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Policy interpretation and sensemaking by KZN provincial officials with reference to the private schools and norms and standards for school funding

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ABSTRACT

Arguing for the understanding of policy and its implementation as a multi-dimensional process, this study explores how provincial officials interpret and implement policy. It uses the context of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) aimed at KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) independent schools to study what happens on the ground in relation to policy implementation.

The aim is to explore knowledge and experience residing within local implementation contexts. It presents policy implementation from an interpretive perspective highlighting how provincial officials receive, interpret and transmit policy meanings. This research was conducted using a qualitative methodology. It is based on a case study of three KZN provincial officials in head office and one in the district office, sampled on a purposive basis. The interviews were administered to elicit responses from participants. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse data collected through interviews in order to discover among other things patterns, concepts, themes, and meanings.

Premised on the theory of sense-making in policy; the study concludes that how policy is interpreted or understood depends largely on the repertoire of skills, knowledge, and experience of its implementers (Spillane, 2002). The research makes three key recommendations for policy, implementation, and research:

1. Allow local knowledge to flourish by engaging more with local implementers of policy as intelligent individual sense-makers and contributors.
2. Decentralise the system by delegating some decision-making powers to district and circuit levels. For example, allow them to have the power to advertise posts; make appointments; and perform other related duties that will contribute towards efficient implementation.
3. Capacitate district directorates through constant training and support.

Chapter 1 introduces the study's historical foundations and explains the underlying factors that influenced its composition; chapter 2 presents a literature review; chapter

3 outlines the research methodology; chapter 4 describes the data collection; and chapter 5 offers a summary, discussion, conclusions and implications.

Key words: Interpretation**,** sense-making**,** cognition**,** implementation, policy, in-depth understanding.