The relationship between government policy and management practices at further education and training colleges

Ntlantla Sebele
9076B Bokaba Street, Orlando West, 1804, South Africa.

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This paper aims to explain the relationship between FET policy origination and management practices at college level in Gauteng. Empirical evidence shows that there exists a gap between policy and practice. Literature points out that since 1994, South Africa has passed laws that created favorable conditions for policy development. The success or failure of government FET policies can be judged at college level. According to research, some managers in former technical colleges lack skills and knowledge to successfully implement government transformation initiatives. Lack of management capacity at college level is cited as the reason for the non-implementation of policy. Policy makers derive policy from political, social and economic imperatives and infuse this with theoretical sources that describe how the policy process works and are often less sensitive to the practical conditions in which the policy is to be implemented. Conversely, policy implementers are primarily guided by contextual and systemic considerations as they implement policy. In the thesis upon which this paper is based, it is argued that understanding the processes of policy development and implementation can assist in explaining the relationship between government policy and management practices at college level. The study interrogated policy intentions by analyzing the original meaning of FET policy from the originators’ perspective and juxtaposed this with the understanding of policy implementation from the implementers’ perspective and described the relationship between intended and implemented policy. A qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to gather data from participants was used. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from policy originators and college managers. During data analysis, six main themes were distilled from the data collected: centralization vis-à-vis decentralization; resources; structures; curriculum; governance and strategic planning. Findings revealed how issues of power and authority affect policy development and implementation. The study establishes that policy implementers need capacity, power and authority to plan and make decisions on policy implementation, but decision-makers at higher levels of the system often subjugate these powers. For policy implementation to match policy intentions, policy implementers need capacity and authority to understand, plan and make policy implementation decisions.

Key words: Policy origination, management practices, transformation, governance, policy implementation, policy intentions, resources, centralization, decentralization, structures.

INTRODUCTION

Public education policy defines the course of action that government intends to pursue in order to achieve national education goals and specifies the intentions to achieve these goals. Government policy intentions should culminate in successful policy implementation. Good policy simply means effective policy with good intentions and yielding intended results. The intentions of policy are usually documented in policy documents but results are
reflected in practice. The purpose of the Further Education and Training (FET) policy as declared in 1998 was to transform the FET colleges into a flexible and responsive sector. FET colleges are meant to be one of the key vehicles for skills development in South Africa. Skills shortage and unemployment have remained serious problems in South Africa and initiatives geared towards alleviating these challenges should be supported and implemented. Tilak (2002:3 cited in Moyo, 2008) indicates that the formal sector has limitations in absorbing skilled workers into formal jobs and internationally public FET provision has been focused on responding to the needs of the informal sector and self-employment. Grierson (2001:22 cited in Moyo, 2008) indicates that VET programmes and policies are necessary to prepare individuals for employment or self-employment in the informal sector as well as participate meaningfully in economic development of the country. Tilak (2002:3 cited in Moyo, 2008) therefore argues that the informal sector needs to be developed as the sector has the potential to serve the majority of the people. This sector presents an opportunity for VET colleges to develop and present skills programmes that will cater for both employment and self-employment. Tilak (2002 cited in Moyo, 2008) cites Bangladesh as a typical example in this regard and indicates that when it was established that Bangladesh could not offer job opportunities to its masses, UNESCO (2002 cited in Moyo, 2008) suggested that the government in that country shift its VET training focus to the informal sector. Courses that are oriented towards self employment were used to prepare people for the purpose of creating their own ventures.

The World Bank has since 1991 been advocating the notion that skills development should be left in the hands of private providers as this kind of provision has always been regarded as likely to be more efficient than public provision. McGrath (2005:3 cited in Moyo, 2008) indicates that however in recent years the World Bank has shifted from this position and now advocates the notion that public FET colleges should be responsive to the labor market. In other words, the World Bank is making a strong call that public FET colleges are expected to train people based on the needs as identified by employers. It has been argued by authors like McGrath (2005) and Anderson (2003) that the FET sector has the potential to develop human capital faster than any other education sector and the European Union (EU) has been on the forefront in supporting this call. In fact, Anderson (2003:3 cited in Moyo, 2008) points out that the purpose of VET is to promote economic growth through the development of human resources which directly enhances productivity and profits for industry. The World Bank has also funded programmes to assist governments to develop and align education policies for the development of FET or what they refer to as Vocational Education and Training (VET). However, literature abounds that documents the failure of many government policies in this regard. Authors such as Jansen (2001), Manganyi (2001) and Kraak and Young (1990) all point out that numerous studies have been undertaken that confirmed that public policy implementation most of the times does not match policy intentions. This article therefore asks: 'what is the relationship between the intended policy as exposed in the Green Paper (RSA, 1996a) and institutional practices with regards to the implementation of intended policy in Further Education and Training colleges in Gauteng?'

The article flows from a study that sought to understand and describe the relationship between intended and implemented policy from the context of policy development and policy implementation.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study upon which this paper is based seeks to understand why policy development and policy implementation are the way they are in the FET college sector in South Africa. The research lens that was used in qualitative and sampling was purposeful. According to Babbie (1992:167) purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select the sample on the bases of his/her own judgment and knowledge of the population. The researcher in the study believed that the selected sample was in a better position to provide the information required to answer the research question. The following criteria were used to select the sample:

1) Participants who were involved in the development of the FET policy who were members of either the NCFE or the NBI and being available for interviews; and
2) Participants who are currently holding a principalship’s position at an FET college in Gauteng and being available for the interview.

The researcher has conveniently selected policy developers and implementers as informants because they have specialized knowledge and experience in the processes of policy development and policy implementation. Policy developers in the study were the actual people who worked on the FET policy and possessed a special understanding of the policy development process. Principals of FET colleges who in this case are regarded as implementers and are at the forefront of the implementation process of the FET policy. They are in the context and they experience issues around implementation at a practical level. Seven cases were taken and participated in the study as informants and as indicated by Ploeg (1999:2 cited in Moyo, 2008); this is not a rare case in qualitative research. In fact, Ploeg (1999:2) indicates that qualitative research normally involves smaller sample sizes and that sampling is normally flexible. Kelly (1999:381 cited in Moyo, 2008) says that between six and eight sources of data in qualitative research are acceptable as they normally yield
desired results. Four policy originators and three FET Colleges' principals participated in the study. The type of data that was collected was qualitative in nature and was collected through open-ended semi-structured interviews. Two pre-determined interview schedules were prepared and used to collect data from the informants (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997:447). The first interview schedule was constituted by questions extracted in advance directly from the Green Paper on Further Education and Training and a situational analysis of FET institutions in the Gauteng Province: report to the Head of Education and were addressing policy issues from the perspective of policy originators of which informants were directly involved. The second interview schedule was used to corroborate or dispute views and perspectives of respondents in the first schedule. In addition, probing as a characteristic of in-depth interviews was used during interview to clarify certain responses for the purpose of strengthening the credibility of data collected (Babbie and Mouton, 2004: 289; McMillan and Schumacher, 1997: 450).

Corroboration, openness, member checking and thick descriptions of methodologies of data collection and analysis were used for this purpose. Policy originators' views and meanings of policy statements were corroborated with policy implementers to check common understanding. Codes and themes that emerged during data analysis were interpreted in order to try to understand why policy development and implementation are the way they are within the FET college sector. Neuman (2003:148) indicates that it is the responsibility of the researcher to interpret data by finding out how the informants see their world, how they describe their situation or what it means for them. McMillan and Schumacher (1997:533) indicate that said this is the stage where themes simply provide an explanation of the situation. Both first- and second-order interpretation were used to interpret the identified themes. First-order interpretations were derived from meanings attached by informants (Neuman, 2003:148) and second-order interpretation was carried by the researcher after the first-order interpretation. It was at this stage that an intellectual understanding of the relationship between policy development and implementation emerged. The first-and second-order interpretation revealed six major themes that I believe tried to qualitatively describe the relationship between government policy and management practices at FET colleges in Gauteng.

THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION DILEMMA

The intentions of the South African government about various educational policies during the 'White Paper Era' were to restructure and transform the education system. However, there were many frustrations that accompanied these intentions (Sayed, 2001:189). Some of these frustrations included the issue of personnel appointed in key positions across all levels of the bureaucracy as one obstacle towards the realization of government good intentions. According to Sayed (2001:189 cited in Moyo, 2008), the appointments of new personnel at policy development and implementation levels had the potential for policy failure as the people appointed had varying capabilities, knowledge and experience in the areas in which they were appointed. In particular, the appointment of new principals of FET colleges in South Africa in May 2003 by the Minister of Education increased the potential for policy failure. Ayyar (1996:348 cited in Moyo, 2008) and Jansen (2001:48) says that the appointment of these principals was welcome but further states that this did not go far in addressing the issue of successful policy implementation at college level. Jansen (2001:48) points out that this assertion by Ayyar was confirmed in a study by Hess (1997) that established that lack of implementation of government policy is not due to the lack of resources including human resources but that reform policies are meant to be symbolically attractive and not intended to "improve the costs required by significant change". The main reason for non-implementation of educational policy is the difference in approach to policy development and implementation by both policy makers and policy implementers (Galvin and Fauske, 2000:43 cited in Moyo, 2008).

On one hand, policy makers are classified as deductive thinkers as they derive policy from existing theories that describe how the policy process works (Galvin and Fauske, 2000:43) and they therefore do not consider the practical conditions in which the policy is to be implemented. On the other hand, policy implementers are regarded as inductive thinkers. Inductive thinkers build on operative theory of collaboration from the synthesis of their experience (Galvin and Fauske, 2000:43). The essence of Galvin and Fauske’s argument is that policy makers do not take into account the context of policy implementation. They are guided by theory that might not hold true in certain contexts of implementation and do not take into account the theories behind their practices. According to Lodge (1982:19 cited in Moyo, 2008), the Minister of Education is the one who defines objectives, priorities and decisions on government policy. It is Lodge (1982:19) contention that politicians expect practitioners to concentrate on means where ends have already been defined. Can practitioners take decisions that will enable them to contextualise the means in order to get to the already defined ends? Do managers of educational institutions have power and authority to take decisions that impact on a centrally defined policy? Lodge (1982: 19) does not think so and says that politicians wield so much power that other levels of decision-making are sometimes rendered redundant and ineffective and decisions are taken on their behalf. He cited as an illustration of absolute power by politicians, an incident
where Thatcher reversed Circular 10/65 on education in the UK that had been issued by the previous Labour Government.

Dunn (1994:24) indicates that implementation of any policy starts with communicating the policy to stakeholders, more specifically to the practitioners or implementers of the policy. Dunn (1994:24 cited in Moyo, 2008) maintains that communicating the substance of the policy document to the practitioners will enhance the implementation stage as practitioners will have the policy-relevant knowledge that is important for implementation. According to Van der Walt et al. (2001:185 cited in Moyo, 2008), an important step in policy implementation involves the translation of policy into action by the practitioners. By implication, this means that it is the responsibility of FET colleges to translate the FET policy into action. How they interpret policy and the type of college plans they will come up with will directly affect the quality of policy provision (Becher, 1981:153 cited in Moyo, 2008).

DATA INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS

Six major themes emerged after analysis of data and these are outlined as follows:

Centralization

Centralization is the concentration of authority at the top level of an organization to take most of the decisions (Schermherhorn, 1999:215). Stoner et al. (2001:360) says “the amount of authority and autonomy given to a manager is the reflection of the relative centralization or decentralization of the organization”. In education, central power and control are vested in the Minister of Education (as is the case in South Africa). In other countries like Britain, central power is vested in the hands of the Secretary of Education (Marishane, 1999:22 cited in Moyo, 2008). Karlsson et al. (2002 cited in Moyo, 2008) indicate that centralized control should be maintained in order to ensure equal distribution of resources. One of the advantages of centralized control is that it helps organizations to efficiently integrate subunits for the pursuit of organizational goals through the strategic plan.

Decentralization

Schermherhorn (1999:215) defines decentralization as the act of dispersing authority to make decisions throughout all levels of the organization. In addition, Schermherhorn (1999:215) says that decentralization is a characteristic of newer structures and is a trend in many recent organizations. Stoner et al. (2001:359) and Karlsson et al. (2002:143 cited in Moyo, 2008) is of the opinion that decentralization allows for better decisions to be made because those who should take decisions are close to the customer. Decentralization is important because it enables decision making to take place at appropriate levels in the organization. According to Stoner et al. (2001:359), decentralization promotes flexibility and faster decision making and this allows organizations to be able to respond favorably to the needs of their customers.

Managing resources

Successful implementation of policy requires effective and efficient management of scarce resources. According to Parker and Kirsten (1995:1 cited in Moyo, 2008), the lack of adequate resources by educational institutions is the most single aspect that undermines successful policy implementation. Therefore, resources such as funding, materials and physical should be available and managed properly if the intentions of policy are to be realized in earnest. The availability of resources for an example aid policy developers to communicate policy intentions but also implementers are able to use the resources to ensure that implementation is not impeded by lack of resources.

Management structures

Every organization has a formally instituted pattern of authority and an official body of rules and procedures which are intended to aid the achievement of organizational goals and according to O’Neil (1994:101), this is what is referred to as a structure of an organization. A structure is defined as a formally instituted pattern of authority and an official body of rules and procedures that are used to aid organizations realize their goals. Schermherhorn (1999:202) defines an organization structure as “the system of tasks, workflows, reporting relationships, and communication channels that link together the work of diverse individuals and groups”. Stoner et al. (2001:315) defines an organization structure as a framework that a manager devises for dividing and co-coordinating the activities of employees of his/her organization.

Managing the curriculum

The college is a curriculum and managing the curriculum has become another facet of managing change as indicated by Lofthouse (1994:152 cited in Moyo, 2008). To successfully manage the curriculum means being able to manage the ambiguities caused by overlapping and competing agendas in the field of curriculum studies.

Governance

Governance in education is concerned with relationships
between people, that is individuals, interest groups, direct stakeholders, and institutions and structures in the education system (Department of Education, 2000:30). Atchoarena and Delluc (2001:34 cited in Moyo, 2008) indicate that traditionally the state organizes the education system. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to oversee the governance of the FET sector but it is not unusual to find more than one Ministry in a country overseeing governance in education. Before 2009, governance in education and training in South Africa was split between the Department of Education and the Department of Labor and the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education and Training saw governance for the FET college sector located within this new Ministry. Therefore, managing governance in FET implies ensuring that those who take decisions at college level do so in the interest of the college.

Planning
Planning is an important aspect that defines the functionality of an organization. For any system to function effectively, planning should precede all other activities. Government policy articulates the planning sequence that should be applicable within the whole system of the FET. Planning within the FET college sector takes place at three levels: national, provincial and college level. Each of these levels develops its own plans that must fit in with plans of the other two levels to enhance effective and efficient policy development and implementation. The following is an outline of each of the themes listed earlier. The themes present the perceptions of research informants with regards the transformation of FET colleges in Gauteng with particular reference to public policy initiation and management practices at college level.

Centralization and decentralization
In terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa policy and policy priorities are the prerogative of the national Department of Education and the nine provincial governments through principal departments such as Gauteng Department of Education are also tasked with implementation of both nationally and provincially developed policy priorities and in this regard FET colleges are sites of policy implementation. The study found that the national Department of Education (DoE) is the uppermost decision making structure of the department and national education planning and decision-making are profoundly centralized at this level. Aspects such as policy development, research and planning are centralized at this level and provinces are expected to implement these policies, plans and decisions. It is desirable sometimes that some key decisions be taken centrally. It was also found that centralization enables the national department of education to put control measures on the college environment to ensure that the college sector is transformed according to the intentions of government in particular to address national needs and goals. A policy originator indicated that it is important that the purpose and goal of the FET sector be derived centrally by the national Department of Education (DoE). A nationally developed purpose for FET colleges will enable relevance and responsiveness to national goals at an implementation level. The vision of the department which is quality skills development can be realized when a clear national purpose in defined at the top level and effectively implemented at college level. Decisions such as determining national priorities should be centralized at national level. It was further found that centralization ensures accountability.

A centrally determined mandate for the colleges is important to hold managers accountable. A policy developer indicated that it is through centralization that mechanisms can be put in place to ensure that the work is done at college level. Accountability is realized when there is some form of control or authority that makes decisions at a higher level. College managers need to account to another level of authority in terms of what they are doing or plan to do. This centralized control is a necessary measure to ensure that work is done at college level. A policy originator said: “Give greater autonomy to management and council, but also put in place new forms of accountability”. Accountability then acts as a form of control to ensure that things are done according to the predetermined requirements that are developed centrally. There is a need that the national Department of Education, as the ministry responsible for education in South Africa develops a plan that outlines broad national goals for the FET College sector that act as a guide for colleges. This centrally developed plan will ensure coherence of the sector but also ensure that national needs and demands are addressed in a coordinated and accountable way at implementation levels. However, central authority and control sometimes turns policy implementers at lower levels into slaves that work on the master’s decisions without any input whatsoever. A certain measure of decentralization is necessary to allow decisions about policy implementation to be taken at a site of implementation. The study also found that the national Department of Education has not decentralized functions as outlined in the Green Paper on Further Education and Training. These functions include the autonomy to make decisions on matters that impact on individual colleges. One college manager indicated that both the DoE and Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) still drives colleges when it comes to planning and principals are not able to achieve college goals as they cannot take college-bound decisions. According to Stoner et al. (2001:359), decentralization promotes flexibility and faster decision making and this allows organizations to be able to respond favorably to the needs of their customers.

In other words, authority should be decentralized to
lower levels and in this regard it was found that the DoE needs to devolve more power to the Gauteng Department of Education which in turn should give colleges more power to make decisions and implement their plans. One policy developer says that managers of colleges in Gauteng are “given discretion to make decisions” within their colleges, but in the words of another policy developer, college managers should be empowered to take college-bound strategic decisions in order to be able to “move away from waiting for things to happen”.

According to this policy developer, “it is annoying to wait for decisions to be taken somewhere” before you can start with your own planning. Another policy developer felt that “if colleges’ decisions are decided up there, a manager can do all the planning he or she wants” the college goals will never be implemented as planned by the college. Although, the study established that some aspects within the FET college sector have been decentralized, there are strong sentiments that advocate for increased decentralization. Colleges should be allocated increased decision-making authority as they are meant to serve communities that expect them to address their needs. College plans should therefore reflect and address community needs and this is mostly not possible if managers’ power and authority to take decisions are limited. Decentralization in organizations contributes to empowerment (Schermherhorn, 1999: 215). Managers of colleges in Gauteng should be given discretion to make decisions within their colleges, but should also be empowered to take college-bound strategic decisions in order to be able to “move away from waiting for things to happen”.

One college manager felt that it is frustrating for a college manager to wait for decisions to be taken somewhere before starting with college planning. If colleges’ decisions are always decided centrally, a manager can do all the planning he or she wants but the college goals will never be implemented as planned by the college were the sentiments of a policy originates. If colleges do not have the ability to make those key decisions for implementation, it becomes difficult for them to serve local needs that change according to the continuously changing environment.

Managing resources

The supply of resources especially financial resources for colleges is the responsibility of the national department of education, but management and acquisition of additional resources rests with the individual colleges. The national department provides guidelines on expending resources and colleges should develop plans on how the limited resources will be utilized in order to achieve the goals of the college, province as well as the country. The FET policy places the responsibility of managing college resources squarely on the shoulders of college managers and the college council. One of the policy developer indicated that a right resource mix is needed to be able to deliver on the needs of customers and according this participant that resource mix is everything from the right lecturers to the right curriculum to the right material courseware to the right learning process. Resources such as staff at FET colleges and curriculum are currently the responsibility of government and government should make these resources available. The college is responsible for managing these resources but more importantly colleges should develop strategies to acquire additional resources to supplement the scarce resources government provides (DoE, 2000:27 cited in Moyo, 2008). The study found that although colleges are required to implement government policy, they do not have power and authority to do so as they may not on their own accord organize additional resources that are essential to successfully implement policy. They need to first seek permission from the provincial Department of Education. This indicates lack of power and this often leads to partial or non-implementation of government intentions.

One policy developer said that managers should be entrepreneurial in their approach because being entrepreneurial means that the manager is able to access additional resources for the benefit of the college. Being entrepreneurial simply means that management at college level should be able to access other resources other than those provided for by the DoE. “A college will need that and that” and therefore the ability to acquire additional resources by college managers is important. College managers therefore need to possess appropriate skills, capacity and authority to manage them effectively in order to ensure value for money. The study found that a business-like approach to the management of resources is critical as this will enable colleges to raise additional funds and other resources for the college. Unfortunately, while the FET policy has created an enabling policy development environment, the policy implementation environment as it is presently does not allow college managers to be innovative. For example, entering into contracts or agreements with third parties to secure resources of any kind without prior permission of the Provincial Department of Education is not allowed. College managers should first seek permission from the province and this has often proven to be an obstacle for colleges to raise important additional resources. Some policy developers felt that policy should create an enabling environment for colleges to make decisions and plan without fear of reproach. Some of the rules used in public colleges "militates against business principles" and prevent managers from acting in a business-like manner.

Another policy originator indicated that colleges in Gauteng need to be managed differently from the way schools are managed because “they need to have a much more of a business orientation than a normal school”. Another policy developer echoed these sentiments and said “There must be a clear framework and that framework should encourage people to be entrepreneurial – we need to build into policy the kinds of
Management structures

The FET policy is very clear on management structures within the FET College sector. The policy augments other pieces of legislation such as the National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996 cited in Moyo, 2008) with regard to the management of FET. Therefore, management structures in education are clearly outlined in policy although there are problems with regards to the functionality of these structures. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996a) and the National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996) unambiguously states that it is the responsibility of the Minister of Education to determine national policy but it is the prerogative of provincial departments to also develop and implement policy. The national Department of Education is the uppermost level of authority, followed by the Gauteng Department of Education as the provincial management structure and then colleges at the bottom end. This management structure is set in terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996b) and the National Education Policy Act (27 of 1996) and these are commonly referred to as the national structure, the provincial structure and finally the college structure. Within each of these structures, there are management structures that oversee the functionality of that particular structure. In terms of Schermerhorn (1999:203) management structures at college level are meant to promote effective and efficient development and delivery of the curriculum of the college. The study found that the structure at national level is fully functional in terms of fulfilling its mandate of planning for the entire education system and developing policy. However, the Green Paper on Further Education and Training alludes to the problem created between the national and provincial management structures in terms of monitoring policy implementation.

There are usually overlaps in terms of functions between these two structures and this creates confusion for colleges. Both policy originators and college managers indicated that difficulties within the college management structure arise, to a large degree, from both the lack of clarity concerning the role and authority at different levels of the management structure. A college manager indicated that both the Gauteng Department of Education as well as national are not decisive in terms of what authority managers of FET colleges should possess in order for colleges to be effective. When college managers' authority is not clearly defined, this leads to a situation where managers “wait for the word from above before they can act”. One college manager indicated that sometimes they do not even know where the instructions will come from as sometimes they get these from GDE but sometimes from the national office. The lines of authority and responsibilities at each level of the management structures are blurred and this creates confusion at the site of implementation. It was also found that some management structures within the FET college sector are not effective. Management structures at FET colleges are still plagued by many past problems and these renders policy implementation difficult. In spite of the many problems evident in the previous management structures, the study found that there were some pockets of excellence in management of the previous technical colleges and this excellence was replaced by the appointment of politically correct people. One policy developer indicates that there were "pockets of colleges that were functioning very well". There were college managements that had good relationships with industry and this enabled these colleges to deliver on the much needed skills. According to this policy developer, this is the direction government is trying to take in terms of new colleges. Industry and colleges should be able to cooperate in terms of what should be offered at colleges that will benefit employers in the workplace.

The study found that the management structure at college level is not able to address these many problems plaguing the colleges. This structure is ineffective and this is in most cases due to the perception that college managers lack authority to make decisions at this level.

Managing the curriculum

Education is about the curriculum and therefore the successful design and management of the curriculum should result in effective education. A national curriculum is a reflection of the national needs of the country and therefore the curriculum for FET colleges should be constituted by the national goals and priorities. A national curriculum should address the vision of the government which is the development of quality skills for the country as well as responding to many broad national problems in South Africa. The curriculum is characterized by struggles between and among various pressure groups. Successful college managers are able to manage pressure groups, parents, stunts and politicians as they all jostle for the right to shape the curriculum (Lothhouse, 1994:140). In spite of all these jostles, the curriculum of a college needs to address particular needs. Therefore, curriculum design and management need to balance national, provincial and local needs. Therefore, the relationship between the three levels of policy is important in order to ensure that the curriculum of colleges addresses real issues. It was found that with regards to curriculum, management government has failed the FET college sector. Two policy developers pointed out that the process of policy development and mergers was completed long time before the main issue of curriculum and "In my view we should have started with the curriculum –
we should have started with the process of curriculum development other than putting a lot of energy on mergers, structures, management and so on” indicated one policy developer. Another policy developer asserts that curriculum design should have taken precedence over the merging of colleges. This informant indicated that the curriculum was still being shaped long after other transformational issues were concluded.

Both policy developers and college managers in the study expressed views that paint a gloomy picture about curriculum design and management in Gauteng FET colleges. They indicated that the curriculum on offer before 2009 did not address any current need. The previous curriculum was designed to support the apprenticeship system which in itself was not working. In other words, the curriculum was not responsive to the need of the industry and hence “it’s dismal failure”, using the words of one policy developer. However, another policy developer indicated that although the old curriculum was ineffective, the apprenticeship that was offered should be regarded as an important programme that can be used effectively for skills development in the country. According to this informant there is sufficient evidence to show that there were colleges that were functioning very well with regards skills development in colleges. In addition, this informant indicates that problems that existed previously were not because of the design of the apprenticeship, but solely because of the lack of management skills to manage the curriculum. Another policy developer supports this view and indicates that there was a stage in the history of colleges where colleges had a strong relationship with industry where the curriculum was designed to offer skills training as per industry requirements. Legislation on skills development has repealed the old apprenticeship system as an approach for crafts skills development (RSA, 1996b). It was established in the study that although policy advocates learnerships as the new approach to skills development FET colleges in Gauteng, there are still problems pertaining skills development. Therefore, Gauteng FET colleges managers should focus on the implementation of the new curriculum and the introduction and management of learnerships as a way to meet national policies and priorities.

Both policy developers and college managers expressed a wish for the continuation of the apprenticeship. One policy developer indicated that colleges were never meant to be stand-alone learning vehicles, but instead they were meant to have a relationship with the world of work all the time and the apprenticeship programme fulfilled this role.

**Governance**

Governance has taken a central role in education. This situation is attributed to the political history in South Africa where structures that previously supported government policies were given a say in education matters. One of the benefits of the new democratic dispensation in South Africa is the democratization of college councils. In terms of FET Colleges Act 16 of 2006 (RSA, 2006 cited in Moyo, 2008), college councils are regarded as governors of colleges and are tasked to oversee the affairs of their colleges and in this regard they have a responsibility to develop strategic plans for their college. For these college councils in Gauteng to be able to develop effective strategic plans, it was found that autonomy of councils is of paramount importance. Although, policy and legislation give college councils more power and authority to govern FET colleges; it was found that presently the status quo is that college councils are not autonomous as they are still driven by either the national department or provincial department, whichever gets to reach colleges earlier. College councils are not able to make key strategic decisions with regards the operations of colleges. For example, college councils cannot decide on the form that the college wants to take. This is decided upon by the Gauteng Department of Education. One college manager indicated that sometimes the province take decisions that are within the jurisdiction of college council and the province expect colleges to implement these decisions. One college manager pointed out that decisions about what should college councils do in colleges are taken at different levels and this usually impacts on the functionality of the individual college. This scenario points out that national and provincial direct the way college councils’ function and in most instances this is directed by national.

This is the situation that existed prior 1998 when college councils had no authority to decide on the course of the college but to offer just advisory services to colleges. This kind of a situation suggests that college councils in Gauteng have no powers to take decisions and decisions are taken on their behalf at another level. The study further found that councils are only allowed to take petty decisions that do not necessarily give any impetus to the college. It was found that decisions that college councils can take are of discretionary nature and these kinds of decisions can be rescinded at any time by higher authority especially GDE. This study further found that governance power lies with the National Board for Further Education and Training (NBFET) as well as the Provincial Advisory Board and college councils only endorse what has been decided by the department of education. Autonomy is very critical in FET policy. In this, article I argue that decentralization of authority should be seen as the ultimate solution to relevance and responsiveness. Unless policy implementers have the power and authority to plan and take decisions that are context-based, policy intentions will simply remain intentions and nothing else. The core business of education is curriculum delivery and therefore government intentions with the FET policy for colleges were to devolve more power
to those who are directly involved with taking decisions on curriculum matters. Colleges as sites of curriculum delivery were therefore seen as appropriate to have increased authority in terms of taking decisions with regards curriculum design and delivery.

Further Education and Training colleges are in a better position to interact with local communities, employers as well as the labour market and giving colleges more power will enable them to take appropriate and beneficial decisions that are within the broad national guidelines. Presently, the scale of power tilts in favour of centralization. Colleges as sites of policy implementation do not have sufficient authority to make strategic decisions as these are held back by the national Department of Education as well as GDE. Therefore, the relationship between policy intentions and practice are skewed. Practice is not according to the intentions of policy. The Education White Paper 4 allocates substantial powers to college councils and provides an opportunity for the establishment of partnerships between government, business and labour, and communities (RSA, 1996b:27). It was further established in the study that colleges do not have the power and authority to enter into any partnership. The authority for this kind of an initiative rests with the Gauteng Department of Education.

Planning

Without planning, managers cannot know how to organize people and resources to effectively implement government policy. The finding of the study is that planning for the FET college sector starts at national level where broad goals are defined. This plan incorporates government goals as far as the whole FET college sector is concerned. Presently, there is a national plan in place in the form of policies that are driving the FET college sector. But one college manager felt strongly that it is the responsibility of the national department to “make planning coherent, make synergy and put things together”. The different levels of planning should complement each other in order to create synergy within the department and colleges in Gauteng. One policy developer felt that a national-level plan “should provide a set of guidelines for the college within which to develop their own strategies”. This policy originator indicated that national-level planning is not meant to be the plan for colleges instead is meant to guide colleges. Neither the national nor provincial departments should prescribe plans for colleges. The province has the responsibility to review plans for the purpose of funds allocation and not to reject college plans. Instead of rejecting plans, provinces should rather negotiate changes, indicated one college manager. However, the study identified planning problems mostly at provincial level. Informants indicated that the province is always not in the loop in terms of planning for the sector. It was found that the Gauteng province did not have a plan for FET colleges in place. Colleges usually plan according to national guidelines as the province fails to provide its own guidelines.

As one college manager puts it “we were driven by national to put strategic plans. There was pressure on us to put those plans, only to discover that the province is still to put its own plan”. Another college manager indicated that sometimes the province delay in its planning and providing guidelines to colleges and when colleges submit their plans, usually they (that is colleges) find that they have to redo all their planning. Sometimes colleges develop their plans (directed by national) before GDE can prepare its provincial plan and this is caused by lack of co-ordination especially between the other two levels of planning that is GDE and DoE. This indicates lack of coordinated and cohesive planning at national and provincial levels and this often result in poor planning and this impact negatively on policy implementation at college level. Planning at college level is more concerned with managing the interests and operations of the college. This can be safely referred to as an operational plan and deals with activities of individual college in Gauteng. Some policy developers felt that colleges need to devote more time and energy on planning as this is the level at which implementation occurs. Curriculum delivery happens at this level and any mishaps in this regard cannot be afforded. In addition, the college should use its plan to position itself to function optimally within its changing environment. A college-level plan should be informed by local needs that the college needs to address.

According to one policy originator, managers need to understand both the local environment plus national issues before they can embark on planning. This is an important requirement for management. A policy developer felt that colleges should be responsive to the local needs and they should be able to show in their planning how they will meet local community needs and contribute towards the broad national targets. Another policy developer indicated that for successful planning, college top leadership and staff should plan together in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness within the college sector. Another policy developer warned that managers should note that “people want to make a contribution” and this enhances policy implementation. Rather than just being told what to do, staff want to be empowered. Managers can empower their staff by instilling the sense of ownership of the college plan. One of the policy developers says that empowerment comes in the form of involving staff in the planning processes of the college.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between government policy and management practices at colleges in Gauteng can be stated that theoretically policy informs practice whilst practice
should inform further policy development (Galvin and Fauske, 2003 cited in Moyo, 2008). In practice, this relationship depicts a different scenario. Practice at colleges does not reflect government intentions and goals. Power that lie at different levels of the bureaucracy determine what policy intentions gets to be implemented and which to be discarded. Those who are tasked with the responsibility of supporting and monitoring government policy implementation usually do so without due consideration of policy directives. Those who actualize policy find themselves sometimes implementing departmental decisions that contradict policy intentions. This then create a relationship of ‘silos’ that is operating as two totally unrelated entities – ‘them and us’. For example, it was established in the study that senior managers within both GDE and DoE expects colleges’ managers to act on their instructions without questions. It does not matter what colleges do, what gets implemented is determined by the Gauteng Department of Education or national Department of Education. This study provides a practical solution for the problem of policy implementation. It is important that different levels of power within the system should be of complementary nature rather than be in competition. Policy makers should work with policy implementers instead of working against them due to their position in the hierarchy of the department.

College managers play a critical role in the equation of policy development and implementation. They are ‘foot soldiers’. They do all the ‘dirty’ work and without them the department of education will simply become a collection of ‘think tanks’ who theorize policy without being able to evaluate the value and impact of its policies. In the same spirit, policy implementers at provincial and college level should appreciate the very critical role that is played by policy makers in holding and moving the entire system together. It is at national level that the vision for the whole education system is designed. Without this office, the system will be fragmented and uncoordinated and this could result in the FET college sector deteriorating into a worse system. Secondly, the study has shown that the gap between policy intentions and practice is as a result of the conflict between two power structures that is the bureaucratic and local democratic powers. Centralized power represents bureaucratic power while decentralization represents the democratic form of power. There are inconsistencies between national, provincial, and local college management levels and in this case, centralized power is more dominant and influence practice. In rhetoric, decentralized power which is observed at provincial or college management level is more democratic than the centralized power. The harmonization of these two conflicting power structures is critical for effective policy development and practice within the system. Both forms of power need to recognize the importance of the other. The study found that there is a need for both of them if effectiveness and efficiency of the system is the intention by government. It is necessary for the departmental officials responsible for policy implementation to understand their roles but also to be receptive of feedback from those implementing departmental policies.

In conclusion, the study on “the relationship between government policy and management practices at Further Education and Training Colleges in Gauteng” was designed to help in understanding the implementation ‘problems’ with regard to FET colleges sector recent policies and the study represents a significant contribution to the understanding of underlying reasons for lack of effective and efficient public policy implementation.

REFERENCES


