CURRICULUM REFORM PARADIGMS AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES IN THE TEACHING OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum transformation is a driving force that seeks to change the content of public administration in South Africa. All degree programmes offered in South Africa are required to transform in line with government`s policy of promoting equity and diversity in South Africa. The curriculum offered in public administration has to change to fit in with the requirements of the country. The theoretical paper explores the challenges associated with curriculum transformation. It is posited that curriculum reform should be informed by the national ideology. It is argued that government`s national ideology is not clear-cut; it advances and retreats without taking a forthright position and in some situations, it takes one step forward and two steps backward in articulating the national ideology. The back-and-forth movement without a firm stance could be linked to the diverse political views and volatile political quagmire of the tripartite relationship. The national ideology is presented as a catalyst of change. It is posited in this paper that curriculum reform initiatives should aim to resolve or address the persistent controversy bedevilling public administration that politics should not be part of public administration as an academic discipline. The compartmentalisation or separation of politics, administration and management as single entities in curriculum reform is presented as a challenge. It is indicated in this paper that curriculum reform can better be implemented within change management paradigms that were tried and tested in other countries with success. Curriculum reform failures are also highlighted to shed more light on undesirable approaches to curriculum transformation initiatives in South Africa. Zero-based approach to curriculum reform is presented as one of the approaches to consider in designing the content of public administration in South African universities. Incrementalism is an approach that could be adopted in curriculum transformation as it takes a gradual approach to change. It is argued that radicalism could be a suitable approach to the teaching of public administration in South Africa as it could act as an antidote or total renunciation of apartheid ideas in public administration. Maintaining the status quo is another approach to curriculum transformation adopted by some universities during periods of uncertainty. Future studies should focus of curriculum transformation and development.

Key words: Curriculum reform, national ideology, zero-based approach, incrementalism, radicalism

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum transformation has become mandatory across all disciplines in South Africa in response to the needs of the country in the post-apartheid era. Universities are changing the public administration curriculum in line with the social, political, economic and technological needs of society. The content of the qualifications offered should be responsive to the needs of the country, political organisations and employer organisations. Also, the content should be relevant to employing organisations such as the public service, corporate world and non-governmental organisations. Changes in government, the political landscape and international relations influence the teaching of public administration in South Africa. Curriculum reform in universities brings about change in content that is aligned to national goals. This paper focuses on national ideology, political and administrative focus, change management paradigms, zero-based approach, incremental approach, radical approach and the status quo strategy.

CURRICULLUM REFORM AND NATIONAL IDEOLOGY

The national ideology of a country influences curriculum change in many countries. The national ideology reflects the aspirations of a country. The vision of a country is influenced by the ideology and universities incorporate national values into their curricula. State universities embrace curriculum change policies that are in line with laws on transformation of institutions and policies which seek to promote diversity in South Africa. Even though private universities have diversified curricula which are not controlled by government, they transform the content of their qualifications to address the needs of the country and to prepare their students for the South African workplace. The national ideology is presented as a catalyst of change. The major ideologies that influence universities globally are Communism, Socialism and Capitalism. Dominant cultures, religions, political parties and economic performance of a country also influence curriculum transformation (Muhammed & Brett, 2019:235).

South Africa`s national ideology is not clear-cut and government does not propagate the national ideology apart from emphasising that the country is a member of BRICS. The member countries which form BRICS are Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. South Africa cultivates the Pan-Africanist ideology and South-South cooperation (Neethling, 2017: 50). South Africa considers the African market as essential and it is reported that the Minister of Trade and Industry said,

“Two-thirds of South Africa’s trade are with the world, whilst a third of the trade is with the African continent. Of the latter, two-thirds comprise trade in value added products," African News Agency (ANA), 2018: 1).

The member states of BRICS such as Brazil, Russia, India and China have large economies and they are great exporters (Neethling 2017: 50). In BRICS, South Africa focuses on economic prosperity and like other member states, focuses on mass production of goods that are exported to African countries and the rest of the world. There are times when the ruling party takes an anti-imperialist stance, anti-capitalist ideology and espouses socialist and communist ideas (Neethling 2017:52). South Africa sometimes advances and sometimes retreats without taking a forthright position in promulgating the national ideology. The South African government takes one step forward and two steps backwards in articulating the national ideology. A change of presidents results in wavering of ideological ideas in the ruling party (Booysen, 2018:7). The back-and-forth movement without a firm stance on

the national ideology could be linked to the diverse political views and the volatile political quagmire of the tripartite alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The ideological foundation of the tripartite alliance is shaky and interparty commitment to ideological values is unpredictable and this is manifested during elections and labour unrest (Booysen, 2018: 8). Values about democracy, non-racialism, economic transformation, empowerment of previously marginalised groups, entrepreneurship, ownership of the means of production by workers and attraction of foreign direct investment by luring multinational companies to invest in South Africa and leverage the economy become conflictual in the formulation and delineation of a national ideology in South Africa. Opposition parties tend to be obsessed with economic prosperity and elimination of corruption in government and private organisations.

University lecturers are expected to exercise academic freedom which should be reflected in the curricula they design (Sultana, 2018:229). Universities should have academic autonomy in which they decide on the content and direction of the curriculum and take ownership of academic matters. In a command economy, companies are told what to produce by government (Marshall & Shulsky, 2018:220). In a free market economy, companies produce according to consumer demand and companies manufacture products according to government demand and market needs in a mixed command and free market economy such as that of China (Marshall & Shulsky, 2018:220). Similarly, universities can be compelled through higher education policies that are under the auspices of the Minister of Higher Education to produce knowledge that is needed by government for a specific purpose and not just producing knowledge and innovation out of sheer creativity. A command curriculum is produced and implemented by universities under a communist government. The priority of the state comes first and knowledge production is controlled and monitored through censorship (Sabloff, 2018:1). In terms of curriculum transformation, command curriculums need state approval for major changes in the curriculum and syllabi. The transition from communism, or socialism to democracy in curriculum transformation could be slow (Sabloff, 2018:1).

The teaching of public administration in South Africa is constrained by ideological challenges that seem to be irreconcilable in some situations but converging in fundamental values about job creation, democracy, good governance and human rights. In light of the divergence in ideological perspectives, it is suggested that curriculum transformation initiatives in public administration should refine the ideologies in a way that suits the needs of South Africa.

BALANCE BETWEEN POLITICAL IDEAS AND ADMINSTRATIVE SKILLS IN CURRICULUM REFORM

In a bid to strike a balance between political ideas and administrative imperatives in curriculum reform, some universities split political science content from public administration science modules. However, the politics-administration dichotomy is more apparent than real in the teaching of public organisations (Chohan, 2018:1009). Consequently, students may graduate with a qualification in political science at diploma, degree, and other postgraduate levels. Students with an interest in political ideas would select modules and programmes with a stronger focus on politics and international relations hence they focus less on public administration as a management science. To mitigate the effects of diverse political ideas in the

teaching of public administration, curriculum developers would focus more on principles of management in general so that graduates would fit into many organisational settings such as non-governmental organisations, the public service or state-owned corporations. The ideologies that would be incorporated in curriculum transformation with an administrative and management focus could be those that are linked to economic performance of organisations (Ege, 2018:1). Political science in public administration gravitates towards philosophical and political ideas that influence the country, bilateral relations and the promotion of democracy in the country. However, both trajectories are practically inseparable as political preferences bring about policy shifts, and the work of a public servant is influenced by politics (Guy, 2018:161). It is argued that public administrators should be able to navigate politicised work environments in the implementation of government policy (Guy, 2018:16). It is indicated that public management involves implementation of government policies and ideas hence mastery of political and administrative skills is an essential component that qualifications in public administration should encompass (Guy, 2018:161).

CHANGE MANAGEMENT PARADIGMS IN CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

When academics change modules in line with transformation imperatives, the change is likely to unsettle and disorient them and students could encounter associated challenges. Change brings about speculation of good or negative events to come. Planned change is organised and helps organisations to adapt to the new ideas and employees are expected to show a change in behaviour in the implementation of the new ideas. Planned organisational change models (POCMs) could be applied to curriculum reform in South Africa. The top-down approach is adopted in curriculum transformation in South African universities as universities seek to comply with the imperatives of curriculum transformation (Rosenbaum, More, & Steane, 2018:286).

Kurt Lewin`s Three Step Change Model is applicable to curriculum reform in the teaching of public administration in South Africa. The three steps are unfreezing, changing and refreezing (Cummings, Bridgman, & Brown, 2016). Change in curriculum could be associated with a fall in academic standards or quality of education unless the curriculum reform is managed with care and caution. Curriculum reform in South Africa calls for a decolonisation of the public administration curriculum. This includes changing prescribed books, theories and learning content that is based on Western ideas (Van Jaarsveldt, De Vries, & Kroukamp, 2018:1). Some of the students expect the public administration curriculum to focus more on indigenous African knowledge or issues affecting African countries to be predominant in the curriculum (Van Jaarsveldt et al., 2018:1). The ``unfreezing`` stage of the model requires curriculum developers to break up the public administration curriculum into meaningless units without a structure like a melted liquid. The second stage which is ``changing`` is when the curriculum reformer is required to intervene and mould the curriculum in the desired manner. This involves reorganising the content and adding new content that is currently relevant to the needs of society. The last stage which is ``refreezing`` requires the curriculum reformer to consolidate the new structure created after transformation of the curriculum. Consolidation involves explaining the new curriculum to stakeholders and holding workshops to create awareness among academics and students. Curriculum integration, course alignment, and consolidation of course content improve the quality of public

administration education within the context of curriculum transformation (Valerius, Mohan, Doctor, & Hersh, 2015:200).

Lippitt's Phases of Change Theory has seven phases in which change is managed. The phases are: (1) diagnose the problem (2) assess motivation and capacity for change, (3) assess change agent`s motivation and resources, (4) select progressive change objective, (5), choose appropriate role of the change agent, (6) maintain change and (7) terminate the helping relationship (Mitchell, 2013:32). Following the steps of the theory, problem diagnosis focuses on traditional practices in the teaching of public administration in South Africa. The lecturers and university should justify the necessity and capacity for change. Change without resources could be costly and untenable. The objectives followed in curriculum transformation should be clear and the team identified to spearhead the programme should be well-trained and led by action plans. The changes to the curriculum should be sustainable and university departments should be able to implement curriculum reform without continued reliance on external consultants as that could make the programmes less effective in the teaching of public administration in South Africa.

The Diffusion of Innovation theory (DOI) is a theory of communication which helps curriculum reformers in communicating the change to the consumers, constituencies, students, academic fraternity and the general public. Proponents of the Diffusion of Innovation theory are Bass (1963), Moore (1995) and Rogers (2003). If a planned change in the curriculum is not communicated properly, the chances of the new idea or innovation to be well-received, adopted and implemented by the target population would be remote. Bass (1963) as cited by Cheng, Kao, & Lin, (2004:440) developed a model which demonstrates how information is diffused into the target population. The information can be communicated through mass media, word of mouth and workshops. In any group of participants, there are innovators, early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, and laggards (Cheng et al., 2004:440). The innovators are participants who are the first to accept the idea and are eager to start implementing the new idea or innovation being introduced. Early adopters are opinion leaders who have the capacity to influence others in curriculum reform. The leadership group, thought leaders, and gatekeepers are targeted to propagate the need for curriculum reform. In the higher education setting, this includes course coordinators, heads of departments, heads of schools, deans, deputy vice chancellors, vice chancellors and the minister of higher education. The early majority is a group that would emerge accepting the innovation when they receive evidence of the success of the innovation. The group would be willing to implement curriculum transformation programmes in their universities. The late majority is a group that is not easily convinced when a new idea such as curriculum reform in the teaching of public administration is promulgated. The laggards are the last group to adopt the innovation. Information diffuses slowly to the group. This group would stick to the old public administration curriculum and teaching methods (Gwandure & Mayekiso, 2020:502).

THE ZERO-BASED APPROACH TO CURRICULUM REFORM

The zero-based approach to curriculum reform is built on zero-based budgeting (ZBB) principles. Zero-based budgeting involves an increased movement towards achieving policy objectives by committing unencumbered revenue sources or funds in non-essential projects to high priority projects (Lauth, 1978), as cited by Modlin, 2019:231). When preparing budgets for the following year or a specific project, the planners start from a zero base without earmarking funds for specific

areas. Each line of expenditure is evaluated and justified as a priority item. Redundant projects would not receive an allocation or the allocated funds would be redirected to other projects (Unoli, Adeyemi, & Onuora, 2016:28). The same principle applies to curriculum reform.

Curriculum reform or curriculum transformation can be initiated from a zero base. A zero-based curriculum reform strategy starts from scratch. It assumes that the content taught in public administration should be redesigned to meet current needs of society and challenges facing the discipline. The zero-based approach to curriculum transformation would assume that all topics, themes, trajectories, or programmes offered in public administration are redundant until justified for their existence in the curriculum. Heads of departments and lectures are required to identify priority areas and justify how such programmes would be viable in terms of attracting students and funding to the university (Soetanto & Van Geenhuizen, 2015:26). They should be able to demonstrate if the skills offered are in demand in the country, regionally or internationally. There are researchers who argue that public administration as a discipline should remain value-free and scientific in approach so that it becomes applicable to public service operations, locally, regionally and internationally, thus allowing graduates to be employable across the world. Promoters of the prioritisation of the local content in the curriculum would be required to provide the justification and those who support an internationally accredited curriculum would justify the content or modules they incorporate into the curriculum (Van Jaarsveldt et al., 2018: 1). The zero-based approach to curriculum reform is objective and cost-effective in that only relevant content is sustained.

THE INCREMENTAL APPROACH TO CURRICULUM REFORM

Lindblom (1958) developed the incrementalism theory which was further modified in the 1960s and 1970s to address various dimensions of public administration. Incrementalism is a theory that is applied to policy-making processes and implementation of ideas (Hayes, 2017:1). It is contended that rational decision-making is not easy to make in situations where various groups have diverse perspectives on a subject. Various parties or interest groups are more likely to disagree on many fronts. The lack of consensus could be related to purpose of change or inadequate knowledge base about the subject matter (Hayes, 2017:1). The incremental approach to curriculum transformation advocates for a consultative process in which various stakeholders agree to the planned change but deviating from the status quo in small proportions. If there is a significant change to be made to an existing policy or programme, that should happen through a gradual accumulation of small changes that are implemented over time (Hayes, 2017:1). The gradual incremental process is referred to as seriality which denotes a gradual orderly progression (Hayes, 2017:1). The incremental approach emphasises mutual adjustment to existing structures or programmes and political compromise among competing parties (Chon & Ahn, 2014: 194).

The incremental approach to curriculum reform in South Africa could be more ideal as it adopts a conservative approach and seeks to strike a balance between the apartheid public administration curriculum and the post-apartheid curriculum which focuses on democracy and diversity. The fundamental courses or modules that form the foundation of public administration across the globe are more likely to be retained in curriculum transformation (Rutgers, 2010:1). Universities work in partnerships and collaborations as seen in academic activities such as external examination of

degree programmes in public administration. Universities monitor their standards and the external examination process as a peer review mechanism compels universities to be conservative in retaining standards that are shared with the other universities locally, regionally and internationally (Stensaker, Brandt, & Solum, 2008:211).

THE RADICAL APPROACH TO CURRICULUM REFORM

A radical approach towards curriculum change in the teaching of public administration seeks to overhaul the entire scope of the curriculum so that the end product would be fundamentally different from the traditional public administration curriculum offered in South Africa. The public administration curriculum should be sensitive to the needs of the country. Some researchers would advocate for a complete restructuring of modules and syllabuses, course outlines, teaching and learning processes, student experiential learning programmes, governance processes and university policies that govern the teaching of public administration (Kezar, 2005:634). However, ideas about radical change face resistance as there would be no consensus on the direction to take in radically changing the curriculum (Kezar, 2005:634). Radicalism could create a sense of insecurity among students and lecturers as the approach has no guarantees on quality assurance and compliance with international standards as set by professional bodies and societies that promote public administration as an academic discipline and profession.

Radicalism in the transformation of the public administration curriculum in South Africa is constrained by the historical status of the universities. There is still inequality in terms of economic resources and variety of academic programmes offered in universities. The larger universities tend to have more resources and their academic reputation is built on their past achievements and accolades in the teaching of public administration hence taking a radical approach would be a negation of status or departure from the norm. Radical change could be perceived as a leap in the dark. A radical approach towards changing the colonial library in the teaching of public administration in South Africa could be an unwelcome gesture in some universities and the forum to radically revamp the curriculum is a contested space (Matthews, 2018:48).

THE STATUS QUO STRATEGYY IN CURRICULUM REFORM

Some universities adopt the ``wait and see`` approach before they transform their public administration curriculum. They keep their public administration curriculum as it is. The status quo strategy is adopted when an organisation is driven by fear of the unknown, tradition or serendipity to avoid risk and maintain the current state of affairs as ideal (Martin & Millesen, 2018:20). The stance not to change the curriculum is sometimes taken when the public administration department in a university views itself as apolitical and free from pressures exerted on universities by political parties to change academic offerings in a way that would give political parties mileage in their campaigns. There is a concerted effort by political parties to gain entry into universities and influence what is taught. There are organised political activities by different political parties in the country that are performed in a bid to be associated with universities. In case of a fallout or loss of grip, leaders of political parties may denigrate universities as retrogressive and lacking the vision to transform the curriculum in the interest of the country. Student activism is putting pressure on the need for curriculum transformation and good governance in South African universities (Stuurman, 2018:1).

The conundrum in curriculum reform revolves around the role of the state in the teaching of public administration and the academic autonomy of universities in deciding the content to be taught in public administration. State interference and unwanted intrusion into university governance is a phenomenon experienced in developing countries and developed countries such as the US (Bailey, 2019:1). Government provides funding to state universities hence it has a role to play in monitoring the academic performance of universities. The state recruits interns from universities and it regards universities as the human resource base for its manpower needs. In terms of manpower or skills shortage in the country, the state is inclined to advise universities to produce graduates that are employable. Through the department of labour, the state may prescribe skills that are in short supply in the country. Surveys on critical skills shortage provide human resource forecasts that universities are required to study and advise government on developing national policies on addressing scarce skills shortage in the country. The universities may conduct their own assessment of the employability of their graduates in public administration hence they might not comply with an order to change a curriculum that enables their graduates to get employment. The departments of public administration in universities could employ the status quo strategy to hold on to their curricula. It is argued by some researchers that university students leave universities with the potential to be employed but they would need further skills on the job that the employer would provide (Okeke-Uzodike & Naude, 2018:424). Some universities partner with the public service and engage in collaborative research in determining the content of public administration and relevant skills for graduates needed in the South African workplace (Lau, Johnson, Amaya, LeBaron, & Sanders, 2018:1166). When government works with university departments in public administration curriculum development, there would be no reason why those departments would be required to transform a curriculum that is relevant and already utilised by the public service in its recruitment and training programmes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The approaches to curriculum reform discussed in this paper could be utilised in higher education in the teaching of public administration in South Africa. The approaches are not cast in stone; university departments could modify them to suit their current needs in the teaching of public administration. Curriculum reform should get endorsement from the university leadership for it to have the desired effect. Students as stakeholders should be involved in curriculum transformation. They should be included in university and departmental committees that promote curriculum reform. Curriculum reform programmes should be continuously supported and monitored and not provided for window dressing or a tokenism to ingratiate the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The new content offered in the teaching of public administration should comply with standards set for the discipline by oversight bodies such as the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and peer evaluation reports by other universities. The new curriculum should be subjected to continuous improvement to keep abreast of local, regional and international practices that improve and strengthen the discipline of public administration in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum reform is mandatory in South Africa as university departments are required to change their degree offerings in view of transformation imperatives. The content of degrees and other qualifications in public administration should reflect the South African context. The paradigms of

curriculum reform should serve as guidelines for lecturers to design or rebuild their curricula in a way that is applicable to their teaching and learning context. The curriculum reform process should be managed as a transitional phase in which due care should be exercised to prevent programme failure or loss of interest by implementers. Future studies would focus on curriculum reform solidification processes in South African universities.

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