
Research Policy for the South African Council for Educators (SACE)

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Acronyms and Abbreviations Used

CHE	Council on Higher Education
CPTD	Continuing Professional Teacher Development
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ETDP-SETA	Education, Training & Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authorities
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee (of the CHE)
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
FET	Further Education and Training
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

Foreword

The South African Council for Educators (SACE) is obligated to contribute to the development of the teaching profession in South Africa. It is recognised as one of the most influential post-1994 educational agencies in the country with a number of years' experience in regulating the teaching profession. SACE recognises that unless it initiates a process of self-renewal, its impact in the education system will not be felt. In this regard, SACE has developed a Research Policy with priorities for the next five years as a way of ensuring that its work is evidence-based to influence educational policy, improve educational outcomes and ensure that the teaching profession is regulated in a supportive way.

It is fundamental that SACE's research contribution is focused effectively on areas of national priority. The identification of priorities of areas of national priority has to be performed in coordination with other strategic stakeholders. Moreover, the effective contribution of SACE in the national education policy discourse requires increased internal efficiency. This requires clear mechanisms for undertaking and/or managing research with clear governance processes in relation to research. It is the objective of this Research Policy to provide a clear framework for SACE's research agenda. The implementation of this Research Policy will require the identification of research priorities and their match with internal capabilities.

Notwithstanding its well-known challenges, the South African education system has been successful in many respects. Every day, many children throughout the country make significant progress towards academic success. Nevertheless, the society expects much more of its educational system than it is now getting. To rise to these levels of expectations, we must develop more complex understandings of learning, teaching and the teaching profession in ways that will impact directly on educational improvement and effectiveness.

Needless to say, there are many role-players in the South African educational arena. SACE is but one of them. SACE therefore presents this Research Policy and a

research agenda as its intention to contribute to an already existing body of knowledge in as far as education is concerned which SACE recognises.

In charting forward its research agenda SACE will forge partnerships with research agencies, institutions and individual researchers that produce relevant educational research.

SACE therefore sees its role as two-pronged - on the one hand, it is the management of existing research and utilising such for its purposes. On the other hand, because of the peculiarity of its statutory mandate, SACE will in future also need to undertake primary research in some areas. The intention of SACE's research agenda will be to ensure that the research has an impact on policy and on educational effectiveness and improvement. Researchers have been criticised for talking to one another with no impact filtering down to the system that they are researching about.

Through this Research Policy, SACE will not only turn around the organisation into a learning organisation, but will also have played its role in contributing to evidence-based education policy making in South Africa as well as revolutionising the teaching profession into a research-informed profession.

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1. Introduction

South Africa's education system is vital to our nation's commitment to equal opportunity. Every family should have the right to expect that its children will have a fair chance to develop the abilities they need to participate fully in the social, economic, political, and cultural richness of our society. This noble goal has not yet been fully achieved, however, and we must find ways to improve our educational system to provide more equal opportunities for learning to all of our young people. A vibrant and energetic democracy requires a well-educated and thoughtful citizenry.

The SACE Act, 2000 (Act No. 31 of 2000) spells out the statutory mandate of SACE. In broad parameters, SACE is responsible for regulating and supporting the teaching profession through registration, advocacy, professional development and ensuring adherence to the educators' professional code of ethics. SACE also has an advisory role, one that tends to be downplayed in public discourse. According to the SACE Act, the Council 'must advise the Minister on matters relating to the education and training of educators...' [RSA, 2000(5)(b)(ii)], 'on any educational aspect which the Minister may request it to advise on' [RSA, 2000(5)(e)(i)] as well as 'on any relevant educational aspect' [RSA 2000(5)(e)(v)]. The formulation in the SACE Act makes it mandatory rather than optional for SACE to provide advice to the Minister.

It is therefore a natural outgrowth of the totality of its mandate that SACE will produce regular position papers aimed at advising the Minister on the three aspects outlined in the SACE Act. The SACE Act thus positions SACE as an organisation that can significantly influence education policy in South Africa. The ability of SACE to provide informed, considered and strategic advice to the Minister will depend on its capacity to identify key issues and developments in the country's education system. In all these regards, a strong capability to undertake, analyse and/or manage research would be vitally important for SACE. While there is no emphasis in the Act for SACE to undertake research, except in reference to the development of a professional development policy, the nature of its broad mandate and specific

responsibilities implies a need for SACE to undertake research on an ongoing basis, hence a need for SACE to have a research policy.

The purpose of this Policy is therefore to provide a framework within which SACE will manage and/or undertake research. It is also intended as a means of communicating that framework to the professional community, including researchers, teachers, higher education institutions, the Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training and other stakeholders who may have an interest in the work of SACE and educational research broadly.

In summary, this Research Policy:

- Provides a rationale for SACE to have a research policy, a research agenda and research priorities as a professional council in the first analysis.
- Outlines the purpose and objectives of SACE's research policy.
- Proposes a framework for SACE's research agenda that:
 - Recognises the complexity of the educational policy environment and that the outcomes of policy implementation may or may not be as intended;
 - Is geared towards providing a deeper understanding of the modalities, pace and contradictions of change in the education system at both systemic and institutional levels;
 - Utilises already existing educational data, such as that contained in the Education Management Information System (EMIS), the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), Statistics South Africa, etc.
 - Takes into account educational research undertaken by higher education institutions through their faculties and education policy units (EPUs), individual education researchers, research agencies such as the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) as well as non-governmental organisations and other sister organisations - e.g. the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) and research undertaken by trade unions representing teachers with a view to forging strategic links with these organisations.

2. Why a research policy for SACE?

One of the initial questions to ask is why an organisation such as SACE would need to concern itself with undertaking or managing research or having a research policy. After all, South Africa has a number of organisations which undertake research in education, e.g. universities through their faculties of education and education policy units (EPUs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), quality councils, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP-SETA), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), etc.

If SACE's statutory mandate includes influencing educational policy through its advisory function, the fact is that regularly, a number of policy decisions (including those in the realm of education) are taken based upon research findings. In many instances, these decisions have a major impact on the education sector as a whole and specifically for the educators. This makes research in an educational context very crucial. It is our contention that research is no longer a domain exclusively reserved for university academics, but that it has found a role beyond informing theoretical debate. It now plays a vital contribution in providing evidence to support ideas and opinions in order to inform public policy. Put simply, without evidence to support your point of view, you are 'just another person with an opinion'. SACE must therefore be able to respond to the particular policy context within which the education system finds itself and within which teachers operate.

The connection between research and knowledge is almost undisputed. Due to the rise in the value of knowledge, the role of research in policy debates and policy making is crucial. Research is thus used to identify gaps with current policy and suggest alternative viable options. Governments have become more receptive to evidence-based policy solutions and as a result there is an increased demand for primary research and analysis. To facilitate this process of policy evolution and improvement of planning, assessing and monitoring of the South African education

system, it is essential that policy makers and other actors in society (including SACE) possess reliable information on teachers, schools, students and resources gathered during the research processes.

The ability of SACE to conduct research potentially brings together in a dynamic way three components, i.e. research, policy and the practice of teaching. This nexus is critically important if we are to have an adequately nuanced view of our education system in South Africa. Research is crucial to the development of teaching and the quality of learning; thus both education policy and educational practice should be informed by the best available evidence. The undertaking of research by SACE will potentially result in research-informed professional practice.

An effective system to link research with policy and practice is needed because of the scope and magnitude of educational problems needing attention in South Africa. It is expected of SACE to raise the profile of the teaching profession. Central to the standing of any profession is the commitment to maintain and improve practice and, in the case of teachers, the ability to share good practice to help improve education.

There is a lot of literature pointing towards the notion of teaching as a research-informed professional practice. Therefore one of the ways in which SACE can enhance the profile of the teaching profession is by undertaking research that will force teachers to reflect critically on their practice. The more the practice of teaching is informed by research, the better the teachers can contribute to school improvement for their benefit as well as for the benefit of their pupils.

3. The Scope and Focus of SACE's Research Agenda

One of the main conceptual and methodological issues that SACE will have to tackle in giving effect to this Policy is to define the scope and focus of its research agenda. Firstly, there is the specific advice required by legislation in relation to the education and training of educators. This is very broad and could include areas such as professional development (including CPD), the quality of education and training and by extension the quality of teaching and learning.

Secondly, there is the 'blank cheque' external education policy environment from which SACE is enjoined to advise the Minister of Education upon the Minister's request. This kind of research is referred to as a blank cheque because it has been left broad enough to include anything and has two parts, namely the part where SACE would need to respond to the Minister to request advice on a particular aspect of the education system as well as where SACE could give proactive advice to the Minister on any aspect of the educational system.

Thirdly, there is the need for SACE to determine whether it is making any impact on the education system and the behaviour of the educators through its many areas of responsibility. In other words, this kind of research is both inward-looking and outward-looking. It looks outside in order to improve what is happening on the inside. One could also include satisfaction surveys.

Fourthly, SACE is professionally obliged to undertake research that will improve the actual practice of teaching, including sharing of good practices among teachers.

Finally, there are pieces of research that SACE should ordinarily undertake because of the nature of its mandate as a professional council. For instance, there is no organisation that is better placed to produce periodical reports on the state of the teaching profession than SACE.

4. Proposed research priorities for SACE

The possibilities of research programmes that SACE can initiate are vast and it is not possible for SACE to do everything simultaneously. It is therefore important that SACE develops a list of research priorities for the next five years.

4.1 Research for self-renewal

Before SACE embarks on research programmes that are outward-looking, it is important that SACE first conducts research that is aimed at improving its own internal efficiencies. This is the kind of research that is found in organisations that are typified as learning organisations which are constantly engaged in a process of self-renewal based on findings from impact studies, satisfaction surveys, etc. As a first step, it is important that SACE looks at the totality of its mandate and commission a series of impact studies in relation to registration, professional development, and adherence to the code of ethics. For instance:

- In relation to **professional registration**, it would be important for SACE to determine whether educators attach any professional value to being registered with SACE or whether they see registration as mere compliance with legislation.
- A reflection of SACE's **professional development** programme on change in the classroom also needs interrogation. This will in future include investigating the impact of the continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) system on classroom behaviour on the part of educators;
- Ensuring adherence to the **professional code of ethics** is arguably the most well-known function of SACE. The extent to which the discipline that is meted out to educators who deviate from the code of ethics discourages bad behaviour among teachers is also worth investigating. In other words, will SACE work itself out of a job in this area, which will happen when all educators adhere to the code of ethics? The enforceability of sanctions imposed by SACE against recalcitrant teachers has also been an issue of much debate.

- The implications of the findings on the above for **advocacy and publicity** would therefore need to be formulated.

Linked to the notion of self-renewal is the need for SACE to use evidence to advise government on the review and expansion of its mandate. A number of teaching councils across the world are not only responsible for registration and discipline, but have quality assurance within their mandate.

In South Africa, all statutory professional councils, over and above registration, professional development, advocacy, research and advice, etc., are responsible for the accreditation of programmes which lead to professional registration in their sectors. If professional councils have custodianship over professional standards, it makes perfect sense to connect such custodianship over professional standards to quality assurance so that the professional council is assured during training that professional standards are upheld. SACE is the only statutory professional council in South Africa that has no quality assurance mandate. SACE receives students who are 'finished products' the quality of whose training has been scrutinised by another quality assurance body, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). This is no indictment on the systems of the HEQC which are internationally comparable, peer-driven and have stood the test of time.

4.3 The size and shape of the education and training of educators

As indicated earlier, SACE is obligated to advise the Minister on the education and training of educators. This is a broad topic. However, there has been a lot of debate on the issue of supply and demand of teachers and whether the previous colleges of education should be re-opened. This issue featured prominently in the resolutions of the Teacher Development Summit that was held in July 2009. However, it has been openly and tacitly agreed that the colleges of education cannot be re-opened in the form that they were during the apartheid era. SACE therefore has to be pro-active

and advise the Minister of Higher Education and Training of the size and shape that the education and training should take in order to meet the demand for the production of educators for the country's education system as part of an overall integrated plan for teacher development agreed to at the Teacher Development Summit.

4.3 Research to understand teaching as a professional practice

High priority should be considered for a sustained, comprehensive and coherent programme in support of teachers' professional development. Without improving our understanding of what it will take to produce a well-prepared and professional corps of teachers, school improvement will not be possible. There should be a particular concern with producing new knowledge about connections between professional development and improving education.

General goals of this program of research should be to strengthen knowledge and understanding of:

- how changes in teaching practice can bring about improvements in students' learning;
- how teachers' professional development can bring about improvement in teaching practices; and
- how the work of teaching and activities aimed at professional development can be organized to support improvements throughout teachers' careers.

This research programme will be underpinned by the perspective that teaching is a complex practice and consider the continuous learning of teaching across the teacher's career as an integral part of that practice.

4.4 The state of the teaching profession

It is recommended that SACE undertakes periodic studies on the state of the teaching profession in South Africa and continue to do so every five years. Such reports tend to be qualitative in nature giving a broad overview of the state of the profession and covering key issues that have confronted the teaching profession during intervals. The report will therefore take stock of the profession, make an overall assessment and offer some prognosis. In particular, the state of the profession could cover the following aspects:

- Facts and figures, i.e. the number of teachers in the system, teacher supply and demand, profile of the teaching profession (by age, race and gender), teacher migration, qualifications of teachers (to determine the progress that is being made to ameliorate the problem of under-qualified and unqualified teachers from one report to the next); attrition rate, etc. The PERSAL system and the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) under the custodianship of the Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training respectively will be utilised for this purpose.
- Challenges faced by the teaching profession

5. Implementation

Undertaking primary research will be a costly exercise for an organisation of the size of SACE. Important as it is to invest in primary research, it will require a huge budget as well as a sizeable staff complement. The implementation of SACE's research agenda should move from the premise that there are various organisations (research agencies, universities, NGOs, education policy units, etc.) and individuals with expertise in educational research. So, instead of undertaking primary research, SACE should tap into the research already in existence; undertake meta-analyses of existing research and commission research to individuals and/or agencies, depending on the scope of the work. This is a phased-in approach in relation to the implementation of SACE's research agenda.