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DISTRUST, ACCOUNTABILITY AND CAPACITY IN SOUTH AFRICA'S FRAGMENTED EDUCATION SYSTEM

Nomancotsho Pakade and Thokozani Chilenga-Butao

Introduction

The right to education in South Africa is enshrined in the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which refers to an education system tasked with making education available, accessible and adaptable. Despite the South African government's explicit commitments to education reform in the 1990s, there are provincial education departments (PEDs) that are dealing with an education system with uneven performance and poor learner outcomes.

This chapter highlights the challenges of accountability and capacity in PEDs of education, specifically in the province of the Eastern Cape. This province underwent a process referred to as the School Rationalisation Project (SRP) which sought to facilitate an accessible and better resourced schooling system through the eradication of small and unviable schools. After some internal reflections and several attempts to rationalise in the province, the Eastern Cape Department of Education requested support from the Government Technical and Advisory Centre (GTAC) to assist with the SRP. This project was an attempt to provide access to better quality education in a province whose education department has a strong historical legacy from the apartheid education system, which still plagues the structure and actions of the department to date. Through this case study, we argue that on the one hand there is formal bureaucratic accountability that is expressed through laws and regulations, while on the other, there are uncodified practices within micro-systems of governance at the provincial and district levels that produce different outcomes to the intended goals of improved learning and teaching.

We apply the notion of codified and uncodified practices to examine this argument using the case study of the SRP and its particular implementation in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Yee (1997: 1012)[1] describes codified

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practices as, 'Formal rules [that] are intentional social entities…within an organization context, given a textual expression, and endowed with external, often coercive, enforcement capabilities'. Therefore, codified practices are ones which are legally or formally regulated practices within an organisation or institution. However, institutions also create uncodified practices, described as 'norms, conventions, self-imposed codes of conduct, and shared understandings and expectations (i.e. informal rules) [which] are largely evolutionary ideational entities, usually uncodified and unwritten, possessing informal social and psychological enforcement' (Yee 1997: 1012). This chapter argues that given the difficulties around accountability and capacity in the South African education system as a whole, there is evidence that officials resort to using uncodified practices more than codified practices in order to implement education policy, as evidenced in the rationalisation case study that we present below.

This chapter is divided into three sections: the first section provides a brief history of the South African education system, which prior 1994 was separated into one education system for white learners and another for African, Coloured and Indian learners. The former system was implemented in the then four provinces: the Cape Province, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal. The latter was implemented in regions collectively known as the Bantustans. The Bantustan comprised the 'independent homelands' of the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and the Ciskei, as well as a number of 'own administrations' for Coloured and Indian people. This segregated system was based on the racist apartheid regime. The explanation of this system is integral to understanding the wider historical implications of such a system on the current education landscape in South Africa's democracy.

The second section of this chapter outlines where there were possibilities for trust, accountability and capacity in the post-apartheid education system. Here, we illustrate that there were a number of codified norms that were established in the democratic state, which informed policy formulation by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and its subsequent implementation in PEDs, and their districts and schools. In this section, we also posit that given the enormity of the task of transforming South Africa's education system from a balkanised apartheid system to an inclusive one under the democratic dispensation, the most prevalent issues in the system are accountability and capacity more than trust. The reason for this is that first, incoherence in accountability and capacity does not create the environment to cultivate trust amongst education stakeholders. Second, there are various reasons for issues of trust and distrust in the South African education system. We provide reflections in order to show the various reasons for trust and distrust in South Africa's education system.

The third and final section of this chapter examines the case of the SRP in the Eastern Cape PED. Rationalisation is not new in the province and previous rationalisation efforts were characterised by non-compliance with the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) on the issues of closure of schools, fragmented planning that impacted on the availability of scholar transport, teacher placements (from old to new schools), and availability of resources and infrastructure

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in receiving schools. The unavailability of scholar transport for learners moving to schools further away created distrust from communities which, in turn, fuelled the resistance against rationalisation. The need for rationalisation in the Eastern Cape is especially pressing. The Province inherited a particularly high number of very small schools from the former Transkei era, while migration to urban centres both within and outside of the province has further contributed to the proliferation of small, unviable schools. When the GTAC Project began in 2016, close to 50% of schools had fewer than 250 learners, and an additional 17% had less than 100 learners. This environment creates very difficult challenges for the future institutionalisation of the intervention undertaken by GTAC. A number of potentially valuable lessons can be drawn from the SRP, both for the Eastern Cape experience and for other provinces implementing rationalisation.

Finally, this chapter emphasises the role and significance of the mesosystem and the exosystem of the education ecology system, as per Bronfenbrenner's (1989) illustration discussed in Chapter 1 of this book. In this exosystem of South Africa's basic education system, we find the PEDs, which are integral to the implementation of education policy, while school district offices are located in the mesosystem of South Africa's basic education system. Both the PEDs and district offices are focal points in our argument and reflect the practical aspects of education provision in South Africa. Moreover, the exosystem and mesosystem are the levels wherein improvements and interventions for education are most implemented, as our case study will illustrate. By focusing on these levels, we extend our analysis beyond the interaction between learners, parents and teachers and move towards other instrumental actors and institutions in South Africa's education provision. The instrumental actors and institutions are provincial officials, district coordinators and education intervention strategists.

Fragmentation and transition: A brief overview of the South African education system

South Africa's current education system is a result of and a reflection on significant efforts to create a public administration representative of all South Africans and to meet democratic and development goals to provide inclusive, quality primary education. Before the formation of the current system of education in 1994, there was minimal trust, accountability and capacity in the apartheid education system. The apartheid education system was built on several education systems following its missionary school predecessor. The latter espoused less discriminatory efforts towards racially inclusive education while the apartheid regime promoted separate development for whites, Indians, Coloureds and Blacks which translated to better investments in white minority education (Berh, 1988; Christopher, 1994; Thompson, 2000). As such, the Eiselen Commission was formed in 1949 (although preceded by the 1947 Sauer Report) to investigate how to restructure the education system for the particular incorporation of Black Africans.[2] Following the Eiselen Commission, the education of black

Africans was centralised into the Department of Native Affairs. When the Bantu Education Act was formalised in 1953, about 90% of the African schools were state-aided mission schools. The function of education for black Africans was moved to the Department of Bantu Administration, Development, and Bantu Education. The education of Coloured (Education for Coloured People Act of 1965) and Indian (Indians Act of 1969) children fell under the control of the provinces which administered white minority education but later moved to 'Own Affairs' departments situated in those communities.

The restructuring of the education system from 1948 to 1990 under the apartheid regime coincided with a number of legislative changes such as the Native Laws Amendment Act 54 of 1952 and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act 49 of 1953, which restricted the access of Africans to urban areas for 72 hours and provided separate amenities for different races in different spaces, respectively. These two acts are illustrative of the spatial location of Africans, specifically in rural homelands and township settings. Hence, the movement of education from the Department of Natives Affairs to the Department of Bantu Administration and Development and then Bantu Education was not coincidental because it emphasised the spatial arrangements of segregation that would come to characterise the apartheid state in general, and the administration and resourcing of education to the disadvantage of the majority of the population.

The political result of this was that education for white learners at the time was well funded and produced the desired outcome of developing their education and training. Furthermore, as a regulated practice in education but more broadly under the apartheid segregation, education for white learners, also known as Model C[3]education, was superior to the underfunded, biased and limited education for Black African, Coloured and Indian learners. As a result, even in South Africa's current inclusive democracy, racist tropes about who is better educated, depending on the history of the resourcing of schools during apartheid, remain. The administrative result of the apartheid education system underpinned by the racist ideology is that, apart from white schools and their governance, the system had approximately 19 different education systems in the Bantustans (Letsoalo, 1995; Ngoma, 2007; Van der Berg, 2007). Each of the education systems in the Bantustans had its own administrative, financial and operative patterns as well as its own institutional, environmental and political factors that influenced its education outcomes. The Bantu education system comprised the following:

1. 'The four independent homelands, Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei, each with its education system
2. The six governing territories, Lebowa, Gazankulu, Kwandebele, QwaQwa, KwaZulu and Kwangane
3. The three different own affairs education departments for whites, Coloureds and Indians
4. The two general affairs education departments for Education and Training and the National Education' *(*Letsoalo, 1995*: 1)*.

Therefore, the Bantustan education system was subject to apartheid decentralisation, as a form of state formation, as much as the rest of South Africa (Bardhan and Mookerjhee, 2006). During the transition to democracy, a process that began in the 1991 negotiations for a peaceful transition, all existing and separate education departments were amalgamated. This meant that education departments in the Bantustans and provinces had to merge into one national department and nine oversight provincial departments in each of South Africa's nine provinces. Currently, there is one department, nine provincial departments and 86 districts (DBE, 2019). Despite the reform efforts, as early as 1999 the state limited expenditure in education even though education is positioned as a necessary human resource for the political and economic development of the country. As Languille points out, the public schools are empowered to determine fees for the school, thereby creating elite public schools financially inaccessible to the majority of South Africans. This class demarcation reinforces the gap between affluent and no-fee paying schools (See also Fiske and Ladd, 2005). The Eastern Cape between 2006 and 2013 experienced a sharp increase of learner migration to independent schools.

The enrolment of learners under Bantu Education was determined by the Native Commissioner in consultation with the Bantu Education Inspector who had the power to recommend candidates. The Act also had a special provision for the sons of chiefs to train them as future leaders (Ramoketsi, 2008). Locally, access to schooling was facilitated via the elite groups of chiefs, headmen and other community leaders as school committee and board members. Additionally, learners to be considered for admission would belong to an ethnic group from the surrounding communities that served the school. The enrolment numbers were kept as low as possible and the curriculum remained elementary with emphasis on producing manual labourers. Between 1953 and 1965, the enrolment of Bantu education schools doubled and they were overcrowded: primary school enrolment increased from 852,000 to 1833,000 while secondary schools also grew from 31,000 to 66,000 (Ramoketsi citing Troup 1977). By 1979, 3484,329 African children were listed as learners. The expansion was contained: white compulsory education with the state expenditure 10 times more per capita than on African learners (Thompson, 2000). From trained teachers, infrastructure and textbooks, Black schools in the urban townships and Bantustans were severely under-resourced through the race-based funding scale (Christie, 1985).This was as a consequence of the growing economy which demanded semi-skilled migrant workers with minimum basic education for the rapid industrialisation of the markets and the rise of population growth: the Bantu education provided exactly that. As such by 1991, in Black schools, the infrastructure shortfall was at 29,000 classrooms at the primary level and 14,000 at the secondary level. By 1994, approximately one in three teachers were underqualified (Fiske and Ladd, 2005) or 46% were under- or unqualified (Institute of Race Relations, 1997).

Thus, Bantu education became a product of the requirements of political and economic structures of the country, intended not to raise the abilities of

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Africans to their full capacity but to facilitate access to cheap labour under the slogan 'teach the native to work'(Nokwe, 1954; See also Christie and Collins, 1984). The teacher–learner ratio was 1:42 on average but in the former Transkei, as the anomaly, it stood at 1:70.[4] Between 1953 and 1993, the teacher–learner ratio in black schools was 1:50, 1:70 in extreme cases, while the white schools had a maximum ratio of 1:25 (Fedderke et al., 2000). The outcome of this was the low performance of Black, Coloured and Indian learners. In addition to this, the resourcing of schools in Bantustans, in particular, was highly politicised. That is, these schools functioned in environments where financial resources were dependent on the relationship between Bantustan leaders and the apartheid government. For instance, the Lebowa Department of Education, then part of the Northern Transvaal Education Department and now a predecessor of the Limpopo Department of Education, was a weak institution with an equally weak administration (Jacklin, 1994: 1). Furthermore, the Lebowa Department of Education was 'operating in the poorest region in the country with minimal resources, capacity and legitimacy' (Jacklin, 1994: 1). In the midst of this, the Lebowa Department of Education was riddled with mismanagement and corruption, which residents in the community protested against (Jacklin, 1994: 2).

Similarly, the Gazankulu Education Department of Education – also within the Northern Transvaal Education Department – was characterised by mismanagement and corruption that was 'rampant, undisguised and relatively unchallenged' (Jacklin, 1994: 2). However, unlike other Bantustan education departments, Gazankulu was allocated more resources by the apartheid government because it had a higher number of 'qualified teachers' (Jacklin, 1994: 1). Moreover, the institutions and bureaucracies of the Bantustan education system each had their own patterns and ways of working (Ngoma, 2007). Therefore, the levels of trust, accountability and capacity in the Bantustans were low at most and varied at least.

Legacies of fragmented trust, accountability and capacity in South Africa's education system

At the end of apartheid, there was a large, inefficient and race-based education system. More importantly for this book and chapter, there were mixed levels of trust, accountability and capacity in this highly fragmented apartheid education system. The education system as a whole, from the micro to the macro systems, was geared to advantage or disadvantage learners according to their race and geographical location. Within that system, mostly white schools were 80% state resourced (Dekker and Van Schalkwyk, 1996) financially, well-staffed with teachers and the necessary learning materials needed for education. In democratic South Africa's education system, it is these schools that still maintain their reputation for high levels of trust, accountability and capacity.

A case in point that illustrates the interplay of these three variables is the notion of learner migration and urbanisation based on the parent's choice and

perceptions of the schools. For instance, Msila (2009) identified three kinds of choices: first, the voice option which seeks to change the school, second, loyalty as a default position in the absence of alternatives or means to choose otherwise and third, the exit option that has learners' move to the suburban former White, Indian and Coloured schools, seen to be more effective than Black rural or township schools. The third option is the frequently exercised one, even though authors such as Msila have documented intra-township migration to better performing schools. Sekete et al.'s (2001) study on learner migration indicated that the migration is one-way, towards better resourced schools. Furthermore, the exit option introduces a financial burden on the parent, which may include payment of fees, transportation and other compulsory extracurricular activities. As a result of this migration, rural and township schools inhabit empty schools commonly referred to as 'white elephant schools', which have empty buildings or small schools with below average learner enrolment numbers and teachers. Migration to better schools is caused by high levels of poverty and unemployment in people's resident or indigent provinces.

The case of learner migration from schools that were under-resourced during apartheid shows a lack of trust in education provision in these schools. These schools were established on an unequal footing with Bantu education, thus causing distrust in the ability of these schools to provide a good education. This distrust was a direct result of the lack of capacity in these schools. And, thus, began a vicious cycle of distrust, lack of capacity and lack of accountability in a fragmented education system, which continues today.

In terms of the trust, former White schools continue to enjoy *institutional trust*, as outlined in Chapter 1, because historically they have the resources and status of providing better education in South Africa. These schools are known as former Model C schools, which generally 'represent high-quality teaching, better discipline, safety; a chance to better oneself through one's children' (Battersby, 2004: 281). Furthermore, the high-quality teaching in these former Model C schools continues partly as a result of unequal resourcing and privilege during apartheid and partly because the legacy and institutional fortitude of these schools remain. This indicates a high level of capacity in these former Model C schools. In terms of the trust, parents continue to trust former Model C schools because of the high levels of capacity demonstrated in these spaces. Parents' perceptions about former Model C schools are that they are a 'site for fast-tracking a way out of historical disadvantage…because they believe it will provide their children with opportunities that they themselves did not have, opportunities to be counted equal with white children on entering the workforce' (Battersby, 2004: 280–281).

These high levels of trust are not only reserved for former white Model C schools but also other schools with generally high levels of capacity due to resourcing during apartheid. As a result, 'Children from black African communities are sent to historically Coloured schools, children from poor and gang-ridden Coloured communities are sent to schools in wealthier coloured suburbs, filling the gaps left by children from these areas leaving to go to Model C schools'

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(Battersby, 2004: 281). In terms of accountability, these schools are efficiently run through their school governing bodies (SGBs) and are accordingly granted extensive powers over their finances and operational procedures. These schools are currently known as Section 21 schools in South Africa, based on that section of the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA, 1996) and have integrated the migrant black learners from township and suburban dwellers.

Therefore, capacity and trust in the education system, both during apartheid and in other areas of the system of the current democratic South Africa, are highly racialised due to the direction of resources from the apartheid to White, Coloured, Indian and Black schools, and in descending order. However, despite these high levels of capacity and trust, there is a more complex issue emerging around racial integration at former Model C schools in democratic South Africa (Battersby, 2004; Soudien, 2010; Robinson, 2019). Thus, the education landscape has been shaped by the apartheid spatial legacy where schools with a high trust dividend attract learners from under resourced areas – even if it means that they are moving from no-fee schools to fee-paying schools. In addition to this, there is the pattern of contemporary economic migration, where families of learners move to areas with better service delivery and employment opportunities which are most likely to be in urban centres, the coastal line for the Eastern Cape. What they leave behind, are a number of small and unviable schools and at worst, empty school buildings that become vandalised if not handed over to the Department of Public Works as legislated.

This background to the current education system in South Africa matters because it shows how trust, accountability and capacity can differ significantly within an education system based on the political and social conditions of a country. The background of the apartheid education system also matters because it should cause us to question the aggregation or disaggregation of trust, accountability and capacity in the current education system. This is evident in the amalgamation of all the education departments during the transition to democracy. The amalgamation revealed that among education bureaucrats in provincial head offices there were high levels of distrust between white and black bureaucrats and between black bureaucrats from different Bantustans (Ngoma, 2007). Capacity and accountability were low too. Finally, this background matters because it indirectly shows the potential for trust, accountability and capacity in the reformed South African education system. The potential for trust is available from the micro to the macro level as the current education system is pursuing quality education for all learners, based on the principles of equality, access and social welfare.

Possibilities for trust, accountability and capacity in the post-apartheid education system

During the transition to democracy in South Africa, there was an opportunity to create a space for trust, accountability and capacity within the new education system as part of the transformation, redress agenda. Like many of South Africa's

administrative and public policy changes at the time, the national education system underwent significant top-down and political change. The political change was primarily that of an inclusive and democratically based state. Also, along with this, the national education system experienced significant changes including the formalisation of the single, non-racialised education system as well as the reorientation of school governance and funding (White Paper on Education and Training, 1995). The reformation of the education system in South Africa paralleled the state formation that was taking place in the country at the time. Both these processes were aimed at nation-building, policy renewal (Booysen, 2001), restructuring and transformation (Ncholo, 2000), and a general alignment with the Constitution's Bill of Rights and public administration values (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

At the provincial level, the reformation of the education system in South Africa was more complex and challenging. This is because, as mentioned earlier, the changes that needed to take place to align with the national education system's reformation were ones that involved the former Bantustan and White schools and their districts amalgamating under the new provinces to form a new education system. The challenges around this amalgamation revolved around different institutional legacies colliding; varying degrees of administrative capacity; multiple factions and their logic being forced to cooperate; and sometimes, the perception that the top-down process of reformation was flawed (Ngoma, 2007). Other transformative interventions included an increase in expenditure in programmes such as infrastructure (school renovations), fee subsidy, school nutrition and training of teachers. All these factors contributed to the reduction of teacher–learner ratio from 1:47 in 1994 to 1:35 by 2000 (Department of Education South Africa, 2001). Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) argue that political transition relies heavily on the idea of 'credible commitment' by the government. The challenges remain, as the number of dropouts, particularly in the secondary schools, continues to grow, with a reported 50% between Grades 10 and 12 (De Kadt, 2011). Despite these issues, there were and still are possibilities for higher levels of trust, accountability and capacity to take root in South Africa's education system.

One of the most apparent areas for higher levels of these factors was at national level, with the reformation and the representation of education through the creation of a single and national DBE. Like most national departments in South Africa, the DBE formulates policy, collates and monitors data and is supposed to maintain quality, accessible and equal education for all learners. The role of the DBE is, thus, to provide accountability in education while overseeing trust and capacity in PEDs, districts and their schools. Second, the PEDs role is then to implement national education policies at provincial level through teaching and learning; the provision of learner teacher support materials (LTSM); maintaining the provision of teachers as well as maintaining a functional provincial head office. Therefore, to do this, PEDs require a high level of capacity, and they have to oversee capacity in districts and their schools.

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It is important to note that the South African education system strives to be a hierarchical one, as outlines in Chapter 2 of this book. That is, it is an educational system that is 'tightly managed from the centre with strong, top-down control of recruitment, promotion, curriculum and content of classroom instructions', as per Levy et al. (2018). Such hierarchical education systems also have relationships of 'command and control', with high levels of dependence on the stat's regulation of school quality through national standards and regulations. For instance, through rationalisation, the incorporation of community inputs through the public hearings and submissions are limited by the authority of the MEC who rests with the decision to close or maintain a school. As such the community's role is not on the basis of consent but consultation.

A third possibility for trust, accountability and capacity to take root is through the PEDs ability to implement auxiliary but necessary national education policies such as transport for learners, and the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) at the district and local level. The implementation of these policies not only requires a high level of capacity but also establishes an avenue for transparency between various internal and external stakeholders. This means that there needs to be a level of trust between schools, parents, PEDs and the DBE as well as the ability to develop mutual accountability between these stakeholders under the promise to access quality-free compulsory basic education.

A final possibility for higher levels of trust and accountability is through districts and their schools. Schools and districts are at the frontline of education provision and thus their ability to manage daily processes in schools, as well as manage the expectations of learners and their parents, is an ever-present one. However, this outline of the national, provincial and local levels of governance in education is part of a codified system of education. Uncodified practices also exist within PEDs and districts as they make trade-offs between their resources, priorities and capabilities in the large, and complicated education system. To further complicate the issue of capacity and accountability, the following section focuses on policy implementation challenges in the rationalisation process and intervention. District officials are administratively accountable to PEDs as well as the school and community. As this chapter focuses on the SRP implementation at the district level, the ensuing analysis enables a reading of the institutional interplay of these trust, accountability and capacity.

Interventions in the Eastern Cape: The Schools Rationalisation Project (SRP)

The Eastern Cape is an ideal case for understanding these dynamics of the South African educational system because it has some of the lowest learner outcomes in the country, coupled with a high poverty rate and, historically, is one of the prominent examples of apartheid spatial legacies. These three factors collide in this province to create a fertile ground for education reform, and yet the reforms have been stifled by a number of factors including a lack of capacity and accountability.

PARI worked in a team of experts for 3 years in the SRP (Aug 2016–May 2019) and a number of minutes and interviews were collected during the project's life cycle to produce a case study documenting the implementation of the intervention. Through the SRP example, we can identify the tension between codified education reform and uncodified practices as a way to think through how trust, accountability and capacity manifest in a fragmented system.

Background to the Eastern Cape PED

The education system in the Eastern Cape, like the rest of the country, is shaped by colonial and apartheid racialised segregation; the two regions of the former Transkei and Ciskei in the Eastern Cape had their independent education institutions until the post 1994 education reforms that consolidated these two administrations. As a consequence of this spatial legacy, local communities would petition government or traditional authorities to establish a school in their area producing a landscape of rural communities that each had their own primary schools, far and scattered across the province. Post 1994, the economic migration to urban centres has also contributed to the emergence of underutilised, small schools in the rural areas. The Eastern Cape has about 5554 public schools with 15.4% of national enrolment. Relative to national averages and trends, the province has around 1849 schools too many (ECDE Annual Report, 2015). Data from 2014[5] and 2016[6] demonstrates that there is still a high concentration of small schools. Some of these schools have large physical structures, but low enrolment.[7] Furthermore, the Eastern Cape is also characterised by 56% of No Fee schools (Bloch, 2010), reflecting the poverty and inequality of the province. The Eastern Cape Department of Education's (ECDE) 2015 Annual Report revealed a high number of small and unviable schools which made it difficult for the department to resource the schools adequately. In addition, the Eastern Cape generally has the highest net migration statistics of the nine South African provinces.[8]

Cole (2018) further details the incremental numbers of learner migration within the province, noting that the migration is from rural to urban townships and suburban areas around the coastal lines are seen to be economically more viable. Furthermore, Motala and Pampallis (2001) argue that despite the attempts to redress resource allocation under the Norms and Standards for School Funding, poorer schools still face funding deficiencies compared to urban schools. This also relates to weak capacity in financial management within PEDs. Similarly, Soudien (2004) points out that the reverse of immigration to black schools has never happened in the history of the country. Thus, rationalisation comes from an analysis of poor educational outcomes within the context of a system that was chronically underfunded and arguably continues to be underfunded given the Bantustan and apartheid legacy along with the skills capacity for administration.

The SRP aimed to address the effects and consequences of the historical legacy just outlined. Rationalisation is a national DBE programme which was initiated in 1996 with the enactment of various legislation, formalised through

the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education in 2005, and which was supposed to have been finalised in 2012 (Directorate Rural Education, 2009:7). Rationalisation is intended to consolidate the education landscape by reducing the number of small schools deemed unviable to improve resource allocation towards quality access to teaching and learning centres. More importantly, the reduction in the number of small and unviable schools allows a full education curriculum to be run daily. Instead of having one teacher teach multiple grades of learners in one class, it allows for the creation of larger, better resourced and accessible schools. Thus, rationalisation streamlines multiple administrative processes around teacher post provisioning, scholar transport, the NSNP, providing LTSM and others. Some of the provinces with large numbers of these small schools that are targeted for rationalisation are the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

Rationalisation of schools in the Eastern Cape, therefore, provides opportunities for high levels of trust, accountability and capacity of education provision in this province. These possibilities are presented by the policy's intention to amalgamate rural schools and thereby enhance available education resources and increase the accessibility and efficiency of education in rural areas.

The SRP in the Eastern Cape also illustrates the depth of transition and overhaul required in a fragmented system. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the transition of the education system from apartheid to democracy was mainly a national effort, comprising the amalgamation of the fragmented system and confronting the legacies of this system. In addition to this, the nine provinces in South Africa had to address regional and local legacies of apartheid's fragmentation. For the Eastern Cape in particular, and similarly to other large rural provinces, rationalisation sought to address this spatial legacy of education provision.

Codified regulations for the SRP

The SRP comprises three aspects of rationalisation, which are codified practices for closure, merger and the realignment of schools, which are set out in writing. The first type is the closure of a school, according to Section 33 of South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA). This section of the SASA stipulates that schools selected for closure should be notified by letter from the PED, public hearings should be held, documented and submission of representations made, a report with recommendations on these should be provided by a district official to inform the Member of the Executive Council's (MEC[9]) final decision. Notice for closure should be gazetted in government media and teachers and learners should be transferred to the identified nearby operational schools.

The second aspect of rationalisation is a merger, according to Section 12A of the SASA, whereby following the selection of schools to be merged, a notice of merger is sent to the school and SGB to activate the submission of representations to the district office. Similar to the closure process, a report with recommendations is submitted by the district office to inform the MEC's decision. Once the MEC makes a decision, a notice of merger is published in the newspapers.

The MEC hears appeals and oversees the necessary planning before administrative adjustments are activated. Key to the process is the establishment of an interim SGB where other details, such as the transfer of enrolment of learners, are finalised.

The third aspect of rationalisation is the process of realigning schools, as per the *Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure*, discussed further later. Following the selection of schools for realignment, provincial and district officials produce a report outlining the process for realignment, following which the district office and the PED decide to realign the school and give notice to the SGB and the transfer of learners and teachers takes place.

The *Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure* have created a clear legal position on what constitutes a small or large school. Regulation 5(3) (ii) provides that a small primary school should consist of a minimum capacity of 135 learners while regulation 5(5) (i) provides that a small secondary school should consist of a minimum capacity of 200 learners. Section 5(2) and Section 5(4) stipulate that a streamlined system of schooling should be maintained with 8 years of primary schooling (Grade R-7) and 5 years of secondary schooling (Grade 8–12). Through the *Imbewu Project*, it was noted that unlike the national norm where primary school starts from Grade R-7 and secondary starting from Grade 8–12, Eastern Cape has the following school system:

- Primary schools (lower) – Grade R-3
- Primary schools (higher) – Grade 4–7
- Secondary schools (junior) – Grade 7–9
- Secondary schools (senior) – Grade 8–12; Grade 10–12
- Combined schools – different combinations of primary and secondary schools (Grade R-12; Grade R-9).

By 2011 an estimate of 66% of schools in the province were classified in quintiles 1 and 2 which is the poorest and lowest end in the scale of 1–5 quintile categorisation. Generally, poorer households are more likely to require state support in the form of services like scholar transport. When small schools are closed down through rationalisation, increased burden of resources, such as infrastructure adjustments and scholar transport, falls on the PEDs. The Education Management Information System (EMIS) data shows an increase in the number of small schools between the years 2009 and 2012. Most of these schools are located in the former Transkei.

The recommendations that framed the SRP were sourced from (1) the 2005 Ministerial Committee for Rural Education which set the national tone through the *Guidelines for the Merger and Closure of Rural and Farm Schools* and the provinces were left to produce detailed plans; (2) the ECDE commissioned research from *Imbewu Project* (2005–2008), which provided analysis for the provincial context on

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rationalisation; (3) between 2009 and 2010, the ECDE worked closely with the Committee on Rural Education to conceptualise the rationalisation process for the province. In 2012, the concept became formalised as the *Provincial Framework For Rationalisation, Re-Alignment, Merger And Closure Of Public Ordinary/Special Schools In The Eastern Cape Department Of Education* and; (4) the recommendation by the Council of Educators, which recommended school prototypes, thereby positioning realignment of schools as a necessary element of rationalisation.

The rationalisation and realignment of the school landscape in the Eastern Cape can be understood as a restructuring intervention both at the systemic and school levels. This analysis of learner performance shows a correlation between performance and small and unviable schools. Furthermore, the recommendations to rationalise and realign the education landscape in the province is underpinned by the need to adhere to national standards and norms (infrastructure, resources and learner numbers, etc.) which has implications for the effective and responsive distribution of resources within the education system.

These codified practices for the SRP illustrate attempts by the South African government to standardise the outputs and outcomes in a system that remains fragmented due to unequal inputs during apartheid. To this end, and as described by Levy et al. (2018), carrying out bureaucratic tasks becomes a measure of successful standardisation and results in hierarchical coordination and the consolidation of trust, accountability and capacity. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that standardisation, as a process of hierarchical coordination, is difficult to achieve because it is complex with competing procedures and resource intensive, and the district officials who implement the SRP resort to uncodified practices for implementation.

Uncodified practices in the implementation of the SRP

The first attempt to rationalise schools in the Eastern Cape began between 2012 and 2015, using the 2012 Provincial Guidelines. Three parallel processes characterised the implementation of the SRP:

> *Practice A*: Closing non-operational schools led by the Eastern Cape PED. These are shell schools considered 'unofficially closed' because of the procedural non-compliance that hinders the the PED's education management information system (EMIS) from deregistering such schools. Therefore categorised as 'pending closure' dependent on the official closure by EMIS as delegated by the MEC. Thus EMIS freezes the resource allocation to schools pending closure.
>
> *Practice B*: Meanwhile, district offices are also closing non-operational schools, whereby district officials quietly implement rationalisation in their own areas. At the district level these ad-hoc practices of school closures relied on what PARI refers to as the 'operational power'[10] of circuit and district managers, who facilitate learners' and teachers' movements based

on pressing demands in their area, submitted by principals and upon negotiation with parents to move learners. Nevertheless, these sometimes innovative and well-intentioned ways of navigating the administrative processes for rationalisation on the ground, sometimes adversely contribute to instability in the system (including the management of data on assets, teacher and learner numbers and so on, which are important for planning and resource management purposes). Similar to Practise A, the school remains registered with dwindling learner and teacher numbers categorised as *pending closure* in the EMIS system, until the community and district officials agree to move i.e. 10 to 50 learners left.

Practice C: This refers to the GTAC SRP which uses the CSLPs as the cornerstone for an improved comprehensive and coordinated planning that centres on the district capacity to implement.

The first two practices feed into each other and create two non-compliant parallel practices of closure which have not led to the de-registration of schools via the MEC and EMIS, as codified. During this period, approximately 504 schools were unofficially closed.[11] The initial 2012–15 rationalisation process showed that the challenges confronting school closures were based on the scholar transport and the infrastructure[12] backlogs. The critical success factor in this period was the leadership role of district directors in closing some schools, although the process was reactionary and not driven by an overall district plan.

This reactionary approach was further weakened by a lack of compliance with the Rationalisation Guidelines and dysfunctionality of the Provincial Coordinating Team (PCT) and the District Implementing Teams (DIT). The rationalisation process became limited with regards to legislative compliance such that there was incomplete implementation of the Section 33 or 12A processes due to factors such as lack of information about the codified practises that are in place. The result of this incomplete compliance was 'white elephant' schools, which are vacant school buildings, that were not officially handed over to PED nor the Department of Public Works as outlined under the asset management procedures of the department, because the official deregistration of closed or merged schools can only be finalised once all the procedural steps in the codified practice have been carried out and authorised by the MEC. Therefore, the result of the uncodified practices is an increasing number of 'white elephant' schools as well as 'double parking' of teachers. Double parking refers to the process of teachers following learners to rationalised receiving schools, when their home school is closed or merged; this creates an excess supply of teachers in the receiving school.

By the time the GTAC intervention was implemented (2016–19), it became the third practice that tried to consolidate these parallel systems. The GTAC model facilitated the transfer of learners and teachers through a planned and phased approach, driven by data in the comprehensive Circuit School Landscape Plans (CSLPs). Additionally, the process guided the Standard Operating Procedures

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that outline all the steps for the three aforementioned scenarios for rationalisation in line with legislation. The GTAC systems and tools distinguished this phase from the previous ECDE – one that had less coordinated planning and limited tools. Due to multiple rounds of interventions and approaches, there has been a proliferation of processes and leaderships associated with rationalisation. This has created frustration for some district and circuit officials and has led to ad-hoc approaches to rationalisation being followed on the ground. More generally, uneven and often broken administrative systems (for data collection, for example) deepen the complexity in this rationalisation process in the province. This administrative environment also has insufficient coordinated planning for rationalisation in two key areas – scholar transport and school infrastructure.

At the PED level, the uncodified practices of the SRP are compounded by newer projects and programmes that reorient the planning and implementation of the ECDE. Therefore, there is continuous change and restructuring at the provincial level, which destabilises SRP further because these changes often occur without the effectiveness of existing interventions having been tested or with competing demands on the officials, which further adds to the incoherence of project implementation. For instance, the SRP unfolds under the Service Delivery Model approach, Strategic Plans, Data-Drive Districts and the Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Development Initiative amongst other strategic initiatives that are conceptually interwoven but, in practice, operate in silos. During the School Rationalisation, the department had 242 circuits in 23 districts coordinated through three clusters at the provincial Head Office, it currently has 220 circuits in 12 districts under two clusters post the amalgamation. This process of district rationalisation delayed the finalisation of the CSLPs. The creation of parallel systems has an adverse long-term effect on the overall project. Jansen (2004) maintains that complexity within the education system is such that the system requires much coordination of various actors who possess some degree of autonomy and relating to this, is the high level of interdependence, which all require alignment of the policy strands.

Conclusion

The case of rationalisation includes the post-apartheid transition, continuous restructuring within the education system, and how the historically fragmented system shapes interventions. The combination of institutional priorities, strategies and interventions aimed to improve the education system, have the potential (as they are simultaneously implemented) to exert what McIntyre and Klugman (2003) describe as *transformation fatigue* characterised by isolated initiatives, which potentially could divert work from the overarching goals. Transformation, therefore, requires various forms of accountability that consider delegation, the flow of resource and support, information management and motivation. As such, weak institutional capacity can be the result of incoherence in accountability relationships within the organisation, in particular, the management relationship.

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Weak implementation of projects can be symptomatic of weak elements of the system of accountability relationships in which an organisation is embedded (Andrews et al., 2017). Thus, the uncodified practices, which result in administrative challenges such as 'double parking' for Human Resource and post provisioning processes which affect teaching capacity at the school level, are amongst the typical ways in which accountability can become incoherent.

Districts, as intermediaries between National and Provincial Departments on the one hand, and schools, on the other, are required to implement policy by monitoring progress, as well as to provide support to schools but yet with limited managerial autonomy. Added to this, circuit offices are virtual with limited staff capacity, in that they are generally located in the District Office, only staffed with a circuit manager. Districts have become the locus where much of this information is demanded from schools for reporting purposes up to the system – the case of rationalisation points to the hyper-congestion of competing and parallel demands at the district level. Moreover, at the different operational levels when there are multiple interpretations of the intervention simultaneously at play – which was the case with the multiple rounds of rationalisation interventions – this contributes to uncodified practices. The SRP invested in central planning through the identified structures as per the rationalisation guidelines. This central planning system used the bottom-up approach of feeding data from the districts to the provincial office. However, the recipients at the provincial level would distribute the data, but this would not activate the codified processes of closure.

The district interfaces with various education stakeholders and positions circuit managers as responsible for the rationalisation demands without the means to allocate budget to the infrastructure of scholar transport community concerns. The issue of 'closing schools' or 'failure to deliver' scholar transport or deploy (i.e. Maths) teachers, bring together the political reading of education promises unfulfilled by political heads-nationally, which in turn casts doubt on the ability of the provincial government to deliver services. When the SG or other senior officials concede to unbudgeted demands due to political expediency, the technical consequences of these are no different from uncodified practices used by district officials to navigate the rationalisation of schools. These threaten a stable financial management through proper budgeting, control and reporting as the challenges of expenditure exceeding the projections due to unscheduled payments remain. Other factors maintain these limitations such as the communication challenges between and to districts, and the dishonouring of confirmed programmes and agreements.[13]

Although there has been some critique on focusing on learner enrolment numbers in determining the restructuring of the education landscape, the enrolment numbers are indicative of the stark inequalities in learner performance amongst the different school quintiles. The disparity in resource allocation and the migration from low-to-high performing schools widens the performance gap. Additionally, this points to the provincial department's ability to facilitate

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access to quality teaching and learning. The public trust in the education system has been declining over the years such that interventions like rationalisation are met with suspicion, partly due to the limited communication on rationalisation with both internal and external stakeholders which points to an erosion of accountability.

The GTAC team influenced the discourse of rationalisation and produced data-driven planning tools, with flexibility for future change that is dependent on maintenance and timely updates. Coordination remains central to the mainstreaming of tools and its data. The coordination requires a knowledgeable and skilled team, the department of education both at the district and national level often absorbs teachers as employees who learn through experience the administrative-governance practices in the department. This points to the limited technical expertise for complex interventions such as rationalisation but this is not to undermine the critical contribution that emerges from the teaching experience. Nonetheless, capacity enables service delivery which in turn improves trust amongst the education stakeholders at different levels of the education chain; this then opens up the possibility to develop accountability. At the same time, accountability is essential for capacity building. Additionally, this responsive accountability, as argued by Andrews et al. (2017), is not a matter of logistical implementation addressed through training or skills capacity building, and technical capacity but we argue illustrates the overall organisational capacity as a question of coherence and mainstreaming of projects (indicative of the bureaucratic and political interface).

The ECDoE 2016/17 Head Office Operational Plan reflects that, amongst its key challenges, dishonouring of decisions pertaining to efficient administration through good corporate governance and management, and the lack of capacity in internal audit, which show the limitations in the internal accountability system. The technical documents with the symbolic championing of the SRP by the SG are not met with the timeous and consistent application of the project further reinforcing the lacking confidence in the ability of the department to deliver its service. Hence, the notion of distrust. The many announced rounds of rationalisation have limited legitimacy in the public, as Andrews et al. (2017) put it 'the external accountability is not driven by accounting or detailed measures of cost effectiveness or proven impact or reducible to precise figures, but they have to continually prove to key constituencies that they work, and if these external actors no longer believe the organization's account then they lose traction with their internal agents and external constituencies no matter what the accounting says'. Thus, the technical and political mechanisms are intertwined.

Apart from availability of resources, the sustainability of rationalisation hinges on two main processes: the ECDoE's adoption of the institutionalisation framework and the actual implementation of the rationalisation plans, both produced as part of the intervention for a 10-year phased implementation approach. Institutionalising rationalisation beyond the SRP intervention will rely on several factors such as improved coordination for the planning and

implementation of the work along with the delegation of authority and compliance by the implementers at the district level. What the case study illustrates is that access to free basic education necessitates the reduction of financial barriers in order to facilitate access; hence, the scholar transport, teacher placement and adherence to infrastructure norms and standards become integral in the rationalisation process. While efforts to implement policy are underway, the context, that is regional and other inequalities, continue to characterise the administrative (in)efficiency and (in)coherent policy implementation. The assumption is that learner improved achievement may be cultivated by the availability of resources and responsive allocation thereof. However, resources are part of the demand on capacity as the redistribution/reallocation of funds is not a guarantee of improving performance. Van der Berg (2007) maintains that it is one thing for a department/programme to have resources at its disposal but quite another for it to use the resources effectively. The dynamics of management factors required for the efficient and effective use of resources points to planning, monitoring and oversight as underlying features necessary for responsive accountability and administration.

Notes

1 See also Goodin and Olsen (2013).
2 We use 'African' as encompassing the population categories that were classified as non-Whites by the South African Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950 and which did not form part of the Tricameral parliament system in 1984. In this chapter, Africans are those who were classified in terms of their ethnicities, namely Nguni and Sotho. Among the Nguni are the Zulus, Xhosas, Tsongas, Vendas, Swatis and Ndebeles and among the Sotho are the Pedis, Tswanas and Sotho-speaking people of the apartheid era. They were referred to as 'Blacks'. In the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, the term 'Black' refers to Africans, Coloureds and Indians. It should be noted that references used in this chapter might sometimes use the term 'Blacks' to mean non-Whites and also to mean 'Africans', interchangeably or Black African.
3 Model C schools were introduced in terms of the Education Affairs Act No. 70 of 1988 that entailed the transfer of ownership from the state to the school even though they remained state aided. These schools received largest per capita budgetary allocations. Entrenched existing privileges with the best facilities and highly qualified teachers (Gazette No. 16987 vol. 169, 14 February 1996 – Education White Paper 2). Note that the Model C-former white schools – referred to throughout the chapter – do not include the white private or independent schools as the focus is on public schooling system.
4 For detailed figures between 1953 and 1988 see F. Troup. Forbidden Pastures: Education Under Apartheid.
5 Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2013. Diagnostic overview of the Eastern Cape Province: A resource document for the Vision 2030 Development Plan; http://www.itec.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/ECPC_DiagnosticOverview.pdf.
6 ECDE Annual Report.
7 http://www.itec.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/ECPC_DiagnosticOverview.pdf.
8 See Stats SA: Mid-year population estimates 2018, http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022018.pdf, also ECDoE Long-Term Provincial Education Plan Incoporating Schools' Rationalisation, April 2019.

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9 In South Africa, an MEC is a member of the province's cabinet, who is responsible for a particular portfolio of services in the provinces. In this case, the district officials will recommend which schools should be closed to the education MEC for the Eastern Cape province.
10 As described by Simkins (2003) and Moyo (2017) to mean incongruence between the lived experience(practise) which illustrates how the work is done in relation to how it has been planned for or envisioned (policy), pointing to the need to capture the unofficial way of doing this, which can become a structural constraint.
11 That is they were still within the education system as they were not regularised because the South African School Act (SASA) Sections 33 and 12A empower the MEC to officially close schools and for EMIS to de-register them from the education system once processes in the Act are followed. The process to address the 310 schools was taken back to the districts, EMIS as a source of data confirmed that some schools were closed as far back as 2009.
12 https://www.provincialgovernment.co.za/department_annual/131/2014-eastern-cape-education-annual-report.pdf.
13 https://docplayer.net/26053804-Eastern-cape-department-of-education-2016-17-head-office-operational-plan.html.

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