

EDUCATION IS THE KEY

Laying the foundation for future generations

This newsletter reflects on basic education and how various segments of society perceive this topic. Education has consistently been a priority for Government and accounts for an exceptionally high percentage of its total allocated expenditure in each financial year.

The research findings and media coverage explored herein, dovetail with the findings from the Census 2011 and together provide a mixed picture on the education system. However, before we get into the current reality we should also look back at the road we have travelled.

In 1994, we inherited an education system geared to supporting the aspirations and needs of only one sector of our population. Decades of social and economic discrimination against black South Africans had left a legacy of inequality along racial lines. This was particularly marked in education which had to be reformed in its entirety.

Government had to reform education

“The Census 2011 results showcase the strides we have made in educating children which remains the key right of all children. Any country that wants to be prosperous economically needs to invest in the education of its children. By educating our children we are also creating better leaders of tomorrow who will take this country forward.”

President Jacob Zuma

from top to bottom; new legal and regulatory policy frameworks had to be put in place, including the establishment of organisations and institutions that created the conditions and structures for effective transformation from the old to the new. It also involved merging the various departments created by the apartheid government into one integrated department.

The then Ministry of Education was confronted with the task of dismantling apartheid structures and creating a unified education system, that was more equitable in serving the needs of all our people. The enormity of this task should never be underestimated.

Looking back we can be proud of what we have achieved so far, but it is clear that more still needs to be done.

Where are we today?

Today we can confidently say that the majority of people experience better education than under apartheid. GCIS National Tracker Research (March-May 2012) shows that the vast majority of South Africans rate Government positively in providing education. This is particularly true in rural areas where higher satisfaction rates regarding education are noted.

However, the GCIS National Qualitative Study (March 2012) suggests that changes in the curriculum are perceived as being particularly worrying. According to participants, this is due to constant changes. Educators find it difficult to grasp and adequately understand the curriculum themselves and are therefore hamstrung in implementing it effectively.

Of concern is the fact that research findings seem to indicate that both learners (young participants) and parents (older participants) do not

understand the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) system. This makes it difficult for parents to assist children with their schoolwork. (Participants were referring to OBE).

Participants in the qualitative research also suggested that there was a need for libraries and computers in schools so that learners could have access to information to complete their schoolwork. They called for a set curriculum and for Government to consider ways to increase the pool of qualified teachers, especially in rural areas.

A media overview shows that education attracted the most coverage of all five government priorities.

Between 2008 and 2010, education coverage enjoyed a remarkable level of positivity, but since then the trend has changed as textbook delivery in Limpopo, and the Eastern Cape temporary teachers' problems made headlines.

The overall findings show a range of reactions on Government's progress in providing quality education and clearly indicate that more needs to be done.



Key positive research findings

The GCIS National Tracker Research (March-May 2012) indicate that Government's performance in addressing matters of education is rated as a priority by South Africans.

Government was rated as follows on basic education:

- Positively for addressing educational needs (74 per cent)
- Improving quality of schooling (72 per cent)
- Increasing supplies for schooling such as textbooks (70 per cent)
- Training teachers (62 per cent)
- Improving the quality of basic adult education (ABET) (53 per cent)

At provincial level, with the exception of the Western Cape, the majority of the participants perceived Government as doing well in addressing educational needs.

A similar picture is evident from the GCIS Qualitative Study that was conducted in March 2012. Although there were some negative sentiments, findings indicated that some participants felt that education has improved especially because of the new curriculum (OBE). Government was also praised for its policy on no-fee schools.

Rural participants felt more optimistic about education and acknowledged efforts made by Government to assist learners through the provision of no-fee schools and feeding schemes.

Results may appear surprising given the largely negative reporting on education in mainstream media in 2012, as explored further in this newsletter. But is it really?

The most powerful driver of a person's opinion is often likely to be their first-hand exposure, or in taking their cue from others.

The research appears to show that although media is a powerful voice in shaping public opinion it is unlikely to trump positive first-hand experiences.

The availability of feeding schemes and no-fee schools are among the factors related to the high approval rating of education. Others are an appreciation of the new curriculum and the quality of schooling.

Learners today have access to subjects in their curriculum that we never had, a clear reflection that the education system has improved.
(Emnyameni; 35-49; LSM 4-6)

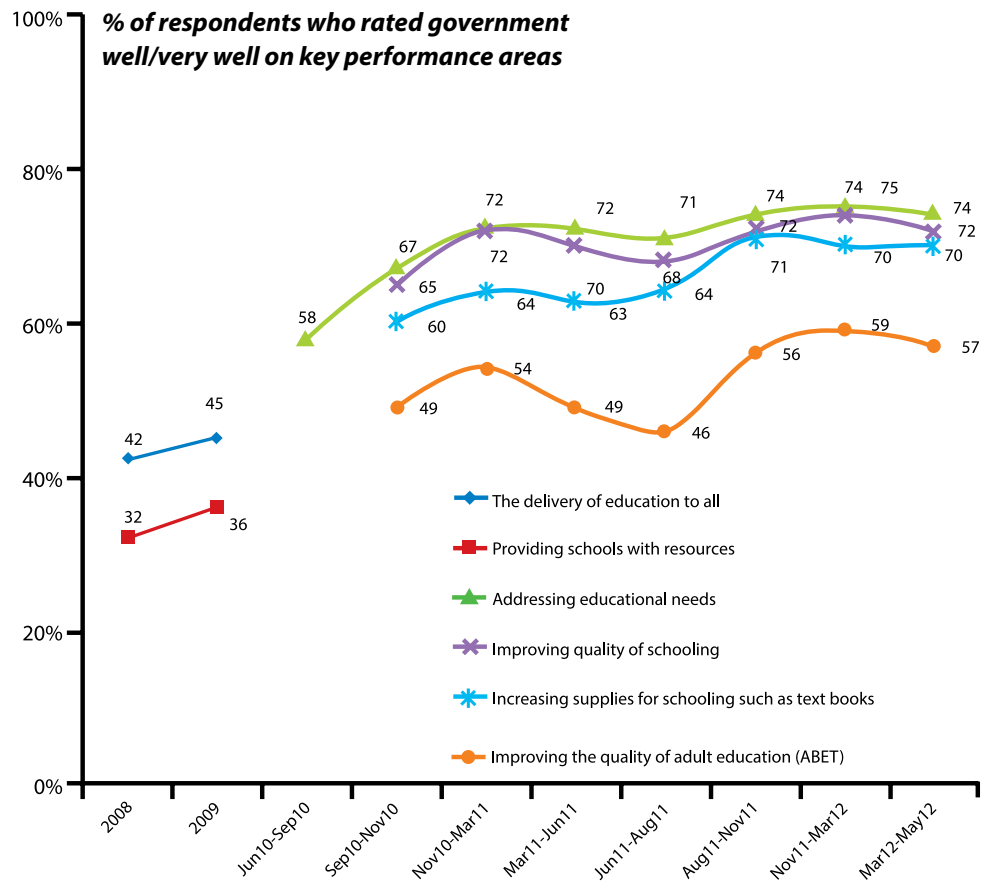
The state has done well by providing many citizens with no-fee schools that enable learners to focus on their school work, while school feeding schemes provide vital nutrition to learners.
(LP; Lulekani; 18-24; LSM 1-3)

More children now have access to schools and can study and work in a classroom instead of schooling taking place under trees.
(LP; Seshego; 50+; LSM 4-6)

Government provides support and textbooks to all learners which encourage them to continue learning.
(LP; Umlazi; 18-24; LSM 4-6)



Public perceptions of Government performance on various education measures



Source: Tracker 2012

In 2010, a massive intervention by Government allowed all children of school-going age, especially from poor families, entry to schools by exempting them from paying school fees.

This move resulted in an increased number of children being registered at public schools. Given these interventions, the ratings on Government's performance in delivering education to all and providing schools with resources, significantly improved from the GCIS Tracker research conducted in 2010, to the research conducted in May 2012.

In 2008 and 2009, the public views or ratings on Government performance about education issues were less positive compared to the rating in 2010 onwards, as indicated by positive trend-lines in the graph.

In the 2012 GCIS Tracker Survey, the areas on which Government was rated positively by most respondents were on addressing educational needs (74 per cent), improving quality of schooling (72 per cent), increasing supplies for schooling such as text books (70 per cent) and improving the quality of adult basic education (57 per cent).

This would appear to be on the back of Government tackling the issue of schooling being too expensive for many citizens. High school fees had resulted in some schools being inaccessible to some learners, particularly those from poor backgrounds.

Even schools that charged a nominal fee of less than R100 per year were also found to be a burden to poor parents. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2008, p.98), low fees in absolute terms are said to constitute a high proportion of mostly poor household's income.

Given the latter, Government reviewed its policies on education in 2007, which

resulted in no fee-schools receiving a minimum amount of State funding of R554 per learner per year starting in 2007 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008: p.100). The State funding of no fee schools per learner and the increase in the number of no-fee schools between 2009 and 2010 as a result of Government policy change, saw an increased number of children five years and older attending educational institutions without paying fees (Statistics South Africa, 2011: p9; Department of Basic Education - No-Fee Schools Branch, 2013).

Those who perceived Government

performing well in addressing educational needs and improving the quality of schooling, were mostly black people, people in LSM 1-3, people residing in rural and urban areas, and those with some primary schooling. Looking at the provincial perspective, it was mostly people from the Eastern Cape, the Free State, Mpumalanga and the North West.

Government performance in increasing supplies for schools, such as textbooks, was rated positively mostly by black people in the rural areas of Mpumalanga and North West. Respondents aged 18 to 24 were also more likely to rate Government positively on this aspect.

The view from sceptics

The GCIS National Qualitative Study (March 2012) suggests that younger people are more positive, while older participants feel that the quality of education has deteriorated.

There is a view among participants that private schools offer superior education as opposed to Government schools. Many respondents stated that the quality of our education was poor in comparison with some other African countries.

Respondents also listed constant curriculum changes and a lack of resources as some of the reasons why education was struggling.



Qualitative study findings suggest:

- Constant changes in the curriculum make it difficult for educators to adequately internalise it, and many are unable to implement it effectively.
- Huge amounts of money and time are said to be wasted on training educators on the new curriculum.
- Both learners (young participants) and parents (older participants) feel that they do not understand the system and this affects parental input and support.
- Respondents feel that the learning environment is unfavourable as most schools are overcrowded, especially in rural areas.
- There is a shortage of teachers – which results in Government appointing unqualified teachers.
- Lack of adequate infrastructure at schools (e.g. schools, classrooms, proper ablution facilities, and transportation) is also seen as a contributory factor to poor education especially in rural areas.
- Lack of educational aids and resources, such as functional computers, necessary stationery at the beginning of the academic year, and fully equipped laboratories also have a negative impact on the quality of education.



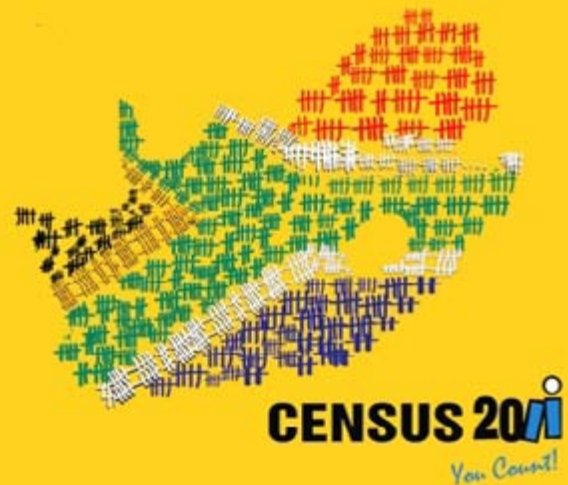
What the Census 2011 results reveal?

Since the Census 1996, there has been an increase in the percentage of children aged five to 15 attending educational institutions.

The five-to seven-year-old age group showed the most significant progress in terms of increased enrolment rates. Enrolment for the five-year-old age group was at 22,5 per cent at Census 1996, 45,6 per cent at Census 2001 and leaped to 81,2 per cent in the latest results.

For the six-year-old age group, these figures were at 49,1 per cent in 1996, 70,3 per cent in 2001 and 92,7 per cent in 2011, while for the seven-year-old group it was at 73,1 per cent in 1996, 88,4 per cent in 2001 and 96,1 per cent in 2011.

The vast majority of students (92,7 per cent) in South Africa attend public educational institutions. However, there was a general increase in private school attendance across all the provinces, with the highest in Gauteng at 16,7 per cent, followed by the Western Cape at 7,5 per cent and the Free State at 6,4 per cent. All other provinces had private institution attendance rates of less than five per cent.



Media perspective

The media traditionally keep a very close watch on developments in education and the past year has been no different. The overall findings from media show a variety of reactions on how Government is progressing in providing quality education and are an indication that more needs to be done.

The volumes in coverage focussing on education normally peak around the release of the matric results, and then decline towards the middle of the year when attention shifts to other areas of interest.

The media sentiment towards education issues however seems to be recovering from the unprecedented lows experienced earlier in 2012, as a result of the Limpopo textbook delivery problems.

Compared to public opinion surveys where concerns were raised about the availability of skilled teachers, media particularly focussed on the general availability of teachers in the Eastern Cape.

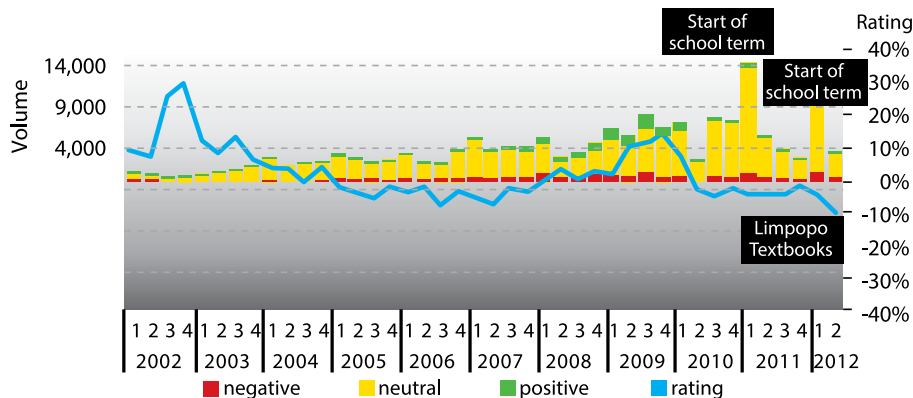
The Government's share of voice was at 47 per cent, with Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga, followed by Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande being the most quoted Government sources on issues of education.

Compared to other Government priorities, education attracted the largest volume of media coverage.



Volume and rating of education

Volume and rating of coverage on education: 2002-2012 (q2)



Education coverage generally spikes in the first quarter of each year with the commencement of the new school term. In 2012, ratings dropped because of strong coverage on the non-delivery of textbooks in Limpopo.

Source: GCIS

The graph on the left shows a gradual increase in the volume of coverage over the 10-year-period from 2002. The period between 2008 and 2010 enjoyed a remarkable level of positivity, with the mean rating more positive than negative.

However, the drop in the mean rating, which is evident from around 2010, demonstrates a possible impact from a number of the challenges that have besieged education. The delivery of textbooks in Limpopo and the issue of temporary teachers in the Eastern Cape attracted the most negative reportage.

Government is planning

Schools infrastructure

Census 2011 figures show that the vast majority of learners attend public schools, thus investment in infrastructure is crucial to ensure quality education for all. Under the auspices of the Strategic Integrated Projects (SIP), specifically SIP 13, Government has a National School Building Programme with 9 434 school projects in the pipeline. These deal with backlogs of 468 inappropriate schools, 63 000 school classrooms, 15 000 libraries, 13 600 computer labs, and 16 500 admin buildings.

The National School Building Programme is essential in view of a Department of Basic Education report on school infrastructure based on statistics from 2011 which shows that:

- 14 per cent of schools had no electricity supply
- 10 per cent of schools had no water supply
- 4 per cent of schools had no toilets
- 79 per cent of schools didn't have a library

- 85 per cent of schools didn't have laboratories
- 77 per cent of schools didn't have a computer centre
- 17 per cent of schools had no sports facilities.

The census figures will feed into the implementation plans of the National Development Plan (NDP) which is Government's vision for South Africa by 2030.

Vision 2030

Through the NDP, Government will make early childhood development a top priority, with all children attending at least two years of pre-school education.

A 2030 target is also set of about 90 per cent of learners in grades 3, 6 and 9 achieving 50 per cent or above in literacy, mathematics and science. Moreover, the plan aims for 80 per cent of learners to successfully complete the full 12 years of schooling. It also aspires to increase the graduation rates with more than 25 per cent.

Another NDP target is to eradicate school infrastructure backlogs so that all schools meet the minimum standards by 2016.

THE WAY FORWARD...



When communicating: Speak directly to parents and learners using existing school communication channels with traditional and social media as complementary channels.



Information drive: Messaging should be aimed at teachers, learners and parents to explain the curriculum changes and their implications to each audience. Communication in the beginning of the school year should also explain school processes and the role of parents so that they can better support learners. Information must be clear and concise and easy to digest and understand.



Talking to media: Use the matric results and Annual National Assessments to show the improvement in the education system. Also, bring media on board regarding the planning and implementation of the delivery of school textbooks and developments around SIP13. However, as shown in this newsletter, word of mouth and personal experiences are often the best way to communicate a message. Media can be used to complement the communication and interaction with parents and learners on ground level.

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We welcome your feedback and suggestions, which can be forwarded to insight@gcis.gov.za

Insight newsletter is produced by the GCIS Chief Directorate: Policy and Research. This newsletter provides a snapshot of important research results and media reporting on a range of government's programmes, initiatives and policies. Each issue is devoted to a single theme, which generally corresponds to key national milestones, events and priorities. It provides unique insight into the perceptions of South Africans and the media, as well as an understanding of government's implementation of policies and programmes.