

EDUCATION TRENDS

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Teachers

According to a new study, poor pay is a key factor in the decision of many South African teachers to seek work in the United Kingdom. The as-yet-unpublished study by Oxford research fellow Dr K Ochs, surveyed 192 teachers recruited from other Commonwealth countries to jobs in the UK. 90 % of the South Africans who responded said they did not consider financial packages at home attractive enough, compared to a figure of just 60% in Australia.

One thousand teachers in the Western Cape were absent during the first two months of 2007 due to, amongst other reasons, stress. Teachers feel alone, unsupported and disillusioned. The department said it would no longer accept doctors' certificates for stress unless they were issued by a psychiatrist. Teachers are under pressure from high work loads, violence and undisciplined learners. Since the introduction of the new curriculum which depends on continuous assessment, teachers have been complaining that they spend more time keeping up with paperwork than teaching.

Other factors that are inhibiting successful teaching are class sizes, a discipline system where the rights of ringleaders seems to be prioritised, the rights of teachers that are being ignored, lack of in-service training for the new curriculum and weak departmental administration. A shortage of 50 000 teachers is foreseen within the next three years if government does not urgently intervene to improve the working conditions of teachers.

In yet another incident of school-related violence, a Grade 2 Eastern Cape educator died after being shot three times by a man masked in a balaclava. In expressing his condolences with the family of the murdered educator, Johnny Mankato, MEC for education in the Eastern Cape, stressed the importance of the speedy implementation of the education department's security programme for schools. This programme, he hoped, together with the co-operation of the community, would bring an end to violence at schools.

Teenage Pregnancies

The number of teenage pregnancies in South Africa is increasing rapidly. According to the Department of Education, more than 72 000 girls aged between 13 and 19 did not attend school last

year because they were pregnant. Official figures from the Provincial Departments of Education reveal that 5 868 learners in KwaZulu-Natal and 1 748 in the Free State fell pregnant last year, while about 5 000 teenage pregnancies were reported in Limpopo. Gauteng recorded 2 542 teenage pregnancies in the past two years. In the light of the severe HIV/AIDS epidemic that is reaping havoc in South Africa, it is a very disturbing fact that so many teenage pregnancies occur, and questions arise such as: How many of these girls are infected with HIV and what does the future hold for these girls and their babies?

According to Steven Levitt, writer of the international bestseller *Freakonomics*, 'growing up in a single-parent home roughly doubles a child's propensity to commit crime. So does having a teenage mother.' Educators should ensure that learners are equipped to enter adulthood with the potential to make a living and provide for a family. However, this cannot be done without highly qualified educators, and the wholehearted support of government, the education department, business, society and parents.

HIV/AIDS

The Minister of Education recently launched the Higher Education HIV & AIDS (HEAIDS) programme. The challenge faced by the higher education sector with regard to HIV/AIDS is succinctly captured in the following statement from the Association of African Universities: 'To a greater degree than ever before, African universities must renew their commitment to help Africa find effective solutions to its perennial problems of hunger, poverty and disease. In particular, the HIV/AIDS crisis poses a serious threat to African societies within which universities are situated.'

We need to recognise that the solution to this problem might well lie in Africa. African universities must, in any event, be in the forefront of research, education and action in this matter.' As a nationally coordinated effort in the fight against HIV/AIDS, HEAIDS seeks to strengthen the capacity, systems and structures of all higher education institutions in managing and mitigating the causes, challenges and consequences of HIV/AIDS in the sector and to strengthen the leadership role that can and should be played by the higher education sector.

According to the minister, one of the first activities of the HEAIDS programme will be a national survey involving a sample of 25 000 staff and students, to establish HIV prevalence on the campuses and to understand the beliefs and behaviour of students as they relate to HIV/AIDS. A second area of activity that will take shape soon is the focus on equipping student teachers to deal more effectively with the challenges they will face as they enter the classroom. More detailed content on HIV and AIDS in the teaching curriculum will be developed and more time will be spent on developing the skills that teachers need to respond to learners living with the virus or affected by its impact on their families.

e-Learning

Business and educational institutions are increasingly using online instruction/distance education as a teaching method. In 2000 investment in e-learning in the USA was \$2.2b and was estimated to exceed \$23b by 2004. However, very few empirical investigations of this method of teaching have been done so far. One investigation into the high drop-out rate of students attending e-learning courses shows that student's satisfaction with e-learning is a key indicator in their decision to drop-out, while the academic focus of control seems to have no impact on their decision. As e-mail forms an important medium for Internet-based education concerns exist about the care students put into writing their e-mail messages.

Scholastic Performance

In an effort to improve SA's poor matric results the DoE will, for the first time, set mathematics and language exam papers for Grade 11 pupils. National exam papers will also be set for all the other Grade 11 subjects and some schools will be selected to write these papers to enable the DoE to benchmark standards. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education has reportedly instructed schools to promote grade 11 pupils who failed last year to matric. The reasoning seems to be that normally, failed grade 11's opt to repeat grade 11 at school; however, this year that means that these pupils are doing the New Curriculum Statement with all the changes that accompany the introduction of the new curriculum.

As a result, most pupils are not coping with this shift. Moreover, some schools are not able to provide additional assistance to these pupils. A spokesperson for the National Teachers Union has described the decision as a 'good formula of disaster', contributing to a continued decline in matric results in the province. The KwaZulu-Natal directive follows an earlier statement by the director-general of education that the department will not allow 38 000 failed Grade 11 pupils in the Eastern Cape to be pushed through to matric this year.

The Department of Education announced that South African learners would not be participating this year in an international maths and science test in which it has twice come last, the Sunday Times reported. The test is conducted every four years. In 1999 South Africa came last out of 38 countries, and in 2003 last out of 50. The reason given for the decision was that the department did not want to 'over-test' pupils, as they would already undergo one domestic and one Southern and Eastern African regional test this year.

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

According to an article in The Lancet world wide at least 200m children younger than 5 years fail to reach their potential in cognitive and socio-emotional development, because of: malnutrition leading to stunting, iodine and iron deficiencies, and inadequate stimulation in their first five years of life. These

children are likely to fare poorly in school and subsequently have low incomes, high fertility, and provide poor care for their children, leading to an intergenerational transmission of poverty. As there are effective and low cost actions to prevent the damage and remedy these deficiencies, this lost potential is preventable, but the problem is the lack of professional and political commitment to mobilise action.

Skills Deficit

South Africa is facing a serious IT skills deficit due mostly to a lack of training. 'We are not seeing a big enough inflow into the economy of IT and engineering graduates,' said director of black empowered IT training company IT Intellect, Peter Denny, who also claimed that the problem is getting worse. Denny also pointed out that there are just not enough young adults coming out of school with the ability to move on into the tertiary level and undertake IT, engineering or science-focused degrees or diplomas. Moreover, like the UK, South Africa was losing skills to other countries 'as young people opt to leave the country to work overseas, due to perceived higher levels of employment, overall opportunities and, frankly, considered safety factors'.

Education Trends is compiled by the [Institute for Futures Research](#).

