Chapter VIII
Collaborative Partnerships and the Application of ICTs in Secondary Education in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics of collaborative partnership involving the private sector, government, and community groups in the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for expanding access to and improving the quality of secondary education in South Africa. Based on the operations and projects of Mindset Learn channel in secondary schools in South Africa, the study explores the enabling factors for the innovative improvement of secondary schooling with ICTs. On the other hand, the study also focused on the challenges facing Mindset Learn innovative approach to secondary education as well as the prospects of the sustaining this model of educational development in South Africa and other countries in Africa. Qualitative data collection methods were used to gather data from key informants.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a report of an instrumental case study of the processes of collaborative partnerships in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in secondary education in South Africa. The organization studied is the Mindset Learn, which is part of the Mindset Network Organization. South Africa has more collaborative partnerships involved in the use of ICTs for the improvement of education more than any other country in Africa.

This study is informed by the need to understand how Mindset Network (MSN) Organization

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applies various forms of ICTs to expand access to and enhance quality secondary education in South Africa; and how their activities in educational technology are sustained. Collaborative partnerships are the backbone of ICT in education policy implementation in South Africa. The democratic government of South Africa made ICT in education policies for two main reasons: first, to use the potential of ICTs to ensure a rapid expansion of quality education; and second, to use modern ICTs to attain a level of national economic competitiveness in the emerging knowledge economy through the training of highly-skilled workers. Despite the development of ICT in education policies, implementation remains a challenge.

One of the logical solutions to the shortage of financial resources for technological intervention in schools is the involvement of the private sector through collaborative partnership models. ICT in education projects require pooling of resources by private companies, civil society, and the government. Against this backdrop, the study investigates the implementation processes of ICT in education policy by collaborative partnerships in South Africa through the following key questions:

1. What factors enable the implementation of ICT in secondary schools by collaborative partnerships in South Africa?
2. What challenges face collaborative partnerships in the implementation of ICT in secondary schools in South Africa, and how are solutions to these challenges negotiated among partners?

Each of the above research questions are answered through the analysis of interview data and the archival and policy documents from the field. These questions are approached from the perspectives of policy network and actor-network theoretical frameworks. The methodological framework of the study consisted primarily of field research carried out in South Africa. The fieldwork consisted of semistructured interviews with key informants such as government officials, officials of Mindset Network Organization, and representatives of businesses and organizations that are members of Mindset Network. Other qualitative instruments employed in the research include direct observation in secondary schools where MSN projects are located, and the review of government and project documents.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is growing evidence that ICTs may be the only feasible and economically sound means of expanding access to and improving the quality of secondary education, both in South Africa and the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Isaacs, 2002). ICTs are used in education for three purposes: to widen access to education, to raise its quality, and to reform it. Perraton (2004) argues that the last two applications shade into each other as qualitative change can be seen as a way of reforming and transforming education. For these reasons, the interest to use ICTs to support secondary educational initiatives in South Africa and Africa in general, has increased dramatically in the last decade. As Hawkins (2002) rightly observed, successful integration of ICTs in education cannot be handled alone by the ministry or department of education in the developing world. Hence, there is the need for strategic collaboration between the government, private companies, and the civil society.

However, a major gap exists within present research and understanding of the role of collaborative partnerships in ICT in education policy implementation in South Africa and other countries in SSA. A survey carried out by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) confirmed that while financial issues are critical, a major obstacle to successfully adopting ICTs in African education is the establishment of the political and institutional frameworks necessary to sustain such initiatives

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