

# Decolonising Public Administration: A Case of Limpopo Education Department

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**Abstract:** This paper examines whether decolonising the Limpopo Education Department would not enable the department to match or outsmart its competitors in terms of education delivery. The paper is conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. The question guiding the paper is: how many years does the province require to become the pace-setter of good education delivery in the country? Narrative enquiry and interviewing techniques were used to collect data. Out of the population of 15 experienced sectional heads in the education department in Limpopo Province, South Africa, 6 were conveniently sampled. The sampled research participants were all heads of sections. Findings revealed that ignoring to dispense knowledge with liberating force delays the departmental decolonisation; secondly, untransformed organisational structures are a setback for the department; thirdly, applying antiquated governance procedures robs the department of the opportunity to revamp through decolonising; fourthly, lack of modernity; lastly, un-implemented impressive policies. The researcher recommends for the disruption and dismantling of colonialist practices.

**Keywords:** Governance, Liberating, Policies, Systems, Untransformed

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## 1. Introduction

This paper sets out to examine if decolonisation would not generate efficacy in the education department. Limpopo education department is a broken department struggling to mend. Gold (2016:8) stresses that in education departments, decolonised practices, remain a viable option. Decolonisation refreshes and energises a department. Sebola (2015:61) stresses the creation of a structure and order, which result from interaction between a multiplicity of governing nodes which influence each other in the creation of a certain decolonised environment. Education departments require order and a certain way of behaving by its practitioner for a quality service to be rendered. This is what decolonisation is all about. Public administration requires decolonisation to remain competitive and efficacious to the ethos, culture and general unique ways of doing things in their environments (Shejvali, 2015). In an education department, decolonisation invigorates practitioners to serve with aplomb and distinction. It is the act or manner of governing an educational institution which enables everyone to speak out his mind due to breaking free from the vestiges and clutches of colonialism (Clarke, 2009). This amounts to emancipation of everyone and the triggering of excellent functionality by a public administration. Decolonisation encapsulates how

power, authority, accountability and governance are exercised in a particular education department in carrying out the mandate of that department. Msila (2016:31) articulates that decolonisation has a potential of steering the half-sinking ship into the bay of educational transformation and social change. It could enhance the service delivery of a public administration. With decolonisation in place, a public administration that was known to be struggling in terms of producing brilliant service delivery, could turn the tide and be productive. Decolonisation in public administration, teaches emancipatory and civil ways of engagement. Furthermore, it is able to teach how to decimate organisational challenges and hurdles other than aggravating them (Fox, 2010; Theletsane, 2014; Moyo, 2015:16; Levin, 2017:33). Khoza (2015:43) and Masina (2015:24) contend that decolonisation is the way to go for public administrations. Tisdall (2015:15) remind us that apartheid has instilled in civil society, a sense of self-hate and inferiority complex to the level of battling to embrace decolonisation through which they would use to manage and lead their education departments with pride. Functionality by public administrations is possible with decolonisation (Yukl, 2006; Motsepe, 2015:5; Allen, 2017:9). Placing little attention to decolonisation delays the undoing of colonialist practices in public administrations (Siswana, 2007:182; Shejvali, 2015:34).

## **2. Theoretical Considerations**

Du Plooy-Celliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2016:37) regard a theory to be a roadmap which a researcher uses in her expedition of finding patterns in answering research questions and finding solutions to research problems. This signifies that when one advances a particular argument on a phenomenon such as decolonising public administration to promote the efficacy of the Limpopo Education Department, with a theory in place, one's argument is likely to hold substance. Interpretivism underpins this paper. It was chosen to allow the researcher an opportunity of interpreting how practitioners opine on the decolonisation of their education department to promote its efficacy. Interpretivism helped the researcher to make meaning from decolonising the education department to enable it to cope with its mandate of delivering quality public education to the residents of the province and how reverse ongoing departmental underperformance. One of the principles of Interpretivism is engaging with practitioners to establish the meaning they attach to decolonising their department to enhance its effectiveness. The other principle relates to determining the way practitioners approach cases in their daily lives. Cases imply how Limpopo education department continues to be outsmarted by the other 8 provinces in terms of education delivery and the readiness of sectional heads in the province regarding reversing departmental underachievement. The elected paradigm enabled the researcher to gain deeper meanings constructed by diverse sectional heads who were research participants in this paper. Interpretivism assisted in determining how much were practitioners aware that lack of decolonisation of the department, was likely to perpetuate poor education delivery to provincial recipients (Msila, 2016; Motsepe, 2015:5; Ponelis, 2015:538). Knott (2017:14) and Joubert (2017:18) remind us that a lack of decolonisation projects in an education department may make it difficult for the practitioners to be sufficiently accountable to their education recipients. Moyo (2015:16) and Skenjana (2017:8) advise that dismantling the existing colonialist structures in the department could pave the way for the success of decolonisation. Interpretivism uncovers whether inability to create structures, systems and processes by provincial education departments, to enable the success of decolonisation there, was a deliberate or unintentional exercise (Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2009; Higgs & Smith, 2020).

The problem of this paper centres around ongoing underperformance by the Limpopo education department in comparison to the other 8 education departments in the country (Allen, 2015). Interpretivism advocates for critical reflection on education, in order to discover the hidden assumptions that maintain the prevailing power relationships that keep the societal members perpetually enslaved though in a different form and guise (Higgs & Smith, 2010:72; Arden, 2013:38). Frequently, how provincial departments normally think and act, it is the product of many years of being subjected to conditions of colonial apartheid that impede the delivery of decent educational service to the province's residents due to the absence of strong decolonisation in the department (Tisdall, 2015:15; Joubert, 2017:8). Briggs, Coleman and Morrison (2012) advise that researchers need to define carefully the issue or a research problem to be investigated and the context within which that problem is set. Hofstee (2010:110) proclaims that no skill is more useful than the ability to recognise and articulate a problem clearly and concisely. Indications are that some sectional heads of the education department are taking the education recipients for granted through managing and leading their sections devoid of decolonisation. This is another problem that constitutes a disservice to the education consumers. Due to the suffered colonialism in Africa and apartheid in South Africa, indications are that the two have eroded and corroded in people, any semblance of humanity and Ubuntu to the level where egoism in Africans is so strengthened such that departmental practitioners opt to continue with colonialism in an era of decolonisation (Skenjana, 2017:8).

## **3. Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in this paper are anchored on Interpretivism as the theoretical perspective that underscores the paper (Higgs & Smith, 2010:88; Pheko, 2017:27). The research questions are as follow: How can decolonisation of the department enhance its education provision? What are the thoughts, ideas, concerns and aspirations of the departmental practitioners regarding replacing colonialist practices with the decolonised ones that facilitate efficacy?

Broad as they are, the above questions can be broken down into the following sub-questions:

- How is decolonisation construed by departmental practitioners?

- How are the decolonisation structures and systems created?
- How best to create efficacious decolonisation structures?
- How long does it take a decolonised department to be effective and efficient?

#### 4. Methods and Materials

This paper is qualitative in nature. In the first place, the problem which this paper pursued is centred around the ongoing underperformance by the Limpopo education department in comparison to the other 8 education departments in the country. The nature of the problem was found to be researchable along the qualitative school of thought as against the quantitative line of thinking, especially that the paper is underpinned by Interpretivism (Dawson, 2006; Levin, 2005). The researcher created a synergy between Interpretivism as the theoretical perspective that underpins the paper, as well as the qualitative approach as the overarching research methodology (Hofstee, 2010:115). The two illuminated issues of how lack of efficacious decolonisation practices by some sections of the education department in Limpopo Province, deny the province's education recipients, the basic right of quality and decent schooling service. This persists to paint a bleak picture of some sections of the department, being the destroyer of future of countless provincial learners. This occurs amongst others as a result of lack of efficacious decolonisation practices from the provincial education department down to the school level. That was manifested through poor learner results by the province's secondary schools as confirmed recently when the class of 2019 matric results were being announced by the Minister of Basic Education. The example just referred to exhibits the rife nature of lack of decolonisation in the provincial education department downwards to the school level. With Interpretivism underpinning this paper, the researcher utilised it, to interrogate how departmental practitioners at the provincial level, normally understand how lack of decolonisation persists to keep the education department underperforming, of the 9 provinces of South Africa. Furthermore, the theory was also applied to establish and determine the common reactions by departmental practitioners as regards utilising decolonisation project, to generate departmental functionality. Since this

paper is qualitative in nature, there was a need to amalgamate Interpretivism and the qualitative research approach to maximise the ability and strength of both towards the exposure of how lack of decolonising education department, robs education recipients of the quality schooling service they are entitled to. Partnering the qualitative research approach and Interpretivism helped the researcher to make an in-depth understanding of the likely impact of decolonisation in the department. To conclude this item on research methodology, there is a need to divulge that the narrative enquiry and interviewing techniques were utilised to construct data relevant for this paper. Six sectional heads within the provincial education department were sampled and offered an opportunity to narrate their opinions of decolonisation to their sections in the education department and beyond. To corroborate and triangulate the gleaned data, interviewing was conducted with those 6 research participants who narrated their views on decolonisation in the education department. Both narrative and interview responses, were audio-taped for transcription later-on and for easy data analysis (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005; Levin, 2017:33).

#### 5. Results and Discussion

Findings arrived at in this paper, are in relation to the research topic whose focus is: decolonising public administration: A case of Limpopo Education Department. The basis of the findings is the analysed data which were generated through the narrative enquiry and the interviewing technique. The 6 sectional heads within the Limpopo Provincial Education Department were interrogated as regards the invaluable contribution of decolonisation to the efficacy of that department towards the delivery of decent education service to the provincial residents. The 6 sectional heads were being referred to as Section A, Section B, Section C, Section D, Section E and Section F respectively. That was done to protect the actual identities of those sections and their heads. The researcher sampled those 6 sections within the education department for scrutiny in the area of a decolonised education department as part of public administration. Their choice, was on the basis of the researcher having familiarised himself with issues of decolonisation in that department and within the said sections, down the years. Findings and discussion for this paper are the following: liberatory knowledge versus the regulatory one, untransformed inherited organisational

structures and the application of antiquated governance procedures. A detailed discussion of each finding follows.

### 5.1 Liberating Knowledge Versus Regulatory One

The National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 explicitly proclaims that ascertaining the prevalence of organisational systems is the responsibility of the functionaries in the department (Brunton, 2003: B-11). Excellent functionality of an education department owes its origin on decolonisation which is appropriately anchored, Section head A of the Limpopo Provincial Education Department asserts that:

*"shunning transformation and decolonisation in the form of re-conceptualising inherited departmental structures, has allowed the education department to be overtaken by other fellow 8 provinces in as far as improving its educational delivery to the provincial citizenry is concerned".*

Section head B narrates that:

*"colonial apartheid bequeathed education department with systems that are in the main, out of touch with reality, to the level where as a province, we are ever behind in comparison to the other 8 provinces, in the area of education delivery to the provincial populace. Adapting to colonially inherited education systems, keep on retarding our progress other than facilitating it, in the mandate of delivering a quality and decent education to all residents of the province".*

Section head F reasons that:

*"without a sound decolonisation project in our education department as a whole, which is based on functional policies, well aligned implementation procedures and processes of the delivery of education to its provincial recipients, all sections of the Limpopo Education Department are likely to pull hard to lift the province's education delivery, to the standard and level of other provinces in South Africa".*

The utterances of the research respondents call for taking decolonisation practices seriously by departmental sections. The review of literature supports this as evidenced in Tsheola, 2002; Mbeki, 2003;

Madue, 2013; Zwane, 2015:10). Macha (2016:16) and Nengovhela (2020:10) remind that there is colonialism to unlearn and decolonisation to learn to salvage the department from collapsing.

### 5.2 Untransformed Inherited Organisational Structures

On this challenge of some sections of the department, not showing signs of being ready to replace colonialist patterns of operations with decolonisation practices, Section head C cautions that:

*"my experience of having being in this position for no less than two decades, keeps on reminding me, that it is the readiness to try new innovations, which assists in sustaining the momentum of excellent functionality embedded in the structures of this department".*

Section head E states that:

*"show me a single province whose learner performance is annually excellent, which is not producing those mouth-watering pupil-results not being helped by a decolonisation practice, which keeps on enlivening the operation spirit at that province's department".*

Section head A shares that:

*"having noticed what a decolonisation project does for other departments, it has to be soon for me and my departmental section to begin to embrace it as a result of its vivid contribution to the excellent functionality in myriad provinces of this country".*

As a researcher, I fully align myself with the observation by the research respondents about the significance of decolonisation. The body of literature reviewed confirms in no uncertain terms the expressed views. For instance, Gobillot (2008), Cunha, Filho and Goncalvers (2010) advocate that the essentiality of decolonisation in public administrations is beyond doubt.

### 5.3 Application of Antiquated Governance Procedures

Allen (2014:9) remarks that as long as the creation of efficacious decolonisation practices are not taken as a priority by myriad education departments, then

managing sections of the department within the emancipatory mood characterised by freedom could remain a pipe dream. This point suggests that apart from the discourse on decolonisation, not relying on antiquated governance procedures within the colonialist environment, this is likely to make the created decolonisation systems, structures, policies, procedures and processes inefficacious. On this aspect of the need for utilising new governance procedures in the education department, to usher in a fresh way of doing things, Section head B emphasises that:

*"despite having less than 15 years as section head, I have personally witnessed good intentions in the department failing to be impactful to the delivery of service by the department, because of hostile set-up within which decolonisation is awaited to enhance departmental service delivery".*

Section head B reasons that:

*"attempts to operationalise ideas associated with decolonisation, however noble they could be for the revamping of a section or department, when those ideas are detached and disconnected from the enabling new governance procedures and the nature of sectional incumbents populating a department, then the governance procedures' contribution to the efficacy of the department or section could be minimal".*

Sectional head D reminds that:

*"the concept of decolonisation, just like any other intervention mechanism in a section or department, stands to flourish in due regard to how that new innovation is embraced at the section or department and being appropriately supported by the relevant systems, procedures and processes on the ground".*

Briefly, the responses of the research participants accentuate the point that ignorance of the context or environment in a section or department, which is where decolonisation practices are expected to thrive, is tantamount to embracing decolonisation on the one hand and sticking to colonialism on the other. This fact is even being vindicated by countless literature reviewed for the sake of this paper (Omano, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Thornhill & Van Dijk, 2010; Sebola, 2012; Qwabe, 2013; Tisdall, 2005:15; Skenjana, 2017:8).

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Public administrations such as education departments, need to deal with their challenge of underperformance, sooner rather than later. This is likely to enable them to enhance their overall departmental performance. Tapping into the concept of decolonisation could be helpful in terms of reversing exclusionary colonialist practices in myriad education departments, which tend to stifle excellent functionality by those departments. Whether decolonisation hurdles experienced by education departments are internally generated or externally imposed, is not an issue now. The question to ask has to be: how should every education department make decolonisation practices successful? That stands to enable education departments to operate differently and in an efficacious manner? That could enable education institutions to put their mandates in a trajectory of forward development and movement. This is possible with decolonisation systems, structures, procedures and processes that are well tailored to the practitioners and departmental operational conditions. Appropriate decolonisation practices need to be free from euro-centric models and general organisational rigidity. The postponement of introducing decolonisation by some education departments, like Limpopo, could allow departmental underperformance and instability to persist unabated. There are copious incidences and examples occurring in the selected sections of the education department, that confirm that as regards magnificent and brilliant decolonisation systems, structures and processes that enable a department to offer first class education delivery, the studied sections in the Limpopo education department were still lacking. The bases of these recommendations are the discussed findings which are as follow:

There is a need for the Limpopo education department to deliver to its residents, education with an emancipatory force other than of a regulatory function. That kind of education is likely to attract learners to value schooling and have them producing praise-worthy results just like other 8 provinces in the country.

There is a need for the education department to rescind running the department with untransformed inherited organisational structures, which stifle a department from ever matching fellow education departments in terms of producing brilliant

learner results or to outcompete those departments. Decolonisation of the department of education is likely to flourish with the relevant organisational structures, systems, procedures, policies, processes and governance structures in place.

Lastly, there is a need to harmonise decolonisation of the department with the nature of institutional practitioners there as well as the nature of the departmental context or environment facilitating the success of the introduced decolonisation project.

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