

The dilemmas of cooperative governance in the Department of Basic Education in South Africa

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Abstract

In this article, we analyse the concept of cooperative governance in terms of the dynamic relationships between national and provincial departments of education to determine their influence on education delivery in South Africa. These dynamic relationships include delegation of responsibilities, decentralisation and other concurrent functions. The concept of cooperative governance is significant because it does not find proper and adequate practical expression in the relationships between and operations of the various spheres of government and has a noticeable impact on the way in which the various spheres are supposed to deliver their mandate in education. The article is of interest to readers in education departments in South Africa and students and scholars of education governance.

Keywords: cooperative governance in education, decentralisation in education

Introduction

The advent of the democratic dispensation ushered in legislative and policy realignment in South Africa in general and the departments of education in particular. Based on these legislative and policy realignments, South Africa agreed on a cooperative governance system that would govern, regulate and guide the functioning of the various spheres of government.

According to Malan (2005: 229), cooperative governance is a partnership between the three spheres of government and requires each sphere to fulfil a specific role. Cooperative governance does not ignore differences of approach and viewpoints between the various spheres of government, but instead encourages healthy debate during consultation in order to address the needs of the people which each sphere represents. Cooperative governance provides for the self-rule of the various spheres of

government to enable them to serve their people accordingly and in response to their contextual conditions. It is in terms of this self-rule provision that the various departments of education are vested with exclusive powers to decide on the different approaches and viewpoints as regards education delivery within their jurisdictions.

As a conduit for cooperative governance, decentralisation has far-reaching implications for education delivery, as it involves the power and authority to control and legislate on the applicable functions plus the resources necessary for executing these functions. Cooperative governance as the main vehicle through which education is delivered to all the learners in South Africa determines and influences all the aspects pertaining to education delivery.

The concept of decentralisation expresses how both functions and administrative authority are shared between the spheres of government and it is thus important in understanding the relationships between and the operation of the spheres of government within the context of cooperative governance.

This article aims to analyse the concept of cooperative governance in terms of the dynamic relationships, including delegation of responsibilities, decentralisation and the concurrent functions, between the national and provincial departments of education to determine their likely influence on education delivery in South Africa. The article argues that in terms of the cooperative governance system the locus of education control in South Africa is shared between the various spheres of government, albeit at different levels. Constitutionally, however, the national and provincial departments of education are vested with exclusive powers to determine the policies and strategies required to deliver education within their jurisdictions. This 'double' creation of policies to guide the same education system, although varied in terms of levels, has the potential to create both confusion and tension between the two levels of the departments of education.

It appears that both practitioners and bureaucrats do not have a common and shared understanding of the concept of cooperative governance and its broader meaning as a system of governance in South Africa, particularly in education. As a result, this concept of cooperative governance does not find proper and adequate practical expression in the relationships between and operations of the various spheres of government. This, in turn, may have a noticeable impact on the way in which they are supposed to deliver their mandate in education.

The article has four main sections. Firstly, it outlines data collection procedures and analysis techniques. Secondly, it looks at cooperative governance within the governance system in South Africa. This is followed by a discussion of findings and lastly the article will outline the conclusion.

Methodology

The research that underpins this article used a qualitative research design method, as

it is capable of providing rich data about real-life people and situations (De Vos 2001: 5). Data were collected using in-depth interviews with purposively-selected officials from the national and three provincial education departments, the former director-general of the Department of Education and two former superintendents-general of provincial departments of education in order to understand their views and perceptions of cooperative governance and how it influences the delivery of education. In this article pseudonyms will be used for all the officials we quote.

These officials were selected because they were or had been in constant interaction with one another owing to the portfolios they managed. They were thus presumed to have espoused the principles of cooperative governance during their operations and interactions. According to Cohen et al. (2007: 115), purposive sampling is used in order to access 'knowledgeable people', i.e. those people who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues, often by virtue of their professional roles, power, access to networks, expertise or experience.

Literature review

A cooperative governance system determines how power is distributed between the various spheres of government, their subsequent carrying out of their various roles and responsibilities and the impact this has on the lives of the citizens. Accordingly, the Constitution of South Africa emphasises and promotes cooperation between the various spheres of government, especially in view of the history of social divisions before 1994. This also forms the backdrop to the concurrent and exclusive activities in which all spheres of government have to engage as they seek to deliver basic and essential services, including education, to the people of South Africa (Ile 2007: 18).

Accordingly, the way in which the various spheres of government understand and interpret their exclusive and concurrent powers determines how they will relate to each other and also the subsequent fulfilment of their functions (Sokhela 2006: 84).

In the South African context decentralisation is a critical feature of the cooperative governance system, especially as regards the fulfilment of the concurrent functions. The national Department of Education works with and through the provincial education departments to perform its functions. Within the concurrent arrangement for the provision of education, the national Department of Education is responsible for policy formulation, standard setting and the drawing up of the necessary regulations, whereas the provincial education departments are responsible for policy implementation and the delivery of education according to the standards set and the applicable regulations. Through decentralisation some of the executive powers, authority and functions are devolved to the provinces because the provinces are closer to both the people to be served and the context within which certain key functions are to be performed. In addition to a common understanding of decentralisation, all the spheres should also possess a sound understanding of the scope and essence of what is

decentralised to be able to fulfil their mandate.

According to Narsee (2006: 29), although almost everyone has a rough understanding of what decentralisation means, defining it precisely may present problems because the term may be used in a number of different ways and in significantly different contexts. Thus, in order to prevent confusion, it is essential that decentralisation has a well-defined purpose and scope and that it should not be used to avoid taking responsibility and accountability for certain issues relating to education delivery.

Decentralisation may be defined as the state's readiness to transfer its competences, planning, functions, resources, decision-making or administrative authority from the central government to the local governments owing to its own lack of ability to perform them efficiently in a timely manner and the establishment of autonomous bureaucratic units of decision-making and service provision at the local level (Carp & Sienerth 2014: 1209; Narsee 2006: 30; Prabhakar 2012: 67; Reidl & Dickovick 2013: 323; Utomo 2009: 2).

The main argument for the transfer of functions, powers and resources to the local units is that, because the local units are closest to the people they are supposed to serve, they are better placed than central government to understand the needs of the people and to respond appropriately in terms of services. Elumalai (2013: 199) asserts that the proponents of decentralisation contend that it brings the elected local government officials closer to the people; hence it allows these government officials to understand their specific preferences and aspirations so as to reasonably reflect these in the developmental planning. According to Elumalai (2013: 199) the direct participation of local people in planning, implementation and monitoring of developmental programmes tends to improve the quality of public goods and services. On the other hand, Escobar-Lemmon & Ross (2014: 175) contend that decentralisation promises to increase government's responsiveness to citizen needs, improve effectiveness of the allocation of public goods, mobilise citizens through new avenues of local political participation, increase political accountability and generally improve democracy from below.

According to Ssonko (2013: 33-34) the merits of decentralisation include the following:

- Improved service delivery – the lower tiers of government can deliver services effectively because politicians and public servants are more aware of the needs of their community and of the preferences of local populations.
- Productive efficiency – the local governments can produce goods and services at lower cost than central governments. The usual 'middle-man syndrome' and bureaucracy involving contract procedures are reduced.
- Improved efficiency of central government – decentralisation allows central governments to concentrate on national issues, rather than being preoccupied with service delivery.

On the other hand, the local units should also be ready, willing and capable to accept

and fulfil the transferred functions, powers and administrative authority if the intentions of decentralisation are to be realised. Elumalai (2013: 199) warns that decentralisation is hampered by the absence of supportive conditions like political commitment to sharing power and adequate resources and technical capacity in the local government. He further argues that such supportive conditions would enable the local government to provide quality delivery of drinking water, health care services, educational facilities and rural infrastructure.

According to Ssonko (2013: 36) decentralisation is often favoured because it brings government closer to its citizens and provides opportunities for participation in decision-making. However, achieving this goal depends on a variety of conditions for successful decentralisation, which include the following:

- Full commitment from national and sub-national government and adequate resources: Central government must be willing to give control and recognise the importance of sub-national government in service delivery.
- An appropriate legislative framework that clearly defines the responsibilities and powers of sub-national governments and the expected relationship between central and lower levels of government.
- Adequate financial and staff resources to support effective decentralisation.
- Capacity at sub-national government level: Sub-national government must have sufficient professional and well-trained staff. Capacity denotes the ability, competency and efficiency of sub-national governments in planning, implementing, managing and evaluating relevant policies, strategies or programmes for their jurisdictions.

Ssonko (2013: 36) further argues that if there are additional omissions then decentralisation and service delivery at lower levels of government may remain problematic. Furthermore, Prabhakar (2012: 73) warns that dependence on central authority for resources has further reduced the political autonomy of local institutions and therefore their responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of the local people.

Narsee (2006: 34) asserts that decentralisation means that the centre retains the main elements of strategic control of the system while the scope of planning, decision-making and control at the local level of the system is enlarged. Accordingly, the national Department of Basic Education is responsible for formulating policies and legislation, and also for determining the strategic direction of the education system, whereas the provincial education departments are responsible for policy implementation. As a result, Prabhakar (2012: 67) contends that if decentralisation is carefully planned, effectively implemented and appropriately managed, it can lead to significant improvement in the welfare of people at the local level, the cumulative effect of which can lead to enhanced human development.

According to Samoff (1990: 516), decentralisation may be divided into 'administrative decentralisation' and 'political decentralisation'. Samoff (1990: 516) further explains

that the language of administrative decentralisation is one of 'service delivery, efficiency, and behavioural incentives and rewards' while that of political decentralisation is one of 'effective participation, empowerment and collective action'. The primary purpose of administrative decentralisation is to improve policy implementation. Political decentralisation, on the other hand, involves promoting the participation of the citizens through the transfer of the decision-making authority to previously under-represented or marginal groups.

The type of decentralisation chosen should be consistent with the expected result to avoid unnecessary confusion. Furthermore, Plaatjies (2008: iii) argues that the design of the decentralised cooperative governance system is of critical importance for policy and implementation. The decentralisation of roles and responsibilities between the spheres of government within the context of cooperative governance imposes an obligation on these various spheres of government to cooperate with each other. Accordingly, the spheres are enjoined to ensure that they complement each other, particularly as regards the concurrent functions.

It is essential that, in decentralisation, roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined so that, in the event of a failure to deliver on the mandate as expected, the relevant level may be held accountable for such failure. However, there is a precondition to this happening, namely sufficient strengthening of the local authorities through the transfer of power and resources from the central government. According to Ssonko (2013: 38), any shortfall in resources and inadequate power and authority may lead to either non-delivery of services or delivery of sub-standard services and products.

Although countries often decentralise their basic education systems in order to conform with wider administrative reform or with the general principles of administrative responsibility being given to the lowest capable level of government, giving the users a greater voice in decisions that affect them and greater recognition of local linguistic or ethnic diversity, decentralisation may also lead to confusion about education management. This confusion may result in conflicting decisions or a failure to carry out functions, thus adversely affecting quality and efficiency. It is thus essential that a proper balance should be maintained between the transfer of powers and functions and maintaining proper accountability without undue interference (Winkler & Boon-Ling 2007: 1).

It is important to note that the positive results of decentralisation may be realised only if its intention and purpose are clearly spelled out and implemented accordingly and all the supportive conditions are in place. The lower spheres of government should share the same understanding of this purpose as central government, be prepared to accept it and also possess the necessary capacity to carry out the decentralised functions. The education system will benefit enormously if these prerequisites for decentralisation are evident because all the spheres of government will be able to deliver on their mandate both individually and collectively to the advantage and

benefit of all learners.

This literature review highlighted the intentions or merits of decentralisation, supportive conditions and preconditions to be put in place for the successful implementation of decentralisation, how decentralisation has to be executed, the allocation of roles and responsibilities, the definition of how the spheres of government should operate and relate to each other and possible risks of decentralisation. All these aspects will inform and strengthen discussion of the findings as to how decentralisation is understood and operationalised by the various spheres of government in South Africa.

Discussion of findings

A government, through its departments, is obliged to serve its citizens and enhance their well-being. One of the various approaches that a government may employ to deliver services to its citizens is through the decentralisation of authority and functions to the lower levels of government. However, the fact that decentralisation has multiple meanings and interpretations as well as the various ways in which it has been implemented in different countries and different contexts may create challenges as regards its successful implementation (Utomo 2009: 25).

The success of any policy and/or programme that emanates from the national Department of Education depends on the resources and capabilities that are available to the provincial education departments. However, in view of the fact that the provinces have both the power and the authority to control and prioritise their resources, a challenge sometimes arises in respect of the resourcing of national projects. This is often compounded by the fact that the provinces also have the power to act autonomously.

The research data reveals that the lack of and/or a varied understanding and implementation of decentralised cooperative governance is creating serious dilemmas for the various spheres of government and this is, in turn, having an adverse effect on the level and quality of the education delivered to the nation.

The tension related to power and authority

The officials from the provincial departments are sometimes placed in a situation in which they have to serve two 'masters' with similar powers and authority. This, in turn, creates a problem of divided loyalty for these officials, who, ultimately, end up choosing to obey the MEC or HOD as their employer at the expense of the national projects or programmes. This may lead to the non-delivery of certain functions and cause frustration on the part of the officials in the national department, as they are aware that they have limited authority to demand or enforce compliance from their provincial counterparts. This sentiment is reflected in Marks' comment that

‘sometimes we would want certain things to be done and the provincial officials’ response would be “but we are expected to do this for the Member of the Executive Council’s (MEC’s) office or for the Head of Department’s (HOD’s) office and we don’t therefore have the time to respond to what we have discussed during the national meetings” ... so those problems arise. This also causes delays and frustrations in the delivery of certain national functions and/or services.’

Although the Department of Basic Education (DBE) depends on the provinces to deliver on its mandate, it does not have authority to enforce compliance and/or efficiency from the provinces. In addition, education is delivered to the schools which are controlled and managed by the provincial departments. As a result, Brian warned that ‘the issue of power and authority, if it is not approached with understanding, may have a negative impact on service delivery because it would comprise accountability, monitoring, evaluation and reporting in the system. This will affect both the general performance of the education sector and the quality of education delivered to the nation.’

Although the Constitution provides for the self-rule and shared-rule approaches within the cooperative governance system, an overemphasis of the self-rule approach will militate against the requirement that the spheres of government cooperate and complement each other. This overemphasis of the self-rule approach may occur as a result of apparent tensions in respect of power and authority between the spheres of government. The provinces want their territorial integrity to be respected and they also want to be afforded space in which to operate without undue interference by the national department on matters allocated to them by the Constitution, whereas the national department views itself as the ultimate reporting and accounting body to parliament and thus feels it should have control over how education is delivered. This frustration is highlighted in Godfrey’s argument that ‘the provinces must understand that the DBE is the head of this country and there is accountability which the provinces have to show to that head and that is where part of that problem is ... the provinces often feel that, because they have their own MECs ... they have their own HODs they can operate separately from the national department ... the national department’s position is saying we are the coordinating body ... we are the ultimate reporting body for the sector so you cannot be far away from us.’

The tension of authority to communicate instructions to the operational officials may create serious operational challenges. The Minister, with his/her national status, may want to be in charge, but he/she does not have direct authority and control over the provincial officials nor does he/she have any control over the resources required for the implementation of his/her instructions. On the other hand, there is a far greater possibility that the instructions of the provincial MECs will be carried out, because they are regarded as the employers of the provincial officials and they thus have a stronger claim to their loyalty. In addition, the provincial MECs also control the resources required to implement their policy decisions. Of the two ‘masters’, the

provincial MECs are in a superior position in terms of their authority over the officials responsible for policy implementation. These subtle tensions in terms of authority were expressed by Cornelius, who commented that

The Western Cape is viewed as a republic by the rest of the country ... and you find that there are particular protocols that apply in this province and which do not apply in other provinces ... I will give this specific example. A week ago I attended this summit on school discipline and we were supposed to send 10 delegates, including school principals and learners ... but, because of the way things are done here, we could not have the required number of principals ... we could not have any delegate who was a learner ... that does not contribute to what national is trying to do ... so there is that kind of tension that we experience.

The issue of the tension about authority, although subtle, is always present between the national department and the provincial departments. The provinces are of the opinion that, although a decision on a particular matter emanates from the national department, they still have the prerogative to decide on the level and nature of implementation and even the level of participation of their officials. The apparent tension in respect of power and authority between the spheres of government may also influence the allocation of resources for the implementation of certain policy decisions, as discussed in the following section.

A disjuncture between the planning emanating from policy decisions and the allocation of resources

It was indicated earlier that, in the main, decentralisation is defined as the transfer of planning, functions, resources, decision-making and/or administrative authority from the central government to its local units. The argument in favour of this is that, because these local units are closest to the people, they are better placed to understand their needs and to respond appropriately in terms of services. However, a major challenge arises when the planning and functions which have been transferred are not accompanied by the necessary resources, as the lower units will be left with valuable plans and beneficial functions that they are not able to implement and/or fulfil. This becomes a particular problem if one considers the fact that the aim of administrative decentralisation is to improve 'service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness' (Narsee 2006: 30; Utomo 2009: 2). Prabhakar (2012: 73) argues that dependence on central authority for resources has further reduced the political autonomy of local institutions and therefore their responsiveness to local needs and aspirations.

The successful implementation of decentralisation requires the creation of the necessary conditions and environments at all departmental levels. If these necessary conditions, environments and requirements are not put in place beforehand, decentralisation is likely to create implementation challenges. This is evident in the decentralised relationship or practice between the national Department of Education and the provincial departments of education (PEDs) because, for the majority of the time, the PEDs are confronted with unfunded mandates and/or decisions from the

national department. As a result, the PEDs have to contend with resource dilemmas and the progress reports which the national department expects.

Accordingly, if the provinces are to deliver as expected, they need to receive sufficient and timely assistance and support from the national department. However, it would appear that this does not always happen at the required levels and time, thus causing dysfunctionality within the system. Simon bemoaned the fact that

The approach to planning by the DBE is somewhat different from the way the provinces do their planning ... there is also a difference in terms of time lines ... for instance, you will find that, by the end of the year, the provincial departments have already put together their plans for the next financial year ... those plans are intact ... and we will come as the DBE ... say in February ... March just before the next financial year and say here is our calendar of activities ... these are the things which will be happening ... that we have planned as the DBE and we would like your support ... in terms of making sure that they are being implemented.

This type of planning is problematic because, firstly, it is late and, secondly, the plans are not necessarily accompanied by the required resources. On the other hand, the provinces have formulated their plans and allocated the necessary resources and they are ready to start the implementation process. Thus, the DBE plans, besides being late, often cause major disruptions to the provinces' plans, because they require extra resources which the provinces do not have. Although cooperative governance provides for different planning by the spheres of government to happen at the same time, the major challenge is that the spheres of government have to use the same resources to implement the various plans. Thus, the existence of different strategic thinking to inform, direct, guide and regulate the same education system has the potential to create confusion, tension and conflict, as the provinces may either not attend to or resource some of the delegated activities, thus resulting in poor service delivery to the citizens. However, within the cooperative governance system resources are controlled by the provinces, which also have the powers to allocate and use these resources according to their autonomous decisions. Simon indicated:

The delegation of activities really creates serious tensions because, in some instances, provinces would tell you that 'We have had our plans consolidated, finalised, approved, costed and everything ... before you came up with your additions, so we can't help you ... we did not budget for this because you did not tell us in time ... so we are unable to participate and support your plans' ... those are some of the conflict situations that I have managed to pick up ... and the DBE would have had that in their plans, committed and even presented to cabinet. Then the DBE will be faced with a dilemma of having plans which are likely not to be implemented by the provinces and the frustration of having to account to the Education Portfolio Committee in Parliament as to what really happened to these plans that it has presented before them.

It is clear that unsynchronised planning may create major problems for the national department because it relies on the provincial departments to deliver on its mandates. Its planning is carried out on the assumption that the provincial departments will readily accept such plans for implementation. However, this assumption has been proved to be unfounded, because the provincial departments have their own decision-

making powers and authority to plan and allocate resources according to their own priorities. In addition, the national department has no authority as regards the way in which the provincial departments utilise their resources. All the national department can do is to consult and negotiate with the provincial departments in time to ensure that they reserve some of their resources for the implementation of national programmes.

The officials from the provinces voiced a genuine concern that, although the DBE has made a commitment to parliament and to the portfolio committee that it will devise certain plans to improve education in the country, as long as there are no resources these plans are bound to fail. This, in turn, will affect the delivery of education to the citizens and the subsequent skills level in the country. Brian indicated that

The problem actually is that very often the DBE policies, norms and standards are not effectively assessed in terms of their affordability ... so you have this norm ... you have this standard ... you have this policy and the provinces are supposed to implement it and either they don't have the money or the capacity or the conditions are not conducive to implement them.

The inadequate assessment of the affordability and feasibility of its policies, norms and standards by the DBE creates resource and capacity challenges for the provinces. These challenges then work against the purpose of decentralisation, which is to improve service delivery to the nation. James stated specifically that

There are other norms and standards like paying for the affiliation fees to the SGB associations on behalf of schools ... the provinces like KZN and Limpopo will say 'We don't have money, therefore we are not going to do it' ... it is a national policy, they decide 'We are not going to budget for that ... you can jump up and down as you want but nothing is going to happen' ... compensation of school fees is another one ... the department is supposed to compensate schools for school fees exemptions ... some provinces will tell you that we don't have money because we haven't budgeted for that.

These are some of the challenges faced by the national department when it sets norms and standards which fall outside the fiscal capacity of the provinces. As a result, the laudable policy intentions are not finding practical expression at the provincial level and these policies will thus not have any practical impact on the lives of the citizens.

The fact that plans and policy decisions are generated at the national level while resources are managed and controlled by the provinces is bound to create serious decentralisation and/or implementation challenges for the education system. No matter how good the plans and policy decisions made at the national level, as long as there is no buy-in from the provinces their good intentions will not be realised. Accordingly, this disjuncture between planning and resource allocation will remain an albatross in the education system. The capacity, capability and level of resourcing of the provinces should be determined and confirmed before any function is delegated.

Authority to prioritise activities

The fact that the national department and the provincial departments have 'similar

powers in terms of decision-making on policy and legislative issues' and that the provinces have the right to make autonomous decisions on education delivery has the potential to create tensions and confusion regarding the ultimate authority to determine priorities in the education sector. The national Minister of Education is responsible and accountable for the quality and delivery of education in the country and would thus want all the institutions involved in education delivery to follow and implement the same priorities and directives. On the other hand, the provinces, through their premiers who report to the president and not the Minister of Education, may have their own targets to achieve.

The different spheres of government focus on the priorities which have been identified for the process of delivering their mandates, both politically and educationally. Where such priorities are not aligned, a challenge will probably arise regarding the provision of resources and the subsequent implementation of these priorities. This may be compounded by the fact that education delivery is led by the Minister of Education at the national level and a Member of the Executive Council (MEC) at the provincial level, both of whom account to different offices. This situation is aptly articulated in Simon's comment that

You would find that the national department would set up priorities for maybe a medium-term expenditure framework ... let's say 2014–2016 ... to say here are the priorities ... but you will find that, when it comes to the next level ... the provincial level, they have their own priorities ... to the extent that some of the national priorities may not be enacted at the provincial level ... because the province would say 'We also do take instructions from the office of the premier'.

The apparent conflict and tension resulting from the parallel determination of priorities to guide the delivery of education by the two spheres of government raise serious questions regarding the nature of consultations that are purported to be taking place between them. Among other things these consultations are supposed to broker consensus regarding priorities for the education system. In addition, the majority of the provinces belong to the ruling party and this suggests that they are supposed to follow the same political mandate and manifesto. However, the fact that the office of the premier may issue instructions that are different from those issued by the minister indicates that provinces are adamant that they are authorised by the Constitution to make and administer decisions without undue interference by the national department. This also demonstrates the political power play between the premier and the Minister, where the premier, in most instances as the provincial party-political chairperson, wields more political power than the Minister. It is thus not surprising that some of the national priorities are not enacted at provincial level, because the premier's instructions are more important than those of the Minister in this political context and they are therefore always given preference in terms of implementation.

These dual management levels of education delivery, creation of policies and determination of priorities are creating operational challenges and tensions which adverse-

ly affect the rigour of education delivery. Benjamin indicated that

Very often the provinces think that they are autonomous ... and that is the problem ... so reporting and accounting to the national level become problematic ... because, for example, the Minister of Education cannot dictate to the MEC or hold the MEC accountable ... the MEC is accountable to the premier of the province.

In addition, the dichotomy of national vs. provincial and self-rule vs. shared rule that defines the education system creates another dynamic in terms of accountability and reporting on education delivery because the two spheres are vested with exclusive powers to make policy decisions on education which may have a significant influence on the performance of the education system in general. Any dissonance between the spheres of government with regard to legislative and policy guidance will probably create confusion and tension. The characteristic multi-faceted and dichotomous relationship between the spheres of government renders collaboration a prerequisite for the effective and efficient performance of the education system.

The fact that the departments operate within and are guided by the principle of decentralisation enjoins them to work collaboratively, align and coordinate their activities and priorities and, above all, consult with each other on common issues to avoid working at cross-purposes with each other. However, as was evident in the officials' views and comments, the level of collaboration between the spheres of government is not always in line with the principles of cooperative governance.

Conclusion

A cooperative governance system determines how power is distributed between the various spheres of government, their subsequent carrying out of their various roles and responsibilities and the impact this has on the lives of the citizens. The powers and authority of control and governance of the education system are devolved proportionally to the different spheres of government to ensure effective and efficient service delivery to the citizens.

As a conduit for cooperative governance, decentralisation has far-reaching implications for education delivery, as it involves the power and authority to control and legislate on the applicable functions plus the resources necessary for executing these functions.

The success of any policy and/or programme that emanates from the national Department of Education therefore depends on the resources and capability that are available to the provincial education departments. The fact that plans and policy decisions are generated at the national level while resources are managed and controlled by the provinces is bound to create serious decentralisation and/or implementation challenges for the education system. Accordingly, this disjuncture between planning and resource allocation will remain problematic in the education system. The successful implementation of decentralisation thus requires the creation of the necessary conditions and environments at all the departmental levels.

The article further revealed that although cooperative governance provides for different planning by the various spheres of government to happen at the same time, the major challenge is that the spheres of government have to use the same resources to implement the various plans. Thus, the existence of different strategic thinking to inform, direct, guide and regulate the same education system has the potential to create confusion, tension and conflict as the provinces may either not attend to or resource some of the delegated activities, thus resulting in poor service delivery to the citizens.

Therefore, the dual management levels of education delivery and the creation of policies and the determination of priorities are creating operational challenges and tensions which adversely affect the rigour of the education delivery. In addition, the dichotomy of national vs. provincial and self-rule vs. shared rule that defines the education system creates another dynamic in terms of accountability and reporting on education delivery because the two spheres are vested with the same exclusive powers to make policy decisions on education which may have a significant influence on the performance of the education system in general.

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