

Competent Illiterates or Competent Literates: A Comparative Study of South Australia and South Africa Basic Education in Literacy and Numeracy Proficiency

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ABSTRACT Education system has four main components, which are education system policy, education system administration, structure of teaching and support services. In this paper, focus will be on third component, which is teaching structure or structure of teaching. In teaching structure or structure of teaching that is where there is curriculum and differentiation. Is South African curriculum producing the desired material of citizenry for the development of this country? Since introduction and changes of the new curriculum, learners are perceived to be unable to read, write and calculate. Basic education should cover three main basic aspects which every learner should know, writing, reading (literacy) and numeracy. It should not serve as a conveyor belt to the next level of education phase. This paper is a comparative study of South Australia and South Africa's involvement of stakeholders in teaching their children literacy and numeracy as the basis of communication.

INTRODUCTION

South African education system has come a long way since dispensation in 1994. It is a long struggle of transforming education to the way in which all citizens would benefit. The education system of South Africa's third component, which is education system structure, needs to be reviewed. That is curriculum and differentiation at basic education in order to close a gap between basic and higher education.

Basic education and nation development go hand in hand. All countries throughout the world developed because of the standard of their education. Education has got so many advantages in terms of developing individuals who then develop the whole society and a country at large. This paper is comparing the provision and stakeholders' involvement on numeracy and literacy of South Australia and South Africa to the young once.

WORLD DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR ALL (1990)

UNESCO in 1990 emphasised that Education for All should be based on the recognition that illiteracy does not of itself imply ignorance, that formally educated persons are not necessarily the most enlightened, and that the poor and the uneducated can also be knowledgeable, wise and informed. Education frequently disinherits people from traditional and folk forms of learning and devalues the capacity of the so called uneducated to learn (World Education Forum, 1990).

World Education Forum (1990) in its declaration Article 1 states that every person - child, youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time.

BASIC EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Ahmed, Ming, Jalaluddin and Ramachandran (1991) define what basic education and nation development are. Basic education begins with the premise of human right, and contributes to social and economic development of the country, and that it adds to the quality of life of people. The question asked frequently is how education contributes to national development and not how development policies and programmes affect educational progress.

According to World Conference on Education for All as stated by Ahmed et al. (1991) define basic learning needs and basic education in the following way:

Basic learning needs: refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for people to survive, to improve the quality of their lives and to continue learning.

Basic education: refers to education intended to meet basic needs; it includes instruction at the first or foundation level, on which subsequent learning can be based, it encompasses early childhood and primary education for children, as well as education literacy, general knowledge life skills for youth and adults; it may extend into secondary education.

Ahmed et al. (1991) further state education development interaction aspects as follows:

- The relationship between basic education and aspects of national development is better explained and understood as a non-linear and interactive process rather than as a direct cause-and-effect relationship.
- The crucial question is not whether and how much basic education is necessary, but how to maximize its beneficial consequences.
- The inner workings of basic education-its content and quality, as well as overall development parameters-policies, objectives and priorities in development, which also affect educational programmes, have to be looked at simultaneously.
- The synergy between basic education and national development falls into place naturally when human development becomes central to national development.
- Programmes for poverty alleviation need to combine economic measures with basic education components.
- Primary education and literacy help make mass communications educationally more potent.
- Primary education-plus and literacy-plus should be the core of basic education.

It is very important to include educators in development of basic education and national development. Educators' performance is a critical area of action for improving cost-effectiveness of basic education. Almost all the major problems in basic education relating to goals, learning achievement, organization of educational programmes and performance of the system require addressing the performance, behavior, motivation and skills of educators and how they are utilized by the system. Educators and their performance emerge as the central arena of action of both cost effectiveness of educational programmes and achieving the overall goals of the system.

Improving educator effectiveness of resources devoted to education, since educators typically account for over 90% of the cost of basic education programmes. Primary education educators' role and functions have to be differentiated to introduce possibilities of professional growth and a career ladder, changing the present situation of a dead-end occupation (Ahmed et al. 1991).

Basic education is the foundation upon which opportunities for further learning are built. Therefore, equipping learners with basic learning tools and skills constitutes one category of objectives for basic education. The essential knowledge and skills for survival and a life with human dignity, which are expected to be disseminated through basic education, constitute the second category of basic education learning objectives. There is general unanimity that literacy and numeracy are the basic tools for further learning and they occupy a central position in primary education. As for the contents of the second category, these are liable to vary, depending on the perception of what the essential knowledge and skills for living in a particular context (Ahmed et al. 1991:41).

LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

According to DoE (2013) after research, the evidence before on the improvement of numeracy and literacy in South Australia highlights three key areas for improvement:

- Ensuring that all children have a great start in their literacy and numeracy learning.
- That more attains stronger foundational skills.
- That all children and young people have the opportunity to engage powerfully in their learning. This will enable them to become skillful problem solvers with the ability to make use of their numeracy and literacy capabilities.

Literacy and Numeracy

DoE (2013) states that, numeracy is related to, but not the same as mathematics. While explicit learning in mathematics contributes to the numeracy development of children and students, it is the ability to use mathematical information to solve problems and respond successfully to day-to-day challenges that makes a young person numerate whereas literacy is often thought to involve reading, writing and understanding the conventions of language. While these aspects are very important, they do not cover the entire field called literacy.

South Australian government in DoE (2013) indicates that numeracy and literacy skills are crucial to every child and young person's ability to develop as an individual, to live a satisfying and rewarding life and to actively participate in society. Children and young people are educated in a time of increased awareness about the importance of learning and education from birth and throughout a person's life. Simultaneously, people are experiencing the exponential change that technology brings to the way they communicate, learn and work as well as to their individual, local and global identities.

Parents in South Australia want the best education possible for their children, regardless of where they go to learn. They want their children to graduate from school having choices and the confidence to pursue them. Engagement in learning and the contribution this makes to a child's wellbeing is a high priority for every early childhood and school community. Research shows that highly developed numeracy and literacy capabilities strongly contribute to the social, economic and physical wellbeing of individuals. Children who are able to apply mathematical understanding and communicate effectively in a range of contexts – economic, technical, scientific and social – are best placed to succeed in education and in life (DoE, 2013).

DoE (2013) continues to state that a highly numerate and literate population is also important to the health and prosperity of the state and to productivity and workforce involvement. Young people who are unable to communicate successfully because they cannot read or write well, or who struggle with numeracy skills, often leave school early and are more likely to be unemployed or in low-skilled jobs. For South Australian State to thrive in a rapidly changing global economic climate, the State needs citizens who not only possess the foundations of numeracy and literacy, but are able to apply them powerfully, with the confidence and capacity to continue to learn.

Parents, Carers and Families, Teachers and Leaders

DoE (2013:13) states that the success of literacy and numeracy and ability to meet challenges will depend on the efforts of three important groups of people: parents and families, teachers and leaders working together. It is people who make a difference and as partners with children and young people, all having common high expectations, they can make a positive difference in numeracy and literacy achievement for every learner. In the second half of 2012, the department undertook a review of local, national and international research and evidence, to add to the

practical experience and knowledge in their preschools and schools. A discussion paper, Numeracy and Literacy, was released for discussion with the South Australian community.

Common themes emerged from the consultation:

- Parents and families would like more information about how to support their children in numeracy and literacy development.
- Parents and families would like to better understand the expected level of numeracy and literacy achievement for their children.
- Parents and families would like to be more closely connected and involved with early childhood settings and schools to better understand how their children learn.
- Educators would like greater clarity about effective programs, practices and approaches in numeracy and literacy.
- Educators would value greater consistency in assessment practices and data analysis to help them design tailored and targeted learning.
- Educators would value more consistent diagnostic assessment processes to better track and report on each child's and student's progress and achievement.
- Educators would value coherent, high quality professional learning to enhance their practice in order to improve student learning outcomes.
- Children and young people want a say in how they learn.

The consultation also helped to identify three drivers – key factors that will help to make a significant difference to numeracy and literacy achievement across the State:

- Inspiring teachers and educators, challenging children and students to achieve their best.
- Active parents and families, collaborating in learning partnerships with early childhood settings and schools.
- Successful 21st Century leaders, leading the learning.

These drivers are connected by common high expectations of numeracy and literacy achievement standards. Each of these drivers focuses on meeting three key challenges in both numeracy and literacy **Great start – Strong foundations – Powerful learners**. For example, Driver 1, in aiming to have a great start for all, will focus on providing more equitable outcomes for early learners. It will look to ensure good foundations and will also focus on enabling all young learners to develop powerful learning capabilities and dispositions from birth onwards (DoE, 2013).

Great start: Making sure more children have a great start to their numeracy and literacy learning

In the DoE (2013) young children thrive when their parents and carers speak with them, read to them, sing with them, play with them and encourage them to explore their world and ask questions. It is known that the messages parents and other adults give about the importance of mathematics and numeracy have an enduring effect. Therefore, when parents and carers support their children to notice the world around them, the shapes, and the numbers and the ways in which people communicate and use mathematics, they are enhancing children's early numeracy and literacy development.

Their learning and their ability to continue to learn are further developed when they are encouraged to play with others, develop their curiosity, engage in conversations, and question what they see around them. These simple things are amongst the most important contributions that parents and carers can make to their child's numeracy and literacy development.

DoE (2013) further states that in South Australia at present, most children have a great start to learning in numeracy and literacy. The way families, teachers, care workers and other professionals are connecting and working together is enabling children to have a range of quality experiences that:

- Build their vocabulary;
- Develop their communication skills;
- Help them make sense of words, symbols, shapes and numbers; and
- Enable them to notice and ask questions about the world around them.

DoE (2013) states that, the influence that family experiences have on a young child's development is also profound. A baby's first attachments with family members and the trusting relationships they build with others provide them with a secure base for exploration and learning. Their ability to self-regulate and to make connections outside of the family is shaped by early experiences. To support healthy development and wellbeing of babies and young children, the Numeracy and Literacy Strategy:

- Promotes the monitoring of every child's development, through the use of the 'Blue Book' as a common source of information for families and health and education professionals, as well as establishing ways of monitoring children's early numeracy and literacy development.

- Promotes family participation in child health checks – particularly the 18-24 month health check – and include advice about numeracy and literacy development.
- Provides information and support to service providers to ensure they are able to assist families with advice on children’s numeracy and literacy development.

To further support parents, carers and families in providing strong support for their children’s learning, the Numeracy and Literacy Strategy:

- Ensures provision of targeted referral processes that link families to community support and build their capacity to support the numeracy and literacy development of their children.
- Increases the number of supported playgroups in preschools and schools so that families have access to regular, play-based early learning activities which include a focus on numeracy and literacy development.
- Develops online and other resources for parents on numeracy and literacy.
- Develops courses and workshops for parents to support their children’s numeracy and literacy development (DoE, 2013).

LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the following paragraphs we will be discussing how South Africa’s National Integrated Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is supposed to assist in improving numeracy and literature in primary schools and the involvement of National Education Evaluation Development Unit.

National Integrated Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The strategy includes improving teacher content and conceptual knowledge, strengthening teaching methodology, strengthening implementation of the curriculum with increased accountability, access to quality LTSM including access to reading materials and numeracy resources, improving the quality of and access to Grade R, evidence-based planning and monitoring, as well as reliable and regulated reporting processes. Provincial targets will show how performance in Literacy and Numeracy will be strengthened in sustainable and systemic ways across all districts and schools, based on the 2013 audit of provincial strategies for reading, Maths, Science and Technology, the recommendations of the National Education Evaluation Development Unit (NEEDU) and a series of sustainable interventions to strengthen performance in these key areas across the entire system (DoBE, 2013).

NEEDU (2013), Table 1 reveals that comprehension scores are less impressive, averaging just over 3 out of 5 for the six learners tested. Similarly, the school's Annual National Assessment (ANA) scores for Grade 3 lie just on the provincial mean for mathematics (35%) and below average for Home Language (HL) (40%). And both the quantity and quality of writing in Foundation Phase (FP) learners' books is inadequate in both Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) and mathematics. The question must be asked: What prevents this school from taking its best learners to reading levels beyond the average? Why are the best six readers in the school not all reading at the 'top' benchmark, and scoring full marks on this simple comprehension exercise? Could the school be doing more to stimulate acquisition of more comprehensive literacy competence and more sophisticated concept development?

The first step in exploring literacy in Grade 1 is learning to read and write using the alphabet and natural numbers. This is a process that continues throughout one's life. As the learner's reading fluency and comprehension powers develop so a learner is drawn to read books which provide the learner with an expanding vocabulary an increasing complex array of grammatical structures and wider range of genres: stories, biographies, non-fiction and poetry (NEEDU, 2013).

Taylor in Jansen (2013) states that Grade 2 pupil must read at least 58 words a minute by the end of second term and 71 words a minute at the end of the fourth term. In this case learners read at least between 20 and 29 words a minute which is inadequate.

NEEDU (2013) further indicates that the power of writing comes from its ability to leave an enduring trace. This allows the writer to reflect upon what has been written and generate and refine ideas in the process.

On the role of teachers, Taylor in Jansen (2013) states that teachers could no longer afford to shut their heads of department out of their classrooms, because if the situation was to be remedied, reading had to be declared a national priority and professional development needed to take place at schools. Teachers are teaching putting far too little emphasis on the ultimate goal, which was independent reading-currently children were simply 'singing in unison'. The notion that school managers should not visit classrooms was both rife and disastrous.

LESSONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

- Numeracy and literacy ensures that all children have a great start in their literacy and numeracy learning.
- That more children attain stronger foundational skills through numeracy and literacy.
- Children who are able to apply mathematical understanding and communicate effectively in a range of contexts – economic, technical, scientific and social – are best placed to succeed in education and in life.
- A highly numerate and literate population is also important to the health and prosperity of the state and to productivity and workforce involvement.
- Young people who are unable to communicate successfully because they cannot read or write well, or who struggle with numeracy skills, often leave school early and are more likely to be unemployed or in low-skilled jobs.
- The success of numeracy and literacy strategy and ability to meet challenges depends on the efforts of three important groups of people: parents and families, teachers and leaders working together.
- It is people who make a difference and as partners with children and young people, all having common high expectations, they can make a positive difference in numeracy and literacy achievement for every learner. Parents in South Australia want the best education possible for their children, regardless of where they go to learn. This should be the same in South Africa.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we compared South Australia strategy and South African national integrated literacy and numeracy strategy. The comparison is done in order to improve the quality of numeracy and literacy at basic level of education.

We are concerned about the way in which NEEDU reports its findings in terms of the number of the words which learners at a certain Grade should read in a minute. This is really a serious concern which needs to be addressed immediately.

Involvement of parents in education is perceived to be instrumental in improving children's access, attendance and retention in school. But it also has the potential to improve parents' sense of empowerment, and support the greater achievement of valued educational outcomes (Grant Lewis 2004) and (Fleisch 2008). Most unfortunately in South Africa as expected, poverty,

unemployment and poorly educated and fractured families are the norm. Efforts to improve parental involvement in South African education are confronted by daunting poverty, illiteracy, low parental self-perceptions and poor channels of communication.

The Department of Basic Education should consider lessons learnt from South Australia in order to improve numeracy and literacy skills amongst learners who are at primary schools.

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TABLE 1: Reading fluency and comprehension of six best learners in school X

CLASS	LEARNER	READING FLUENCY: Correct no. words read in simple text p/min	COMPREHENSION: No. correct answers (max 5)
	L 1	80	3
C 1	L 2	121	4
	L 3	99	3
	Mean	100.0	3.3
	L 5	91	3
C2	L 5	54	4
	L 6	80	2
	Mean	75.0	3.0

Source: NEEDU (2013)