

## **1. Overview**

The poor performance of South African schools compared to those in both developed and developing countries has been established at primary level in mathematics and reading (Fleisch, 2007; Howie et al, 2007) and at secondary level in mathematics and science (Taylor,2008). Recent Annual National Assessment (ANA) results released by the Department of Basic Education provide further evidence of the crisis faced by the education system in South Africa. The results showed that nationally, Grade 3 learners performed at an average of 35% in Literacy and 28% in Numeracy, while in Grade 6, the national average performance in Languages is 28% and for Mathematics 30% (DBE, 2011).

The question of learner poor performance of South African schools in literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy is not new in South Africa. It has been researched in a variety of metamorphoses, the concerns it has raised and how it has been approached as the context of education system changed. Emanating from the literature one can identify six factors which have a significantly negative impact on academic performance (learner performance), school leadership and management; parental involvement, socio-economic status, the question of continuous teacher professional development, curricular policy, and resources. In order to solve the crisis in the education system is it important to design a model that will link all the stakeholders in education. As Taylor (2008) puts it : the key to improve performance lies in fostering a culture of professional responsibility at all levels of the system (from the minister up to the school level), and this task involved both a cultural sea change, and a technical dimension which would combine the use of focused accountability systems and professional development.

## **2. Proposal Statement**

Based on the results of the Annual National Assessment (ANA) in 2011, matric results, SACMEQ and TIMS where South African learners poor performed badly, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), which has majority of membership (over 250 000) in the teaching sector, thereby being a major stakeholder, proposes that Department of Basic Education (DBE) adopt the disaggregation model, in response to educational reforms. This model is unique in the sense that it will help DBE and other stakeholders to develop intervention strategies that will address the education crisis in the country. The model is

important in that it seeks to disaggregate the DBE then study each provinces, region/district and school, and develop a workable plan that will address the challenges faced by region/district and the school. The model takes into consideration factors which have a negative impact on the quality of learning and teaching in schools, factors such as lack of parental involvement, teacher professional development, school leadership and management, socio-economic status and resources.

## **2.1. Disaggregation Model**

South Africa presents a unique challenging case with its widely unequal school system. Teaching and learning in contemporary South Africa takes in different conditions. Some schools operate in affluent conditions while the majority is in poor townships and villages. Therefore one solution cannot solve the crisis faced by schools operating in different settings. Shalem (2011) posits that the work of teachers in well-resourced schools differs intrinsically from the work in the impoverished areas. Dual economy of schooling exists between those children who have a second and third site of knowledge acquisition such as access to books and the internet at home or tutorial support, and those children whose only site of learning acquisition is the school”.

By disaggregating the department of education according to provinces, regions/districts and schools, this will give space for education stakeholders to study a region or a school and see what is happening, what the challenges are, what needs to happen to create more possibilities currently it is difficult to deal with the department as a whole. It is not easy to have one program that seeks to address this challenge nationally. After carefully studying all the factors that affect learner performance in the classroom, then develop a plan that will address the problem in that school taking into consideration the context the school is operating in. Mamdani (2008) argued:

*“My design must reflect local conditions, use local resources in response to local problems. Anything from outside must be complementary to this. This is what we call sustainable development”.*

Sustainable development requires research that leads to long-lasting solutions. Research means knowing the society you live in and knowing yourself. The rationale for using this model is that although the challenges we face in the education system are the same, the

reality is that provinces, regions/districts and schools are different and therefore they must be approached differently.

This model will also help DBE to design teacher professional development programmes that will address specific challenges that teachers faced within the provinces, districts and/ schools. Dembele (2003/5) concurs that any project that is about bringing change in school (classrooms and/ teacher professional development) should be conducted in, or close to the classroom of the participating teachers, that is, it should be school-based or classroom-based. Teachers have to learn as they do, that is, – theory with practice within their classroom context (Phiri, 2011, Wideen, 1987; Thiessen, 1992).

For the majority of poor schools, teachers are the best resources learners have towards a better education (McNeil, 2004). Thus, teacher professional development holds an important key for such learners. In this regard teacher professional development programs should take into consideration the environment teachers are working in, socio economic status of the learners and the resources teachers need to implement the curriculum.

## **2.2 School Leadership and Management**

The importance of school leadership to the success of the schools is undeniable, Taylor (2008). The quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes. Schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best education for their learners (Bush, 2007). In order to improve teaching and learning, DBE should give time and space for school leaders and managers to develop policies and strategies that will solve problems in their specific situations and locations. DoE (1996) also declared that improving the quality of learning requires strategies which focus on change at the school and classroom levels...managers can no longer simply wait for instructions or decisions from government. The pace of change, and the need to be adaptable and responsive to local circumstances, requires that managers develop new skills and ways of working. Like teacher professional development, school leadership development and management programs (intervention strategies) should take into consideration the environment in which the school is operating. Based on the challenges faced by the school, a specific plan which involves all the players in the community should be developed.

Intervention strategies must be developed in such a way that they address the following key issues:

- Time management and institutional culture
- Managing curriculum delivery
- Planning and monitoring curriculum delivery
- Provision of books
- Promoting home educational practices

### **2.3 Parental Involvement in the activities of the school**

Research has shown that when parents are involved in the activities of the school children perform well academically. (Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2003) further maintains that close co-operation between schools and families effectively promote a child's school success, classroom behaviour and academic performance. Parental involvement has been linked to improvements in a child's attendance, participation and a decreased likelihood of engaging in high-risk behaviours (Christenson et al., 2005; Hoover-Dampsey et al., 2003). Henderson and Berla, (1994) conclude that 'the evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life'.

However, this is not the case in the South African context. The majority of the parents are semi illiterate therefore they do not get involved in school activities and their children's education. Spaul (2011) posits that the effects of this inadequate education mean that children of impoverished parents are likely to be poor themselves. It is important that parents get involved in their children's education.

The DBE with the assistance of EDTP- SETA, school management and community initiatives should make parents aware that schools cannot function properly if they are not involved in the activities of the school. This can be done through say, involving NGOs, Teacher Unions and the unemployed youth to educate parents about their rights including the power to elect SGBs and to hold school management accountable. Unemployed youth to be employed by the SETAS to work as teacher assistants, to help learners on after schools and Saturdays with basic literacy and numeracy, help with homework.

Parental involvement programmes should be compulsory in every SA school; SGBs to lead out (Ndebele, 2011). Amongst other things, such involvement, teaches parents to:

- Provide the necessary resources
- Ensure that the child attends school

- Create space and time for the child to do homework
- Regularly check school work
- Sign assignments and comment on progress of child
- Attend parent meetings
- Interact with teachers regarding the child's work

## **2.4 Socio Economic Status and impact on learner performance**

Literature has proven that socio economic status is an important variable in understanding student performance. The disaggregation model suggests that the department of education should study the socio economic status of the schools and use that to understand what type of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu) parents, teachers and students have, then develop intervention strategies to respond better to the challenges faced by the school in this context. Through the disaggregation Model, the DBE, Department of Social Department and the community may be able to identify learners with special needs and learners who do not have access to food and find ways to help them. According to a study conducted by the Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers teacher subject knowledge has less impact on learner performance than socio economic status. In this regard it is important for any policy of the DBE to take into consideration the socio economic status of the learners as this has a major impact on their performance in the classroom.

## **2.5 Resources**

International research has proven that when schools have a functional library fully stocked with a fulltime librarian, laboratories, computer centre, storage facilities, enough toilets, a play ground, sports facilities, a school hall, a staff room, a kitchen, an administrative centre, water and electricity, are beneficial to the progress; and academic development of learners. In a major international study researchers concluded that all other things being equal, student performance increases by between 10% and 25% when a library space is adequately stocked, and properly staffed within a school. The ANA results show that learners from affluent schools perform better than learners from poor rural schools. Therefore schools that performed badly in the tests need intervention strategies that is relevant to their conditions.

### **3. The Quality, Learning and Teaching Campaign: Successes and limitations**

The Quality, Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) was launched in 2008 by the government and teachers unions. This campaign calls on all individuals and organisations to assume responsibility for improving the quality of education, It aims to inform citizens about the importance of education and their roles, responsibilities and obligations towards education; mobilise communities to monitor and support schools, teachers and learners; improve the quality of education for all children, especially the poor, and to demonstrate this improved quality via improved learner achievement.

Quality, learning and teaching goes beyond *teachers being in the classroom in time and teaching, with no neglect of duty and no abuse of pupils. The children should be in class, on time, learning, be respectful to their teachers and each other, and do their homework (Zuma, 2011). There are other factors that affect quality, learning and teaching which are outside the school premises for instance, socio economic status of learners, failure of government to provide teaching materials in time and lack of parental involvement. (Shalem, 2011) concurs that “We must therefore challenge the commonly held view that school failure is a result of teachers’ inefficiency, rather is it the intractable pattern of inequalities produced by the close association between children’s cognitive development and family poverty, adversarial market conditions, bureaucratic of teacher’s work and a radically new curriculum”.*

It has been three years since the launching of the QLTC and it is failing to achieve its objectives. In the rural communities where majority of the schools are located, where serious intervention is needed , the QLTC is not visible, most of the parents do not know about it, learners don’t know about, teachers, school principals and management are not sure how take the campaign forward. For the QLTC to achieve its objectives, DBE must ensure that the objectives of the QLTC are translated to the school level where teachers, parents, learners and the community are. This will help to ensure that all the stakeholders understand their roles in the QLTC.

## **Conclusion**

As SADTU we are committed to QLTC and to ensure that our members are at the forefront of improving the education system because we believe that by ensuring that every child in South Africa, both in deep, obscure rural locations and those in big, bright, and affluent cities have an equal chance to education that will ensure that South Africa is genuinely investing in its future human capital. SADTU is prepared to play its part by ensuring that our members are well-trained and developed through continuing professional development initiatives that we are currently developing. We however caution the DBE to allow teachers to be teachers and to provide guidance as they the ones who are faced with challenges that learners experienced. Teachers should be allowed to advise on what works in their schools and should be given the respect that they deserve that will motivate them to value the art of their profession rather than being blamed for all the failures within the education system which dis-empower them and result in those good teachers turning their back against this noble profession. As SADTU we believe that both the DBE and all stakeholders should work in unison to ensure that through education “**there is better life for all our children**” both in rural areas and affluent cities of this beautiful South Africa of ours.