

Human Resources Management in Education: Operational Competencies Required to Teach In Secondary Schools

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Abstract. Among the different human resources in schools, educators play a significant role in the lives of learners, colleagues and their immediate community. They have the opportunity to influence the community, develop learners holistically, create lifelong learners and reflective thinkers. For an educator to demonstrate such competence across a range of teaching roles and contexts, a vast range of operational competencies are required. The aim of this study was to identify operational competencies required of educators in secondary schools. Using a quantitative research approach a questionnaire was administered to a sample of secondary school educators. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the data resulting in the extraction of 5 factors (competencies), namely *communication and behavior management*, *interpersonal relationships*, *planning and assessment*, *leadership skills and perseverance* and *organizational commitment*. These competencies, if well developed, may contribute to greater levels of productivity and result in better learners in schools.

Keywords: Educators, Learners, Communication, Planning, Leadership

1. Introduction and Background to the Study

In an attempt to make education more accessible to the wider population of South Africa, the Department of Education (DoE) has gone to great lengths to introduce and implement a new paradigm of teaching and learning in primary and secondary school education (DoE, 2008; DoE, 2010).

New educational and operational competencies have to be learnt to bring 'life' into teaching in the classroom, to enable learners to grasp knowledge, engage in reflective thinking, and apply knowledge in real-world situations. Research (Grammatikopoulos, Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2007; Tshannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001) suggests that educator quality impacts on learners' outcomes more than any other variable throughout a learner's primary and secondary school years. Among the different human resources in schools, educators and school management teams are the means for delivering quality education in the classroom (DoE, 2010). This study focuses on operational competences required of secondary school educators to succeed in a classroom.

In an education system that strives for the equality of all cultures and languages in South Africa, an educator is often called upon to perform more than just the traditional function of transmitting knowledge. The role of educators has evolved significantly. Educators, who were previously required to merely transmit ready-made knowledge to learners (Christie, Butler & Potterton, 2007; DoE, 2005; DoE, 2001), are now also expected to prepare learners to apply such knowledge in different spheres of life.

To perform the function of developing learners holistically and creating lifelong learners and reflective thinkers in society (Krihnaveni & Anitha, 2007), educators' operational competencies need to be developed so that competence across a range of teaching roles and contexts is demonstrated (Fraser, Killen & Nieman, 2005). Effective learning and productive teaching necessitates that educators stay abreast of a variety of instructional methods. They are required to continuously update their expertise in line with the curriculum (Ngwane, Wamkuru & Odebero, 2006; Van Niekerk, 1997). Consequently, educators are expected to possess certain core operational competencies.

While the concept of 'competence' is used in a variety of contexts across different sectors, its definition becomes a significant concern within the education sector. Fraser et al. (2005:232) define competence as the skills, knowledge and abilities needed by an individual to perform in an occupation while Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell and Lay (2001) perceive competencies as building blocks that must be utilized in a holistic and

integrative way in any situation. In the context of this study competence is defined as the skills, knowledge and capacity to function productively and effectively in the classroom.

Several operational competencies have been identified in the literature. Educators are required to be achievement orientated and to manage performance of learners (Du Plessis, Conley & Du Plessis, 2007). In this regard they are expected to compile and make various types of assessments, record marks and follow up with learners who are not performing adequately (Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), 2003). In terms of organizational skills, educators need to be skilled in planning, leading learners and delegating additional work and responsibilities (Bubb & Earley, 2004). They also need to engage in individual/professional development, which includes undertaking further studies and training to keep abreast of new trends and developments in education. Educators also require interpersonal understanding, which includes better understanding of the learner and being a facilitator and mediator, being accountable, honest and trustworthy (RSA, 2000; Kruger, 1997; De Wet, 2004). They should demonstrate organizational commitment, be skilled in developing others and exhibit confidence, which includes being knowledgeable regarding the curriculum and learning programs (ELRC, 2003). Furthermore, they are expected to have excellent written and verbal communication skills (Van Niekerk, 1997).

In addition to acquiring the afore-mentioned competencies, educators have a number of responsibilities that extend beyond the classroom. These include being a committed role model in the community and to play a pastoral role in providing guidance and encouragement which builds character (De Klerk & Rens, 2003:369), encouraging learners to develop a set of values and morals (DoE, 2001 taking reasonable steps to ensure a safe learning environment and promoting equal opportunity for all learners.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose this study was to identify operational competencies required of educators to teach in secondary schools.

3. Materials and Methods

A comprehensive literature study on operational competencies required by educators was conducted. In addition, a quantitative research approach which involved the administration of questionnaires to secondary school educators was used. Convenience sampling was used to recruit secondary school educators with three years and more experience to participate in the study. Using a sample frame obtained from the Department of Education, random samples were drawn from 166 secondary public schools in selected districts in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Two hundred and eleven ($n = 211$) completed questionnaires were received.

A structured questionnaire was used in the study. It comprised three sections. Section A requested demographic and general information from participants. Section B included questions on core competencies required in education. Section C included questions investigating the level of teaching satisfaction of educators. Both Sections B and C made use of a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 5 indicating strong agreement, 3 moderate agreement and 1 strong disagreement.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS for Windows, Version 19.0) was used to process the raw data obtained from the questionnaire survey. Descriptive statistics were initially undertaken to analyse the demographic composition of the sample. Exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the core operational competencies required of educators to teach in secondary schools.

4. Results

4.1. Demographics

Respondents were required to provide information relating to their gender, educational level and years of service in secondary education. In terms of gender eighty one male (38.6%), and hundred and thirty female (61.4%) completed the questionnaire. One-hundred-and-nineteen (56.4%) respondents had a Diploma or Degree, forty-nine (23.2%) had a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, thirty-seven (17.5%) had an Honors or B Tech qualification and only six (2.9%) had a Masters degree. Seventy-six (36%) respondents

had between 1-5 years of service, twenty-eight (13.2%) had between 6-10 years, twenty-one (9.9%) had between 11-15 years, twenty-six (12.3%) had between 16-20 years and sixty (28.6%) had over 20 years of service.

4.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was conducted and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was undertaken to establish whether the data was suitable for a factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.93 (a value deemed marvellous by Kaiser (1974:35)) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at 0.000 indicating that factor analysis could be conducted on the captured data. Principle component analysis together with Varimax rotation was applied to all the items in Section B of the questionnaire to identify the competencies required of secondary school educators. The final factor structure comprised five dimensions (competencies) with 29 variables. The rotated component matrix is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Rotated factor loading matrix

Factor and variable descriptions	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Communication and behavior management (Factor 1)					
Takes charge and uses resources effectively	0.587	0.233	0.24	0.383	0.104
The ability to maintain self-confidence under adverse circumstances	0.674	0.224	0.205	0.326	0.104
The ability to influence and to generate enthusiasm through example and negotiation	0.717	0.097	0.177	0.249	0.174
Being persuasive in the classroom	0.664	0.094	0.255	0.355	0.123
Shows the skill at negotiating commitment	0.687	0.296	0.191	0.094	0.222
Promote a clear sense of purpose	0.737	0.339	0.243	0.079	0.161
Ensuring that the message received is the same as the message transmitted	0.707	0.271	0.208	0.202	0.031
The effectiveness of expression in a group	0.686	0.28	0.243	-0.008	0.115
The ability to confront conflict constructively	0.686	0.201	0.087	0.227	0.151
The ability to confront disruptive behavior in a classroom	0.651	0.219	0.072	0.362	0.128
Develops areas in need as part of self-development	0.693	0.403	0.108	0.109	0.168
Interpersonal relationships (Factor 2)					
Show respect for the learners needs and feelings	0.252	0.678	0.149	0.296	0.171
Provide guidance to learners	0.319	0.738	0.185	0.201	0.177
Establishing a relationships of trust with learners	0.372	0.651	0.097	0.409	0.164
Establishing a relationship of openness	0.386	0.763	0.104	0.052	0.16
Willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected	0.221	0.736	0.16	-0.01	0.314
Planning and assessment (Factor 3)					
Effective planning of lessons	0.441	-0.01	0.584	0.344	0.133
The ability to assess what needs to be part of a lesson	0.449	0.052	0.642	0.225	0.115
The ability to plan so that the curriculum will be completed in a year	0.398	0.134	0.715	0.098	0.019
The ability to determine aims/objectives for learners	0.16	0.301	0.78	0.07	0.025
The ability to assess learners work on a daily basis	-0.043	0.152	0.564	0.384	0.31
Leadership skills and perseverance (Factor 4)					
The ability to be on time to meet deadlines	0.338	0.054	0.396	0.614	-0.02
The ability to display a high level of perseverance	0.428	0.187	0.264	0.604	-0.074
Establishing a relationships of trust with other educators	0.302	0.234	0.108	0.602	0.244
Leads by example	0.458	0.224	0.274	0.553	0.126
Organizational commitment (Factor 5)					
Talk about the school to friends as a great institution to work for	0.082	0.247	0.054	0.245	0.764
Show loyalty towards the school	0.135	0.355	0.024	0.392	0.566
Accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for the school	0.142	0.096	0.125	-0.139	0.831
Shares the values and the school with personal values	0.322	0.186	0.073	0.056	0.739
Eigenvalue	13.323	2.348	1.539	1.224	1.099
% of variance explained	45.950	8.095	5.307	4.222	3.791
Cumulative %	45.950	54.035	59.342	63.564	67.354
Reliability (Cronbach alpha)	.940	.898	.827	.814	.803
Means	4.209	4.346	4.206	4.349	3.970
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization					

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Factor 1, *communication and behavior management*, which accounted for 45.6% of the variance explained, suggests that educators deemed this factor to be one of the most important operational competencies. This finding confirms the findings of previous studies regarding the importance of communication and behaviour management. Hoogervorst, Van der Flier and Koopman (2004:288) state that communication is more than just transmitting information. The primary objective of communication is to affect behavior and to focus on behavioral change. This is possibly why the two different constructs of behavior management and communication formed one construct in the factor analysis. Labuschagne (2006:267) adds that communication is the flow of information between individuals in an attempt to influence behavior and achieve certain objectives within the classroom. If the behavior of learners is

managed it will create an environment where the communication process can be effective and successful, ensuring information that has been transmitted is also understood (Robbins 1998:310).

Factor 2, *interpersonal relationships*, implies that educators were in agreement that guiding learners and establishing a good relationship is of utmost importance for effective learning to take place. *Interpersonal relationships* was also found to be an important factor in teaching in previous studies. De Wet (2004:157) found that successful educators are honest, neat and reliable people who always have time for their learners. They know their learners and listen to them; they are friendly, considerate and accessible, continuously building a relationship with their learners. Rogers (1967:59) opined that educators who are genuine in their relationships with learners, with convictions and feelings can promote better interpersonal relationships.

With regard to factor 3, *planning and assessment*, Wood's (2008:112) argued that one of the key competencies of being a good educator lies in careful preparation, designing and interpretation of learning material and lesson planning. Planning is a future-orientated activity that aims at drawing a blueprint about what needs to be done in an organization (Mentz & Pienaar, 2001:5). Smith and Cronje (2000:11-12) add that planning is the management function that determines an organization's mission and goals. It involves identifying ways of attaining the goals and the resources needed to accomplish the tasks. Assessment is the final step within a planning process (Van Niekerk, 1997:304). It is the process of "identifying, gathering and interpreting information about a learner's achievement as measured against nationally agreed outcomes for a particular phase of learning" (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2007:67).

Factor 4, *leadership and perseverance*, supports the notion set out in the National Education Policy (RSA, 2000: 47-48) that one of the seven roles of the educator is being a leader. In this role educators make decisions appropriate to the level of their qualification and manage learning in their classrooms. This competency is expected to be performed in ways which are democratic and support learners and colleagues. Potenza (2002:1) is of the opinion that implicit in this role is the need to develop key characteristics which include perseverance, originality, strong self-esteem and the ability to manage one's own frustration.

Regarding Factor 5, *organizational commitment*, it is evident that educators' are of the opinion that commitment and dedication to the school that they work for is a key factor to support quality education. Robbins (1998:142) describes organizational commitment as "the degree to which an employee identifies with a particular organization and its goals, and wishes to maintain membership in the organization." The goal of a secondary school is mainly to ensure good education for the learners (DoE, 2010:ii), thus every educator who shares this goal, is committed to the school that they works for and will accept almost any type of job assignment to keep working for the school.

The traditional emphasis on the acquisition and dissemination of factual knowledge is no longer appropriate to a changing society. The application of such knowledge by both educators and learners in a productive way will go a long way in preparing learners for a complex world outside the school environment. Public secondary school educators require, in addition to their basic knowledge of educational theories and best practices, operational competencies that are necessary in establishing and promoting their instructional roles. The current study identified the following operational competencies: *communication and behavior management, interpersonal relationships, planning and assessment, leadership skills and perseverance and organizational commitment* which were assumed to be important by public secondary school educators. These competencies, if well developed, may contribute to greater levels of productivity and result in better learners in schools.

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