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 partner-
ships are the backbone of ICT in education policy
implementation in South Africa. The democratic
government of South Africa made ICT in educa-
tion 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 competitive-
ness 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 govern-
ment. 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 part-
nerships 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
widens access to education, to raise its quality, and
to reform it. Perraton (2004) argues that the last
two applications shade into each other as quali-
tative 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, suc-
cessful 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 success-
fully adopting ICTs in African education is the
establishment of the political and institutional
frameworks necessary to sustain such initiatives
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