



Efficacy in the Provisioning of Educational Needs for Learners in Schools in the Amathole East Education District

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article was to investigate the extent of efficacy on the part of departmental officials in the provisioning of resources for teaching and learning to schools in the Amathole East Education District (AEED). The idea was to establish the extent to which the Department of Education, in the context of this Education District, lives up to the expectations of schools in so far as the provisioning of educational needs of the learners in schools is concerned. The focus on AEED, however, does not preclude the context in which the District operates, which is the Provincial Department of Education and National.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative Research Method was used in this study. The approach to data collection was exploratory. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the aim of drawing experiences from the members of the National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASGBs), Teacher Unions, School Principals and Teachers, as well as Literature Review. The researcher in this study adopted the approach of focus group discussions. A group of school principals, for instance, was invited to converge under one roof. Executive Members of Teacher Unions at Regional Level were also asked to converge under one roof for the purpose of group discussions. Then the researcher initiated a discussion with the focus group by throwing questions that were responded to spontaneously within the group. From time to time, in the course of the discussions, the researcher would ask follow-up questions. The questions were aimed at ensuring that the discussions are focussed on the issue at hand. They were also asked to ensure that the researcher obtained more clarity on issues ventilated on.

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From the focus group discussions that ensued, the researcher was able to transcribe, code the ideas that came up, develop themes out of the ideas, make meaning of the themes and subsequently develop a principle. This is the procedure that the researcher applied across the focus groups that were interviewed, the members of the NASGB and the teachers in the case of this study. The Interpretive Phenomenological Theory (IPA) has been used as the basis for data analysis in this study.

Findings – the view that resonated across participants in this study is that the provisioning of educational needs for learners in schools by the Department of Education in the Eastern Cape is in a terrible state. The recommendation is that the Minister should subject departmental officials to extensive capacitation programs on resource management. In addition to that the Minister should revise the policy on National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF) to cause it to speak to the educational needs of the learners on the ground.

Research limitations/implications – Participants in the study might be unwilling to say things that would make the Department of Basic Education to appear in a bad light in the eyes of the public. Participants would do this for fear of making the Department of Education for which most of them work, as being brought into disrepute. This is a factor that has a potential to place restrictions on the methodologies and conclusions of the researcher in this study. It's a factor that is not within the control of the researcher, despite him having made a concerted effort to allay fears on the part of participants.

Practical implications - The findings and recommendations from this study will speak to the conscience of those in charge of creating an enabling environment for schools to allocate resources to schools as expected of them. The service delivery protests by school communities and labour unions against the officials of the department will either be greatly minimised or put to an end completely. The findings can also have an effect of influencing the budget allocation for the Department of Basic Education by the Minister of Finance. Many of the adverse findings in the study are attributable to the underfunding of schools by the State.

Originality/value – The study zooms into issues besetting the functionality of schools in the Amathole East Education District as a result of lack of support from the District, as well as National and Provincial Head Offices. The study provides a theoretical and empirical contribution to the existing literature on the critical issue of the quality of education in schools as provided for by education departments. There are practical recommendations that are made in the article to assist National and Provincial Departments to understand the impact and gravity of inadequate funding of schools by the State, as well as the need for accredited capacity building programmes for departmental officials.

Keywords: Education provisioning; quality; underfunding; capacity building; accreditation.

1. Introduction

Since the dawn of democracy the issue of the quality of education resourcing in the post-apartheid South Africa has been under spotlight for communities who rely on public schooling for their education. The disparities along racial lines, orchestrated and effected by the white minority regime in South Africa in the period pre-1994, constitute the main reason for this situation to come about. Soon after the advent of democracy, a need arose for

the imbalances and the inequalities of the past between historically advantaged white schools and the historically disadvantaged black schools to be addressed by the newly elected government which happened to be a government led by the African National Congress (ANC).

Mouton, Louw, and Strydom (2012) throw some light into the period 1994-2011 which they say introduced a radically new historical era for all South Africans, and most importantly for education; an era that saw schooling in dire straits, plunging it into a state of being one of the worst in the continent in so far as success is concerned. Mouton and his colleagues (2012) contend that there was a widespread ignorance as the new curriculum moved away from the crucial basics like reading, writing, and arithmetic to a learner-centred approach with the result that most learners at university level struggled with reading and the understanding of the content that would be expected of a university scholar. The new curriculum referred to by these authors is the Outcomes-Based Education which became controversial from the outset for both the educators and policymakers alike. The shortcomings of the new curriculum included the proliferation of developments that were almost impossible to implement, expensive, and with teachers disastrously ill-prepared for, since no adequate training had ever been given to them.

The quality of education in South Africa is in a dire state; it is *horrible; it is dismal and catastrophic*. The one bald conclusion that one can draw from studies that have been made is that we have an *Education System that is in Crisis in South Africa*. Wilmot (2017:49) says “only 25 percent of schools in South Africa are currently providing quality education”. He goes on to say that these schools are mostly affluent schools in urban areas; and for 75 percent of South African children, quality education remains an elusive ideal.

1.1 The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to argue that the Department of Basic Education, through its Provincial Departments and Districts, is failing to provide schools with education resources of such a quality and quantity as to enable schools to deliver efficiently on their mandate of curriculum delivery at that level where the tyre hits the tar. Yet, schools have their hands tied and are unable to perform as expected, precisely for this reason of the failure of the State to provide them with resources necessary for effective teaching and learning to take place. The paper argues that the State fails to provide an enabling environment that schools need for student performance that is up to standard. As if the State is oblivious of that reality, it is quick to apportion blame on teachers and school principals, when their respective schools underperform. When a school underperforms, principals are called upon to account, and in extreme cases, they are required to give reasons why they should not be shown the door for their underperformance. When a High School produces a Pass Rate that is below the Provincial one at the end of the year, it is deemed to be underperforming. Section 58B (1) of the South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996 (SASA) states that the Head of Department must, annually, identify any school that is underperforming in relation to any matter referred to in subsection (2) (a) (b) or (c). Subsection (2) cited above mandates the Head of Department to issue a written notice to the school contemplated in subsection (1) if he or she is satisfied that-

- (a) *the standard of performance is below the standards prescribed by the National Curriculum Statement*

and is likely to remain so unless the Head of Department exercises his or her power in terms of this Act.

- (b) There has been a serious breakdown in the way the school is managed or governed which is prejudicing, or likely to prejudice, the standards of performance; or*
- (c) The safety of learners or staff is threatened.*

Section 58B is an amendment in the South African Schools Act (SASA) by way of an insertion through the Education Laws Amendment Act, Act 31 of 2007. Section 58B of SASA must be read in conjunction with s16A(b) which directs principals of underperforming schools, in terms of section 58B(3)(a - b), to provide the Head of Department with an Academic Performance Improvement Plan (APIP) whose purpose is to show how the school principal plans to turn around the underperformance. School principals must submit the APIP within 14 days of their receipt of the notices. This legislation is all about consequence management, which is a good thing for authorities to do. However, the question that needs to be given attention as well is ‘*to what extent does the Department of education, through the HoD, create an enabling environment for schools to perform at the level expected of them, before calling on school principals to account for underperformance*’. This is what informs this study. It is important to note that section 58B (4) states emphatically that the ‘*Head of Department must take all reasonable steps to assist a school identified in terms of subsection (1) in addressing the underperformance*’.

The study goes further to establish what the causative factors are, that a school performs below that standard expected of it. The final point that the study makes, is that of making recommendations as to how the quality of education provisioning could be improved.

1.2 Background to the study

There seems to be hues and cries among school communities across the length and breadth of the country around the provisioning of basic necessities for teaching and learning in schools, the Learner and Teacher Support Material (LTSM) and the requisite infrastructure. The question that this investigation seeks to answer is whether or not the Department of Basic Education does live up to the expected standards in so far as the provisioning of educational needs of the learners is concerned. Section 12 of SASA dictates that the *Member of the Executive Council* (MEC) for education must provide public schools for the education of learners out of funds appropriated for this purpose by the *provincial legislature*. The Act makes it clear that this provisioning must include the provision of hostels for the residential accommodation of learners. The MEC in terms of this section of the Act must also take all reasonable measures to ensure the physical facilities at public schools are accessible to *disabled* persons. These are the necessities that the Department of Basic Education must provide. These necessities include human resource, school buildings, school furniture, textbooks and stationery, technological equipment such as computers, tablets and other gadgets associated with digital divide for both teachers and learners, consumables like duplicating paper, as well as recreational facilities for learners. Veriava (2017) argues that in South Africa there remains schools that must function without the ‘full basket of entitlements’ necessary for basic education. To this cause, Veriava (2017) states that civil society organizations like Centre for Child Law (CCL), Section 27 and Equal education have led many campaigns for a better quality of education in historically disadvantaged public schools. This is what informs this study.

Wright (2012) describes the failure by District Offices and Provincial Departments to manage and support teachers in schools as a problem. In support of Wright (2017), Kota, Hendricks, Matambo and Naidoo (2017) state that the structural consolidation in the provincial government, and in the integration of a disparate set of political and administrative stewardship of the African national Congress (ANC) constitute an integral part of the factors responsible for the crisis prevailing in education in South Africa. Moorosi and Bantwini (2016) identified leadership styles that are top-down autocratic approaches with traces of consultation and participation; a situation that led to gaps in collaborative planning. This has had a ripple effect of decisions that are taken not addressing the needs of schools as seen and identified by the schools themselves.

1.2.1 Reports by Print Media Houses

Eastern Cape schools have been lacking infrastructure for years and the lack of funding to improve this has left students with dangerous sanitation facilities; while receiving education in classrooms without roofs appears to be a norm rather than a deviation (Careersportal, 8 December 2020). The infrastructure backlogs in respect of school buildings and ablution facilities seem to be a stubborn challenge too insurmountable for the Provincial Departments of Education to resolve. The Education Department has acknowledged that there is a huge backlog challenge (in regard to school infrastructure) and a lot of work needs to be done, hence the Sanitation Appropriate For Education (SAFE) and Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ACIDI) had to be reviewed earlier in the year (Careersportal, 22 June 2022).

There is evidence that there are learners who deserve to benefit from the Scholar Transport Program of the Department, but these learners continue to walk long distances to receive education in schools. They do this at the risk of losing their lives to having to cross flooded rivers and walking on terrains that are dangerous due to crime committed by rapists and thugs who always seek to prey on them as they travel to and from school. The National Household Survey (NHTS), 2020 results show that 'walking all the way' remained the mode of travel that was most used by learners to receive their education in all nine provinces (South Africa: statssa,2020). The survey, released by Statistics South Africa in 2020, reports that about 10.1 million learners walked all the way to their educational institutions. This translates to 59.4% of all learners in South Africa. In the Eastern Cape, only 81% of pupils who are eligible for scholar transport will be transported and 24 000 will be left stranded for the whole of the 2022/2023 financial year (*Capetimes*, 30 June 2022).

Backlogs in respect of school furniture are no exception to the picture on school facilities infrastructure and scholar transport portrayed above. In the Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Education, the backlog affects 51, 629 pupils who are without basic school furniture (Dispatchlive, 26 November 2020). In regard to Learner and Teacher Support Material the picture is as gloomy as it is for school furniture and other requisites necessary for a conducive teaching and learning environment in the Eastern Cape schools. These materials are either not delivered at all or not delivered on time to all schools in the province. Democratic Alliance's provincial spokesperson on education said that pupils at 4 703 out of 5 451 public schools in the province started the school year without textbooks because LTSM had not been delivered (City Press, 19 January 2022). For the reason of this situation, the Democratic Alliance (DA) undertook to refer the matter to the Human Rights Commission as textbooks are crucial in fulfilling a pupil's constitutional right to education. This was after the

MEC for Education had admitted that this was true, citing serious budgetary constraints that prevailed when orders were placed as reason.

The other challenge that seems to be persistent and continuing *unabated* within the Department of Basic Education, particularly in the Eastern Cape, is the one that relates to the filling of teacher vacancies. Following the departure of several educators last year (2020), the Eastern Cape's Education Department has acknowledged that more than 2 000 teaching posts; including those of principals, heads of departments, and teachers; needed to be filled (Careersportal: 8 September 2021). Teachers' Union, SADTU, also expressed its disappointment with the Department as its provincial secretary, Chris Mdingi, stated that this has been a long-standing issue that is yet to be addressed despite their efforts in convincing the department to do so (Careersportal: 8 September 2021). Reports by various print media houses continue to hammer on this issue of teacher shortages in schools as a pertinent challenge besetting the functionality of schools. Teacher shortages at poor schools in the Eastern Cape schools continue to affect learning and teaching; and according to reports by SADTU there are a number of schools that started the school year (2021) with classrooms full of learners with no teachers (Elitsha, 26 February 2021).

The sentiments as expressed in the extracts above are further supported by an incident that took place at Provincial level wherein the Head of Department was suspended by the Premier. Eastern Cape premier, ..., has suspended the head of the department of education, ..., over the delay in delivering textbooks and the forfeiture of a R200m grant meant for school infrastructure (Businessday, 06 April 2022).

1.2.2 Perspectives from Participants in the Study

During the first term of the 2022 academic year, there was a disruption of schooling across the Amathole East Education District (AEED) as stakeholders embarked on protests against the Department of Education for lack of service delivery. The Provincial Chairperson of the National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASGBs) concurred with the statement by the Regional Secretary of SADTU that:

We have resolved to embark on a "Shut Down" of schools across the entire district as we call for answers from the Department as to why there have been budget cuts of R690/ learner/school on school allocations last year, as well as why some learners who had been benefiting from scholar transport have since been cut off from benefitting from that provision. We demand, among other things, an immediate delivery of Stationery to all schools that have not received their supply, the filling of all vacant posts for teachers, the provision of non-teaching staff to schools, the provision of ablution facilities to schools, and the provision of school infrastructure and furniture. Where we loosen up for us to attend school, we will exercise the "Work to Rule" principle. We will only do that which is stipulated in our job descriptions, and nothing more. We have put all extra-curricular activities in abeyance until these matters are addressed.

Participants in the study expressed great concern over the state of infrastructure and school furniture in their schools. There are schools where pupils receive tuition in mud- structures and dilapidated fabricated structures that are falling apart. These are structures that were put up by the former homeland government authorities. A

Circuit Manager of one of the Circuits in the Districts expressed frustration at the high rate of school vandalism and damage to property caused by school communities. He stated as follows:

The backlog in terms of infrastructure in this district is enormous and I believe it will take years to address, given the slow rate at which projects are rolled out currently; a situation that is exacerbated by the high rate of vandalism that is taking place in schools. There is a school that has been burned down twice in this circuit in a period of less than three years. A school was built for the community at a cost of millions and millions of Rands. They burned it down in one night. They were provided with temporary classrooms for teaching and learning to take place. They burned those temporary structures down as well. I am going to that school now and I do not know what solution I am bringing to the community in this situation; for it is them who should be knowing who the culprits are. It is them who should be guarding their school against vandalism.

When schools are built, it appears that there is not so much thought given into how the safety of the infrastructure and the people inside the school will be ensured. The only safety measure that is exercised is one of security fencing, and nothing more. Evidence from participants in the study is that there are no security officers to serve as night guards are provided to schools. So far, people employed as ‘security guards’ have their job descriptions stating that they report for duty in the morning and knock off in the afternoon. During the night the safety of the building and other assets in it is left to fate.

In March 2022 one of the participants in the study who was a school principal stated as follows:

We are frustrated and hamstrung because the Department has failed to transfer to schools money for school nutrition. Some of the pupils who rely on the National School Nutrition Program (NSP) for their only decent meal a day are no longer attending school; and how do you teach pupils who attend school to receive tuition on empty stomachs?

A member of the School Governing Body of a school was contemplating to remove her child from the school, and seek admission elsewhere. She said:

A principal has not been appointed in this school since last year. This is despite the post having been advertised in the Bulletin that was issued early this year. It is May now and the post still has not been filled. This has created a situation where a leadership vacuum has existed in the school for too long; and as such there is a complete lack of direction in both the administration of the school and the tuition that pupils are supposed to receive.

Another school principal who was fed up with how the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) was managed by the District Office stated as follows:

This project is a very good project because it goes a long way in creating job opportunities for the unemployed youth. It plays a significant role in pushing back the frontiers of poverty in many households, but now it has since become a nerve wreck for school principals. Employee Assistants (EAs) and General Assistants (GAs) that are employed through this project go for months and months without salaries; and their first point of call when

they feel the pain is us, the principals. Over and above that, our core business as teachers is too teach, but as a result of this project we have to turn our backs on pupils and attend to the bulk of paper work that we need to do to get the EAs and GAs paid. This is a big frustration.

These are some of the sentiments that participants have shared in this study which point to a serious lack of efficacy in the provisioning of educational needs for learners in schools. There is therefore both anecdotal and empirical evidence of the existence of lack of efficiency in the provisioning of resources necessary for effective teaching and learning in schools.

The one bold statement that resonated across all the participants in this study is that there is a dire need to subject departmental officials on extensive capacitation programs on how to go about with the provisioning of educational needs for learners and teachers in schools. Participants stressed the point that such programs should be accredited by way of certification and should be offered by accredited educational institutions.

These are insights from available literature, print media houses, as well as participants in the study that constitute the background to the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 State of Education Provisioning in South Africa

Revelations from the literature that has been reviewed in this study, as well as perceptions from participants in the study point to a dismal failure on the part of departmental officials at district, provincial and national level to provide an enabling environment to schools, for them to produce quality education. Bantwini (2019) alludes to a growing global concern regarding the state and quality of education received by many children in and from poor and disadvantaged communities. Bantwini (2019) goes on to further state that the state of and quality of basic education in South Africa have also been the main concern of the South African government since the attainment of democracy in 1994 and this originates from the country's gloomy history in the provisioning of basic education necessities for black learners in the historically disadvantaged schools. By implication, this assertion means that the gloomy history in the provisioning of basic education necessities for black learners in the historically disadvantaged schools continues to be perpetuated by departmental officials in the post-apartheid era in South Africa.

The narrative, as expressed in the paragraph above, is supported by the levels of low morale amongst educators serving in the Department of Basic Education. Mtyuda and Okeke (2016) have found that lack of resources, overcrowded classes, administrative issues and no recognition for good work done caused dissatisfaction among teachers; as a result a remarkable number of them took a decision to disengage and leave the profession.

One fundamental requisite for effective teaching and learning to take place in a school is that there should be a teacher in front of the learners. In the Eastern Cape Department of Education it is a norm rather than a deviation that when a teacher vacates a post in a school, there will be no immediate replacement. The post that becomes substantive at the point the teacher vacates will remain unfilled until the end of the financial year when it no

longer remains substantive any more. A substantive vacant post is a post that is budgeted for and therefore funded. When the financial year ends since the vacant status of a post has occurred, the post ceases to be substantive. It becomes an unfunded vacant post and it therefore cannot be filled for the reason of budgetary constraints. In fact, such a post no longer exists in essence immediately the financial year in which it occurred expires. SADTU has described this tendency as a mischievous retrenchment of staff through the backdoor by departmental officials. SADTU has always been at pains to ward off the deliberate intent and efforts by the Department to retrench teachers for the reason of budgetary challenges. Nearly a month ago, SADTU remained opposed to the decision by the Department of Education in Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) to retrench teachers (Careersportal, 5, October 2021). In this regard, SADTU declared a victory through a media statement after successfully fighting off the decision by the KZN Department of Education to retrench 6 000 teachers, citing a tight budget as reason. The situation is worse off with non-teaching staff vacancies. Participants in this study were unanimous in saying that when the post of an Administration Clerk becomes vacant it is never filled. One participant stated as follows:

“I can say it without any fear of contradiction that in the past five years there has never been a bulletin issued for non-teaching staff vacancies in this province”.

Bulletins for teaching posts are issued once per term and sometimes appointments are never made in respect of those vacancies. Moses, Victor, and John (2022) contend that the resourcing of schools in developing countries, like South Africa, is characterized by huge inequalities and an attempt should be made to redress the situation. In South Africa, the ANC led government has been contending with this issue of resource allocation to schools and redress ever since the dawn of democracy in 1994 without any resounding success. White and Van Dyk (2019) argue that it would appear that “only the poorest schools were targeted and those schools located in the middle of the resource targeting table, the so called middle schools (Quintile 3), became neglected and impoverished. This is after schools had been ranked into five Quintiles, with Quintile 1 representing the poorest schools and Quintile 5 the most affluent. Quintile 1 to Quintile 3 schools were then declared “No- Fee Schools”, meaning that parents whose learners attend in these schools do not pay fees. The education of learners in “No- Fee Schools” is funded in full by the State. Schools in quintiles 4 and 5 are deemed, for all intents and purposes, to be wealthy schools. They get a negligible funding from the State. Parents in Quintiles 4 and 5 schools are responsible for the funding of the education of their children. These schools charge school fund from parents to run the day to day activities of the school. However, a “fee exemption policy” for parents in these schools had been adopted by the State. The policy provides for a parent who is struggling to pay fees for reasons relating to financial burdens to apply for fee- exemption. The amount of money allocated by the State to a school depends on: the quintile of the school, and the number of learners in that school.

The amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) had to be so designed as to address the inequalities as depicted in the quintile profiling of schools. However, despite that strategy having been put in place, the provisioning of all the resources that historically disadvantaged schools need for learning and teaching to take place as expected continues to be a pie in the sky. Schools continue to operate under extremely difficult conditions of overcrowding, shortage of teachers, lack of furniture, inadequate funding, late delivery of, and LTSM that is seldom enough for learners and teachers, unavailability of infrastructure and equipment for indoor

games, absence of recreational facilities such as play grounds, as well as equipment for all different sporting codes and music equipment. The shortage of the requisite resources for learning and teaching in schools is a scourge that is not unique to South Africa. The challenge of underfunding of education in schools seems to be inescapable and too difficult to resolve. Since the advent of democracy in 1994, government has pursued equity in education in the context of limited public finances (Motala and Carel, 2019). In support of Motala and Carel (2019), Ndou (2022) categorically states that the majority of learners in South Africa are not provided with quality education due to underfunding, and what makes matters worse, is that the quality of schooling is inequitably distributed.

2.2 Underfunding of Education outside South Africa

The underfunding of education provisioning is not unique to South Africa. It is a bug that thrives on besetting the functionality of schools across almost all the countries of the world.

Kelly and Schafft (2021) attest to the effect that underfunding did prevail in Pennsylvania, but it was effectively mitigated through the shale gas boom. The shale gas boom profoundly reshaped communities, local institutions and living conditions for many residents. On average, districts that were experiencing unconventional drilling had lower per pupil revenues locally raised per pupil funding for schools, per pupil income, and per pupil property wealth than very similar districts that did not experience unconventional drilling. Adegami and Adesanmi (2018) came to the conclusion, after assessing the state of education in Nigeria, that education is a requirement for an all-round transformation of the people and societies; but is undermined by poor funding, outdated curriculum and poor policy that portend danger to sustainable development of a rapid population growing Nigeria. This situation of poor funding has been exacerbated by the ravages of the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria which resulted in the suspension of the operations of schools as financial resources were redirected to fighting the impact of the deadly pandemic on society (Abari and Orunbon, 2020).

Mississippi also constantly has one of the lowest amounts of revenue generated to address kindergarten-twelfth grade educational needs (Hall, 2018). The model for the funding of these schools at this level is documented in the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP). The allocation of money in terms of this document is based upon per year decision by the Mississippi Department of Education to take money from the general fund of the state's budget, a situation that has led to MAEP being fully funded only three times since its implementation in 1997. All efforts to revise the funding model came to nothing, as a result the state continues to underfund education as it relied on local taxes to supplement the low level of state funding.

2.3 Underfunding in First World Countries

There are first world countries that also experience underfunding challenges for public schooling. Owings and Kaplan (2019) refer to a lack of adequate funding which has become a number one concern for public schools in America. The lack of adequate funding referred to finds its expression in an era of a dwindling fiscal support prevailing for public schools, increasing federal mandates, and local budget requirements which call for leaders to be able to articulate sound finance theory and application in America. In the same vein, education in Russia is

facing underfunding in terms of budgetary resources (Dubovik, 2018). The situation in Russia comes about as a result of anti-Russian sanctions and attempts to isolate the Russian system of education. To mitigate this situation, the Russian education and government authorities came up with a number of strategies. These include increasing the share of education in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), raising the status of teacher-innovator, reducing the level of bureaucratization, formalization and standardization of education, reduction of paperwork, creating jobs that require high qualifications, and ensuring equal opportunities of education for all.

Education in China, standing out as a huge economy as it does, has not escaped the pangs of the monster of underfunding for its education. China's social policy in general, and education policy in particular, exhibits a model that is not stable due to tensions that exist between centralized mandates and decentralized financing, leading to underfunded social programs (Zhao, 2018). The central government, as a result, has resorted to a top-down mobilization for the purpose of achieving both the unfunded and underfunded policy mandates.

2.4 Adequate Funding of Education as provided in some First World Countries

Not all countries of the world experience the underfunding of schools. In Australia, schools are funded by government purely on the basis of needs, regardless of whether the school is a public school or a private school (Rowe and Perry, 2020). In this regard, funding is allocated to schools in accordance with the estimate measure of how much the school requires to meet the educational needs of all its students. This is done via a school resourcing norm that is called the School Resource Standard (SRS). In terms of the SRS, every student in each school is allocated a base amount which goes along with six loadings that provide for additional funding for disadvantaged students. Disadvantaged students are classified as: student with disabilities (SWD), Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students, low socioeconomic status students, and low English proficiency students.

Knight and Toenjes (2020) also give an account of schools, called charter schools, in the US which are funded through state school finances. In Texas, as well as in California and nationally, charters receive formula funding that is capped in the amount of additional student poverty weighted funding. The funding formula ensures that no student is funded less than is necessary for all their educational needs to be addressed. In America, charter schools and "traditional public schools" receive a similar treatment in terms of funding from the State in that they both receive subsidy through a combination of primarily state and local taxes based on their pupil enrolments.

3. Research Methods

Qualitative Research method has been used in this study to collect and analyze data. Brown–Saracino (2021) firmly states that most qualitative research relies on the researcher's close engagement with the data that they collect and analyze. Asper and Corte (2020) define qualitative research as an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied. The approach to data collection and analysis was exploratory and interpretive. The sense, perceptions and meanings that participants had and made of the issue

under investigation constituted the basis of the conclusions that the researcher drew. Qualitative approaches have become accepted and indeed embraced as empirical methods within the social sciences, as scholars have realized that many of the phenomena in which we are interested are complex and require deep inner reflection and equally penetrating examination (Elliot and Timulak, 2021). Focus group interviews were used to establish what the perceptions of the participants in the study are. These focus groups included school principals, teacher unions, SGB Associations and departmental officials in the form of Circuit Managers. The researcher facilitated discussions by playing the role of an investigator, making sure that discussions are focused and provide answers to the issues at hand. The face to face semi structured interviews required of the researcher to listen and respond to the participants' answers or speech (Arifin, 2018). Jones (2020) holds the view that qualitative interviews are distinguished from survey interviews in being less structured in their approach and in allowing individuals to expand on their responses to question, and that is what the researcher consciously maintained in this study. Information gathered was arranged into themes, and a sense was made of what the message that information under each theme sought to put across. Due consideration was taken for the protection of the identities of participants. The confidentiality of who said what was strictly upheld in line with universally accepted research ethics standards.

4. Discussions, findings and recommendations

Sayed, Motala, Carel, and Ahmed (2020) contend that equity and redress, in and through education, are fundamental commitments of the new South African democratic government that ensued in 1994 after a brutal and protracted history of colonial and apartheid segregation and oppression denied the majority black population the fundamental right to equitable and quality education. Sayed and his colleagues (2020) further state that more than 26 years after the ending of colonial and apartheid rule, the South African education system, and society in general, remain, far from equal – made worse by the current COVID-19 pandemic. By implication, this basically means that the underfunding of education and therefore lack of resources for effective teaching and learning are not a thing of the past as yet. Schools continue to operate under difficult conditions of lack of resources: physical, financial and human.

Section 3(1) of SASA makes it compulsory for a parent to cause the child to attend a school from the first school day of the year in which the child reaches the age of seven years until the last school day of the year in which the child reaches the age of fifteen years or the ninth grade, whichever comes first. Subsection (6)(a) of the Act states categorically that any parent who, without a just cause and after a written notice from the Head of Department, fails to comply with subsection (1) is guilty of an offence and is liable to a fine or an imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months. Subsection (6)(b) goes on to say that *any other person* who, without just cause, prevents a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance from attending school, is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months.

The point that I am driving at, with the issues that I am raising in the two paragraphs above, is that it thus becomes unfair therefore for departmental officials to apportion blame, only at the doorstep of the school principal when a school underperforms, without taking into account first the extent to which the department has created an enabling environment for the school concerned to perform as expected. From this study, it is clear

that learners travel long distances to access education, walking on dangerous terrains which subject them to criminal acts of rape, of vicious attacks and killings, as well as kidnaps and forced marriages. Others have to put their lives at risk by crossing flooded rivers that do not have any bridges to access education. Schools contend with the predicament of making ends meet for the better part of the year without textbooks and stationery. The dignity and the human rights of teachers and learners are grossly violated. They are subjected to a situation where they must operate in dilapidated infrastructural establishments where toilets, school furniture, water and sanitation, technological equipment that has become the acceptable standard of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), adequate Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff, as well as other important requisites for effective teaching and learning, are conspicuous by their absence in schools.

Maybe it is prudent to indicate at this point that this argument should not be misconstrued to be saying that principals of schools should not be made to account for underperformance or non-performance. What the argument is advancing rather, is that the level of accountability and consequence management meted out to school principals should be concomitant with the resources supplied, or the conducive environment that has been created by the State for effective teaching and learning to take place. It's an argument that does not seek to conclude that accountability is a wrong direction for departmental officials to take, both for this generation and the next generation of school principals (Cochran-Smith, Carney, Keefe, Burton, Chang, Fernandez, Miller, Sanchez and Baker, 2018). The argument seeks to reclaim and embrace accountability that reconstructs its targets, purposes, and consequences in line with the dispensation of the larger democratic provisions. There is nothing wrong with accountability. Every employee, in the employer-employee relationship, has to be answerable to someone for his or her actions, but that answerability must be just. It must be fair. It must be considerate. I must encompass a lot of responsibility to deliver on the part of both the employer and the employee alike. That is the essence of the argument that this paper is advancing.

When the Heads of Departments demand the Academic Performance Improvement Plans from the school principals of underperforming schools in terms of Section 58B; they must, in the same vein, provide the school principals with clear plans as to how they are going to support the individual school principals concerned in respect of those areas that are within their competence before the APIPs are approved. There should be commitment that the plan of the HoD, together with that of the school principal, do translate into action. Theory and practice should go together. Whereas subsection (4) of Section 58B is clear to say that “the *Head of Department* must take all reasonable steps to assist a school identified in terms of subsection (1) in addressing underperformance”, evidence gathered from participants in this study is that such assistance seldom comes forth. Before any punitive measure is exercised against a school principal for underperformance, there should therefore be evidence of the support and guidance that departmental officials as a collective have given to the principal to address the conditions that militate against the efforts of the school principal to exhibit performance that is up to scratch. That undertaking by departmental officials should not just be a word of mouth. In fact, for employers to coerce employees to be optimally productive without having provided such employees with the requisite tools of trade amounts to what can best be described as “unfair labour practice”. It is for that reason that it is difficult for the employer to charge with success an employee with misconduct for the reason of poor performance. In terms of item 10 and 11 of Schedule 8 to the Labour Relations Act, Act 66 of 1995 (LRA) an employer intending to dismiss an employee due to incapacity has a number of duties to fulfill in respect of the

employee before taking any action that should lead to the employee's dismissal. Courts have endorsed the concept of corrective or progressive discipline in terms of which efforts should have been made to correct the employee's behaviour through a system of graduated disciplinary measures such as counselling and warnings before the dismissal process is enacted (Schedule 8 of the LRA amended by s. 57 Act No. 42 of 1996 and s. 56 of Act No. 12 of 2002). For the employers to succeed in such a case, they must be able to produce evidence that they have given the employee all the support the employee needed in order to perform as expected. Principals of schools in this study have indicated that they have been bombarded by the employer with threats of dismissal without the employer having met the provisions of Schedule 8 of the LRA as amended. This is particularly the case, according to participants in this study, with principals of schools that are declared as "chronic serial underperformers". Chronic serial underperformers, according to participants in the study, are schools that have produced a pass rate that is below the provincial pass rate for three consecutive years and above.

The Department of Basic Education, as one of the best strategies it can adopt for the realization of efficacy in education provisioning, especially in regard to LTSM delivery, could advisably grab with both hands the opportunities presented by the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The Department should network with Private Sector and other Government Departments for the purpose of putting up the necessary infrastructure, especially in the rural areas where this infrastructure is conspicuous by its absence, for the purpose exploiting this space of the 4IR. Nundkumar and Subban (2020) are of the view that the Fourth Industrial Revolution as a contemporary phenomenon provides new forecasts for consideration where Information and Communication Technology (ICT) underpins functions that strategically align the objectives of the Education and Training landscape. ICT would come in very handy in supporting education provisioning to schools where teachers and pupils are provided with laptops and tablets from which to source out information from the relevant software that has readily been installed in them. These gadgets should be supplied to all pupils in all schools across the length and breadth of the country.

From the deliberations that participants in this study made, it became apparent that there are projects that were started in some schools for the purpose of addressing infrastructure backlogs; but were left unfinished because of the use of Service Providers that do not have capacity. In some cases, the Service Providers abandoned the projects long before their ultimate completion for the reason that they were not paid by the State in accordance with terms agreed upon in the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that they signed prior their commencing with the work of their respective projects. It also appears that the policies that favour the hiring of the services of Small, Medium and Micro - Enterprises (SMMEs) do not seem to be working well to address the huge infrastructure challenges that schools are facing. These are policies that are meant to empower the previously disadvantaged entrepreneurs through the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) program, but the results are not as pleasing as they should for schools. However, these policies cannot be wished away; otherwise the rich would become richer while the poor fast become poorer. The solution to the problem that participants have highlighted in this regard is the close monitoring and evaluation of their service delivery. One of the reasons why these projects collapse before they are finished, according to participants in the study, is that the State fails to pay the Service Providers promptly, as the law prescribes. There should therefore be consequences for officials who fail to do their work. Some of them, as per the allegations from participants in the study, are people who found their way into senior positions in government as a result of cadre deployment at the expense of those who possess the

requisite qualifications for those positions. Deployment into senior positions in government should be based purely on merit, and not on any other criterion that is based on ulterior motives.

Some of the infrastructural challenges that schools are experiencing are as a result of vandalism by community members. When pupils are not happy with how school principals and teachers address their concerns, they sometimes easily embark on strikes that are characterized by destruction of property. Classrooms, libraries, laboratories and Administration Blocks are burned down by pupils who suddenly run amok and become unruly.

In light of the finding in this study that the appointment processes of teachers to fill existing vacancies greatly disadvantage the learners in schools, a recommendation is made for the revision of policies that regulate these processes. The processes are too bureaucratic and protracted, allowing an untenable situation whereby pupils sit in class without teachers before them for months and months, up to a year and over at most. The importance of recruitment and selection function is a critical managerial endeavor that organizations can ill-afford to overlook, more so in developing countries where the need for efficient and responsive public service is at the heart of narratives framing institutional reforms (Regobert, Sorkpor and Pagrah, 2020). A remarkable improvement can be seen in regard to appointments if posts were to be advertised on a month to month basis on the website of the Department, while delegations for the appointment of teachers and support staff are wholly devolved to the level of the District. Head Office officials should advisably not entertain any fears in devolving power and authority to appoint a replacement where the post is a substantive vacant post. A substantive vacant post is a post that have been created as a result of the retirement, resignation, abscondment, dismissal, or the death of the incumbent. It is a post that is therefore budgeted for. Districts are adequately equipped in terms of the human resources and connectivity to deal with issues of appointments. In the case of a teacher who has gone on maternity leave, there is no reason why a substitute cannot be appointed the same day the teacher concerned leaves the school. All that is needed is for the necessary documentation such as “Applications for Leave” Forms duly signed by accredited Medical Practitioners to be submitted on time. Same applies to the appointment of a substitute in respect of a teacher who has gone on sick leave for a period of a month and over. Failure to appoint teachers into vacancies that exist as a result of whatever the cause is a prejudice that cannot be justified to pupils; hence this recommendation.

The issue of the absence of access roads and bridges leading to schools has been raised very sharply in this study by participants. The construction of roads and bridges is not the competence of the Department of Education. However, if service delivery is compromised in regard to this aspect, schools are bound to suffer immensely. When heavy rains persist school attendance is crippled to a point where pupils abandon schooling; a situation that leads to a high dropout rate. Incidents of fatalities and serious accidents have been reported as a result of pupils attempting to cross flooded rivers that do not have bridges. Service providers for Scholar Transport are reportedly unable to transport pupils to schools sometimes as a result of adverse weather conditions that leave roads and bridges completely unusable. Same applies to service providers for the National School Nutrition Program (NSNP). They have difficulty taking food to school because of bad roads and bridges and rivers that cannot be crossed. It’s either there are no bridges at all, or the bridges are too low to allow for cars to cross in the event of floods. In circumstances like these the Department of Education cannot afford to work in silos. The recommendation that is made in this regard is one of the intensification of collaboration

between government departments and private sector. When matters of budgeting are discussed at the level of District Municipalities, at Provincial Legislatures and in the National Assembly it is important that the department of Education is well represented by people who know and understand the conditions as they obtain on the ground. Such representatives should be able to tell which roads and bridges ought to be prioritized, village by village, local municipality by local municipality, if pupils are to be able to attend school as the law prescribes even in the worst of adverse weather conditions.

The one strong point that needs to be highlighted is that of the need to subject departmental officials to extensive capacitation programs across all government departments if the educational needs of learners in schools are to be adequately addressed. Government departments and Municipalities should advisably desist from the practice of working in silos. Multi-disciplinary teams that include officials from all sectors; government, Municipal and Business Sector; should be set up for the purpose of confronting and tackling the challenges of education provisioning together as a collective.

5. Contribution to literature

The study contributes by way of literature reviews, anecdotal and empirical evidence gathered from practitioners on the ground on whether or not officials in the Department of Education are doing justice in the provision of resources that schools need for effective teaching and learning to take place. The study further provides practical solutions that Departmental officials need to deal with factors that impede adequate provisioning and allocation of resources to schools. It lays bare the importance of collaboration and social cohesion between government departments and private sector for the purpose of addressing issues of equity and equality in the manner that resources are allocated to schools.

6. Implications for research, practice and/or society

Given the detailed account of findings and recommendations articulated under discussions, findings and recommendations the Department of Basic Education stands to benefit a lot in so far as equipping its officials with best practices for equitable and effective allocation of resources to schools. Policymakers within the National Parliament and Provincial Legislatures in general, and the Department of Education in particular, may find it necessary to relook into how allocate resources to schools so as to ensure the kind of distribution that address effectively and optimally the teaching and learning needs of teachers and pupils respectively.

7. Conclusion

The study sought to establish if the Department of Basic Education, through its officials, is failing or not to provide schools with education resources of such a quality and quantity as to enable schools to deliver efficiently on their mandate of curriculum delivery at that level where the tyre hits the tar. The answer to this question is that it is failing. The infrastructure in schools is in a terrible state of disrepair, overcrowding in township schools is the order of the day, the provisioning of water and sanitation is far below the standard that ensures the dignity and integrity of pupils and teachers in schools, most schools are still using pit toilets, the delivery of LTSM to Quintiles 1 to 3 schools remains a cause for panic and headache for teachers and pupils

every time schools re-open at the beginning of the year, vacancies for teaching and non-teaching staff are not filled on time, no security officers are provided to guard schools overnight, the State of the Art sports grounds remain the privilege of the historically advantaged schools, and pupils still walk long distances to access education as no adequate provision of Scholar Transport is given to schools.

Recommendations on each of the areas mentioned above have been made in this study. A multidisciplinary approach involving the Municipalities, various government departments and private sector has been recommended to address issues that are not within the competence of the Department of Basic Education. For LTSM provisioning the department has been advised to make strides in exploiting opportunities provided by the Fourth Industrial Revolution for both the teachers and pupils to access information at the click of the button. A recommendation has been made in this study that established construction companies that have a proven track record, rather than SMMEs should be utilized to address the enormous backlogs that exist in regard to school infrastructure. Regarding the filling of vacancies in schools a recommendation has been made for the decentralization of power and authority to appoint staff to districts, more so that it has been found in the study that there is adequate human resource and connectivity at that level.

Finally and more importantly, the study advances an argument that says before the Heads of Departments call for school principals to account for underperformance in terms of Section 58B, they should make sure that they do not demand of them to perform more than they themselves have provided an enabling environment for principals to perform. Their approach should be corrective rather than punitive. They should take stock of what they have been able to deliver to schools before they demand of schools to be best performers. For departmental officials to expect performance that is not commensurate with what they have been able to support schools with is somewhat unfair, and is difficult to justify. As a recommendation in this regard, s 58B of SASA should therefore be revisited so as to include a clause that speaks to this aspect of performance by school principals that should measure equally to the quality and quantity of resources allocated by departmental officials.

The importance of the need to intensify capacitation programs for officials in the Civil Service, in government and in Municipalities cannot be over-emphasized.

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