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An investigation into the nature of leadership development programmes for South African principals in Gauteng schools.

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Abstract

Leadership development and learning programmes have become an international phenomenon and efforts to improve the ongoing development of principals are considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement. In South Africa, a national ACE in School Leadership is being introduced by the Department of Education as a pre-service qualification targeted at developing aspiring principals. It is a professional qualification, focusing on skills development, applied competence and on-site assessment. 16 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), predominantly comprising universities, are currently delivering and fielding testing the ACE using a common framework. This paper reports the findings of an enquiry which aimed primarily to establish how HEIs in Gauteng have interpreted the implementation of the national ACE in delivering a standardised qualification. The study revealed that all HEIs were critical of the official course materials and have modified the content of the curriculum, rewriting some or all the modules. HEIs have focused on the conventional classroom elements and the delivery of knowledge, predominantly using their traditional lecturing approach. One HEI has continued to emphasise the theoretical components of the content over the practice-based elements as per their conventional academic programmes. There are no standardised assessment rubrics and HEIs have been left to implement their own criteria across all elements. The lack of uniformity in the content and curriculum taught and the use of non standardised assessment criteria and possible outcomes across all HEIs, have diminished the notion of a standardized, national accreditation programme. The paper concludes by recommending the formation of a national professional body responsible for assessment of the ACE qualification.