

Exploring Practices Determining School Effectiveness: A Case Study in Selected South African Secondary Schools

R. J. (Nico) Botha¹ and T. M. (Michael) Makoelle²

¹*Department of Education Leadership and Management, College of Education,
University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Pretoria, 0003, South Africa
Telephone: <+27 824116361>, E-mail: <botharj@unisa.ac.za>*

²*Department of Further Education and Training, Faculty of Education,
Cape Peninsula University of Technology, PO Box 1906, Belville, 7530, South Africa
Telephone: +27 761722431, E-mail: <makoellet@cput.ac.za>*

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ABSTRACT When parents choose a school for their children to attend, especially a secondary school, they usually look for an 'effective school' so that their children can receive what they regard as a good, quality education. In this process, it is most common that parents evaluate or assess the effectiveness of secondary schools on the basis of the school's academic results or outputs. But what other factors, apart from academic results, constitute school effectiveness? From the research literature it is evident that a number of approaches had been applied in the school context to evaluate the effectiveness of schools in general. But the question remains: what particular practices determine school effectiveness? Since 1994 a number of legislative frameworks had been put into place in South Africa to deal with school effectiveness. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 laid the foundation for how a school should be effectively managed and governed in its quest for school effectiveness. This paper, based on an exploratory qualitative study conducted in selected South African secondary schools, explores some of the practices determining the effectiveness of secondary schools. It indicates that there are various factors, apart from academic results, such as effective management structures, a strong school governing body, a healthy school environment or climate, good infrastructure, motivated learners and good educators that determine school effectiveness. The study concludes with an Index for School Effectiveness. Derived from the study, the index can be a useful tool in assessing school effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

Conceptual Framework

The issue or concept of school effectiveness continues to dominate the literature of education management and administration and is conceptualised differently by many authors. Beare et al. (1989), for example, equate effectiveness with the fulfilment of objectives by the school; that is, if the school is able to attain its objectives, it is effective. Conversely, Van der Bank (1994) views school effectiveness from a management perspective, averring that schools with effective management strategies, such as strong leadership by the principal, are highly effective. However, Van der Westhuizen (2002) broadens the discourse by contextualising school effectiveness within the school's organisational culture, and concludes that an organisation and its effectiveness lie in the effectiveness of its components. Authors such as Kruger and Van Schalkwyk (1993), Macbeath and Mortimore (2001) and Marishane and Botha (2011), in turn, emphasise the significance of teaching and learning and effective leadership, as the core determinants of school effectiveness.

Although school effectiveness is widely associated with learner attainment, it becomes clear from the discussion above that there are various ways of defining and conceptualising it. From the research literature on this issue it is also evident that a number of approaches had been applied in recent years to evaluate the effectiveness of schools. Fitz and Lee (2000) refer, for example, to the practice of 'Inspection' as an efficient way of evaluating school effectiveness. By contrast, Cuttance (1994) avers that 'Quality Assurance' is crucial for evaluating school effectiveness, while other authors such as Morley and Rassool (1999) hold that an effective school is simply a 'learning school', with all its principles and activities centred on learning by all involved in the educational (teaching and learning) process.

The role of the school principal in a school is also believed to have a very significant impact on how well and effectively the school functions (Marishane and Botha 2011). Macbeath and Myers (1999) also postulate a close relationship between an effective school and an effective principal. The same proposition is shared by Gunter (2005).

In South Africa, the 'Apartheid' legacy continues to influence the manner in which school

effectiveness is conceptualised (Department of Education 2009a). However, since 1994, a number of legislative frameworks have been put in place to deal with this legacy and to improve the situation. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa 1996) laid the foundation for how a school should be managed and governed. In terms of the South African Schools Act, the management and leadership of the school rests with the principal and the School Management Team, while the governance of the school rests with the School Governing Body, consisting of teachers, parents, learners and other stakeholders.

The evaluation of teachers and schools remains a contentious issue in the quest for improved school effectiveness. According to the National Education and Evaluation Development Report of 2009 (Department of Education 2009a), the following three systems were designed in the past to provide the basic evaluation or assessment framework in South African schools:

- The Whole-School Evaluation Policy which provided a framework for evaluating schools.
- The Development Appraisal System which was designed as a tool to respond to the development and needs of teachers.
- The Performance Management and Development System which was aimed at measuring performance for remuneration purposes.

These three systems were later consolidated into the Integrated Quality Management System, which was a response from the South African National Department of Education to shortcomings in both teacher evaluation and performance management. This study was conducted after the implementation of the above mentioned systems and there are currently strong indications that they are not in any way improving teaching and learning (effectiveness) at schools (Department of Education 2009a). Furthermore, the implementation of outcomes-based education during the 1990s raised some concerns about quality at schools. Authors such as Botha (2000:129) were very sceptical about this change and regarded the introduction of outcomes-based education in the South African context as a “curriculum intended to transform the education system by articulating learner-centeredness.” However, it is questionable whether this was ever the case.

In its most recent (October 2009) report, the task team appointed to review the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education 2009b) clearly states that outcomes-based education has failed miserably, and that it has to be replaced with a new system to try to improve the effectiveness of our schools (Makoelle 2009). The more recent announcement, on 6 July 2010, by the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, that outcomes-based education has to be reviewed is an indication that its implementation affected the manner in which schools operate and function. The report recommended, *inter alia*, that teachers should have only one file instead of many; that learner portfolios should be scrapped; that the number of projects should be reduced; and that the importance of the textbook should be emphasised (Department of Education 2009c). All these suggestions have an impact on school effectiveness.

The role of the education district has also raised the issue of whether or not its support to schools actually enhances school effectiveness. Chinsamy (2002) avers that, if the district provides adequate support to schools, they are likely to do better than expected. Currently, very little support is given to schools; therefore, to improve the situation, the districts should provide management training to school principals by building the capacity of School Government Bodies and by training teachers in curriculum delivery (Department of Education 2009c).

The fact that numerous secondary schools, regarded as dysfunctional schools, cannot produce the expected matriculation results calls for the identification of strategies, guidelines and practices that the National Department of Education could put in place to ensure that more of these secondary schools perform at the expected standard (Department of Education 2009a). Clear guidelines should be given to the principals of these dysfunctional schools to ensure improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and, subsequently, to improve school effectiveness. This brings us to the problem statement of this study.

Problem Statement

This situation described above gave rise to the following main statement of the problem for the study: *Which practices (could) contribute*

to the effectiveness of secondary schools in the Free State Province of South Africa? The following five sub-questions were developed to provide an answer to the aforementioned question:

- What are the characteristics of effective schools?
- What does secondary-school effectiveness entail?
- Which factors (may) contribute to the effectiveness of secondary schools?
- What entails school effectiveness from a legislative perspective in the South African context?
- How can Free State secondary schools in particular be assisted to become more effective?

METHODOLOGY

The epistemological knowledge view (how knowledge is acquired) and ontological reality view (how reality is perceived) are crucial positions in any research inquiry. In this study, these two knowledge views are premised on the fact that knowledge is not produced through an objective researcher who collects facts about the social world and builds up an explanation in a chain of causality (positivism), but that reality is socially constructed rather than objectively determined (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999). This view is consistent with the traditions of qualitative and case-study research (Noor 2008).

The research approach used in this study was qualitative in nature. While the population of the study was all secondary schools in a specific District in the Free State Province of South Africa, the sample of the study comprised of six individual case studies conducted in six selected secondary schools in this District of the Free State Province. The sample of six schools consists of three highly effective schools and three less effective schools in terms of learner achievement. The sampling of schools was done in a random manner, using a quota-sampling technique (Neuman 2006).

In this process, the matriculation results of all the schools in the district over a three-year period were compared. From the schools identified as highly effective (pass rate of 90% and above), three were randomly selected – and from those identified as less effective (pass rate of 60% or below), a further three were selected in the same manner.

The researchers conducted unstructured interviews with the following participants from each of the six sampled schools: the principals of the selected schools, selected school-management and governance-developers, selected learning-facilitators, a teacher focus-group, a School Management Team focus-group and a School Governing Body focus-group. The questions presented to the various groups of participants in the unstructured and focus-group interviews aimed to address the effect of their respective practices on school effectiveness. They included questions for the:

- six principals, focusing on identifying aspects of management and leadership
- School Governing Body focus-groups, addressing aspects of governance
- School Management Team focus-groups, relating to aspects of curriculum delivery
- selected school-management and governance-developers, focusing on support and development aspects, and
- teacher focus-groups and selected learning-facilitators, addressing subject-support aspects.

Data from the interviews were transcribed, analysed and discussed. The researchers attempted to make sense of all the data collected qualitatively; that is, from unstructured interviews, focus-group interviews and documentary analysis. The developmental data analysis was carried out in line with the following series of basic steps (Laws et al. 2003):

- *Step 1:* Data was collected through interviews using a tape recorder and was then transcribed by the researchers to ensure familiarity with the data and to expedite its analysis, thus making the process of analysis much easier and more manageable.
- *Step 2:* The next step was to categorise data into themes, referred to as ‘coding’, involving the labelling of data according to units to ensure meaning. Neuman (1997) refers to this process as organising raw data into conceptual categories in order to create themes that will be used to analyse the data. The data was consequently categorised into themes where the researchers labelled units and developed conceptual categories that were used to analyse data.
- *Step 3:* The data was then re-read to verify that the interpretations are correct and valid to confirm the themes.

- *Step 4:* The researchers then linked the identified themes by writing the themes next to the quotations and notes. This step enhanced the examination of the data.
- *Step 5:* The last step was to examine and interpret the categories of themes. This step ensured that meanings derived to draw logical conclusions. From the interpretations of themes, logical conclusions were drawn.

Triangulation was done by analysing how each set of data answered the sub-research questions. The subsequent analysis considered each set of data in relation to the question. To ascertain the trustworthiness of the study the following were carried out: dependability in this study was maintained by ensuring that all the data were collected systematically and that all the contributions and experiences of the participants were represented by recording and transcribing them for analysis. Furthermore, to minimise ambiguity it was ascertained in this study that the questions were clear and meant the same to all respondents. Moreover, to maintain credibility, the researchers ensured that appropriate methods and techniques had been employed in such a way that other researchers have a step-by-step guide to how conclusions were arrived at. Similarly, the researchers determined credibility by representing the experiences of the participants as accurately as possible through intense observation and member checking (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Objectivity in this study was maintained by ensuring that all the data were collected systematically and that all the contributions and experiences of the participants were represented by recording and transcribing them for analysis. Reliability of the instruments in this study was ascertained by ensuring that the questions were clear and meant the same to all respondents.

The validity of the study was maintained by ensuring that appropriate methods and techniques had been employed in such a way that other researchers would have a step-by-step guide to how the researchers had arrived at their conclusions. To assess trustworthiness in this research, the researchers determined credibility by representing the experiences of the participants as accurately as possible. This was achieved through intense observation and member checking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical research findings are a culmination of a data-triangulation process, whereby data from semi-structured interviews are triangulated with data from focus-group interviews and documentary analysis. The use of literature supports the outcomes of the empirical study. In addition, the researchers reviewed the transcripts of the interviews from the participants of the three less effective schools and compared them to those of the three highly effective schools to determine the similarities and differences between the data in order to determine patterns in the data. A constant comparative analysis of schools against their learner attainment was therefore made because this is one of the main indicators of the effectiveness of a school. The findings were analysed according to each of the following four themes:

- *Theme 1: Management, Leadership and Administration* This theme comprised the responsibilities of the principal and the School Management Team, as well as the impact of the administrative infrastructure on school effectiveness.
- *Theme 2: The Curriculum* This theme comprised aspects of subject curriculum delivery, administration and management by teachers – and the impact of these on school effectiveness.
- *Theme 3: School Governance* This theme focused on how school government issues such as the school development planning, finances, etc. are dealt with by the School Governing Body and its influence on school effectiveness.
- *Theme 4: Support Structures* This theme investigates and look into the question of how the role, functions and support of learning facilitators, school-management and school-governance developers influenced school effectiveness.

Findings with Regard to Research Question 1: What are the Characteristics of Effective Schools?

In order to answer this research question, it was firstly important to define an effective school from the perspective of the research literature, and then to compare the literature definitions with views from the empirical study. Most of

the research literature, discussed and reviewed earlier in the conceptual framework of this study, highlighted the following characteristics as important in defining an effective school:

- Learner attainment: an effective school experiences high learner attainment.
- Effective teaching and learning: an effective school has a high level of teaching and learning.
- Effective management and leadership: effective schools have good leadership and are properly managed.

When participants in the interview phase were asked about what an effective school is, the principals of all the schools participating in the study seemed to believe that effective schools were those with higher learner attainments. One principal, in defining an effective school, remarked:

[They are] schools that perform beyond expectation in terms of learner attainment and have good results.

This gives a clear indication that school effectiveness is measured by the performance of learners and this seems to be the perception of all participants in the study. The empirical study found that the three highly effective schools that took part in this research had a high learner attainment and good teaching and learning practices as well as effective management and leadership. It can be concluded that the three aforementioned aspects form the basis of any definition of an effective school; this was also confirmed by the literature discussed earlier in the conceptual framework of this study.

Findings with Regard to Research

Question 2: What Does Secondary School Effectiveness Entail?

The findings with regard to this research question were summarised according to the first three of the four main themes identified earlier as indicators of effective schools, namely management, leadership and administration (Theme 1); the curriculum (Theme 2) and school governance (Theme 3). In their responses, the participants focused more on how their own roles influenced school effectiveness. Hence, they identified aspects of learning facilitation, school management and governance development that could influence school effectiveness.

The focus was on which external factors retard or enhance school effectiveness from an

external perspective. External factors would therefore mean external support by district office in areas of management, curriculum and governance. This external support was also mentioned attested to by Chinsamy (2002) as very crucial for school effectiveness

Respondents focussed on the external factors that retard or enhance school effectiveness from an external perspective. For instance, the school management developers interviewed believed that the school managers and governors are in a better position to influence effectiveness at the school, and that for schools to be effective, intervention plans have to respond to the school's needs. Two participants said in this regard:

Well, I do not have a comprehensive plan for all schools but I respond to individual schools according to their needs; and

My assistance for schools is based on the needs of each school; you see schools are not all functioning the same, so your intervention is rather school-based.

On the other hand, learning facilitators indicated that curriculum delivery was the key to school effectiveness; therefore, more curriculum support to teachers was pivotal to enhance school effectiveness. In substantiating this, two of them remarked:

Well, I run information sessions for individual schools and conduct workshops for the cluster of schools based on the overall weaknesses identified either by formal assessments or my visits to schools; and

I conduct workshops for schools in my cluster and give individual support to teachers per school based on their needs.

Findings with Regard to Research Question 3: Which Factors (May) Contribute to the Effectiveness of Secondary Schools?

Findings towards this research question are discussed according to the themes above.

Theme 1: Management, Leadership and Administration

The research results revealed that several management, leadership and administrative factors influence the effectiveness of schools positively. These include proper planning, a properly implemented year plan, a democratic management style, regular teacher development, the

induction of new teachers, motivation of staff and learners, parental involvement, marketing of the school, effective management of conflict, regular control of teachers' work, proper delegation of staff, proper decision-making, effective quality-assurance measures, proper strategic management, effective communication, proper time management, a welcoming atmosphere for all stakeholders and visitors, admissions being done in advance, regular attendance by both teachers and learners, proper control of administrative registers, proper control of stock and assets, maintenance of good interpersonal relationships, proper planning of extracurricular activities, an inclusive approach to teaching, employee wellness and regular performance reviews. It also became apparent that departmental collaboration, proper record-keeping, regular visits by learning facilitators, and the involvement of the School Management Team members in the running of the school all have a profound influence on school effectiveness. For example, on the issue of planning, differences between a highly effective and a less effective school were illustrated by comments made by their respective principals. In the words of the principal of one of the highly effective schools:

[We] have to plan for the day, term and the year; this means determining daily objectives, medium-term plan and long-term plan, then organise resources both human and physical, lead by giving clear direction and instructions, then making a follow-up to see that they are carried out.

There seemed to be a lack of knowledge of year planning on the part of less effective schools. The principal of one of the less effective schools had this to say:

We have not done the year plan although the Department said we must; we are looking for a template to use.

Theme 2: The Curriculum

The research findings revealed once again and demonstrated that the following curricular issues are pivotal to school effectiveness: good planning and the choice of subject curricular content, regular and appropriate assessment strategies, appropriate use of teaching methods, regular motivation of learners, a collaborative approach to teaching, support of learning facilitators, regular review of performances, man-

agement of teacher stress and the maintenance of discipline in the classroom. To substantiate this, a quote from a teacher at one of the highly effective schools regarding planning choice of subject curricular content:

I have to organise the content and resources to teach, decide on the method, draw up a lesson, present it, and monitor the understanding of learners through questions or class tasks.

By contrast, for a teacher at one of the less effective schools, planning is not well defined:

I believe I have to analyse content against the requirement of the Department, mobilise appropriate resources and choose assessment methods that will assist all learners to learn effectively, but I experience difficulties.

Theme 3: School Governance

The research findings validate the research literature, for example Macbeath and Mortimore (2001), who postulate that governors whom versed in their roles, have a positive influence on school effectiveness because they are involved in school development planning, capable of planning and conducting meetings regularly and properly, involved in policy-making, knowledgeable about the running of projects, involved in learner discipline, able to motivate parents to take part in school activities, committed to maintaining the vision and mission of the school, involved in teacher recruitment, uncompromising in maintaining the cleanliness of the school grounds – and who help with fundraising, financial control, safety on school premises and form part of all the committees at the school. It was clear, for example, that school governors who are involved in school development planning had a profound influence on the effectiveness of the schools they govern. For example, the following was said by the governor at one of the highly effective schools:

Yes, we do the Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threads - analysis of the school, and then determine what should come first, and then draw up the school-development plan. All stakeholders are involved in the development of the plan.

In contrast, less effective schools seem not to do any development planning. The following extract from the response of a School Governing Body member of one of the less effective school sums up the situation:

We have not been involved in such a process; the principal will just show it to us in the School Governing Body meeting; I think he does it himself.

Theme 4: Support Structures

This theme is focused on how external support for learning facilitation, school management and governance development could contribute to school effectiveness. Various aspects of these are discussed.

a) Learning Facilitation

(i) Identification of Subject Areas of Development/Intervention

The research literature (cf. Chinsamy 2002) indicates that the support of external bodies influences school effectiveness; regular monitoring and assessment of teachers' work in the subjects affect teacher efficiency; intervention is based on the needs of individual schools and teachers and there is a need for intervention programmes that can be applied in all schools. The study furthermore indicates that in-service training should be an ongoing process in order to improve the skills of teachers.

(ii) In-service Training and Provision of Resources

The research literature further indicates that in-service training should be ongoing in order to improve the skills of teachers. Although teachers regularly attend workshops, there is excessive emphasis on policies and subject administration at the expense of the content of the individual subjects. Moreover, the resources provided to teachers are mostly departmental documents and textbook lists rather than information about the latest subject insights. Consequently, there is a need for more defined training and resource-provision procedures.

(iii) Workshops

The empirical research shows that most in-service training is conducted through workshops and that much less individual support is given to teachers. The conclusion is that there is a need for more individualised support and fewer work-

shops. While all learning facilitators indicated that they hold workshops for teachers every term, little was said about helping individual teachers in the classroom. The following extracts support this assumption:

I conduct workshops on a needs basis. It is not like I have to do it every month or so, but we have a district programme of workshops per term; and

There is a workshop programme for every school term.

(iv) General

Learning facilitators pointed out that, in general, the factors influencing effectiveness at their schools usually centred on the following:

- a lack of management capacity on the part of the School Management Team//principal
- the negative attitudes of teachers
- a lack of work control

The indication is that learning facilitators tend to blame the schools and teachers for the ineffectiveness of schools; for example, one said:

The attitude of some teachers, in terms of commitment and towards their work in general, is very negative.

The conclusion is that there is a need for an inclusive programme that can be used to intervene and support teachers and schools to deal with the challenges.

b) School- management and -governance Development

The empirical research determined that school-management and -governance developers believe that the development of schools should be based on the situation of each school. Currently, no comprehensive plan is being used to develop the schools.

(i) Tool for Planning Intervention and Assessing Progress

While all school-management and -governance developers claimed to use a checklist to control and plan intervention at their schools, the research determined that there was no coherent and uniform way of carrying out the monitoring. Currently, there is no plan to assist schools. School-management and -governance developers go to the schools and do whatever

they think will help them, for example, two of them said:

Well, I do not have a comprehensive plan for all schools but I respond to individual schools according to their needs; and

My assistance for schools is based on the needs of each school; you see schools are not all functioning the same, so your intervention is rather school-based.

(ii) *General*

School-management and -governance developers mentioned that the following factors, that should be addressed to improve school effectiveness, compromise the effectiveness of schools:

- poor management
- a lack of commitment by learners
- hasty changes
- a lack of parental involvement

Findings with Regard to Research Question 4: What Entails School Effectiveness from a Legislative Perspective in the South African Context?

The legislative literature on school effectiveness in South Africa makes it clear that the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa 1996) forms the legislative core of how schools should be managed and governed. The Schools Act of 1996 (Republic of South Africa 1996) also makes it clear that the current school- and teacher-evaluation systems (see earlier in this study) are not assisting schools in improving their effectiveness. In particular, the findings of the documentary analysis as well as the empirical study undertaken indicate clearly that:

- There is a positive relationship between school effectiveness and good governance as contemplated by the South African Schools Act.
- The evaluation of both teachers and schools forms the basis for school effectiveness.
- The implementation of the new curriculum since the advent of outcomes-based education has had a negative impact on school effectiveness.
- There is a need for the involvement of an external body to evaluate and support the schools.

For example, although the school-management and -governance developers visit schools

and collect reports from principals, it is not clear if these reports are used to support schools. Again, reports are based on what principals say rather than what has been proven through external evaluation. The following quotes sum the situation up:

We rely on the reports from the principal of (to gauge) the need for intervention or support; and then respond appropriately; and

I prefer to use my checklist to get evidence of what the school is doing, [and] then respond to what I regard as the school area of development.

The study indicated that there was more checking of the schools than support for them. It was evident too, that school-management developers had not put a support system in place, and that there was a strong need for such support.

Findings with Regard to Research Question 5: How can Free State Secondary Schools be Assisted to Become More Effective?

The literature on school effectiveness and improvement (see conceptual framework earlier in the study) indicated that the current school- and teacher-evaluation systems are not assisting schools in improving their effectiveness. In particular, the findings indicate the following:

- There is a need for the involvement of an external body to evaluate and support the schools.
- Teachers need to receive in-service training on a continuous basis, and the content of the workshops should be teaching-based rather than administration based.
- Support should be given to individual teachers.
- School-management and -governance developers do not have comprehensive school-improvement plans to enhance their effectiveness.

Illustrating the need for support and with regard to workshops presented by the learning facilitators, there was a strong view that support is needed in the classroom. One of the members of the Head of Department focus-group had this to say:

Yes, learning facilitators send visit date lists for us to arrange to meet him/her. They usually come during school time and I encourage that they see the teachers in their classes to avoid disruption, but other learning facilitators do not

want to go to class but want to see the teachers elsewhere but this sometimes disturbs the school because if more than one learning facilitator is at school some classes are left unattended.

It is pertinent that the highly effective schools that took part in this research indicated that the Integrated Quality Management System was falling short of enhancing both teacher and school effectiveness. Indeed, comments made by one of the principals of a highly effective school during an interview supported this conviction:

This system does not help us at all. We use other principles, such as trust and loyalty, ones that are inherent to our staff, to cope. We trust our teachers and they are prepared to walk the extra mile for our learners, for them, we don't need an Integrated Quality Management System or any other system for that matter.

In addition, it is noted that principals from highly effective schools have instituted extra-measures to compensate for the weaknesses of the Integrated Quality Management System in teacher evaluation; in this regard, one participant suggested collaboration and mentoring, while another suggested forming peer groups based on experience. The principal of one of the highly effective schools said:

We hold workshops for teachers in various subjects and as colleagues share our experiences. We appoint experienced teachers as mentors for newly appointed teachers and we induct new members to the staff.

The results of the empirical study indicate that schools, generally, do not have a local improvement strategy to enhance their effectiveness. Existing improvement plans are usually designed as a quick solution to a perceived weakness diagnosed in a specific area. For example, two school management and governance developers indicated that their response to schools is based on Grade 12 performances. The following extracts sums the problem up:

It depends on the nature of the school's performance, but I recommend they provide extra support to the matriculants; and

I have encouraged schools to develop their own catch-up programmes, which will be geared towards the improvement of results, for example extra classes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while some schools have not yet achieved an acceptable level of effectiveness,

others are indeed effective and could actually serve as models of improvements for others to emulate. It requires the involvement of all the stakeholders at a school to make a difference; hence, the proposed Index for School Effectiveness may serve as a starting point for enhancing the effectiveness of schools in the Free State to ensure that quality education is provided in the Province as a whole. Finally, the research findings in this study could form the basis of considerably expanded investigations into the complex field of enhancing the effectiveness of secondary schools in South Africa as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What schools need in order to enhance improvement and sustain effectiveness is a comprehensive localised strategy that draws on the strengths of their stakeholders. The Whole School Evaluations conducted by the National Department of Education do not offer a solution to the plight of the schools as they are carried out only every five years – schools, however, need a tool that they can use to assess their effectiveness on a continuous basis. As a result, and based on the findings of the empirical research, the authors have subsequently designed a model to enhance school effectiveness. This model, the Index of School Effectiveness, is suggested as a localised, context-bound and stakeholder-driven review tool that schools in the Free State can use to enhance their effectiveness in all aspects.

This Index is a developmental model informed by the current research. It is intended to help schools in the province review their current effectiveness status, determine the improvements necessary and plan their implementation. The Index adopts a developmental approach so that schools can use it to reflect on their current practices with a view to improving in the future. School effectiveness is usually a process associated with learner attainment, and all improvement processes are geared towards improving the performances of learners.

The Index, however, views learner attainment as only one narrow aspect of school effectiveness. It articulates a comprehensive and holistic school-improvement model which focuses on all aspects of school functioning with the aim of improving effectiveness. The Index for School Effectiveness is an initiative that perceives

school effectiveness from a local, school-based perspective, mobilising and facilitating the community-based involvement of stakeholders in the process. However, this Index should not be perceived as a recipe for the immediate improvement of schools; instead, it should be viewed as a tool providing an opportunity for all members of the school community to reflect on, brainstorm and evaluate their current practices so as to enhance their effectiveness.

While the authors do not recommend a particular way of using the Index, it is important to note that being familiar with its contents could offer an insight into how it could be best used in each unique school context. The approach or use is purely participatory and seeks to involve all stakeholders in improving their schools.

It was explained earlier that the concept of school effectiveness is varied and complex insofar as there are different beliefs as to what constitutes it. There is, however, consensus that school effectiveness is determined by the structural functioning of the school. Other views hold that there are factors within the school structure that could influence school effectiveness, and that the context in which the school operates has a significant influence on its effectiveness. It follows that the school operates within a particular social context with unique social characteristics, and that these have a profound influence on its effectiveness. The Index adopts the latter approach, which takes into consideration each school's contextual scenario and is centred on the same four themes used in this study:

- **Theme 1: Management, Leadership and Administration.** The Index asserts that the management and leadership of a school have a profound bearing on school effectiveness; therefore, attempts should be made to improve and capacitate the management and leadership of the school at all levels, from the classroom to the office of the principal. Administration is the cornerstone of the management and governance of a school. Consequently, the administrative process of a school has a profound and direct bearing on the functionality of the school. It is important to maintain effective administration in order to enhance school effectiveness and improvement.
- **Theme 2: The Curriculum.** Teachers, as the presenters of curriculum material, are

central to the subject-content choice, delivery and assessment. Therefore, the manner in which the curriculum is managed, delivered and facilitated has a significant bearing on the general effectiveness of the school.

- **Theme 3: School Governance.** The Index notes that the governance of a school is a strengthening arm of school management. For this reason, governors should be better equipped to deal with issues of governance in a way that complements and enhances school effectiveness.
- **Theme 4: Support Structures.** Schools exist within a particular educational structure and are supported by management structures such as the School Management Team. The district and provincial education departments are responsible for providing support to schools. This kind of support can be optimised if everything is carefully planned and executed to have a positive influence on the effectiveness of the school.

The Index for School Effectiveness is furthermore underpinned by the following principles:

- **Awareness.** In order for a school to move from its current state of effectiveness to an improved state of effectiveness, all stakeholders need to be aware of the current situation. This can be attained through proper communication, thus making the stakeholders aware of all the improvement processes. The stakeholders of effective schools are usually highly involved.
- **Participation.** All stakeholders, having recognised and acknowledged the need for improvement, should get ready to participate in a process of reviewing, planning, action and reflection, all geared to the improvement of school effectiveness.
- **Collaboration.** All stakeholders should agree to work together on a collective set of goals and ideals that will be attained by them as a team.
- **Effective Communication.** This implies that the process should be driven by constant feedback and reporting.

According to the Index, the process of school effectiveness is cyclic, ongoing, and consists of the following five stages: review of effectiveness; development of the operational framework for development; improvement plan; implementation, monitoring and feedback; and reflection

and re-planning. The process is cyclic that school-development planning is ongoing, because stakeholders constantly strive to renew the conditions at the school to achieve an ideal state. The process of improving school effectiveness takes place within the framework of the four themes identified earlier as indicators of effective schools. According to the literature and the results of the empirical study, these four themes form the core of school effectiveness.

The Index will therefore bring all stakeholders on board to improve the state of effectiveness at the school, foster participation in reviewing the situation, and assist them in developing operational plans to improve the conditions, implement such plans, and reflect on progress made. This Index will also ensure that the process, illustrated below, is collaborative and reflective.

As alluded to in Figure 1, the process of improvement is underpinned by the following stages:

Stage 1: A Review of Effectiveness This stage, similar to a Strengths/Weakness/Opportunities/Threads - analysis, seeks to raise the stakeholders' awareness of the state of affairs at the school and to foster communication among them. All the stakeholders need to participate in this process and, ideally, the following questions should be raised:

- What is the current situation at our school with regard to effectiveness?
- What do we understand by school effectiveness?
- What have we achieved in the past, and why?
- What are the strong and weak points of the school?
- What are the opportunities and threats that face the school?
- What are the challenges that confront the school?

Stage 2: Developing an Operational Framework for Improvement The second stage strives to enhance participation. Because no process can be driven without a steering committee, this stage involves the forming of a school effectiveness committee. Ideally, all stakeholders should serve on the committee which will be responsible for:

- reflecting on the current effectiveness processes by reviewing tactics and strategies and planning new processes
- mobilising support from stakeholders by outlining the objectives, expectations and goals
- setting up an effective framework that includes meetings, the duties of committee members, feedback and monitoring systems, and reflection procedures

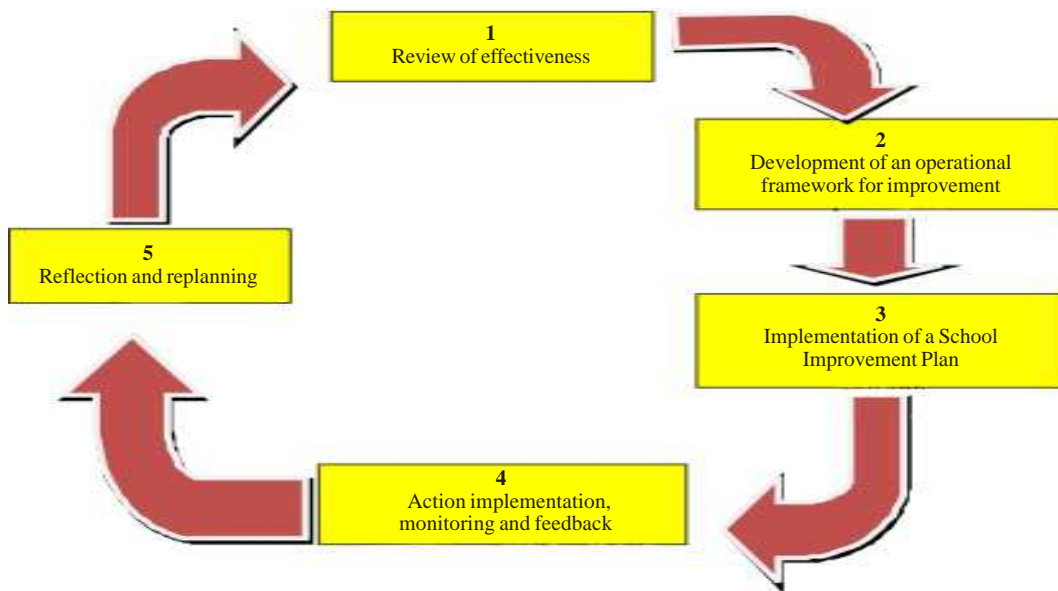


Fig. 1. Cyclic index of school effectiveness

Stage 3: Developing a School Improvement Plan In this process, to foster collaboration, areas of development will be identified. The School Improvement Plan should attempt to answer the following questions:

- What should be done and why?
- Who should do it?
- When should it be done?
- How will it be monitored?
- How and where will reflection and feedback be managed?
- How will the process be financed and resourced?

Stage 4: Action Implementation, Monitoring and Feedback This is the stage during which the School Improvement Plan will be put into practice. The monitoring tool for checking the effectiveness of activities will be used to provide constant monitoring and feedback. During this process, the following questions should be asked:

- What have we planned?
- Are all the planned activities taking place?
- What are the challenges?
- What are the successes and failures?

Stage 5: Reflection and Re-planning During stage five of the Index for School Effectiveness, all the processes will be reflected upon to check the overall successes and failures. The strategies applied will be investigated to see if they have worked. A report is then compiled for all stakeholders and to serve as the basis for future reviews. The following important questions should be considered:

- What did we plan?
- What were our goals?
- What have we achieved, and why?
- What have we not achieved, and why?
- What have we learned from the process?

It is recommended that the Index for School Effectiveness be used to evaluate the effectiveness of all secondary schools in the province in terms of these characteristics. The results of such evaluations can then lead to the design of intervention strategies to enhance the overall effectiveness of all the relevant schools.

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