

Poor Infrastructural Development as a Major Impediment to Education Acquisition of Children in South Africa: A Discourse Analysis

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KEYWORDS Millennium Development Goals. Qualitative Education. Education For All (EFA). Policy Implementation. Hygiene and Sanitation. Classes

ABSTRACT With the stocktaking of the Millennium development goals slowly time ticking to 2015, infrastructural development remains a major impediment to education acquisition of children in South Africa. Although South Africa has pencilled many policies and clauses in an attempt to address education acquisition of children, it is unfortunate that many platforms indicate paucity of schools; while other areas have schools lacking toilets and sanitation facilities. The article aimed at raising debate and discourse on challenges besetting acquisition of quality education among the South Africans especially those residing in the rural areas. The article utilized a review of literature methodology. Findings indicate the following deterrents to qualitative education in South Africa: poor infrastructural development; inadequate schools and classes; poor state of sanitation and hygiene environment; and longer distance to schools for both the teachers and students. The following strategies have been suggested to address the above deterrents: ensure enough schools and classes; a humane and hygiene environment; reconstruction and renovation of the schools; and government to collaborate with the private sector to improve the circumstances of schools in the country.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of inaccessibility to qualitative education of children especially in the developing world continues to take a global, regional and national centre stage in an endeavour to find out the actual contributing factors (World Health Organization (WHO) 2014). The need to give the children the right they inalienably deserve has also posed a huge concern. Moreover, with the country of South Africa endeavouring to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal access to primary education due in 2015, it is critical that the state of educational infrastructure is explored so that gaps can possibly be identified and strategies to fill them mooted (National Planning Commission (NPC) 2011). The need to advocate for the rights of children to access quality education has immensely motivated these authors to document this debate and discourse based article with the hope that the paper may stimulate possible

recommendations that can augment policymaking, programme planning and implementation, with the ultimate goal of addressing gaps pertaining to the educational acquisition of children in South Africa. Indubitably in many rural areas of various countries, South African notwithstanding, many rural children lack proximity to essential educational resources needed for a healthy growth and development (Equal Education 2013). This runs counter the situations in urban settings where children are exposed to relatively qualitative education, well managed schools and relatively well skilled staff (Goven-der 2013). Perhaps this is because many people especially those with better and easily employable skills prefer to work and stay in the urban settings. This also informs the phenomenon of rural-urban migration. The situation of rural-urban divide is not an exclusive phenomenon of developing countries such as South Africa, but can also be traced in the developed part of the world, although the developed world continue to shrink their rural areas to give way to urbanity. This is because of the immense developmental scope they are experiencing (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 2013). The scenario depicted above can succinctly explain skewed differential

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growth between the rural and the urban areas, with urban areas enjoying better infrastructure at the expense of the rural areas (Brushett and John-Abraham 2006). Perhaps this explains social exclusion of the people of the rural areas who might need good and reliable education in order to address and rid their areas of the cycle of poverty and social injustice. It is a succinct naked fact that high quality education is one of the incisive weapons to fight poverty (Goven-der 2013). However, rural areas are beset by inadequate schooling infrastructure and space for the rural children to enjoy. Geographical terrain is also a serious deterrent to qualitative academic acquisition. For example, if a child is in a rural county or district with a poor education system, they may not have the opportunity to choose another school because of distance. With no public transportation system, the opportunities for a good education are limited to what is in the vicinity of their residence (Christensen et al. 2011). The situation may present a human rights denial. This is because access to education is recognized as a legal human right espoused in the national constitution of South Africa (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996). On the other hand, the government of South Africa further commits itself to the progressive realization of that right. To this end, many other clauses and policy documents have been ratified by the government of South Africa indicating its undivided attention towards meeting the needs of the children. This is because access to education is not only a right, but also a basic human need (Kaplan 1996) as it empowers, equips, enriches and capacitates individuals to bolster their employability and therefore becoming well-armed citizens of the country they belong. There is an inextricable relationship between the quality of education and the quality of skill development (Department of Basic Education 2013). Education acquisition and by extension skill development contributes to a significant exploitation, tapping and harnessing of the local resources that may guarantee individuals a healthy and a sustainable future (EFA (Education For All) Global Monitoring Report 2005).

Most likely, children who have access to qualitative education may make it to university level and may contribute significantly to policy development and national governance; whereas children without a qualitative access are likely to drop early and possibly become social burden through engagement in illicit behaviours that endangers peace and tranquillity of others in-

cluding their parents and close kin (HaluHalu 2014). It is quite unfortunate that although South Africa has made many gigantic national steps in the national development endeavours, it portrays some pathetic gaps on the ground as far as educational pursuit is concerned. Despite the ever rising literacy levels compared to other African countries, the educational terrain in some quarters presents a very heart-breaking state of affairs. Since the country remains one of the strongest powerhouse in the continent, perhaps it is the implementation of the policies that contributes to the glaring and horrendous challenges manifest in some rural areas (Poverties. Org 2011). While provision of grants is commendable in an attempt to fill in some economic and psychosocial gaps, poor infrastructure such as lack of sufficient classrooms poses a huge deterrent to the qualitative access to education (Equal Education 2013). This also disturbs the teaching and learning as well as any kind of socialization that they may need.

Problem Statement

Inarguably, the government of South Africa has done a lot of changes and steps is addressing the access to qualitative education. The policy environment is strong although effective implementation may be lacking. This is because the actual situation in some quarters in the country testifies that many children struggle to have access to qualitative education due to poor infrastructural development. For example, some areas glaringly lack enough buildings or classrooms, and the schools are located very far away from the homes. This demotivates both the teachers and the students alike. This long list of impediments presents a horrendous and a pinching problem to the access of qualitative education to the many children in South Africa. It is hoped that through documenting examples from literature, this paper will likely inform policy making, government bodies and other structures to be proactive in bolstering programmes that can effectuate reliable infrastructure that will ensure every child has a meaningful qualitative access to education

Study Aims

The aim of this paper is to examine the context, extent, and quality of infrastructural development and how it affects the educational acquisitions of children in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a literature review methodology and presents a debate and a discourse on the bottlenecks lying on the way towards access to a qualitative education to children especially in some quarters of the rural areas in South Africa. The paper has immensely benefitted from literature from UN documents, journals, books and the researchers' knowledge, intuition and experiences on the domain. The paper has also displayed other rights such as the rights to shelter that also affect the children in their educational pursuit.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Some Infrastructural Impediments Derailing Qualitative Educational Access in Some Rural Areas of South Africa

Poor Infrastructural Development

The state of infrastructure and other educational artefacts play a pivotal role in motivating learners and educators towards achieving and attaining their target goals of learning ((Brushett and John-Abraham 2006). In the same vein, where there is a lack of meaningful infrastructure and artefacts, this may inform or heralds poor or unsatisfactory learning. This is because infrastructure and its commensurate artefacts such as classrooms, ventilation, doors, and books among other things, create an enabling environment that foster meaningful learning (Brushett and John-Abraham 2006). Perhaps the lack and poor administration of allocated funds could be the mother of problems that bedevil the infrastructural hiccups in the areas with serious infrastructural challenges. It is ironical as well as unfortunate to say that despite the government of South Africa allocating R190 billion (US\$28 billion) or 21 percent of its 2011/2012 national budget to education, surprisingly 80 percent was spent on personnel and the remainder was not even enough to supply thousands of schools in mainly poor areas with textbooks. This may also point to possibilities of impropriety surrounding the spending. Although South Africa prides in wealth as a rainbow nation, surveys done by the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality Surveys of 2000 and 2007 on the quality of education point out that the country's reading

performance of children is very low, with only 25 percent of them in a position to read; while in mathematics, the country stands at number 12 when examined and compared with other 14/15 countries in the Sub-Saharan Region (IRIN (International Regional Information Network) 2014). Also, other literature indicate that many schools lack basic facilities such as buildings, electricity, clean water or phone lines (Timeaus et al. 2011).

It is heart-breaking that although schools are allowed to raise funds through either charging school fees among other things, it is only the former Model C schools that have been successful in this regard. Former model C schools are those that are administrated and largely funded by a governing body of parents and alumni. They constitute some of the country's best schools. It is good to indicate however that only white category schools afford to employ extra teachers and bolster other complementary facilities (Timaues et al. 2011). Moreover, other authors note that the quality of education at the disposal of the majority Blacks affects their propensity to participate meaningfully in the labour force and therefore face dwindling probability of being employed. Studies by inter alia Moll (2000), Mwabu and Schultz (1996), Fallon and Lucas (1998) broadly emphasize on the importance of education for the Blacks as they constitute the largest and the poorest group in the country. This state of affairs, however, is pathetic and incredible twenty years after South Africa's democratic dispensation. This calls for a serious scrutiny of the underpinnings behind these glaring pitfalls in the educational domain. Perhaps policy adjustments and implementation apparatus and personnel need thorough scrutiny especially if South Africa, one of the economic powerhouse of the African continent, is to make a significant score in the just about to be concluded Millennium Development Goal stock taking in education in 2015.

Inadequate Number of Schools

The availability of schools is an important indicator to the effectuation of children's educational rights in South Africa (Ntanjama 2013). Classes provide a conducive shelter from the horrendous and pinching effects of weather, whether rain, storms, or very high temperatures

that may not allow a teacher-learner interaction outside a sheltered structure (Trac 2014). Availability of classes and therefore schools is especially critical for countries which are slowly coming from the evils of colonialism and underdevelopment such as South Africa (Midgely 1995). This is because education creates a public good that bolsters skill development as an integral tool of human development (World Bank 2013). Education also serves a transformative role. As diverse literature indicate that South Africans were unfairly subjugated, discriminated and denied opportunities of accessing education, it is important that schools and by extension a conducive learning environment are availed so that the majority Black South Africans can acquire education as a public good for their transformative and developmental purposes. Institution of schools and therefore educational acquisition is inextricable to the growth and development of the individuals (Manomano 2013). Some pragmatists contend that the denial of the Blacks to access education was the goal of apartheid to ensure that the Blacks remain under the nose of the whites. Perhaps this history should make the current government to work round the clock to ensure that the country has adequate classes and well catered for schools if the children can escape the negative designs of apartheid.

Poor State of Sanitation

Indubitably, sanitation related infrastructure constitute a very important resource necessary to effectuate an enabling environment for meaningful access to quality education (Kang'ethe and Manomano 2014; Manomano 2013). Sanitation constitutes an array of basic needs such as the availability of toilets and other concomitant facilities such as water that expedite normal human functioning (Segal et al. 2007; Sheafar and Horejsi 2008). Sanitation and its quality thereof is a basic human need that is pivotally essential for every citizen to access (Kaplan 1996). Moreover, sanitation issues have also been high on the agenda of many public domain in South Africa. The phenomenon is also well anchored policy wise with clauses such as the White Paper of Water Supply and Sanitation of 1994, the National Water Act of 1998, the draft National Sanitation Policy of 1996 as well as the Water Services Act 108 of 1997 among others (Monyai 2003). The lack of qualitative sanita-

tion deters the right to education with estimates postulating that 443 million school days are lost every year due to poor or lack of humane and qualitative sanitation environment. Lack of toilets, for example, has been cited as one of the barriers to school attendance especially for the girls (UNRIC 2014). Interestingly, poor state of sanitation compromises the right to dignity as well as the right to health which is well anchored in the country's national constitution (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996). There is suspicion that lack of funding in this domain reduces the provision of sanitation and toilets in schools. To this end, OECD indicates that 5.5 percent of the development aid was set for water and sanitation in 2009 as compared to 8 percent in 1990. This discrepant funding system is a contributing factor to the challenges faced in schools in respect to sanitation and toilets. It is important that the issue cease to remain a taboo (UNRIC 2014) and if it was, it should be taken seriously because anecdotal evidence notes that every dollar spent on water and sanitation will generate 8 dollars in reduced health costs among other things (UNDP as cited by UNRIC 2014).

Perhaps the government needs to prioritize enhancing sanitation as a health right. Cases of toilets becoming disused due to lack of water have not been uncommon in some schools in South Africa. For example, in North West and Gauteng Provinces, some toilets though new are disused because there was no water supply to facilitate flushing (Sedibe 2011). This scenario was believed to be a precursor to lowered school attendance in the schools (Sedibe 2011).

Distance to Schools for Teachers and Students

Unarguably, and due to inadequate number of schools in a particular area, learners as well as their teachers may have to walk many kilometres to school. For the learners, especially, the phenomenon may make them weak, fatigued and may rob them of their energy and stimulus to listen and process what they may be taught (Manomano 2013). Usually due to poor geographical locale and terrain, the situation of reaching the school premises may be exacerbated by having to walk through the forested paths and uninhabited geographical terrain. Sometimes a lone walker may be a subject of crime and fear from animals in some areas (PRI 2013). These are factors that set in demotivational factors for both

the teachers and the learners. This may explain the high rate of school absence, attendance and eventual attrition in such school settings (UNICEF 2012). Therefore, the location of schools plays a very pivotal role in motivating both the learners and their teachers alike. This heralds an inextricable link between educational performance and productivity and the availability of schools in a particular area.

In a study on RDP Housing in Golf Course estate in Eastern Cape, it was discovered that the children who reside in RDP houses have to walk for many kilometres to the schools are located (Manomano 2013). It is unfortunate that this quagmire if not addressed poses a huge challenge as far as meeting the Millennium Development Goal of universal access to primary school education is concerned (UNICEF 2012). Perhaps the question these researchers beg is why after almost two decades after independence South Africans should be facing the problem of inadequate number of schools. Perhaps the biggest disadvantage of learners from such areas with inadequate schools, and where conditions are not conducive for good learning, find themselves competing with other learners from other regions where learning conditions are relatively conducive. The situation poses a glaring evidence for skewed regional development parity (Sedibe 2011).

CONCLUSION

Indubitably and importantly, education is an invaluable public good in which all have inalienable right to access. This is well anchored in South African constitution and supported by various educational related international instruments. Although the post-apartheid government has made a lot of commendable steps in addressing the lack of schools especially in areas inhabited by the Blacks majority, contrastingly there are many rural areas with fewer schools, or schools devoid of adequate infrastructure such as classes, humane sanitation and a lack of teachers. With the country scoring poorly especially in science and mathematics compared to the schools from other relatively economically challenged neighbouring countries, and with the country being one of the hugest economic powerhouse of Africa, the situation needs serious reconsideration. The country, therefore, needs a serious policy and pragmatic paradigm shift to

address the state. Policy implementation and having competent implementers is key. The country needs to position itself to score meaningfully in the just about to be concluded Millennium Development Goals stock taking poised for the year 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS/STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE EDUCATIONAL DETERRENT FACTORS

The following strategies have been documented by the researchers to assert possible pathways to address the educational bottlenecks faced by many children from the disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

- ♦ Ensuring that all schools where learners are enrolled have access to adequate and humane sanitation, water and effective operating toilets cannot be over-emphasized. As noted earlier, this is an investment that can reduce the possible expenditure on the health of the learners upon getting sick.
- ♦ The reconstruction and renovation of schools is necessary to ensure that schools are habitable and accessible by all, especially the learners and the teachers. City and town planning needs to take cognizance of the need for sustainable dwellings and communities that will harness access to education expeditiously.
- ♦ Proper educational investment is a requisite factor to ensure that more demanding needs such as toilets and sanitation are covered while ensuring that the planning takes into consideration the attainment of the country's Millennium Development goals targets.
- ♦ Collaboration with both private and public bodies in ensuring resources are easily availed is critical while departmental collaborations will also go a long way in ensuring that a combined effort is achievable to address the infrastructural problems impeding meaningful access to education

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