

Inequality of Access to Resources in Previously Disadvantaged South African High Schools

Mabatho Sedibe

*Department of Educational Psychology, University of Johannesburg,
P.O. Box 524, Aucklandpark, Johannesburg, 2006, South Africa
Fax: 011 559 2262, E-mail: mabathos@uj.ac.za*

KEYWORDS Equality. Access. Learner-Teacher-Support Materials (LTSM). Disadvantaged Schools

ABSTRACT The new South African constitution adopted following the inception of the new democracy in 1994, states that everyone has the right to a basic education. Also, the South African Schools Act (SASA of 1996) states that schools must admit all learners without discrimination. However, equality of access to education is still problematic and has remained a major problem and a challenge in South African schools. That is the reason why in this paper issues with reference to equal access to education will be explored. This is evidenced by debates from the literature stated in the proceeding sections. Schools still face problems with regard to access to resources such as Learner-Teacher-Support-Materials (LTSM) and classrooms. Grade twelve (final year of high school) learners and their teachers from three high schools in the north-west province were interviewed to examine the availability and equality of access to resources. The information obtained could assist the government and relevant stakeholders review the present situation in schools and make changes to existing policies where possible. The findings showed that there is still no equality in access to resources in previously disadvantaged high schools and that this is an educational major problem. Recommendations are made about possible ways of addressing this problem. Conclusions drawn from the review indicate that inequality to access has serious implications to the quality of education in disadvantaged schools.

INTRODUCTION

Equal access to education signifies equal society, holistic equity in all spheres of life, whilst Learner-Teacher-Support Materials (LTSM) refers to any tool or resource used to enhance teaching and the understanding of the subject content. The explanation of these two concepts is important in facilitating an understanding of the past and present education system in the previously disadvantaged schools. They are also important in understanding the reason such schools are still facing inequality of access to resources in education.

The inequalities of access to resources led to social and civil unrest, and as Louw (1991) noted, slogans such as liberation now and education later were began to be heard increasingly. Disruption of schools became synonymous with violence, as analyzed by Fraser et al. (1996), in their South African study. They discovered that the main causes of violence in schools stem from the former apartheid policies which laid more emphasis on racial discrimination, social, ethnic conflicts and exclusions.

Engelbrecht and Green (2001) write that apartheid policies have left a legacy of severe disparities, leading, on a political level, to Fraser et al. (1996) calling for a New Education for Peace. Hopkins and Stern (1996) calling for

education for liberation. Hartshorne (1992) meanwhile, mentions that it is not only students who were not satisfied, the teachers were not pleased at all. As Fraser et al. (1996) noted, the role of teachers and principals was reduced to that of spectators and Nxumalo (1993) discovered that teachers in Kwa-Mashu schools had also been dissatisfied because they believed it was the whole system of Bantu Education that was the core of all the problems facing the schools today. This implies that what is presently happening in the schools is the result of years of oppressive education.

The above arguments emphasize the unfair and unequal access to resources in the South African education system. There has been inequality of access to education between the White and Black schools in the past, and the evidence is brought forth when the political instability led to the disruptions of schools and centres for political indoctrination, leading to strikes and class boycotts, with the aim of demanding a change in the Black institutions of learning. These disruptions led to school absenteeism and continued unrest in many previously disadvantaged schools where the already limited facilities, school buildings and equipment were damaged or stolen. In certain places, for example, where I was once a resident of a peri-urban area, poor people from the community

had the opportunity to loot doors and corrugated iron sheets in order to erect shelters for their families. All these events were caused by the lack of equality of access to education in schools. Class boycotts, thus, became part of the schools' culture of teaching and learning and continued to have an impact on the political and educational set up in South Africa up to the year 1994.

Whilst class boycotts contributed to the successful struggle by the South African majority against racial oppression by the minority, they also had negative educational consequences for learners. The legacy of the disruption on the teaching and learning process, has impacted on the culture of teaching and learning to this day. As Fourie (1986) asserts: pupils' grievances sometimes resulted in the burning of schools, books and stationary, while the Bureau for Information (1988) acknowledges the negative impact by adding: 17 schools were destroyed, 30 seriously damaged and 247 slightly damaged during 1985. This compelled the DoE to close down the seriously affected 33 schools, as it was a waste of time and resources to keep them open.

Based on the above consequences, South Africa up-to date (2011) is still experiencing a serious problem with regard to equality of access to education in many disadvantaged high schools. That is the reason why learners are bussing from the disadvantaged schools to advantaged urban schools on daily basis. Writing a decade after the new democratic country and new integrated education system for all, Pacheco (1996) noted that learners' achievements have dropped, leading to a high failure rate. Hartshorne (1992) also noted that since 1980 there had been a regular pattern of a 50% failure rate, while the highest matriculation pass rate was just 16% and the overall pass rate had fallen to 36.2% by 1990. Hartshorne (1992) prior to the new democratic country, further states that in the whole of Soweto only 460 pupils or 4.8 percent of candidates gained a matriculation. These statistics are strengthened by Strauss et al. (2000), who add that ... the total number of passes with exemption was 68,626 (14.0%) for 2000, compared to 63,725 (12.5%) for 1999. Given these numbers by different authors, one can make calculations and arrive at the answer that between 1980 and 2000, there was a continual fluctuation in the overall pass rate of learners due to lack or little equality of access of resources to education in schools. For ex-

ample, there was a disadvantaged school in Limpopo where grade twelve (matric) pass rate was 0% in one of the previous years.

At the time of the first democratic elections in South Africa, a World Bank data on education was also used to draw an even bleaker picture, noting that an additional 1,900 classrooms were required to relieve overcrowding in schools and that approximately 850,000 children of school-going age remained outside the formal school system, requiring 23,000 classrooms or 766 schools to accommodate them. The above information links with what follows in the proceeding section, strengthening the point that equality of access to resources in schools is still a problem and a topic to debate about as it affects the quality of education in South Africa.

LTSM/resources have been explained in the preceding section and one can further explain that they are equipments, facilities and structures that make it possible or easier for the school to perform its functions. Resources include textbooks, furniture, laboratories, references and classrooms, and are essential for teaching and learning schools. As Mwamwenda (1996) notes in his local research, pupils in developing countries perform below those in developed countries because of inadequate and poor facilities. This means that disadvantaged schools cannot function effectively with inadequate and unequal access of resources such as laboratories, libraries, toilets, books and computers. The Department of Education has, therefore, a responsibility to supply adequate resources available to all schools equally, in order to enhance a culture of teaching and learning.

From my observation and experience during my schooling period at different disadvantaged schools and also teaching at such schools during my teaching time for more than twenty years, it came to my realisation that most of previously disadvantaged schools operate with for example, inadequate LTSM, over-crowded classrooms, unqualified and under-qualified teachers. To add to that, a documentation of the inadequacy of resources by the Education Foundation, (2000) found that almost half of all the schools in South Africa do not have electricity and telephones in rural areas. It was also found that "many schools make use of water sources that are unhygienic, thus a health concern for learners and teachers". Further evidence noticed by me is that in townships and rural schools uncondusive envi-

ronment is a problem and is still experienced for example, I visited one school in the North-West province where they lack textbooks. Czerniewics et al. (2000) write that the average former Department of Education and Training (DET) schools are under-resourced. Mabogoane (2005) states that the differences in how learners learn in the classroom are not only a function of differing teaching abilities but also of resources available for teaching. Colglough et al. (2003) argue that the availability of adequate learning materials is an extremely important condition for the achievement of good-quality education.

On this note one can say that where resources are inadequate and unequally distributed, a culture of teaching and learning may decline because of lack of references, as the only source of information received will be that of teachers which is not enough for learners.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

A question can thus be asked as to whether LTSM are available and equally accessed in most of previously disadvantaged schools. With my own experience I can say there are still those learners in remote areas who are taught under the trees. This evidence suggests that the promise of equal distribution of resources has not yet materialized. Vakalisa (2000) notes that in schools in the townships and rural areas, where learners are mostly blacks, conditions still remain very much the same as they were in the apartheid era. Therefore, the lack of equal access to learning and teaching resources is still a problem, even though in certain areas, financially able parents solve this problem by opting for what Vakalisa (2000) calls voluntary-bussing, where learners are transported on daily basis to better learning opportunities in pursuit of better education. To curb this problem, I am of the opinion that “Tirisano”, meaning working together to improve education be speeded up in schools, failing which the quality of education and inequality of access to resources in previously disadvantaged schools will still remain a problem, and thus an extreme challenge to South Africans.

Given the information above, LTSM and their use are important in any teaching and learning in schools, a point emphasized by the research of Stockard (1980), who discovered that pro-

viding adequate resources helps in promoting learners' achievement. For example if one teaches Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) as a learning /subject area, its success depends largely on the availability of relevant resources or apparatus (LTSM). I believe that if schools function with none or inadequate resources, there is the likelihood that ineffective teaching and learning will take place, leading to poor academic performance of learners. This is because learners will not be able to perform certain functions that could in turn improve their academic performance. Learners should, therefore, be accommodated in classrooms with equality of access to resources which can create a conducive atmosphere to teaching and learning.

In summary to this section, one can mention prematurely that issues such as lack of textbooks, overcrowding and unconducive environments, as part of LTSM have been and is still a serious concern to previously disadvantaged schools and should therefore, be given priority and be addressed urgently by the Department of Education (DoE) and Government, in order to enable effective teaching and learning to take place. Taking cognisance of these factors will enable teachers, learners, parents and other relevant stakeholders to realise the importance of equal access and sharing of LTSM in schools.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLED HIGH SCHOOLS

I think it is important to describe the location of three sampled schools with an aim of understanding, supporting or opposing the argument within this paper. School A, (with hundred grade twelve learners and eighteen grade twelve teachers as participants) which is assumed to be one of the best school in the area of Makapanstad over the period of five years in terms of matriculation pass rate results, is situated next to the tarred road, and is also nearer to the post office, shops, churches, bus stops and the Makapanstad Area Project Office (APO) previously called Circuit Education Office. School B (with one hundred and eighty Grade twelve learners and eighteen grade twelve teachers as participants) is further away from School A, serving another population within Makapanstad. This school resembles more or less the same

characteristics as School A, except the fact that it is far from the Makapanstad APO. In contrast to the two schools, School C (with fifty Grade twelve learners and ten grade twelve teachers as participants) which is the poorest school in as far as the Grade twelve results are concerned over the consecutive period of five years, is situated in a remote dry area where there is no sign of better infrastructures such as those mentioned above.

All the three schools are more than 28 kilometres away from Hammanskraal, a small town in the borders of North-West and Gauteng Provinces. All the grade twelve learners and their teachers were interviewed at these schools on different days after I was granted the permission by the APO/Circuit Education Office officials. Research method, data collection strategies Findings and discussions, recommendations and conclusion based on the adequacy of LTSM are discussed below:

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore and describe the inequality of access to resources in previously disadvantaged South African high schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study followed an interpretive qualitative research paradigm because it will give insight in understanding why equal access to resource is important in all South African schools. Henning et al. (2004) add that phenomena are studied in their natural settings. I will further use purposeful sampling in this study because it is expensive and difficult in any research study to engage all the participants (all the high schools' learners). Only three disadvantaged high schools and a total number of two hundred and fifty grade twelve learners and their teachers were selected.

Data Collection Strategies

Data was collected through in-depth focus group interview where open-ended questions were asked in order for the participants to give a full description of inequality to access to resources in their schools. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed to get a proper

transcription analysis. Seidman (1991) mentions that the primary method of creating text from interviews is to tape-record and transcribe them. Mouton (2001) describes data analysis as the breaking up of data into themes, patterns and relationships. Data was analyzed by means of content analysis which is relevant to this study because Henning et al. (2004) describe it as the process of transcribing and coding themes that emerge from the categories. The themes will then be described in detail in the proceeding section.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following themes emerged from this study, LTSM, School buildings, Library, Toilets, Laboratory and Computer use. Each will be discussed in the proceeding section.

Learning Teaching Support Materials (LTSM)

The responses from the participants were that "most learners were not supplied with free textbooks and other resources from the government and therefore, teachers resorted to photo copying notes for learners and some learners even end up buying textbooks for themselves". The above statement is not a surprise to most of disadvantaged schools in South Africa. Bishop (1989) revealed similar findings in his study which he conducted in rural areas in South Africa. He revealed that learners had inadequate educational facilities and these short falls resulted in the following educational problems: school failure, repeating classes or school drop-out. Colclough et al. (2003) noted that the availability of adequate learning materials is an extremely important condition for the achievement of good-quality education. This suggests urgent attention and financial expediency in education should be paid to inequality of access to resource in schools so as to ensure fair and equal distribution of resources, and this will help teachers to be flexible in the implementation of various new approaches to teaching and learning as they will be equipped with adequate LTSM.

School Buildings

In all three schools the participants mentioned that "generally the buildings are old".

For example, in School A, an example was even given by one of the teachers that “the school buildings are more than fifty years old with a lot of burglaries. Letters have been written to the North-West Department of Education since 1993, but up to 2004 no renovation of the school building took place”. Participants from School B and C even stated that “windows are broken and it takes a time to repair them, as burglars break in often”. Presented with this bad situation in teaching and learning, I am of the opinion that if the community and all stakeholders are involved in the education of their children, the conditions in the schools will possibly improve as the community will develop a pride in the school buildings and repairs of any school damage will be done responsibly by them. This is supported by Coutts (1996) when saying every school should become a community school as this will enable the school to be shared by a group. Kniker and Naylor (1986) add that instruction will be better in a modern well equipped school.

Library, Laboratory and Computer Use

Generally, all three schools responded by saying that “since there is no electricity in the schools, it is difficult for them to utilize library, laboratory and computers effectively, so they even resorted to locking up the library, laboratory and computer rooms”. The implication is that when electricity is not available it becomes difficult to use the library, laboratory and computers; that is why schools resort to locking them in for safety sake. It was further mentioned by a participant in School A that “electricity is only operating in the principal’s office”, whilst in School B and C participants stated that “there is no electricity in their schools”.

The implication of the above discussion is that even if the schools have libraries, laboratories and computers, it is difficult for the schools to use them effectively because the lack of electricity hampers their use. I feel that when libraries, laboratories and computers are not fully utilized in schools just like in School A, B and C, an adverse impact on education can be experienced thus a decline in a culture of teaching and learning in schools. Learners and teachers will lack opportunities to empower themselves and implement practical skills in any teaching and learning situation, thus hampering their

critical and creative thinking. This is supported by Coutts (1996) that poor conditions such as inadequate facilities ... de facto disempower teachers as professionals. Maden (2001) further adds that the use of computers is further transforming the behaviour of all the community.

Toilets

Participants’ in School A, indicated that, “toilets are in the process of being improved” whilst in School B and C participants mentioned that “toilets are new, yet are locked”. The reasons for locking toilets in school B and C is that there is no water for cleaning the toilets and also toilets seats are stolen by villagers and learners. Based on the manner in which the toilets are functioning in these schools, learners could be academically affected because if toilets are locked, where is the healthy atmosphere for their (the learners’) personal well-being? The lack and absence of toilets could cause learners to be absent from school and affect their school attendance, thus poor academic performance and dropout of school. This is supported by The Education Foundation (2000) when stating that many schools make use of water sources that are unhygienic, thus a health concern for learners and teachers.

Through the literature review supported by qualitative method, it became clear that the topic of this article is complex and has also shown that ongoing debates and discussions from educationists, researchers and relevant stakeholders are still proceeding since the inception of the new South African democratic country in 1994. On this note, authors such as Thembela (1991), Nxumalo (1993), Chisholm and Vally (1996), The Education Foundation (2000), Robinson (2002), The Education Africa Forum (2003), support the idea that a culture of teaching and learning in previously disadvantaged schools is declining based on the unequal of access to resources.

CONCLUSION

The literature review showed that equality of access to education in South African schools is complex and debatable, amongst the teachers, learners, parents and stakeholders. The cause of debate on this issue originated from the legacy of apartheid where previously disad-

vantaged schools were having inequality of access to resources. This for me does not mean that teachers should wander and relax when faced with this discouraging and frustrating problem. Instead they should strive for efficiency and improvisation in their teaching with an aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning that will in turn yield better academic achievement of learners in South African schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the preceding discussions, the following recommendations are made:

- Introduction of Telematic teaching in the previously disadvantaged schools could help in alleviating the problem of unequal of access to LTSM. Telematic is a philosophy of flexible teaching and learning that uses variety of methods and technology operating from the advantaged centre, for example, a higher education institution, to ensure imparting of knowledge and interaction of learners and teachers in schools thus bringing into picture equality to education. The DoE should, therefore, put the following in place for effective teaching and learning to take place through Telematic approach: provide adequate funding to the centres, network with other institutions and departments in order to share ideas, sufficient training be provided to staff members and also provide learners with relevant study materials that promote interactive teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

- Bishop G 1989. *Alternative Strategies for Education*. Hong Kong: MacMillan.
- Bureau for Information 1988. *South Africa*. Cape Town: CTP Books.
- Chisholm LK, Vally S 1996. *The Culture of Learning and Teaching in Gauteng Schools*. Learning and Teaching, Education Policy Unit, Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.
- Colclough CA, Samarra S, Rose P, Tembo M 2003. *Achieving Schooling For All in Africa*. Ashgate: Burlington.
- Coutts A 1996. *Empower the Teacher*. Halfway House: International Thomson Publishing (Pty) Ltd.
- Czerniewics L, Murray S, Probyn M 2000. The role of learning support material in Curriculum 2005. *A Research Paper for the National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development (NCCRD)*.
- Education Africa Forum 2003. *Delivering Africa's Education Renaissance in South Africa*. 6th Edition. South Africa: Interpak Books.
- Education Foundation 2000. *The Education Atlas of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Engelbrecht P, Green L 2001. *Promoting Learning Development. Preventing and Working With Barriers to Learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaiks.
- Fraser WJ, Meier C, Potter CS, Sekgobela E, Pore A 1996. Reflections on the causes and manifestations of violence in South African schools. *Prospects*, 26: 2.
- Fourie HB 1986. *Annual Report*. Department of Education and Training. Pretoria.
- Hartshorne K 1992. *Crisis and Challenges: Black Education 1910-1990*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Henning E, Van Rensburg W, Smit B 2004. *Finding Your Way to Qualitative Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaiks.
- Hopkins D, Stern D 1996. Quality teachers, quality schools: International perspectives and policy implications. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 12: 501.
- Kniker CR, Naylor NA 1986. *Teaching Today and Tomorrow*. London: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.
- Louw JBZ 1991. *Annual Report*. Department of Education and Training. Pretoria.
- Mabogoane T 2005. The challenges of distributing knowledge. *Edu Source Data News*, No. 44. August.
- Maden M 2001. *Success against the Odds-Five Years on Revisiting Effective Schools in Disadvantaged Areas*. New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Mason J 1996. *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage Publications.
- Merriam SB 1998. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mertens DM 1998. *Research Methods in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Mouton JK, Marais HC 1993. *Basic Concepts in the Methodology of the Social Science*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.
- McMillan JH, Schumacher S 1993. *Research in Education: A Conceptual Introduction*, 3rd Edition. New York: Harper Collins.
- Mwamwenda TS 1995. *Educational Psychology. An African Perspective*. Durban: Heinemann.
- Neuman WL 1997. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Nxumalo B 1993. The culture of learning: A survey of Kwa-Mashu schools. *Indicators, South Africa*, 10: 55-60.
- Pacheco R 1996. *Leerkultuur in skole van die voormalige Departement van Onderwys en Opleiding. DEd-proefskrif*. Johannesburg: Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit.
- Robinson M 2002. Teacher reforms in South Africa: Challenges, strategies and debates. *Prospects*, 12: 290-293.
- Seidman I 2000. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. Teachers College Press. 3rd Edition. London: Sage Publications.
- South African Schools' Act no. 84, Section 20, 1996. Pretoria: Government Printers, pp. 31-32.
- Stockard J 1980. *Rethinking People Management. A New Look at the Human Resources*. New York: Amacom.
- Strauss AL, Corbin J 1990. *Basics of Qualitative Research:*

- Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.
- Strauss JP, Van der Linde JJ, Plekkers SJ 2000. *Education and Manpower Development*. Research Institute for Education Planning, Faculty of the Humanities, No. 20 Bloemfontein: University of the Free State.
- Thembela AJ 1991. *Current Realities in Education and a Vision for the Future*. D.Ed. Thesis. Unpublished. Ulundi: University of Zululand.
- Thomas RM 1998. *Conducting Educational Research*. New York: Routledge.
- Vakalisa NCG 2000. Curriculum, teacher and teaching, where does the answer or educational reform lie? *Educare*, 29:13-27. Pretoria: University of South Africa.