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THE PHASING-OUT OF COMMERCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUBJECTS IN LIMPOPO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Commercial subjects are facing extinction in some rural Limpopo schools in South Africa because of poor performance of learners in such subjects. This facing out of commercial subjects developed curiosity in the researchers to start with this inquiry. This study was aimed at examining the reflections and experiences of teachers on the phasing-out of commercial subjects in selected rural Limpopo Secondary schools. The study is both empirical and conceptual in nature. Interviewing and observation techniques were used to collect data from twelve commercial teachers with 3-8 years of teaching experience. The findings revealed that, firstly, there is poor teachers' performance, which results in the phasing out of commercial streams. Inadequate pedagogical content knowledge and non-subject specialists were found to be the primary contributors to poor teachers' performance. Secondly, shortage of teachers was identified as a challenge experienced in rural Limpopo schools. This shortage perpetuates the use of non-subject specialists. Thirdly, a hostile working environment caused by work overloading and lack of strategic school resources and infrastructure. As part of the conclusion, this study recommends that qualified teachers should teach commercial subjects from Senior to Further Education and Training Phases. Furthermore, the teacher's provisioning model should be reviewed, and each commerce subject should be taught by a person who specialised in such a subject. Lastly, teaching and learning resources and provisioning of subject advisors' backlog should be addressed.

Keywords: Commercial Subjects, Subject Speciality, Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Teacher Provisioning Model, Teaching and Learning Resources' Backlog.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The South African education system is grossly inefficient, severely underperforming and egregiously unfair (Spaull, 2013a). The primary contribution to the crisis in the education system can be leveled on government that is not successful in the provision of adequate school resources, such as teaching personnel and teaching and learning materials, coupled with lack of proper infrastructure. The effects of such a crisis are made conspicuous and visible through lower performance in commercial subjects that threatens the extinction of commercial streams in the affected schools. In the study conducted by Kruger (2018) on pedagogical content knowledge on Economics Education in secondary school, reveals that “*learners do not perform well in the Economics examination in the annual National Senior Certificate examinations, which explains*

the decline in the number of learners who opt to do Economics as a school subject". The phasing-out of Commercial subjects in some rural Limpopo schools is the results of fewer numbers of learners willing to follow this stream (Ngwenya, 2014), and this shift leads to the extinction of such subjects.

Mbude (2018) echoes the same sentiment when explaining the challenge of learners dropping Accounting as a means to dodge Mathematics in schools where both subjects are required to be taken together. Furthermore, curricular change in Accounting and contextual factors were found to challenge the pass rate in some public schools. For instance, the changes in accounting curriculum brought along a shift from *"mastery of formulas and procedures to an understanding of the interpretation of financial information"* (Ngwenya, 2014). When South Africa is still battling in making Business Studies a secondary school subject that creates a platform for initial entrepreneurial awareness and development initiative; a country such as Hong Kong is currently at the phase of the *"integration of academic and vocational aspects as well as a better link between business subjects"* (Cheung, 2016). Furthermore, England Business education is structured to *"produce certain kinds of identities congruent with and supportive of an emerging culture of enterprise"* (Jordan & Yeomans, 2011). If this situation in South African public schooling continues without some intervention, it will result in teachers' redeployment and redundancy. This article examines the reflections and experiences of teachers on the phasing-out of Commercial subjects in selected rural Limpopo secondary schools.

Apart from challenges related to curriculum change, shortage of teachers, lack of resources and infrastructure contribute to the basic education failure in attaining its outcomes. *"Poor quality schooling at the primary and secondary level in South Africa"* (Spaull, 2013b: 6) are the results of these factors. The combined effects of such challenges lead to low teacher morale, low levels of teacher commitment and high levels of teachers' attrition, which impacts directly on poor performance of learners in such subjects. This perpetuates lower pass rates in commercial subjects, that results with the redeployment of teachers. The Department of Basic Education uses redeployment and rationalization (R & R) processes to move excess teachers to schools they are mostly needed. Redeployment results with movement of teachers from one school to another within the circuit and if matching does not happen, this may lead to teachers' redeployment across the districts and provinces. Teacher redeployment that is defined by Vandavelde (1988) as *"the transfer of permanently employed full-time teaching staff from one educational institution to another"*. The South African approach to teachers' redeployment is well spelt by Bougardt (2011) that its aim was not *"to force teachers out of the system, but rather to move them to other schools so that a more equitable distribution of teachers could be achieved"*. This portrays teachers' deployment as a temporary measure, but if the situation becomes perennial, it leads to redundancy.

In addition, if the phasing out becomes perennial, and then the affected teachers will face redundancy which becomes a fair dismal. Teachers' redundancy occurs when *"a subject is no longer being taught as part of the curriculum"* (National Education Union, 2019). At an advanced stage, the phasing out of Commercial subjects will result with the collapse of Business Schools and centres in higher education, in the country that experiences low economic rate and rocketing unemployment amongst its people and youth in particular. The main cause of the problem that leads to South African teachers' redeployment and redundancy lies with curricular change and other multiple contextual factors.

The ability of learners to attain high levels of subject outcomes depends on blending teachers' competencies acquired in teacher training and experience acquired from good teaching

and learning educational landscape, availability of teaching and learning resources, and teachers' support and development. However, research continuously points out that majority of learners in South African public schooling are taught by teachers who lack disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge (Spaulla, 2013). Such a lack among teachers, questions the quality of South African teacher education. This situation in South Africa is best described by Spaull (2013a) when he highlights that research supports that there *"is an on-going crisis in South African education, and that the current system is failing the majority of South Africa's youth"*. In support, Madisaotsile (2012) echoed the same sentiments when saying, *"There are many signs that there is a crisis in education"*. In support, Gamlen & McIntyre (2018) highlights that the compromised education is the result of multiple factors, ranging from a lack of adequate funding, understaffing and teachers with limited teaching competencies, lack of school infrastructure such as classrooms and flushing toilets; and a lack of adequate learning materials. Apart from stated hindrances to provision of quality education in the South African schooling system, the country is faced with economic meltdown emanating from recession and low economic growth. These two factors are major drawbacks towards the attainment of quality education, and as a result, the country fails to meet its educational obligations and poverty reduction plans. Despite all odds, South Africa as a developing country requires education for human development in order to improve its economic growth to fight the plight of poverty, unemployment and inequality (Modiba, 2018; McComas, 2014; Ngozi, 2014).

South Africa experiences dismay that Susan Blum declared as a *"fatally flawed higher education"* that heads towards its doom and obsolescence; and recommended radical transformation for its rescue from extinction (Samuel et al., 2019). Similarly, African National Congress led government suggested radical economic transformation to address a lack of economic growth and development; and negative external ratings. This lack of disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge among teachers led to revision of Teachers Norms and Standards policy, and resulted with its replacement by the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education qualification (MRTEQ) policy 2011, then revised in 2015. The aim of MRTEQ is to ensure radical teacher education transformation.

Lack of strategic school resources, such as proper infrastructure and school equipment, is inherited from the apartheid era, and democratic government has not succeeded in addressing such backlogs. The challenges, which teachers encounter, are the unavailability of teaching and learning resources and infrastructure (Thaba-Nkadimene & Mmakola, 2019; Thakur & Shekhawat, 2014; Zachariadis et al., 2013) and a lack of qualified foundation teachers; and a perennial lack of those who can teach key subjects (Holmqvist, 2019). Sweden experiences similar challenges with regard to shortage of teachers who are very strategic in supporting societal knowledge development Holmqvist (2019). The lack of effort to improve the teaching conditions of public rural schools makes teachers lives difficult in discharging their duties. Most often, poor conditions of work results with work stress and leads to teachers' demotivation and attrition. This study aimed at examining the reflections and experiences of teachers on the phasing-out of commercial subjects. In an attempt to achieve the stated aim of the study, the following main research question was used, namely:

- What are the causes of the phasing out of commercial streams in rural Limpopo secondary schools?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The response and achievement of South Africa in their recognition of education as a fundamental human right led to the declaration of compulsory basic education from Grade R to Grade 9. This transformation was driven by the United Nation's Millennium Goal number 2 that puts emphasis on provision of education to all children of the world by 2015. Juma et al., (2012) put it clear when they highlight that access to quality education is recognized as a basic right by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and it is considered as a catalyst for economic growth and human development. Similarly, the United State America's response brought along compulsory education, namely, "*No Child Left Behind movement*". Despite the availability of the United States commission and South African legislative framework, literature still indicates that many black learners receive poor school education (Department of the Presidency, 2012) and quality education for all becomes a far reaching goal. Contrarily, the Department of Basic Education has put it clear that basic education is priority one in government; and they regard quality of learning as related to development of all South Africans and the country (Department of Basic Education, 2016).

However, good policies are not adequately funded, and the implementation of such policies stands to fail. None provisioning of strategic school resources and infrastructure is a cause of poor teachers' morale, demotivating teaching environment and poor teachers' performance. Quality teachers are known to offer quality teaching and improved student learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Katāne et al., 2006; Azi & Saluhu, 2016). South Africa, which is faced with poor black education, requires resources and of utmost paramount quality teaching personnel. This means that the improvement of public education is possible through the placement of highly trained and competent teachers in all classrooms. In support of Desimone et al., (2006); & Modiba (2016) highlights that competent teachers are the most critical factors in attaining high levels of learners' achievement. The Department of Basic Education, in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and Training (2015) initiated continuous teachers programme with the aim of improving quality-teaching personnel who can offer quality teaching and improves student learning and achievement. Despite the progress made, there is still a challenge in the performance of teachers and learners in Limpopo province particularly in commercial subjects. Research reveals that most schools in South Africa are still underperforming (Spaull, 2013(b); Horowitz, 2014; Jane, 2015; Modiba, 2016; Mashau et al., 2016), despite prevailing interventions. Research indicates that the major cause of school underperformance is the results of unpredicted home environments of learners that are educationally unsupportive due to high levels of poverty, parents' low-level of education, high unemployment rate, child-headed families, emotional problems and issues relating to gender roles (Rammala, 2009; Umobong, 2010).

The problem this study investigated was poor performance of commercial teachers as displayed by poor performance of learners in such subjects. There is limited research on the performance of commercial subjects in South Africa. However, research on accounting in higher education indicates that accounting is facing problems related to limited resources and underdevelopment of skills (Romburgh, 2014). The situation with Economics and Business studies, as commercial subjects in the schooling system is similar to that of accounting. Many schools and circuits in Limpopo Province are phasing out commercial subjects from school streaming because they are declared killer subjects in such schools and they don't get support or experience changes in such subjects. Mathematics that is known to be a difficult subject that has

become less of the killer subject in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province (Maher, 2015), and other schools in South Africa. Contrary to that, Limpopo schools are still experiencing multiple of subject challenges ranging from Mathematics, English and Commercial subjects in matric results. This challenge has been existing in the previous examination boards, and it still prevails today after a change to the National Senior Certificate.

THEORY OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Anderson's theory of organization development was used in examining the reflections and experiences of teachers on the phasing-out of commercial subjects in selected rural Limpopo Secondary schools. The rationale towards the choice of this theory was based on the understanding that teachers work for attainment of a common goal, which is promotion of student learning and performance. Employees are significant in any organization, and it is a known fact that their performance contributes towards organizational success or failure. Similarly, the performance of teachers contributes towards student learning and school success or their failure. Therefore, the dynamics of teams and groups; and schools' climate and culture and have influence towards individual teachers' performance.

Teacher Education is expected to produce quality teachers who can offer high quality educational service that is relevant, and to equip the 21st Century learners to venture into higher education and the world of work without some hindrances related to their educational preparation. As student learning is a product of quality teaching (Hénard & Roseveare, 2012; Hattie, 2012; Heyvaert, 2011), subsequently, quality teaching is a requirement for learners' success and attainment of basic competencies such numeracy, literacy and life skills in basic education. In addition, the education system plays a greater part in creating an inclusive society; providing equal opportunities; and helping all South Africans to realize their full potential (Department of Basic Education, 2014). Moreover, the Department of Basic Education (2011) highlights that the purpose of the schooling system is to develop skills, knowledge, attitudes, competencies and values that should transform learners into better citizens, who are well positioned to participate in the country and the global economic activities, and be equipped to contribute towards science, technology and entrepreneurship. For the schooling system to attain such competencies, it requires quality teacher education programmes, coupled with well-planned and well-thought continuous development ones. The continuous development programmes (CDPs), as organizational strategy, should be organized primarily for organizational effectiveness (Cummings & Worley, 2015) and should be aimed at keeping a folk of teachers abreast of the changing information, processes and techniques in their workplaces and the world around them.

The CDPs are aligned to the first principle of 'provision of adequate training' as one of the tenants of Theory of Organizational Development. This principle was used to frame the first main research questions: 'does teacher education provide adequate training of teachers? The principle aimed at establishing the level of teacher training in equipping students with necessary 21st century teaching competencies, provision of well-structured teaching practice programs that provides adequate experiential learning, and offering good programs that prepare teachers to become good teachers who excel in teaching profession.

Within the Theory of Organizational Development, the most important principle is the second one that strives towards an improved learning process. This is because intervention strategy should be used to change teaching and school leadership practices for betterment of

teaching and learning processes. In this study, the focus of intervention strategies is on improving teaching competencies through CDPs and related programs. The most important reason for the realization and conceptualization of a training program or any intervention strategy is to improve the quality of teaching and student learning. This principle helps the researchers in crafting the research question: *‘what intervention strategies can be developed to improve the teaching of Commercial subjects?’* This principle helped the researchers in examining whether mentor teachers were well equipped to assist pre-service teachers and the school provided an adequate experiential learning environment for student teachers. The principle also assisted the researcher in finding out whether student teachers were able to bridge the gap between theory and practice, schools offered a well-structured mentoring program for novice teachers and whether schools promote mentoring of novice teachers by experienced and willing mentors in their initial teaching years.

The third principle on transformation of the learning environment is examined through the improved teachers’ performance that is required for improved teaching practice and student learning. Social transformation is singled out as crucial principle in post-apartheid education system (Department of Basic Education, 2011). In this study, the principle of transformation of learning environment informed the formulation of the research question, *“How can schools’ learning environment be transformed to help in improving the teaching of Commercial subjects?”* Based on this question, the researchers were able to understand whether schools promote collaborative teaching and learning and whether circuit offices organize adequate workshops and training sessions. In addition to the above, it also aimed at understanding whether schools serve as learning organizations where teachers learn from one another, the school culture offered teachers a good teaching grounding for their teaching in their initial years of teaching career; and whether my school leadership has good control of school discipline. Furthermore, based on the principle on transforming the learning environment, the question, *‘what strategies are you using in addressing a lack of pedagogical resources in your teaching of Commercial subjects was formulated.*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The empirical and conceptual nature of this study was understood using the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist paradigm is adopted because *“the nature of knowledge is interpretive, including lived experience”* (Pascal et al., 2010).

Interpretivist was selected to aid *“our understanding of the contemporary social world”* (Chowdhury, 2014; Coe et al., 2014; Chili, 2013). In this case, contemporary social world, which this study needed to examine, are the reflections and experiences of teachers on the phasing-out of commercial subjects in selected rural Limpopo Secondary schools. In this study, interpretivist paradigm informed the use of qualitative methods in data collection. Both interpretivist paradigm and qualitative design facilitated the examination of *“experiences, understandings and perceptions of individuals for their data to uncover reality, rather than rely on numbers of statistics”* (Thahn & Thahn, 2015). Interviewing and observations techniques were used to collect data from twelve commercial teachers with 3-8 years of teaching experience. The narrative analysis is adopted to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers on the phasing out of commercial subjects in schools. The narrative analysis in qualitative research creates a platform for the researchers to present the research participants’ life stories from

“individual’s subjective evaluation of his experiences and of giving information about his social experiences” (Hj et al., 2008).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Poor Teachers’ Performance

The first research finding identified by the research participants is the poor teachers’ performance. The phasing-out of commercial subjects in some rural Limpopo schools resulted in a fewer numbers of learners willing to follow this stream (Kruger, 2018; Mbude, 2018). This is because of poor teachers’ performance that threatens the extinction of such subjects. Participants identified a lack of pedagogical content knowledge, and allocation of commercial subjects to non-commercial subject specialists. Teacher 5 highlights that *“In many cases commercial subjects are allocated to some teachers who did not specialize in Accounting, Business studies or Economics. Teachers without commerce specialty lack adequate pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)”*. In support, Teachers 10 states that *“the allocation of non-commercial teachers to teach Economics, Business studies and Economic and Management Sciences subject due to shortage of teachers, has vastly contributed towards the high failure rate in commercial streams that threatens to extinction of such stream”*. Teacher 12 vehemently states, *“Teachers who did not specialize in commerce subjects, compromises the teaching and learning of such subjects. Furthermore, they mostly lack adequate PCK levels to address dynamics of the subjects within the stream”*. In support, Spaul (2013a) reveals a lower level of content and pedagogical knowledge among South African teachers. Adequate levels in PCK create space for teachers’ flexibility in situations of change. A continuous change in curriculum and accommodation of 21st Century’s pedagogies requires teachers who are vested and grounded in the subject and approaches to teaching such a subject.

Similarly, the study conducted in some parts of North West by Kruger (2008) identified a lack of pedagogical content knowledge as the cause of high failure rate in Economics, and that it impacts negatively to future subject intake. In the main, the major contributors of the phasing out of commercial subjects in South Africa ranges from high failure rate of learners, lack of pedagogical content knowledge, allocation of commercial subjects to non-subject specialist; pairing of Accounting with Mathematics.

Shortage of Teachers and a Lack of Support Staff in Rural Limpopo Schools

Secondly, the study reveals the shortage of teachers in rural Limpopo schools as a contributor towards poor teachers and learners’ performance. South Africa experiences challenges to shortage of teachers to support societal knowledge development and to provide strategic human development required in science, technology and economy. Similarly, Sub-Saharan Africa (Gallie & Keevy, 2014) and Sweden (Holmqvist, 2019) experience the same challenges. Teacher 2 highlights that

“Despite having a teacher provisioning model that prescribes a teacher-learner ratio, schools are experiencing a serious shortage of teachers. As a strategy to address such a challenge, school principals allocate non-commercial teachers to teach Accounting, Business studies and Economics and Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) that compromises teaching and learning of such subjects and fails to positively impact student academic achievement”.

School principals and school governing bodies are put in pressure, until they resort to teachers teaching classes and subjects that they were not trained for (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Barnhardt et al., 2018; Bertschy et al., 2013). This act of allocating teachers to non-speciality subjects is countering the Department of Basic Education intentions to attain a set of learning outcomes.

Furthermore, a lack of support staff, such as curriculum advisors (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Florian, 2013), material design specialists; and digital pedagogical specialists; educational and clinical psychologists pose a challenge to optimal utilization of teachers and learners. Teacher 3 highlights that

“Our schools are not supported by educational, technological and health professionals. The overload I get from teaching large classes and marking four subjects, sometimes makes me feel overwhelmed; and in need of a health professional to attend to my mental and physical distress”.

Contrarily Teacher 9 comes from school with an adequate supply of educational technologies. Teacher 9 highlights that

“I want to use pedagogical technology available in schools, and I feel like I am not adequately supported on day-to-day challenges that I experience in my workplace. I need professionals such as material design specialists and digital pedagogical specialists that are not provided at school or at circuit level”.

Teacher support was singled out as a major challenge. In order to alleviate such a challenge of teacher support, there is a need for schools to be allocated professionals such as material design specialists, digital pedagogical specialists, educational psychologists, clinical psychologists and social workers. Furthermore, a lack of support for teacher continuous development was identified. If teacher professional development (TPD) is not put as a priority, teachers are denied a platform to tap from the following benefits; firstly, that TDP creates conditions for lifelong learning (Jovanona-Mitkovska, 2010). Secondly, such TPD offers opportunities for acquisition and renewal of basic teaching skills (Jovanona-Mitkovska, 2010). Lastly, TPD offers space for teachers to become current and relevant in relation to change in teaching methods, forms and strategies (Jovanona-Mitkovska, 2010; Dlamini & Makondo, 2017). Follow-up and action is required to address areas that needs development identified during Integrated Quality Management Systems (IQMS) processes.

Hostile Working Environment Caused by Work Overloading and Lack of Strategic School Resources and Infrastructure

Rural Limpopo teachers work in a very hostile working environment (Modiba, 2018) caused by work overloading that results from shortage of teachers; and lack of strategic school resources and infrastructure. Teacher 4 states that

“Work overloading has caused me psychological and health problems. I am now diagnosed as having work related depression. I am a deputy principal, and my school’s working relationship is very stressful; and I feel like exiting the system before my pension years.”

This teacher echoed frustrations caused by hostility of rural Limpopo school working conditions. In support, Lumadi (2008) reveals inadequate resources; low remuneration; heavy workload; and placement as school challenges that cause teacher attrition. In addition to hostility of school working place, Teacher 7 contends that:

“Working in schools with shortage of strategic school resources is very tiresome. As a teacher, you are expected to improvise when there are absolutely no teaching and learning resources”.

These hostile and toxic school working conditions are causing teachers’ stress and high turnover (Jennings, 2008) and low teacher morale that further impact directly on student learning and performance”. Poor performance of learners that was revealed in matric results 2019 may be attributed to hostility of rural Limpopo schools’ working conditions. This empirical study, and literature reviewed, are contrary to van der Berg (2002) who excludes the effects of school resources on school performance; instead pointing fingers on malfunctioning school management and teachers. Thirdly, hostile working conditions, with shortage of strategic teaching and learning resources and infrastructure; and a lack of support were identified as a limitation that results with compromised teaching and poor performance of learners. All these factors combined, contribute towards poor quality of education (Madisaole, 2012; Mncube & Harper, 2012, Spaulla 2013).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to answer the main research question, namely: ‘what are the causes of the phasing out of commercial streams in rural Limpopo secondary schools?’ The empirical study and literature reviewed emerged with three main causes that contribute towards the phasing out of the commercial stream, namely: poor teachers’ performance results; shortage of teachers and a lack of support staff in rural Limpopo schools; and the hostile working environment caused by work overloading and lack of strategic school resources and infrastructure. Each theme further emerged with complex challenges that teachers experience day-by-day in such schools.

This study recommends that the Limpopo Department of Education should employ qualified teachers to teach commercial subjects from senior to further education and training phases. This will address a challenge related to lack of pedagogical content knowledge. Furthermore, there is a need to review and revisit the teacher’s provisioning model and ensure that commercial subjects are taught by a person who specialized in such a subject. Moreover, the department should allocate professionals such as subject advisors, material design specialists, digital pedagogical specialist; educational psychologists; clinical psychologists and social workers to school with the aim as to offering required services to teachers and learners. The department should provide strategic school resources and infrastructure in rural Limpopo schools to address backlog that was caused during apartheid era.

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