

Title: Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Mauritian primary schools : the role of learner-centred pedagogy in current educational reform

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Abstract:

This study examines the international transfer of learner-centred pedagogy as a means to improve the quality of teaching and learning in developing countries, with special reference to detailed fieldwork in the Small Island Developing State (SIDS) of Mauritius. Specifically, this case study critically examines a primary schooling initiative in Mauritius called 'Zones d'Education Prioritaires' (ZEP). This education reform was conceptualised in the light of international agendas calling for a Quality Education for All. Such initiatives often promote social justice for marginalised children through the integration of learner-centred pedagogy in schools and classrooms. This research investigates efforts to shift from formalistic to learner-centred pedagogy in the ZEP Initiative, with reference to the history of Mauritian education reforms, the evolution of ZEP policy, and a detailed and empirically grounded case study of one ZEP school. The study explores the successes achieved, along with the challenges and barriers encountered, in implementing learner-centred pedagogy in the Mauritian context. Fieldwork engaged directly with ZEP Initiative staff at the Mauritius Ministry of Education and Human Resources, support organisations present at ZEP schools, ZEP teachers, pupils, school administrators, and communities. The findings suggest that there is slow, but unsustainable, movement towards learner-centred pedagogy in the ZEP Initiative. Progress is restricted by hierarchical social norms that have perpetuated competition in the country's formalistic education system. The study's major findings indicate that sustainable progress may depend upon greater practical attention to quality-oriented policies and processes that underlie learner-centred pedagogy. In concluding, the study explores the implications of the research for the case study school, for the ZEP Initiative, for related government policy and practice, and for the theoretical literature on the international transfer of learner-centred pedagogy and educational reform processes in SIDS.