

Analyzing Views of Intermediate Phase Educators with Regard to Their Experiences of the Revised National Curriculum Statement

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ABSTRACT The study examines the views of Intermediate Phase Educators on the viability of Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). The study also aimed at examining the views of the Intermediate Phase Educators and their perceptions with regard to the implementation of RNCS in Mangaung schools and its impacts on their teaching philosophy. The findings from this study pointed to problems such as educators receiving inadequate training on implementing RNCS. Another finding showed poor planning in terms of the preparation and allocation of teaching and learning support material to the schools and all these factors foster negative perceptions among educators. It is the light of the latter cited problems that the researcher got motivated to engage in an analytical research study of the views educators hold with regard to Revised National Curriculum Statement, in particular, the educators in the intermediate phase. On the basis of the findings of this study, a number of recommendations for the implementation of RNCS are given which requires support and monitoring, this should be provided by the department officials. The support and monitoring stage should be followed by training of the educators. Workshops should be designed by the departmental officials for professional development of educators on the topics consistent with thrust and vision for the curriculum. There should be adequate supply of learning support material which is essential to the effective running of an educational system.

1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa's democratic government inherited a divided and unequal system of education. Under apartheid, South Africa had nineteen different educational departments separated by race, geography and ideology. In each department, the curriculum played a powerful role in reinforcing inequality. What and how learners were taught differed according to the expectations of their roles in the wider society.

Curriculum change in post-apartheid South Africa started immediately after the elections in 1994 when the National Education and Training Forum curriculum developers removed overtly racist and other insensitive issues from the syllabi. For the first time curriculum decisions were made in a participatory and representative manner. Curriculum 2005 was the first major curriculum statement of a democratic South Africa, deliberately intended to simultaneously overturn the legacy of apartheid education and take South Africa into the 21st century.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement attempts to provide more structure and support

to teachers than curriculum 2005. While it is an improvement on its forerunner, it still has weaknesses. Teacher training time had gone into explaining the complex vocabulary, and too little into the substance of Outcomes Based Education. When the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grade R-9 (schools) became a policy, it replaced the statement of the National Curriculum for Grades R-9 approved in 1997. The implementation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (schools) is planned as follows: in 2004 (Grades R-3), 2005 (Grade 4-6), 2006 (Grade 7), 2007 (Grade 8) and 2008 (Grade 9).

The Revised National Curriculum Statement was a new mode of curriculum delivery in South Africa. There are various complications such as its broad understanding, application, general reception, its administration, the principles behind it, proper training of educators, experience of trainers and the ever changing and frustrating demands that educational authorities place on educators. Adams (2008) acknowledges the efforts of the Department of Education in establishing free schools but also reports the numerous challenges to this ideal, claiming that "Curricula

remains underdeveloped and where they were developed, the training of teachers to deliver those curricular is limited or completely lacking.

- ♦ What reception challenges do educators experience regarding the RNCS?

Theoretical Framework

Jurgen Habermas is widely considered as the most influential thinker in Germany during the 1970s and '80s. As a philosopher and sociologist, he mastered and creatively articulated an extraordinary range of specialised literature in the social sciences. His roots are in the tradition of German thought from Kant to Marx, and he has been associated with the Frankfurt school of critical theorists which pioneered the study of the relationship between the ideas of Marx and Freud (Habermas 2005).

Critical emancipatory theory is mostly influenced by, among others Marcuse, Habermas, Fay and Foucault and it grounds this study in terms of how to look at perceptions. Critical emancipatory theory is mostly concerned with making people aware of their capabilities and freedom. Human beings can change, and are subjective. The way educators see the RNCS can also be subjective and dynamic (Blignaut 2007). Critical theory thus points out many possibilities such as truth, reality and perception (Ramroop 2004). Respondents were given the opportunity to speak for themselves as this study was grounded in emancipatory research. 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.

Bush and Glover (2009) suggests that educators hold one of four major views of the RNCS, that is, (1) assessment is useful because it can provide information for improving instruction and learning, (2) it is a necessary process for making learners accountable for their learning, (3) it is a process by which educators are made accountable, and (4) it is relevant to the work of educators and the life of learners. These views resulted in different assessment practices. Educators, who view assessment as a useful means of gathering

data upon which to base decisions about learning and their own teaching, attempt to make assessment an integral part of teaching.

In this study, views of some Intermediate Phase Educators in Mangaung on the viability of the RNCS was analysed and understood so as to give real audience to it and not to misrepresent it.

The RNCS still faces a huge task of capacity building among educators. The majority of educators are still not clear as to what the RNCS entails in practical classroom situations. The workshops that are being conducted in an attempt to alleviate this problem still fall short of addressing the realities of classroom situations faced by educators.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a "plan or recipe for investigation". It represents a structure that guides the execution of a research method and the analysis of the subsequent data, with a view to reaching conclusions about the research problem (Kruger and Mitchell 2005). It offers a clear description of how a research study is to be conducted and provides an indication of the procedures to be followed in the sampling, data collection, data analysis, and in the presentation of findings in answering the research questions. The qualitative 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. The questionnaire was aimed at analysing the views of educators on the viability of the RNCS in Motheo Schools. The data that were collected through the questionnaires were analysed. The open-ended questions of the questionnaire were qualitatively analysed.

Population: A population is the total set from which the individual or units of study are chosen. It reflects to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics. According to Imenda and Muyangwa (2006: 97), population is a group of subjects to whom the findings of a given study will be generalized. The population did comprise educators from the Motheo district schools. The views of all educators were analysed concerning the viability of the RNCS.

Sample: Brynard and Hanekom (2006: 54) always imply the simultaneous existence of a population or universe of which the sample is a

smaller section in the Motheo district. The sample will comprise educators from the Intermediate Phase in the Motheo district. It is worth noting that the findings of the study will not be generalised for all Intermediate Phase Educators. That notwithstanding, the findings of this study will provide baseline information on the views of Intermediate Phase Educators concerning the RNCS, and how improvements can be implemented, if necessary. A simple random sampling method will be used for selecting the sample of this study. The usual definition of a random sampling is that it is a procedure in which all the individuals in the defined population have an equal and independent chance of being selected as a member of the sample. Borg and Gall (2005:227) maintain that in simple random sampling, the probability that the universal unit (member of the defined population) will be selected at any given draw is the same as that at first draw.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Instrumentation: The questionnaire was designed to gather the opinions of Intermediate Phase Educators on the viability of the Revised National Curriculum Statement in Motheo Schools. Motheo is one of the five districts in the Free State education department.

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 by the researcher. 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 researcher; 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. Examples of these were captured in the questionnaire.

Data Analysis: Labovitz and Hagedorn (as cited in Ngidi, S.A. 2007: 216) suggest that the analysis of data involves both descriptive and inferential statistics. In this study the analysis of data will involve both descriptive and inferential statistics. In the following sections the difference between descriptive and inferential statistics will be discussed.

III. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Descriptive Analysis of Data

Statement 1: Assessment strategies are reliable for teacher learner performance in the RNCS.

This is a positively worded statement. Table 1 shows that 6 (12%) 'highly accept' and 25 (50%) 'accept' that assessment strategies are reliable for teacher learner performance in the RNCS. About 19 (38%) 'do not accept'. The mean score of 1,74 falls within the 'A' category (see Table 1). On an average, the assessment strategies are reliable for teacher learner performance in the RNCS.

Statement 2: Portfolios are easy to complete in the RNCS.

It is a positively worded statement. Table 1 indicates that 12 (24%) of the educators 'highly accept' and 20 (40%) 'accept' that portfolios are easy to complete in the RNCS. About 18 (36%) 'do not accept'. The mean score of 1,88 falls within the 'A' category. On average, educators accept that portfolios are easy to complete in the RNCS.

Statement 3: Planning of lessons according to the (LPG), learning programme guidelines is advantageous to the educators.

The statement is positively worded. Table 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 Table 1). On average, educators accept the planning of lessons according to the LPG as advantageous to the educators.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of responses to item 1-10 (N=50)

Statement No.	Response			Category Mean \bar{X}
	Highly acceptable (HA)	Acceptable (A)	Not acceptable (NA)	
4	6 (12)	25 (50)	19 (38)	1,74
5	12 (24)	20 (40)	18 (36)	1,88
6	9 (18)	31 (62)	10 (20)	1,98
7	5 (10)	26 (52)	19 (38)	1,72
8	4 (8)	18 (36)	28 (56)	1,52
9	3 (6)	10 (20)	37 (74)	1,32
10	3 (6)	37 (74)	10 (20)	1,86

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

Statement 4: Monitoring in the RNCS is enough.

This is a positively worded statement. According to Table 1, 5 (10%) of the educators 'highly accept' and 26 (52%) 'accept' that monitoring in the RNCS is enough. About 19 (38%) 'do not accept'. The mean score of 1,72 falls within the 'A' category (see Table 1). On average, educators accept that monitoring in the RNCS is enough.

Statement 5: Educator support in the RNCS is enough.

This is a negatively worded statement. According to Table 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 Table 1). On average, educators do not accept that educator support in the RNCS is enough.

Statement 6: The RNCS class-teacher learner ratio is acceptable.

This is a negatively worded statement. Table 1 reveals that 3 (6%) of educators 'highly accept' and 10 (20%) 'accept' that the RNCS class-teacher ratio is acceptable. About 37 (74%) 'do not agree'. The mean score of 1,32 falls within the 'NA' category (see Table 1). On average, educators do not accept that the RNCS class-teacher learner ratio is acceptable.

Statement 7: I use the RNCS documents in my day-to-day teaching.

It is a positively worded statement. Table 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 Table 1). 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 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 2: 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 3: 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 4: 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 5: 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 6: 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 7: 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 8: 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.

Findings from the Interviews

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.

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.

IV. CONCLUSION

Educators differed in the extent to which assessment strategies are reliable for teacher-learner performance in the RNCS. Training in the RNCS lasted only two to three days and educators found this too short and questioned the quality of the trainers. Educators found problems with learning support materials. They need textbooks, along with other learning support materials and they need to be trained to use them effectively. Educators differed in terms of the departmental support they received concerning 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).

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The main purpose of this study was to analyse the views of Intermediate Phase Educators on the viability of the Revised National Curriculum Statement. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

The National Curriculum Statement should indicate what knowledge, within each learning area, should be taught and learnt, in what sequence, and at which level of competence. The learning outcomes (content, concepts and skills) and assessment standards should be presented together with each learning programme and grade.

The learning outcomes by grade should specify the sequence of the core concepts, content and skills to be taught in each learning programme at each grade level, and represent an integrated skill, concept and content statement of the projected learning outcomes.

The assessment standard should:

- Describe the expected level and range of performance for each of the learning outcomes for each grade level.
- Provide assessment exemplars which detail what kinds of tasks can be set, what assessment strategies should be adopted, and the kind of answers that should be expected.
- Provide guidance on summative and formative assessment.

The learning outcomes should be 'designed down' from the 'destination of the GET'. This means that the first step in the development of the learning outcomes is the specification of the Grade 9 exit outcomes (knowledge, skills and values) and the specification of the exit assessment standards; what will be assessed and at what level of detail and complexity.

The proposal for improving training should accordingly be grouped into two main categories linked to long- and short-term strategies.

Long-term preparation of educators for c2005 occurs within an overall, integrated educator development framework, strategy and plan.

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