

IMPROVING QUALITY EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA SCHOOLS: AN “ILLUSION” AND “ELUSIVE” PURSUIT

Keene Boikhutso

Department of Languages & Social Sciences Education
University of Botswana
Boikhutso@mopipi.ub.bw

Anna Molosiwa

Department of Languages and Social Sciences Education
University of Botswana
molosiwaa@mopipi.ub.bw

Abstract

This article critically examines Botswana’s attempt to improve the quality of education in public primary and secondary schools. Since 1966, numerous reforms have been instituted to produce graduates who are supposedly endowed with labour market skills and ready for absorption into the labour market or self-employment. To achieve this goal, large sums of money are ploughed into the education sub-sector every financial year yet the public as well as the private sector continue to decry the quality of education judging by the calibre of secondary school leavers produced. Data sources included official policy documents and reports which were analysed qualitatively to identify gaps and factors that contribute to failure in attaining quality education. The findings revealed poor synergy between past and current policies, inadequate human and material resources, lack of commitment and political will to implement policies, and inefficient monitoring and evaluation processes that do not adequately inform subsequent reforms. The article concludes that Botswana Qualifications Authority, Human Resource Development Council and Education Training Sector Strategic Plan provide a framework for rethinking quality education which has largely remained an “illusion” and “illusive” pursuit over the past five decades.

Keywords: *Quality education, Botswana Qualifications Framework, Education policies, Globalisation, Neoliberal reforms*

Introduction

Botswana is commended for making notable progress in achieving Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the quality of education continues to decline as measured by national, regional and international studies. Academic results are used as a proxy to measure quality. Other related activities used include: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Southern African and Eastern Consortium for the Measurement of Educational Quality (SACMEQ). Quality of education is also measured by “the proportion of learners attaining A-C passes for Primary and Junior levels while the proportion getting 5 Cs or better is used for senior secondary” (Botswana Examinations Council, 2017, 6).

Improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning through reforms is an integral part of ensuring that students receive quality education. Over the past four decades, Government of Botswana has

and continues to formulate and implement education reforms meant to improve the quality of education in primary and secondary schools. These reforms include the 1977 National Commission on Education (known as Education for *Kagisano*), 1994 Revised National Policy on Education, Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP) and Junior Secondary Education Improvement Project (JSEIP). Education oriented neoliberal reforms are credited for ensuring that training is linked to labour market demands. For Botswana to develop and compete globally, it requires graduates who have acquired 21st century skills. These are knowledge, skills and attitudes citizens need to be able to fully participate and contribute to the knowledge society such as; collaboration, communication, information and communication technology literacy, social and/ or cultural competencies (including citizenship). Most frameworks also mention creativity, critical thinking and problem solving (Lai & Viering, 2012). To produce graduates with these attributes, education standards, assessments, curriculum, instruction, professional development and learning environment need to be aligned with these skills.

Apparently, it is believed that Botswana graduates lack the critical skills and competencies as evidenced by the high youth unemployment rate in the country. In 2017, the World Bank estimated unemployment rate among the youth aged 15-24 years as standing at around 35.7%. This is the percentage of the youth as a proportion of the total labour-force without employment but available or seeking employment (Botswana-Unemployment, 2019). The 2009 study that reviewed the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) curriculum revealed that the quality of education is not satisfactory. Even though teachers felt the curriculum was of good quality, some members of the community and out-of-school youth felt that it was not. It was opined that school leavers lack innovativeness, creativity and team-spirit, thus fail to take full advantage of youth empowerment and joint venture programmes funded by Botswana Government (Republic of Botswana, 2009).

The Education Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP 2015-2020) states that some of the challenges facing Botswana's education sector in terms of meeting the labour-market demands include: failure to implement child-centred approaches; inadequate supervision capacity; lack of accountability; inadequate stakeholder engagement; ineffective integration of ICT in teaching; inadequate monitoring and evaluation of academic achievement; lack of responsive and inclusive curriculum; and large class sizes. Intervention measures to address these challenges have achieved limited success. Huge sums of money are consistently channelled into the education sector but the quality of education remains poor. For example, in the 2019/2020 proposed budget allocations, Government still prioritizes the Ministry of Basic Education with the largest share of 17.5% of the total Ministerial Recurrent Budget (Republic of Botswana, 2019). This article therefore seeks to find out: (i) What the challenges of implementing initiatives to reform education quality are in Botswana, and, (ii) What strategies should be put in place to implement education policies that would improve quality. The next section uses neoliberal reforms to provide context to the nature of educational reforms in Botswana.

Neoliberal education oriented reforms

Globalisation and neoliberal reforms have led to concerted efforts to align education to the global economy. This has also stimulated curricular reforms in an effort to produce graduates who supposedly possess "attributes such as creativity, versatility, innovativeness, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a positive disposition towards teamwork attributes deemed essential in today's changed work environment" (Tabulawa, 2009, p. 88).

Throughout the history of public schooling, reforms have been implemented to improve access to educational opportunities. Investment in quality education is a prerequisite for the production of a globally competitive workforce (Rizvi, 2016). Brathwaite (2016) explains that “the global market calls for more advanced skills and technology than it did decades ago, and high schools are tasked with introducing students to these skills” (p. 2). Put simply, education reforms are primarily geared towards improving academic standards and achievement, closing academic gaps among learners and preparing the youth for the labour market (Brathwaite, 2016; Hursh, 2007).

Connell (2013) reminds us that “educators need to understand neoliberalism...and consider why it has gained its contemporary grip” (p. 100). Hursh (2007) agrees that these reforms are not only dominant but also inevitable. Bourdieu (1998) decried the endless debates around neoliberalism and its consequences. What is crucial is that neoliberalism influences all areas of public and private life (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). The authors of this article draw upon the conceptualisation of neoliberalism as provided by Connell (2013). Neoliberalism is used to refer to the economic and social transformation driven by free market forces. It entails economic and social reforms which have also found their way into the education sector. These have led to loosening of controls over banking, currency exchange and capital movement (Connell, 2013). The next section reflects on the notion of quality education to help us appreciate the nature of past and current education reforms in Botswana.

Conceptions of quality education

Quality education takes on different meanings both in space and time (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010). Discussions on quality education are elusive, lack clarity and coherence (Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu & Oduro, 2005; Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nickel & Ukpo, 2006; Galabawa & Alphonse, 2005; Tawil, Akkari & Macedo, 2002; Tikly, 2011). Quality education also changes with the context and nature of demands at local, national and international levels (Ndoye, 2005; Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010). Adams (1993) argues that defining quality is contextual and differs from one country to the next. It is “work in progress” characterised by intensive debates among policy makers and education practitioners.

In the past, quality education implied a focus on educational expansion such as access and acquisition of skills such as how to read, write, calculate, solve problems or communicate. It was measured primarily in terms of learning outputs and not necessarily what learners were able to do or not. Adams (1993) contends that “the concept of educational quality has remained somewhat illusive and many persistent questions surround any attempt at its definition” (p. 3). In the 1970s and 1980s, policy makers in sub-Saharan Africa limited their attention to access and enrolments (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010). In spite of increased access, the quality of primary education and high dropout rates remained problematic. There was widespread public perception that many children completed school without having acquired basic reading, writing and numeracy skills. It was apparent that access was not sufficient to achieve effective basic learning (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010). Between 1980s and 1990s, there was increased focus on educational quality. The assumption was that the education provided then was unable to cope with rapid social and economic transformation (Adams, 1993) hence the need to create 21st century workforce by aligning education skills to meet future societal demands (Kirk, 2014).

This article adopts the definition that quality education “effectively promotes and effectively sustains learning for all on an equitable lifelong basis to address the changing economic, social, political

and technological needs of society, and caters for the aspirations of all learners from all backgrounds” (REDI4Change LLC-Consultants, 2011, p. 14). This definition resonates with the principles of Education for All, Inclusive Education and Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) to which Botswana is committed. It identifies the key tenants of quality education as ‘equality’, ‘relevance’, ‘inclusiveness’, and ‘equity’ as critical for developing standards and indicators for quality education in Botswana (University of Botswana Team, 2013). Similarly, Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) focuses on the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all.

In the study conducted by REDI4Change LLC-Consultants (2011) in Botswana on behalf of the then Ministry of Education and UNICEF, *Batswana* stakeholders associated quality education with characteristics such as: a curriculum that stresses skills in business and technology; support learners from all backgrounds; invests in children’s school readiness as well as teachers’ professional development; emphasis on passion and commitment in rewarding teachers; strong links between the world of learning and the world of work. Further, the stakeholders contended that quality education required: adequate textbooks and learning materials; qualified, experienced and dedicated teachers, clean, comfortable classrooms and facilities, adequate infrastructure and services, inquisitive students who are keen to learn, and special provision to help weaker students. The stakeholders argued that quality education is not just limited to examination results but also include competencies like creativity, initiative, self-reliance, and objectivity. In other words, these are the attributes they expect of school leavers with a good quality education.

Research methodology

This article employed qualitative research methodology utilising document analysis and in particular, primary and secondary sources of data. Official policy documents and reports that were analysed include the 1977 Education for *Kagisano*; 1994 Revised National Policy on Education; selected National Development Plans; Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP); Junior Secondary Education Improvement Project (JSEIP); Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA) and Education Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP 2015-2020). These documents were purposively selected given their relevance to issues of quality education. The analysis of these documents helped to ensure that the study comprehensively illuminates the phenomenon under investigation (Bowen, 2009).

According to O’Leary (2014), document analysis is an important research tool in its own right capable of producing reliable data. It is a process of “evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding developed” (Bowen, 2009, p. 33). The analysis involved a series of steps. First, we appreciated that documents were solicited and produced on behalf of either the Botswana Government or sponsors such as USAID. Such documents were either produced to influence policy formulation or monitor and evaluate the implementation of public policies. The second stage involved coding content into themes relevant to quality education. In doing so, we recognised that the use of existing documents had implications for ethical and credibility issues. Fortunately, the documents used were not confidential hence accessible to the public. We also took into account the advice by Bowen (2009) that document analysis is not simply the collection of anecdotal evidence but also requires researchers to maintain a high level of objectivity for the results to be credible and valid. In the sections

below we focus on the critical review of past and current attempts aimed at improving education quality in Botswana.

1977 Education for *Kagisano*

According to Boikhutso (2013), after gaining political independence in 1966 the Botswana Government faced insurmountable challenges regarding access and quality of education. The education system at the time was characterised by weaknesses such as persistent school leaver problem, declining academic standards, and public dissatisfaction with its quality. In 1976, Government instituted a commission of enquiry to address these challenges. This culminated with the adoption of Education for *Kagisano* (social harmony) policy in 1977. This policy articulated Botswana's educational goals and linked them to national principles namely: development, self-reliance, unity and democracy. The main focus was to prepare children for useful productive life in the real world (Republic of Botswana, 1977). It also provided the educational policy framework for improving the quality for subsequent years (Chisholm & Chilisa, 2012; UNESCO-IBE, 2006).

A number of initiatives were implemented in line with the recommendations of Education for *Kagisano*. These included splitting secondary education into junior and senior secondary education. This was meant to equip learners with knowledge and skills in readiness for the labour market. Curricula reforms included integration of practical subjects into the junior and senior secondary school curriculum. New instructional materials and textbooks and training of new teachers to teach two-year junior certificate programme were implemented. There was optimism that the reforms would lead to improved quality of education (Chisholm & Chilisa, 2012) but the results turned up to be disappointing. The sections that follow focus on National Development Plans, the Primary Education Improvement Project and the Secondary Education Improvement Project and the 1994 Revised Policy on Education.

National Development Plans

The formulation of national development plans helps countries to articulate public policies and priorities for the different sectors of the economy. They also help in allocating scarce resources, setting realistic national goals and regulatory framework for private participation in the economy. Similarly, well-articulated plans enable developing countries to source the much needed donor funding and technical support from international organisations.

In 1965, the Transitional Plan for Social and Economic Development was instituted in the then Bechuanaland Protectorate as part of the preparatory work for political independence in 1966. Since then, Government has consistently initiated five-year national development plans to achieve sustained development, rapid economic growth, economic independence, and social justice. The first post-independence National Development Plan covered the period 1968-1973. Government took a bold step to institutionalise education reforms within the national development plans (Meyer, Nagel & Snyder, 1993; Tabulawa, Polelo & Silas, 2013).

The 1979-1985 National Development Plan 5 outlined the following policy framework as critical for improved quality of education: (i) increased educational opportunities and reduced inequalities, (ii) balanced economic development aligned to labour supply and demand, and (iii) promotion of personal

qualities including incorporation of national principles and values. Government took cognisance of contextual factors and financial constraints such as dire financial challenges which were bound to negatively impact on the provision of quality education. Thus, donor aid was solicited through collaborative networks (Republic of Botswana, 1980). The Plan marked the beginning of relentless efforts to improve quality of education. Subsequent national development plans including the current national development plan 11 (2017-2023) place high premium on improved quality education.

However, despite persistent and massive investment in education across all levels of schooling, the quality of education did not substantially improve. Over the years notable achievements have been realised such as increased access to education at primary school level and upgrading primary school teachers from teacher's certificate to diploma level (UNESCO-IBE, 2006). In spite of this, the quality of education has remained subdued.

Primary Education Improvement Project

In 1966, Botswana's education system was in a poor state of affairs. The quality of primary education was unacceptably low as measured in terms of basic literacy and numeracy skills (Noel, 1991). This was attributed to a host of challenges: failure to prioritise primary education due to financial constraints, shortage of trained teachers, increased use of unqualified teachers, and lower salaries for primary school teachers and the fact that teaching attracted less capable candidates who took it as a last resort (Noel, 1991; Tabulawa, 1998, 2009). There was urgent need to reverse this trend. This included revamping teacher training programme to make primary teaching a more attractive career path (Noel, 1991). Priority was also placed on increased access, efficiency and relevance of basic education. The ultimate aim was to achieve universal education at primary level (Noel, 1991; Tabulawa, 2009).

Notwithstanding these noble intentions, efforts to improve the quality of education were frustrated by limited human resource capacity and heavy reliance on expatriate staff (Noel, 1991). In 1980, Government initiated a collaboration project with USAID known as the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP). This was designed to improve pre-service and in-service training for primary school teachers (Noel, 1991)

The implementation of PEIP (1980-1990) produced positive results and was seen as a success story by all the contracting parties. It helped develop resource capacity for in-service training locally and the establishment of education centres across the country. PEIP also led to the establishment of the Department of Primary Education within the Faculty of Education at the University of Botswana (Louis Berger International, 1988; Noel, 1991). The department provided academic leadership in improving teacher education, educational research and evaluation (Monyatsi, Tsayang, Bulawa & Mhozya, 2008). PEIP also called for the use of learner-centred pedagogies (Tabulawa, 2003). However, this remained a pipe dream as the traditional chalk and talk teaching methods continued to dominate Botswana's primary school classrooms.

Junior Secondary Education Improvement Project

In 1985 Botswana's Ministry of Education (MOE) and USAID signed the Junior Secondary Education Improvement Project (JSEIP). USAID contributed 73% of project budget compared to 27% by

Botswana Government (Louis Berger International, 1988; Noel, 1991). This was a five-year project to improve the quality education. Original focus was to upgrade the quality of community junior secondary schools through: i) the development of curriculum and instructional materials, ii) strengthening teacher-training particularly in-service and pre-service, and, iii) upgrading management capacity of the Ministry of Education. This did not sit well with the Government hence the review of terms of reference to cover: i) increase of quality and efficiency of institutional component of the expanded educational system, ii) institutionalise the capacity to develop, manage and support new junior secondary instructional component of the system and, iii) make junior secondary schooling more responsive to national development needs (Louis Berger International, 1988; Noel, 1991).

The different expectations of the contracting parties hampered the smooth implementation of JSEIP. USAID understood the project to focus on development of curriculum and instructional materials, teacher's development (both in-service and pre-service) and strengthening capacity of the MOE to plan, and manage large-scale educational reforms (Louis Berger International, 1988; Noel, 1991). In contrast, Government perceived JSEIP as an externally conceived and managed project, thus reflecting entrenched interests of the donor (Maipose, Somolekae & Johnston, 1997).

Despite the challenges highlighted above, JSEIP made significant contribution to the improvement of junior secondary education in Botswana. First, assertiveness by MOE allowed for alignment of project to national priorities. Second, a fully-fledged Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation was established to adapt school curricula to demands of rapidly changing national economy. Third, Government gained leverage over management of major components of the project through integration of activities within existing structures of the MOE. Fourth, Government strategically used the mid-term review and evaluation to push for changes in project management and alignment to national priorities (Noel, 1991).

As part of the implementation of JSEIP, the three year Junior Certificate was changed to a two year programme. This was not well received by the public at large. According to Rowell and Prophet (1990), parents, students and potential employers did not buy into the reforms complaining about lowering of academic standards. Even JSEIP Chief of Party, confessed that education systems are large, complex and sometimes driven by political agenda. He underscored the need to understand why education systems operate in certain ways as well as the need to minimise "system-trauma" by making timely adjustments of project goals. In 1993, Government took the decision to review the entire education system resulting in the second Commission on Education discussed below.

1994 Revised National Policy on Education

In 1993, Government set-up the second national commission on education to address the new challenges facing the education system. The terms of reference for Commission included the need to: i) review of current education system, relevance, problems and strategies, ii) suggest ways of aligning education sector to requirements of national economy and, iii) foster greater achievement of access to basic education and vocationalisation of curriculum content (Republic of Botswana, 1993, 1994). The report of the Commission culminated with the adoption of Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE, 1994).

The 1994 RNPE placed emphasis on science and technology, and training of teachers as the main drivers of the national economy (Biao & Maruatona, 2015). It also called for systematic monitoring and remediation in the education system to address issues of quality. Similarly, the new education policy outlined strategies for achieving national goals, institutional framework and monitoring of educational practices. Other areas that were identified included improving learning achievement, physical facilities, and teacher qualifications, mixed ability teaching, curriculum development and assessment. In addition, issues such as access and equity, effective preparation of students for life, citizenship and world of work were identified as key priority areas (Republic of Botswana 1993; 1994). It was argued that the promotion of labour market and self-employment skills was one of the prerequisites for achieving sustained and diversified socio-economic development (Republic of Botswana 1993; 1994). At the school level, Government re-committed itself to improving i) management of schools, ii) quality of instruction, and, iii) development of a more balanced curriculum; linking skills to world of work and increasing the number of practical subjects offered (Republic of Botswana 1994).

The implementation of RNPE recommendations yielded both successes and failures. Notable successes included: increased access and equity owing to the channelling of large sums of money into the education sector; improved institutional capacity in primary, junior and senior schools; mainstreaming of pre-school and early childhood into public primary schools; provision of special education and counselling services in schools and establishment of institutions such as Botswana Examinations Council (BEC), Human Resource and Development Council and Botswana Qualifications Authority.

However, the failures are evidenced by persistent challenges such as: high school drop outs; limited capacity to increase enrolment and retention rates for children in remote areas and marginalised communities; lack of diversified curriculum which is inclusive and relevant to the needs of all learners; poor academic performance in national examinations across the different levels of schooling and increasing numbers of unemployable graduates. This could be attributed to several factors such as language in education policy, large class sizes and lack of facilities and instructional resources.

In addition, there appears to be lack of continuity in education policies which in turn hampers the achievement of quality education. For example, Education for Kagisano (1997) recommended that Setswana should be used as the medium of instruction from Standard One up to Standard Three and English be introduced in Standard Four. Paradoxically, the RNPE reversed this recommendation to say; “English should be used as the medium of instruction from Standard 2 as soon as practicable” (Republic of Botswana, 1994, REC.18 para.4.7.31). There are two contentious issues in this respect. First, both recommendations did not take into account the plight of children from ethnic minority groups whose first language is not Setswana. It is a given that many of these learners begin school without having attended pre-school hence have limited exposure to Setswana which is the medium of instruction in Standard One. This situation is compounded by the fact that these learners have to struggle to learn Setswana while at the same time having to make a transition to English in Standard Two. Second, the medium of instruction used at the initial stages of education continues to disadvantage learners from marginalised communities whose mother tongue is not Setswana (the national language). In fact, this kind of language in education policy excludes them from meaningfully accessing education.

The issue of language in education also resurfaced in Vision 2016 which pronounced that; “Botswana’s wealth of different languages and cultural traditions will be recognised, supported and strengthened within the education system” (Republic of Botswana, 1997,5). It has been demonstrated that national visions are critical since “countries that have succeeded over time have invested in developing long-term visions, and have also created the institutions to translate long-term visions into reality, supporting them and following up” (The World Bank, 2005, Preface). The fact that Botswana initiated Vision 2016 (Towards Prosperity for All) and Vision 2036 (Prosperity for All) is commendable. What is problematic is the failure to translate the visions into tangible outcomes. In the period 1997-2016 the vision outlined the need for a tolerant nation but nothing was done to turn this dream into reality. For example, nothing was done to mainstream ethnic minority languages into the education system. This is a clear demonstration of government’s lack of political will and commitment to promote ethnic diversity.

Vision 2036 is also significant in that the four pillars are aligned to the 2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs) namely: sustainable economic development, human social development, sustainable environment, and governance, peace and security). The pillar on human social development is too generic to promote a sustainable nation-state which wholeheartedly embraces multicultural education. The closest it gets to is to note “by 2036 Botswana will be a moral, tolerant and inclusive society that provides opportunities for all”. The Vision does not spell-out the role of education in facilitating the creation of an inclusive society.

The 1994 RNPE passed several recommendations that would have improved the quality of education but were never implemented. For instance, The RNPE recommended that “in the long-term the norm of maximum class size should be 30, but in the short term the maximum should be reduced from 45 to 40” (REC 22. para. 4.8.21). Clearly, The Government is still adhering to the short-term recommendation. In fact, class sizes have grown bigger since this recommendation was made. In contrast, the number of unemployed teacher graduates roaming the streets has grown substantially. Anecdotal data shows that large class sizes have negative impact on academic achievement. Similarly, the Botswana Teaching Professionals Council is yet to be established in line with policy recommendation from the 1994 RNPE. It was envisaged that the council would oversee issues around teacher qualifications, teacher work ethics and effective teaching and learning. The reality on the ground is that Government seems to adopt business as usual approach without any sense of urgency to commit itself to reaching the set targets.

Botswana Qualifications Framework

Internationally, national qualifications frameworks (NQF) are the nexus of national education and training systems and labour markets. According to Chakroun and Daelman (2015), “the emphasis is on increasing the relevance and flexibility of education and training programmes, enhancing lifelong learning, improving the transparency of qualification systems, creating possibilities for credit accumulation and transfer, or developing quality assurance systems” (p.11). The 2030 agenda and in particular, SDG 4, calls for improved education and training in terms of the quality and relevance of qualifications, qualifications systems and lifelong learning opportunities. There is need for coherence in the articulation of learning outcomes to achieve better communication, co-operation and co-ordination between diverse stakeholders across institutional sectors and countries.

National Credit and Qualification (NCQF) frameworks use levels of descriptors to make objective judgements on the quality of education. In line with international best practices, there are ten (10) level descriptors to ensure coherence across learning in the allocation of qualifications and part qualifications to particular levels. The level descriptors also help to facilitate the assessment and international comparability of qualifications and part qualifications (SAQA, 2014). It is important to look at the educational, social, economic and political context which underpins the formulation and implementation of NCQF policies. This has to take into account learning outcomes, stakeholder involvement and institutional and validation arrangements and articulation of learning pathways (European Centre for Development of Vocational Training, 2017).

The establishment of Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA) Framework and Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) in 2013 are the latest attempts to address what is perceived as declining quality of education. The two institutions potentially represent a paradigm shift and a holistic approach to improving quality education within the global environment in which education is seen as the key driver to increased mobility and labour market responsiveness (Botswana Qualifications Authority, 2018). The BQA is tasked with the implementation of the National Credit and Qualifications Framework (NCQF) policy.

The BQA replaced Botswana Training Authority (BOTA). Its objectives are to: i) develop and maintain National Credit and Qualifications Framework (NCQF), and, ii) coordinate education, training, skills development and quality assurance system (BQA, 2016). The BQA is responsible for generating, awarding and maintaining learner records, credits and certification. Records of learning provide details of the extent to which learners attain individual unit standard achievements and at the same time recognising their qualifications. BQA has already conducted workshops around the country for all stakeholders particularly the Education and Training Providers (ETPS), explaining registration processes of learning programmes and the accreditation of academic programmes. Currently, ETPs have already submitted new programmes to BQA for auditing and validating before re-registration on the National Credit and Qualifications Framework. Overall, the BQA's objective is to ensure that there is synergy in quality of education across different layers of Botswana's education system.

Human Resource Development Council

The Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) established in 2013 through an Act of Parliament which replaced the then Tertiary Education Council (TEC). The HRDC's mandate is to help improve quality by transforming Botswana's education and training system from a supply-led into a demand-driven one (Human Resource Development Council, 2015.). This is a significant step meant to address problem of skills-mismatch which makes it difficult for youth to penetrate the labour market. HRDC is responsible for the implementation of the Human Resource Development Strategy (HRDS). It also advises the ministries of Basic Education, Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology, and Employment, Labour Productivity and Skills Development on human resource development policy issues and planning. Similarly, HRDC provides advice on tertiary education financing (Human Resource Development Council, 2015). In terms of achievements, HRDC manages the Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF). This is a training fund based on levies collected from organisations whose

current Value Added Tax threshold is one million pula or more. The organisations are reimbursed based on the costs for training in areas that critical to the growth of national economy.

Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan

The Botswana Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP 2015-2020) is the latest initiative to reform the education system. It has been in place for about four years although there is no substantive evidence regarding whether or not it is being fully implemented. The ETSSP provides clear guidance to decision-makers and planners at all levels and *aims* to improve education sector performance over the five year life cycle. It seeks to promote diversification of knowledge-based economy through planned and careful development of human capital. It addresses linkages between academic qualifications and labour market requirements by focusing on improved outcomes of learners. ETSSP also identifies the following critical strategic priorities for all stakeholders in the education sub-sector: improving quality and relevance, equitable access, learning outcomes, life-long learning, skills development, alternative pathways, responsive tertiary education planning and budgeting, utilisation and integration of ICT and improving monitoring and evaluation (Republic of Botswana, 2015). The other focus is to align education and training to national development goals, the RNPE, National Development Plans, Vision 2016 and 2036 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the Post-2015 Education Agenda. The ETSSP recommends the development of multiple pathways so that learners can make a transition from academic to vocational stream and vice versa without any obstacles. It is anticipated that the introduction of the NQF will allow for a seamless progression of learners from secondary school to TVET or vice versa. Currently, the entire curricula of the public education system are being revised and aligned to outcomes based education. It is critical that all pre-service and in-service teachers are equipped with the requisite knowledge on outcomes based education for the smooth implementation of the revised curriculum. Given the pace at which the Ministry of Basic Education is moving with the ETSSP, it is yet to be seen how much of the proposed strategic priorities meant to improve the quality of education will have been achieved by the year 2020.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of how Botswana embarked on a concerted effort to improve the quality of education since attaining independence in 1966. The first task was to decolonise and align the education system to the rapidly growing national economy. Secondly, Government grappled with the problem of educational financing, hence heavy reliance on bilateral and multilateral assistance. As expected, donor assistance came with its own set of external pressures and controls. Botswana Government inadvertently mastered the art of manipulating contractual agreements to derive maximum benefits from donor-sponsored education projects. This paid dividends as the sponsored initiatives resulted in increased access and equity especially at the primary and junior secondary school levels. In spite of this limited progress was made to improve the quality of education. The establishment of the BQA, the HRDC and the adoption of ETSSP marks possible paradigm shift in the way Botswana conceptualises and delivers quality education.

This paper has identified factors and challenges which impede on policy implementation thus making it difficult to transform quality education and align it to labour market demands. These are

complex and interwoven challenges which revolve around inadequate human resource development capacity, ineffective allocation of limited financial resources, lack of political commitment and will, lack of buy-in from all stakeholders such as students, parents, public sector which often lead to unfavourable attitudes to the adopted reforms, limited training of the implementers, and lack of continuity in policies due to inefficient monitoring and evaluation procedures. It is important to make use of the lessons learnt from past education reforms in order to achieve high success rate for the on-going reforms. Disregarding these means that quality education in Botswana would remain an illusion and an elusive pursuit.

The way forward

The mitigation of barriers to policy implementation to education reforms is a complicated process. It requires detailed, continuous and systematic analysis as well as the appreciation of interlocking nature of the factors that are at play. Policy makers ought to appreciate that quality education is a prerequisite for the preparation of responsive labour force to meet the challenges of rapidly changing knowledge-based economy. This requires aligning education to drive critical sectors to make the national economy competitive at regional and global level. Specifically, policy makers ought to revise and strengthen the existing policy implementation framework. This involves: selective bench marking against best practices; use of lesson learned from internal and external policy formulation and implementation practices; putting in place mechanisms to improve capacity to implement reforms; and facilitate continued professional development. All these suggested processes are more likely to create an ecological environment which facilitates buy-in from all stakeholders including the Government.

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