowledge about the subject."*

*P3: "During CAPS training and with the guidance of the subject advisor, we as the teachers have developed lesson plans with activities for the quarter. The Subject advisor shows us how the content can be applied in many ways whether it is scenarios, case studies, or group discussions."*

The subject advisors, who are conversant with the content, teaching methodologies and a good understanding of the annual teaching plan (ATP), guided the teachers through the workshop ensuring that they were involved in developing lessons plans. Of interest is that the subject advisor was not only knowledgeable about the content but also suggested various methodologies which could be incorporated into the lessons to ensure content understanding and skill development.

Subject advisors were not only knowledgeable about the content of the subject, but they also demonstrated a positive attitude and confidence during the training:

*P4: "The subject advisor was knowledgeable about the content of the subject and always positive and confident. I like that ... it makes you positive as well. [S]he used different scenarios to demonstrate the content on a practical way."*

*P5: "Never miss out, it [training] empowers you, keeps you updated, and you just learn new things every time. One has developed trust and respect for the district official. From my experience, this was informative, and subject advisors showed how to approach some topics and the importance of content we need to teach ... and training sessions."*

The responses indicated that the positivity and confidence demonstrated by the subject advisor were transferred to the teachers. This indicates that the overall feeling of teachers about the training was positive as teachers were equipped with SCK and PCK.

### 5.3 Challenges LO teachers experience during the implementation of the subject.

#### **Theme #3: Challenges LO teachers experienced during CAPS implementation.**

Teachers faced many challenges that hindered them from effectively implementing CAPS in the LO classroom. Participants elaborated on how they experienced challenges during the CAPS implementation. A number of challenges were identified, such as knowing and understanding the content, that is development of SCK:

*P5: "... teachers need to be trained effectively. Therefore, "It is not just anyone who can teach the subject, although people assume that. When you understand the subject, you are on top of the content (know the content well). You must have a good understanding of the subject matter and even to say, you must be an expert and knowledgeable on the subject matter. It is also a professional competence a teacher should possess in teaching a specialised subject."*

Large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms were also an issue:

*P3: "This is because of the overcrowded-large classes at school where you cannot give attention to all learners at once. Classes with fifty-plus learners are difficult to manage and our management does not listen."*

The issue of allocating teaching and 'filling up' the timetable was raised as it seems that if teachers' timetables are not filled, then they are allocated to teach LO:

*P1: "Don't mention the meetings, it is terrible here. That makes me negative because ... especially in departmental programmes, the Life Orientation periods are always at stake. Even when setting the timetable, when teachers are in short periods, they allocate LO periods to teachers to fill up their timetables. When you speak your mind, this means trouble with the school management team."*

The participants above acknowledge that teachers experienced many challenges during the implementation of CAPS, which tended to impact on instructional delivery in the Life Orientation classroom.

## **6. Discussion of the findings**

The training of teachers on how to effectively implement the new curriculum, CAPS, was compulsory for all teachers in South African public schools. Teachers have different experiences with the type of CAPS training received. Findings revealed that teachers were in general, satisfied with the training received from the district and provincial officials from the Department. This implies that in many cases, the training was to equipped teachers with the knowledge and skills required for their practice which led to confidence and positive attitude. Congruent with the findings of this study, Du Plessis and Marais (2015) revealed

that participants were well-trained and had a clear understanding of the content for teaching.

Participants have touched on various aspects of the implementation of CAPS, as the policy outlines skills-driven, related content, and the complexity and pacing of the content related to a specific grade. The main initiative with CAPS was to move away from a theory-based curriculum and to implement a more skills-oriented curriculum (CAPS, 2011), whereby learners must be able to demonstrate the necessary skills at the end of each lesson. In so doing, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) state that teachers' professional development is an application of the theory, within a work-integrated learning environment that emphasises knowledge and skills. Kleickmann (2013) supports this view and underscores the importance of quality SCK to confirm that learners can fully grasp and understand the subject matter. A pivotal recommendation of Department is that Subject Advisors must assist principals and teachers in improving teaching and learning in schools (Smith, 2018), which aligns with Kelly and Cherkowski (2015), who highlighted that continuous teacher professional development is an augmentation of the knowledge and skills that equip teachers for effective instruction delivery in the LO classroom. Nationally, CAPS promotes the same content that teachers may teach as stipulated in the annual teaching plan (ATP); however, although the Department has specified subject matter assigned to a specific quarter, there is no rigid and structured sequence, but the content must be completed within that quarter (DBE, 2011). A lack of resources affects the effectiveness of a teacher's lessons and indeed, the resources available to enhance the learning process is a vital factor in determining learners' ability to learn. Teachers at such schools have low expectations of their learners which result in poor performance (Du Plessis & Marais, 2015), and in contrast, it seems that access to a range of resources can enhance academic performance (Jacobsohn, 2017). For teachers to be developed as experts in their subject, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) suggest this should be done through continuous professional development. One advantage the CAPS (DBE, 2011), is that it aligns the curriculum throughout South Africa ensuring that it is taught and assessed as the same time, as specified in the ATP.

Findings revealed that there were a variety of professional development opportunities. Some teachers received training once per quarter and others only as a once-off during an afternoon after school. Mouton and Malumbete (2023) contend that long-term professional development provides a platform for more time and that teachers can thoroughly learn about their practice. They further argue that training teachers quarterly in the clusters prepares them in advance for the quarter ahead. This assertion agrees with the view of Dhakal et al., (2024) who posits that CPTD can be useful if it is designed to be of a longer duration. Scholars share the same view on well-trained teachers. These researchers suggest that, despite some training being short-term (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), there is more value in long-term CPTD (Du Plessis & Marais, 2015), since it provides a stable learning environment (Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015) for teachers to develop expert SK and learn about their practice (Mouton & Malumbete, 2023).

The role that Subject Advisors played during the implementation phase was vital in that they facilitated workshops and other forms of training. This finding

supports previous research by Deliwe and Seabe (2022) who found that Subject Advisors are responsible for supporting curriculum implementation and providing school support visits to promote quality education. The findings revealed that teachers were satisfied with the quality of the in-service training received from the Subject Advisors. Training becomes worthwhile when teachers feel that they benefit from such training in such a way that they can apply the content in their teaching and learning, and not see it as an add on that increases their workload. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to join professional communities that can help not only to develop knowledge, but also to enhance professional development which plays an important role in CTPD. In view of the latter, scholars concur that the quality of training is a reflection of the SCK and PCK that subject advisors should have to effectively support and develop in-service teachers (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Stephan & Motlhabane, 2020; Seherrie, 2020). The participants acknowledge that Subject Advisors knew their subject content and were able to suggest a variety of methodological strategies to incorporate in the lesson plans. In addition, subject advisors portrayed positive attitudes, and instilled confidence in the teachers during the training sessions. Yulianti et al. (2022) confirm that teachers' self-esteem, personal beliefs concerning teaching, and professional growth were influenced by training for the implementation of CAPS. Therefore, the Subject Advisors' capabilities help to instil values that contribute to the holistic development of LO teachers and enable them to critically engage and be reflective practitioners (Jita & Mokhele, 2014). Referring to the values highlighted by Yulianti et al. (2022), the findings revealed that LO teachers developed trust and respect for Subject Advisors because of their expertise, efficiency and effectiveness during training (Akinyemi et al., 2020). This implies that collegial dialogue between Subject Advisors and LO teachers created a positive working relationship. Consequently, the training sessions inculcate a sense of willingness, honesty, and transparency between the Subject Advisors and LO teachers.

Finally, some challenges faced by teachers were identified during CAPS implementation in the LO classroom (Diale, 2016; Muller & Hoadley, 2019). The findings revealed that it was assumed that all qualified teachers were equipped to Life Orientation, not understanding the uniqueness of the subject which would require training to be effective. This assumption is confirmed by Burnett (2020) and Joubert (2023) who claim that LO teachers' position in the classroom is exacerbated by insufficient teacher training. This implies that teachers without sufficient training cannot do justice to the LO teaching and learning process as they are equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills and thus lack SCK and PCK. The view of Shulman (1986) is confirmed by Kleickmann et al. (2013), who indicates that in identifying a teacher's expertise can improve effective teaching performance with favourable goal-setting in the LO classroom. This suggests that LO teachers should be well-versed in all aspects of teaching and learning. These findings suggest that teachers must be trained to acquire the proper knowledge and skills to implement the curriculum efficiently (Mouton & Malumbete, 2023). SCK must continuously be improved because it forms the centre of professional knowledge, skills, and competencies teachers should acquire. The findings indicated that teachers were allocated to teach LO to fill their teaching timetables

even though they were not LO teachers. It can be deduced that this allocation has contributed to the poor quality of teaching and learning. This research argues, as stipulated in CAPS (DBE, 2011), school management teams must adhere to the provisions and requirements of subject time allocations and ensure that all subjects are treated equally. This finding aligns with that of Diale (2016) who asserted that the inadequate application of allocated time for LO may cause instability in the subject and that it has undermined the successful implementation of LO to achieve its educational goals. Modiba (2017) concurs by stating that the unevenly allocated time for LO results in the ineffectiveness of teachers and their negative attitude regarding the subject, which influences their teaching as a praxis. Despite the assumption that any teacher could teach LO and have insufficient training, it is evident that long-term CPTD can enhance and improve LO teachers' SCK and PCK to deliver quality teaching and to ensure the holistic development of learners (Swarts et al., 2019).

The findings revealed that overcrowded classes make it difficult to manage classes effectively (Hachem & Mayor, 2019). This situation is exacerbated by the school management teams (SMTs) not heeding their concerns. Hachem and Mayor (2019) report that this phenomenon is mainly due to the exponential increase of learners with a scarcity of specialist teachers to teach the subject. Another explanation is that overcrowded classrooms are a challenge to many teachers. Limited physical space and large class size will always cause challenges with instructional delivery and discipline (Khan & Iqbal, 2012; Marais, 2016; West & Meier, 2020).

## **6. Conclusion**

This study foregrounds the TLT where LO teachers transformed their teaching praxis during the training and implementation of CAPS and the SET which indicates teachers' self-efficacy during the implementation thereof. This article aimed to seek how the LO teachers narrate their lived experiences during the implementation of CAPS. Findings reveal that despite many challenges, LO Subject Advisors have played an important role in supporting LO teachers in the implementation of CAPS in schools. This training sessions allowed LO teachers to share their ideas, beliefs and experiences during their training which contributes to the literature regarding their CPD. Participants acknowledged that the training was effective and that there was an improvement in their SCK as well as their PCK. The findings showed that they regard the Subject Advisors as important role players in supporting them in their capacity as curriculum implementers. Finally, teachers highlighted the challenges they experienced. Although most were systemic problems, Subject Advisors could advise on how the teachers could mitigate such challenges.

Despite the value of this study, it had a few limitations. The ultimate approach of this study was qualitative in nature. This may have limited the findings' generalisability despite the in-depth insights. Since there was no quantitative data, the results may not be representative of all LO teachers. This study used a small sample of secondary school teachers, which may not represent the lived experiences across the districts and provinces in the country. The limited sample size may have an impact on the validity of the conclusions reached. Additionally,

this research impacted the practical enactment of the pedagogical magnitude and acknowledged possible prospects for further research.

Further research recommendations are based on the key findings and the gaps emanating from the literature. A mixed-methods design study of LO teachers' lived experiences on implementing CAPS compared to other school subjects, public and independent schools, could be conducted. Research based on the implementation of the LO/Life Skills curriculum of South Africa and that of countries abroad should be investigated. Student teachers should form part of the collaborative efforts between Department and Higher Education Institutions, and they should be included in the initial stages of implementing change in the curriculum. Unqualified teachers who are teaching LO at schools must be encouraged to enrol in short learning programmes. These teachers must be identified and undergo training during school holidays to accumulate CPTD points.

## 7. References

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