

Education as an Essential Service: is South Africa Having Sufficient Support Services to Turn Education into Essential Service?

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ABSTRACT The ruling Party in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC)'s sub-committee after its first meeting from Mangaung Conference (in 2012) and ANC Lekgotla has resolved that education should become an essential service. There is an outcry from different stakeholders that education cannot become an essential service. Some stakeholders indicate that education is not like any other services, and cannot be given essential service status. The idea of making Education essential service was derived from Mangaung Conference Resolution which stated that there is general agreement that education has to be protected from disruptions. Disruption of schooling through industrial action and service delivery protests impact negatively on the stability of schools and the quality of education. In this conceptual paper we are arguing that education cannot become an essential service as there are still schools which are under-resourced throughout the country. These schools are physically, financially and human under-resourced. Schools and educators still need support services. Educators are still waiting for better salaries. The paper will also deal with statutes such as Labour Relations Act. The paper supports stakeholders which argue that education as of now cannot be considered an essential service.

INTRODUCTION

Policies in the South African democratic government are mostly coming from the African National Congress Policy and Elective Conferences. In the conference of the African National Congress (ANC) which was held in December 2012 in Mangaung, the Commission on Education and Health resolved the following:

- There is general agreement that education has to be protected from disruptions.
- A Presidential Commission be established to review the remuneration and conditions of employment of education and health professionals and make recommendations on salary adjustments and wage increases in a manner that protects education and health as national priorities.
- The department must match teaching skills and competencies with positions to which teachers are appointed.
- Post provisioning norms in addition to numbers must be informed by socioeconomic context and curricula needs.
- The department must profile all educators on the basis of their qualification and teaching experience.

The first resolution which says that there is general agreement that education has to be protected from disruptions is the one which is prompting the ANC government to make education essential service. The African National Congress as majority Party in Parliament may enforce education to become essential service.

In this paper, though we agree that education is priority in any country's development, we argue that education cannot become essential service as the Department of Basic Education is to provide basic minimum support services to educators. Remuneration of educators is also essential in the provision of education.

EDUCATION AS ESSENTIAL SERVICE VS SOUTH AFRICAN LAW

According to Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995 essential service means:

- a) A service the interruption of which endangers the life, personal safety or health of the whole or any part of the population;
- b) The Parliamentary service;
- c) The South African Police Service.

Designated Essential Services

According to The Institute for Accountability in Southern Africa (IFAISA) the ESC has over the past fifteen years carried out its mandate and it has, after due notice and public investigation, designated a large number of services as essential services. These are:

- Municipal traffic services and policing
- Municipal health.
- Municipal security.
- The supply and distribution of water.
- The security services of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.
- The generation, transmission and distribution of power.
- Firefighting.
- The payment of social pensions one month after they fall due.
- The services required for the functioning of Courts.
- Correctional services.
- Blood transfusion services provided by the South African Blood Transfusion Service (Brand, 2010).

As far as South African law is concerned, education does not fall under essential service category; if it is interrupted it cannot endanger human life. If the African National Congress wants to declare education as essential service, it will then have to amend Labour Relations Act and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. It should also provide minimum support services to schools and pay market equivalent salaries to the educators.

THOUGHTS ABOUT EDUCATION AS ESSENTIAL SERVICE

Education as essential service is a nice idea which promises to solve a educational problems. It also happens to be wildly unpopular with organised labour and is very likely unlawful under South African jurisprudence. If one is to ask how the country even began to debate the inclusion of education into the essential service category, one is more easily and more likely to end up with a disclaimer about how complicated South African laws are, and how nothing is ever that simple. And that is exactly the conclusion that the ANC reached after a few days of fighting words and confusion (Hlongwane, 2013).

Hlongwane (2013) further states that according to some labour experts, this re-classification may not even be possible, given the way that the Constitution and the Labour Relations Act are written. This is, even on the face of it, a loaded statement, because essential services exist in a category of their own. Unlike other types of jobs, workers employed in jobs categorised as an essential service can never go on strike as a method of industrial action. That option simply doesn't exist. Traditionally, this restriction has been limited to jobs related to the preservation of life, personal safety or the health of people.

One of the main talking points of that discussion (this has only subsequently become obvious) was the provision of declaring the education sector to fall under the special 'essential services' provisions of the Labour Relations Act, which would essentially ban strikes for everyone involved in the sector. The immediate fix is that this would stop teachers from embarking on strikes, which would mean that they would not be allowed to abandon classrooms in order to force a point in a negotiation with their employers (Hlongwane, 2013).

The biggest obstacle to a policy that declares education to be an essential service would be the Constitution of South Africa. It enshrines the right to strike. It basically denies anyone working under that classification the right to demonstrate in the case of a wage negotiation deadlock.

According to Nicholson (2013) Organised labour groups have criticised the ANC National Executive Committee's resolution to try to declare education an essential service, which would lump teachers in with other groups who aren't legally allowed to go on strike, namely police officers, paramedics and emergency workers. Opinion has been split on the issue. Many critics blame South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) for interrupting schooling and are happy the ANC finally want to take decisive action on the dismal education system. Others believe in teachers' right to withdraw their labour when absolutely necessary. Yet others simply point out that it's probably unconstitutional to classify education as an essential service.

SADTU General Secretary Magwena Maluleke spoke to Daily Maverick outside the Department of Basic Education offices. Teacher strikes are just one issue, he said, and stopping them won't solve education problems. Resource issues such as classroom sizes of 150 students and students learning under trees are the greater challenge, said Maluleke. "Declaring education an essential service is not going to build a classroom," he said on the sidelines of the demonstration (Nicholson, 2013).

Nicholson (2013) states further that unions knew that classifying education as an essential service would likely be proposed to solve some of these issues. Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU)'s own analysis of the National Planning Commission (NPC)'s diagnostic report said: "The NPC statement about teachers is two-fold. Teachers are not supported, but teachers are also ill-disciplined, period. They engage in strike action, they hide behind complex labour regulations, they hold union meetings during school hours. In short, the implication is that part of the problem with the education system is the labour market dispensation that governs the education system. Logically the reform that will be proposed is to either ban strike action or place teachers under essential services (as the Democratic Alliance has suggested), introduce flexibility in the education labour market by making it easy to hire and fire teachers, limit unionisation of teachers or devise ways to make it difficult for teacher unions to operate in the education system. If this is the direction that the NPC will be taking, we wish to remind them of the Freedom Charter: 'Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens.'"

According to Nkomo (2013:6) South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) and the South African Onderwys Unie (SAOU) have banded together and accused ANC of a narrow focus and elevating strikes as a main problem over bigger challenges in education.

The key points to remember in this debate are, while teacher strikes impact heavily on a child's right to education, conditions for teaching and learning environments in many schools are not up to par and also prevent children from accessing this right (Schoeman, 2013).

Schoeman (2013) further states that at this point the government also needs to consider the reasons why teachers strike. While salaries are often the reason for protest marches, teachers are also frustrated with poor working conditions, limited resources and poor levels of learning.

While education is essential, declaring it an essential service to merely prevent teachers from striking without addressing the key problems serves no purpose. It is crucial that the government works toward reducing the teacher-to-pupil ratio, create facilities for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, increase access to early childhood development centres and address sanitation and nutrition at schools.

Declaring education an essential service does not negate government responsibility to provide children with quality education. It is important that we strengthen the fabric of our society by allowing children access to the rights set out in our Constitution (Schoeman, 2013).

NEEDED SUPPORT SERVICES FOR QUALITY EDUCATION BEFORE EDUCATION BECOMES ESSENTIAL SERVICE

Besides better remuneration, which is the main cause of industrial action by educator unions, support services needed to minimize industrial action in education system of South Africa before education is categorized as an essential service will be discussed in this paper. Throughout the years, different authors defined support services in various ways. Lazarus (1997:2); Van Schalkwyk (1995:20); Steyn (1997:68); Steyn & Steyn (1997:10); Steyn & Wolhuter (2000:13) and Mashau, Steyn, Van der Walt & Wolhuter (2008:416) define support services as:

- Support services include all human and other resources that provide support to the individual learners and to all aspects of the system.
- Support services are organised outside help given to the individual schools so that their education may run smoothly.
- Support services are specialized non-educational services needed to improve the quality and effectiveness of the educational activities according to the needs of the target group.

Support services discussed in the following paragraphs may assist in enhancing quality in the South African education system. Before the ANC through its majority advantage in Parliament can enforce the Department of Basic Education to make education an essential service, it should enforce provision of minimum support services to all schools throughout the country.

Support services needed for educators

▪ *Library and media centre services*

The school library is regarded as one of the core elements of supporting services provided for the educators (Theron & Van Staden, 1995:548). According to Theron & Van Staden (1995:548) in rural areas of the USA where communities and their schools are too small to justify well-equipped libraries, there are mobile libraries.

According to Steyn (2000:134) most schools in urban areas have a well-equipped library or have access to a library. In rural areas however, very few learners or educators have access to a library. Van Schalkwyk (1988:136) states that the function of media centres is to make

efficiently-housed and well-ordered collections of old and recent books, magazines, and educational aids readily available for educators and learners.

Media centres help educators to systematically plan, develop, implement and evaluate instructional units, activities and instructional strategies that help meet the needs of students and educators, (Lee & Hicks, 1997:61). According Lober (1993:32) students in England use the open libraries in place at many schools far more frequently than they did previously, when they could go to library for half an hour during the class scheduled weekly library period. How welcome they feel and whether or not they go depends on the attitude of the library media specialist. When the media specialist is more interested in working with students than shelving books and maintaining order, students flock to the library. They go there to work because they feel that the librarian cares and is trying to help them, that the librarian is interested in what they are doing.

The library centre is an excellent place to schedule meetings attended by community members. Strangers to the school generally walk out feeling that their tax money is working for them (Lober, 1993:32). Technological developments have made new equipment available in media centres, some of which have found its way into the classroom.

Van Schalkwyk (1988:136) states that the function of media centre is to make efficiently housed and well-ordered collections of books, magazines and educational aids readily available for the use of educators and learners.

This can be done in South Africa. Libraries and media centres are essential for educators and learners. If services of this nature are not there in our schools, education cannot be categorized as essential service.

- *Sufficient communication channels between school/educator and education department*

Communication between school and the department leads to an increase in the level of effectiveness in the educational programme. The research has shown that direct contact proves to be the most important form of communication between school/educator and the department of education (Oosthuizen, 1997:168). According to Lazarus (1997:13) lack of access to other services such as communication services, also affects the learning process and leads to learning breakdown or exclusion.

According to Lober (1993:13) in England, Districts are responsive to the community and staff, and maintain open lines for two-way communication. The many successes of the district need to

be shared. District members need to elaborate education and build on the successes rather than waiting to be torn down by critics and negative press.

- *In-service training and training of educators*

Lazarus (1997:19) states that the absence of ongoing in-service training of educators leads to insecurity, uncertainty, low self-esteem and lack of innovative practices in the classroom. This may result in resistance and harmful attitudes towards those learners who experience learning breakdown. If the education system is to promote effective learning and prevent breakdown, it is imperative that mechanisms are structured into the system to break down existing barriers. In England, Local Education Authorities Training Grants Scheme (LEATGS), grants are made to Local Education Authorities either to provide training using their own staff or to buy expertise from higher education or the growing number of private trainers (Gaunt, 1995:118).

According to Dalin, Hans-Gunter, & Bab (1993:24) in-service training (school based) is becoming the norm. Other actors, such as pedagogical centre (e.g.Netherlands), educator centres and even independent organisations (e.g. UK), are taking over a major part of the in-service market. Traditional in-service training has been geared towards subject-based courses for individual educators. Increasingly such courses are seen as staff development for groups of educators.

According to Iredale (1996:15) there is skepticism about the relevance and effectiveness of initial educator training led to general agreement that in-service educator education is the most effective way of ensuring that educators adapt to the changing demands of revised curricula. Change in the teaching profession is as fast as in other occupations, and there is an increasing awareness everywhere that the methods, curriculum, and books which educators operate will continue to alter so rapidly that life-long learning in-service training will be necessary in all classrooms at all levels.

Steyn (1998:131) states that if the transformation of South African education is to succeed, educators must be at liberty to make informed decisions and share power equally in the schools. This requires suitable training for principals and educators and ample opportunities for power sharing.

Seminars and courses, independent organisations, NGO's and the Department of Education can help educators in improving the way they teach. Slavin (1991:271) states that when the quality of

instruction is high, lesson presentations make sense to students, are interesting to them, and are easy to remember and apply. Adequate incentives help to ensure that students will be motivated to learn. Seminars and courses must be conducted for educators so that they know about how to teach interestingly. (Garison as quoted by Steyn 1998:131) confirms that individual educators should be empowered to participate in the process of knowledge production and distribution and not passive consumption.

Van Schalkwyk (1988:136) states that the training of educators has a threefold task:

- Academic;
- Professional; and
- To effect both of the above mentioned forms of training in the light of the norms and philosophy of life.

The training of educators can again boost the lost morale, as Asmal (1999:4) indicates that many educators have been demoralised by the uncertainty and distress of rationalisation and redeployment. Educators have a reasonable expectation of stability and job security, but that has long in coming.

▪ *Curriculum services*

Van Schalkwyk (1988:139) states that the curriculum must continually reflect on the relevancy of subject objectives, the acceptability and the suitability of the subject-contents, the effectiveness of didactic guidelines which have a bearing on such subject-contents, and the applicability of educational media to the teaching of such subject-contents. Curriculum developers must get in touch with subject-experts, experts in the education field, educationists and those who draw up curricula, and to undertake sustained study of recent and relevant scientific publications in order to bring about the necessary and relevant innovation in curricula and syllabi.

Baine *et al.* (1994:127) recommended the following in designing the curriculum:

- The curriculum should be ecologically valid.
- The knowledge and skills taught in curricula should be based on an analysis of local, regional, national, continental and international trends in technology, industry and population migration.
- Basic education should integrate academic knowledge and skills training.
- The curriculum should promote reflective education that goes beyond rote learning.

According to NEPI (1993:103) the curriculum should be related to teaching and learning. Curriculum policies should encourage sound teaching and learning. In progression and assessment curriculum policies should help students to progress through the curriculum and assessment or evaluation helps to increase student participation in schooling and facilitate student learning (NEPI, 1993:103). Educators should have the capacity to adapt the curriculum to facilitate learning among learners to prevent learning breakdown (Lazarus, 1997: vii). In South African case, politicians' policy decisions and incorrect curriculum choices have messed up the key foundation of the education system (Sunday Independent, 2013:16)

- *Subject advisory services and subject courses*

It should not be assumed that the upgrading of educators' subject skills is an inappropriate or an unreasonable form of educational investment. Subject upgrading is an essential and central part of an educator's professional development. The World Bank cites evidence that in many situations educators are unable themselves to answer the examination which they have set for their pupils. This is obviously the disastrous basis for effective teaching, both because the educator is likely to provide wrong or misleading information, and because of the effect on teaching style that lack of self-confidence can have on an educator in front of large class. It may well be the 'educator monologue' so familiar to many children in a developing country classroom arises from the educator's fear that interaction and questions may expose educator's ignorance of the subject (Iredale, 1996:13-14).

Iredale (1996:15) further argues that subject upgrading will continue to be a major issue for education systems in most developing countries, where students enter profession with minimal academic qualifications, typically equal to secondary school leaving certificate.

Practical subjects such as technical subjects require considerable Organisation and administration. Educators of these subjects can be assisted, guided and advised by subject advisors so that they can present subjects effectively. The services can be extended to other subjects apart from technical subjects (Van Schalkwyk, 1988:136). Subject advisory services help educators to teach their pupils with self-confidence.

- *Current image of educator in education*

The educator is the linking pin between student, the home and the school. Educators are the people who make coming to school a joy or a disappointment. How educators talk and listen to students and parents, respond to questions, teach and challenge students, and care and understand students' problems, triggers a response. Students are delighted when educators are knowledgeable, patient, caring, and have a sense of humour. Praise and a smile go a long way towards making students feel good about school. No child wants to come to school to be frustrated (Lober, 1993:30).

McLaren (1994:1) argues that educator education has rarely occupied a critical space in contemporary culture. Such endeavors as presently exist are damagingly bereft of both social conscience and social consciousness. The political space that education occupies today continues to de-emphasise the struggle for educator empowerment; furthermore, it generally serves to produce the technocratic and corporate ideologies that characterise dominant societies.

Asmal (1999:4) indicates that the morale of educators in all communities is low. The causes and incidence may be different in different institutions. They may be demoralised because of process of redeployment and rationalisation. Other reasons may be vulnerability to trespassing, vandalism, carrying and using weapons, drug dealing, rape, sexual abuse or even murder.

- *Personality and personal problems*

Every individual is unique. Educators are unique too. They are different in the way they live. It is therefore necessary for different educators to accept the way they are. Their personality problems are to be addressed by psychologists so that they can educate with purpose and have courage of accepting the way they are.

(Eysneck as quoted by Fontana 1977:3) state that personality is the relatively stable organisation of a person's motivational dispositions, arising from the interaction between biological derives and the social and physical environment.

(Digman as quoted by Jackson; Furnham; Ford & Cottert (2000:223) state that after the resolution of the damaging and distracting person situation debate in the 70s, and early 80s, there has been a remarkable and wide spread resurgence of research and interest in personality and individual differences. This has been partly because of impressive developments in psychological and statistical methods, as well as intensive work on the psychometric properties

of personality tests. At the same time, there has been a move to further develop psycho-biological models of personality.

Personal problems go hand-in-hand with personal development. Wallace (1984:11) states that person does not mean individual, and personal development is not concerned with the assertion of the self as ego. The person emerges only in the context of other people, in the web of human relationship. Personal problems also affect human relations amongst the colleagues.

- *Problems in the working environment*

According to Dalin (1993:7) the environment is important to all schools. By 'environment' is meant the administrative links to school authorities, as well as the many informal links with homes, organisations, institutions and business in the community. It is not obvious that the school should respond to the demands from the environment.

Fullan (1992:53) states that environment changes include the shuffling around of principals and support staff in school systems without regarding the continuity of the project at the school.

In many ways educators do not differ from employees in other organisations. They want decent salaries and benefits, suitable working conditions, recognition and promotion opportunities. As of now there are dissatisfied educators and there is considerable scope for eliminating sources of dissatisfaction. A critical component of improving schools is to ensure that the working environment in schools enhances the job satisfaction of educators (Steyn et al., 1994:43). Besides the shuffling of the principals and support staff, there can be major shifts from government policies, demographic changes in student populations, economic trends affecting the availability of funding and public opinion (Fullan, 1992:53).

- *Promotion opportunities, pension fund, medical aid, housing and job placement*

Although these needs are addressed by professionals in the Department of Education it is possible that the services are not sufficient or effective, known to practicing educators or neglected, and it needs attention or even need to be supported or helped by NGOs and /or other organisations.

From an administrative standpoint, a manager who understands what his or her employees believe to be in their best interest can develop a unique reward system. Rewards must be flexible enough to meet the expectations of individual employees. It is also necessary to structure

individual's jobs so they realise that when they act in the best interest of the school circuit, they are acting in their own best interest (Rebore, 1982:237).

In China educators typically spend their whole career in one school, and cannot make a personal decision to move, internal promotion is the major vehicle for career development. The process involves the principal, an internal committee of educators and the educational bureau. The committee nominates a candidate for a vacant post. If the principal accepts the nomination, it is put forward to the education bureau for the final decision (Bush & Gay, 1998:190).

Health is inextricably linked to educational achievements, quality of life and economic productivity. By acquiring health-related knowledge, values, skills, and practices, educators can be empowered to pursue a healthy life and to work as agents of change for the health of their community (Nakajima, 1997:1).

According to Rieger (1995:23) for placement employer must answer an employee's following questions:

- What is the employee expected to do?
- Where will he be working?
- What is the relationship within the employer's organisation?
- Is the employee required to guarantee his qualifications or expertise?
- What hours must the employee work?
- Must he work overtime if required to do so?

Heyns (1998:123) states that the selection of a candidate for a post does not only influence the post concerned or the department within which such a post falls, but also the staff, learners, parents and community. In short, it means that the school as a whole is influenced by that post.

Support services to education activities and structures

▪ Physical facilities and place of teaching

Teaching and learning can be effective if it is supported by the necessary physical facilities such as the provision of school buildings. Support services regarding education activities and structures regard teaching activities, support in the management task of the school and support to physical features of the school. Education cannot take place properly if furniture for students and students is not available. Learners need chairs to sit on and tables or desks to support them when

writing. Educators need chairs for sitting, tables and cupboards to store their books and other important documents (Muremela, 1999).

▪ *Educational aids*

Teaching and learning aids are often referred to only as teaching and learning aids. This concept encompasses more than audio-visual aids, but includes all aids which the educator can use in his teaching and which the learner can use in his learning (Kruger *et al.*, 1983:265).

Kruger *et al.* (1983:265) states further that teaching aid is the medium which can be used in the interaction or dialogue between the educator and the learners. It can be used as a bridge to reach the position that the educator has achieved. It therefore functions as the intermediary in teaching-learning situation. (cf. 2.3.1.1 for description of stationery/textbook, libraries and media centres). Computers can be used in learning. According to Oldert (1992:417) advantages of computer based learning are:

- Each student can learn at student's own pace and not bound by the level of a group;
- Each student gets to interact with the computer at a one-on-one level;
- Material is standardised;
- The computer never runs out of patience;
- A student's level of understanding can automatically be assessed, giving immediate feedback; and
- Students' record and statistics on student performance can be kept automatically.

The contribution which the computer-assisted instruction can make to South Africa's education renewal lies not in the state-of-the-art and expensive equipment, but in the utilisation of base-level technology. Using the simple PC, computer-assisted instruction can be created to assist educators with an enormous range of remedial work and revision, while simultaneously relieving them of enormous testing and marking load (Oldert *et al.* 1992:425).

▪ *Office*

For effective communication and administration, school offices should have the following: furniture, computers and telephones. These items will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Oldert & Braas-Baker (1992:414) state that what should be obvious to everyone is that the use of computers represents one of the alternatives, at least an alternative that must be seriously

considered. People who know about computers in education are already convinced that computers are part of the solution.

The school as an organisation involves lot of people such as learners, educators and parents. In any organisation there is communication which takes place for it to function smoothly. According to communication with Mahlale (1999) telephones can be used to communicate with parents, businesses to assist in the funding of the school and communication with the Department of Education. Telephones can be used to liaise with all education stakeholders.

The importance of telephone is for the educators to contact their students' parents within the first three weeks of the school. The educators are able to introduce themselves one by one to the parents and talk about the students while everything is going well. As a result of early contact, such as this, parents feel at ease to call educators and ask questions when in doubt. Concerns do not build and become problems (Lober, 1993:226).

▪ *Gymnasium and sports field*

Regular physical activity provides numerous health benefits. School physical education programme promotes physical activity and can teach skills as well as form or change behaviours. It holds an important key to influencing health and well-being across the life span (Lambert, 2000:34). Lambert (2000:34) further states that to provide healthy-lifestyles education, a quality programme of physical education must be a core requirement in all schools and a central component in a comprehensive school programme.

According to USA report on the importance of physical activity, is to increase the level of activity among children and youths. Physical inactivity results in substantial, negative health consequences. Obesity, high blood glucose, high blood pressure and high blood lipids all occur more often among sedentary adults. These problems increase the risk of chronic disease such as cardiovascular disease, various cancers, Type II diabetes and hypertension. Quality physical education programmes are essential in helping students gain competence and confidence in a variety of movement forms such as sports, dance, recreational activities, and fitness activities (Lambert. 2000:34). Physical activities can take place either in the gymnasium or sports field.

CONCLUSION

For education to be regarded as an essential service, it is important for the Department of Basic Education to provide at least minimum support services to educators. We also recommend that after the minimum support services have been delivered to schools the African National Congress should influence Parliament to amend the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa together with Labour Relations Act. It is obvious that ending educators' strikes does not and will not address the challenges that education is facing in our country.

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