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South African Educators' Responses to Racial Integration in Public Secondary Schools

Abstract

The paper examines the role educators and members of school management teams (SMTs) play in transforming schools towards integrative learning environments. Data was collected through a survey and individual interviews that were administered to educators and members of SMTs (N = 88) in four multiracial schools. The survey included open-ended questions that focused on what was happening in schools, in racially diverse classrooms, and the interaction between racially diverse groups. SMTs and SGBs are seen as always advancing strategies that lead to racial integration at school. The results showed that racial integration was not evident in these schools but rather there was a heightened racial conflict and racial incidences were prevalent in former White, Indian and Coloured schools.

Keywords: educators, management, racial integration, Critical Race Theory, Lewin's Change Management Theory

Introduction

There is a growing call in South African schools for new approaches to integrate learners from racially diverse backgrounds in education that engage in nuanced ways of power, privilege and difference (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). This includes an increasingly urgent need for educators to be sufficiently trained to equip both educators and learners with the skills and knowledge to engage competently with issues of oppression, discrimination and diversity (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). This need, which is not unique to South Africa, foregrounds diverse classroom pedagogies and educational practices that focus on diversity and on challenging oppressions such as race, racism, and jurisprudence. The purpose of this paper is to ascertain the effectiveness of educators' and school management teams (SMTs) in managing and facilitating racial integration in public secondary schools.

According to Carrim and Soudien (1999) there is an ongoing spread of institutional racism as well as severe levels of inequality that continue to detrimentally impact the life chances of the Black learner. At national policy level, the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995) highlighted the need for:

... new education and training policies to address the legacies of under-development and inequitable development and provide learning opportunities for all will be based principally on the constitutional guarantees of equal educational rights for all persons and non-discrimination...

The White Paper and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) formalised the desegregation of schools as redress for the legacy of apartheid policies and mandated schools to provide equal educational opportunities to all learners regardless of difference. The process of desegregation is a pertinent challenge internationally as it is in South Africa (Vandeyar, 2008). Subsequently, racial integration was driven as part of education reform to accommodate the diverse nature of learners in society.

Research has indicated that desegregation in schools has resulted in schools adopting diverse ways of responding to the racially diverse learner population (Meier & Hartell, 2009, p. 181). Moletsane, Hemson and Muthukrishna (cited in Reygan & Steyn, 2017, p. 69) stipulate that many educators and schools are either unwilling or unable to implement the urgent necessity for interventions and approaches to adequately prepare young learners to embrace diversity.

Studies by Vandeyar (2008) established that many educators lack the knowledge of the backgrounds of diverse racial learners and have limited knowledge of teaching in racially diverse classrooms, where the onus is upon the educator to create an equitable educational environment. The important role of SMTs in leading change efforts is evident but there is a lack of perception in literature regarding the role of SMTs. The lack of research on school management in managing racial integration has resulted in a lack of empirical guidance that SMTs may possibly utilise to assist educators to close this gap and so enhance racial integration among racially diverse learners in mixed-race schools.

Racial integration in post-apartheid South Africa

Inequality, division, and segregation have been features of South Africa's history of education. According to Vorster (2005), this can be defined as a social process of transforming an undeveloped, poor, and divided society into a peaceful community with equal opportunities within which individuals were able to enjoy dignity and basic human rights in harmony with other people who may function within different racially populated groups. However, years later the era of social harmony, development and prosperity still seems far-fetched. The media frequently report that schools are characterized by racial tension, ignorance, misunderstanding and aggression because of the poor management of diversity (Meier, 2005).

According to Sayed and Soudien (2003, p. 11) 'equal opportunities' have had a minimal impact on the disadvantaged learners from the inherited apartheid education. Instead, this has resulted in major structural inequalities, with learners from former black schools being labelled incompetent, illiterate and ignorant. Despite years of reform effort, South Africa continued to lag in international comparisons and has failed to significantly integrate learners from racially diverse backgrounds.

Jansen's (2004) assessment of effective leadership for change has identified a lack of the 'essentials', notably educators need to be suitably qualified and motivated, allocation of appropriate teaching and learning materials and sufficient time allocated to tasks. International literature over the last quarter of the century has identified that effective management and dedication is a critical issue in managing change and purposely integrating racially diverse learners. Therefore, educators needed to become more involved in providing an interactive learning context in which commonality and diversity would be embraced. This process aimed to develop independent and

responsible learners and to make educators realize that they are accountable for this reconciliation process.

Numerous post-1994 policies and legislative enactments that directed desegregation in South African schools took on the responsibility to racially diversify their learner population in varied ways (Meier, 2005). By contrast, township (Black) schools remain largely excluded from the process of integration, while previously "Coloured" and "Indian" schools now have a substantial number of Black learners, however White learners are mostly absent from them. Integration can be understood as the fundamental change in the attitudes of learners and educators as well as the institutional governance of the school, meaning the policies and ethos of the school (Naidoo, Pillay & Conley, 2018).

A major problem with racial integration in South African schools as noted by Sayed and Soudien (2003, p. 11) is the range of approaches to racial integration being used. These approaches create inequalities by requiring Black learners to adopt the language, ethos, and values of the school, thereby undermining Black learners' racial backgrounds and heritage. Consequently, racial segregation persists, therefore, strong education and leadership is needed to facilitate racial integration in public secondary schools. The major goal of these approaches is to "divert attention away from racism" (Bank, 1984, p. 44).

The need for strong leadership and management to facilitate racial integration

Currently, South African school leaders are concerned with the continual search for quality education (educators' duty to learners) and public accountability (duty to community) (DoE, 2001). Issues in South African schools can be attributed to the apartheid policies during the previous dispensation (DoE, 2001). According to the DoE (2001), post-apartheid education was driven by two imperatives: firstly, the government had to rescind all apartheid legislation in the need to redress past racially discriminatory laws and practices and provide a system of education that builds democracy, human dignity, equality, and social justice. Secondly, a system of lifelong learning needed to be established. Nkomo, Twala-Mkwanazi and Carrim (1995) stipulates that racism persists in schools despite school desegregation. Racism remains a "reality in the modern world even in democratic societies where discrimination is illegal, human rights are entrenched, and racism routinely censured and denied" (Painter & Baldwin, 2004, p. 12).

Theoretical frameworks

The theories of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Lewin's Change Management Theory were selected as the frameworks for this study because of the applicability of CRT in the discourse of racial integration, and in relation to this study, is the social justice framework that it attempts to maintain. Lewin's Change Management Theory expresses aspects of South African schools that are undergoing major social and organisational changes due to poor school management and governance structures in some schools, ineffective policy formulation and implementation, lack of commitment from staff, unsuitable interrelationships between racially diverse learners, a lack of social justice that forms an integral part of democratic educational change and underperforming educators (Naidoo, 2014).

Research design and methodology

A quantitative research design was used with the goal to identify the educators' and SMTs perceptions of how management effectively manages and facilitates racial integration in public secondary schools. The researcher collected quantitative data using a self-developed structured questionnaire that focused on the qualitative data which allowed participants to engage in a discussion about their perceptions and experiences without denunciation. Data was analysed employing a statistical package that was used by statisticians to analyse the quantitative data. This data corroborated the findings from the qualitative feedback from interviews.

Data analysis

The data collected from respondents was presented in the form of scores and percentages that were tabulated and analysed. The advantages of selecting a survey approach gathers information from large, representative groups of school community members on specific school issues, and catalytically elicited responses to predetermined questions through the application of a structured data collection instrument (Duncan et al., 2007). In relation to the study, descriptive statistics give simplified summaries of the data collected, with the task of reducing large masses of data to meaningful values. Thus, the purpose of descriptive statistics was used to form a basis on which to produce information about the characteristics of the data that was collected, followed by further extensive statistical analysis.

Discussion of findings

Five sub-themes were identified, namely:

- policy and practice;
- school curriculum and quality of education;
- interrelationships;
- the need for capacity building of educators; and
- racial conflict.

Policy and practice

The quantitative results showed that educators from previously White, Indian and Coloured schools indicated that they had in place policies on racial integration and that these were implemented to enhance racial integration among the learners. Further findings from the quantitative study indicated that SMTs and SGBs were committed to managing racially integrated schools with the implementation of extra-curricular activities that promoted racial awareness and racial understanding among learners. Although the quantitative results showed that SMTs and SGBs had developed these policies it does not mean that schools were effectively practicing them. Educators from previously Indian and White schools perceived the various SMTs as effective in implementing policy and addressing racial issues through the school Code of Conduct.

Contrary to the quantitative results the qualitative findings showed that White and Indian educators agreed that policies on racism and racial integration did exist and were adequate. Coloured educators complained that these policies were inadequate and vague, whereas Black African educators indicated that policies of this nature did not exist in these schools. Educators, and members of the SMT indicated through focus

groups that these policies were on 'paper', which meant that they were formulated by school management, initially inculcating a sense of enthusiasm, with positive and supportive attitudes. However, SMTs agreed that these policies did nothing to change the negative attitudes or behaviour of educators. Educators still ignored the issues surrounding race, whether it was racial discrimination, stereotyping or racial prejudice.

School curriculum and quality of education

The quantitative results of the study showed that former Black and White schools both believed that the quality of education had improved as a result of racial integration. On the other hand, former Indian schools believed this was to a reasonable extent only, however SMTs used the curriculum to promote racial integration by including learners who do not speak English as their first language in class activities. School management are aware that several policies inform the curriculum and managing teaching and learning is about curriculum delivery. Educators develop lessons that include racial awareness and implement assessment practices to accommodate the needs of racially diverse learners.

There is a discrepancy in the qualitative data that shows that educators from the former White, Indian and Coloured schools believed the low academic performance of the school could be blamed on the admission of Black learners and the problems of a poor socio-economic and educational background of their family, including their home language being Nguni and Sotho rather than English. Principals and educators claimed to have an 'open door policy' but expected learners to conform to the ethos of the school as well as the curriculum, which focused on Ubuntu (human dignity). These superficial and pretentious changes, made to suit the needs of their learners, were insufficient to bridge the chasm between racially divided societies.

Interrelationships

The quantitative results showed that educators have good relationships with their learners and can communicate in an environment in which there is no racial prejudice or bias. Meanwhile, the qualitative results showed evidence of stereotyping in a few of the learners' and educators' discussions. They both indulged in ridiculing, name-calling, racially stereotyping, and derogatory labelling of many Black learners in the classroom and on the playground.

Need for capacity building of educators

Educators and SMTs from former White, Indian and Coloured schools indicated in the quantitative results that racial integration was managed amongst all learners at their schools. Educators applied teaching strategies to facilitate racial integration in their diverse classrooms. School management and governance structures work collaboratively in implementing policies that promote racial integration and in addressing racial issues. This evidence shows that, overall, educators, school management and governance structures were well capacitated in teaching racially diverse learners and in managing racial integration effectively.

The qualitative study, meanwhile, showed otherwise, with educators feeling deeply agitated and frustrated when facing racially diverse classrooms. In the focus group discussions educators from former White, Indian and Coloured schools conceded that a common problem was that they did not know how to teach racially diverse learners.

Racial conflict

The crux of the educators' subjective reality in a changed education environment is a belief that their racially diverse classrooms are active, collaborative and racially inclusive, so allowing learners to indulge in behaviours that enhance racial integration.

The qualitative research showed concern that learners knew more about the management issues pertaining to racial integration and whether it was happening in their schools. Learners experienced marginalization of some form of racial discrimination or victimization at school.

Combat racism and promote racial integration

One of the primary tasks of South Africa's democratic government was to reform the education system by creating a barrier-free and supportive environment for all learners in all education institutions (Daniels, 2010, p. 632). Most of racially diverse learners were affected by ignorance about and lack of commitment to school management and governance structures on implementing policies based on race, colour and ethnicity, and as a result had become targets for racial abuse.

The central view of this study is that if educators and schools do not honestly address and confront racial issues in their schools, they will do an injustice to the social reconciliation and transformation of the democratic education system.

Conclusion

The quantitative findings were presented with the use of a questionnaire in this study. The results illustrated that racial integration was taking place in ex-White, ex-Indian and ex-Coloured secondary schools. However, and since Black schools were mono-racial, these schools had not experienced racial integration because there were no other race groups besides Black African learners only. Learners and educators also had the perception that racial integration was practiced and constructed in policy. It was found that interactions between learners from different racial backgrounds seldom rested on the issues of race.

The presence of racially diverse learners prompted educators to adopt different strategies, therefore encouraging racial integration in diverse classroom. Hence, the results indicate that in the previously White, Indian and Coloured schools, the SMT was effectively managing racial integration, whereas in Black schools, the SMT could not implement any racial integration initiatives because there was no need for racial integration because there was only one race group. Effective policy on racism and racial integration needs to be enhanced and implemented. The current thinking, behaviour and attitudes of educators need to be balanced with a change in capacity building and understanding of learners from racially diverse backgrounds. Racial issues need to be addressed to achieve racial integration and the elimination of racism. SMTs need to apply correct procedures when handling issues of race, racism, and jurisprudence. Therefore, enriched professional practice is deemed prominent for the promotion of racial integration.

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