

The challenges facing education in South Africa

Kem Ramdass

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, University of
Johannesburg, Bunting Road, Auckland Park, South Africa

ABSTRACT

There is a major emphasis on the education of the South African people to become responsible, participatory and reflective citizens that contribute to an emerging democracy. However, the government of SA is faced with many challenges that hinder the South African people from becoming an educated nation. This is based on the assumption that education plays a major role in improving the economic status of the nation. The education in South Africa is categorized into sectors, primary, secondary and tertiary which are interlinked through a fine thread that determines the success of individuals. Thus, in this manner education within the various categories can contribute to the building of a united, peaceful, and democratic country (Wilson, 2006). This paper sketches the challenges faced by a young democracy and the initiatives that have been implemented to improve the status of education in South Africa.

I INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in the research to highlight some of the issues affecting the SA education system includes a review of secondary data including existing literature and documents, relevant research reports from the department of education inclusive of other government departments, relevant journal articles in education.

In an era of rapid change that is enforced through technological innovations, globalisation, market expansion and mass production, the focus on the most important asset of an organization, human capital is often forgotten. The change should be centred around people – their intellectual abilities, their fear, their cultural background and their ability to add value to the changing societal needs, thereby working together for the common goal of the country.

Since the 1994 elections, the emphasis has been on the redress of the inequalities of the past. The South African government strategised a programme of restructuring the education system on principles of equity, human rights, democracy and sustainable development. Changes that occurred included a unified, national education system, more democratic system of school governance, new standards and qualifications authority, redistribution of financial and human resources, higher education reforms and the re-orientation to outcomes-based education. Against this scenario of change, the South African education system still faces major challenges, with political instability at the forefront of education. This is especially true in terms of the tension between implementing changes that need both time and considerable resources to work their way through, and propinquity of issues that need to be addressed at the sites of implementation i.e. in the schools/universities/technikons and particularly, in the lives of human personnel.

This paper sketches the challenges faced by a young democracy and the initiatives that have been implemented to improve the status of education in South Africa. The methodology used is the review of literature on articles in books, magazines, newspapers, government policies and the internet.

II BACKGROUND OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN 2006

South Africa is a multicultural democracy of approximately 44 million people, and is geographically located at the southern nib of Africa. Until 1994, the apartheid ideology created a scenario of inferior educational opportunities to people of colour. Education was often highlighted by protest action by the disadvantaged population. In particular, the teaching of the Afrikaans language was rejected by generations of secondary students.

Tertiary education reinforced race and class differences under apartheid. Disparities in resource distribution and the curricula offered maintained the apartheid mentality.

The African National Congress-led government faces a challenge to address the disparities that exist. Administrative bodies were created to oversee education at every level and to improve the quality of education for previously disadvantaged individuals (PDI's). With the formulation of a unified national department of education, the government merged the 21 universities and 15 technikons into 23 non-racial, more equitably resourced institutions. The college sector, which includes teacher training institutions and other vocational schools, has also undergone major restructuring (www.education.gov.za)

III LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several challenges facing the South African educational system, including a large percentage of school aged children who still do not attend school beyond the primary level (currently 87 percent attend at the secondary level and only 20 percent at the tertiary level), and the threat that HIV/AIDS poses to the infrastructure supporting education as the disease takes administrators, teachers, and parents – most in their prime years – in increasing numbers.

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in South Africa reported that 12 million children live in poverty. Four million of these children are starving and 40% have growth problems. Statistics reveal that 81% experience income and material deprivation any many live in shacks. More that 50% live in households where nobody is employed. Approximately 24% are in the wrong grade for their age and 6% are not in school. 24% live in households without both parents (Cohen, 2008)

Access to education for all South Africans are available to children 7–15 years and fees are waived according the financial status of parents. However studies and outreach is needed to look at those who have never attended or have been unable to attend school because of lack of money (Higgins, 2007).

a) THE HIV AIDS IMPACT ON EDUCATION

HIV Aids is having a major impact, not only in SA but throughout the world. It is reducing the supply of qualified teachers and may disrupt schooling for a whole generation of children. Over a period of time, the diminishing investment in human capital may delay social and economic development. The major issues are discussed below:

- The HIV/AIDS epidemic is diminishing the progress being made in the education sector.
- There is a reduction in the supply of educational services due to teacher deaths and absenteeism. Studies predict teacher shortages in many countries, including Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- There are high medical and other costs being imposed on the educational system for medical care and death benefits for infected teachers and for recruiting and training replacements for teachers lost to AIDS.
- There is a reduction in the number of school-aged children due to HIVAids. When children are born with the virus, they rarely live long enough to attend school.
- Orphaned children are often neglected and less likely to attend schools than non-orphans. Children drop out of school to assist ill parents and provide care or help financially with menial jobs. Studies by the HSRC in sub-Saharan African countries show low rates of enrolment among children when both parents are deceased.
- The quality of education is reduced through the impact of HIV/AIDS. Teachers that are infected are often absent or too sick to provide acceptable education. Substitute teachers may not have the experience or qualifications to replace qualified teachers. Thus, the quality of education would suffer when the government focuses on diverting funds into the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic(www.statssa.org.za)

The Medical Research council revealed that there was a rapid increase in HIV Aids during the period 1993 and 2000. The possible reason for this was that people were distracted by the political changes. HIV Aids was becoming widespread as the South African people and the world's media were focused on the political and social changes occurring in the country. The results of these political changes may have been positive, but the epidemic did not get the attention that was needed. It is possible that the impact of the epidemic could be reduced by prompt action. The head of the Medical Research Council has stated that AIDS killed around 336,000 South Africans between mid-2005 and mid-2006. (www.avert.org/safricastats.htm)

b) THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

South Africa is facing a major skills shortage in various facets of the economy (Pandor, 2007). Maria Ramos, CEO of Transnet mentioned that there is a severe, potentially incapacitating skills challenge as SA attempts to build sustainable higher levels of economic growth with shared benefits. She mentioned that SA is not alone in this quandary; other developing countries are facing similar skills shortages. "Globally, some estimates suggest that 50% of firms in developing countries are facing a skills shortage, Ramos said (Ramos, 2008). One of the possible reasons for this predicament is the shortsightedness of government in the restructuring of teacher training colleges. One of the beneficial aspects in the apartheid era was the teacher training colleges that produced teachers for the primary and secondary sector (Ramdass, 2007).

The challenge is to improve the quality of education in all schools. This is a daunting task. The schools are deprived of resources, facilities and qualified teachers. It is extremely unimaginable to have efficiency, effectiveness and quality in education under these circumstances. In the last budget speech by Minister Trevor Manuel, education took a priority with an allocation of R105 billion. Hopefully, the education sector would improve in the next few years (Pandor, 2007).

c) THE BUREAUCRACY AND POLITICS IN EDUCATION

The legacy of apartheid has left “footprints” in all government related occupations. The white dominated areas, some of which are still maintained, have now been taken over by “blacks” with reverse affirmative action. All people of colour are not treated alike, thereby creating conflict and an atmosphere of low morale. As an example, white academics with the same qualifications as their black counterparts have major disparities in terms of the salary scales. The white academic is placed on the 70th percentile of a salary scale while the black academic is placed on the 30th percentile of a salary scale. This has caused frustration among academic staff who seek opportunities in the private sector (Ramdass, 2007).

d) THE IMPACT OF CRIME IN EDUCATION

There is a total lack of discipline in schools. It has deteriorated to such an extent that students severely injure teachers and fellow colleagues to an extent that the crime “kills them” (Berger,2003).

The well-being of young people in South Africa is threatened through crime and violence in schools. A study on security in Durban schools found that "schools are places where drugs, thugs, and weapons move as freely through the gates as the pupils" (van der Berg and Burger, 2003). Despite national efforts to restore a culture of learning and teaching, incidents of theft, vandalism, burglary, rape and even murder are reported on school grounds (Beger, 2003). Teaching and learning should actually start at home, with disciplined upbringing which could be developed in future years.

The school environment is “contaminated” through crime and violence which jeopardises the educational process. The element of fear within an educational environment creates long-standing physical, emotional and psychological implications for both teachers and pupils including: distress, reduced self-esteem, risk of depression and suicide, reduced school attendance, impaired concentration, fear and a diminished ability to learn (Schultz and Mwabu, 1998).

Democracy and economic stability is threatened by crime and violence which inadvertently impacts on the peace of the country. With racism “peering its head” from time to time, the social fabric of communities and the nation as a whole is thwarted by crime and violence which endangers the health of both children and adults. It disrupts the provision of basic services and destroys respect for human rights. Crime and violence can also deepen gender and social inequalities and reduce the overall quality of life (Simkins, 2001).

The school plays a central role in the socialisation of a child and it is critical that schools offer a safe environment in which learning and growth can take place. The transformation of education in South Africa has created multiple challenges for both teachers and pupils. Democracy has brought about dramatic changes in the resources available for schools and the way in which they are governed. In addition, schools have had to adapt to racial integration, reduction of staff and a new outcomes-based curriculum.

Over the past five years government and non-governmental organisations have initiated a number of pilot projects throughout the country in an attempt to promote safer school environments. Security has been upgraded in many schools and life-skill programmes, psychological empowerment and peer mediation efforts are now common (Naidoo, 2006).

According to the February Community Survey 2007 conducted by Statistics SA in all provinces, covering 246 618 households and numbering 949 105 persons, progress was noted with regard to attendance in the past 10 years.

- The percentage of people aged 5-24 years attending school has increased (from 63% in 1996 to 73.6% in 2007), particularly for those aged 5-17 years.
- Provincial differences in school attendance are minimal, with percentages having increased all provinces between 1996 and 2007.
- Both males and females have equally benefited.
- However, disparities exist on a racial basis. Attendance at an educational institution among persons aged 5-24 years in 2007 was 68% among Asians/Indians, 74.7% among blacks/Africans, 64.4% among coloureds and 73.1% among whites. In 1996 the percentages were 70.1%, 70.7%, 64% and 70.6%, respectively.
- The percentage of persons aged 20 and above with no schooling has decreased substantially from 19.1% in 1996 to 10.3% in 2007.
- The percentage of persons aged 20 and above with some secondary education has increased from 33.6% in 1996 to 40.1% in 2007, while the percentage with a higher education has increased from 7.1% to 9.1%.

Based on the findings from international comparative research the SA Institute of Race Relations claims that "South African schools are among the worst in Africa." Among Southern and East African countries that participated in a study on schooling quality, South Africa scored below average on reading and mathematics proficiency for pupils in Grade 6. Only one in five Grade 6 pupils in SA had attained the desired level of reading mastery. This was despite SA having a higher per capita gross domestic product, a higher human development index rating, and higher spending per primary school pupil than many of the countries that recorded better scores. The institute also raised questions over whether sufficiently skilled teachers were available to teach these basics.

Other problems for non attendance include, but not limited to the following:

- Lack of interest and care
- Sickness
- Pretending to be sick
- Influence of peers

- Cultural issues
- Lack of finance/food

e) **STUDENTS PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION**

The challenge is to ensure the success of students who attend universities and universities of technology. The number of graduates from these institutions has more than doubled over the last decade, which is encouraging. There are approximately 750 000 headcount students in this sector, the majority at universities.

However, the actual success rate is not what it should be. SA does not have enough graduates in areas of need, that is the engineering fields. Analysis on student intake has revealed that more students enter into human and social sciences and the least being in the engineering department.

By mid-2006, the South African public education system had 12 million learners, 366 000 educators and about 28 000 schools, including 390 special-needs schools and 1 000 registered private schools. Of all schools, 6 000 were high schools (grades 7 to 12) and the rest were primary (grades 1 to 6) schools. Learners attend school for 13 years. The first year of education, Grade 0 or reception year, and the last three are not compulsory. Many primary schools offer Grade 0, which can also be completed at nursery school (www.avert.org./safricastats.htm)

The South African Council for Educators has a register of approximately 495 000 educators of which 19 000 are registered provisionally. The matric exam pass rate in 2005 was 68.3%. Although this represented a slight decrease in pass rate, the number of learners writing and passing the Senior Certificate increased substantially. A total of 347 184 learners passed the Senior Certificate, which was 16 367 more than in 2004. In 2005, 86 531 candidates achieved university endorsement compared with 85 117 in 2004. A total of 32 112 learners passed Mathematics on the Higher Grade (HG) and 45 652 passed Physical Science HG. A total of 40 952 learners passed with merit and 9 339 passed with distinction. The pass rate for 2007 was affected by the teacher's strike which reduced the pass rates of students by approximately 5%. Major transformation of the Further Education and Training (FET) college sector took place during 2002/03, in which the existing 152 technical colleges were merged to form 50 multisite-campus FET colleges (www.avert.org./safricastats.htm).

IV RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

a) **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The challenge is to make the national skills development strategy (the industrial training programme) which is currently managed by the SETA's (sector education and training authority) work more effectively to support a more competitive business sector and a more efficient state. Unfortunately, the SETA's are not delivering the promised mandate of government at present and would be reconfigured in the next year or two.

The current challenge is to prepare young people for the world of work, more effectively. Numerous so called “third world” countries like Brazil, are faced with a demand for more literate and numerate school leavers than ever before. There has been a major focus on redesigning curricula to suit a world that is reinventing itself rapidly through new technologies. In South Africa the democratic government faces a particular challenge in this regard; black children in the pre-1994 era were not thought suited to learning Mathematics and Science (Cassim, 2006).

The first priority in the development of skills should be the education of Mathematics and Science in schools. Government support in the provision of relevant resources at each grade should address this problem. The project began with Dinaledi schools in 2001 and met with mixed success. The scheme required re-evaluation and was reorganized with a co-ordinated set of specifications (textbooks, laboratories, and teachers) and draw in the assistance of business. Mathematics is a pre-requisite for approximately 80% of the qualifications offered at tertiary level. Matriculation without mathematics would prevent school leavers from entering specific technical fields (Pandor, 2007).

About 400 000 students attend FET (Further education and training) colleges and 750 000 attend higher education institutions. Given the human resource requirements in the economy, school leavers attending higher education institutions should increase over the next few years. FET colleges were established to provide for a certain target market; that is students that preferred working with their hands.

A Bill in Parliament in October 2006, which is the second priority, established colleges as separate institutions from schools and provides a framework to strengthen responsiveness, co-ordination and quality. The college sector is being recapitalised and redesigned. From next year (2009) the colleges would be able to offer intermediate and high-level skills to students from the age of 16 to mature adults and give effect to the long held idea of providing lifelong learning. The indicators of economic growth and development point to the fact that there should be more artisans being trained for all the economic sectors in South Africa. The education department is of the opinion that colleges would add value through their teaching of “hands on” skills alongside industry and other partners.

The third priority is the recognition of Universities of Technology as a major national asset. The problem experienced is that of the mergers of the technikons with universities, the rationalization of programmes and the attitude of “take-over” by universities which leave staff demoralised. Technikons produced graduates that were on par with university graduates in the workplace, but were often looked down upon as inferior graduates (Ramdass, 2007).

Universities of technology offer an alternative entry into higher education for students who would otherwise have been excluded on academic grounds from the university sector. Many qualified graduates, like the Minister of Finance studied at a university of technology. Technology universities offer national diploma and certificate programmes at level five and above of our National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Employers, parents and students see technology universities as institutions guaranteeing greater employment prospects than universities.

SA is short of skills in the following areas:

- business and financial managers
- engineering skills
- information technology (IT) skills.

Studies and surveys confirm that the country is in need of the above skills and the economy is experiencing this notion. Universities of technology have a fundamental role to play in South Africa. The global landscape is constantly changing in terms of occupational structure, qualification mix and its alignment with industry requirements and soft skills. There is a focus on “skill intensity” in managerial and professional occupations.

There is a demand for job specific – technically orientated skills, that cut across boundaries of disciplines which require basic skills, generic skill (including verbal, numerical, planning and communication skills), information technology skills and managerial and leadership skills, including an ability to work together in a diversified environment which is of utmost importance in South Africa. The current experiences show racial tension that divides the nation and prevents South Africa as a country from becoming a global first world country in terms of its economy (Padayachee, 2004).

Technology universities have made and are continuing to make a difference in the higher education landscape with the development of technical competencies through work-based experience. This is evident through the massive expansion in enrolment in recent years and the re-curriculation of qualifications (Cichello, et al. 2003).

The fourth priority is the university that train professionals like lawyers, engineers, and doctors. The major focus of universities has been on research into fundamental principles of science and mathematics. Universities are generally judged by their research output on issues facing the country. The dilemma facing institutions is the funding formula used to calculate government subsidy for institutions. Costs are escalating but the subsidies are reducing, thus pressuring institutions to reduce costs wherever possible (Pandor, 2006).

The fifth priority is the skills development strategy. Government has played a leading role in aligning the skills supply of the education and training sector with the demands of the economy, that is, the skills needs of the private sector, state operated enterprises and government.

To focus and facilitate the process the Joint Council on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), which includes government, business and labour leaders, has been established. JIPSA serves as a central clearing house for discussion on skills needs and strategy development. This could be achieved in the following ways:

- Employers in public and private enterprises should start intensive on-the-job training that turns a graduate into a professional.
- The Human resources department could play a more strategic role in recruitment and selection of employees with a focus on succession planning and development of employees.

- Political appointments and discrimination against people should be re-evaluated. The best person for the job should be employed.
- A credible multi-stakeholder forum for the enforcement of the above should be created to prevent corruption within the system (Chandra, 2001).

b) STRUCTURES WITHIN EDUCATION IN SA

South Africa has a single national education system, which is organised and managed by the national Department of Education and the nine provincial departments. Statutory bodies include the Council of Education Ministers, Heads of Education Department's Committee, General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Council, South African Qualifications Authority, Council on Higher Education, South African Council for Educators, National Board for Further Education and Training, Education Labour Relations Council and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme.

c) CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The new National Curriculum Statement was expected to be introduced into schools as follows:

- Grade 10 in 2006
- Grade 11 in 2007
- Grade 12 in 2008

In 2005, the Department of Education gazetted the new National Senior Certificate to replace the Senior Certificate, widely known as "matric." The National Senior Certificate would be awarded for the first time in 2008. It requires learners to do four compulsory subjects, namely two official languages, Mathematical Literacy or Mathematics and Life Orientation. In addition, a learner should select three approved subjects. The department also developed the guidelines for teaching and assessment that was distributed to schools in 2005. Provincial departments of education conducted one-week workshops to orientate Grade 10 educators. However, educators were disappointed with the process followed which affected teaching and learning time.

d) POLICY ON SCHOOLING

Schooling is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 15 years. All learners are guaranteed access to learning. There are two types of schools: independent (private) and public. At public schools, parents vote on the level of school fees. Poor parents are given exemption or reduction of school fees (Devey et al.2005).

Over five million learners at 16 000 schools benefited from the R200-million primary school nutrition programme in districts which has also created opportunities for women's co-operatives and small, medium and micro enterprises in KwaZulu-Natal, the Northern Cape and North West provinces in particular (Hosking, 2001).

By September 2006, more than R7 million was spent schools implementing a voluntary no-fee policy. Approximately 2,6 million learners were not required to pay

school fees. Policies on school fees are expected to be in place in 2007 to ensure that fees for the poorest primary schools are eliminated. The process is still in progress.

e) FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

South Africa has experienced an increasing number of young people completing their schooling career, but there have not been an equivalent number of learners entering the further and higher education domain. Fewer than 4% of young Africans enter higher education. Penny Vinjevold, deputy director in the Department of Education, mentioned that in South Africa, expanding further education and training is seen as a way to open access to post-school education, raise student numbers, plug a skills gap – and improve diversity in the tertiary system. The plan is to enroll a million further education students by 2014, the deputy director said. There are approximately one million learners in each grade as the school system is retaining learners. There is a sharp drop-out rate in the 17 to 19-year age group in the past few years of school. The SA government hopes to attract this “lost” group into the FET stream. The school sector has the largest number of learners, followed by the HE sector and then the FET sector. It would take some time to align the number of learners within the education system.

An improved FET system would provide a greater range in type and level of courses, qualifications and graduates that the country needs. This would assist in the development of skilled personnel thereby addressing the skills gap in the country. The National Qualifications Framework, which umbrellas the different sectors of education, was structured in a way that closely related FET and school-level education – with the last years at school seen as further education. South Africa had more than 200 mostly small and under-resourced colleges which provided a wide range of qualifications from technical, vocational and trade qualifications to higher education, but produced too few graduates. 50 larger colleges were created in 2003-04 with a merger of further and higher education institutions at 230 sites.

R2 billion was made available by the SA government to pay for a restructured, strengthened and improved FET system. Teaching, nursing and agricultural colleges were incorporated into universities, leading to concerns about loss of differentiation in these key skills fields. Under a FET College Act promulgated in 2006, colleges were separated from schools and became post-secondary. The Act provides for expansion of the college sector and aims to encourage a flexible and responsive FET system, as well as to promote accountability and guide public funding, governance, appointments, registration of private institutions, quality assurance and transitional arrangements. Curriculum development has also driven transformation in the FET system, which in the past mostly provided a theoretical grounding for people acquiring vocational or trade skills. The government implemented changes that were aimed at tackling a huge problem of youth unemployment, and took into account international trends. Education and training are becoming inseparable, especially when a job for life is being replaced with lifelong learning. Employer requirements vary according to the job specification, but require fundamental aspects of effective communication, problem solving skills, and the ability to effectively use information technology. In developing a new curriculum, these needs translated into the

fundamentals of reading, writing, calculating and information technology, and into a combination of conceptual and applied knowledge.

The government introduced a national certificate examination in each of 11 sectors identified as priority skills fields, each consisting of seven subjects including three that are compulsory – language, mathematics or mathematical literacy, and life skills – and four vocational subjects with both theoretical and practical components. In 2008 there are 63,000 students enrolled on these national vocational certificate programmes, and the plan is to raise this number to 100,000 by 2010.

The idea, said Vinjevoid, is also for FET students to gain access to pre-university training, even as they are doing vocational training. “Whether you’re a baker or a welder or whatever, you need an education. That is what the modern world demands of us. We’ve tried to meet this demand by offering the extra subjects which aim to give a general education, although practical vocational training courses are also available as standalones” (Dias and Posal, 2006).

While curriculum development has introduced greater diversity of learning within the priority fields, concerns have been expressed that nationally conforming programmes could reduce differentiation, along with government funding of (low fee) priority programmes that would likely siphon students away from the wide range of other courses that colleges offer. Joy Papier, of the University of the Western Cape, mentioned that “the same issues affecting differentiation in the higher education system are going to affect FET colleges because policy and funding are moving toward a narrowing of the focus of colleges, rather than differentiation of their potential targets”.

A new funding system, starting in 2008, is programme-based and depends on student numbers. The act requires colleges to report on planned enrolments. FET funding, said Vinjevoid, now “responds to the strongest and best colleges, especially as they relate to recruiting, throughput and placing of students”. The state provides 80% of funding for priority programmes, so no student on a government-sponsored programme pays fees of more than R5,500 – considerably alleviating the problem of finance as an obstacle to student recruitment and retention. Colleges are free to run other programmes, funded from other sources such as fees. Needy students can get bursaries to offset fees: the government has allocated R600 million to the FET colleges Financial Aid Scheme over three years, starting in 2007 (Dias and Posal, 2006).

While some colleges offer no higher education programmes, in others up to 40% of courses are at this level. Some colleges only offer the national certificate, others have just 10% of students on them. So within the programme mix, Vinjevoid said, there is diversity in the system. “In next decade there would be an evaluation to determine what the best programme mix might be.” The challenge, she added, would be to ensure that “230 college sites offer a range and diversity of programmes to the million young people who need to be in formal further education and training” (Dias and Posal, 2006).

The FET quality assurance body takes responsibility for policy development for grades 10 to 12 in public and independent schools, as well as in public and private FET colleges. It monitors the trustworthiness of assessment in schools and colleges. The QA body also designs and develops the academic curriculum as well as a range of vocational subjects. The FET sector provides education and skills development for out-of-school youth and adults (Dias and Posal, 2006).

It oversees, maintains co-ordination and constantly evaluates the system's management for the improvement of learner performance in the fields of Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST). It devises strategies aimed at the use of information and communications technology (ICT), and supports curriculum implementation through the national educational portal called Thutong (www.thutong.org.za).

In 2005, the branch's main achievements included:

- The development of new national certificates for Grade 12 in 2008 and levels 2, 3 and 4 vocational education in 2007, 2008 and 2009
- Preparation for the new curriculum implementation for Grade 10 in 2006 and for Level 2 national certificates in FET colleges in 2007
- Planning and research for the re-capitalisation of FET colleges
- Preparation for the registration process of private FET colleges
- national examinations for Abet Level 4, FET colleges and six subjects of the Senior Certificate.

The past year has seen significant progress being made by the department of education towards the re-organisation of technical colleges into further education and training institutions. The technical college physical infrastructure represents the most significant state investment in South Africa which is specifically aimed at meeting the human resource development needs of commerce and industry. As such, it focuses on vocational education at a post general education level (Dias and Posal, 2006).

f) QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Government plans to invest some R12,5 billion over the next five years to improve and develop education by means of a programme that would concentrate on addressing apartheid's legacy in education.

Five thousand schools that do not perform well based in remote locations would be identified. Resources such as libraries, laboratories, and teaching materials would be provided. Educators would be supported by education development programmes and effective development teams (Hooegeveen and Ozler, 2004).

Teaching and learning would focus on the acquisition of important contents and academic skills and on equipping learners with literacy and numeracy skills. The progress made by learners and their schools would be monitored and assessed regularly.

SAQA is a statutory body of 29 members appointed by the ministers of labour and of education. SAQA, through the NQF, ensures that South African qualifications are of excellent quality, and internationally comparable. The authority oversees the:

- development of the NQF by formulating and publishing policies and criteria for the registration of bodies responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications
- accreditation of bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of such standards and qualifications
- implementation of the NQF by ensuring the registration, accreditation and assignment of functions to the referred bodies
- registration of national standards and qualifications on the NQF.

The NQF is a set of principles and guidelines on which records of learner achievement are registered. This enables national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages lifelong learning. The NQF also attempts to move the measurement of achievement in education and training away from input towards outcomes. The Saqa's Centre for the Evaluation of Educational Qualifications determines the equivalence between foreign and South African qualifications in the South African context. In 2005/06, SAQA implemented a new standard-setting system, developed a discussion document for rationalising qualifications on the NQF, completed the unit standards project (the checking of all registered unit standards), and cleared the Mathematics fundamentals for Level 4 qualifications.

The loading of UMALUSI senior certificate data was also completed, with 5,5 million learner records on the national learners' records database. Furthermore, 1 902 applications were registered and 1 526 certificates of evaluation were issued to individuals. In 2006, SAQA continued to provide leadership and professional expertise to ensure that high-quality, nationally relevant and internationally comparable unit standards and qualifications were registered on the NQF. SAQA has an important role to play in developing appropriate scarce skills, particularly in technical fields. SAQA would continue to target strategic areas for skills development such as the FET sector.

The CHE was established in terms of the HE Act 1997 (Act 101 of 1997), and is responsible for:

- advising the minister on all policy matters related to HE
- executive responsibility for quality assurance in HE and training
- monitoring and evaluating the achievement of policy goals and objectives, including reporting on the state of South African HE
- promoting students' access to HE.

g) HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) TRANSFORMATION

HE is central to the social, cultural and economic development of modern societies. The HE Branch provides strategic direction and institutional support for the development of a single co-ordinated system.

The branch provides leadership by:

- developing legislation
- developing policy support to the HE system
- liaising with constituencies in HE
- registering private HE institutions
- implementing the National Plan for HE
- allocating and transferring subsidies to public HE institutions.

Total government funding of the HE system has more than doubled since 1996. The re-organisation of these institutions is designed to improve the ability of this country to educate and train a workforce which is both skilled and globally competitive in terms of internationally accepted standards of quality. The emphasis lies on the provision of access to the education system. The mission of the South African qualifications authority is "to ensure the development and implementation of a national qualifications framework which contributes to the full development of each learner and to the social and economic development of the nation at large." The qualifications framework is "a set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievement are registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages life-long learning". The objectives of the national qualifications framework as outlined in the South African qualifications Authority Act (no 58 of 1995) are as follows:

- to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements
- to facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths.
- to enhance the quality of education and training
- to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities
- to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

In order to achieve these objectives, the South African qualifications authority would:

- establish a national learners' records database
- oversee the quality assurance process
- develop a regulatory framework for the standard setting process

According to a strategic plan for higher education (HE), it is envisaged that enrolment at these institutions would rise from 15% to 20% of school leavers within 15 years. Within five years, enrolments in the humanities would decline, while those in Business and Commerce, and Science, Engineering and Technology would rise.

The 2001 National Plan for HE also envisaged:

- research being funded through a separate formula based on research output
- targets being set to increase the numbers of black and female students and academic staff.

The role of HE in the South African education system is threefold:

- Human resource development (HRD): mobilising human talent and potential through lifelong learning to contribute to the social, economic, cultural and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society.
- High-level skills training: training and providing person-power to strengthen the country's enterprises, services and infrastructure. This requires the development of professionals with globally equivalent skills, but who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation.
- Producing, acquiring and applying new knowledge: national growth and competitiveness depend on continuous technological improvement and innovation, driven by a well-organised and vibrant research and development system that integrates the research and training capacity of HE with the needs of industry and of social reconstruction.

In April 2001, the ministries of education and of labour jointly launched the human resources development strategy (HRD) Strategy for South Africa, entitled "A Nation at Work for a Better Life for All". The strategy is underpinned by a set of institutional arrangements, including sector education and training authorities (Setas), and the general reshaping of FET and HE to meet the HRD needs of the country.

The strategy ensures that integrated HRD planning and implementation is monitored at national, regional and sectoral level. Progress is measured against approved indicators. The key mission of the strategy is to maximise the potential of people in South Africa through the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It also seeks to introduce an operational plan and the necessary arrangements to ensure that everyone is productive and works competitively to improve their quality of life.

The goals of the strategy include improving the social infrastructure of the country, reducing disparities in wealth and poverty, developing a more inclusive society, and improving South Africa's position on the International Competitiveness Table over the next 10 years.

Central to the education policy framework is the contention that a high-quality education sector cannot be built by government alone. It depends on creative and dynamic partnerships between the public sector, civil society and international partners. The Department of Education; teacher unions; and the Education, Training and Development Practices Seta signed a historic declaration at the National Education Convention in November 2002, in which they committed themselves to working together to achieve education-transformation goals. The success of key national initiatives relies largely on partnerships with the private and non-governmental organisation (NGO) sectors.

Several partnerships have been consolidated, providing working models of educational transformation through public-private partnerships. The Business Trust, a partnership between business and government, works in education through three NGOs, namely the Read Educational Trust, the Joint Education Trust and the National Business Initiative Colleges Collaboration.

The international community's contribution to the transformation of education is important. The department co-operates with United Nations (UN) agencies and numerous donors to improve access to basic education, FET and HE. Development co-operation partners such as the Australian Agency for International Development, Flanders, France, Germany, Italy, Japan International Co-operation Agency, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, the Danish Agency for Development Assistance, the Sweden International Development Agency, the Canadian International Development Agency, the UK's DFID, the Netherlands, the Irish Agency for International Development, the Finnish Government and the European Union have been instrumental in the provision of technical and financial assistance to the national and provincial departments of education.

In 2005, the Netherlands gave the Department of Education a grant of R213 million over a four-year period to help empower teachers. The grant was also expected to be spent on the development of the National Framework for Teacher Education, as well as support material for educators. The governments of the UK and Northern Ireland are making available R226 million to the Limpopo Department of Education. The assistance, which will be spread over six years (2003 to 2009), is known as the Khanyisa Education Support Programme. The programme aims to improve learning achievement, support and service delivery across the whole education system. The ministry also played a leading role in the development of the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Education and Training, which aims to achieve equivalence, harmonisation and standardisation of education in the region. International partnerships and South-South exchanges are fostered particularly within the African continent.

The department has a strong collaborative relationship with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. A key initiative of the collaboration is the development of national Education for All (EFA) action plans. As part of regional consultations on implementation, the department participates in assessing progress in the elaboration of the EFA plans of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and exchanges information on best practices in the development of these plans (www.doe.org.za).

Going forward the minister of education has formulated a pledge that is being circulated for comment; that requires that each learner recite the pledge on a daily basis in the morning assembly, to enforce discipline and hopefully reduce criminal activities. The pledge reads:

"We the youth of South Africa, recognising the injustices of our past, honour those who suffered and sacrificed for justice and freedom."

"We will respect and protect the dignity of each person, and stand up for justice."

"We sincerely declare that we shall uphold the rights and values of our Constitution and promise to act in accordance with the duties and responsibilities that flow from these rights." (Pandor, 2008).

V CONCLUSION

South Africa faces a number of formidable challenges in the years ahead in the realm of education. Some of the newly proposed and developed educational reforms in South Africa, including OBE and Curriculum 2005, involve sophisticated educational

concepts that require better-skilled teachers than were produced in South Africa under the Bantu education system as well as resources most schools cannot afford. Additionally, many of the new education policies are as yet unenforceable (e.g., provisions for free and compulsory education and the language policy), although they express the ideals and common values that underlie education in post-Apartheid South Africa and provide guidelines for further action. Resource constraints, both human and material, on implementing the new policies and their associated programs will limit the speed at which the educational system can be reformed and high quality education can be made accessible to all in South Africa, especially for the very poor. The major constraints in most sectors of South African education, as already noted, are trained personnel and adequate material resources. Strategies have to be evolved for training the trainers at just about every level education if the outcomes envisaged by the Ministry of Education are to be realized. Turning around the legacy of Apartheid education in South Africa in all probability will take several generations.

Furthermore, the as of yet immeasurable impact of HIV/AIDS would likely be devastating on the entire educational system, debilitating and destroying the lives of countless teachers, administrators, and other educational staff either directly or indirectly in the years to come and diminishing the number of students able to participate in education as the rates of infection and death from HIV/AIDS grow. The educational sector has a special obligation and responsibility to attend to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its various ramifications in South African society, including the schools. Designing and implementing a well-structured campaign to combat this ravaging disease is essential, and educators must take their part in the campaign, as the Department of Education has noted in its May 2001 report on the status of education in the new South Africa.

The funding available for education, even with donations from the United Nations, the European Union, Japan, Canada, Britain, U.S., and other international sources, currently is inadequate to address the scale of South Africa's education problems created by Apartheid in the near future. In August 1997, for example, the Schools Register of Needs was launched to determine the exact location of each school, the state of physical facilities, condition of buildings, services provided, and available resources. The survey of more than 32,000 schools found that no water was available within walking distance of 24 percent of the schools and that only 43 percent of the schools had electricity. In the northern province, where conditions are most severe, a staggering 79 percent of the schools had no electricity and 41 percent of the buildings were in a serious state of disrepair. More than half of the schools used pit latrines with 13 percent of them having no toilet facilities of any description. The survey also found the most appalling conditions imaginable in the estimated 5,400 schools countrywide located on land owned mostly by white farmers. The task alone of developing these schools—public schools on private property—to the required level would require the country's entire education budget.

In its May 2001 review of educational accomplishments in the post-Apartheid era, South Africa's Department of Education underscored the importance of education for equalizing the opportunities and improving the future prospects of all South Africans. The report's authors emphasized that "education is pivotal to economic prosperity, assisting South Africans—personally and collectively—to escape the 'poverty trap' characterizing many of the communities. It has also to reach beyond economic goals,

enabling South Africans to improve the quality of their lives and contribute to a peaceful, concerned, and democratic nation." The burden of attending to the requisite demands of the transformative process is Herculean indeed, and improving South Africa's education system will require the dedicated perseverance of South Africans from all backgrounds for many years to come. As the authors of the May 2001 Department of Education report observed,

The national project of education transformation is multi-faceted and complex—requiring systemic transformation at all levels and in all sectors. It takes account of widely disparate conditions, characterized by differing degrees of capacity, poverty, inequality, and privilege. It must go beyond mechanisms of delivery seeking to mobilize educators, young people, and communities to celebrate learning: as a celebration of human nature and as a means to personal and social development, employment, and opportunities for a better quality life.

One of the major problems experienced by the South African public is the high and rising unemployment rate that inadvertently influences the crime and violence experienced in the country. The most feasible antidote for this dilemma would be education and training through skills development. The explanation for unemployment is that there is a lack of skills which inhibits economic growth. Reports of a "brain drain" over the last decade provide further explanation for the lack of skilled labour especially when the economy is moving along a "high-skilled" employment growth path (Bhorat and Hodge, 2001 and Bhorat and Leibbrandt, 1999).

This paper provided an overview of the current challenges experienced within the education system in SA and counteractive plans that have been implemented to address these issues. The challenges encountered by the education department cannot be resolved overnight. It starts with parents guiding their children throughout their educational career from pre-primary school until they complete their higher education and become responsible citizens that could add value to society. A study conducted by Dias and Posel, (2006) there is a strong relationship between unemployment and skills development. The study mentioned that "the relative benefits to matric education remained unchanged over the period, but relative to an individual with only primary school education, individuals with tertiary education, on average, were more protected against unemployment over the period."

It is possible that prospective labour force participants are not specialising in specific fields of study required by the labour market or that employers have concerns about the quality of formal education. It may also be that hiring preferences among employers contribute to experiences of skills shortages. But it has been suggested that perhaps the most obvious skill lacking in the South African labour force is the absence of work experience. The majority of the unemployed in the country has never worked before. Recent surveys of large-scale organisations indicated three main constraints to expansion – crime and theft, corruption, and currency volatility (Kingdom and Knight, 2005).

More research needs to be undertaken to determine the success of government initiatives and its effect on the South African people. Governmental organizations need to focus on performance management initiatives to ensure that the human capital employed is delivering on promised tasks. This is a journey that may take another

decade or two to establish working relationships among a diversified nation. With a change in behaviour and attitude and the elimination of political ties, South Africa could become the most prosperous nation in the world.

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kramdass@uj.ac.za

Kem Ramdass has worked as a senior work-study officer, industrial engineer, production manager and skills development facilitator in the textile and automotive industries for the past 15 years. He joined the academic profession in 1999 at the Real Estate and Economics management as a lecturer with the old Technikon South Africa. He later moved to the UNISA'S Department of Business Management in 2006. He is currently employed at the University of Johannesburg. He has vast experience with regards to continuous improvement methodologies from an industrial engineering viewpoint, quality management systems implementation and auditing and he has a passion toward the improvement of service delivery in both public and private sectors.

He is a SAATCA accredited quality management system auditor and is currently a member of the South African Institute of Management Services (SAIMAS), South African Institute of Management Scientists (SAIMS), South African Quality Institute (SAQI) and South African Institute of Industrial Engineers (SAIIE).

His qualifications include:

- National Diploma Organisation and Workstudy/Industrial Engineering
- National Higher Diploma Production Management
- Bachelor of Technology Degree in Quality Management
- Masters of Technology Degree in Production Management
- Complete PhD research in the field of Production Engineering Management with the University of Johannesburg 2008.