

REPORT SUMMARY:
EMERGING RESEARCH FINDINGS ON QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION WORKSHOP
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basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP

The **Strategic Planning, Research and Coordination Chief Directorate** hosted a workshop titled *Emerging Research Findings on Quality Basic Education* on 24 October 2012. The purpose of the workshop was to create an environment within which emerging research findings on the quality of education could be presented and discussed in anticipation of the upcoming review of policy in education over the first 20 years of democracy; as well as to facilitate well researched quality aspects into education programmes and interventions.

Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Provincial Education Department (PED) officials as well as selected external stakeholders attended the workshop

2. OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATIONS

Presentations were delivered on the following key areas:

a) Early educational inequalities and the impact of Grade R by Dr Stephen Taylor

The presentation highlighted the cognitive disparities caused by social inequalities amongst learners entering the schooling system, providing evidence that parental social economic status, education, influence, and opportunities affect the learning ability of learners and successful schooling in the current education system. Research further indicates that large portions of South African (SA) children in Grade 5 are functionally illiterate, one root cause being a failure to learn to read in the early grades. As all learning builds on earlier learning, learners with weak foundations learn less over time.

Research indicates that interventions during Early Childhood Development can be expected to have strong impacts on school readiness. Educational policy has greatly expanded access to Grade R across the country, increasing enrollment from about 200 000 to over 700 000 learners since 2001. Increased enrollment has been particularly high in economically poorer provinces but the quality of Grade R and ultimately its ability to foster effective learning remains a challenge.

b) Poverty and privilege: Primary school Inequalities in South Africa by Mr Nicolas Spaul

The current schooling system should be seen as two different schooling systems, the first being that of the wealthy successful learning Quintile 5 institutions and the second being that of underperforming schools comprising of schools in Quintile 1 to 4. Disparities in effective learning indicate that the education system does not perform at a reasonable average performance standard but rather as the top 25% of the wealth quintile performing exceptionally in reference to the South African standard and the remaining 75% of the wealth quintile performing at very low levels.

Resultantly education policy and reform should not be structured into a single system for all schools as this creates a generalized approach that does not adequately focus on problems at hand but compares highly contrasted schooling systems against each other, expecting norms, processes and incentives to be similar for both systems, which is unrealistic. Lessons should be learnt from the 25% of high performing

schools as well as from successful Quintile 1 and 2 schools in order to develop relevant policy to affect successful and effective learning, thus enabling education to be a tool of social transformation.

c) The Annual National Assessments 2011(Public expenditure analysis) Findings and reflections in quality outcomes by Mr Nicolas Spaul

The Annual National Assessments (ANA) have afforded the DBE an opportunity to measure learner and school performance at a standardised level for the first time with exception of the National Senior Certificate. This is particularly significant in measuring the quality of learning in primary school, the foundational level of all education which in turn provides required standardised national information for the Department to adequately assess primary school education and intervene timeously to improve learner outcomes.

In order for ANA to be fully effective one grade of the assessed grades should be externally administrated and verified, subsequently interventions should be detailed and specific in providing detail on how schools should improve their learning and teaching to improve their education and results over time. The results of ANA should be published publicly to empower parents, district officials, schools and learners by reflecting on an accurate assessment of where the learner or school rate in comparison to the expected educational outcomes, other similar schools with regard quintile and then overall on a national scale. This will enable the said stakeholders to improve as they would have a realistic perception of their abilities, empower principles to better direct learning and teaching and empower parents to make better decisions in school choice and parent involvement at schools.

d) Education : Analysis of National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) wave 1 and 2 data sets by Reza Daniels and Nicola Branson

NIDS has established a longitudinal study in which over 30 thousand individuals are followed for an extended period; their data includes migration patterns, progress through school, income indicators, physical health as well as psychological wellbeing. Data that is by far more detailed than the current Departmental school or learner database.

Due to its nature as a longitudinal study NIDS is an opportunity for the DBE to access a broad data set on which better policy may be developed and proposed interventions may be tested prior to universal implementation. To date an educational aspect of NIDS has been developed and its finding include confirmation that the Departmental Quintile system is accurate in its categorisation of schools- that there are very limited differences between quintile 1 to 4 followed by a large gap between these quintiles and quintile 5.

e) Grade 12 mathematics results: Did the 2006 provincial boundary changes have an impact?

In 2006 30 schools were moved from the North West (NW) Province to Gauteng with regard to administration and jurisdiction. These schools have subsequently improved more than other schools remaining in the NW and more than other schools previously in Gauteng. This indicates a positive effect of moving from the NW to Gauteng. Research on the reasons for these improvements is being

undertaken, and once these are identified and categorised they may be replicated nation-wide improving overall student performance.

The paper also discusses the puzzling finding that students in Limpopo perform relatively well in Maths and Science in the National Senior Certificate exams although they perform poorly in Grade 6 ANAs. Further analysis is being conducted to confirm this pattern that Limpopo is an under-performer at the primary school level but a good performer at the National Senior Certificate exam. Once research has been concluded these influencing factors may be replicated or encouraged in other similar schools and provinces.

3. IMPLICATIONS

The presentations and plenary discussions offered insight into the current education system highlighting the areas of improvement and creating the foundation for more meaningful amendments in policy and programme implementation. Key implications include:

- Developing the quality aspect of Early Childhood Development, particularly in Grade R as early intervention substantially improves cognitive ability and learner readiness for attainment of basic education.
- Developing a standard curriculum guideline for Grade R in alignment with the Grade 1 expectations to facilitate easier transition from grade R to grade 1.
- Reviewing the single policy approach to basic education with consideration of developing a dual system targeted at underperforming schools and outstanding schools. This will afford the Department the opportunity to provide greater detail in approach, implementation and interventions as schools would be categorised into similar groups where recommended solutions have relevance and viability.
- Researching, documenting and replicating successful school structures and performance particularly in quintile 1 schools, providing these schools as models and examples to which similar schools under similar conditions may aspire.
- Researching, documenting and replicating successful practices of high performing schools around the country, mostly in quintile 5 and using their experience, programmes and human capital as a resource to assist education overall.
- Selecting a single year of ANA to be externally administered and verified to institutionalise reliability of the ANA results, apply an external national standard and reflect on the difference between mark allocation of the external administrators/markers with that of school teachers to identify and address assessment discrepancies.

- Utilising ANA as an accountability standard instrument in schools, districts and provinces. Institutionalising performance measures and standards across schools to improve overall education particularly from the teaching and school management aspect.
- Utilising ANA as a public empowerment tool to foster civil support of the educational system, parental support and expectations of schools and a true reflection of the learning levels of students.
- Discussing possible relevant indicators which could be incorporated into NIDS as well as identifying which current indicators may assist the DBE in planning, policy review and impact evaluation.
- Pursuing research on the impact of border changes and using these to assess provincial education nationally, developing positive indicators and measures that could be replicated nation-wide.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion this workshop has begun the process of expanding from access to basic education to addressing quality aspects that directly relate to effective learning and relevance of basic education in facilitating further education and employability. Serious consideration of the research and its implications is necessary to improve the socio-economic impact of basic education.

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