School Quality

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ABSTRACT: Achieving high levels of school quality is difficult everywhere. Aspects of the recent experience of the United States are reviewed, with special attention paid to incentive issues. Statistical evidence on school enrolments since 1980 is presented as a background to resource reallocation since 1994. South Africa's poor school performance in mathematics and science is discussed. Recent initiatives regarding measurement and management of school quality are presented, and South Africa's particular problem of multilingualism is discussed. South Africa needs to work intensively at school quality issues for years to come.

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1 Introduction

Even in advanced industrial countries high levels of school quality are not guaranteed. School quality is a function not only of resources applied, but also of the efficiency of their application. Efficiency in turn is a function of incentives facing pupils, teachers and school and system managers.

For more than two decades the performance of pupils in the United States has been a matter of policy concern. Despite substantial increases in public spending per pupil (from below $ 2000 per pupil in 1960 to above $ 5000 per pupil in 1990, both amounts in constant 1990 dollars), scores on standardised national tests have shown little improvement and American students pupils occupy undistinguished places in the league tables from standardised international tests (Flyer and Rosen, 1996: Figure 2.3 and pp 17, 34; Coleman, 1997:19-20). Emphasis has increasingly been placed on school reform in the 1990s and the next section deals with the principles behind it.

Resourcing has been a major issue in South African education, partly because of rapid growth in the number of pupils at a time when the economy has been growing slowly and partly because of the inequality of treatment associated with apartheid. Section 3 sets the scene by describing school enrolments since 1980. Section 4 deals with measures taken to improve the distribution of expenditure since 1994.

Attention is then turned to work on measurement of quality. The results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in which South Africa participated will be discussed in Section 5. Approaches of researchers, the Ministry of Education and provincial departments are discussed in Section 6.

Section 7 deals with the vexed issue of multilingualism and Section 8 concludes.

2 School reform in the United States

One of the major theorists of educational reform in the United States was the sociologist James Coleman. He advocated output-driven education which encourages the creation of strong achievement norms by establishing external standards, evaluating school and pupil academic performance over time, and rewarding pupils, teachers and schools for achievement gains (Coleman, 1997:2). Coleman believed that the lack of external standards are particu-

larly damaging to academic achievement. Without them, teachers and pupils negotiate with each other to advance their own self-interests - students to get better grades for less effort, and teachers to make their lives easier by assigning less homework and setting low standards. In the presence of an external standard, the relationship changes. The teacher becomes a coach and facilitator rather than a standard-setter and it is in the pupil's interest to co-operate in achieving an external standard neither teacher nor pupil can manipulate. Associated with this approach is the view that the primary goal of education is preparing pupils with intellectual skills necessary to become productive members of society. Students will develop a greater sense of self-esteem and personal self-esteem if they master complex ideas and advanced skills in mathematics, reading and reasoning.

Progress towards achieving standards must be evaluated for output-driven education to work. Evaluation should measure not only performance levels, but performance gains over stretches of school grades. Schools and teachers should concentrate on maximising value added. A value added approach recognises progress made with pupils who start a schooling phase in a relatively weak position. Outcomes based education and the performance assessment which goes with it can help: OBE was originally a demand from outside the educational system to hold education institutions accountable for their product through external measurement of achievement. However, Coleman observes that the original intention was altered by those interested in expanding the goals of education in affective directions and blurring academic goals so that no pupils could fail to achieve the standards (Coleman, 1997: 38).

Shouse investigated the relationship between school mean socio-economic status (SES), school sense of community and 'academic press' (the degree to which schools are driven by achievement oriented values, goals and norms, using data from the US National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988-94. He used the mathematics test results because it contained the greatest number of items and ability-level version and because mathematics scores reflect in-school learning to a greater extent than other items. He found that:

- Academic press is significantly linked to mathematics achievement, and its strongest effects occur in low SES schools
- For schools at low and middle SES levels, high combined levels of academic press and communality produce a strong achievement effect

- For low-SES schools, the combination of weak academic press and strong communality has significant negative impact on mathematics achievement. This is because the social capital available to schools in poorer areas may underemphasise or actually undercut the value of academic effort

- For high-SES schools, communality is positively linked to mathematics achievement across all levels of academic press. (Coleman 1997: 77)

During the late 1990s, bipartisan support grew for US school reform based on four principles: accountability, standards, testing and choice (Reeves 2001: Chapter 1). Each has been clearly defined by the George W Bush administration. Accountability includes rewards for good performance and exposure, censure and consequences for poor performance. Standards are embodied in clear statements of what pupils should know and be able to do. Testing is the assessment of whether standards have been reached. The detailed interpretation of choice is particular to the United States: the principle is that parents should have as many opportunities as possible to move their children away from poor schools and towards good ones.

The Bush reforms are based on testing pupils in every grade. Tests are most important for their diagnostic aspects: if pupils are not reading, writing or computing well, teachers and schools must change timetables, curricula, teaching practices, class and home work and every other variable impacting on performance until better results are achieved. The requirement of demonstrated achievement of standards does not dictate one mode of instruction (the 'joyless academic boot camp'), but it does expose ineffective teaching. Test scores can and should be interpreted against social background variables not under the control of the school.

In one respect, South Africa is more fortunate than the United States in having had for many decades an externally set and marked Senior Certificate at the end of Grade 12. To this will be added the General Education and Training Certificate at the end of Grade 9, to be administered from 2008 (Department of Education, 2001). Candidates will be required to satisfy the assessment requirements of at least half of Grade 9 learning outcomes in each of the eight learning areas:

- Languages

- Mathematics

- Natural Sciences
- Technology
- Social Sciences
- Arts and Culture
- Economic and Management Sciences
- Life Orientation

Both (moderated) school based assessment and external assessment will be used in the GETC. In due course, the Senior Certificate will become the Further Education and Training Certificate.

Resources available to the South African educational system are not likely to permit standardised testing in each grade within the foreseeable future. However, the FETC and GETC could usefully be complemented by a relatively low cost multiple choice test at the end of the Foundation and Intermediate phases of general education, i.e. at the end of Grade 6.

In other respects, South Africa is considerably worse off than the United States. Per capita incomes and therefore resources for education are much smaller. Inequality is much greater. Both apartheid and the school based challenges to it in the 1970s and 1980s left a cultural legacy weakly attuned to teaching and learning. And even now, the acceptance of the goal of education as 'preparing pupils with intellectual skills necessary to become productive members of society' is qualified or contested. Nonetheless, a number of elements of the current US school reform approach have found their way into the South African debate, as Sections 5 to 7 will show.

3 School enrolments since 1980

Table 1 sets school enrolments by grade in 1980, 1985 and each year from 1990 to 2000. LSEN (Learners with Special Needs) enrolments are shown separately. From 1998, pre-primary and Grade 0 (reception year) enrolments appear. Pre-primary and Grade 0 enrolments accommodate pupils not yet ready for Grade 1; these pupils were often placed in Grade 1 for custodial rather than educational reasons. It is policy to extend Grade 0 enrolments

to universal coverage of six year olds, the standard age for entry into Grade 1 having been set at seven years.

The average annual growth rates between 1980 and 1985, 1985 and 1990 and 1990 and 1995 were all high. This was occasioned not so much by rapid growth in primary enrolments (which grew not much faster than population) but by very rapid growth in secondary enrolments as secondary school retention rose. The average annual rate of increase between 1995 and 2000 was much lower - barely positive, in fact - with primary enrolments dropping and secondary enrolments increasing by less than 2% per annum. Two reinforcing factors have produced this result: sharp drops in fertility since the late 1980s and stabilisation of secondary school retention rates. Only in Grades 11 and 12 were enrolments in 2000 less than 90% of the appropriate age group in the population (Ministry of Education 2000b: Figure 8).

The drop in enrolment rates is likely to be permanent with relatively minor fluctuations. The standard demographic interpretation of the fertility transition is a changing preference from quantity of children to quality of children induced by a modern economy. Indeed, Livi-Bacci (1997: Chapter 4) analyses the demography of Europe and developed world as moving from waste (large numbers of short lives) to efficiency. Not only does the fertility transition make quality improvements in education possible, it also ensures that parents will increasingly demand them.

4 Resource reallocation since 1994

Three initiatives taken since 1994 have reallocated resources across the school system:

- *Teacher redeployment*, undertaken to equalise pupil: teacher ratios across the system. Redeployment was accompanied by a voluntary severance package for those reassigned teachers who did not want to move between schools. Initially, national norms of 40 pupils per teacher in primary schools and 35 pupils per teacher in secondary schools were announced, but it was found that these norms could not be implemented within provincial budgetary constraints. Currently each province sets it own targets. In 2000, the pupil:teacher ratio in all schools nationally was 32.7, varying from 30.3 in North West to 36.6 in KwaZulu-Natal (Ministry of Education, 2000b: Table 1). This was much more equal (at least inter-provincially) than the pattern found in primary schools

in 1997, where the national average was 35, varying from 25 in the Western Cape to 40 in KwaZulu-Natal. (Ministry of Education 2000a: Table 8)

- *A needs based capital programme.* A school register of needs was compiled in 1996. It dealt with the condition of school buildings, amenities (water, electricity, telephones, toilets, media centres, text book availability and laboratories) and average travelling distance to school. The deficits in buildings and amenities could then guide priorities within the provincial capital programmes for schools. A second school register of needs was taken in 2000 to enable an assessment of progress to be carried out and to establish new priorities in the next round of capital spending.

- *Targeting of non-personnel operating funding.* In 1998, the Department of Education produced a new framework for the allocation of non-personnel operating funds. Known as the National Norms and Standards for School Funding, this framework required each provincial department to produce a resource targeting list by ranking schools on the basis of (a) conditions at the school and (b) the poverty of the community served by the school. Each criterion was to be given equal weight and the schools divided into five quintiles. Financial allocation of non-personnel operating funds should then be allocated as follows:

  Bottom schools containing 20% of learners 35% of funds

  Next 20% 25% of funds

  Next 20% 20% of funds

  Next 20% 15% of funds

  Top schools containing 20% of learners 5% of funds

The indicators used by each province to rank their schools vary considerably across provinces, as does the proportion of non-personnel costs in total recurrent costs. (Education Foundation, 2000a: 107). This means that there is considerable variation in allocable recurrent funds per pupil. These ranged from a low of R 92 per pupil in the North West to R 275 per pupil in the Northern Cape in the year 2000 (calculated from data in Education Foundation, 2000b: Annexure B). Moreover, whatever index is used to define need,

the school at, say, the 20th percentile in Gauteng will be better off than the school at the 20th percentile in the Northern Province. For these three reasons, the programme does not work well if the objective is taken to be the targeting of schools most in need nationally.

5 Mathematics and science competence among pupils: TIMMS

In 1995, South Africa participated in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. This tested more than 500 000 school pupils in 45 countries. TIMMS identified three target populations:

- Population 1: the two adjacent grades containing the largest proportion of nine year old pupils at the time of testing
- Population 2: the two adjacent grade containing the largest proportion of 13 year old pupils at the time of testing
- Population 3: the final year of secondary schooling.

The Human Sciences Research Council was responsible for the South African component of the study. In South Africa, Population 1 was not included because of problems with language and medium of instruction. Population 2 was taken from Grades 7 and 8 and Population 3 from Grade 12.

At the Population 2 level, data were collected from 4 401 Grade 8 pupils in 114 schools and 5 301 Grade 7 pupils in 137 schools. Strict sampling methods were used. The tests had four components: multiple choice questions, short answer questions, extended answer questions and performance tasks. In addition, national, school and teacher questionnaires were administered to probe the relations between the intended curriculum (what is supposed to be taught), the implemented curriculum (what is actually taught) and the attained curriculum (what is learnt).

The results of the Population 2 study showed that South Africa's scores were very low compared with those of other participating countries. They also showed the lowest improvement in achievement between Grade 7 and Grade 8. South African students were found to possess generally inadequate problem-solving techniques and had difficulty in constructing their own answers. The amount of homework reported by students for both science and

mathematics was much lower than the international average. South African students had less learning time in classrooms than the students in top performing countries. The average number of books in the home was far fewer than the international average. Gender differentials in performance in South Africa were not statistically significant. Differences between home language and language of instruction were found to lower scores internationally and in South Africa. At the curriculum level, South Africa's science curricula were found to be behind those of other countries, while it mathematics curricula were more in line with other countries (Howie 1997: 10-13)

The results of the Population 3 (Grade 12 students) study again showed that the overall scores of pupils were significantly lower than those of students in other countries. They had particular difficulties with problems that involve graphic interpretation and with problems that required them to construct their own answers (as compared to choosing one from several possible answers). Again it is possible that the language factor had a negative impact on achievement. South Africa was the only country with no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls in either mathematics or science. Unlike the Population 2 study, Grade 12 pupils reported spending a great deal of time on homework. (Howie and Hughes 1998: 6)

The Population 3 sample included students who did not take mathematics and science in Grade 12, since the objective was to measure mathematics and science competence among all Grade 12 pupils. The scores obtained among the various combinations of subjects were:

Mathematics and science

Literacy score

National average 352

Mathematics HG and Science HG 397

Mathematics SG and Science HG 353

Mathematics HG and Science SG 334

Mathematics HG and no Science 332

Mathematics SG and Science SG 380

No Mathematics and No Science 320

These results are unnerving in the unsystematic relation of mathematics and science literacy to the levels at which the subjects were studied, or

indeed, whether they were studied at all. They suggest that little value is added to pupils' general scientific literacy by enrolling for mathematics and science at the Senior Certificate level. Even the Mathematics higher grade and Science higher grade average score of 397 was substantially lower than the international average of 500.

6 Measurement and management of school quality within the public education system

A number of initiatives to improve school quality have been taken in recent years. Oversight at the national level is exercised by the Chief Director: Quality Assurance

6.1 The Culture of Teaching, Learning and Service (COLTS) campaign

This campaign was premised on the view that the apartheid legacy created a climate in schools and other learning sites that is not conducive to effective teaching and learning. The campaign was designed to build a positive perception of education and to improve the condition of schools. It aimed to encourage parental participation in institutions of learning at all levels, to create a safer learning environment and to enforce key values such as application, commitment, determination to succeed, orderliness, discipline, mutual support, community involvement and ownership (Ministry of Education 2000a: 26-27). One might say that COLTS was an attempt to relegitimise education after its widespread delegitimisation and collapse in the political climate of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Chisholm and Vally investigated the issues contributing to the collapse of schooling in Gauteng in 1996. They found that four main factors were responsible:

- Delapidation of school buildings and facilities, affecting not only the difficulty of teaching but general morale
- School leadership engulfed by social conflicts and problems in the school, which had spiralled out of control

- Adversarial relations between principals, heads of departments, teachers, students and parents
- Socioeconomic contexts of poverty and unemployment (Chisholm and Vally: Chapter 2)

While many of these themes will endure, the COLTS programme was a response to the conditions found in schools in the early years of the first post-apartheid government. Over time, it has given way to more specific approaches to the identification of school quality problems and the management of them.

6.2 Statistical identification of underperforming schools

In 1998, Crouch and Mabogoane undertook a number of studies designed to identify underperforming schools. These studies took the resources available to schools into account, so performance was measured not absolutely but relative to the average achieved in schools with the same resources. The statistical method used was to regress absolute measures of performance against resources having a signification effect on performance and then to look at the residual (actual performance minus expected performance) for each school (Crouch and Mabogoane, 1998a, b, c). Their approach has been used by the Sunday Times in its annual selection and analysis of top schools in South Africa.

Their study of Senior Certificate pass rates in Gauteng found the following:

- Poverty is an important factor which cannot be subsumed under the notion of resources. Even when resources are equalised, schools in very poor areas tend to have Senior Certificate pass rates some 20% lower than schools in richer areas
- School location is an important factor: the fact of school's being in a township or just being ex-Department of Education Training (the DET controlled African schools outside the homelands in the late apartheid era) lowers Senior Certificate pass rates by 20-30%.
- When it comes to resources, the teacher:pupil ratio matters much less than the quality of the educators. An extra year's qualification on the part of teachers raises the Senior Certificate pass rate by 16%.

- Once all measures of poverty, resources and so forth have been taken into account in the regression analysis, about 30% of the performance of schools remain unexplained. Crouch and Mabogoane take the unexplained variance to refer to managerial factors. (Crouch and Mabogoane, 1998b: 3-4)

Finally, Crouch and Mabogoane make the methodological point that any real quality assurance system must contain a control, that is, a quality feedback loop. A QA system must (a) detect which of its parts is underperforming and (b) correct the underperformance. They distinguish between three types of control systems: bureaucratic ("command and control"), democratic (subject to periodic control by an electorate of some kind) and market (where performance is controlled by purchasers voting with their income). Bureaucratic control systems rely on rules-based mechanisms which apply to the production process, whereas market and democratic systems separate the detection mechanism from the control mechanism. Within market and democratic systems, the detection process is focused on outcomes; within bureaucratic systems, it is focused on inputs. All three types of control system can be used in education, with the optimal mix depending on the society in question. The combination requires careful attention to the measurement of education output. (Crouch and Mabogoane, 1998c: 1-3)

6.3 The Monitoring Learning Achievement Project

The Monitoring Learning Achievement project is a joint UNESCO/UNICEF initiative which began in 1992. Eighteen African countries, including South Africa, participated in the 1999 round. The MLA project tests the learning achievements of Grade 4 pupils in respect of literacy, numeracy and life skills. In addition to the testing of pupils, questionnaires completed by parents, teachers, school heads and pupils collect information on the learning and social environments which affect pupil performance.

Just over 10 000 pupils participated in the South African 1999 MLA project. The tests for pupils were translated into all eleven official languages. The literacy test consisted of items in the following domains: word recognition, comprehension, writing skills, spelling and grammar and retrieving and providing information. Pupils were relatively strong in word recognition and providing information and very weak in writing skills. The top performing provinces were Western Cape and Gauteng. The numeracy test dealt with

four domains: numeration, measurement, geometry of shapes and everday statistics. There was not much difference between performances in each of the domains: numeracy skills generally weak, with pupils obtaining a mean score of 30% (compared with 48% for literacy). The life skills tests dealt with five domains:

1. health, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene
2. civic sense, protection of the environment and community development
3. pre-vocational skills
4. HIV/AIDS and
5. science and technology.

The average life skills score was 47%, with strengths in pre-vocational skills and civic sense and weakness in science and technology.

At the socioeconomic level, the MLA study found that the following factors which limit learning are widespread: parents with incomplete primary education, few books at home and in libraries, overcrowding in houses, low household incomes and high unemployment. Ready availability of electricity, radios and television sets, on the other hand, can promote learning.

At the level of educators, three quarters were found to be adequately qualified, i.e. in possession of an M+3 or better qualification. Very limited inspection and appraisal was found, with almost 90% of educators not having been appraised during the two years before the MLA. More than 40% of schools in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal had not been visited by a departmental official in the two years before the MLA. Textbook provision was variable. There was found to be a wide dispersion of ages in Grade 4 caused by early entry into school, late entry and repetition. Shortage of class rooms and specialised facilities were found, as well as lack of electricity in many schools. Basic furniture and learning materials were generally available.

Attendance of pupils in 33% of schools was rated as average to poor, while 20% of learners indicated that they stayed away from school without good excuses. In almost 20% of the schools, more than 20 days in the school were lost due to late registration, boycotts, illness among staff and cultural activities. Teaching practices, described by both teachers and pupils, pointed to a teacher-centred and textbook-centred approach. Assessment practices

showed a low use of standardised tests; this combined with non-appraisal of teachers can lead to teaching at an inappropriately low standard. It also points to difficulties with introducing OBE. There is not much communication between teachers and parents. (Strauss 1999: Ch 7)

6.4 Whole School Evaluation

In September 2000, a conference was held to launch the national policy on whole school evaluation. The aims of the policy were stated as follows:

- To establish a sustainable national system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education on a continuous basis
- To establish an information base for policy interventions to improve performance standards
- To develop methods and indicators for long-term monitoring and evaluation by the school, district and supervisory levels to increase levels of accountability.

Evaluations are to be for quality improvement and control of standards. They must be characterised by openness and collaboration. They must be standardised and consistent. The full range of school inputs, processes and outcomes must be evaluated. A prescribed code of conduct must be adhered to and their must be a clear complaints procedure to deal with unfair treatment. The areas to be evaluated include: basic functioning of the school, leadership, management and communication, governance and relationships, quality of teacher and educator development, curriculum provision and resources, learner achievement, school safety, security and discipline, school infrastructure and parents and community.

The evaluation process will consist of the following steps:

- Pre-evaluation visit and survey
- School self-evaluation according to set criteria
- Detailed audit and reviews of the school for a three to five day period
- Post-evaluation reporting

The Minister of Education announced that 200 supervisors were being trained and would start going into schools in January 2001 (Ministry of Education, 2000c: 4)

Teacher trade union representatives present at the conference gave their qualified support to the principles of whole school evaluation. Comments included:

- "We want this instrument to be developmental and supportive and not judgmental and punitive"
- "We need to have enough money to develop schools after we have evaluated them"
- "Whole school evaluation is not going to work if we do not couple it with the Development Appraisal Strategy. Whole school evaluation looks at the organisation, but within that organisation there are individuals who need to be developed"
- "It is important that whole school evaluation is not about monitoring and control"
- "Whole school evaluation is not known throughout our country, but the instrument the Department wants to use in classroom observation - and teachers associate that with inspection."

6.5 The provincial link

Norms and standards for schools are designed in Pretoria, but their supervision is a provincial responsibility. The Ministry of Education carried out an audit of provincial quality assurance activities in 1998 and found that there was very little system-wide engagement with the concept of quality assurance. This omission was reflected in the lack of policies, implementation strategies and dedicated structures to carry out the quality assurance function. Provinces tended to view quality assurance activities as an added burden on already strained financial and human resources. Only two provinces had dedicated structures for the co-ordination of quality assurance. Limited use was made of education management information systems. (Ministry of Education, 1998: v-vi)

At the conference launching the whole school evaluation policy, the Gauteng Department of Education reported on its Education Action Zones as an

intervention to improve the performance of schools. Secodary schools were identified for targeting if less than 20% of their Senior Certificate candidates in 1999 passed the examination. 71 schools fell into this category and they were grouped into nine clusters. The programme:

- Stabilises poorly performing schools
- Develops school-based plans
- Implements these plans.

There are regular checks and visits by the EAZ team until the school graduates to the next phase. There are several phases until the top stage where the school needs only basic support. If a school does not improve, the GDE will consider closing it down and re-deploying the teachers elsewhere. EAZ has been able to accelerate appointments, terminations, substitutions, procurement and disciplinary procedures. There has been some resistance from teacher unions, especially around assessment and evaluation and follow-up actions against teachers.

7 Multilingualism

In addition to the official languages of English and Afrikaans (Dutch until 1925) specified in the Constitution of 1910, nine African languages were granted official status in the Constitution of 1996. Of course, the African languages had been taught in schools for decades before 1996, but language teaching policies have varied considerably over the last ninety years. Vinjevold (1999) summarises them as follows:

- In White, Coloured and Asian schools, the medium of instruction was either English or Afrikaans and the other language was taught as a compulsory subject. The second Smuts administration (1939-48) promoted dual medium of instruction in schools (half the lessons taught in English and the other half in Afrikaans), but this was reversed by the National Party after 1948 which favoured separate schools for English and Afrikaans speakers. Recently, a minority of formerly White schools have introduced an African language as a subject. Schools for Asian pupils have generally used English as the medium of instruction, with Afrikaans as a second language. Some schools have hosted instruction

in Indian languages after hours or as part of the curriculum. Coloured schools have used either Afrikaans or English as a medium of instruction, although there are a number of schools which offer both English and Afrikaans streams.

- By 1939, the medium of instruction in African schools was the mother tongue during the first years of schooling. The duration of mother tongue instruction varied by province: in Natal it was for the first six years of school, in the Cape and Free State the first four and in the Transvaal the first two. After these initial years of schooling, one of the official languages was to be used as the medium of instruction. The vast majority of schools opted for English. National Party policy was different. African schools were placed under central control and mother tongue education was extended to Standard 6 by 1959. (At that time African primary education consisted of eight grades, compared with seven for everyone else). English and Afrikaans were both made compulsory subjects from the first grade. They were to be used in equal measure as languages of instruction in African secondary schools. Territorial apartheid introduced another complication: homelands could decide their own language policy and generally opted for four years of mother tongue education and English instruction thereafter. Following the Soweto riots of 1976, a single medium of instruction - generally English - was adopted in African secondary schools. In 1990, the policy changed at primary schools as well. Parents at non-homeland African schools were given the following choices:

  1. To go straight for the long-term medium (either English or Afrikaans)
  2. A sudden transfer from the mother tongue to the long-term medium
  3. A graduated transfer from the mother tongue to the long-term medium.

The current policy is set out in the *Norms and Standards for Language Policy in Public Schools* (Government Gazette 1997). The policy is described in general terms as 'additive multilingualism', the underlying principle being to maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional languages(s). Policy will be developed using the results of research, both locally and internationally. The Minister believes that most learners benefit cognitively and emotionally from the type of structured

bilingual education found in dual-medium programmes. The right to choose the language of learning and teaching is vested in the individual, subject to practicability. All learners are to offer at least one approved language in Grade1 and Grade 2. From Grade 3 onwards, all learners shall offer their language of teaching and learning and at least one additional approved language as subjects. (An 'approved language' is one approved by the Minister at first or second language level. All official languages are approved languages, as is German first language. Other may be added to the list.)

Each school governing body must stipulate how the school will promote multilingualism through using more than one language of teaching and learning and/or by offering additional languages as fully-fledged subjects and/or applying special immersion or language maintenance programmes, or through other means approved by the head of the provincial education department. It is regarded as reasonably practicable to provide education in a particular language of learning or teaching if at least 40 in Grades 1 to 6 or 35 in Grades 7 to 12 learners request it for a particular school. Where there are less than 40 requests in Grades 1 to 6 or 35 requests in Grades 7 to 12 for instruction in a language in a given grade not already offered by a school in a particular school district, the head of the provincial department of education will determine how the needs of those learners will be met, taking into account a number of considerations. This confers the right to be educated in an African language at the secondary level.

Table 2 sets out what has been happening at public schools during the 1990s.

In primary schools, the proportion using Afrikaans most often as a medium of instruction has remained stable at 11%. The proportion using English most often as a medium of instruction rose sharply from 33% in 1991 to 55% in 1998, with a corresponding drop in the African language totals from 55% to 34%. In 1997, more than three quarters of secondary schools used English most often, 11% Afrikaans and 7% an African language.

Table 2 suggests a widening gap between what parents and pupils want and what the Department thinks is good for them and the country. A research project undertaken by the National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development suggests that the Department of Education needs to educate all parents by making them aware of the benefits of home language maintenance and the social and economic benefits of multilingualism (NCCRD 2000: viii) In fact, behind the tension is a tangle of issues, not all of which are well-understood. Some of the most important are:

- Many learners, particularly in an urban African context, do not have a single mother tongue. They are fluent in a number of languages and do not have a desire to consolidate an identity in any one linguistic group. It has been argued that the language spoken by many children is an amalgam of southern African languages with regional and community variations. For them, instruction in an approved language is not mother tongue education (Vinjevold, 1999: 219)

- It is no easy task to maintain eleven official languages. English can be taken off the list, since usage is defined by international practice. Afrikaans has a variety of institutions which regulate its use, though the feed through to the educational system is less than perfect. A generation ago, learners of Afrikaans as a second language had to acquire a list of proverbs which Afrikaans first language speakers had ceased to use and to avoid 'Anglisismes' which many Afrikaans first language speakers habitually used. Codification of the nine African languages started out as a missionary endeavour and ended up in the educational system itself. The resources needed to update these codifications are huge; if they are not available to the extent needed, the result is likely to be imperfect description of the rules of use and archaism.

- It is not well understood what the expectations of African language speakers are for their languages. It is likely that the primary requirement is that the languages should continue to exist and develop as vehicles for spoken and practical written communication. A child who fails to develop socially acceptable competences at these levels because of the way he or she is educated is at risk of ostracism. The nature and extent of further aims is in need of investigation.

- The demands made of school governing bodies by the norms and standards for language policy are substantial, and there is evidence that they are not being met. Knowledge of the norms and standards in the school system is very limited (NCCRD, 2000: 45-47), decisions about language are made in a way not in accordance with the norms and standards (Vinjevold, 1999: 213-214), schools may or may not adapt to changes in the language profile of pupils (Vinjevold, 1999: 214 and NCCRD, 2000: 47), staff language proficiency determines language policy at former Coloured, Asian and White schools and practices at schools

are influenced by perceptions of the value of English as a language of power and status (Vinjevold, 1999: 215).

- There is often a complex relation between the language policy of the school, insofar as it exists, and what actually happens in classrooms. In part, this depends on the competences of the teachers. Some teachers who used not to need African language competence now find themselves with substantial numbers of African first language speakers in their classes. Responses have varied from the acquisition of a relevant African first language to the use of teaching assistants fluent in African languages. Other teachers who can speak the relevant African languages switch codes in their teaching. Moreover, classroom discussion may take place partly in an African language even if the teacher is speaking in English. Teachers will search for what works best under the circumstances.

From the point of view of the quality of teaching and learning in non-language subjects, Table 2 suggests that mastery of English as a second language is crucial for African first language speakers, especially in the higher school grades.

8 Conclusions

School quality has to be worked at; it does not necessarily emerge and improve itself spontaneously. Evidence from standardised cross-national tests suggest that there is a quality problem at all levels in South African schools, and Senior Certificate results confirm this finding. In the last half-century, quality improvement has taken a back seat as the numbers enrolled climbed rapidly (often faster than GDP growth since the 1970s) and as a consequence of inegalitarian educational policies under apartheid. Both the rapid growth of enrolments and apartheid have gone, so it is particularly appropriate to focus on quality. Increasingly well educated parents will demand it more strongly.

There have been various attempts to install quality assurance mechanisms in the last five years, but the elements of a strategy have yet to be fully integrated and effectively applied. Testing is essential. Crouch and Mabogoane's insistence on detailed statistical analysis to determine which schools are performing well and badly given their context and resources needs to be followed

up and incorporated into whole school evaluation. Provincial capacity and activities need to be monitored and strengthened where necessary. Particular attention should be paid to performance in teaching English as a second language.

In all of this, it is appropriate to identify where new resources are needed for school infrastructure and teacher training. But much of the emphasis must be on management and on teacher performance. One cannot expect all teachers to welcome tighter quality assurance. Individual interests and broader orientations can combine to resist it, as they did in the case of a US educator opposed to recent school reforms in her country:

"Why people would believe the promises of the fellows who gave us junk bonds, downsizing and Joe Camel, I don't know. What I do know is that across the land teachers are bowing to the pressure of corporate-political-infotainment pronouncements. They are eliminating recess and putting away the building blocks, the tempera paints, and the picture books that don't introduce phonemes in the sequence chosen by the publishing conglomerate so venerated in Texas and California. They are bringing out the skill drill worksheets that will get every kid in America learning the schwa on schedule" (Reeves 2001: 35)

The South African conclusion is inescapable: much more teaching of the schwa on schedule is needed. There are many ways of doing it, but it must be done.

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Table 1: School Enrolments by grade, 1980-2000

	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Pre-primary												80,676	56,305
Grade 0											149,407	156,292	226,631
Grade 1	1,145,890	1,243,210	1,433,798	1,508,674	1,549,707	1,558,864	1,583,411	1,676,273	1,590,385	1,548,019	1,412,810	1,318,932	1,055,397
Grade 2	925,407	987,590	1,116,169	1,141,259	1,195,017	1,229,822	1,224,394	1,224,411	1,278,271	1,248,179	1,217,375	1,223,529	1,090,765
Grade 3	864,882	959,525	1,047,499	1,077,819	1,099,822	1,153,196	1,174,371	1,172,260	1,186,110	1,186,282	1,169,392	1,194,425	1,178,712
Grade 4	732,881	849,956	930,739	972,524	1,004,755	1,039,563	1,071,948	1,096,489	1,114,075	1,117,226	1,137,506	1,167,683	1,167,949
Grade 5	668,464	805,218	899,736	941,582	982,364	1,023,749	1,041,671	1,079,551	1,076,779	1,051,058	1,052,412	1,087,829	1,088,636
Grade 6	558,366	685,939	791,508	820,962	862,498	906,490	934,862	958,493	983,266	988,376	979,914	998,705	1,009,782
Grade 7	500,097	612,665	724,929	748,511	779,239	827,811	859,862	897,842	909,705	922,008	927,639	937,741	936,454
Grade 8	396,667	547,637	725,741	783,916	831,030	870,934	917,969	982,700	1,005,094	1,002,185	1,014,923	1,043,067	1,039,547
Grade 9	340,812	464,587	625,472	668,246	715,489	756,164	801,065	844,969	869,357	889,524	886,926	917,239	922,566
Grade 10	286,567	387,539	527,098	552,659	587,566	637,291	662,990	728,509	783,214	801,301	827,665	840,803	836,962
Grade 11	172,725	273,094	443,329	473,409	518,045	553,730	588,899	633,546	672,512	679,669	710,132	783,220	724,192
Grade 12	110,318	196,012	379,224	424,907	473,249	505,045	546,156	559,725	580,169	567,986	585,254	571,848	549,203
LSEN		22,087	34,524	35,629	36,186	38,443	41,652					36,910	27,021
Unspecified												2,697	2,570
Total excl LSEN/ Unspecified	6,703,076	8,012,972	9,645,242	10,114,468	10,598,781	11,062,659	11,407,598	11,854,768	12,048,937	12,001,813	12,071,355	12,321,989	11,883,101
Preprimary/ primary	5,395,987	6,144,103	6,944,378	7,211,331	7,473,402	7,739,495	7,890,519	8,105,319	8,138,591	8,061,148	8,046,455	8,165,812	7,810,631
Secondary	1,307,089	1,868,869	2,700,864	2,903,137	3,125,379	3,323,164	3,517,079	3,749,449	3,910,346	3,940,665	4,024,900	4,156,177	4,072,470
Annual growth rates													
Total				4.86%	4.79%	4.38%	3.12%	3.92%	1.64%	-0.39%	0.58%	2.08%	-3.56%
Primary				3.84%	3.63%	3.56%	1.95%	2.72%	0.41%	-0.95%	-0.18%	1.48%	-4.35%
Secondary				7.49%	7.66%	6.33%	5.84%	6.61%	4.29%	0.78%	2.14%	3.26%	-2.01%
5-year average growth rates													
Total		3.63%	3.78%					4.21%					0.05%
Primary		2.63%	2.48%					3.14%					-0.74%
Secondary		7.41%	7.64%					6.78%					1.67%

Sources: SA Statistics 1995 and 2000; Dept of Education, Annual Report 1998; Research Institute for Educational Planning (Uni Free State) Reports 16-19; Dept of Education, Preliminary Educational Management Information System Report, 2000

Table 2: Most used medium of instruction at public schools in South Africa, 1991-1998 (Percentage distribution)

	Primary Schools			**Secondary Schools**
	1991	1997	1998	1997
Afrikaans	11	11	11	11
English	33	42	55	76
IsiNdebele	1	0	1	0
Sepedi	0	6	4	2
Sesotho	11	6	2	0
Siswati	2	1	1	0
XiTsonga	3	1	1	1
Setswana	6	7	4	1
TshiVenda	1	1	1	0
IsiXhosa	15	9	10	1
IsiZulu	16	14	10	2
Unspecified/Other	1	3	0	5

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Primary:Monica Bot, Macro Indicators in Education 1994-2000, Centre for Educational Policy and Development, Johannesburg, 2001: Table 1.5
Secondary: Department of Education, Education Statistics in 1997, Pretoria, 1999: Table 30