Involvement of Stakeholders in Curriculum Change at the Further Education and Training Level in the Vhembe District, Limpopo

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Accepted 1 December 2020

This qualitative study was undertaken to investigate the involvement of stakeholders in curriculum change at the Further Education and Training level in the Vhembe District, Limpopo, in the Republic of South Africa. Interview data were collected and used for themes identification. It emerged from the study that some of the major stakeholders were not adequately involved in the curriculum change processes; workshops that were conducted mostly for teachers were not sufficient for the teachers in implementing curricula in an effective way; other stakeholders were excluded in curriculum change; there is an inadequate support of the district to schools and school management and leadership has inappropriate skills. The study concluded that stakeholders should be involved in all spheres and processes of curriculum change and that curriculum change in South Africa should be devoid of racism, discrimination and inequalities. The article thus recommends the provision of capacity building workshops to the stakeholders who lack skills in curriculum change processes. There is an urgent need for the attendance of stakeholders in more curriculum-related workshops. It is further recommended that stakeholders should be involved more in curriculum change than at present.

Keywords: Change; curriculum change; involvement of stakeholders; stakeholders.


INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Curriculum change is not a smooth-sailing journey. Curriculum change is of national concern in South Africa, and the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province is not an exception. Countries worldwide have experienced changes to their curriculum and this has had an intense impact on the way in which it has been conceptualised and implemented (Horsthemke, Siyakwazi, Walton, and Wolhuter 2013). There is a need for involving all key stakeholders in all spheres of curriculum change. Involvement of stakeholders in previous curriculum changes was not satisfactorily. This was evidenced by Sinyosi (2015, 3) who confirmed that before 1994, there was no equality of educational opportunities for all children in South Africa. One may cite the fact that white learners were privileged to such an extent that most of the opportunities were given to them while black learners were excluded from most opportunities and equal education on account of their skin colour because of the apartheid philosophy. The education system under apartheid consisted of racially-segregated departments of education. In South Africa during the apartheid era, schools for white and black South Africans were...
completely segregated. In 1953, the government passed the Bantu Education Act to ensure that blacks received only enough education to perform manual labour. This called for curriculum changes in South Africa to address the education system which was characterised by racism, discrimination and inequalities. This inequality caused nationwide strikes and uprisings. The Soweto Uprising in 1976 was perhaps a watershed moment for the government, putting the focus fairly and squarely on education. As a result, young people and especially blacks demanded to be educated at the same level as the rest of the population so that they could secure jobs and a better life for themselves.

Curriculum transformation in South Africa has become the topic of much debate within the past 26 years. Sahlberg (2012, 1) is of the view that the neglect of the curriculum change process and stakeholders is the cause of many failed educational reform projects. “Curriculum change requires the input of different stakeholders such as teachers, school heads, parents, community members, students, district administrators and school boards” (Lumadi 2015, 29). Troudi and Alwan (2010, 117) state that stakeholders should be involved in current curriculum change initiatives through consultation, workshops, monitoring and supporting curriculum change, financial support and motivation. It appears that few stakeholders are maximally involved; some stakeholders are minimally involved whereas others are side-lined in curriculum change. “Most stakeholders are not qualified and have inadequate skills to participate in curriculum change. Their approach to participation in the curriculum change process is not well-defined and is very difficult, so they face many challenges regarding their involvement in curriculum change (Salter 2017, 1)”. As a teacher in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase of the school system in Vhembe District and an academic, I have noticed that stakeholders are not adequately involved in the curriculum change processes, some major stakeholders are excluded from the workshops and other stakeholders have few workshops designed for them. Again, it is a well-known fact that the degree of involvement by stakeholders in curriculum change is not the same. These are major problems throughout South Africa where very little has been done to address the problems since political independence in 1994. This qualitative study was undertaken to investigate the involvement of stakeholders in curriculum change at the Further Education and Training level in the Vhembe District, Limpopo, in the Republic of South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining curriculum change

“Curriculum change is a process of using resources effectively in order to improve curriculum (Yasmin, Rafiq and Ashraf 2013, 1)”. For the purpose of this study, curriculum change means moving from Bantu Education, to C2005 which was based on OBE, to the NCS and now to CAPS. Curriculum needs to be revised to consider the needs, learning styles, and different intelligences of our learners because society's values and needs change over time.

Current Involvement of Stakeholders in Curriculum Change in the Vhembe District

Learners

After the 1994 democratic elections, South Africa underwent many educational changes. “Learner participation in South Africa was legislated in 1996 through the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996)”. This legislation requires schools with Grade 8 or higher to elect a representative council of learners (RCL). Learners in the Vhembe District are involved in curriculum change through serving on the School Governing Bodies (SGBs). “It is noted that the RCL member in the SGB may not be in office for more than one year (RSA, 1996)”. Learners in Vhembe District are prohibited from discussing financial matters and teacher-related matters. Learners are involved in curriculum change minimally as they are side-lined during the discussions of some aspects of school affairs. “Curriculum experts have argued that curriculum-making either at the level of development, design, implementation or reformation needs the inputs of critical stakeholders if it is to be relevant, meaningful and adequate to meet the needs of people for whom it has been devised (Ahmadi and Lukman 2015, 29)”.

Parents

Since the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, according to Molukanele (1998, 18), parents should be involved in curriculum change through their representatives which, in the case of South Africa currently, is through the School Governing Bodies (SGBs). Involving parents in curriculum matters is not easy. Evidence was noted by (Okeke 2014, 5) who suggested that parents were not officially involved in any curriculum matters. Parents in the Vhembe District experience difficulties as they do not have much say over curriculum matters. Parents are largely uninformed about their functions, roles and responsibilities in the management of schools in the Vhembe District. The period for which parents serve in the Vhembe District indicates that parents are not involved to any great extent in curriculum change. Mncube (2009, 85) asserts that this
is because they lack the skills to do so. Parents rely on the school principals and teachers for leadership and guidance in decision-making about curriculum change. Parents are excluded from curriculum change as they are not professionals and they are also inexperienced in curriculum change. Some parents use the low level of education as a justification not to get involved in education. During the apartheid era, South African parents had little or nothing to say until their liberation came in 1994 when the concept of empowered parents was introduced. Eventually, the education system was democratised in the Constitution of South Africa to was introduced. Eventually, the education system was democratised in the Constitution of South Africa to strengthen the partnership cooperate governance among all the stakeholders in education and parents were given minimal platform in curriculum change.

**Teachers**

Teachers are involved in curriculum change in the Vhembe District through serving on the SGBs although they may only form a minority on the committee. Zeiger (2007, 1) asserts that, although teachers can have input into curriculum change, their involvement appears to be minimal, but Malambo (2012, 10) notes that even in the most democratic classrooms, teachers have more influence than learners because they are responsible for what goes on when learners are with them, setting the pace, evaluating the process and deciding whether learners should pass or fail. Teachers know best what the curriculum implementation is all about as they interact directly with learners in the teaching and learning process, yet they do not have much say in the process of curriculum development and the changes thereafter (Raselimo and Wilmot 2013, 5; Onojerena 2014, 5). Charema (2010) asserts that it is important to include the teachers in the planning and development of that process. Unfortunately, teachers are not often involved in that process even though they are the ones expected to implement educational practice—a situation that could adversely affect the intended outcomes of that process. Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe (2011, 317), note that teachers need support to implement the curriculum. It would be a grossly unfair to expect teachers to implement the curriculum maximally if they have not been properly prepared to do so, or if they do not have sufficient Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM).

**School Principals**

School principals do not get the needed support from the district with regard to managing the implementation of curriculum. Mafora and Phorabotha (2013, 123) contend that school principals get no systematic support and follow-through from education authorities with regard to managing curriculum change implementation. Evidence confirms that district leadership matters when it comes to driving curriculum reforms as well as improving schools and student learning (Fullan 2016, 542). Furthermore, school principals do not have appropriate management skills to manage their schools effectively. This is evidenced by Naidoo (2014, 1) who points out that school principals need to be properly trained and skilled in school management but they are faced with a challenge to motivate the staff to accept the envisaged change. According to Badugela (2012, 10), school principals are not well-trained to manage curriculum change. It is crystal clear that school principals are involved in curriculum change minimally.

Game Theory of Participation (GTP) and Stakeholder Theory were used as theoretical frameworks. GTP was originally developed in the field of economics to describe social interactions (Chiong and Jovanovic 2012, 83). Stakeholder Theory was originally developed by Freeman (1984:46). I find these theories relevant for this article in the sense that, in GTP, the players in a game are those people or things that make decisions that affect the outcome of a game (Chiong and Jovanovic 2012, 83). The players are the government, curriculum planners, educators and other stakeholders like parents. As in any game, there are certain rules that should be known beforehand or possibly negotiated by the players, and each player takes up a position. In the curriculum change game, everyone is on the same team, working towards the goal of transformation. “In the curriculum change game, everyone is on the same team, working towards the goal of transformation. It is particularly problematic if curriculum changes are imposed on educators and the rules are not negotiated up front (Bertram, 2011).” Curriculum change which is drafted by curriculum experts appointed by the government, which educators ought to follow without question, can be imposed on educators. This creates a confrontational atmosphere in the game, where not everyone is working towards the goal because it has not been negotiated ahead of time. Some stakeholders will simply remain spectators, sitting on the side-lines, and some people will not get “tickets to the game” at all, so to speak; for example, the youth or learners.

 Learners have, inadvertently, been side-lined when it comes to the kind of curriculum that will equip them with employable skills. The cultures and traditions of black people were omitted from previous curriculum change initiatives. The colonialisists destroyed African culture by introducing their own way of life in Africa. Some key education stakeholders such as black parents were excluded from the planning, creation and implementation phases of previous curriculum changes (Seroto 2004, 88). Parents and SGB members are also minimally involved in the institutions where curriculum change is occurring because of their lack of educational
qualifications or experience which they clearly do not have to manage the schools. Stakeholder theory is thus applicable in this study because some role players have been left out of the “game” and, if they were included, it might well change the outcomes. In the educational milieu, this would mean that all stakeholders such as teachers, school principals and parents should be involved together with the regulatory authorities in decision-making about educational matters, such as curriculum change. A primary stakeholder would be the DBE which is responsible for monitoring and supporting curriculum change. Society is, however, directly impacted by curriculum change.

METHODOLOGY

Interpretivism was adopted as the underpinning philosophy for the study. A qualitative phenomenological design was used and produced a large amount of data that had to be analysed. The population in this study comprised all teachers, learners, school principals and SGB members. Since there is rarely enough time or money to gather information from everyone in population the goal therefore becomes finding a representative sample of that population (Khan Academy 2018, 1). Purposive sampling was used to select five school principals as they are curriculum managers. Ten secondary school teachers at the FET level (Grades 10-12) were selected considering their assumed knowledge of the involvement of stakeholders in curriculum change and the fact that they are teaching at the FET level (Grades 10-12). Five of these ten teachers came from the lowest-performing school (labelled School A) and the other five came from the highest-performing school (labelled School B). The researcher also purposively selected fifteen parents taking into account that they were from two schools in the Vhembe District, either School A or School B. Parents from School A were interviewered using individual interviews and a focus-group discussion was held with parents from School B. Four learners were purposively selected from two secondary schools, in the Vhembe District from School A and School B. They were also selected in this study as they were the Chairpersons and Secretaries of the Representatives Council of Learners coming from the FET level (Grades 10-12). The samples were chosen because of their professional roles, expertise, experience and knowledge they possessed, that made them to be information-rich participants of this study. They were capable of making informed independent decisions to participate or not.

Data Collection and Analysis

Considering that qualitative interviews are an attempt to understand the world from the participant’s point of view (Strydom 2011, 342) this study employed interviews and specifically semi-structured interviews to enhance the reliability of the study. This study used individual interviews and focus-group discussions. The discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. There were two phases of focus-group discussions in this process. In the first phase, the researcher organised the focus groups and gave the participants information with regard to the research. The focus group comprised eight participants (8 SGB members) from School A which had the lowest Grade 12 pass rate in 2018 in the Vhembe District. In the second phase, the focus group comprised seven SGB members from School B which had the highest Grade 12 pass rate in 2018 in the Vhembe District.

In interviews analysis can be done through coding (Alshenqeeti 2014, 41). I derived categories from emergent themes within an understanding of the participant’s view point of the context. I noticed and identified features through an interpretive process whereby data and categories emerged simultaneously with successive experience. Guided by the foregoing this study utilised a coding system to analyse data collected from interviews. The purpose was to reduce the amount of data into usable and useful information and to compare data across similar incidents. This information was sorted and the interpretivist nature of the study allowed for interpretation of words of the participants. I read and re-read the text to divide data into meaningful analytical units. I examined verbatim transcripts of the interviews, re-read the text and listened to the tape recording. The procedure of coding assisted me to identify similarities or consistencies across all transcripts. To determine why there were differences in responses provided during interviews, I read the words and the terms of the participants and categorised them into themes. The process continued until all common and different patterns of the interviews were compared with each other. The analysis in this study depended on saturation whereby, according to Thorne (2017, 1) additional interview is not believed to add any new information. I compared the findings of the interviews with the findings of literature review and discussed the differences between them. Finally I wrote a complete report and the report was in narrative and not in figures because this study was guided by qualitative methodology.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussions were summarised in five themes for the study: The different degree of involvement in curriculum change by stakeholders; minimal involvement in past curriculum change initiatives; inadequate involvement of stakeholders in current curriculum change initiatives; lack of a sense of ownership of curriculum change and
involvement of stakeholders in some spheres of curriculum change processes.

Theme 1: The different degree of involvement in curriculum change by stakeholders

It emerged from the study that the degree of involvement by stakeholders in curriculum change is not the same. This is in line with the following responses: SP1 [School principal no.1] said: “The teachers play the key role in the implementation of policies relating to curriculum change in the classrooms is of great value. Teachers are doing their tasks in the implementation of curriculum change with great distinction”. SP2 responded in this fashion: “Curriculum change requires the input of different stakeholders. SGB members must know the curricula of schools but they are not involved more in curriculum changes. Learners and parental involvement in curriculum changes are to a lower degree. The government is the key driver of curriculum change.”

TE1 [Teacher no.1] confirmed this by responding that: “Curriculum can be interpreted in the classrooms by the teachers as they are the key education stakeholders”. TE2 had the following to say: “The level of monitoring and supporting curriculum change by the government at school level is low and not satisfactory”.

The preceding responses are an indication that the level of involvement in curriculum change by stakeholders in the Vhembe District varies. Curriculum change needs the input of different key stakeholders. The interpretation is that teachers and school principals must not be left out during curriculum change as they are the chief implementers of the change. What is evident from the above remarks is that the government is the key driver of curriculum change. The monitoring and supporting curriculum change is of great value.

The responsibility of the government must to see to it that the planned curriculum change is implemented successfully at school level.

Theme 2: Minimal involvement in past curriculum change initiatives

It emerged from the study that during the colonial era, stakeholders were minimally involved in curriculum change. The findings also established that formal education was mainly provided by missionaries or by the government of the day (i.e. the colonialists). Again, the findings indicated that, prior to 1994, the curriculum in South Africa was characterised by racism, discrimination and inequalities and ignored the culture of black Africans.

HPS [SGB from highest performing school] said: “The colonialists were in charge of the curriculum. Curricula for blacks were inferior”. SP1 revealed that: “Curricula were in the hands of the whites and black people were involved to a lesser extent in curricula.” TE4 had the following to say: “Ok….there was no equality of educational opportunity and the culture of blacks were destroyed by the colonialists”. TE5 responded: “White learners benefited from formal education in South Africa”. SP2 indicated: “I think school principals are moderately involved in the curriculum development process since we are occasionally called upon to attend seminars on the same”. The majority of the school principals indicated that their level of involvement in the curriculum development process is very low as one of these respondents (SP3) indicates:

‘Something is not just right in our education system. School principals are supposed to oversee curriculum implementation in their respective schools and yet their participation in the entire curriculum development process is very low at best and none at all at worst...how do you oversee the implementation of a process you are not conversant with....something needs to be done with the minimum of delay’.

From the above responses and quotes, one can argue that formal education was dominated by the missionaries or by the government of the day (i.e. the colonialists). It can be noticed that stakeholders were side-lined in curriculum related issues by the government of the day. Contemporary curriculum development processes should involve more frequently public discussions and consultations with a range of stakeholders, and the curriculum has to progressively evolve into a topic of debate engaging policy-makers, curriculum experts,

Theme 3: Inadequate involvement of stakeholders in current curriculum change initiatives

The study found that the government conducted workshops that were not up to standard. The study revealed that school principals are ill-informed about curriculum change. It was pointed out that the district officials are not qualified to train schools. Findings from interviews with stakeholders indicated that the level of stakeholders’ involvement in curriculum changes through consultation is minimal. It was also reported by teachers during interviews that consultation of stakeholders was not often done. To validate the above assertion, SP1 indicated: “I think school principals are inadequately involved in the curriculum development process since we are occasionally called upon to attend seminars and workshops”. TE2 revealed that: “Consultation of stakeholders is not regularly done in order to make sure there will be successful involvement of stakeholders in
Theme 4: Lack of a sense of ownership of curriculum change

All the participants agreed that there are challenges in promoting a sense of belonging and ownership of curriculum change. From the data collected with the interviews, stakeholders wanted to have a say in any envisaged curriculum change. TE1 said: “Teachers cannot experience ownership of curriculum change. Teachers were not involved earlier in curriculum change at the planning stages. It was found that stakeholders could not be given a sense of ownership and they can be proud of the curriculum change they can be producing”. SP2 added: “The curriculum change that will be implemented in classrooms can belong to the stakeholders not the government’s or department’s curriculum change but stakeholders lack a sense of ownership of curriculum change”. TE2 responded in this way: “OK... stakeholders can be involved in curriculum change to have a say in the curriculum change”. SP3 responded this way: “Teachers made decision for the implementation of curriculum change in the classroom level”.

From the above responses by school principals and teachers, it appears that stakeholders cannot experience ownership of curriculum change. One may argue that the curriculum change that can be developed can belong to teachers and school principals. Based on the preceding response, it is clear that the argument might be that stakeholders need to be involved in curriculum change and have a say about it. Zeiger (2007) points out that drafting a curriculum is a highly specialised and professional task which needs the involvement of teachers and head teachers to give professional input.

Theme 5: Involvement of stakeholders in some spheres of curriculum change processes

Findings from interviews with stakeholders are not involved in all spheres of curriculum change processes. Furthermore, it emerged from interviews with stakeholders that school principals and teachers are more involved in the implementation phase of curriculum change than in the planning phase. LPS said: “Teachers are instructed to implement curriculum change at school level. Learners have insufficient skills and they take curriculum change as it is.” HPS responded in this way: “There are serious gaps in the provision of equipping the illiterate people in the district with skills in order to pursue their careers. SP1 had the following to say: “The government or DBE should monitor and support curriculum change in all levels.” SP2 stated: “The inclusion of indigenous knowledge in South African curriculum should be emphasised. Again, the exclusion of some stakeholders in curriculum change should be stopped”. As a complement to the above, one school principal (SP3) responded in the following way: “Stakeholders should be involved in all spheres of curriculum change to a greater extent”.

From the responses and the quotes above, it would appear that revisiting of the current curriculum is needed in order to involve all stakeholders in all spheres of curriculum change. It appears that stakeholders are not involved in all spheres of curriculum change processes.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded that generally stakeholders are not adequately involved in the curriculum change process in the Vhembe District. Stakeholders in the Vhembe District should join hands and become involved more in curriculum change. Training of stakeholders should be adequate and competent district officials should become the facilitators in monitoring and supporting curriculum change at school level. The repetition of similar answers by different participants proved to me that the instruments I used were valid for the purpose of this study. The instruments I used to interview participants did not disappoint me – it was suitable and reliable. During interviews, this study produced similar results from different participants; therefore, this study is valid and reliable.
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The restricting of the study to five secondary schools in the Vhembe District was a potential limitation to the generalisation of findings. A further research will be required to involve stakeholders in curriculum change from all districts of the Limpopo Province in South Africa. The financial implications of the study were fairly high, which inhibited extensive travelling to distant schools. I made efforts to source funding so that financial constraints did not affect the study negatively. Information from the participants may also be biased, not well reconstructed or may give inaccurate accounts of the existing situations. To ensure that such eventualities did not distort the study findings, data obtained from different sources was corroborated through the triangulation of interviews and focus group discussions. The study may be constrained by using qualitative method as the research approach. To overcome this challenge, I called on my experience in previous research and made a concerted effort to develop my skills in qualitative research to ensure the study remained focused on solving the research problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

• Learners, teachers, SGB members and school principals should be more involved in curriculum change than at present as it was found that some stakeholders are not adequately involved in the process of curriculum changes that have taken place in the past and some key education stakeholders were side-lined in curriculum change.
• Learners, teachers, SGB members and school principals should be involved to a greater level in all spheres and processes of curriculum change as it appears some of the stakeholders are simply forced to implement curriculum change in the district without any prior consultation and extensive experience.
• Stakeholders should attend more curriculum-related workshops as the study found that although there were some workshops that were conducted mostly for teachers; they did not help the teachers to implement the curricula effectively. Capacity building workshops should be provided to stakeholders who lack skills in curriculum change processes.
• Monitoring and supporting curriculum change should be done regularly by competent school principals and the district officials. District officials should also be capacitated to make sure that school principals attend workshops in order to acquire suitable skills in the management and implementation of curriculum change.

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