

WHY IS OBE FAILING IN THE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS OF THE FREE STATE GOLDFIELDS?

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ABSTRACT

The learners going through outcomes-based education (OBE) were expected to acquire skills which would help them to become critical thinkers, good workers and good citizens. However, this is not happening for learners in the Free State Goldfields' township schools, due to the unsuccessful implementation of OBE in these schools. The purpose of this study is to investigate why OBE is failing in the Free State Goldfields' township schools. In order to determine these reasons, a questionnaire was developed and administered on 183 educators from township primary schools in the Free State Goldfields. Focus group interviews were also conducted to confirm information collected through the questionnaire. Data collected was qualitatively analysed. It was found that the inadequate professional training received by educators, the poor home backgrounds of learners, illiteracy of parents, and a lack of adequate resources and facilities were the main reasons why the implementation of OBE was not succeeding in these schools. The re-training of the township school educators, the involvement of parents and the provision of resources may help to implement OBE more effectively in these schools.

Keywords: Failure of outcomes based education, black educators, township schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Outcomes-based Education (OBE) was introduced more than a decade ago, and it brought about new approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and management within classrooms (and schools). It was hoped that OBE would, among others,

- promote cooperation and teamwork among groups and individuals;
- promote creative and critical thinking among all learners;
- guarantee academic success for all learners; and
- equip all learners with skills, knowledge, values and attitudes required for future success (Naicker, 1999; Steyn & Wilkinson, 1998, Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997).

However, the above-mentioned outcomes have not been realised, especially in the (black) township schools. In contrast, a number of complaints had been raised since the introduction of OBE. The complaints include the following:

- learners not being able to read, write and do mathematics,
- educators not implementing OBE, but continuing with old teaching methods,
- more administrative/paper work for educators and less time for teaching,
- the conditions in schools, such as time-tabling and educator-learner ratios, still not aligned to OBE (Onwu & Mogari, 2004; Vandeyar, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors which make OBE fail in the black township schools of the Free State Goldfields.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design selected was a basic interpretive qualitative approach, and its aim was to give a descriptive analysis of the factors which make OBE fail in the township schools of the Free State Goldfields. The descriptive approach is oriented towards providing thorough descriptions of social phenomena, as well as their meaning and their implications. This approach was chosen because it is flexible and exploratory; it is also contextual since it captures the naturally occurring behaviour of participants in their natural setting, and in the way the participants themselves view their behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Merriam, 2002).

Data collection was done by means of a questionnaire and semi-structured focus group interviews. Once the questionnaires were processed, coded and patterns established, focus group interviews were conducted. The focus group interviews were used to check and support data obtained through the questionnaires. Babbie and Mouton (2001) agree that both questionnaires and interviews are suitable methods for use in a qualitative descriptive investigation. Focus groups of eight to ten educators were formed for the purpose of conducting interviews. The tape-recorder was used and notes were taken during the interviews. The data collected through the focus group interviews was grouped, patterns were established and codes were assigned to these patterns. The interpretive reporting approach (Krueger, 1998) was used.

There was a need to provide numerical data in order to indicate how often certain occurrences or situations applied to the respondents. Silverman (2001) believes that simple counting techniques can offer a means to survey the whole corpus of data ordinarily lost in intensive, qualitative research. Dey (1993) states that numbers and quantities may be used to express situations in a qualitative research, but more value should be attached to the feelings and expressions of participants about the situations, than to the numbers. In this study simple totals and percentages were used to enhance the understanding and interpretation of data collected.

Data was analysed qualitatively. Lavery (2003) views data analysis in a qualitative research as the reconstruction of the participants' system of knowledge, their interpretations of their lives, and their classification of their experiences into the themes or topics under discussion. The township educators' responses were seen as the genuine interpretation and understanding of their situation.

The study was limited to the primary school educators in the Free State Goldfields. Simple random sampling was used since every primary school educator in the Free State Goldfields had an equal and independent chance of being selected as a member of the sample (Payne & Payne, 2005). Of the 185 educators who were selected, 183 responded: a response rate of 98,9%.

The study was approached from the sociological perspective: while the factors that made OBE fail in the township schools were investigated and revealed, also, the impact of OBE for the community/society were also considered.

3. ETHICAL ISSUES

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Free State Provincial Department of Education. I also wrote a letter to the principals of selected schools, requesting permission to visit their schools and meet educators. Participating educators were informed that their participation was voluntary and that all information would be treated with strict confidentiality. Participants were requested not to write their names or names of their schools on the questionnaires, in order to protect their identities.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The responses of participants are recorded in Tables 1 and 2 below.

The items in Table 1 were developed from issues that were viewed as having an influence on the implementation of OBE in general; while items in Table 2 included factors that influenced classroom processes (such as teaching, learning, assessment and recording).

Table 1: Factors influencing OBE in general (N=183)

Items	Yes %	No %	Total %
Did the teacher-training programme you followed at college/university prepare you for OBE?	10,9	89,1	100
Did the DoE provide you with any OBE training?	75,4	24,6	100
Is OBE material such as handbooks and teaching aids from the DoE enough (i.e. was it received by all learners)?	10,9	89,1	100
Are parents able to buy additional material for their children?	7,1	92,9	100
Does continuous assessment in OBE mean more written tests than before?	62,8	37,2	100
Does the illiteracy of parents negatively affect the learning of your learners?	94,0	6,0	100

Table 2: Factors influencing OBE in the classroom (N=183)

Items	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Never %	Total %
The number of learners in my class enables me to implement OBE easily.	11,5	9,8	32,8	45,9	100
The poor home background of my learners hinders their progress.	69,9	15,9	14,2	0	100
Because of the lack of material and facilities in my school, I am forced to teach by only talking and writing on the chalkboard.	40,5	20,2	28,4	10,9	100
The conditions existing in my classroom make it difficult for me to achieve the set outcomes.	51,9	15,9	27,3	4,9	100
I can apply OBE assessment techniques with confidence.	9,3	14,2	52,5	24,0	100

5. The relevance of professional training to outcomes-based education

In order to determine the relevance of their training for the OBE approach, participants were asked if the professional training they had undergone had prepared them for applying OBE in their teaching activities.

The majority of the respondents (89,1%) mentioned that their professional training had not prepared them for the OBE approach. It should be noted that many black educators received their professional training during the apartheid era. Therefore, their professional training was not aligned to the OBE approach, but was relevant to the apartheid education that was offered to black learners during the apartheid era (Onwu & Mogari, 2004; Taylor & Vinjevod, 1999). The non-alignment of professional training to the OBE approach implies a substantial gap in the execution of important activities such as preparations for lessons, methods of lesson presentation/facilitation and assessment strategies. The situation would be normally managed by the introduction of an intensive programme of in-service training for educators, in an attempt to provide them with basic skills required for the OBE approach. Such an intensive programme of in-service training would require huge funding.

Comments related to the workshops provided by the DoE for educators included the following:

“The information did not help that much because the course facilitators were also not sure of some OBE principles, and they also did not help us with our individual problems it was just a general presentation.”

“OBE needs enough time to be practised.”

“I still have problems after these workshops.”

The Department of Education (DoE) provided some OBE training in the form of workshops. However, the educators complained that the workshops were too short (the duration of training ranged from a few hours to one week), and too theoretical (only lecturing in one big venue, with no demonstrations or practical application of the OBE approaches).

The other complaint raised by educators was that the workshop facilitators were uncertain about some of the principles and practices within the OBE approach. The lack of demonstrations and the perceived uncertainty of workshop facilitators imply that the training provided by the DoE was not helping educators to implement the OBE approach.

Educators enjoy respect and recognition due to their level of education, the expert knowledge of the teaching practice and the role they play in the education of learners, especially in the township where many people are illiterate. With the introduction of OBE educators become novices; and this has a negative impact on their professionalism, as well as on the respect they enjoy from the society (Vandeyar, 2005). These educators may be forced to use their old teaching methods, in order to avoid fumbling with OBE approaches.

6. The influence of class size on the implementation of outcomes-based education

In the OBE approach smaller numbers are recommended in order to promote learner participation, learner-centredness and individual assessment (Spady, 1994; Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997). However, big classes were found to have a negative influence on the respondents' ability to implement OBE. Only 11,5% of the respondents could easily implement OBE, and 9,8% could do so most of the time. The rest could not easily implement OBE with their numbers (45,9% never and 32,8% sometimes).

Educators remarked as follows:

"I have 51 learners and I cannot attend to individuals because time is limited."

"Sixty learners; it is not possible to teach OBE in such a class."

The official educator:learner ratio is 1:35 for secondary schools and 1:40 for primary schools. However, many township classrooms still have more learners than officially prescribed (Chisholm, 2005). Kokot (1997) maintains that it would require a highly trained educator to handle 40 learners in the classroom. Therefore, the inadequately trained township school educators would find it difficult to handle the large classes, especially within a complex system like OBE.

The educators' inability to handle large classes could lead to behavioural problems, ineffective teaching and poor results all factors with the potential to have negative long-term effects among learners as workers and as members of society.

7. Material, equipment and resources in the implementation of outcomes-based education

The supply of materials such as charts, glue, colouring pens, drawing pins and teaching aids from the DoE was not enough for all learners. The majority of the respondents (92,9%) reported that parents were also unable to buy additional material. The lack of teaching aids could also promote a situation where the educator does most of the talking, while learners listen quietly ('chalk-and-talk'). Only 10,9% of the respondents never used 'chalk-and-talk', while 40,5% always used it, 20,2% often used it and 28,4% sometimes used it.

In addition to the lack of materials, the township schools are generally characterised by a lack of libraries and laboratories, and a shortage of equipment such as photocopying machines, computers and data projectors (Bloch, 2008). Since the OBE approach emphasises self-discovery and learner participation (Spady, 1994), the dearth of material and equipment negatively influences the implementation of the OBE approach in the township schools.

The comments of participants included the following:

"I try to teach without material, but my teaching is not effective and interesting."

"My teaching becomes negatively affected if there is no material. I cannot teach creativity in children."

"Enough material is needed."

The non-availability of teaching and learning material may be stressful for the township school educators since it may, among others, have a negative impact on the teaching of the educator, and promote feelings of failure among these educators (Vandeyar, 2005). The former Model C schools are in a position to provide teaching and learning material where the DoE fails to do so since the majority of parents of learners in these schools afford to pay school fees (Fiske & Ladd, 2005; Vally, 2005). The availability of teaching and learning material in the former Model C schools may lead to the achievement of set outcomes, and the production of good quality learners; whereas the non-availability of materials in the township schools may imply poor teaching, poor quality learners and poor results factors which reduce the respect and recognition township educators enjoy.

8. The role of the home background in teaching and learning

Research revealed that the home background of learners, as well as their economic and social circumstances, plays an important role in their linguistic and educational development (Coltrane, 2003; Sibaya, Sibaya & Mugisha, 1996; Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997). Fiske and Ladd (2005) found that due to the advantaged background from which they come, white learners generally perform better than black learners. In the OBE specifically, the educator is expected to use the learner's existing knowledge in order to lead to new knowledge (Spady, 1994). The township schools have many learners who come from backgrounds characterised by lack of books, television and internet access (Fiske & Ladd, 2005; Mpeti, 2000). These learners may, therefore, not be exposed to educative material, or they may have little relevant knowledge which the educator can use as a point of departure in lesson presentation. It is for this reason that the majority of the respondents (69,9% always and 15, 9% often) indicated that the poor home backgrounds of their learners hindered the learners' progress. The implication is that the educator remains the only source of information and is expected to explain and describe (i.e. do most of the talking), while learners mainly listen.

The comments of participants were:

"I have to lower the standard of my lesson because these learners lack the broad insight and knowledge."

“I have to oversimplify my lesson to accommodate them.”

“The lesson becomes very difficult because I do not know where to start with them.”

The other issues related to home backgrounds could be discipline, attitudes and behaviour. For instance, informal settlements are generally known for high incidents of crime, child abuse, prostitution and general lawlessness (Dunlap, 2000). Children who are exposed to these activities may be attracted and find themselves perpetrating such activities (Dunlap, 2000; Fiske & Ladd, 2005). Bloch (2008) believes that poverty, hunger, child abuse and criminal gangs have an impact on what is happening in the classroom. Therefore, unhealthy and unsafe home backgrounds do not only contribute to poor learner performance, but may also turn children into delinquents and social misfits.

9. Parental involvement in outcomes-based education

The OBE approach emphasises parental involvement in the learners' education and school tasks. Parents are expected to help their children to do homework, to collect and prepare material for projects, to monitor progress of their children and to attend parents' meetings and evenings (Onwu & Mogari, 2004; Spady & Schlebusch, 1999). However, the situation where parents participate effectively in the education of their children applies to middle-class parents, who are literate or educated – most of such parents have children in the former Model C schools (Vally, 2005). The majority of township school parents are from the working (or low) class, are illiterate and are unemployed or earn low salaries (Vally, 2005) hence their involvement in school matters is minimal or non-existent. It is for this reason that the majority of the respondents (94%) believe that the illiteracy of parents negatively affects the learning of their children.

The lack of parental involvement in school activities led to the following comments by participants:

“It increases my workload, and it also makes it difficult to identify the learners' problems.”

“It increases my workload because I have to cover even the parent's role.”

Apart from issues related to illiteracy and poverty, negative attitudes among township school parents also contribute to the lack of parental involvement in school matters. Many parents in the township schools hold the view that educators are paid a lot of money to teach their children, and they, as parents, are not expected to do work that is supposed to be done by educators (Steyn & Van Wyk, 1999).

The OBE approach has the potential of ensuring that education is relevant to the needs of the community, because of its emphasis on parental involvement. The involvement of communities in education is vital for the general success of education and schools. Msila (2007) refers to the involvement of communities in education as social capital; and he believes that education and schools may not succeed without adequate support and influence from communities. However, the support for schools by township communities is minimal. The reasons for the minimal support include poverty, low educational level and the parents' concern or obsession with basics such as food, shelter and clothing (Mpeta, 2000, Vally, 2005). The lack of parental involvement implies that financial support, contribution of ideas and influence on school culture by parents are minimal or non-existent in contrast to what the OBE approach recommends. The successful schools have effective School Governing Bodies which are supported by the community (Msila, 2007; Fiske & Ladd, 2004). The support from the communities may be one of the reasons why former Model C schools achieve success in the implementation of OBE; while the lack of community support may be contributing negatively to the implementation of OBE in the township schools.

10. Assessment in outcomes-based education

Assessment was also found to be the least understood activity among township school educators. This is confirmed by the 62,8% of the respondents who indicated that continuous assessment in the OBE approach meant more written tests. In addition, only 9,3% of the respondents were always able to apply OBE assessment strategies with confidence.

The comments of participants were:

"I do not worry myself about what I do not know, I just do what I know."

"I do not know assessment. I am worried."

"Not certain. I feel bad."

Assessment plays a major role in OBE since it is only through the application of the different assessment strategies that the achievement of outcomes can be determined (Spady, 1994). The implication is that the majority of township school educators could not apply OBE assessment; and could, therefore, not determine the achievement of set outcomes. The aim of outcomes is to promote the achievement of certain skills and attitudes among learners, with the hope that a certain type of workers and citizens will ultimately be produced (Spady, 1994). Without proper assessment, it is not known if the required skills and attitudes are achieved; and consequently, it is not known if the required type of workers and citizens would be produced.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure the effective implementation of OBE in the township schools, the following issues need to be addressed:

The shortage of basic equipment and materials is at the forefront of poor implementation of OBE in the township schools. Therefore, the provision of adequate resources may improve the implementation of OBE in the township schools.

The provision of facilities such as libraries and laboratories could play an important role in the implementation of OBE in the township schools, especially if it is considered that many learners come from poor backgrounds with little or no exposure to internet, television and books.

Intensive training or re-training of township school educators is to be undertaken, especially in OBE teaching approaches, assessment strategies and record keeping. Since OBE is a complex approach, the intensive training is to be accompanied by regular in-service and refresher courses until educators have fully grasped the OBE approaches and its strategies.

The promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children may contribute positively to the success of OBE in the township schools. Helping their children with projects, making financial contribution to schools and becoming involved with learner discipline are some of the benefits of involving parents in the schooling of their children. This could be done through workshops, parents' evenings and cultural activities.

12. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Spady (2008) indicated that the implementation of OBE in South African schools failed because of the following reasons:

- the South African schooling system was not yet ready for a complex system like OBE;
- the South African officials who introduced OBE misinterpreted some of the OBE principles;
- the language used to express the outcomes was inconsistent and peripheral; and
- that the OBE that is being implemented in South Africa is not the OBE he developed and advocated;

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, Spady (2008) called the South African Department of Education (DoE) to 'drop the OBE label'.

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