

Introduction of Traditional Leadership and Local Government Mayors and Councilors in Improving Learner Performance and Quality Education in the Limpopo Province

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ABSTRACT The quality of education is enhanced by members of society where schools are situated. In urban areas, members of society, besides parents, educators and learners may be School Governing Bodies' (SGB) federations, social partners (that is, teacher unions), student movements, Non-Governmental Organizations (that is, Development Foundation and Trust) industry owners and business leaders who can sponsor schools with different support services that can enhance quality of schools. In rural areas where schools are mostly under Quintile 1-3, society members might include Traditional Leaders, Traditional or Royal Council Members, Executive and local Mayors, Traditional Healers, Ward Councilors, Ward Committee Members, Civic Leaders and Business Leaders and qualified professionals (including retired ones). If educators, learners and parents, with members of society mentioned above, can come together in supporting schools by whatsoever means they have, there can be some difference in the provision of quality education in the Limpopo Province. This assertion is informed by South African President's 2016 State of the Nation Address in which education was declared as a "societal" matter. This is a paper which aims at bringing together unimagined members of society (traditional leaders and local government leaders) in the provision of quality education in the Limpopo Province. The paper used qualitative design where interviews were used to gather data from traditional council members and local mayors. The findings were that traditional leaders and local councils are not involved in education as there is no legislation stipulating their role in education. The paper also suggests mechanisms on how to include all members of society in education.

INTRODUCTION

For years, education has never been isolated from society. Society has been part and parcel of education as a strategic partner. The partnership of society and education makes easy for both society and education to work collaboratively in order to improve the lives, economy and development of society. It is in this regard that the paper discusses the role of traditional leadership and local government (municipality) mayors in improving learner performance and quality education in the Limpopo Province. Society is composed of many facets, according to Gonzalez et al. (2000), as quoted by Mbokazi and Bhengu (2008) who state that people are living in an interconnected society where forming synergistic partnerships can create stronger economies and offer residents a high quality of life. In this paper, researchers discuss how Traditional Leader and Mayors of municipalities, as members of society, should play a critical role in improving learner performance and quality edu-

cation. Gomes (2003) as quoted by Mbokazi and Bhengu (2008) states that partnership, in this regard, schools, traditional leaders and mayors (society) should function symbiotically, and maintaining this kind of relationship requires an understanding of multiple realities because conflicting perceptions of the same event can lead to a breakdown in communication. Society in partnership should be the result of a mutual desire on the part of two or more institutions to effect change. Among those characteristics deemed essential are: common goals; mutual trust and respect; shared decision making; long-term commitment; and information-sharing.

The Role of Traditional Leadership in Education

According to South African History Online (SAHO) (2016), the traditional leadership institution represents an early form of societal organisation. The institution embodies the protection of culture, traditions, customs and val-

ues. Before the colonial era, the institution of traditional leadership was a political and administrative centre of governance for traditional rural communities in South Africa. It was a form of government with the highest authority. The leadership control of traditional leaders changed when the colonial authority and rulers introduced their authority to the landscape of traditional governance. Traditional leadership has been there ever since and cannot be ignored.

Democracy in South Africa has allowed for the development of an equal society, where the political ideals and rights of all citizens have legitimate voice and are guaranteed by the Constitution. There are, however, a number of critical issues which have stemmed from the democratization and liberalization of the South African political system. The practice of traditional leadership has become a point of vociferous debate and has led to severe political contention (Meer and Campbell 2007).

Meer et al. (2007) further state that it has been argued that traditional leadership has no role to play within a democratized society and, therefore, has little role to play within the contemporary South African system of governance. This argument has been opposed by traditional authorities who claim that their fundamental cultural rights and the role they play within rural societies is unfairly compromised by the current democratic system in place.

Traditional leadership is part of community leadership in rural contexts and attempts to establish linkages between this structure and schools has both positive and negative factors. Without ruling out negative ones, the positive ones include an enhanced community involvement and ownership of schools, including parental involvement in school affairs as well as playing a gate-keeping role in terms of access to schools by outsiders (Mbokazi and Bhengu 2008). The concept document on the provision of Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) provides for the involvement of all community structures including Traditional Leadership in rural areas. The Provincial Departments of Education are mandated to establish QLTC structures from Provincial to school levels to monitor and support quality learning and teaching in public schools (DoBE 2009). QLTC entrust traditional leadership and mayors, as leaders of communities: to ensure that every school-going child is at school; to provide a safe and

crime-free environment for schooling; to protect the school and its assets from vandalism; to monitor the performance of schools; and to report problems to relevant authorities.

Traditional Leadership and Schools Ownership

In their study, Tshitereke et al. (2016) state that traditional leaders share the schools' vision for quality education. Traditional leaders support their schools with a sense of pride. It is encouraging to see that traditional leaders visit their schools in January as a way of monitoring school re-opening to ensure effective teaching and learning. One of them goes to the school every year in the beginning of the year wearing a school uniform. It is his way of encouraging learners to also have a sense of pride and co-ownership with parents, teachers and school educators and principals. Furthermore, traditional leaders motivate the learners by arranging village prize-giving ceremonies for the best performing learners in their communities. In January, the school invites the parents of all learners per grade for meetings in which both parents and teachers can agree on the way forward for the year as far as the education of their children is concerned. The result is that parents are reminded to play their part, and the ultimate winner in this arrangement is the learner who has no choice but to do well.

Due to growing violence and discipline-related issues, one of the school principal responded in the afore-mentioned research:

"There is a collaborative programme in which learners found to be ill-disciplined are taken to the chiefs' kraal with the permission of the parents. Ideally, parents will accompany the children and there would be a team of elders who talk to the learners about discipline issues and the consequences thereof. The programme includes participation of other stakeholders such as South African Police Services (SAPS) who conduct random inspections and hold talks with learners about the effects of being involved in drugs and crime."

No school can succeed without discipline, and the civic and headmen's communities help the school to instill discipline by ensuring that they deal with disciplinary issues that involve learners from their communities (Tshitereke et al. 2016). This is reflected in the Venda phrase

which goes: “*it takes a village to raise a child.*” Some research study indicates that culture and discipline at the school reflects the norms and values of the communities surrounding the school.

The Role of Executive Mayors and Local Mayors in Education

According to O’Neill et al. (2006), in the United States, mayoral leadership and involvement in education is not new. In fact, from the development of the first public schools in the 1850s until the 1930s, almost every mayor had direct authority over education. In a few cities, mayors have maintained this formal role to the present day. Since the early 1990s, mayors of some American cities have greater accountability over public education by calling for and receiving the authority to directly select their city’s schools superintendent and school board members.

O’Neill et al. (2006) further state that Mayors can make a difference in public education through informal involvement with local schools, and by exercising their leadership in multiple ways. By using their authority over public safety, health and social service agencies, parks and recreation facilities, and a host of other resources, mayors can make a direct impact on the lives of children and improve their educational outcomes without becoming directly involved in the governance of the school system.

Similarly to South Africa, most American cities are facing rapidly changing demographics, more complex social problems, heightened calls from employers to properly prepare the future workforce, and increased scrutiny by state and federal governments to promote better outcomes for children. Combined with the needs of multiple constituencies who vary with respect to ethnicity, race, income, and citizenship, as well as the striking difference in the background between those who teach and those who are taught in public schools, these issues have increased mayoral concern about local education (O’Neill et al. 2006).

All of these issues are linked to the vitality and quality of cities, which is a fact that ultimately compels greater involvement in education by mayors. Citizens naturally look to mayors to provide leadership in the face of these demands and are holding mayors accountable for their ability to provide solutions, no matter

what formal authority over the schools the mayor may have (O’Neill et al. 2006).

Although some mayors are more interested in addressing core issues in school systems directly, others may want to become involved by supporting issues that are related but no less vital to school systems, such as out of school youth programs, workforce development efforts, social services, and library, museum, arts and cultural programs.

Because of their status as the chief elected officials in their cities, mayors can address the challenges by:

- ♦ Working with the school system to develop an array of opportunities to provide programs that help improve student achievement, such as out-of-school programs, mentoring and tutoring and links to social services;
- ♦ Convening meetings of all parties involved in school issues. This approach may include using bully pulpit, running a slate for the school board to gain a majority, and mediating conflict;
- ♦ Assisting the school system in recruiting and retaining teachers, as well as working to develop strategies to support inexperienced teachers. To improve recruitment and retention of teachers, some mayors have implemented a real estate loan or subsidy program for purchasing or renting housing. Other mayors have called on retired teachers and citizens in the city to assist the schools by serving as mentors;
- ♦ Communicating a consistent message to the community that reinforces the theme that all children can learn;
- ♦ Discussing with business and education leaders the importance of aligning curriculum to rigorous academic standards and what students need to know and be able to do in the world of work; and
- ♦ Providing technical support to improve the school system’s business operation or taking a pro-active approach to suggest that certain functions could be more effectively and efficiently be handled by the city. These functions may include payroll, information technology (IT), transportation, purchasing and contract management and maintenance.

South Africa and Limpopo, in particular, can learn from USA’s City of San José as in the fol-

lowing discussion. Gonzalez (2016) states that education has become an issue that every mayor must make a top priority in order to build a foundation for future prosperity and quality of life. The following framework according to Gonzalez (2016) might provide inspiration to mayors and other municipal leaders interested in making a positive impact on the lives of their cities' children and create a better future for their communities. In the city of San Jose, Gonzalez (2016) states ten (10) ways in which mayor helped to improve public education:

Become a "Teacher-Friendly City.": To attract and retain quality teachers, a scheme known as the *Teacher Homebuyer Program* which provides teachers with no-interest loans to help them purchase their first home was started. This has been very successful in helping districts recruit and teachers become full members of the communities where they teach;

Invest in Preschool Programs, Quality Child Care and Early Literacy: One of the most effective ways to improve academic success is preparing children to learn before they enter school. Early education centers that are operated by school districts, community organizations were started. Child-care providers were trained on reading development and the importance of early literacy, and these have become an invaluable partner with schools;

Keep Schools Safe: The Safe School Campus Initiative to reduce violence and potential risk at and near schools through planning, preparation and practice, in partnership with police and fire departments, was established. A city's relationship with schools has helped schools to become more effective at preventing and managing catastrophic or violent events;

Provide Quality after-School Programs to Extend the School Day: Students with positive after-school activities do better in the classroom and stay away from crime, drugs and alcohol;

Encourage innovation in Public Education: learners who have support of their leaders succeed in their academic work.

Recognize and Encourage Schools that Show Improvement: Most people often point to what is wrong in schools. It is necessary to do more to recognize what is right. It is important to encourage more schools to do better and recognize those that show significant improvement in student achievement;

Encourage Parents to be Active in their Children's Education: The degree of a child's success in school is directly related to parent involvement;

Build Strong Relationships with School District Leaders: Through regular high-level meetings between the mayor and superintendents, we share ideas, insights and innovations that help our children learn;

Support Efforts to Improve School Facilities: A community's commitment to education can be judged by the quality of its schools and the quality of its school buildings. Leaking roofs, cracked walls and broken window glasses interfere with learning and teaching. Mayors must champion school bond campaigns when investments are clearly needed; and

Talk About Education: Mayors can beat the drum to strengthen public support for quality public education. Mayors can use their influence with civic leaders, fellow councillors, businesses, community organizations and the media to ensure that education stays at the top of the public agenda, to celebrate success and to achieve results that benefit students and community.

This can be adopted and used as stepping stones by mayors in South Africa, and Limpopo Province in particular in order to improve learner performance and quality education.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study employed qualitative design where interviews were conducted to collect data from traditional councils' members and local municipality Mayors. Five traditional members from traditional councils in Vhembe District were sampled, and four mayors from Vhembe local municipality councils were sampled in order to collect data. Collected data were analysed through two themes and coding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Limpopo Province is composed of five districts, namely: Vhembe, Mopani, Capricorn, Sekhukhune, Capricorn and Waterberg. These districts are predominantly rural, with small towns scattered around them. Before establishment of local government, most rural parts of the province were under the traditional leadership.

Involvement of Traditional Leadership in Education

Following the introduction of local government in 2000, these areas are currently under the leadership of both traditional leaders and local councils. Mashau et al. (2014) indicate that in rural areas, municipalities have power and functions that largely overlap with those meant to be exercised by traditional authorities. Some of the leaders in the local councils assume that they are more powerful than traditional leaders, while traditional leaders feel that they are born leaders with royal blood and are, therefore, more powerful than local council leaders. Power between local councils and traditional leaders was and is still being contested in some areas.

Cele (2013), as quoted by Mashau et al. (2014), state that the introduction of democratic local government and the establishment of municipalities across the entire country has allowed for the development of an equality-driven society, where political ideals and rights of all citizens have a legitimate voice and are guaranteed by the Constitution. Despite these advantages, there are, however, a number of issues which have stemmed from the democratization of the political system in South Africa. In particular, the role of traditional leadership in a democratic state has become a subject for debate and continues to present what sometimes seems as insurmountable problems.

Since legislation articulates how traditional leadership should work or operate and interact with local councils, this makes it to be in leadership where local councils are in existence. This is a component or facet that cannot be ignored at the local level and the reason it is important to incorporate traditional leadership in education.

Traditional leaders indicated that though there is no legislation indicating that they should participate in education, in the schools where Tshitereke et al. (2016) conducted their research, traditional leadership plays a role. Traditional leaders stated that: *“we visit schools at the beginning of the year and contribute towards giving prizes to learners who have achieved more than others. This might be a lesson to other traditional leaders for them to play a part in the enhancement of learner performance and quality of education of their communities”*. Strong leadership which involves itself in the provision of high learner performance and quality education will not allow vans, taxis and bus-

es to ferry their learners to schools that are too far away. Their schools can produce high learner performance and quality education if they have space to play a role.

Legislation of traditional leadership is very quiet on how leaders should get involved in education. Similar to traditional leadership legislation, local government legislation is very quiet on how municipalities and their leaders such as: mayors, executive mayors and elected council members should get involved in education.

Involvement of Local Councils in Education

The Mayors stated: *“even though we are not involved in education per se, we do back to school campaigns every year. It is unfortunate that, after such campaign we are no longer involved. We visit schools in accompanying the Minister of Basic Education, the Provincial Premier or Member of Executive Council (MEC) of Education when they visit our District”*. Researchers revisited the functions of the mayors who have executive powers and those who do not have executive powers in the Municipal Structures Act of 1998. In terms of Section 49(1) (a)-(b) of Municipal Structures (Act No. 117) of 1998, on functions and powers of mayors, the Mayor of a municipality: presides at meetings of the executive committee; performs the duties, including any ceremonial functions, and exercises the powers delegated to the mayor by the municipal council or the executive committee.

In terms of Section 56 (1)-(2) (a)-(c) of Municipal Structures Act, functions and powers of Executive Mayors are that: an executive mayor is entitled to receive reports from committees of the municipal council and forward these reports together with a recommendations to the council when the matter cannot be disposed of by the executive mayor in terms of the executive mayor's delegated powers. The Executive Mayor must: identify the needs of the municipality; review and evaluate those needs in order of priority; recommend to the municipal council strategies programmes and services to address priority needs through the integrated development plan, and the estimates of revenue and expenditure, taking into account any applicable national and provincial development plans; and recommend or determine the best way, including partnership and other approaches, to deliver those strategies, programmes and services to the maximum benefit of the community.

Researchers regard education as a need of community which Mayors and Executive Mayors should execute. The municipal should assign the mayor to perform education tasks as ceremonial functions. Mayors and traditional leadership fall in the same category as legislation is quiet on how these leaders can get involved in education. Society expects traditional leadership to exclusively play a role in education, to the exclusion of local councils. This becomes unfair as these structures are at the coalface of the communities and should perform similar roles in education. Gonzalez (2016) states that education, however, has become an issue that every mayor must make a top priority in order to build the foundations for future prosperity and quality of life. The municipality should also involve representatives from the Education Department in the process of developing an Integrated Development Plan (IDP) which will address issues of the education sector, as informed by Inter-governmental Relations Framework Act (Act 13 of 2005).

CONCLUSION

Members of society include School Governing Bodies (SGB) federations, social partners (that is, teacher unions), student movements, Non-Governmental Organisations (that is, Development Foundation and Trust), industry owners and business leaders who can sponsor schools with different items that can enhance the quality of schools. Societies leave out very important components or facets which are equally important in enhancing academic performance of learners and quality education. It is in this spirit that all members of society must get involved in the enhancement of performance and quality of education in the Limpopo Province.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends that if traditional leadership and mayors can work together, they can develop school programmes that will help to improve student achievement through mentoring and tutoring, and links to social services. As both parties are respected by communities, they can convene meetings of all parties and society members involved in schools. They can also work together to retain quality and experienced teachers who have resigned and taking early retirement as well as working towards develop strategies to support inexperienced teach-

ers. Traditional leadership and Mayors should be invited to attend school meetings. Partnership with relevant stakeholders mentioned above can produce schools which are centres of excellence. This can be done by including all role players in education campaigns in schools.

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