

Exploration of Involvement of Educators' in Strategic Planning Sessions of their Department

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Abstract: Educators are in the “coal-front” of teaching and learning in all schools and they therefore are key in curriculum delivery. They are at the level that drives the direction of education in terms of quality production. They are however less considered in departmental strategic planning sessions, the fora that gives the strategic direction education has to take. This leaves them with hard work to teach and develop the learners but not aware of the strategic vision, mission and goals of the education sector. This is despite that they have to be capacitated with government priorities related to education in each period of an administration as part of them changing with the Medium term strategic Frame Works (MTSF). This qualitative study used data collected from secondary sources, interviews and observations and realised that in many ways educators are not guided by priorities of government and the department in line with the MTSF as they are mostly denied opportunity to be engaged in effective levels of strategic planning. This has impact on quality of education received by the learners in particular responding to the socio-economic needs in their country. It creates disparities between the hard work educators do in classes and the expected impact. The study recommend that the educators are prioritized in terms of becoming active participants of during strategic planning in their departments.

Keywords: Impact Statement, Vision, Mission, Outcomes, Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

The priorities of government are developed at strategic levels of different departments. This can be at highest offices of such departments where few people with position of authorities are invited. These people look at the government long term plans such as the NDP 2030, African Agenda, Millennium Development Goals, sector priorities and then develop impact statement, vision, mission and outcomes and other key strategies that will direct how in a period of five years matters will be handled in a way that they will produce maximum impact at the end of the specific Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), a term of 5 years in South Africa.

However, it can be argued that educators, people at front seat of teaching and learning are often left behind and therefore do not get chance to understand MTSF priorities of the government and the priorities of the department as they do not become active participants in the provincial education strategic planning sessions. This may be attributed to the fact that they are in large numbers in the department counted in thousands and at lower positions.

In Limpopo for example, there are about 3732 schools. This number keeps fluctuating following the process of merging of dysfunctional schools.

The exclusion of educators in high level planning sessions such as the strategic planning results in poor implementation of key strategies in line with the impact statement and strategic goals of the department hence affecting quality provided to learners.

The impact of this exclusion or lack of other ways to fully capacitate educators is creating the cohort that works tirelessly but parallel to the strategic direction of the department. It is in this basis that this study has been initiated with the aim of exploring the level of educators' involvement in the strategic planning in their department and the impact there off. The study is intended to close gaps that can be indicated by recommending alternative ways of implementing the planning sessions in the department.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the

involvement of educators in strategic planning sessions of their departments. This was also anchored by the following:

To define impact of the educators' involvement/non-involvement in strategic planning session of their departments.

To find out levels of educators' in understanding strategic direction of their government in general and departments in particular.

3. Research Questions

The following questions were asked during the study:

Are educators actively involved in strategic planning sessions of their departments?

What are the levels of educators' understanding of the strategic direction of their department including vision and mission?

What is the causal effect of educators' involvement and/or not involved in strategic planning sessions of their department.

4. Study Area

This study has been conducted in Limpopo Province of South Africa. It used a variety of mechanism to collect the data including observation and asking other participants randomly. It is in this regard that it can be declared that the study was randomly conducted in Limpopo and not specific education district. The study also focused on Public Schools and not Independent schools. The main focus was on finding out alignment of policy implementation in general and the effect thereof in teaching and learning processes.

5. Literature Review

5.1. Defining Strategic Planning Sessions

Generally these are traditional occasions that brings managers together to discuss issues facing the sector [12] These sessions define objectives and set expectations of the sector or organization. It is mainly attended by small numbers of people who mainly come from management. This does not have to be attended simply by management members as its attended needs to be diversified to cut across all expertise available. Unfortunately in departments, educators are not active participants of the management levels to attend these sessions.

Attendees, as Metayes, E added, assist the sector in revising of the sector's vision and mission [13]. They also look at the objectives the sector intends to achieve and strengthen the goals of the sector.

In government of South Africa, Strategic Planning Sessions are mandatory and have to take place as stipulated by the law. This includes strategic Planning Sessions meant for planning and review quarterly performance. The review is part of checking if the sector is indeed working to realize the set objectives and manage to leave their vision and mission.

In addition, [3] also indicates that strategic management sessions implementation is a disciplinary root of the most popular theories and models in which direction of a sector is

constructed at strategic position. Added again is the fact that there is relationship between strategic management and public organisational performance. It can therefore be argued that every employee of the sector should be well conversant to outcomes of the strategic planning sessions. They equally have to understand the direction the department is following.

5.2. The 6th Administration Priorities

The 6th Administration of South Africa, the MTSF 2019-2024 has seven clear priorities [17].

These priorities are based on the commitment put by the ruling party, African National Congress' election manifesto. All these priorities are relevant to education directly and indirectly and only four will be expanded for the sake of this study. These are as follows:

5.2.1. Capable, Ethical and Development State

The Constitution of SA states that every person has the right to basic education including adult basic education [7]. The Limpopo Development Plan as amended indicates as its key priority that such education should be of high quality [18]. This implies that the type of education people receive should allow them to be economic active and contribute in building a developmental state with them being capable due to education they received.

5.2.2. Economic Transformation and Job Creation

The demand for quality education will continue until the living conditions of the people of South Africa in general and Limpopo Province in particular is transformed. This transformation is partially escalated by availability of jobs for skilled people. In June 2021, Statistics South Africa survey reported that the rate of unemployment in South Africa has reached 32.6%. This is also increased by the people who are either lacking skills and those who have degrees and diplomas that are not very relevant to the needs of the economy of the country due to subjects they were made to opt for at schools by their educators and parents who are not taking evidence based decision as they may not be exposed to strategic direction the administration has. They are not previewed to plans for going to improved quality education.

5.2.3. Education, Skills and Health

Being not exposed and not capacitated with priorities on their own departments, educators opt for changing curriculum streams in their schools to take the streams that gives them good passes in grade 12. This is partly because currently education system in South Africa has only one examination administered national which offers certificate which is grade 12. Educators are also hauled at accountability sessions held by leaders of the department focusing on the pass rate in grade 12 and less on other grades. More emphasis and more resources are therefore channeled to feed this exit grade only across the country. This is a contrary to the impact statement of the Limpopo Department of education explained in this study.

5.2.4. Consolidation of Social Wage Through Reliable and Quality Basic Services

This priority also emphasizes the importance of taking a

strategic direction. An educator and any other public servant need to be aware of this priority in order for them to understand that there is a need of provisioning of quality basic services including quality education. Chapter 2 of [7] emphasizes that all citizens have the right to services such as health care, food and social security (Section 27). These need quality education of citizens who will be able to understand the directives of their government from schooling age.

5.2.5. *Spatial Integration, Human Settlement and Local Government*

Education is also needed for the realisation of this priority as in quality education there will be future leaders to carry out supporting activities.

5.2.6. *Social Cohesion and Safe Communities*

Quality education in social sciences can contribute more to the realization of this priority. Education has elements of building the community that methodologically can think and strive for cohesion and safe communities. Section 12 (1) of [7] also adds that everyone has the right to freedom and security. This is one element or the government priorities that educators should be involved in planning of its implementation.

5.2.7. *A better Africa and the World*

As South African learners are expected to be good contributors in building of better continent, his is only possible with quality education.

5.3. *Key Departmental Strategies to Be Understood by Educators*

According to the Limpopo Department of Education's Annual Performance Plan (APP), there are a number of strategic indicators meant to be achieved by the different branches. These can be considered as the pillars to the realisation of the vision, mission and impact statement of the department. These are three key anchors of the strategic direction of the department. Each employee of the department including educators are expected to internalise these three key anchors of the strategic direction of the department in order to be able to contribute in realisation of the priorities of the 6th administration.

5.3.1. *Departmental Vision*

The Departmental vision tells where the department is going and what type of future is planned for it. According to the Oxford South African Concise Dictionary (2010), vision is described as the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom. Educators in basic education are therefore expected to be able to think of the future of their learners. The vision of Limpopo Department of Education is: Excellence in provisioning of innovative quality basic education [14].

There are key words in this vision that are important for all employees of the department. These are Excellence and innovation. It implies that for the realization of the provisioning of quality basic education there has to be excellence and innovative performance. Innovation and

excellence should be practiced from the classroom level to the head office by everyone serving in the department. There is therefore a need for educators to be made aware and trained to internalize this vision. Where possible, all learners should also be aware on the direction the department is taking them to through experiencing activities aligned to the vision of the department. Learners need also to understand the direction they are taken to by their education system.

5.3.2. *Departmental Mission*

When there is a vision the next question becomes how it will be realized. This involves ways anticipated to be taken to lead to the planned future. According to the [4], mission can be described in line with the organization or institution involved in a long-term assignment. In this case is to produce learners from the schools who are ready to go to workplace or further their education. The focus is mainly provisioning of quality education. The mission of the Limpopo Department of Education is: To provide quality and innovative education programs for learners across all grades. The emphasis is making sure excellence and innovation is provided in all grades and not only in the exit grade 12. If implemented accordingly, all learners will pass from one grade to the other and leave basic education skilled enough to get into working industry or furthering their education at higher levels. This will be possible if educators are aware of this mission and work toward its achievement.

5.3.3. *The Departmental Impact Statement*

The impact statement tell all implementers of the interventions such as policies what should be the impact of all they will be doing. According to the Result Base Concept structure of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in South Africa, Impact as indicated in the figure 1 below, is about the long-term developmental results at the societal level that the institution such as the education department is to achieve if indeed they will be satisfied they have completed the task at hand. The Limpopo Department of Education's Impact Statement is: Learners exiting the schooling system equipped with requisite skills and firm foundation for further studies and the world of work.

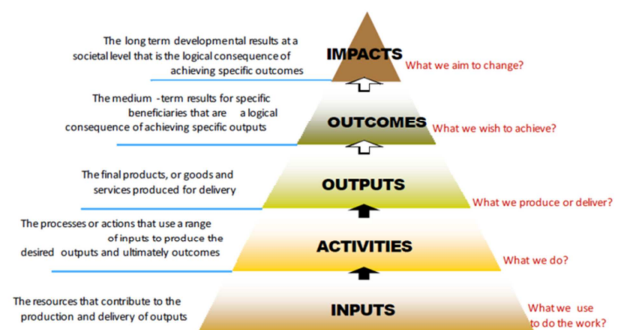


Figure 1. Result Base Concepts. Source: DPME [6].

As in figure 1 above. Some explanations based on education can be made as follows: Inputs: This can be the books, pens and resources and funds provided to educators

and schools' communities to use during teaching and learning.

Activities: Educators will be teaching and other stakeholders doing their roles at schools levels. These activities must be aligned to the departmental vision, mission and impact statement. Unfortunately the implementers or users of the resources (Educators) may not be aware of direction of the department hence having activities that fail to support main direction of the department.

Outputs: Year in and year out there will be learners leaving the basic education system. The outputs marks what will be achieved from activities done following allocated resources and the ways they were expended. However, if educators are not aware of the impact statement of the department, learners may pass and leave the system but lacking requisite skills that allow them to get into the workplace or furthering their studies.

Outcomes: This is the medium term result for specific beneficiaries. In mid-term, if these learners are coming out of the system they will not be able to realize long-term achievement. However, they will be on right track going to realize the set impact statement.

Impact: Expected impact is embedded in the impact statement of the department, making sure learners who leave the system are ready either for work or for high learning. Educators must be aware of this statement and work towards its realisation. They should encourage learners to take and love subjects that are able to take them to the two targeted areas, work or/and further education.

6. Findings and Discussions

6.1. Processes of Strategic Planning

The Strategic Sessions in Limpopo and other parts of the country are mandatory. They are attended by "top" management mainly from director level to accounting authority levels of the Heads of Departments and political leaders. This happens during the planning sessions at the beginning of an administration to plan for next five years, annually to strengthen the Annual Performance Plans and quarterly to review quarterly performances. Educators are represented by their District Directors. There is also another level of Circuit Managers above those in schools (Principals and Educators) that do not attend at the highest level of Strategic Planning. The sessions are characterised by fruitful planning and decisions that lead to the finalisation of the strategic direction the department intends to follow at that stage.

The process alienates educators with the expectation that same information will cascade down from District Directors with same rigour until to the educators.

6.2. Internalisation of Vision and Mission of the Department

The vision and mission are not meant to be seen only on papers and documents of the department. They are meant to

be internalised by all including the cleaners and garden maintenance personnel. The stakeholders of the department must be able to identify with the vision and mission of the department. This will only be seen from how employees are able to show commitment towards the realisation of the mission and vision of their organization.

The internalisation of the vision and mission does not come on its own. The organizations need to have some strategies and have to take some initiatives and creativity to realize this. The initiatives should also not be focused on management only but cuts across the levels. This calls for effective internal communication where ordinary employees are made to be able to freely communicate their views to management. This internal communication should also not take the top-down approach where only management "communicate" with less interaction with fellow employees at lower ranks.

It has been observed that educators are less or some not exposed to the departmental vision and mission. More than 40 interviewed educators including the principals could not show any knowledge of the departmental vision and mission. Instead, schools have their own vision and mission which are created not in line with the strategic objectives of the department.

Out of the 40 contacted more than 25 indicated that the vision and mission of their schools were created by individuals they requested to draft for them. Some even paid consultants to draft for them the vision and mission with some saying they did not even know the importance of having such but imitated as they saw other schools having. Most of them therefore also lack capacity to interpret their own vision and mission.

The challenge in this is that the educators are not sure of the strategic direction of their department, they created the vision and mission only to be in papers, they are not aware of the impact statement of the department but are expected to work towards the realisation of the strategic direction of the department. The study indicated that more than 90% of schools have vision and mission but not more than 10% understand and can internalise their own vision and mission let alone the departmental ones. Parents also are great contributors in channeling their schools to getting quantity passes in grade 12 that lack quality.

One educator at a level of the principal attested that the department is also focusing in main on Grade 12 and ignore all other grades. The educators and the teaching in schools is therefore biased to grade 12 and not other levels.

6.3. Understanding of Impact Statement

All the 40 educators do not understand what the Impact Statement is let alone coming across it. However, when sharing with them the statement indication was that they understand where it is taking the department and they see good outcome should all adhere to it. One educator indicated: "There is a challenge of some of us changing curriculum streams just to make sure we get high grade 12 pass rate and I can see some streams cannot assist our learners in the

current economic demand and situation". This is when they understood that all the department does should end producing learners that will be able to get into place of work or further their studies with reasonable skills. "There must be strategic ways to also try to build skills and capacity for other grades as they are the foundation." Added the Principal who also was seeing the Impact statement for the first time.

6.4. The Power of Effective Communication

The importance of effective communication in a sector to promote successful implementation of its policies and other programmes cannot be questioned. For example, Schramm, W. argues that the problem under-developed regions across the globe is partly due to poor or lack of effective communication [11]. This is what the education sector needs to avoid and promote effective interaction between the top management and the educators when engaging on the strategic planning sessions.

Lu, Y adds that communication gaps impact negatively on development initiatives [8]. This suggests that when educators are excluded in top priority planning meetings they are deprived in becoming relevant to push for the realization of the vision, mission and strategic indicators of the department and its planned MSTF goals.

7. Recommendations

The findings "*supra*" calls for an urgent solution to be brought on board to make sure the employees of the department understand the strategic direction of the sector and work collectively toward achieving its goals.

7.1. Involvement of Educators in Strategic Planning Sessions

The reality is that there are thousands of educators across the province and they cannot be gathered to same place for the session. The session also is likely to be doomed with attendance of such numbers. The Covid-19 safety protocols also prohibit large gatherings in South Africa. As indicated by Rasila, B. N, Mashau, T. S and Obadire, O. S all South Africans are expected to wear face mask at all the time in public space and keep a distance of 1.5 Meters away from others to avoid the spreading of Covid-19 [9]. This makes it difficult for planning gathering to share the strategies of organisations. However there should be a way that those in planning are allowed to find ways of inducting on similar rigour as in the top structure the districts officials together with their circuit managers so that such capacity building finds its ways to the level of educators. This can be done as all circuit managers are part of the district strategic planning. However, there must be emphasis that at list one out of the planning days is completely allocated to planning section to induct these circuit managers well to be able to induct the principals and educators at the rigour used at provincial planning sessions. It has to be mandatory that there should be no annual strategic planning without room for planning

section to induct well both the district officials and their circuit managers and the educators. If need be these sessions can be made virtually or by using current technologies.

7.2. Different Vision and Mission in "All" Schools Across the Province

It can be argued that all the public schools in the Province have different vision and mission statements away from the departmental one. Most of these statements are just created by individuals requested by principals and were never discussed and internalised in their schools with their educators. This increases the thinking that vision and mission are some other writings that get crafted on documents and at times walls with no meaning.

There must be a way for the departmental vision and mission to be shared to all schools and ways are found for them to understand these statements. This can assist in educators and school communities working towards realisation of the departmental strategic direction. In fact, it is strongly recommended that all schools start using the departmental vision and mission and not act as if there are different entities separated from their provincial department. As observed in many established organizations, branches uphold the vision and mission that is cascaded from the mother body down to the branches. They sing from same book, it can be added. Should there be a lee way for schools to have own vision and mission statements, there must be a way for theirs to be aligned to the departmental ones.

7.3. Realising Importance of Field Workers

It has been realised in this study that leaving out educators in major issues of strategic planning equates planning over the heads of those expected to implement the project. This continues to open gaps between expectations by strategic management from lower levels such as that of educators in schools. There is no way for the department to realise its Impact Statement, vision and mission if educators, and all learners indeed are not contributing. The main focus or core mandate of the department of education is at the schools and not only at provincial and districts offices.

7.4. Planning Together with the Foot-soldiers

Educators can be regarded as true foot-soldiers in the processes of teaching and learning. It is therefore imperative for them to be included and be active involved from the planning stages. These are important stakeholders and role players who have to be considered and prioritized every time the education sector adopts new strategies and ways of improvements.

According to [10], good planning needs effective communication between all participants. This is also to avoid unnecessary conflicts and differences of ideologies. Stakeholders or participants such as teachers need to be shown respect and support and be allowed to plan as the sector priorities dictate. If not, there will always be disparities between the support they should get from the

Province and what they are daily engaging in. This can cause frustrations and unnecessary tensions. Sun, T. argues, it is only when people, educators in this case are treated with benevolence, faithfulness and justice that they be in one mind and be glad to serve joyfully in difficult situations and forget their challenges [15]. This suggests strategic planning sessions must be preceded by asking question: "How can the educators be capacitated to understand the direction the sector is determined to take in line with general government long term plans?"

Involvement of educators and all other relevant stakeholders in planning stages at strategic planning sessions to get them understand the strategic direction of the education sector can also build and promote systems of monitoring and evaluation (M & E). [16] indicates that the reason for absent or ineffective monitoring and evaluation of developmental plans and policy implication in some sectors and even countries comes as a result of poor planning followed by lack of political will. The M & E on the other hand is very important in making sure that programs and policies are carried out as planned and are moving towards making impact in the lives of the beneficiaries [1].

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, It is finally recommended that other study to probe other avenues can be done to find ways of making sure educators form integral part of the strategic planning sessions of the department with the aim of not getting them left behind and directionless at this has impact of the quality of education provided to the learners. Educators across the provinces should become active roles at strategic planning session so as to understand fully the strategic direction of their departments and those of the contry pertaining education sector.

Poor capacity building of educators on strategic direction of the department can result in very highly skilled educators teaching hard but opposite to the direction the department is taking. Other ways of doing this maybe when hard working skilled educators is teaching curriculum stream that will not bring light for the learners despite their higher grade passes. Educators should also understand general direction the country is taking and how that is shaped to education sector.

The implementation of Theory of Change need to be considered in planning for the strategic Planning sessions. According to [2], Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a described change is expected to happen in a particular context. It maps out what is described as a "missing middle" in achieving full impact from intervention. Adding, [2] described Theory of Change as methodology for planning, participation and evaluation to promote sound change. Therefore, Strategic Planning session should close the "missing middle" by making sure educators are also capacitated on strategic matters of their government in general and the department in particular.

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