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Stakeholders' perceptions on political instability and its influence on policy implementation within the Lesotho education sector

Kelello A. Rakolobe 

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, National University of Lesotho, Maseru, Lesotho and University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa
kelello33@gmail.com

Kevin L Teise 

Centre for the Advancement of Rural and Inclusive Education Research, Sol Plaatje University, Kimberley, South Africa

Abstract

Lesotho's political landscape is marked by political instability, which has resulted in a dysfunctional state and division among Basotho over the years. This situation also negatively affected the Lesotho education sector. In particular, education policy implementation has been negatively affected because, to be effective and realise its aims and objectives, education policy needs to be implemented in a politically stable context. In this article, we report on stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of political instability on the implementation of education policies in Lesotho. The study reported on here was guided by complexity theory, and it is qualitative in nature with data being collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. Our study revealed that political instability in Lesotho lead to constant changes in decision-making political office bearers, thus affecting the continuity of education policy implementation. The unstable political context, partisan politics, lack of political will and fragmented policies adversely affected education policy implementation in Lesotho. Failure by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to address these factors implies a ministry that assumes that education policies are self-executing and unaffected by context. Amongst others, we recommend that the MoET develops an overarching education policy framework amid political turmoil, inform policy implementation, and ensure continuation.

Keywords: education policy; education policy implementation; partisan politics; political context; political instability; political will

Introduction and Background

Political instability is one of developing countries' most intractable social problems (Matlosa, 1997). Lesotho is no exception because it is characterised by various periods of political instability. Over the years, Lesotho has experienced levels of political instability that prompted the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and other African countries to intervene. With the country being ruled by a series of unstable coalition governments since 2012, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022 Country Report identifies political instability as one of Lesotho's biggest challenges. Political instability impacts on the delivery of basic services and, more specifically, the implementation of education policies and the delivery of quality education. This jeopardises the vision of the Lesotho government, which aims to "... make education available to all and [to] adopt policies aimed at securing that education is directed to the full development of human personality and sense of dignity and strengthening the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Kingdom of Lesotho, 1993:s. 28(a)–(e)).

While this vision appears noble and moral, the realisation depends on an education system operating within a politically stable context. The Lesotho Education Sector Plan (2016–2026) identifies limited implementation of policies as one factor that hinders the provision and attainment of quality education in Lesotho (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016). A study by the Lesotho Ministry of Development Planning in 2014 equally identified a gap in policy implementation within the education sector. This study revealed that despite the efforts by the Ministry of Education and Training (hereafter MoET) to develop policies to curb specific problems, those problems persist (Ministry of Development Planning, 2014). So, while the Lesotho government and MoET might have the vision to implement policies aimed at improving the quality of education and the living conditions of the Basotho, we argue that political instability hampers education policy implementation in the country.

Various authors have written about political instability in Lesotho (Leshoele, 2021; Mahlakeng & Solomon, 2013; Matlosa, 1997; Maudeni, 2010; Rakolobe & Kapa, 2018; Sejanamane, 2017; Shale, V 2017; Tsoeu-Ntokoane, Kali & Lemaire, 2022). Many authors have also written about reasons for policy implementation failure in Lesotho (Imurana, Haruna & Kofi, 2014; Morojele, 2012; Mosia, 2014; Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). However, none reported on the impact of Lesotho's political instability on education policy implementation. In this article, we report on stakeholders' perceptions of the influence of political instability on policy implementation in the Lesotho education sector. Firstly, we define political instability and then reflect on the Lesotho political context. Having done that, we give an account of policy implementation within the context of an unstable state, after which we present our findings. A brief discussion follows the findings.

The Concept of Political Instability

The definitions of the concept of political instability vary depending on different authors. Ndokang and Tsambou (2015, in Galjour, Havik, Aaby, Rodrigues & Mpinga, 2021:2) define political instability as “unforeseen and unexpected events such as the end of a government or of an electorate that occurs either legally or by force.” For Adefeso (2018), political instability is the propensity for a change in the executive arm of government, either by constitutional or unconstitutional means. DG Morrison and Stevenson (1971) define political instability as a condition in political arrangements in which the institutional structure of authority breaks down, and the expected compliance to political authority is replaced by political violence. Political instability can, therefore, be associated with government overthrow or replacement – either through peaceful or violent means.

Political instability emanates from a public sector that is heavily politicised. For Mulgan (1998, in Rakolobe & Kapa, 2018), politicisation of the public sector refers to any type of appointment which contradicts the principles of a politically neutral public service. Politicisation produces poor quality and poor-performing state institutions and promotes public sector corruption and micro-management by politicians or political parties (Ban, 2014). More so, the politicisation of the public sector provides fertile ground for political instability. Various factors contribute to politicising the public sector and to political instability. Among these are factionalism in political institutions, poverty, low level of economic development and other economic, political, and demographic factors (Omelicheva, 2011).

Regular and irregular government transfers characterise political instability, the appointment of partisans into key government positions, politically motivated assassinations, revolutions, periods of politically motivated unrest, rebellion, coups d'état, and civil wars (Asiedu, 2006; Campos & Nugent, 2002; Rakolobe & Kapa, 2018). Subsequently, political instability is also marked by frequent changes of ministers, staff in higher political and bureaucratic positions, and frequent shifts in coalitions (Cohen, 2023). The frequent turnover in political decision makers and bureaucrats necessarily results in the government not being able to perform its basic functions of service delivery (Galjour et al., 2021), it reduces development (Adefeso, 2018), and it also leads to deep-rooted underdevelopment and poverty (Lane & Ersson, 2004; Shumetie & Watabaji, 2019).

Political instability erodes the ability of governments to execute their governance responsibilities, and it casts doubt on the government's ability to remain in power. Since

policies are governance tools, a politically stable context should be created to ensure the effective implementation thereof. Such a context is equally crucial for policy implementation in Lesotho and the education sector.

Political Instability in Lesotho

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a small mountainous kingdom enclaved by the Republic of South Africa (Tsoeu-Ntokoane et al., 2022). Lesotho finds itself in a unique situation that, for some, defies the logic of small countries. Despite its relatively small size, the population's homogenous nature, and religious harmony, Lesotho is politically remarkably unstable (Maudeni, 2010; Sejanamane, 2017). The country was a British protectorate from 1868 until 1966, when it attained independence and changed its name from Basutoland to Lesotho (Khama, 2018). A review of Lesotho's political history suggests that even before its independence, the country displayed signs of political instability ('Nyane, 2018; Vhumbunu, 2015). While independence from British rule was supposed to bring socio-political progress and stability, the opposite seems to have happened.

Since attaining independence in 1966, Lesotho has experienced severe political instability, which has risen to disastrous proportions in recent years. For Rakolobe and Kapa (2018), the political instability and the subsequent collapse in governance and service delivery in Lesotho could be traced to the politicisation of the public sector. However, it is also linked to the formation of various ineffective coalition governments in Lesotho (Shale, V 2017). These governments created countless political challenges or coalition dilemmas (Shale, S 2021), leading to fragile and unstable governments; this further polarised Basotho on all levels and exacerbated the country's political instability.

Political instability in Lesotho is marked by security threats because of a polarised security sector, the appointment of partisan officials in key government positions, repressive military rule, election rigging, coups and attempted coups, motions of no confidence in the various governments, alleged assassinations by the Lesotho military, internal political factions, the erosion of the respect of the rule of law, paralysis of service delivery and the total collapse of governments (Leshoele, 2021; Mahlakeng & Solomon, 2013; Rakolobe & Kapa, 2018; Shale, V 2017). This situation hinders political development and negatively impacts Lesotho's economic growth and development (Leshoele, 2021; Mahlakeng & Solomon, 2013), as is evident in the poverty trap and underdevelopment in which Lesotho has been caught up.

Furthermore, Lesotho's political instability resulted in coalition governments with remarkably

short life spans and a subsequent failure to complete their office terms as dictated by the Constitution (Mokotso, 2019). Recently, Lesotho has held three national elections impelled by votes of no confidence against political leaders and office bearers (Feyissa, 2019; Mohlamenyane, 2018). In addition, coalition governments in Lesotho also heightened corruption, the abuse of floor-crossing, the politicisation of the public sector, the misuse of motions of no-confidence, undue interference in judicial matters and a rise in the government expenditure because of massive cabinets with excessive benefits (Pherudi, 2022). New office bearers were appointed with each new coalition government, resulting in discontinuity and instability in government and the education sector. This instability adversely affects education and the implementation of education policy, and it has a severe and detrimental impact on delivering quality education to the Basotho.

The BTI 2022 Country Report (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022:16) confirms that in Lesotho...

[t]here is a degree of polarisation in government. Principal secretaries who are chief accounting officers of government ministries are appointed on the basis of their political affiliations. This also applies to other government appointments, such as the heads of SOEs, ambassadors and members of the armed forces. This is the major cause of instability in Lesotho, as security forces tend to pursue a political agenda rather than protecting people or property.

The preceding excerpt indicates that Lesotho's political context has long driven the country into continuous political instability. Imurana et al. (2014) are of the opinion that many African public policies face challenges in the implementation stage, making it difficult to address the significant problems for which they are established; this has severe implications for the development of a country as education is generally perceived to be a mechanism that is primary to development. For policies to be effectively implemented, "the expected functionality required by an identified stakeholder" (Brynard, 2009:558) should be achieved. We contend that political instability in Lesotho creates a context in which policies cannot effectively be implemented for them to achieve their expected functionality.

In 2022 Lesotho took to the polls again to elect a new government – the fourth election in 10 years. Battered by political instability and its consequences on the implementation of education policy, the Basotho people hope that this new government will bring political stability and lasting peace as is anticipated by the Lesotho Constitution. Political stability is essential not only for peace in Lesotho, but also to create a politically stable context for effective implementation of education policy because policy implementation cannot occur within a context of political instability.

Policy Implementation Within a Context of Political Instability

Public policy falls within the sphere of government. Anderson (2000:185, in Dye, 2013:3) defines public policy as "whatever governments choose to do or not to do", making it a government responsibility. On the other hand, policy implementation is the actual effecting of the law and where relevant stakeholders work together to achieve the set goal and objectives (Khan & Khandaker, 2016). For Yaro, Arshad and Salleh (2016:3), the implementation of public policy represents "routine governmental processes of putting the government's targeted goals into action, which government agencies or its officials usually do in accordance with the stipulations of Law." Imurana et al. (2014) define the implementation of public policy as an operational phase where policy is translated into action with the hope of solving some general problem.

Implementation of policy is sensitive to political conditions and political turmoil. As such, the implementation of policy is severely influenced by conflicts and struggles among individuals and groups, officials and agencies, who hold conflicting ideas, interests, values, and information on policy public issues (Anderson, 2006). Malen (2006:85) describes policy implementation as "a dynamic political process that affects and reflects the relative power of diverse actors and the institutional and environmental forces that condition the play of power." Hardee, Feranil, Boezwinkle and Clark (2004:4) claim that policy development occurs in varying political settings where "various issues of power come to the fore, that not only affects how policies are developed but also how they are implemented." This not only makes policy implementation sensitive to contextual factors and thus "context-specific" (Chakrabarty & Chand, 2016:8) but also renders it a "practice of power" (Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2009:774). One may, therefore, expect that within a politically volatile and unstable context, the exercise of power, corruption, compromise, bribery and deception all become integral to the policy implementation process and that it largely also determines the extent of policy implementation.

Little (2011:502) argues that "[h]ow policies are generated, and whether they take root, depends to an extent on the contours of the contemporary political environment." Therefore, a politically stable or unstable environment determines the extent to which a policy will indeed be implemented. Policy implementation is, therefore, impacted mainly by context, and hopes of effective policy implementation will be severely hampered in a context of political instability because political instability fails to create that "given institutional

setting and ... specific organisational structure” (Sager & Gofen, 2022:348) that is required for the implementation of policy. With this article we aim to report on stakeholders’ perceptions of political instability in Lesotho and its impact on the implementation of education policy in the country. Participants’ perceptions of political instability in Lesotho and its effect on the implementation of education policy is presented in the next section.

Theoretical Framework

Johnson and Christensen (2012:62) define a “theory [as] an explanation or exploratory system that discusses how a phenomenon operates and why it operates as it does.” Additionally, while Bordens and Abbott (2014:33) view a theory as “an explanation of some aspect of the natural world”, for Luft, Jeong, Idsardi and Gardner (2022), it informs a study’s questions, methods used to collect data, as well as how that data are analysed and discussed. As such, a theoretical framework is meant to guide the research process and to explain the complexity of the implementation of policy in Lesotho.

For Bhuyan, Jorgensen and Sharma (2010) the process of implementing policy is influenced by various factors such as the content of the policy, the nature of the policy process, the actors involved in the process, and the context in which the policy is designed and must be implemented, which implies that the implementation of education policy is a rather complex process. The complexity theory is the theoretical framework that underpinned this study.

Complexity theory suggests that we “shift our analysis from individual parts of a system to the system as a whole; as a network of elements that interact and combine to produce systemic behaviour that cannot be broken down merely into the actions of its constituent parts” (Morrison, K 2006:3). For Hogue and Lord (2007:373) complexity theory furthermore proposes that “organizations are best understood as *complex systems* comprised of dynamic networks of relationships.” Part of these relationships is the link that exist between policy and the context within which it is supposed to be implemented. In addition, complexity theory is also concerned “with environments, organisations, or systems that are complex in the sense that very large numbers of constituent elements or agents are connected to and interacting with each other in many different ways” (Mason, 2008:2). It is for this reason that Burns and Köster (2016:44) remind us that

complexity theory cautions us not to marginalize or disperse with what is apparently trivial or inexplicable. What may appear to be marginal may be part of the complexity of a system, and may constitute the critical level above which emergent properties and behavior become possible.

Nothing should, therefore, be considered as unimportant or too insignificant. As such we should be mindful of the impact of the political context on the implementation of education policy in Lesotho. Insights generated through complexity theory guard against ignorance and prejudice, and sensitises us that context in general, but political context in particular, should not be overlooked or relegated as trivial when the implementation of education policy in Lesotho is investigated.

Complexity theory was regarded an appropriate theory because “policy processes are complex not only because policies are social constructions but also because the natural processes that public policies interact with are also complex” (Morçöl, 2012:21). The choice of complex theory was further informed by the conviction that the MoET “does not recognise the complex nature of [its] policy environment” (Cairney, 2012:348), especially as it relates to the implementation of education policies and the impact of political instability on the success thereof.

Research Methodology

In this study, we adopted a qualitative approach because it was concerned with subjective meanings that people attach to their experiences, opinions, attitudes and behaviour (Daniel & Sam, 2011). Data were collected from 20 purposively selected participants with whom individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. The participants comprised three school principals; two representatives from the Planning Unit, three teachers from various schools; two print and two audio media representatives; two teacher trade union representatives; two members from the Teaching Council; representatives from two non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and two representatives from the Education Secretaries. These participants were all differently involved in the implementation of policy in Lesotho education, and they had experienced the impact of political instability on the implementation of education policy. Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Crowe, Inder & Porter, 2015). The University of the Free State granted ethical clearance, and participants consented to the interviews. Trustworthiness was ensured by ensuring that the data were secured and that access thereto was limited to only the two authors. We did not interfere with the participants’ responses and the participants were also asked to ensure what was written down, was actually what had been said. We also clearly explained our data collection and analysis procedures. Pseudocodes were used to safeguard the anonymity of the participants and they are as follows: School Principals – P1, P2, P3; Planning Unit PU1, PU2; Teachers – T1, T2, T3; Print Media – PM1, PM2; Audio Media – AM1,

AM2; Trade Unions – TU1, TU2; Teaching Council Members – TC1, TC2; NGOs – N1, N2 and Education Secretaries – ES1, ES2.

Results

The results are shared under the following themes identified from the data: unstable political context, partisan politics; lack of political will, and fragmented policies.

Unstable Political Context

The participants pointed out that long-term political instability in Lesotho negatively affected the implementation of education policy. PM1 indicated that challenges with policy implementation were because Lesotho has “*not had a stable government in about 8 years now*” and that “*this political instability is affecting so many things. It’s really sad.*” TU1 concurred that the political instability in Lesotho “*is disastrous for smooth policy implementation.*”

The interviews show that Lesotho has experienced several government changes in recent years. AM2 stated that due to “*... political instability, Lesotho is the only country in the world that I know which has changed governments more than three times in the space of 4 years.*” According to AM1, the “*forever changing [Lesotho] government is very problematic. This thing of changing ministers and PSs [principal secretaries] frequently is causing regress in our development.*” PM2 concurred that political instability in Lesotho lead to “*ministers that do not stay long in a ministry, resulting in lack of continuity ... before a minister even knows who s/he is working with, they are either reshuffled or the government collapses.*” For PM2, this lack of stability “*affects policy implementation in a very negative way as each minister never gets a chance to actually know the policies so that s/he can monitor their progress.*”

PM1 expressed same sentiments about the frequency of political changes in Lesotho, stating that it “*is bad as ministers are frequently changed. Sometimes a minister just serves for 6 months and is reshuffled, or the government changes.*” ES2 also said that from 2017 to 2020, Lesotho’s education sector has had four different ministers in the MoET. For ES2, this situation “*is volatile and not conducive for effective implementation of education policies.*” TU1 aptly expressed frustration with the political instability and regular government changes:

From 2017 to date, [Lesotho] has had four Ministers of Education. How will people that are being reshuffled that much get time and opportunity to know policies in the Ministry? The answer is simple, they can’t, and that’s why our education will remain poor.

Against this backdrop, participants pleaded for more political stability in the country that would

bring some permanency into the education sector. ES2 said that the “*government should avoid too many reshuffles of ministers and principal secretaries (PSs) as that negatively affects education policy implementation.*” The above view was echoed by PM2, who stated that Lesotho “*governments no longer complete their 5-year term in office; instead, they are frequently toppled.*”

The desperate desire for political stability and effective policy implementation is expressed by ES1, who said: “*I am hopeful that the current ongoing national reforms should see the light of the day. I have hope that it is through the reforms that education policy implementation will be affected.*”

Responses suggest that the frequent reshuffling of ministers and principal secretaries (PSs) and the recurrent toppling of governments bring about political instability. According to participants, this adversely affected the implementation of education policy in the Lesotho education sector. It results in a lack of resources to ensure effective policy implementation. In addition, it also results in an apparent lack of support for the implementation of policy.

Partisan Politics

Participants referred to partisan politics, which according to them, also contributed towards political instability and the subsequent challenges in the implementation of education policy in the Lesotho education sector. ES1 stipulated as follows:

Partisan politics have also contaminated our systems as people are no longer hired on merit but on political affiliations. This means that we now have people who do not have the right qualifications for the jobs they hold. The unfortunate part with political appointments is that even donkeys can hold important positions in government. We should also, as a country, avoid appointing principal secretaries (PSs) politically as that breaches continuity in the Ministry, as PSs are changed frequently due to political instability. Too many reshuffles of PSs and ministers that are not even done on merit should also stop for education policies to be effectively implemented.

Partisan politics suggest that officials in critical decision-making positions and in the Ministry of Education are appointed based on political party affiliation, not merit. When affiliation to a political party becomes the primary criterion for appointment, effective implementation of policy is bound to suffer, and quality education will not be realised.

Lack of Political Will

The participants further indicated that political office bearers in Lesotho lacked the political will to implement education policy. According to PM1, “*Politicians [in Lesotho] are not interested in improving education ... these politicians just do things so that the Lesotho people can clap hands*

for them.” AM2 also commented that “*there is a need for political will so that all education policies that are developed get to be implemented.*”

N1 blamed a lack of political will on recent teacher strikes in Lesotho because of the “*failure by government to make teachers and proprietors aware of new policies that guide education.*” AM1 also indicated that the implementation of education policy in Lesotho is not a priority because the “*government has its own priorities ... one would think education should be one of them, but the priorities of government seem to lie elsewhere.*” AM1 continued stating that “*the government does not support the Ministry of Education enough to fulfil its mandate [of, amongst others, policy development and implementation].*” A lack of political will and commitment is also evident in the words of PU2, who claims that the Lesotho government

... is always complaining about limited resources ... however, there are other areas that serve the interests of politicians where money is overspent unnecessarily ... we need to prioritise education as a nation and ensure it gets enough resources because it is the backbone of development.

Participants suggested a need for political will for the effective implementation of education policy to be realised. In this regard, there are calls for reform of the Lesotho education sector; this is according to PM1, who articulated a need for “*reform of the education sector so that we level the field for effective policy implementation.*” This is because the current education context is not conducive.

Fragmented Education Policies

Participants also indicated that Lesotho’s education policies were disintegrated, not harmonised, or not in sync. PU1 pointed out that the biggest challenge was “*... that Lesotho education has disintegrated policies ... at times some units and departments in our Ministry of Education develop policies without knowledge or input from the Planning Unit.*”

PU2 confirms that MoET tends “*to develop and implement Unit or Department-based policies that are not consolidated or coordinated by the Planning Unit ... the frequent changes in government and in MoET affect policy continuity, and it results in disjointed policies.*” For PU1, this “*uncoordinated formulation is very problematic as it means Lesotho [education] policies are not harmonised.*” TU1 was of the view that policy implementation in the Lesotho education sector has failed “*because [Lesotho] has stand-alone policies.*”

The participants ascribed the fragmentation of policy development and implementation within the Lesotho education sector to the lack of an overarching policy framework that would steer policy processes amid political instability and bring stability and policy unity to the sector. In this regard, PU2 said that “*there is lack of Education*

Sector Policy”, and supported by N1, who commented that “*you know ... I searched for the Lesotho Education Sector Policy, but found none ... I even asked friends working in the Ministry about the existence of such a policy, but they told me it does not exist.*” AM1 confirmed that Lesotho education has “*no proper education sector policy.*” TU1 regarded such a policy framework as necessary because “*there are so many education policies that have been developed but are not being implemented ... it is time for us to have a consolidated education policy....*”

It seems as if the Lesotho education sector is experiencing a misalignment between the various policies and units within the sector responsible for policy development and policy implementation, which can be attributed to political instability as office bearers do not have enough time in office to allow them to notice such mishaps. This results in non-harmonised policies within MoET that are not intertextually linked.

Discussion

Unstable Political Context

The implementation of public policy can only thrive in a politically stable country (Imurana et al., 2014:199). Political stability has evaded the Lesotho political landscape for the past decades, and political instability has become endemic to and synonymous with Lesotho. Political instability eroded governance in Lesotho, and it resulted in the implementation of education policy being exposed to “*inevitable changes in political regimes, government structures, economic conditions, and social environments*” (Mthethwa, 2012:41). This resulted in an uncondusive context for successful implementation of education policy that advanced the politicisation of the education sector, partisan politics, and exposed a lack of political will. It also gave rise to disjointed, misaligned, and incoherent policies. Barugahara (2015) states that political instability does not provide room for implementing coherent policies. Lane and Ersson (2004) maintain that political instability makes any consistency or coherence of policy virtually impossible. As such, the Lesotho education sector became incapable of realising its moral vision of providing quality education through the successful implementation of education policies.

Partisan Politics

Partisan politics result in appointing people into key public sector positions based on political affiliation instead of merit (Letsie, 2015). In Lesotho, partisan politics made way for cadres and those who have been faithful and loyal to the political leaders to be rewarded with top positions – for example, of Ministers of Education and PSs within the education sector. These partisan appointments generally lack the skills and expertise

to, for example, effectively manage the education portfolio and execute the related responsibilities. However, despite their inability to effectively perform their duties, these partisans and comrades are appointed into government where they are entrusted with the education of the Basotho, the future of the Basotho youth and the development of the country. Lesia (2015) confirms that in Lesotho, severe capacity constraints amongst parliament members and civil servants limit their ability to carry out their responsibilities. Such incompetence normally results in inefficiency and limited continuity in delivering government programmes (Peters, 2004, in Rakolobe & Kapa, 2018), as has been witnessed in education in Lesotho.

Lack of Political Will

A lack of political will is observed in the context of political instability. Cohen (2023) argues that political instability impacts the political will to implement policies. Since political will matters for the success of policies (Cerna, 2013), the lack of political will inevitably leads to failures in the implementation of policy. Political will is about a commitment by the government and officials to ensure policy implementation by making financial or human resources available. It also finds expression in the consistent support for any policy implementation efforts through effective administration and clear policy frameworks. This kind of commitment towards policy implementation is paramount as it drives policy success (Brynard, Cloete & DeConing, 2013). In the Lesotho education sector, the lack of political will and commitment manifests in the MoET's failure to make resources available for effective policy implementation, inability to train for effective policy implementation, and failure to provide a clear overarching policy framework or road map. These failures of MoET suggest that the Lesotho government does not have the determination or the appetite to create an environment within which education policies could be implemented effectively.

Fragmented Policies

Overarching policy frameworks enhance the implementation of policy, ensure continuation of policy continuation, and provide the need for coherent, intelligible policies. Coupled with the frequency at which education ministers, principals, secretaries and officials are replaced in Lesotho, the absence of a roadmap for the implementation of policy may create volatility that could destabilise the education sector, thus negatively affecting its performance. Incessant government changes result in a "political cycle" (Imurana et al., 2014:199), which negatively affects the efficient implementation of policies (Ekpiken & Ifere, 2015:45). Delaney (2017:11) maintains that "if a

policy is not acceptable to those in government, its successful implementation is seriously jeopardised." Frequent changes in decision makers and key officials also lead to a lack of a cohort of "decision makers with a common understanding of a particular [education] problem that is committed to supporting a potentially effective policy solution" (Cohen, 2023:406). Change in government is accompanied by change in priorities (Ahmed & Dantata, 2016:63). In Lesotho, changes in government, brought to the fore new priorities which further strained the policy-implementation capacity of the MoET.

Within a highly politicised and politically unstable context such as in Lesotho, changes in priorities were deliberate and designed to ensure the political survival of those in power. This is evident in the appointment of partisans and comrades who do not have the requisite skills to do what is expected from them. Investing in education was not prioritised as the switch to new governmental aims and objectives required new officials who were sympathetic to the new government to be appointed. Moreover, it also required that all available resources be directed towards the struggle for political survival and that "old" and existing policies are discarded – actions which seriously jeopardised continuance in the implementation of policies in the education sector in Lesotho.

Political instability in Lesotho and the subsequent failure of the MoET to implement education policies threaten the fundamental role that education is expected to play – that is, to improve the lives of the Basotho people. Instead, deliberate failures to implement education policy are used for political advantage by those in power (Welsh, 2014). The crises with the implementation of education policy caused by political instability in Lesotho is succulently summarised by Sejanamane (2017:para. 2), who claims that at "... the heart of the problem in Lesotho has always been governments which are not focused on answering the needs of the people but answer to the needs of a small clique of politicians allied or subservient to the military."

Conclusion

With this article we aimed to reflect on the participants' views on the political situation in Lesotho and its impact on the implementation of education policy. We note that political instability severely hampered the implementation of education policy in Lesotho. The Basotho hope for an effective and quality education sector to lift them out of poverty and improve their lives. However, this will only be achieved through the effective implementation of education policies. The extent to which the effective implementation of policy will become a reality in Lesotho depends on political

stability in the country; this makes political stability a *sine qua non* for effective implementation of policy. Lesotho has recently elected a new government, and we will have to wait and see what the impact thereof will be. What is certain, however, is that the country needs political stability for its education policies to be implemented effectively. In addition, developing an overarching education policy framework will, amid political turmoil, inform policy implementation, and ensure continuation. Such a framework can also serve as a standard against which the implementation of policy is measured.

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Authors' Contributions

KAR conducted the interviews, provided the data, part of the conceptual framework, the methodology and the theoretical framework. KLT wrote the manuscript, provided part of the conceptual framework and did the data analysis. Both authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

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