

Implementation of the South African National Curriculum: The Educators' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitude held by educators in the implementation process of the South African national curriculum; Outcomes-Based Education system (OBE), since inception until present day. From the inquiry by The Department of Education (DoE), it was shown that educators are still struggling to implement the new curriculum. In order to get the views of the educators which are of great importance, a survey was conducted. This was achieved by administering a questionnaire to a random sample of schools to 60 educators. Of this number 11 are male and 49 are female. The study has made it known that although the majority of educators view the implementation of OBE positively; they still struggle to implement OBE successfully. From the major findings, it was recommended that the continuous professional development training and support programmes; (workshops and seminars), which prepare educators to use OBE, should be offered over a long period a time and a related follow-up occurrences be given, to reinforce the learnt knowledge and skills. The amount of time should ensure that educators are equipped with adequate knowledge and skills to understand educational policies, to translate the curriculum into programmes of teaching and learning. Furthermore the findings of the survey have shown the need for ongoing professional training and support programmes to be offered on a regular basis as a priority to the successful implementation of OBE. This kind of support strategy would enable educators to improve their professional competence and ensure the successful implementation of OBE in South Africa. It was further suggested that themes for workshops and seminars should focus on addressing educational issues which educators experience as variables that hamper the successful implementation of OBE. Training personnel (subject advisors), should be well equipped to train, if quality education is to be sustained in South Africa as well as in the African continent. The study recommends the provision of well restructured continuing professional and support programmes to enable them provide quality education and prepare South African learners to cope with challenges in the 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

When democracy was declared in 1994 South Africa entered into a new era (Landsberg, 2005). Subsequently, the Government of National Unity (GNU) adopted and implemented a new curriculum; OBE, to strengthen the transformation agenda. In line with section 4 of the National Education Policy Act of 1996 (NEPA), the education system in South Africa also changed; Outcomes-based education (OBE) was adopted and implemented to achieve lifelong learners (DoE, 2002). The curriculum changed from traditional methods of teaching; which were teacher-centered and emphasized rote learning, and adopted the current teaching practices, emphasizing learner-centeredness, critical thinking and problem solving skills (Chisholm, 2001 & 2003).

The evolutionary sequence in the new curriculum from OBE, C2005, RNCS and NCS gives evidence of the considerable changes which the South African education system underwent; to fill in gaps identified in the implementation process of OBE (Pudi, 2006). Educators were presented with a number of challenges which they needed to address in order to provide quality education. Amongst all the challenges, all educators in South Africa were primarily invited to use OBE and learner-centered teaching approaches to teaching and learning (Kwazulu-Natal, DoE, 2003). The primary aim of OBE is to rectify inadequate educational practices of the past; and equip the South African citizenry with employable skills, to cope with challenging issues in the 21st century (Sarinjeve, 2009). The adoption and implementation of OBE meant change of attitude to all South Africans.

The implementation of OBE marked a significant era in the South African education system with regards to change (Jansen, 1999a & b). Numerous studies which were undertaken to investigate how the curriculum is being implemented, singled out certain issues and challenges in the South African education system which hampers the successful implementation of OBE (DoE, 1997a & b). In line with the transformation agenda, it was envisaged that the process of change would help bring about change in the teaching and learning practices. The whole process meant that educators and learners should undergo a paradigm shift in order to cope mentally with challenges awaiting them in the work place (DoE, 2002).

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF OBE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Professional competence

Issues regarding the implementation process of OBE arrived when South Africa and the African continent at large are faced with systemic challenges in education (Manganyi, 2001); that should be effectively addressed to ensure quality education for all. Since inception, educators found the principles of implementing the South African OBE demanding. Educators in Limpopo; South Africa, where this study was conducted, viewed the transformation process as frightening and uncertain (Smit, 2001) Evidence of fear, demotivation, stress, resistance and disempowerment, are noticeable in their teaching practices and threatened the successful implementation of OBE. This fear culminated in incidence where some educators; particularly those who were approaching retirement age, ended up opting for severance packages (Lemmer & Badenhorst, 1997).

Education policies (DoE, 2000), require educators to understand key educational policies; and develop learning programmes that translate into classroom practices to enable them use OBE. This exercise laid a further strain on the shoulders of educators who should operate in line with the teaching principles of OBE such as group work, active learning and problem solving, because educators should be professionally competent to be able to design their individual to do likewise. However, in order to accomplish the necessary competence, educators need to be trained and equipped with relevant knowledge and skills to implement the new curriculum effectively (Killen, 2006)., Niemand & Monyai (2006) corroborate that educators in South Africa need to alter their traditional teaching practices; and use OBE to support the needs of learners, and enable all learners to access quality education (DoE, 2002:4) as lifelong learners. In addition; the skill to design learning programmes would enable educators in Limpopo; South Africa become competitive in global issues in education and qualify as the “new” teacher (Lemmer & Badenhorst, 1997).

It is assumed that teachers have the requisite knowledge and pedagogical skills to implement the South African national curriculum effectively in their areas of specialization (Killen, 2006). Furthermore, effective curriculum implementation is dependent on variables such as availability of competent educators, adequate resource provision, suitable infrastructure, and effective supervision among others (DoE, 2000). In response to the critical need for the “new” teacher, this study focused on identifying variables that contributes towards the success and failure of the implementation process of OBE. The study would therefore investigate and find out how educators in Limpopo understand and use OBE.

However, recently, inquiries particularly from DoE have shown that the way the new curriculum was being implemented left a lot to be desired (DoE, 2002). The C20005 review committee (source) seems to suggest that among other things teachers were struggling to implement the new curriculum (Pandor, 2008). The DoE further attributes poor implementation to inadequate resources, lack of on-going curriculum support, unsuitable infrastructure, teachers' incompetence to understand the outcome based concepts (<http://www.pmg.org.za/report/200080527-briefing-department-education-teacher-supply>) In response to these implementation shortcomings the DoE adopted some measures to rectify the situation. The department has provided teachers with the support required to understand the principles and methods to implement the curriculum effectively (DoE, 2002).

Training, monitoring and support

Although educators are considered as vital agents of transformation and economic growth in South Africa, if they are not given sufficient professional grounding and support to deal with the changing demands of implementing OBE effectively (Kwazulu-Natal DoE, 2003), change would be difficult to achieve.

However, it is a matter of concern to realize that the good intentions from DoE, of developing a new national curriculum as an instrument to prepare South African children to cope with challenges in the 21st century are not realized as envisaged. The nature of teacher training and curriculum support in which educators are given adequate training and support for curriculum delivery; should support good classroom practices in various schools, to increase chances of success.

The position regarding the implementation of OBE in South Africa shows a different situation. Various scholars indicate that educators in South Africa were not given sufficient training to assist them implement OBE successfully. Most of the workshop training sessions they attended lasted for two weeks only even one day to a lesser extent. The experiences gained from this nature of training are usually short-lived (Source). The training component which is not intensively managed to a certain extent becomes "a nightmare" to educators and they eventually feel like (Jansen) that OBE will not succeed and become frustrated. According to Roger & Grayson (2003), a considerable amount of resources, time & effort were put to waste since well-intentioned policies were never translated into classroom reality. To concur, the researcher argue that educators indeed need extensive training and ongoing support which should be gradually introduced to assist them adapt to the new approach if educational policies are to be successfully translated into classroom practices.

Research has shown that there is a great need to strengthen teacher training programmes (workshops and seminars) which prepare and support educators to implement OBE effectively. Professor Kader Asmal, the previous minister of education, strongly supported the idea of strengthening the implementation process of OBE through intensive training of educators to equip them with adequate knowledge and skills to develop teaching and learning activities (source). The training programmes should be last for a long period of time and should be coupled with regular and ongoing monitoring and support strategies at all times (source) to ensure provision for quality education because they would last for longer.

Changes to the curriculum, are occurring at all levels of schooling in the South African classrooms (Kennedy, 1996). The successful implementation of education policies is dependent on the participation of educators who are often regarded as “silent implementers”. Research has further shown that the educators’ voices are seldom heard in issues pertaining to educational matters in South Africa. The non participation of educators in issues that affect their professionalism hampers educator’s enthusiasm (Smith 2001).

To elaborate on the need for curriculum support to educators, when the overall performance of poor matric results was identified in South Africa; particularly schools from Limpopo, it was found that learners are not able to read, write and count at expected levels, and are unable to execute tasks that demonstrate key skills associated with Literacy and Numeracy (Government gazette, 2008). The issues of poor performance as indicated in this aspect were attributed to the fact that educators at times tended to misinterpret the related policies.

Policy developers need to realize that the implementation of policies are demanding on educators in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes which should be understood and would always be understood in different contexts. (Smith 2001). Perhaps it is imperative that educators be regarded as partners in education instead of silent implementers of policies. Their experiences at classroom level should inform themes for engagement during workshop and seminar training. Furthermore, their experiences of good classroom practices could be used as terms of reference which could be shared among educators and assist the address problems encountered in teaching and learning (Pandor, 2008).

In response to the shortcomings, which were identified as variables that hamper the successful implementation of OBE, the national education department adopted policies as support strategies to enable educators implement the curriculum effectively and ensure quality education for all (DoE, 1997 a & b). The question remains, do educators in South Africa have the capability of translating the curriculum into good classroom practices?

Support Strategies

The attention OBE have been receiving; attracted scholars worldwide; to critically analyze how global issues that hamper the successful implementation of OBE could be addressed (Lemmer & Badenhorst, 1997). In response to challenges facing the South African education system, DoE adopted a variety of education policies to restructure classroom practices. According to Smit, (2001), educators need to be supported in order to enhance their professional competence and improve learner performance (government gazette vol.513, no 30880). The transformation process affected the role of educators (DoE) to a great extent.

Pudi (2006) shows; those educators are supposed to become an integral part in the implementation process of curriculum system, to support change effectively. In view of the foregoing discussion, educators should be trained and equipped with knowledge and skills to understand educational policies into classroom practices. Perhaps the resistant and reluctant behaviour to implement OBE, of educators in South Africa could be attributed to the issue of exclusion (DoE, 2003).

Education policies; norms and standards for educators (government gazette 2000) are a strategy which requires all educators to acquire every role of the educator as indicated in the policy from an integrative approach.

The contents of the education policy; foundations for learning campaign (government gazette vol.513, no 30880), have been developed as a call to all educators to engage in actively in curriculum development issues; and enable educators to understand and design learning programmes and materials for teaching and learning (Continuous Professional Development and Support <http://www.icce.org.za/Documents/CPDS-doc.htm>).

Provision of Resources

Almost all NRCS curriculum documents developed by DoE national, which provides information and guidelines regarding OBE as well as its implementation, are presented in technical language which teachers find difficult to understand ([http:// www.geolities.com/Athens/Delph/4368/c4obe.html](http://www.geolities.com/Athens/Delph/4368/c4obe.html)) Although DoE developed NRCS curriculum documents to teach educators about the new curriculum, very little information in the documents is given to assist them to understand how to use OBE successfully in their respective schools. Furthermore, RNCS curriculum documents are not easily accessible to some of the teachers particularly in the rural areas such as Limpopo.

Lack of adequate resources create tension and strain to teachers who are required to use NRCS curriculum material in their respective schools; like textbooks and teachers' guides, which were developed by individuals with inadequate competence regarding the eight Learning Areas from the OBE curriculum package (teachers Anonymous, 2008).

Educators are further required to work in crowded classrooms where the principles of group work, individual attention and cannot be successfully implemented. It is imperative that provision for well-resourced schools, with basic needs such as running water, electricity and libraries be made available even in the rural areas of South Africa where the study was undertaken to improve teaching and learning. (DoE). If needs are priorities in South Africa, and in Africa at large, the challenges facing the education system will gradually improve and OBE will be successfully implemented.

Methodology

This study used a survey design to obtain a representative sample from primary schools in Limpopo; Vhembe district. The survey was an economical means for the researcher to reach a large number of participants within a short space of time.

Participants

A sample of 60 participants was randomly selected from the sampled schools. Out of the total, 11 males and 49 females participated in the study. All educators from the reception class (grades R) to grade seven were invited to participate. Furthermore the participants were all primary school educators and have been using OBE in their respective schools; Limpopo in South Africa.

The purpose of this study was clearly explained in the introduction stage of the questionnaire to clear any false impressions from participants (Macmillan & Schumacher. Data were statistically analyzed by a statistician at the University of Venda using the (SPSS) package.

Data collection instrument

A questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument. Participants were asked not to write their names on the questionnaire to guarantee anonymity. The self employed questionnaire contained a cluster of structured statements which allowed participants to rank items positively, to agree or disagree regarding how teachers in Limpopo understand and use OBE (De Vos, 2002).

The questionnaire was developed and pilot- tested with 10 teachers from the same area; schools in Limpopo, who were not participating in the study. The piloting was done to identify area of weaknesses and increase the accuracy from findings of this study (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2006). After a modification of phrasing from two questions was made; the questionnaire was adopted and ready to be administered.

Procedure

Prior to the distribution of questionnaires, permission to carry out the study was sought from the district office. Letters explaining the purpose of the study were sent to principals from participating schools before the actual date of the survey to arrange a convenient time to administer the questionnaire. The researcher personally delivered and collected questionnaires to ensure that all respondents returned the questionnaire guided by (Babbie, 1998). A high rate of response was guaranteed in this study since almost all educators completed and returned the questionnaire (100%).

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The results were presented and interpreted in tables as indicated below:

Table 1. Teachers in Limpopo have been trained to use OBE in their daily teaching experiences.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	11	19.0	19.0	19.0
Agree	33	56.9	56.9	75.9
Disagree	11	19.0	19.0	94.8
Strongly disagree	3	5.2	5.2	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Results from table 1 shows that the majority of educators from schools in Limpopo; a cumulative percent of 75.9% agree that they been trained to use OBE.

Table 2. I understand the RNCS policy documents.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	6	10.3	10.3	10.3
Agree	39	67.2	67.2	77.6
Disagree	11	19.0	19.0	96.6
Strongly disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0	

From table 2, the results indicate that almost all teachers from schools in Limpopo agree that they understand the RNCS curriculum documents.

Table 3. The Limpopo DoE should provide ongoing curriculum evaluation and support to ensure the successful implementation of OBE.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	30	51.7	51.7	51.7
Agree	20	34.5	34.5	86.2
Disagree	6	10.3	10.3	96.6
Strongly disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0	

As it is shown from table 3 above, a high percentage of the participants from the sample, a cumulative percentage of (86.2 %) agreed that Limpopo DoE should provide ongoing curriculum evaluation and support.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The results have been divided into the following broad categories:

In order to understand the responses of the participants; the biographical details should be provided. A total sample of 60 educators participated; 11 males (17.2%) and 49 females, (82.8%) of the sample completed the questionnaire. The majority of educators speak Tshivenda at home (93.1%); in general, all participants are experienced educators (67.2%) more than half of the sample. The majority (48.3%), of the total sample have been teaching for more than 21 years. A significant proportion of a cumulative percentage (36.2%) work in crowded classrooms and are trained to teach in the Foundation Phase (65.5%) where the foundation for further learning is laid. In the second phase of the questionnaire; participants responded to questions indicating how OBE is implemented in South Africa. The questionnaire focused on gathering information regarding how primary school educators from sampled schools understand and implement OBE. Critical questions from the questionnaire tried to establish whether educators from the sample are able to use OBE competently. A high rate of the participants, a cumulative percent (75.9%) agreed that they have been trained to use OBE. More than half of the sample agreed that they understand key educational policies (58.6%). Finally, a significant proportion of the participants, a cumulative of (86.2%) indicated that they need ongoing curriculum support to ensure the successful implementation of OBE.

Educators' professional competence to engage in professional responsibilities adequately emerged as one of the critical variables that determines the success and failure of implementing the curriculum. A cumulative percentage (77.6%) indicated that they understand the RNCS policy documents. The results presented from table1, confirmed that there is a great need to strive for professional competency from educators in South Africa. Fewer educators, which is less than half of sample (48.3%) who participated in the survey rated have shown that they can effectively engage in their professional responsibility because they lack adequate skills to do so. One may argue that adequate skills would be achieved through teacher programmes. The majority of educators (75.9%) viewed the OBE training programmes positively. Despite the positive attitude educators showed towards the preparation strategies, Curriculum monitoring and support was highly rated, (86.2%) as an indication that it should be offered at regular intervals to increase its validity.

It should be noted that the participants who completed the sample were representative of the wider population of educators in South Africa who have been implementing OBE. Their professional competence in using OBE should therefore be considered as valid indicators of how educators in South Africa view and understand OBE.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of the study was to investigate how educators in South Africa understand and use OBE. From the findings of this study; three critical issues emerged as variables hampering the successful implementation of OBE. Lack of resources; educators who lack professional competence; and inefficient framework of continuing professional development and support programmes; which would equip educators with hands-on skills to translate the curriculum into classroom practices. The study has shown that educators struggle to implement OBE because the training they receive was not sufficient to enable them understand and use OBE. The response from the majority of educators in the sample has shown that there is a need for extensive well structured training by the Limpopo DoE to prepare them adequately to understand and use OBE (Chisholm, 2000).

The demographic information of the participants indicated that educators from the sample work in crowded classrooms. OBE teaching strategies; such as group work, role playing, to name a few, need to be exercised enough space to allow active and maximum participation of all learners. Inadequate provision of resources hampers the successful implementation (DoE, 2008).

In order to find appropriate solutions to address some of the challenges that render the implementation process of OBE ineffective, the teacher's attitudes from this study with regard to training programmes; should be considered, to strengthen the framework for the existing in-service programmes; and sustain quality education for all, as envisaged in all schools across South Africa and Africa at large (Smit, 2001). This is echoed by (Killen, 2007), stating that the envisaged framework should give educators the opportunity to engage in a wide-range of practical skills/ hands-on- skills; one of the rare skills the "new" would need educator need to become well grounded in the knowledge, skills, values as well as procedures and principles required in their field of specialization.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research confirms that change depends on the professional competence of educators (Sarason 1971; Fullan 1982; Msila 2001; Pudi 2002).the study has shown that educators in South Africa are struggling to implement OBE. Educators should be seen as an integral part of the implementation of OBE and fostering educational change; seeking for the "new" teacher in South Africa and the African continent at large (Pudi, 2006). From the findings as indicated above, it is evident that retraining and re-skilling programmes should be intensified to enhance the professional competence of educators in South Africa. The study further indicated that the continuing professional development and support programmes should be strategically structured and planned to meet the changing needs of the country (Kwazulu-Natal DoE, 2003). In order to understand and use OBE successfully, educators need to be extensively trained and equipped with knowledge and skills of the new curriculum which would enable them to design learning programmes that address the needs of all learners (Pudi, 2006).

The study recommends that educators in South Africa should be extensively trained extensively trained to understand and use OBE. Furthermore, the study recommends that the continuing professional development and support programmes; both in-service and pre- service programmes should be strategically structured and planned; and offered on a regular basis to increase their professional competence (Kwazulu-Natal DoE, 2003). This study was limited to schools in Limpopo; South Africa. Opportunities for future research on the successful implementation of OBE in South Africa and the African continent at large are recommended.

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