

Challenges Regarding the Implementation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement

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ABSTRACT The study examines the views of Intermediate Phase of educators on the viability of Revised of National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). The aim of the study is to make an analysis of the views of the Intermediate Phase Educators perceptions about the implementation RNCS in Mangaung. The study applied a qualitative research method. Questionnaires were used as the main data gathering instrument because they preserve the anonymity of the respondents thereby encouraging honest. The study revealed that educators differ in terms of the problems that they encountered in the implementing RCNS in the GET band. The findings from this study pointed to problems such as educators receiving inadequate training on the implementation. It was also revealed that no monitor and evaluation was done by the respective official. Another finding, showed that teaching and learning support material arrived late and that there was a large shortage of such material.

INTRODUCTION

The political, social and economic changes in post apartheid South Africa have been accompanied by considerable changes in the education system. The most notable changes have been the desegregation of schools, the development of a Higher Educational Qualifications Framework (HEQF), the adoption of new language policies for education and the introduction of an outcomes-based education (OBE) curriculum. Although the policy changes were driven by the government's drive to "redress past injustices in educational provision" (Department of Education 1996: 1), they have not necessarily resulted in major changes at classroom level; but educators are trying very hard to implement new pedagogical practices.

New policies related to outcomes-based education, languages of instruction and assessment may be well intentioned, but entrenched assessment practices seem to be hampering the government's efforts to transform school education. The reluctance of educators to change their practices in response to new policies and curriculum guidelines may be due to their practices in response to the new policies and curriculum guidelines, as well as their ingrained views of the RNCS. Leyendecker (2008: 195) also examined the gaps between policy and practice in curriculum change and writes that while there is agreement on the aims of reform, there is evidence of divergence in practice.

The curriculum developers in South Africa believed that the new curriculum 2005 had great potential to achieve a society that meets the needs of the 21st century. Unfortunately, in South Africa the implementation has been beset with problems and negativity that have seriously hampered the realisation of the new education system that could be based on equality and democracy. Ramroop (2004: 1) asks the questions: "Why do educators view the implementation of curriculum 2005 as being so fraught with problems? What is missing in this process that hinders the development of schools? Could it be the case of the many gaps that exist between the policy makers and the practitioners? What are the readiness and skills level of educators on the ground to be able to implement the changes?" Although this approach has the potential to restructure and realign a poor and ineffective system, the way it is conceptualised and introduced may jeopardise its ability to address and readdress the real problems and causes of the existing system. However, contrary to expectations, these have not been universally welcomed (Lessing and De Witt 2007: 53).

In teaching and learning situations, educators bring different experiences, backgrounds and expectations, and these have the ability to determine their views. The way educators perceive the RNCS, may influence their ability to implement it satisfactorily. There are two different types of perceptions which are emphasised and they are

positive and negative perceptions. Those with positive perceptions will view the RNCS as understandable and will support its implementation; whereas those with negative perceptions will view the RNCS as something that wastes time, and obviously, will not support its implementation. Their knowledge, beliefs and perceptions play a fundamental role in understanding the reforms (Blignaut 2007: 49).

Habermas (2005: 94) expresses this point of view more cogently when he states that our past ideas are still capable of being held fast in the mind, as if they existed together and linked up with the ideas that come after them. In this study, past ideas includes educators' needs, wants and experiences which influence the views that they have towards the RNCS.

The RNCS cannot be treated in isolation with OBE; it therefore becomes imperative that the literature be reviewed to determine the background to curriculum transformation in South Africa; reasons why there have been problems in educators' views of OBE and curriculum 2005 in schools; factors that are contributing to this problem; and what can be done to alleviate these problems, so that the curriculum transformation which South Africa seeks is fulfilled.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The qualitative and quantitative approach was used in this study. This is an ideal method because it ascertains people's beliefs, attitudes, values and understandings of certain issues. Data was collected using questionnaires and/or interviews (De Vos and Strydom 2007: 173). The intention to use questionnaires and interviews was to get a broader picture through the questionnaires and a deeper understanding through interviews. The interviews can be structured or open-ended depending on the information needed by the researcher. A questionnaire was administered to all participants. The questionnaires aim at analysing the views of educators on the viability of the RNCS in Motheo Schools. The data that were collected through the questionnaires and interviews were analysed. The open-ended questions of the questionnaire were qualitatively analysed.

Population

The population comprised educators from the Motheo district schools. The views of all educators were be analysed concerning the viability of the RNCS. A simple random sampling method was used for selecting the sample of this study. The sample comprised educators from the Intermediate Phase in the Motheo district. It is worth noting that the findings of the study was not generalised for all Intermediate Phase Educators. That notwithstanding, the findings of this study provided baseline information on the views of Intermediate Phase Educators concerning the RNCS, and how improvements can be implemented, if necessary.

Instrumentation

The Questionnaire: A self-constructed questionnaire designed to gather the opinions of Intermediate Phase Educators on the viability of the RNCS in Motheo Schools in one of the five districts in the Free State education department was used. In order to obtain the information needed for the purpose of this study, the questionnaire was divided into three sections namely: Section A, Section B and Section C. The first section consisted of the biographical information of the respondent. The second section (Section B) consisted of ordinary questions needing answers from respondents. In the three point likert-type scale questions, participants were asked, for example, to indicate how acceptable the use of the RNCS is to educators, the 3-point scale where: 3 = highly acceptable; 2 = acceptable; and 1 = not acceptable. An ordinary question, for example, will be: "How frequently do you attend RNCS workshops?" Finally, two open-ended questions were included (Section C) to allow the educators an opportunity to express their views on the positive and negative aspects of developing and implementing the RNCS in their schools.

Interviews: Interviews with one educator per school were conducted. The educators were chosen randomly from the sample. Five to ten minutes were taken for interviews, and a tape recorder was used after permission was given. The aim of the interview was to analyse the views of educators on the viability of the RNCS. The interviews were semi-structured. Educators were asked questions that were predetermined by the researchers; however, follow-up questions were

asked, depending on the answers given. In terms of the semi-structured interviews, interviewees were asked the same general questions. Interviews were used for the following reasons: interviews have an advantage over questionnaires because they provide room for probing, whereas questionnaires limit the respondent to the questions asked. In an interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study better than in a covering letter accompanying a questionnaire.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis of Data

- ♦ Percentages are in parentheses
- ♦ Positively worded statements (scoring 3, 2, 1)

Figure 1 displays the following information pertaining to educators' views on each statement.

Statement 1: The RNCS is a curriculum accepted by educators.

The statement is positively worded. Figure 1 shows that 4 (8%) of the educators 'highly accept' and 35 (70%) 'accept' that the RNCS is method accepted by educators. Only 11 (22%) 'do not accept'. The mean score is 1.86. Therefore, on average, the educators do accept the RNCS as a method accepted by educators.

Statement 2: Lesson planning is easy in the RNCS.

The statement is positively worded. Figure 1 shows that 7 (14%) 'highly accept' and 35 (70%) 'accept' that lesson planning is easy in the RNCS. Only 8 (16%) 'do not accept'. The mean score is 1.98. On average, the educators do accept lesson planning as easy in the RNCS.

Statement 3: There are resources other than text books for the RNCS lessons

This is a positively worded statement. Figure 1 reveals that 7 (14%) of educators 'highly accept', and 25 (50%) 'accept' that there are resources other than text books for the RNCS lessons. Only 18 (36%) 'do not accept'. On average, the educators do accept that there are resources other than text books for RNCS lessons. The mean score is 1.74 falls within the 'A' category (see Fig. 1).

Statement 4: Planning of lessons according to the (LPG) learning programme guidelines is advantageous to the educators.

The statement is positively worded. Figure 1 illustrates that 9 (18%) of the educators 'highly accept' and 31 (62%) 'accept' the planning of lessons according to the LPG is advantageous to the educators. About 10 (20%) 'do not accept'. The mean score of 1.98 falls within the 'A' category (see Fig. 1). On average, educators accept the planning of lessons according to the LPG as advantageous to the educators.

Statement 5: Educator support in the RNCS is enough.

This is a negatively worded statement. According to Figure 1 (8%) of the educators 'highly accept' and 18 (36%) 'accept' that educator support in the RNCS is enough. About 28 (56%) 'do not accept'. The mean score of 1, 52 falls within 'NA' category (see Fig. 1). On average, educators do not accept that educator support in the RNCS is enough.

Statement 6: I use the RNCS documents in my day-to-day teaching.

It is a positively worded statement. Figure 1 reveals that 3 (6%) of the educators 'highly accept' that they use the RNCS documents in their day-to-day teaching, and 37 (74%) 'accept'. About 10 (20%) 'do not accept'. The mean score of 1, 86 falls within 'A' category (see Figure). On average, educators accept that they use the RNCS in their day-to-day teaching.

Interview Questions and the Responses of Educators

Interviews were conducted with ten Intermediate Phase Educators. The questions were asked verbally, and the responses of the interviewees were recorded on a tape recorder.

Question 1: What is your general view of the RNCS?

The responses of the interviewees were as follows:

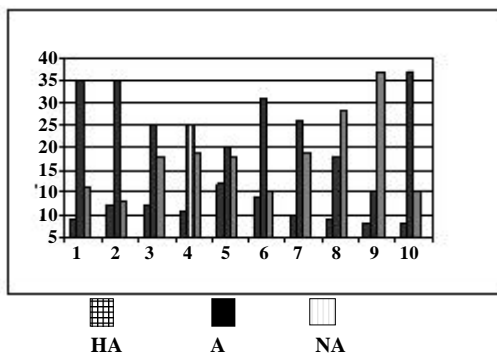


Fig. 1. Responses of educators according to highly acceptable, acceptable, not acceptable

The RNCS still has too many shortcomings and it needs refinement. It is helpful for learners whose parents are literate, because they are able to assist their children. The RNCS is easy to manage. Disadvantaged learners in rural areas have no resources such as computers to assist them and the system involves a lot of paperwork.

Question 2: What are the advantages/merits of the RNCS?

Responses were as follows:

It is learner-centred. Learners are able to experiment, explore and discover knowledge for themselves. Educators are facilitators, guides and assessors. The approach in teaching has improved, and it helps teachers to achieve the intended goals. Learners become life-long learners; they become more independent in solving problems, and they are free to participate in a lesson. It also encourages teamwork. It is an approach that aims at high performance.

Question 3: What are the disadvantage/demerits of the RNCS?

The educators' responses were as follows:

Learners do not fail even when they do not deserve to pass. The training for educators is inadequate. It has a lot of changes which confuse educators. The RNCS is based on quantity and not quality work, because educators have to constantly assess and have too much work in this area. Learners have to move on to the next task without having mastered the first one.

Question 4: What are the challenges experienced by educators in the RNCS?

The interviewees responded as follows:

The RNCS is a new curriculum; therefore, progress is very slow. There is a shortage of RNCS compliant text books. Overcrowded classrooms, a lack of resources and a lack of parental involvement hamper progress. Learners fail to do all the activities.

Question 5: What are your views on educators' training in the RNCS?

The responses were as follows:

Training is insufficient for educators; it should be done more frequently. Experts should be invited to lead the training sessions, because the people who train educators do not know how to approach the RNCS.

Question 6: What is your opinion regarding the assessment strategies in the RNCS?

The interviewees responded as follows:

Learning facilitators change the assessment strategies too often and as a result, they are not properly understood. Learning areas have different

assessment criteria. Nevertheless, they are up to standard, as they enable a learner to show his/her competence, and they also give an educator a clear picture of the learner's performance.

Question 7: What are your views in respect of the terminology used in OBE and the RNCS?

The responses from educators were as follows:

The terminology was difficult to comprehend at the beginning, but over time it has become easier. Some of the terminology needs to be simplified, but in general, there are no problems. OBE has a lot of terminology, unlike the RNCS.

Question 8: Is there sufficient literature in the RNCS for educator assessment?

The responses were as follows:

The literature is not sufficient; it is limited because many aspects have been overlooked.

Question 9: Are the RNCS implementation guidelines adequate?

The responses from educators were: implementation guidelines are adequate and as a result, the work becomes easier and more stress free.

Question 10: How were you introduced to the RNCS?

The educators' responses were as follows:

Educators were introduced to the RNCS through workshops, and training sessions that were conducted at different venues during school holidays. It was also done through the initiative of Learning Facilitators and HODs.

Findings of the Study

Interviews were conducted in which ten educators participated. The ten educators were from different schools in Motheo. Figure 1 reveals that on average, educators accept eight of the ten positively worded statements; namely 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10. The only two statements that they do not accept are 8 and 9. The findings also reveal that educators differ in terms of their views regarding the viability of the Revised National Curriculum Statement. The educators were visited by departmental officials in their schools for monitoring, and they received teaching and learning material in order to implement the RNCS. This reveals that the training of educators, monitoring and implementation of the new curriculum, as well as support given to educators is sufficient. The findings are consistent with those of other studies that were conducted on curriculum 2005 (Christie 1999).

The educators' views were that it took them too long to feel confident about implementing the RNCS; that they need further development in implementing the RNCS and find it difficult to use the learning outcomes. This particular concern was raised as a result of the training afforded to educators.

Concerning the assessment strategies in the RNCS, educators felt that they are always changing and as a result, they are not properly understood. The challenges educators experienced in the RNCS, was that because is a new curriculum, progress is very slow. The problems are further exacerbated by a shortage of RNCS compliant textbooks. Implementation guidelines are adequate according to educators, and thus their work becomes easier and more stress free. Most educators' views on the viability of the RNCS were positive. The reason for their positive views may be that curriculum 2005 has been streamlined and strengthened in the Revised National Curriculum Statement.

Findings with Regard to the Nature of Educators' Experiences in Implementing the Revised National Curriculum Statement

The findings reveal that educators differ in terms of the nature of their experiences in implementing the Revised National Curriculum Statement. A high percentage (70%) of educators report a positive experience level compared to those who reported a negative experience level of (22%).

Educators with ages 35 years and below report a negative experience in implementing the Revised National Curriculum Statement compared to educators with ages of 36 to 40 years who report a positive experience.

Concerning qualifications, educators with (REQV 13 and above) report a positive experience in implementing the Revised National Curriculum Statement. One possible reason may be that it is because they are committed to curriculum changes.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that educators differ in terms of the problems that they encountered in implementing RNCS in the GET band. The findings

from this study pointed to problems such as educators receiving inadequate training on implementing RNCS. It was also revealed that educators had not been visited by the departmental officials in their schools for monitoring implementation. Another finding showed that teaching and learning support material arrived late and that there was a large shortage of support material. The study concluded by raising the level of support afforded to the educators. The thesis of the study recommend that a training analysis and capacity development must be undertaken before new curriculum reform is rolled out.

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