

Leadership within the South African Education System

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KEYWORDS Teacher Unions. Redeployment Teacher Morale. School Governance. Promotions

ABSTRACT The process of appointing teachers to promotional positions within the South African education system has lowered the morale of teachers. Key members of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union reportedly get preference for promotion over deserving ordinary teachers. The aim of the research was to find ways of discouraging cadre deployment in order to boost the morale of deserving teachers. Focus group interviews were conducted using open ended questions. Verbatim transcribed data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. Research findings reveal that union representatives use undue influence while serving as observer members on School Governing Body selection committees by placing their comrades in attrition for promotional positions. Recommendations focus on the effective implementation of the redeployment process with the potential to boost the morale of teachers for enhanced teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

The migration of learners from ill-equipped to well-resourced schools after the demise of apartheid in South Africa (SA) led to some teachers declared redundant and consequently redeployed to other schools. Conversely the increased teacher workloads in well resourced schools led to the creation of additional posts, some of which were promotional ones. To prevent the retrenchment of teachers in excess, a plan for their redeployment was formulated in the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) which is a body consisting of key stakeholders. Selection committees consisting of education stakeholders including teacher union representatives as observers were formed in order to implement the redeployment process at school level. The Employment of Educators' Act, 78 of 1998 (EEA) clearly states the steps to be followed when redeployment takes place. There is the implication that the redeployment process has been hijacked by union representatives as a tool for placing their comrades in promotional posts when such posts become vacant. Van Onsellen (2012) and Pattillo (2012) refer to the practice of placing comrades to management positions as "Cadre Deployment". Pattillo (2012) describes cadre deployment as a form of unwritten policy of patronage-based political appointments to school leadership positions. Minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel (2011) has criticized the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) for causing disruptions in education

through their "jostling for promotions". Conversely the Secretary General of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC) Gwede Mantashe (2011) has defended the placement of ANC and SADTU loyalists in promotional posts on the basis that "it is a correction of what we inherited in 1994." Despite Mantashe (2011) conceding that the applicants should meet the basic requirements for the post, the author argues that a 3 year diploma or degree for promotional purposes as stated should be reviewed.

Diko and Letseka (2009:231) contend that there are sufficient teachers with Honours, Master's and Doctoral degrees that are overlooked when promotions are made. According to Diko and Letseka (2009:231), such irregular appointments may lead to teacher attrition due to low morale. Diko and Letseka (2009:231) further argue that the recruitment and quality of recruited teachers is "basically driven by competition for salary packages". In this context, Mangosuthu Buthelezi (2011) states that through cadre deployment, people have been placed in positions for which they are not qualified. Reference to cadre deployment can also be made to the number of leading SADTU loyalists that have occupied top management and government positions since 1994. Most of them held minimum qualifications for top government positions. Interestingly, the former SADTU President Membathisi Mdladlana a primary school principal with a bachelor's degree majoring in isiXhosa and History became a Cabinet Minister in 1994. Mdladlana failed to perform and was later relegated to

an ambassadorial post in Rwanda. Former SADTU Secretary-General Thulas Nxesi with an Honours degree and a diploma in education was also a Cabinet Minister. Another former SADTU President Duncan Hindle is a case in point as he became the first Director-General in 1994. This trend has cascaded down to school level leading to jostling for positions at the peril of teaching and learning as stated by Manuel (2011) during his speech at the National Awards Ceremony. Cadre deployment has been going on despite promises by the South African President that there would be no favours when promotions were to be made while he was still campaigning for the Presidency during the 2009 elections (Sunday Times 19 April 2009).

This article explores the flaws of the redeployment process in order to explain low teacher morale and attrition in SA. What follows is the background to the study, the research methodology, the findings, the recommendations for effective management of the redeployment process, and lastly the conclusions.

Background to the Study

In 1994 the first democratically elected government in SA established the new education department with the intention to correct the past imbalances that were based on skin colour in terms of access to quality education and resources. SADTU as a subsidiary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) which is the major ANC ally in parliament helped the ANC to power in 1994. The ANC government had to reward the SADTU officials with key positions within government after winning the elections as once confirmed by the ANC Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe (2011). Letseka et al. (2012) attest to SADTU's position as a key partner with the ruling party on the serious implications it has for appointments to key strategic posts in schools. Letseka et al. (2012) further state that the jostling for positions as espoused by Manuel (2011) manifest in "behind the scenes canvassing by union leaders for their preferred candidates." In the same tone, Fleisch (2008), and Ray (2008) in Letseka et al. (2012) have described the South African Education System as a crisis while Bloch (2009) in Letseka et al. (2012) describes it as "in tatters". It is under such circumstances that teachers have become demoralized and are leaving the education system in

droves as stated by Letseka et al. (2012). The opposition leader in parliament Mangosuthu Buthelezi (City Press 2011) has referred to the education system as "bedevilled by the ANC's cadre deployment policy." This statement refers to the countless cases of cadre deployment in South Africa. Other opposition parties in parliament have voiced their strong objection towards cadre deployment by the ANC (City Press 2011).

Section 8(2) Act 78 of 1998 of the EEA dictates that the redeployment or promotion of any teacher may only be conducted with the approval of the School Governing Body (SGB). The principal, also acting as the resource person during the redeployment process, becomes the representative of the employer at school level. The resource person is the departmental representative who sees to it that all processes take place according to Resolution 6 of 1998; section 2.4 of the EEA. The recommendation for an appointment is then discussed with the district official in the presence of union representatives who act as observers. The School Governing Body (SGB) has to validate the selection before it is sent to the Head of Department (HoD) who has the final say in the redeployment of teachers. This process is reportedly not followed in schools and has become a matter of serious concern among educationists and the public according to opposition party leader Buthelezi in a speech read by Singh (City Press 2011) and Wilmot James who is a member of the Democratic Party, another opposition party member.

Findings from the research conducted by Fleisch (2009), Fleisch and Christie (2010) and Letseka et al. (2012), all concur that SADTU has used intimidation tactics to School Governing Bodies (SGB) to influence the appointment of their comrades by deliberately overlooking the curricular requirements for promotions. Fleisch (2009) and Chuenyane (2009) also attest to SADTU intimidation tactics when referring to the 2009 strike action in protest against the non-appointment of their comrades to promotional positions in the Gauteng Province. For the same reasons the ANC President has reportedly proposed that education in SA be declared an essential service (Sunday Independent 2013:1). If this proposal is accepted, teachers will not be allowed to strike. According to the Sunday Independent newspaper (2013:1) SADTU leaders have seriously opposed this view due to strike action they resorted to as reported by Fleisch (2009).

The perceived status of unions as watchdogs of their members' interests and the Department of Education officials may make it difficult to create a culture of teaching and learning in schools. This could lead to problems that hinder the effective redeployment that is meant to benefit learners through the appointment of qualified, deserving and committed managers. Sayed (2002: 29) refers to this as the "policy gap", that is understood as the mismatch between policy intention, practice and outcome.

METHODOLOGY

The approach for this inquiry was qualitative in nature, using a design, which enabled an exploration of how redeployment was handled in order to explain teacher morale. Empirical data were analyzed using the grounded theory method, specifically the constant comparison method. In the dictionary of research methods, Jupp (2006) asserts that in the constant comparative method data is compared in terms of differences and similarities as this happened during the research process.

Three focus group interviews with teachers and one interview with 2 teachers were conducted in the D11 and D12 districts of the Department of Education. The D11 District consists of more than 300 schools while the D12 District consists of more than 250 schools. Sampling for this study was purposive. The D11 and 12 districts were representative in terms of background, colour and race. Barbour (2001) asserts that purposive sampling offers researchers a degree of control rather than being at the mercy of any selection bias. The author targeted teachers with experience varying between 5 and 25 years of service who were still employed on post level one. The sample included participants who were registered post graduate education management students and affiliated to a teachers' union since more than 75% of teaching workforce is affiliated to SADTU (Zengele 2011) Such a sample ensured that the participants would be knowledgeable about the operations within the Department of Education (DoE) and teacher unionism in South Africa. During this study, the following focus groups questions were posed, namely:

- ♦ What is your understanding of the redeployment process
- ♦ How is the actual redeployment process conducted?

- ♦ What are the recommendations regarding the effective implementation of the redeployment process?

These questions needed a lot of probing during all the interviews. The same questions were asked in all the individual interviews to enhance the consistency of findings. To increase the possibility that the participants would reveal their true feelings and opinions, the author used open-ended questions that would promote an in-depth discussion by the research participants during interviews. This questioning strategy is supported by Lewis (2000:4) when suggesting that open-ended questions allow respondents to answer from a variety of dimensions.

The purpose of the questions was to explore:

- ♦ the expected conditions in schools regarding effective implementation of the redeployment process;
- ♦ the actual conditions in schools regarding the actual redeployment process;
- ♦ imperatives for the effective implementation of the redeployment process;

The author had previously worked alongside with some of the respondents, and they had no reason not to participate in the discussions. Gaining access was not difficult because the author had previously worked as a school teacher and school principal in the same region, and shared some of their experiences in the past. Measor (1985:57) maintains that while it is important for the researcher to build a cordial relationship with the participants, the quality of data is ensured when there is an element of trust. The author was again aware of possible biases during the interviews since the author had been a teacher and school principal as well. Johl and Renganathan (2010) attest that access is easier when the group is familiar and the researcher knows exactly the right times to gain access to information. Recording of all the interviews was conducted with the consent of the participants, as suggested by Henning et al. (2004: 73) as one of the ethical prerequisites for a scientific researcher.

For the first focus group five of the ten participants were from the school that was the venue for the interviews. Two men and eight women were requested to attend, but the men did not attend while all the women attended. When the author enquired about the non-attendance, the

principal reported that one of the male teachers had been involved in a legal dispute with the school and the DoE for having been overlooked for promotion in favour of a SADTU loyalist. The other teacher had abstained to provide support for the aggrieved colleague. For this reason the author made a telephonic arrangement to interview the two male teachers at another venue. For reasons already stated the two teachers agreed to be interviewed on condition their principal and female colleagues did not know that they were being interviewed. The two teachers explained that they did not want to be open about the case as it was still a court matter and testimony in front of their colleagues would jeopardize the case.

The second focus group interview was conducted with seven teachers from three neighboring schools. One teacher from one of the schools had organized the focus group on behalf of the researcher. The person who helped to organize the focus group was supposed to be part of the group but reported a domestic emergency at the last minute and the author had to proceed with the six remaining teachers.

The third focus group consisted of six teachers from a Further Education and Training College (FET) based in the city centre of Johannesburg. As mentioned earlier the two districts selected were representative of the demographics of the country's population. The individual interviews were conducted with the two male teachers who had declined to be interviewed in front of their female colleagues and principal as earlier stated. All the participants had considerable years of experience in education. They all expressed concern about their anonymity and the author assured them about the ethical issues of anonymity when they gave consent for the recording of the interviews.

Data were analyzed by means of the constant comparative method through grouping of data into themes and categories then comparing them according to the themes. Taylor (2001) asserts the need for data analysis to be congruent with the research design. The analysis did not take place in a linear order but was somewhat ambiguous, time consuming and messy as also noted by Rossman (1999:150) concerning qualitative data analysis. All the recorded data were transcribed verbatim for ease of analysis. The author went through the transcriptions while listening to the recordings to ensure that transcrip-

tions were relevant and accurate. When writing up the findings the author became selective as Denscombe (2007:303) supports prioritizing certain aspects over others as it is not possible to present all qualitative data. The reason was that at certain moments in the interviews, the participants did not answer the questions directly, especially the probing questions. Therefore clarity was needed from time to time.

Direct quotations have been used to authenticate the findings. The author employed the use of discourse analysis to reveal the implicit rather than explicit responses. This happened because the author knew most of the respondents well. Denscombe (2007:309) supports this method on the basis that a researcher who undertakes discourse analysis needs to use prior assumptions and existing knowledge about the respondents, as well as the politics around that area. In this context the politics refer to the general perceptions among teachers on the redeployment process. The following section reports on findings.

RESULTS

Responses on the Expected Redeployment Process

All the teachers who were interviewed agreed that redeployment at school level was a sensitive issue which had been manipulated by some principals, SADTU and district officials. They agreed that in this respect they expected the undivided protection by their union. One teacher explained, "so that the robbing and cheating system is eliminated". Some teachers insisted that unions are expected to observe the process closely because they are supposed to protect their members. Another teacher added, "I think the ultimate role of the unions is to see to it that schools are supplied with suitable personnel to run schools, not what they are doing right now." The teachers knew that the role of teacher unions during the redeployment process was to serve as observers. This expectation is in line with the contents of Collective Agreement 2 of 2005. Another teacher said that the expected role of unions is to, "...represent teachers at school level to ensure that proper steps are taken according to the Schools Act."

The teachers understood that redeployment takes place when the school has more teachers than it should have, and the filling of new posts happens when the school has fewer teachers than it should have. They explained that when a school needed an additional teacher, the principal had to discuss the matter with the SMT and the teachers while the union representative remained an observer. The criteria for the filling of vacant posts should be the curricular needs of the school, also taking equity into consideration. Another teacher stressed that there should be "...fairness and transparency when deciding about our future." In the process they explained that the principal has to submit their recommendations to the SGB, and thereafter the recommendations are referred to the District office for approval.

Teachers further explained that when the school has more teachers than it should have, the principal receives notification from the District office for discussion with the School Management Team (SMT). The curricular needs of the school are then considered to determine who should leave the school. If there are two or more teachers with the same qualifications, and taking the curricular needs of the school into consideration, then "Last in First Out (LIFO)" principle should apply". They added that during this process the role of the unions is still that of observers. The teachers indicated that the curricular needs of the school have to be considered when redeploying. Another teacher suggested that, "observing procedurally and substantively procedures are followed before redeployment takes place". All groups agreed that the principal and the SGB play a major role. Teachers reported that they expect the unions to "act in our interests in this regard for our improved morale". However the teachers indicated that LIFO was not a good procedure as often the most valuable teacher in the school had to leave as a result of the LIFO. The teachers' understanding was found to be in line with Section 3.2.1(d) of Collective Agreement no. 2 of 2005 which was agreed to by all stakeholders in the ELRC.

Responses on the Actual Redeployment Process

Teachers stated that redeployment was a process that they were not familiar with in their schools because the principal discussed every-

thing with the district official regarding who should be declared in excess. They further explained unions were only interested in the redeployment process if it involved a promotional post. One teacher said, "they only care about money, so they will do anything to ensure that their comrade gets the promotion." Redeployment was only discussed with the district official on grounds that there were many problems in schools regarding the handling of the declaration of teachers in excess at school level in the presence of unions. In other words teachers implied that redeployment was a secretive issue not to be discussed with teachers concerned. The principal, according to the teachers in the first focus group had reported to the staff that redeployment was an agreement between the District and the principal, because involving the unions always presented problems. Another teacher attested that "from post level 2 which is for the head of department to post level 4 which is the principalship, things change because it's a matter of an improved salary package now and not about commitment". Another teacher added, "if it is a post level one post you hardly see them, come promotional posts they start being aggressive and intimidating."

Teachers conceded that redeployment significantly dampened their spirits. One teacher asked "what is the use of doing the Honours and Master's degrees if promotions are acquired so easily". In some instances it was the teacher who was regularly absent from school due to union activities that would be declared in excess. To add to this point the teacher said, "it's either you are the principal's pet or you are a SADTU comrade." Teachers were of the opinion that the education system was regressing to the apartheid era which was characterized by harassment because of the actions of certain principals and government officials at the time.

When asked on the effects of redeployment, teachers reported that the curricular needs of the school were not considered when deciding on the teacher in excess. One teacher said, "If the principal doesn't like you, you just go so that a vacancy is created for the principal's choice of incumbent". All teachers who were interviewed concluded that they were willing to leave the teaching profession because of corruption. One teacher said, "as you see Sir, we are not doing our preparation right now but reading newspapers to find posts elsewhere in the pri-

vate sector.” She further stated” that’s why you see all sorts of newspapers in the staffroom; the reason is that we are looking for jobs elsewhere because we are tired.” When the author asked why the teachers did not report such activities that demotivated them, one of them answered, “how can you report nepotism if the Director or District manager was also deployed by SADTU.” From the responses by the teachers in all the interviews it became clear that they were utterly demotivated. During the interview with the two male teachers it emerged that the one teacher had reached an out of court settlement with the DoE. The teacher said they had offered him R40000 as a settlement. He said “I just took the money and paid my bills but I still remain very angry and can’t even teach well now “. When asked why he could not teach well the other teacher replied, “how can you be normal when you know you performed well during the interviews but were removed in favour of a SADTU loyalist?” Two teachers also revealed that they were regularly absent from school as a result.

Teachers’ Responses on Corrective Action

All teachers agreed that the authorities should ensure that the relevant qualifications should be considered before a promotional post was to be filled. The teachers also said that the participation of unions during the redeployment process should be closely observed by the Department of Education officials. One teacher added “you see sir, it’s good that they remain as observers because they take over the process if the other union does not attend.” They were of the opinion that decisions on who should be redeployed should be based on qualifications and a track record in leadership. The teachers said that decisions taken appropriately would not, “leave a bitter pill in the teacher’s mouth”. Another teacher added “the solution is ...to get the DoE to pay educators for qualifications passed so that this nonsense of clamoring for promotion posts could end. It is really very depressing. Perhaps educators would be more interested in teaching, and the unions can rather represent us during disciplinary hearings”. The author took note during the interviews that most of the teachers’ concerns emanated more from SADTU’s involvement in policy implementation as compared to the other stakeholders. In the

following section a discussion of the research findings is presented based on the presentations and arguments by teachers during the interviews

DISCUSSION

It is evident from the empirical data that teachers need the protection of their unions when it comes to redeployment but face problems when the unions only show interest in the promotion of their comrades. Moe (2011:33) testifies that even in the United States of America (USA) the bureaucracy of the Department of Education is plagued by patronage based public appointments. The problem of cadre deployment is therefore not unique to South Africa. It is also evident that teachers regard district officials, the principals and SADTU to be responsible for cadre deployment in school management positions. This assertion comes as a result of the evidence presented during the interviews that cadre deployment by SADTU exists. Deployed comrades will promote other comrades and this makes it impossible for ordinary teachers to report nepotism to culprits who are in top management positions themselves. Mahlangu and Pitsoe (2011) have also alluded that this situation has led to unacceptably high levels of underperformance in the education system. Pattillo’s study (2012) on corruption in schools also reveals that there is an unwritten policy of patronage-based political appointments to school leadership positions called cadre deployment.

The deployment of SADTU aligned officials is viewed as the reason for failure to report nepotism since these officials are more loyal to the union than to the DoE. Reference is made to Murillo (1999: 40) in Govender (2004:267) where he discussed nepotism in Mexico where the National Union of Education Workers was established with the strong backing of the Institutional Revolutionary Party which won the elections in 1966. In return for their loyalty the union leaders were rewarded with management positions and appointed to key positions in the Mexican government. Govender (2004) has cited this resemblance with the relationship between SADTU and the ANC prior to the first democratic elections in South Africa. SADTU as an affiliate of COSATU played a significant role in helping the ANC win the 1994 elections. The redeployment of SADTU loyalists shadows

the objective selection of suitably qualified teachers to management positions and this lowers teacher morale. Diko and Letseka (2009: 232) concur that due to the “tailor made requirements set when advertising promotional posts to suit the SADTU candidate” there is no reason why ordinary and deserving teachers should not leave the teaching profession”. Taylor (2012) also reported that the promotion of teachers had increased widespread public perception that union activity is primarily about advancing the authority and benefit of the key union members.” The burning question also raised by teachers is on how to abolish cadre deployment when those in management positions are also SADTU employees?

Redeployment is viewed as an arena where teachers and management are pitted against each other at the peril of the learners’ future. The study by Pattillo (2012) on corruption in KwaZulu-Natal, which is another SA province, has revealed that those who have tried to change the SADTU practice of cadre deployment have received tremendous resistance. Reference is made by Pattillo (2012) to the Ntombela case, a SADTU deployed district manager who refused to support political appointments and was met with considerable resistance by SADTU that he had to eventually resign from his post. Letseka et al. (2012) refer to similar events in Greece where Marietta Giannakou lost her parliamentary seat because of insisting on teacher accountability and merit pay. Letseka et al. (2012) also refer to the USA Michelle Rhee who closed down ineffective schools and advocated for merit pay, the unions used their political muscle to force her to resign. In the South African context, Letseka et al. (2012) do not disclose if officials were union employees to their management posts or not. It is evident that the plight of South African teachers can only be addressed when the President of the country clamps down on cadre deployment. The SA President once declared, “I don’t owe anyone a favour and all positions in government will be filled on merit” (Sunday Times 19 April 2009). Soon after becoming the President he appointed one of the SADTU founder members and staunch supporter as the Minister of Basic Education. The author views such an appointment as another form of cadre deployment. The question also arises when the Secre-

tary-General of the ANC Gwede Mantashe (2011) defends cadre deployment as “a way of correcting the imbalances of apartheid and not a sin”. Mantashe (2011:1) however relents that people must meet the basic requirements for the advertised promotional post. The author contends that the basic requirement set, which is a three year bachelor’s degree or diploma, is not sufficient to hold a management position within the entire management structure of the DoE. The author further argues alongside with Diko and Letseka (2009) that there are many teachers who are studying towards their master’s and doctoral degrees but they are overlooked for promotions.

Monama (City Press 2011) quoted two deployed teachers at Fontanus Secondary school in Soweto who were complaining that they were unfairly deployed and thus demoralized. The author is of the opinion that cadre deployment contributes to a state of anarchy in the schools which Bloch (2008) refers to as “a national disaster”. Nuijten (2004:118) argues that even where there is anarchy there is some form of governance at work. The governance becomes that of the union structures like the site committee members when they organize for resistance against the implementation of policies in a perceived unconstitutional manner. This resistance can be attributed to incidents where unions go against all odds to ensure that their members get deployed to key positions. The last section of this article focuses on the recommendations and conclusions on the cadre deployment disease that has plagued the SA education system.

CONCLUSION

The major task of the education department is to provide an environment that enables schools to perform optimally. Schools are expected to be places of safety, excitement and excellence rather than infighting and jostling for positions. The tension that prevails in schools threatens the morale of teachers and the realization of effective teaching and learning. If the prevailing conditions in schools as reported in this article are not attended to, teacher attrition becomes inevitable and a reality. For educational reform to prevail in South Africa, unconditional commitment by stakeholders at every lev-

el of the education department hierarchy is mandatory.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It should be acknowledged that recommendations for the effective redeployment of teachers were sourced from teachers themselves since the author considers them to be at the receiving end of policy implementation. For this reason it was important to amalgamate such recommendations with those of the author where feasible.

Based on research findings and prevailing conditions in schools, the main criteria for promotion should be a post graduate qualification in education management accompanied by relevant managerial experience. The selection process should be referred to employment agencies to allow teacher members of SGB's to dedicate more time to effective teaching and learning. When deploying teachers in excess, the curricular requirements of the school must be strictly adhered to in order to avoid irregularities. Deployed teachers are the ones to be given priority when recommendations are made, according to Resolution 6 of 1998 however this is flawed. There must be a performance audit for all underperforming schools in order to address the school needs for improved performance. There must be performance based on pay for well-functioning schools to boost teacher morale and enhanced teaching and learning. All school managers must sign a performance agreement upon acceptance of promotion. All promotional positions should be based on 3 year renewable contracts based on good performance.

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