

Causes of Overcrowded Classes in Rural Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT The provision of quality education to all South Africans remains a commitment of South African democratic government since its inception in 1994. One of the milestones to achieve this is to provide adequate classrooms to more than 11 million learners in South African public schools who continue to receive education in overcrowded classrooms. Different societal organisations are calling upon the Department of Basic Education to address the shortage of classrooms in public schools. The provision of education in overcrowded classrooms has a negative impact on the performance of both educators and learners. The overcrowded classrooms, which are a common sight in many rural schools, create an obstacle in progressive activities of classroom teaching learning process. The research aims to investigate causes of overcrowded classes in primary schools in rural areas. Seven primary schools under Mamaila Circuit in the Mopani District were selected to form part of the research. From each school, two educators were sampled purposefully to participate in the research. The research was qualitative in nature and face to face semi-structured individual interviews were administered to participate in order to collect data. The findings of the study reveal that overcrowded classes are caused by lack of infrastructure such as classrooms. Some of the causes of overcrowded classes are having one school serving big community; the Department of Basic Education (DBE) takes long to build classrooms or to repair those that are damaged; the shortages of teaching staff and; principals who are looking to increase the enrolment of their school so that their salaries can be enhanced.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa inherited a fragmented and racially divided education system founded on the policies of apartheid (South African Ministry of Education (SAMOE) 2005). The main aim of such policies was to discriminate against certain racial groups, and this resulted in an unequal education provision in terms of race and religion. Many rural Black regions were left with inadequate and poor schooling resources. This condition makes it difficult for proper education to take place in such regions.

The democratic dispensation has committed itself to redress past imbalances in the education system by creating an environment that is conducive for the provision of quality education to all South African citizens. On 29 November 2013, the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga published a legally binding *Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure* document (Department of Basic Education 2013). It stipulates, among others, the provision of safe classrooms to schools with a maximum of 40 learners per classroom.

The issue of learner-educator ratios has been hotly debated between South African educator professional bodies and government. It was eventually agreed that the ratio would be 40:1 at primary level and 35:1 at secondary level (Equal Education 2014). However, in some schools, educators still have overcrowded classes than this to teach. Overcrowded classes are a common sight in many rural schools. This creates an obstacle in the progressive activities of classroom teaching and learning process and the achievement of instructional objectives. Instruction in a large group is a challenging task to any educator who interacts with learners inside the classroom. It is against this background that the research sought to identify challenges that educators face in teaching overcrowded classes in rural primary schools.

Overcrowded Classrooms

Many studies have shown that classroom overcrowding is not only a South African problem. According to Haddad (2006), many educators all over the world find themselves working