



Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity

Educational Access in South Africa

Country Research Summary

**Shireen Motala
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November 2010



**University of the Witwatersrand
Education Policy Unit (EPU)**



Consortium for Research on
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity
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The Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) is a Research Programme Consortium supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Its purpose is to undertake research designed to improve access to basic education in developing countries. It seeks to achieve this through generating new knowledge and encouraging its application through effective communication and dissemination to national and international development agencies, national governments, education and development professionals, non-government organisations and other interested stakeholders.

Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Lack of educational access, and securely acquired knowledge and skill, is both a part of the definition of poverty, and a means for its diminution. Sustained access to meaningful learning that has value is critical to long term improvements in productivity, the reduction of inter-generational cycles of poverty, demographic transition, preventive health care, the empowerment of women, and reductions in inequality.

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Foreword

This Country Research Summary (CRS) provides an overview of recent research findings from CREATE research in South Africa. Its scope is selective and needs to be considered alongside the portfolio of research outputs CREATE has published which cover other aspects of the programme of research. This CRS brings up to date a process that we began in 2007 in the inception phase of CREATE with the publication of a series of Country Analytic Reviews and the initiation of the Pathways to Access Research Monographs (PTA) that now include over 60 contributions. The South Africa Country Analytic Review (Motala et al., 2007) collated recent research, developed a baseline analysis of access to education, located pressing policy issues, generated conceptual tools, and identified key research gaps. The PTAs embrace review studies, analysis of large scale secondary data sets, empirical findings from household and school level data, and evidenced based thematic and conceptual discourses. Interim publications including earlier country level policy briefs have maintained the momentum of the impact of the CREATE research on policy and practice and made research results available in a timely way.

The CREATE team in South Africa, along with CREATE research students and associates have published a collection of monographs and policy briefs along with a portfolio of journal articles and other research outputs with particular relevance to South Africa. These are catalogued on the CREATE website (www.create-rpc.org). These extended the knowledge base we constructed in 2006/7 and contributed to building more understanding of the causes, consequences and capacity to reduce educational exclusion. They complement the generic outputs from CREATE which extend the range of insights into the opportunities that exist to enhance access to basic education consistent with the aspirations of national governments and internationally agreed goals.

CREATE seeks to inform policy dialogue at national level and international level. It depends on its networks of researchers and research associates, and its close relationships with national and local governments and with development agencies, to project its insights and ideas into evidenced based discussions. This CRS, and the associated portfolio of research products, provide a toolkit of ideas and insights to this end.

Keith Lewin
Director of CREATE
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EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

COUNTRY RESEARCH SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 2010

This research summary examines patterns of access to education in South Africa, drawing on recent fieldwork and research undertaken by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE). Despite substantial improvements in both policy and practice, educational access in South Africa remains incomplete in terms of attendance, limited in terms of grade progression, unsatisfactory in terms of age-grade norms, poor in terms of quality and inefficient in terms of learning outcomes. Since many children currently in schools are nevertheless at risk of being excluded from basic education, recent CREATE research has concentrated on problems of over-agedness, repetition and drop-out, in part by tracking learners at schools, shadowing whole classes through one entire day and surveying parents' and learners' perceptions of schools and of the education they are receiving.

Shireen Motala and Veerle Dietlens

1. Educational access in South Africa

The Education for All and Millennium Development Goals commit national governments, international agencies and civil society to ensure that all children are provided with a basic education. South Africa has committed itself to achieving these goals premised on the right to basic education for all which is enshrined in the constitution.

Post-apartheid education policy guarantees the fundamental right of all citizens to basic education, equity, redress, and the improvement of quality of schooling. Since 1994, policy has focused on making education structurally accessible to all who were previously denied, or had limited, access to it. Pro-poor funding policies in the form of school fee exemptions, social grants and, most recently, the designation of 60% of all schools as 'no fee' schools, have made it possible for even the poorest learners to attend school. Inclusive education programmes emphasise the mainstreaming of learners with mild learning disabilities into ordinary schools. The devolution of educational governance onto school governing bodies allows parent majorities to determine school admissions policies, recommend staff appointments and charge fees. Epistemic access has been increased by introducing a brand-new, streamlined, outcomes-based curriculum, and by improving teachers' qualifications.

The newly elected government in South Africa in 2010 prioritised education and developed a strategic plan to address this. Schooling 2025 has encapsulated a number of important areas directed at access (Department of Education Notice 752 of 2010). The key access issues continue to be driven by ensuring greater throughput for learners in specific grades and with specific competencies, and early childhood development. The action plan speaks directly to the CREATE goals and concerns the improvement of physical infrastructure, inclusive education, parent and community participation and grade promotion. Specifically, goal 12 states the need to "improve grade promotion of learners through the Grades 1 to 9 phases of school" and goal 24 promises to "ensure that the physical infrastructure and environment of every school inspires learners to want to come to school and learn, and teachers to teach".

Schooling in South Africa is compulsory only until the end of Grade 9 (or age 15, whichever comes first), but the government is constitutionally obliged to make the next three years (Grades 10-12) progressively available as well. In 2008 there were 26,065 ordinary schools (including 1,086 independent schools) in South Africa, containing 12,048,821 learners in public ordinary schools,

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352,396 learners in independent ordinary schools and 394,225 teachers altogether (DoE, 2009:3). Of these 12,401,217 learners, 30.4% of them were in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3), 25.2% in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6), 22.4% in the Senior Phase (Grades 7-9) and 21.5% in the FET band (Grades 10-12) (DoE, 2009:11). Between 2002 and 2006, attendance of children aged 5 increased from 40% to 62%, and attendance of children aged 6 from 70% to 84% (Government Gazette, 2010). The government aims to achieve the full participation of 5 year olds in pre-school Grade R education by 2010.

South Africans now enjoy near universal physical access to formal public schooling up to and including Grade 9 which compares favourably to school-age children in many other developing countries. In 2003, 92% of 15 year olds completed Grade 9, compared to 78% in 1997. In 2008, South Africa's Gross Enrolment Ratio was 114% and the Net Enrolment Ratio was 87%. In 2006 over 90% of children aged 7 to 16 and about 80% of children aged 17 and 18 were attending an educational institution (Stats SA, 2007). Overall gender parity was achieved in 2004 and from Grades 6 to 12 there are more girls than boys at school (UNESCO, 2008).

However, spot checks suggest that real enrolment rates may be 5% to 10% lower. Late entry is not uncommon and significant numbers of learners are overage. Repetition persists, although the age-grade norm progression policy, which permits a learner to repeat only one grade in each phase of schooling (Foundation, Intermediate and Senior), has reduced its incidence. Not least, given their persistently poor performance in both local and international learning assessments, it can be said that most learners lack access to quality education. Access to largely low quality and poorly managed schools is hardly access at all, and is certainly not meaningful access, which would entail regular attendance, appropriate achievement, progress on schedule and successful completion (Lewin, 2007).

Thus, despite undoubted and substantial improvements in both policy and practice, educational access in South Africa remains incomplete in terms of attendance, limited in terms of grade progression, unsatisfactory in terms of age-grade norms, poor in terms of quality and inefficient in terms of learning outcomes. Put differently, many children are still excluded, or at risk of being excluded, from basic education.

2. The pattern of educational exclusion in South Africa

The prevailing pattern of educational exclusion can be discerned in five specific areas:

Out-of-school children: Hundreds of thousands of children – between 300,000 and 670,000 (Shindler & Fleisch, 2007) – are out of school. These children are likely to be older rather than younger, and found in rural rather than urban areas. Moreover, at least 2% of learners never enter a public school.

Repetition and drop-out: Both repetition and drop-out rates in primary schooling (Grades 1-7) are estimated at around 4%. Using 2007 figures, this translates into almost half-a-million learners.

Overage enrolment: Low net enrolment rates – 87.4% for primary schools in 2008 – suggest that some learners are not in the correct grade for their age. These learners are most likely to be over-age, except in Grade 1 where some may be under-age as well (Taylor et al., 2010).

Poor quality learning: In the national Department of Education systemic evaluation of Grade 6 in 2005, learners obtained a national mean score of 38% in the Language of Learning and Teaching, 27% in Mathematics, and 41% in Natural Science (DoE, 2005). Compared with learners internationally, including many other African countries, South Africans often score lowest (Strauss and Burger, 2000; HSRC, 2004). More recent data from SACMEQ suggests that South African learners fair poorly in comparison to their regional counterparts in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. Van den Berg (2005) also notes that South Africa has the highest levels of between school inequality of performance in both mathematics and reading amongst these countries (Letsatsi, forthcoming).

Poor quality teaching: Many Foundation Phase (Grades 1-3) educators are unable to adequately teach learners how to read and write (Taylor et al., 2010). Many educators come late to school, leave

too early and spend only some 46% of their time teaching during a 35-hour week, with most of the rest of their time at school spent on administrative tasks (HSRC, 2005:xi, Taylor et al., 2010).

3. Causes of educational exclusion in South Africa

Poverty: Poverty is closely associated with educational exclusion. One indicator of the extent of poverty is the fact that, in 2007, 64.5% of children aged 0-6 years received a child support grant, with 1.6% also receiving a care dependence grant and 0.2% a foster care grant. Poverty does not necessarily result in exclusion in the basic education phase since the majority of learners can be classified as poor yet GER remains high until the end of Grade 9. Nevertheless, poverty induces hunger, and hunger affects school attendance and academic performance: in 2003 children in 24% of households were always, often or sometimes hungry (DoE, 2006b:21). Poverty also highlights the indirect costs of education, from uniforms, books, stationery and examinations through opportunity costs for older children to transport costs (Motala et al, 2007; Sayed and Motala, 2009).

Uninviting schools: Schools themselves play a big role in encouraging or discouraging access. Leaving aside the poor quality of teaching and learning, the persistence of racism, sexism, bullying and xenophobia does not make schools very inviting places. The poor state of school infrastructure, such as shortage of classrooms, lack of decent toilets and play-grounds detracts from a healthy learning environment. The absence of state services to support schools in terms of social and psychological issues places increased burdens on teachers who are already overloaded (Williams, 2010; Letsatsi, forthcoming; Dieltiens, forthcoming).

Limited household support: Parents and guardians are not always able to provide the necessary background and knowledge of schooling to support their children, and many households are fractured. More educated parents are likely to encourage learning and to send their children to higher performing schools (Motala, et al., forthcoming).

Negative perceptions: With unemployment hovering around 25% (2009 figures), there appear to be few economic rewards for remaining in school, let alone completing Grade 9, unless higher education is envisaged. Prior to the introduction of no fee schools, the second most important reason (after fees) given by learners as to why they remain out of school is that it is useless or uninteresting: a survey in 2004 revealed that almost 10% of learners overall, and more boys than girls (13.5% as against 6.5%), hold this view of the value of education (OECD, 2007:50).

On a more positive note, despite these many problems of educational access, school-going in South Africa is highly valued, and withdrawing children from basic education is seldom contemplated. Child labour does not appear to disrupt enrolment, though it may affect performance. Foster children are not less likely than any other child to be in school, although they are more likely to be overage. HIV/AIDS does impact upon school attendance, but primarily that of older teenagers.

4. CREATE research in South Africa

CREATE has been carrying out empirical research in South Africa since 2007. CREATE seeks to identify children who are excluded from basic education, establish the causes of their exclusion, and then explore ways of ensuring that all children successfully complete a full cycle of basic education. Focusing in particular on the primary/lower secondary cycle, CREATE investigates educational access in terms of a set of six zones of exclusion.

Zone 0 – children who are excluded from preschool

Zone 1 – children who have never been to school, and are unlikely to attend school

Zone 2 – children who enter primary schooling, but who drop out before completing the primary cycle

Zone 3 – children who enter primary schooling and are enrolled but are “at risk” of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement, and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning

Zone 4 – children who fail to make the transition to secondary school grades

Zone 5 – children who enter secondary schooling but who drop out before completing the cycle

Zone 6 – children who enter secondary schooling and are enrolled but are “at risk” of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning (Lewin, 2007).

In the South African context, zone 0 is linked to Grade R (or other forms of preschool), the (as yet non-compulsory) entry point for learners aged 5 (or turning 5 before the end of June) into the schooling system. Zone 1 includes children who have never gone to school. The second zone includes those who drop out before the end of primary education (Grade 7) and zone 3 contains learners who are at risk of dropping out in this same period. Zone 4 is the transition between Grades 7 and 8, or between primary and secondary school. Zone 5 contains those learners who drop out of Grades 8 or 9, and zone 6 refers to young people of any age who are at risk of exclusion in these two years of lower secondary school. CREATE thus understands access as more than simple physical access to school. True access is meaningful access, and meaningful access requires high attendance rates, progression through grades with little or no repetition, and learning outcomes that confirm that basic skills are being mastered (Lewin, 2007).

Since South Africa enjoys relatively high initial enrolments and a relatively low drop-out rate (at least until Grade 9), CREATE research in this country has focused on age-grade progression and the phenomena of over-agedness and repetition, and especially on issues of silent exclusion and the quality and equity of provision (and thus zones 3 and 6 in particular). Accordingly, specific research questions were asked about a range of school, household and policy factors which impact upon educational access, including teacher and learner absenteeism, teaching styles and methods, the impact of forms of assessment on academic achievement, the extent of repetition and over-agedness, the extent of household poverty, the impacts of migration, parental responses to the perceived value of education, home education support and resources, and policies on teacher accountability and age-grade progression.

Case studies were carried out in eight schools in the Ekurhuleni South district of Gauteng and six schools in the Dutywa district of the Eastern Cape, with a focus on learners in Grades 1, 3, 5 and 7 in 2007, and Grades 2, 4, 6 and 8 in 2008. Key baseline data was collected, including copies of registers, repetition data, new admissions, academic records, the Annual Schools Survey and school policy documents. Interviews were carried out with school principals, mathematics and English educators and district officials. A baseline secondary analysis provided district-level indicators on learners' degrees of vulnerability, with regard to over-agedness, repetition and drop-out. 1,121 Learner Profile Cards (LPCs) were fully completed by Ekurhuleni South learners and 596 by Dutywa learners. In addition, 61 of the approximately 150 questionnaires administered to parents of Ekurhuleni South learners deemed vulnerable by teachers could be matched to the LPCs, and 87 questionnaires were completed by parents of potentially vulnerable Dutywa learners. More information was gleaned through 'Day in the Life' activities, which involved shadowing one class in each grade through one entire day, and school and classroom observations were also undertaken. Community fieldworkers were hired to search for out-of-school children between the ages of 7 and 15 as well as older youth who had not completed Grade 9.

The LPCs captured children's biographical data, including their social and economic status and their degrees of vulnerability (through questions focusing on late coming, absenteeism, repetition, living without biological parents, a parent's or caregiver's non-employment and skipping breakfast). Learner performance was assessed by obtaining teachers' mark schedules for June and September and by analysing numeracy test scripts (devised by the Joint Education Trust) and numeracy and language exercise books. Finally, the surveys of parents solicited information on how satisfied they were with the school and the education being received by their children, and whether and how they normally voice concerns.

The Ekurhuleni South and Dutywa research sites were purposively selected on the basis of their being amongst the more deprived areas in their respective provinces, in terms of income, employment, health, educational and living environment and proximity to services. The table below lists the enrolments and sample sizes at each of the case study schools, and this is followed by a brief outline of the relative position of the schools in the two districts vis-à-vis the general profiles of schools in the respective provinces, in terms of learner: educator ratios, migration, poverty rankings and most popular languages of instruction.

Table 1: Case study schools

Dutywa case study schools, enrolments and sample sizes (Eastern Cape District)				
School pseudonyms	School enrolment 2008	School enrolment 2007	Number of learners in grade(s) targeted	Sample size
Bongani	247		116	116
Thulani	497		174	174
Mngani	451		195	195
Sajika		265	115	115
Cabanga		316	135	135
Mtshana		340	129	129
Total	1,195	921	864	
Ekurhuleni South case study schools, enrolments and sample sizes (Gauteng District)				
School pseudonyms	School enrolment		Number of learners in grade(s) targeted	Sample size
Chitibunga	1,371		691	268
Hombola	715		309	83
Jambo	649		282	176
Kupiso Secondary	964		109	109
Mandlakazi	595		286	215
Pheliwe Secondary	1,549		292	192
Vinjolo	1,117		428	138
Zamani	1,959		866	237
Total	8,919		3,263	1,418

Drawing on national and provincial Department of Education data and the Annual School Surveys for 2006, it can be said that schools in Ekurhuleni South have a higher learner: educator ratio (34.5:1) than schools in Dutywa (33.3:1). Schools in Ekurhuleni South have high levels of in-migration (10%, most of which emanates from outside South Africa). Migration figures for Dutywa are unavailable, but are most likely to indicate out-migration: in the 2001 Census, 254,791 people were lost to the Eastern Cape province through migration.

While most schools in Dutywa fall under the poorest of the government's poverty rankings (36% of schools under Quintile 1 and 22% under Quintile 2), schools in Ekurhuleni South are comparatively better off with only 4.8% falling under Quintile 1 and 7.2% under Quintile 2. The schools in Ekurhuleni South are on average much larger than schools in Dutywa (serving some 990 as opposed to 400 learners).

Complementing the fieldwork research, a range of other levels of investigation have taken place to explore issues related to access. These include on fee free schooling (Sayed and Motala, 2009); on parental participation (Luxomo, forthcoming) numeracy testing and assessment (Pereira, 2010); teacher and learner pedagogy (Letsatsi, forthcoming); language and access (Lafon, 2008); gendered access (Dieltiens, forthcoming); progression patterns, retention and drop-out (Taylor et al, 2010); school based support for vulnerable children (Williams, 2010); the use of learner materials in learning (Venkat, 2010); poverty and access (Meny-Gibert and Dieltiens, 2009) and school infrastructure and ethos (Dieltiens, forthcoming).

5. Access to education in South Africa in CREATE's zones of exclusion

In terms of CREATE's zones of exclusion, educational access in the sample districts and schools can be described as follows.

Zone 1

It appears that almost every child enrols in school, and that the school starting age is appropriate, in both provinces. However, schools' official languages of learning and teaching sometimes cause problems: in the Katorus area of Ekurhuleni South some Foundation Phase learners have to travel, usually by foot or else on provincial department-sponsored buses, to schools where they can receive mother-tongue instruction. Many learners come from informal settlements some four or five kilometres away while very few learners originate from the communities where the schools are physically located. Either parents in the surrounding communities are choosing to send their children elsewhere in search of better quality education (most probably to former whites-only schools), or the local schools do not cater for their children's mother-tongue.

Zone 2

Primary school drop-outs appear to be rare. Reasons given for drop-out include ill health, death of a bread winner, break-up of a family, family relocation, lack of money to buy a uniform and the need to look after livestock.

In Ekurhuleni South as a whole 1,566 learners dropped out of school without completing their grade in 2007, including 51 from Grade 1, representing 10% of the total school population.

In Dutywa as a whole, 2,583 learners dropped out of school without completing their grade in 2007, including 508 from Grade 1, representing 12% of the total population (Shindler, 2011:51-59)

Zone 3

Research found low levels of repetition in both districts. However, the patterns differ: in Ekurhuleni South repetition is highest in Grade 1 and then declines until increasing again at secondary school level, but in Dutywa the proportion of repeaters is fairly constant in each grade, with a similarly significant increase at secondary school level. In both districts boys repeat more than girls. A likely explanation for these patterns is that the official policy of one repetition per phase is able to ensure that few children in the Foundation Phase are outside of grade age, but as a consequence repetition is being deferred to later years when more learners fall behind age grade norms (Motala et al., 2009:262).

Data from the Learner Profile Cards for the Ekurhuleni South schools would appear to support this explanation. Across a fairly even gender profile (46% boys and 51% girls with 3% who did not specify), 23% of the Ekurhuleni South learners in Grade 4 are ten years old, 22% of learners in Grade 6 are twelve and 48% of Grade 8 learners are fourteen. Thus appropriate age grade progression declines as age progresses. The trend is also gendered, with more girls being age appropriate than boys by Grade 9.

Although district guidelines stipulate who can progress and who should repeat, the majority of learners listed as candidates for retention are often moved forward into the next grade. This not only delays resolution of the problem, but compounds it given that these under-prepared learners must now face even more complex learning requirements. It may even compromise a learner's ability to master basic literacy, numeracy and other skills. Thus the issue is not that children are repeating, but that they are not repeating.

In Ekurhuleni South in 2006, the two secondary schools had a higher proportion of over-aged learners than the primary schools, but some of the primary schools had an extremely high proportion of over-aged children: in Hombola and Jambo Primary Schools half or more of children in Grade 7 were over-age.

In the Dutywa schools, over-age figures appear to be under-reported, for researchers found large discrepancies between official records and their own headcounts. In 2007 Cabanga Junior Secondary reported that out of a total of 316 learners, only 12 were over-age; researchers, however, counted 114; Sajika reported that 6 out of 265 learners were over-age, but researchers found 40. Mtshana JS's records were the most accurate, indicating that 76 out of 312 learners were over-age; researchers found 86.

Principals regularly estimated attendance as between 90% and 100%. It was not always possible to check school registers, and when these were available it was sometimes found that they were not up to date. While absenteeism does not appear to be a problem, principals and teachers indicated that it was highest on Fridays, during winter, during harvest time, on livestock dipping days, for a week or two after school vacations have ended, or when there are initiation ceremonies. Absenteeism mostly affects boys; girls usually attend unless ill. Educator absenteeism is noticeable on Fridays, on pay days and when there are union meetings or memorial services for teachers (ComSS, 2007).

Even where children are not repeating and are remaining age appropriate for their grade, the Learner Profile Cards and interviews with parents shed light on the meaningfulness or otherwise of learners' educational access. As expected, poverty and unemployment, and poorly educated and fractured families, are the norm, especially in Dutywa. A little less expected were the findings that Dutywa learners appear a little better-fed (if not necessarily better nourished) and possibly better housed, and that, notwithstanding low levels of parental participation in schools, most parents and learners in both districts appeared to be happy with the state of their education (Motala, Dieltiens and Sayed, 2008:253; Motala, 2011)

57% of the parents or care-givers with whom Ekurhuleni South learners live most of the time were currently employed, and those with jobs were mostly cleaners or domestic workers (mothers) or worked in industry or as drivers (fathers). 25% of families receive one or other form of social grant. Some two-fifths (39%) of learners live in houses; 33% live in 'zozos' (shacks), and the others in back rooms or hostels. 41% always have breakfast, and 29% make use of the primary school nutrition scheme. 68% always have supper. However, only 30% regularly eat three meals a day.

In comparison, in Dutywa only 24% of the parents or care-givers with whom learners live most of the time were currently employed. 60% of families receive one or other form of social grant. 34% of learners live in houses, but only 1% live in 'zozos'; 36% live in traditional mud houses and the rest in back rooms or hostels. 61% always have breakfast, 27% make use of the primary school nutrition scheme, and 69% always have supper.

In Ekurhuleni South, just under half of learners (44%) live with both parents, while 31% live with their mothers or fathers only; in Dutywa, only 20% live with both parents, while 41% live with their mothers or fathers only. Most parents in both districts had a Grade 10 or lower level of education; only 18% of parents in each case had a Grade 12 or higher qualification. 66% of Ekurhuleni South parents reported that they had no books at home; a little surprisingly, far fewer (21% of) Dutywa parents indicated the same.

42% of Ekurhuleni South parents and 57% of Dutywa parents said they supervised their child's homework every day; nevertheless, some Dutywa parents expressed the opinion that their task was primarily to get their child to school, for thereafter education was the school's concern. A large number of Ekurhuleni South learners come from outside Gauteng, with about 20% originating from Mozambique alone. At least 25% of their fathers and 22% of their mothers are not South African, whereas almost all Dutywa parents are South African. At home, most Ekurhuleni South learners speak IsiZulu, XiTsonga or SeSotho (in that order); all Dutywa learners speak IsiXhosa.

Most parents (62% in Ekurhuleni South and 49% in Dutywa) chose schools for their children on the basis of proximity, with the perceived good quality of the school a factor only 8% and 9% of the time, respectively. Parents' choice of schools is constrained not only by poverty but also by what's available: despite the fact than one Ekurhuleni South high school has a bad reputation in the community (being associated with a lack of learning and ill-discipline), few parents wished to remove their children from it given the difficulty of finding places at other schools in the area.

All parents set great store by schools which promote fluency in the English language, as well as 'town' schools in general, whether independent (including inner-city schools) or former whites-only schools; the last are especially valued, because there their children can mingle with whites, and because they believe that an education from such schools will improve their children's job opportunities.

Hardly any Ekurhuleni South parents formally indicated that they were unhappy with the education their child was receiving, and 65% were satisfied with their child's teachers. Most Dutywa parents

were also happy with their schools and the performance of their SGBs, though they also tended to treat schooling as secondary to the daily struggle for existence – the phrase, “You don’t eat school”, sums up many Dutywa parents’ attitudes. However, other statements by some Ekurhuleni South parents expressed dissatisfaction with what they saw as teachers’ disrespectful attitudes, a principal’s demeaning comments, bullying and excessive discipline; and a quarter of sampled parents in both districts would move their child to a better quality school if they could.

Most Ekurhuleni South parents had not participated in an SGB election, did not know who the members of the SGB were, and did not attend SGB meetings, and the same was true of Dutywa parents. However, 33% of Ekurhuleni South parents said that they always attended such meetings, and most sampled parents in both districts had met with teachers in order to discuss their child’s progress. Dutywa parents referred to schools as ‘theirs’, as belonging to the community, whereas Ekurhuleni South parents instead called schools by name, with no sentimental attachment or feeling of ownership. That said, neither set of parents expressed any sense of control over what took place inside the school buildings.

Most parents of learners in primary school thought that care should supersede all school activities, for an uncaring school would spend less time on teaching and learning and be unresponsive to children’s needs (such as regarding uniforms, or the nutrition programme). Parents of learners in high school were more concerned about discipline, either insisting upon it or concerned that it was excessive. Dutywa parents in general, adamant that their status as parents, and the respect accordingly due to them, was being undermined by the new discourses of democracy and children’s rights; deplored the prohibition of corporal punishment.

Contrary to expectations, learners in both Ekurhuleni South and Dutywa had generally positive perceptions of their schools, with 70% of the former and 82% of the latter saying that the quality of their schooling was excellent or good. Nevertheless, Ekurhuleni South learners cited poor infrastructure, bullying and corporal punishment as negative aspects. 10% of Ekurhuleni South learners indicated that they had repeated a grade once and 1% more than once. By contrast, 20% of Dutywa learners indicated that they had repeated a grade once and 4% more than once. 11% of Ekurhuleni South and 16% of Dutywa learners were absent for one or more days during 2008. The Learner Profile Cards revealed no clear gender differences with regard to repetition or absenteeism. More than three-quarters of all learners expected to remain in school until Grade 12.

Zone 4

Drop-out up to Grade 9 is low, with more boys dropping out than girls, suggesting that in South Africa drop-out is a phenomenon of the transition from basic to post-basic education (Motala et al 2009:262-3). Children progress through the basic education system at a slow rate, and thus it is likely that, as the Ministerial Committee on Retention (DoE, 2008) suggests, grade repetition is the single most important predictor of drop-out in South Africa.

Competition for space in secondary schools perceived to be of better quality in Ekurhuleni South may contribute to some learners dropping out after Grade 7. In the Eastern Cape, however, where 44% of schools are combined schools (i.e. from Grade 1 to Grade 9), there is no physical transition between schools and hence no drop-out problem between Grades 7 and 8; instead, the problem here is primarily between Grades 9 and 10.

Zone 5

Access until the end of Grade 9 (two years into secondary school) remains high with drop-out escalating from Grade 10 onwards. Fieldworkers searching for drop-outs mainly encountered older teenagers who had completed Grade 9. Learners often relocated without transfer cards bringing into question the statistics schools provided of “drop-outs” (though these were very few in any case). Pregnancy was however a reason most often given for girls dropping out in the first two years of secondary school.

Zone 6

On the basis of the limited data available, repetition from Grade 8 onwards is variable, with some schools reporting slight decreases but most experiencing exponential increases with each successive grade.

6. Key findings: Access to Education in South Africa

- Access to basic education in South Africa is extensive. Few children do not enrol in school, daily attendance is high, repetition is low and declining, and drop-out is rare, at least during primary school. These findings concur with other research on access which highlight universal access up to Grade 9 (Meny-Gibert and Russell, 2009; Child Gauge, 2008, DoE, 2010). Supply and demand up to Grade 9 is sufficient.
- Access to post-basic education is much more limited, with high levels of repetition and drop-out after Grade 9. Meny-Gibert and Russell (2009), concurring with the findings of the DoE Ministerial Review on Retention (2008), note that the biggest drop-out in South Africa is from Grade 10 to Grade 12. A key issue continues to be that the progression rate from Grade 1 to Grade 12 is poor with only 46% of learners who started Grade 1 in 1997 getting to Grade 12 in 2009 (Soobrayan, 2010). Fieldwork research concurred with this in particular if we look at Zone 6 and the patterns of drop-out at the end of the junior primary phase and the gendered patterns to drop-out (ComSS, 2008).
- Over-agedness is a problem throughout the system, but especially in the higher grades. Over-age entry to schooling is being addressed by the age-grade norm policy, but an unintended consequence is that many learners who should repeat are in fact being allowed to progress, and thus actual repetition is being deferred to higher levels of schooling (Motala, Dieltiens and Sayed, 2009).
- Gender parity has been achieved and appears to be maintained in terms of enrolments and attendance, but more boys repeat, and fewer girls excel academically. However these gender patterns mask substantial differentiation in the schooling system which has a gender bias – in terms of boys retention into the FET phase, curriculum choices and the broader social context in which girls face negative factors of sexual harassment and absence of safe spaces (ComSS, 2008; Dieltiens & Ngwenya, forthcoming).
- Meaningful access to education is still a dream for the vast majority of learners in South Africa. Poverty and poor nutrition, which provoke erratic attendance and cognitive deficits, are the everyday realities with which all education policy and practice must contend. The direct costs of education are being addressed through ‘no fee’ schools, but the indirect costs – of transport and uniforms in particular – are still a huge burden for poor households. Moreover, the persistence of fee-charging schools alongside ‘no fee’ schools helps to sustain a class-differentiated two tier education system (Motala, 2008, Letstati, forthcoming). What has been significant is during the course of the research, policy provisions on school fees have changed substantially with approximately 60% of all schools being declared no fee schools. The effect of this has been to reduce the quintile system which is from 1 – 5 to two quintiles. Initial evidence from the CREATE research suggests that the fee free policy has had important effects in terms of creating greater access to poorer learners to schools (Sayed and Motala, 2009).
- Many parents themselves lack the education, and sometimes the time and inclination, to oversee their children’s homework, a problem exacerbated by the prevalence of single-parent households. For the majority of parents, who are also poor, school choice does not depend on a school’s track record, but is instead based primarily on proximity, and to a lesser extent on social, historical or customary factors, such as parents or siblings having attended the same school, or that certain schools serve certain areas, or feed specific secondary schools, or even that a school by (apartheid) tradition has always served a certain ethnic or language group. However, proximity is likely to be far less of a factor, and perceived school quality much more of a factor, for those parents who can afford higher fees and/or higher transport costs (Luxomo, forthcoming, Motala, Luxomo and Ngwenya, forthcoming, Motala and Ngwenya, 2009).

- School choice is further restricted by competition for places in the relatively fewer number of secondary schools vis-à-vis primary schools, and especially in former whites-only schools in general, and this shortage and skewed demand also restricts parents' ability to transfer their children to another school at a later stage.
- Schools' official language of learning and teaching also limits school choice, forcing some learners to travel long distances to other schools. Inadequate mastery of the language of learning and teaching is also a major factor in the abysmally low levels of learner achievement; yet many parents prefer (with their children's concurrence) for their children to be taught in the second language of English by teachers who are themselves second-language speakers of English (ComSS, 2008; Lafon, 2009; Alexander, 2010, Letsatsi, forthcoming).
- Parents' voices are not sufficiently heard at school level no matter whether they believe they 'own' their school or adopt a more detached view of the school their children attend. The low level of parental participation in school affairs parallels learners' low level of meaningful access to education. Nevertheless, for all parents, discipline, the quality of teaching and care are high on the list of educational priorities. School-going is highly valued, to the extent of making the best of what one has, or keeping one's child in a school one does not like but which is better than no school at all; but this needs further investigation (Ngwenya, 2008).
- Most parents, and most learners, indicate that they are happy with their school, school governing body (SGB), teachers and the overall quality of education being received. What is not clear, however, are the reasons for this perception, and whether it is an expression of parents' resigned acceptance of the limited choice of schools and the few alternatives that poverty permits, or of their own lack of knowledge and of relevant comparative information, or of their unwillingness to contest the real or reputational power of school authorities, or of their genuine satisfaction (Luxomo, forthcoming).
- Similarly, the reasons underpinning learners' overall satisfaction with their education need further investigation, though this finding does not dispute the existence of a significant minority negative perception of the value of education. It is possible that the vulnerability of learners to silent exclusion may be compounded by the fact that they and their parents have no proper benchmark of what a good basic education might entail, are thus more accepting of mediocre school and teacher performances and consequently are not fully aware of their predicament.
- Schools appear to physically reflect their surroundings, often being as under-resourced and dilapidated as their poverty-stricken environs (or as richly endowed and well maintained as their wealthy neighbourhoods) (Dieltiens et al forthcoming).
- With regard to the quality of teaching and learning, CREATE research has found nothing to refute the view of the national Department of Education that the poor conceptual and content knowledge of the majority of teachers, along with their low productivity and indifferent teaching practices, are direct contributors to the low levels of learner achievement (DoE, 2006a:6; DoE, 2003:10). Researchers found very little actual teaching and learning taking place: lessons often start late, much time is spent maintaining order, teachers do most of the talking and learners are passive and contribute little. The absence of writing and written work in classrooms was striking, rote learning and chorusing of lessons was common and coverage of the curriculum was very uneven (Letatsi, forthcoming a; Letatsi, forthcoming b). The use of text books and work books in the Eastern Cape found wide variation across schools in the use of text books, significant difference in the breadth of coverage across LOS and how the specific content is covered. New findings have emerged from the CREATE research on curriculum coverage, content emphasis and curriculum pacing and suggests that more research is required to further investigate the differences within and between schools in terms of opportunities to learn and how this may play itself out in terms of learner performance (Venkat, 2010).
- Through the administering of numeracy tests to about 1000 Grade 5 and Grade 7 learners, Pereira and Du Toit (forthcoming), in research done for the CREATE project note that while some progress has been made, a lot more needs to be done. The findings of the tests were stark. Learners performed way below their expected levels in the tests, over-age and under-age learners were worse off in terms of their performance, prior learning for the majority of learners was poor i.e. they were not

on expected level for the grade and the specific numeracy outcomes which required deeper analytical skills achieved poor scores.

- Corporal punishment is common and continues to be a feature of many schools and at different levels.
- Progression policy and its implementation has had different consequences. The enrolment of under-age learners into Grade 1 despite policy continues to be a feature and is used as pre-school provision. Age appropriateness has a distinct gender bias with more female learners being age appropriate than boys by Grade 9 (Motala, Dieltiens and Sayed, 2009). Repetition is low and seems to be deferred for later years when grade progression becomes more subject to assessment which identifies poor achievement. Taylor et al. (2010) investigating Grade 4 learners in a longitudinal study found that there are distinct SES and gender patterns in repetition. What was apparent was that repetition as a mediation mechanism is not widespread. Over-agedness appears to be related to under-performance reflected in the poor literacy and numeracy schools.
- Figures from the Community Survey in 2007 indicate that they are about 386 000 children who are out of school (Shindler, forthcoming). CREATE research highlights specific factors that are correlated with exclusion including disability, household structure, poverty and lack of access to social grants. All of these increase the vulnerability of children to exclusion.
- Looking at schools within a social development perspective suggests that while policy intent empathises with health promotion, safety, caring for orphans and vulnerable children, quality education for rights and inequality in reality it was difficult to translate the caring schools philosophy into practice (Williams, forthcoming). Educators named entrenched obstacles such as teacher burden, over-sized classes, inefficient governing bodies and support teams, and inadequate training and funding to deal with learners psycho-social issues as the main shortcoming in their schools.
- Unlike most developing countries, South Africa has more girls in school and gender parity has been attained. However, access patterns are gendered in that boys flow through the system at a slower pace than girls and more girls make it to the end of matric. This pattern is especially true of the poorer provinces, such as the Eastern Cape and Limpopo.

7. Policy messages

- The limitations that school language policies impose on school choice and learner achievement could be addressed by clarifying and making more consistent the government's broader Language-in-Education Policy, which tends in practice to privilege English (and Afrikaans), despite a rhetoric of equality regarding the other nine official languages. The negative effects of language on educational access could also be addressed by either insisting upon, or completely doing away with, the requirement that Grades 1 to 3 are to be taught in their mother-tongue, a stipulation often countermanded by parents and learners seeking the use of English as early and as often as possible. Specific policy interventions could include improving teacher training for the indigenous languages, an acknowledgement that additive bilingualism is the norm in most classrooms and equipping teachers to deal with this and focusing on the development of better and more relevant texts for the maths and science curriculum in the African languages. Teacher training to equip them with teaching in English which is not their first language has to be a priority.
- Schools could be made more welcoming, both in terms of infrastructure and facilities and in terms of care and community service. Aside from encouraging more active civic participation in schools and ensuring that teachers and principals always treat parents with respect, more attention could be given to planting trees, building playgrounds, painting murals, fixing desks and chairs, involving Community Development Workers in after-school activities, or paying stipends to unemployed matriculants to read to learners after school or to coach sport. In each of these activities the entire community can be involved, and assistance can also be provided by other government departments, such as Social Welfare, Sport and Forestry, to improve school environments. Practically, rain-water tanks and well-managed Ventilated Improved Pits (VIPs) will make a significant improvement to water and sanitation in schools currently without these very basic services. Improving school infrastructure correlates with

valuing the human dignity of children and can impact positively on children's health and on the conditions for learning and teaching. 1,700 schools do not have toilets and those without running water number 700 (Soobrayan, 2010).

- The continued use of corporal punishment is one possible issue around which debate and discussion could be generated, and which would be worth closer study. Why does corporal punishment continue, and why is it allowed to continue? No doubt, parents must share responsibility, whether they turn a blind eye to corporal punishment or actively condone it, but it is teachers and principals who administer it. There is an opportunity here for a concerted 'rights and responsibilities' education campaign directed primarily at parents, but also involving teachers, principals, SGBs and even learners, which could help raise awareness of the functions of SGBs, how parents can facilitate their children's education, and how teachers and schools can engage better with parents and learners.
- Educational access can be increased, and rendered more meaningful, by improving the quality of teaching, which in turn will raise levels of retention and reduce repetition and drop-out. The quality of teaching will also be boosted by improving community perceptions of and involvement in schools, reducing teacher absenteeism, increasing teacher time in class and on task, fostering more independent reading and writing beyond chorusing out responses or filling in missing words, and more generally by policy-makers avoiding the impulse to raise popular expectations for transformation higher than can realistically be achieved in the short- to medium-term. Classroom practice, pedagogical knowledge and both Inset and reset need to take account of the gaps in teachers knowledge and plan for this. The model of teacher training which is based on workshops and the cascading model should also be reviewed because thus far it has proved less than effective.
- Teacher accountability continues to be the key. Teacher unions are strong in South Africa with the majority of teachers being unionised. The rights of teachers to strike in support of better wages and working conditions is enshrined in law and in the constitution. However the low levels of numeracy and literacy scores in the basic education phase evidenced in both local and international benchmarking and the poor matric (school leaving exam rate – 62% in 2009) indicates that teachers at the school level need to be made accountable for what they are delivering and what the outcomes are. CREATE research has illustrated that on too many occasions teacher contact time was limited, teachers were not present in the school during the school day, teachers were present at the school but in staff rooms or basking in the sun instead of teaching. The ritual of the school day where purposeful teaching and learning takes place for the duration of the day has to be instated. There needs to be a link between the developmental strategies put in place at the school level (e.g. school development plans) and a much stronger evaluation to assess how and whether the set goals are being achieved.
- The different systemic levels need to be bolstered as well to provide maximum support to the schools, especially at the district level. In particular, the social compact between learners and learners' parents and educators need to be strengthened. Social disadvantage is reproduced across generations and initiatives which bring together key stakeholders to address improving quality education and need to be put in place (Bloch, 2009). The notion of "schools as centres" of community life must be reinstated (Asmal, 1999).
- Recent plans by government to streamline the curriculum to standardise teaching practices and assessment into a single comprehensive policy must be welcomed. What the CREATE research has shown is that curriculum strategy must focus on the starting points of learning with regular revision and repetition of learning skills in the early phase of schooling. The focus of curriculum continues to be on the outcomes of learning which is often too late to remediate any learning deficits.
- While South Africa is a success story in terms of universalising access up to the compulsory phase of schooling, the CREATE research vividly shows how poor learning reproduces itself in great deficits in the further education and training phase. Learners repeat or drop out because of this experience. Two policy lessons are important firstly to ensure the promised rollout of early childhood education is achieved in the timeframes identified (2015) and the progression policy which has focused on efficient flow of learners through the system is not at the expense of learners acquiring skills and learning. Over-agedness, patterns of repetition and the gendered nature of this requires policy attention if we

want to ensure that all learners achieve meaningful access. In particular repetition as remediation must be a clear policy strategy, formative assessment must be given equal weighting to summative assessment and drop out which is experienced by a small but significantly marginalised group of learners has to be reduced (Taylor et al, 2010). Multi-grade teaching and learning and the international experience of this may provide a useful experience for policymakers to review. The reality in South African classrooms is that there continue to be different ability groups in the same grade.

- There is a need to better track learner migration, including rural-urban, inter-urban and even (by comparing the origins and movements of learners and their households vis-à-vis school catchment areas) inter-school migration, as well as migration between provinces and from outside the country. Inter-school migration is likely to be affected by affordability, distance, access to transport and the perceived quality of education, as well as school language policies, ethos and reputation.
- While there are many large datasets and much research being done, education policy is marked by limited quantitative analysis. Information at all levels is lacking e.g. in terms of accurate indicators or tracking progression, repetition and drop-out. Research is required at all levels in order to inform meaningful policy change. Research undertaken through the CREATE project is a particularly important example of how research can be used for multi-purposes. It has been used diagnostically at the school and district level, it has contributed new knowledge to the major policy changes facing South Africa particularly in relation to meaningful access and it has provided nuanced, disaggregated and qualitative data which has provided a better framework for analysis of the South African education system. Much more of this is required.

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