

# THE DIALECTICS OF EXAMINATION SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## 1. Introduction

A healthy education system in the world is considered to be none-discriminatory and provides a suitable platform for all learners to acquire and demonstrate their high level of thinking irrespective of their socio-economic conditions. According to Rousseau (Boyd, 1975) all learners have the capacity to learn. In view of these attestations by two experts it can be inferred that an excellent education system is the one that creates opportunities for all learners to succeed irrespective of socio-economic conditions. Critical theorists including Giroux, Habermas and McLaren (McLaren, 2001) assert that the education systems of many countries reinforce the socioeconomic conditions created by capitalism. These utterances by the critical theorists are relevant within the South Africa context given the socio-economic conditions of the majority of the African people created by colonialism and apartheid. The examination in South Africa has in many ways constrained rather than enhanced the quality of education in South Africa and has contributed towards the building of social-inequality in South Africa. This is the main argument that I am advancing in this paper. I explore the dialectics and the dynamics of examination within the education system and attempt to explicate paradoxes that inhibit the quality of teaching learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills by the majority of teachers. In highlighting the dialectics within examination I elucidate critical examination processes such as questions paper development and marking process, school based assessment, common assessment and analyse the role players who are benefiting financially and intellectually from these critical processes. I also shed light on the unintended consequences of an education system that failed to develop educational pathways leading to high failure rate of learners' from the impoverished communities. Finally, I examine the microphysics of power in the examination system and disentangle the intricacies of those who are in charge of the examination system in South Africa and who use examination as counter-revolution tool to disempowered teachers and learners from the impoverished communities.

## 2. Main question

To what extent does the examination system contribute to improving the quality of teaching and learning of the majority of the impoverished communities in South Africa?

### 2.1 Secondary questions:

- a) To what extent has the democratic system created the suitable environment for all learners to succeed?
- b) To what extent has the system demystified the socio-economic classes created by Apartheid and capitalism?
- c) To what extent has the examination system contributed to teacher development?
- d) To what extent has the examination contributed to nation building in South Africa?
- e) What evidence is there to attest to the extent to which exams has contributed to the education of impoverished communities who were victims of Apartheid?
- f) To what extent has the African people being given the opportunity to manage exams and rip the fruits of the examination system in South Africa?
- g) To what extent is the migration towards independent examinations going to affect the transformation required within the exams system?

In an attempt to respond to these questions the data relating to the examination processes, results of learners would be explored including the number of learners who obtained the NSC, those who failed, dropout rate, social ills and other related information that can assist to respond to the questions.

After 20 years of democracy there is a need for critical reflection of aspects of examination and assessment in the republic of South Africa to ascertain the extent to which the majority of black people meaning Indians, coloureds and African have benefited from examination and education system managed within the democratic system. Most of the functions of examination South Africa require the services and expertise of teachers and these opportunities were given to whites in past and currently black Indians are given more opportunities and there is a need for coloured and Africans to be given the opportunities in responsibilities that require intellectual labour. After 20 years of Democracy, it is necessary to reflect on the management of examination in South Africa. The questions that will be answered are as follows: who is in charge of examination in South Africa? Who is benefiting from the examination services? It is necessary for the examination system of every country including South Africa to provide opportunities to all teachers' irrespective colour to develop intellectually. For African teachers to compete with the African counterparts who are leading examination processes in the African continent they need to be given the opportunities to participate effectively in setting national standards. The process of transferring the skills from those who were previously privileged to those that were oppressed has failed dismally and there is a need accelerate the transformation process. The current statistics show that African examiners are not represented in senior positions in question paper development for critical subjects and marking of critical subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Sciences at the DBE and across provinces. These processes in the African content are used to empower the majority of the African teachers and the same opportunities must be afforded to the African teachers to ensure parity of esteem. South Africa is a multi-racial country and African examiners should not necessarily replace whites and Indians but must be placed side by side with them in order to participate effectively in collaborative knowledge generation process. The current state of affairs is that most African teachers are passive recipients of standards set by fellow South Africans at the DBE, provinces and district levels and this system needs to be disentangled and deconstructed to ensure that they are also active participants in the intellectual labour relating to examination processes in South Africa.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

It is critical that a research paradigm should be established in this research and it dictated that this section should dwell on the two major research paradigms and their strengths and shortcomings. Qualitative design represents one of the two major paradigms according to which social science research is conducted. Quantitative research represents the other paradigm. The quantitative design is represented by the positivist approach to research as a model of science. The proponents of positivism hold several beliefs about the nature of knowledge which together form positivist epistemology (Hesse-Biber, 2011:8). The positivist holds the view that there is a knowable reality that exists outside the research process. The social world, like the natural world, is governed by rules, which result in patterns. Accordingly, causal relationships between variables can be identified, proved and explained (Ramoroka, 2014).

The qualitative paradigm, on the other hand, is epitomised by the interpretive stand which is another approach to research and focuses on understanding, interpretation, and social meaning. It presupposes that meaning is constructed through the interaction between humans, and therefore meaning does not exist independently of the human interpretive process. The

researcher, working from the interpretive tradition, values experience and perspective as important sources of knowledge. The interpretive approach is associated with the hermeneutic tradition, which is about seeking deep understanding by interpreting the meaning that interactions, actions and objects have for people. This perspective posits that the only way to understand social reality is from the perspective of those who are immersed in it (Ramoroka, 14).

A qualitative research design has been selected and data has been collected from documents that carry the relevant examinations information and literature reviews. The paper is located within post-Marxist structuralist paradigm represented by critical theorists, Marxist feminism and postmodernism. Ideological critique approach recommended by critical theorist Habermas will be used to deconstruct the grand narratives dominating the examination in South Africa. In respect of analysis of data, thematic analysis as well as document analysis approaches will be used to analyse data emanating from DBE documents including exam reports, Action Plan, question papers, curriculum documents and so on. Literature review will be conducted to establish a conceptual framework which would be used to judge the credibility and integrity of examinations in South Africa.

At the outset it must be indicated that the examination on its own cannot solve all the problems that are raised by this paper but it certainly plays a critical role in driving the system of education towards the achievement of high scores at the expense of the achievements of educational outcomes. The dialectics of examinations need to be explored to ascertain whether these cannot be manipulated, deconstructed, reconfigured and reconstructed into revolutionary tools to facilitate access to the quality of education in this country by the majority of the impoverished communities.

### **3.2 Analysis and interpretation of Data**

The analysis and interpretation of data will be influenced by the ideological critique approach of the current system in terms of its capacity to empower the *Subaltern* meaning the peasants, women, poor people and children, learners and unorganized teachers. Teachers who belong to Marxist orientated unions have the capacity to deconstruct this microphysics power designed to undermine the intellectual development of the *Subaltern*. *Subaltern* is a term used by Antonio Gramsci to refer to a subordinate group which lack organization and which is vulnerable to abuse and disempowerment. Individual teachers can be classified as *Subaltern* if they are helpless and voiceless in the face of the authoritarianism wilding the microphysics of power. However, a revolutionary machine such a South African Democratic Teachers Union has the capacity to free the teachers from the being the victims of these technicist counter-revolutionary instruments who are flexing their unprecedented muscles to impoverish the vulnerable meaning the *Subaltern*.

The data that has been analysed relate to the practices that denote the disempowering of teachers and learners and this include centralization of the development of question papers to the exclusion of the majority of teachers, over-bureaucratization of the system, high failure rate and dropout rate, use of exorbitant amount money to run exams and ANA at the expense of teacher development and learner attainment. The international comparability of standards and how the exam system can be used to empower the teachers and the learners' families.

### 3.4 Literature Review

#### 3.4.1 Conceptual Framework

The schematic representation below represents the integration of the macro evaluation elements and the micro-evaluation elements. This model has been developed by the World Bank to evaluate the examination systems of the world. How does South Africa compare to the world exams system including systems from Africa.

<p><b>World bank Model</b></p> <p><b>Fitness for Purpose:</b> The examination papers and the marking system must produce mark scores that are both reliable and valid</p> <p><b>Equity, Integrity and Public Confidence:</b> The examination should be fair and achieve a higher level of public acceptance.</p> <p><b>Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness:</b> Feedback on exam performance is given to schools in time.</p> <p><b>Transparency:</b> Marking criteria for the awarding of grades must be made available to the teachers, learners</p> <p><b>Beneficial effect on classroom practice:</b> Class room assessment practices and techniques should assess higher – order thinking skills encouraged by the examination.</p> <p><a href="http://www.worldbank.com">www.worldbank.com</a></p>
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The conceptual framework clearly shows that there is a reciprocal relationship between examination data, teaching and learning. There is a need to establish whether the examination system in South Africa is internationally comparable. This can only be ascertained by benchmarking aspects of the examination in South Africa against the international criteria for a good examination system. Some of the criteria include equity, integrity and public confidence and this criterion is related to transparency. To what extent are examination standards made transparent? Are question papers an accurate measurement of the learners in intellectual abilities? Can the standards of question papers be beneficial in the classroom? It is argued that question papers that reflect analytical and critical thinking are likely to drive teaching and learning towards higher order thinking skills. However, question papers that are robust in assessing lower order thinking are likely to influence teaching and learning towards lower order thinking. It has been established by the benchmarking report (Ministerial Task Team report 2014) that most of the papers are biased in assessing lower order thinking. The inference that can be made is that: standard of examination question papers in South Africa is low and has promoted poverty of standards in common tests and in teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom.

Therefore, teachers need to be vigilant and open-minded about the standard of question papers that are received from the national, provincial and districts. These papers must be used judiciously as they may lull the system of education into a false sense of security. Teachers must be critical practitioners and must demand to be given more opportunities to be in charge of the intellectual development of learners and should be skeptical about the over-bureaucratized system that seeks to reduce them to robots and administrators of controlled assessment. When the NSC results are improving significantly most people would infer that there is academic progression in South African system when in fact the standards of papers have been lowered to make as if the system is performing well.

As a result of the Ministerial Task team report that revealed the results of international benchmarking papers, the change of league table where traditional league leaders such as Gauteng and Western Cape found themselves in unfamiliar positions on the league as well as criticisms of the marking process by Umalusi and higher education, there has been a heightened level of skepticism about the credibility of examination results. It is, therefore, necessary for this paper to use the ideological critique approach followed by critical theorists and dialectical approach supported by critical thinking experts to disentangle the epistemological foundation of the examination system in South Africa. The main focus is to deconstruct the microphysics of power dominating examination in the Republic and to recommend radical changes that would result in the empowerment of the *Subaltern*, namely, learners, peasants, women and teachers.

### 3.5 Critical theory

Critical Theory, in a narrow sense, designates several generations of German philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt school. According to the theorists of this school of thinking, a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human emancipation, "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them". The Institute of Social Research was founded in 1929 and was managed by Max Horkheimer, supported by Theodor Adorno, who are considered to be the first generation of this school of thought (Arduini & Horkheimer, 1947). This theory is critical of liberal democracy, market fundamentalism, capitalism, natural science and technology. In the book called *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer criticise the emphasis of the enlightenment on human rights, democracy and free institutions leading to mass politics and democracy which did not emancipate the individuals from the oppression created by market fundamentalism, capitalism and the technocrats. According to the theorists, these forces, including the state, determine the curriculum agenda for the poor which ultimately pushes the majority of people to the margin of poverty and ensures continued domination by the capitalists.

Critical theorists believe that researchers should not only study the situation but must seek to change it. The critical theorists recommend ideological critique and Action research in order to deconstruct grand narratives dominating the society and which is designed to impoverish the poor. The critical theorists who advocate reflective knowledge argue that meaningful human knowledge must not merely understand the world but also change it and be normative and action-oriented, as well as descriptive and explanatory (Reason & Bradbury, 2006:89). There has always been a belief that knowledge is power, and those who lay claim to legitimate knowledge are those in power. The powerless have been turned into objects in the knowledge-generation process by experts, bureaucrats, academics and capitalists. Teachers who receive question papers from the national, provincial and districts with questioning have been turned into robots whose role is to implement passively district standards and teachers are not engaged in intellectual labour to generate knowledge. There over-bureaucratization of the system has paralysed the production of knowledge at school levels. Schools have become institutions for recycling knowledge from textbooks and for drilling learners in order to respond to common tests. Those who are perceived to be failing learners are held accountable and passion of teachers including the love of teaching and creativity have all been destroyed by the "terrors of teacher performativity" (Ramoroka, 2014)

### 3.6 Lowering of Standards

This section is designed to respond to this key question:

#### **To what extent does the examination system contribute to the quality of teaching and learning in South Africa?**

According to the Ministerial Task Team report, there has been a systematic lowering of standards in order to improve the Grade 12 results. The report revealed the findings of the international benchmarking of papers by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Cambridge International Examinations, Board of Studies New South Wales in Austria and Higher Education South Africa. According to the reports there is over-supply of lower order thinking in national question papers and this will have negative academic repercussions to teaching and learning because classrooms are influenced by the standards of question papers and if the standards are lower teaching and learning will logically be of lower standards.

There are many opportunities to gather marks in the South African NSC qualifications. The SBA marks are inflated in order to ensure learners get high scores. In addition, the five percent language compensation revealed a great deal of grade inflation. Consequently the overall performance of the system in the term of Grade 12 performance is inflated and this undermines the validity of the results. The NSC needs to develop into a sophisticated qualification which is robust and which should be achieved by learners who demonstrate analytic and critical thinking. This can be achieved if the assessment regime can undergo radical changes.

In recent times the Department of Basic Education has been under immense attack from opposition political parties and academics over the building of schools, the standard of education, Mathematical Literacy, Life Orientation and passing learners at 30%. Criticism is evident in the two articles that appeared in the editions of 23 March 2012 and 16 August 2013 respectively of *The Star* newspaper, in which Dr Mamphela Ramphele, an academic and political activist, and Rabelani, a lecturer at Witwatersrand's Business School, criticises the current education system. Dr Ramphele (*The Star*, 16 August 2013) considers the current education system to be worse than Bantu education under the Apartheid system, while Rabelani Dagada views Bantu Education as a better education system than the current education system (*The Star*, 23 March 2012). Despite the challenges experienced by the Department of Basic Education, the views articulated by these academics are not only a misrepresentation of historical facts but also demonstrate a condescending, triumphalist attitude by those who benefited from the Apartheid Education, notwithstanding the fact that it undermined the consciousness of African learners. This inference constitutes academic dishonesty and is not based on solid evidence. Given the interest in comparing Bantu Education and the current education system, it is appropriate for this section to dwell on some of the aspects of the Bantu Education Act, 1953 (Act No. 47 of 1953).

The concerns raised in respect of the lowering of standards of grade 12 by higher education experts and international assessments (Ministerial Task report) are a matter of serious concern. The lowering of standards has a reminiscence of the Bantu education. During the Bantu Education, the role of an African was that of labourer, worker, and servant only. As HF Verwoerd, the architect of the Bantu Education Act, 1953 (Act No. 47 of 1953), asserts, "There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live." (Kalaway, 2002; Hartshorne, 1992). The words of HF

Verwoerd summarise the philosophy behind the Apartheid Education system which was to provide an African learner with a special training that would confine him to his community in the rural areas. Verwoerd's philosophy supports Francis Galton's supremacist position that "when classifying the categories of humans according to their natural gifts, the Negro was so extravagantly inferior as to require an entirely different scale of evaluation ... The intellectual measuring tape had to be adjusted downwards to accommodate congenitally limited native capacities" (Roberts, 2007). Bantu Education therefore constituted an entirely different scale of measurement which was adjusted downwards to meet the perceived low intellectual standard of African learners.

The current standards need to be evaluated rigorous to ensure that it does not lower the scale of measurement similar to those advocated by Verwoerd and Galton. It is critical that elements of eugenics philosophy must be deconstructed and disentangled and the examination system must at all times seek to improve the scale of measure and if the scale is lowered it means that the prophets of eugenics philosophy which advocated racial superiority of whites and inferiority of Africans would be validated.

It should be noted that standardisation of assessment by its nature has the propensity of lowering standards. The role of setting standard is centralised to perceived experts at the epicentre who must develop a product and imposed it forcibly upon the periphery. The location of the generation of standards does not legitimise the standards into quality instruments and these standard be carefully consumed to ensure they do not undermine the quality of education at all levels. There is a need to engage in a systematic process of developing standards before the standard can be used to judge the performance of the system. In this instance given that fact that all schools are uncertain about what constitute appropriate standard at the national level, there is a need for a robust debates on standards rather the current authoritarian approach of imposing the instruments from the DBE, the instrument may be a weapon of mass destruction to destroy the system of education and there a is need to analyse these papers and ascertain whether they represent what teachers consider to be appropriate standard. As a result of these standardised and instrumentalist tools the system may collapse and communities will blame teachers when in fact the standardised instruments are responsible. It is necessary to set exam standard at key stages and allow teachers to set their own standards guided by the curriculum standards. This situation is endemic in the administration of Annual national assessment were a group of examiners set the standards at the DBE and impose them upon teachers to implement. This practice will negative academic repercussion for this country because standards are a negotiated settlement.

This debilitating state of affairs justify the use of ideological critique approach to disentangle the microphysics of power which controls standards in South Africa and which continue to use examination as a counter-revolutionary tool to undermine the quality of education, disempower the teachers (mostly Africans), empower minorities and fail the majority of learners from the impoverished communities.

### **3.7 The technicist rationale model curriculum development and assessment**

The scanning of the academic landscape is intended to establish the academic inputs that are responsible for the challenges experienced within system of education in South Africa. This includes teaching, learning and assessment, and the ability of these variables to produce intellectual capital in teachers and curriculum and assessment specialists. The

critical question that is asked here is: Does the South African system have the ability to produce competent intellectual professionals that are capable of educating the South African population, especially the impoverished communities?

From Stenhouse's perspective, this teaching approach is a process rather than a product-driven approach and pre-specified objectives are considered to be antithetical to the inculcation of higher-order thinking skills. According to Stenhouse (1975), curriculum implementation is in a state of becoming. However, curriculum development in South Africa is product-driven and has been influenced by Ralph Tyler's rational model and Bloom's Taxonomy. This has resulted in a content-based approach to teaching and assessment, the regurgitation of memorised facts, and the promotion of rote learning through drilling methodology (Ramoroka, 2014). Examination question papers play a pivotal role in facilitating rote learning and regurgitation of memorised facts.

Academic progression is managed through the policy on progression and promotion. According to this policy a learner should not repeat a grade twice within the same phase, resulting in learners being moved from one grade to the next, even though they do not satisfy the intellectual standards of that grade. This results in a high failure rate and later, to a high drop-out rate in the system. A high failure rate has been noted in Grades 9, 10 and 11 because schools prepare for Grade 12 and gate-keeping mechanisms are beginning to be used. This gate-keeping is responsible for the disappearance of learners from these three grades before they reach Grade 12, and only a fraction of learners are allowed to proceed to Grade 12, to improve the pass percentage. These learners end up using drugs and participating in criminal activities, resulting in various social ills which are anathema to South African society. The technical approach in curriculum design and implementation is focused on the cognitive domain, and the affective and psychomotor domains are neglected (Ramoroka, 2014).

The curriculum is loaded with too much content, which suffocates teachers and learners and undermines the process of inculcating intellectual skills, and there is virtually no time to develop strategies to engage learners in reasoned intellectual judgement. The content has to be completed as an indication that learners are ready for a common examination or the final examination. The content load compromises the cognitive load and consequently content is assimilated and regurgitated by learners because instruments that are designed to assess learners' intellectual abilities are robust in assessing lower-order thinking. Despite the low standard of assessment, learners are unable to achieve quality results. Too much prescribed content is a constraint to the teaching and assessment of critical thinking and other higher-order thinking skills. These constraints have led to textbooks that are loaded in terms of content and weak in skills and conceptual knowledge. International assessment bodies that evaluated the assessment lambasted the question papers and asserted that they were biased towards lower-order thinking and that they were not robust.

### **3.8 Politics of testing**

According to McLaren, the politics of testing within public schools has historically played an insidious role in the perpetuation of underachievement among working-class students and students of colour. Bowles and Gintis (in Fisherman, 2005:215) argue that "the education system legitimates economic inequality by providing an open, objective and ostensibly meritocratic mechanism for assigning individuals unequal economic positions. Through the construction of testing instruments as value-free scientific tools, considered to produce objective, measurable and quantifiable data, predefined skills and knowledge have been given priority at the expense of the cultural knowledge and experience of students from economically disenfranchised communities". The point raised by McLaren is supported by statistical evidence from the National Senior Certificate examination where out of six hundred thousand learners that wrote the examination in 2009, only three hundred thousand achieved the NSC qualification. Although the results have improved significantly over a period of five years and



the failure rate was reduced from 40% to 22% in 2013, higher education is questioning the credibility of the results because the examination is managed by the Department of Basic Education instead of an independent assessment body.

According to Kohn (in Fisherman, 2005:214) high-stakes testing has radically altered the kind of instruction that is offered in schools, to the point that "teaching to the test" becomes a prominent part of the nation's education landscape. Teachers often feel obliged to set aside other subjects for days, weeks, or even months at a time in order to devote time to boosting students' test scores. Indeed, both the content and format of instruction are affected; the test essentially becomes the curriculum (Kohn, in Fisherman, 2005). Teaching for testing in order to address the standards embedded in a proliferating number of common tests has resulted in the promotion of the regurgitation habit of mind.

A major consequence of standardised testing and teaching to the test is the way in which the emphasis of learning shifts away from intellectual activity toward the dispensing of packaged fragments of information. Meanwhile, students and teachers as subjects of classroom discourse, who bring their personal stories and life experiences to bear on their teaching and learning, are systematically silenced by the need for the class to cover a generic curriculum at a prescribed pace established by the state (Antonia Darder, in Fisherman, 2005). Teachers do not have time to engage learners in reasoned intellectual judgment and as a result their teaching, learning and assessment are robust in promoting lower-order thinking which is adequate for achieving the qualification.

Time and again students have to be removed from their classes to undertake tests or examinations and this disrupts the rhythm or developmental momentum of student learning, provokes enormous and unnecessary stress and tension in students, and interferes with the quality of interaction in the classroom. The culture of student testing erodes the teachers' autonomy and creativity as well as their authority within their classrooms (Fisherman, 2005:213). The common tests that are written in June and in September take up teaching time and there is limited time to teach learners adequately in order to prepare for the examination. This type of environment erodes the intellectual disposition of the teachers such as passion, love of the subject, empathy, perseverance, humility, integrity and curiosity which must be instilled in learners in order to empower them with the means to acquire the central tenets of critical thinking.

The examination system in South African, especially the question paper development section, is the nucleus of the education system in South Africa. Examination systems across the world have the capacity to produce contingents of intellectuals that have the capacity to develop assessment items, drive the curriculum, develop qualifications and write textbooks. However, there are no full time specialists in South Africa that are developing assessment items and instruments and the system is grossly deficient in assessment expertise. The system has failed to learn lessons from international practices and from neighbouring countries. Curriculum advisors, teachers and assessment officials' lack of assessment capacity are responsible for the disheartening state of education in South Africa. The system is examination-driven, and school-based assessment is justified in terms of its ability to prepare learners for the exit examination. Given that the system is examination-driven, the skills for developing assessment would have been a critical lever for the intellectual development of learners. A lack of integrity, perseverance, enthusiasm, empathy and humility is evident among teachers and subject specialists. These intrinsic qualities are necessary to inspire both teachers and learners to acquire intellectual skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.

The examination question papers have in past being a preserve of white minorities and the majority of Africans have not been given the opportunity to set question papers. Between the 1994 and 2000 provinces were given the mandate to set question papers and few Africans, Indians and Coloureds were given the opportunities to set question papers and there was an attempt in some provinces to appoint more Africans. As result of the Ministerial task team's recommended a single examination system was established to standardise the quality of question papers and this led to the development of national question in 2001 for Mathematics and Physical Sciences and more subjects were added in subsequent years. By 2008 with the introduction of the National Senior Certificate all question papers were set by the DBE. The question is: What this right move? Another question: who is setting question papers in South Africa? Are question papers set by whites, Indians and Africans? The Answer is very clear Africans are still discriminated in respect of work requires intellectual labour as a results they are disempowered. In terms of racial representations in the examination panels currently setting papers, there over-representation by Black Indians in senior positions and ordinary positions and Africans are represented in Africans languages. This is contrary to the whole of African content where the primary setters of exam papers are the Africans and it is only logical that African teachers in South Africa will be weak because they are not given the opportunity to develop intellectually. This discrimination is also endemic in the development of preparatory question papers and June papers and standardised question papers and consequently majority of teachers have been reduced to passive administrators of districts, provincial and national standards and they have become robotic and cannot compete with the counter-part. What is even worse is that Some African examiners are selected from other African country and a practice that clearly shows that the system does not have confident in the majority of African people.

### **3.9 School Based Assessment**

In this section I explore documents that reflect the evidence relating to teaching and learning and I focus on the evidence generated by teachers during assessment such as question papers, assessment tasks and learner evidence and I also analyse the information presented by the textbook utilized by the participants. I will use the knowledge that I have acquired as a provincial examiner in the North West Provincial Education for History from 1999 to 2003 and when I was a national examiner for history from 2003 to 2005. I would also use my experience as assessment manager managing the school based assessment, marking and international benchmarking of question papers. I will also use the skills and knowledge of the principles of assessment that I acquired from a two week's training that I received from Cambridge Assessment Network in the UK. This knowledge has encouraged me to explore critical thinking and I realized that there are similarities. Both critical thinking and assessment require an intellectual process of making judgement based on standards and evidence and they are also based on inference that is based on valid evidence. I realized that the question paper development process demand accuracy and precision in order to judge the validity of the learners knowledge. However, teachers are prevented from engaging in assessment and are therefore disempowered.

It has been noted in the empirical evidence collected from four schools in Gauteng that teachers are not allowed to develop their own standardized tests as well as assessment tasks (Ramoroka, 2014). The development of these tasks is centralized at the district office where a group of subject advisors are given the opportunity to set them. This approach by Gauteng and other provinces is adopted as an intervention to provide ready-made papers to teachers because they are considered to be unable to develop papers of high quality. Therefore the skill of "questioning" has been barred from the school and to use Spivak's words "it has committed suicide" and teachers appeared to be helpless when assessment component is deducted from pedagogical strategy of the schools. The measurement of intellectual abilities of all learners in the provinces is judged

from the outside by subject advisors through one standardized assessment instrument. This results in teaching for testing because teachers are constantly preoccupied with revising these common papers in their pedagogy in order to prepare for the Grade 12 NSC examination. Some of these papers are of poor quality and consequently obstruct the production of knowledge at school level. The opportunities for engaging teachers in intellectual labour necessary for the development of critical thinking are limited by over-bureaucratization of the system.

Assessment has the capacity to sharpen the intellectual thinking of officials that are involved. Assessment requires items that are constructed to reflect the academic content knowledge of teachers and learners. Assessment items must be accurate, precise, relevant and must assess what they intended to assess. It has been noted that teachers are unable to formulate questions that are assessing higher order thinking skills and critical thinking skills and they are content with assessing the body of knowledge. In assessing historical knowledge and skills Bloom's taxonomy has been considered to be a hindrance given the fact that the model prescribe verbs that restrict the assessment of an independent line of thinking which enhances critical thinking. .

Assessment of critical thinking is closely related to the judgement that is based on reasoning and evidence and the questions posed must be able to assess the elements of reasoning by using standards in order to ascertain the level of proficiency in the demonstration and articulation of the elements of thinking. Question papers that are developed at the district and national level have been considered to fall short in assessing critical thinking and this caused by the dependency of Bloom's taxonomy of knowledge. When history teachers use the comprehensive model of critical thinking there will ensure that higher order thinking is based on the elements of critical thinking.

Setting papers require a strong epistemological knowledge and a person must be grounded on the elements, traits and standards of critical thinking. The examiners make judgement after the initial stage of setting and this is considered to be self-reflection of his ability. The examiner will refine the question which he or she considered to be ambiguous and vague using the standards such as accuracy, relevance of the question to the prescribe content, precision in assessing analytical thinking and making judgement whether the paper is valid or not before a paper can be subjected to a validation process by the head of department or subject advisor or internal moderator. This process requires a continuous training in making judgement and supporting it with evidence. The requirement of the evidence to ascertain whether the question measure the intellectual thinking it intended to assess has led to pretesting of items in other countries before they are consolidated into a paper. The evidence generated would validate the question because it would be verified whether the question is able to elicit a critical thinking information or analytical thinking information which is necessary enable the schools to make judgement about the learners academic progression. This skilled and disciplined thinking and engagement with the assessment items will enhance critical thinking skills. Schools including those that are setting their papers do not make this process rigorous and this result in poor papers produced.

This level of question can be used informally in the class room to elicit a robust classroom discussion so as to ensure that learners prepare essays that are based on critical thinking. The current papers that are developed by the districts were evaluated using the following criteria.

- a) Questions are clear, concise, precise, intelligible, and worked using language appropriate to the range of candidates for whom the test or Task is intended.

- b) Repetition of questions from previous examinations is avoided.
- c) Appropriate curriculum content which is adequately covered within the test/task.
- d) Appropriate distribution of learning outcomes and assessment standards
- e) Correlation between item difficulty, time allocations and mark allocations
- f) Compliance with content and construct validity
- g) Appropriate distribution of cognitive levels
- h) Language level is in keeping with the vocabulary and comprehension levels of Grade 12 learners
- i) Questions or tasks are free from subject error from an academic point of view, e.g. historic or scientific facts.
- j) k) Instructions on the assessment tasks and tests were clear and precise.

Some of these criteria were used by moderators from the DBE and reviser from Cambridge International Examination (Report Cambridge, 2012) to validate question papers that are set by examiners. I used the same criteria to assess the quality of tests and items set by participants and the districts. Most of the class test set by teachers is of the poor quality and this demonstrated their dependency on the standardized tests that are set by the districts and some of the class tests is a "cut and paste" from the textbooks, previous question papers and common tests and this situation is debilitating and denote a system where teachers have been reduced to robots that implement in a mechanical manner the district standards without questioning. Some class test question papers do not have instructions, mark allocation and time allocation and proper numbering and are mainly robust in assessing recall.

This finding is triangulated by the moderation report generated by the DBE moderators, a project that is part of my key performance area. I managed the process of the DBE in appointing the best teachers and subject advisors as DBE moderators. I trained these moderators on the principle of assessment and I deployed to provinces conduct sample moderation of 180 schools. The schools were sampled according to low, medium and high achievers and I deliberately increased the medium and underperforming schools in order to identify the phenomenon that is causing them to underperform. The findings of this team are consistent with the findings of the learner evidence and assessment tasks of the sampled school in this study. The findings are as follows (DBE report, 2013):

- a) Educator competence in terms of the development of assessment tasks and marking still remains a major challenge.
- b) General compliance with Subject Assessment Guideline and subject policy documents is commendable.
- c) Very little or no evidence of pre-moderation of assessment tasks.
- d) Marking in many instances appears to be based on inaccurate and incomplete assessment tool (Marking Scheme).
- e) Marking of learner evidence is generally poor and inconsistent and learners are being provided with inaccurate judgement about their intellectual abilities.
- f) Learner performance is not in keeping with expectation and standard.
- g) Teachers are unable to develop assessment tasks of high quality such as oral history and heritage tasks are therefore unable to make historical skills practical.
- h) Challenging questions testing higher order cognitive levels were limited.
- i) Very little evidence of developmental workshops for educators.
- j) Little or no feedback provided to learners based on diagnostic analyses.

Teachers need to set their own tests and assessment tasks so as to ensure that critical thinking skills of learners are tested. Currently the papers are mainly pitched at the medium level and teaching is also pitched at this level and those learners that have the potential to demonstrate high level thinking are discriminated or disfavored in support of mediocrity. Therefore, by allowing teachers the freedom to set questions they would be exercising their intellectual autonomy and be able to do justice in the assessment of learners intellectual abilities.

### **3.10 Independent Examination Board**

**To what extent is the migration towards independent exams going to affect the transformation that is required within the exams system?**

This section seeks to examine the feasibility of examination being managed by an independent examination board, a practice which is prevalent in many countries in the world. To what extent can this practice be incorporated into the examination system in South Africa? Currently the credibility of the examination is questioned by the media, politicians, Umalusi and Higher education and the examination processes such as marking and the setting of question papers have been subjected to an immense attack. The significant improvement of the results from 60% to 78 over a period of five years has led to critics to decry the systematic lowering of standards of the Government in order to project a picture of an improving education system. This criticism carry weight because the government play the role of the player and the referee by providing teaching and learning services as well as developing the measurement instrument to judge the same system. The independent judgement is brought in by Umalusi, the quality assurance council, which ensures that the papers that are developed by the DBE are of the appropriate standards. However, there are others who feel that Umalusi is pressurized by the bureaucracy to accept the results and this is the reasons some have been calling for the independence of examination in South Africa in order to ensure parity of esteem between South Africa and the international assessment bodies. The main question is that: To what extent will the independent exam board benefit the poor? Or will it continue to strengthen the microphysics of power that is currently using exams to benefit monitories financially and intellectually.

### **3.11 Question paper development and expert judgement presented by CIE , OCR and other African countries**

The drivers of the development of question papers and items are subject officers or product managers or qualification managers as they are called by different awarding bodies. These are officials with extra-ordinary expertise in teaching and the setting of question papers. The officials are subject specialists and possess in most cases Honours and Masters in their subjects and are employed by the awarding bodies permanently. The subject officers must have been principal examiners or chief examiners for a number of years before they can be appointed. Subjects are grouped according to fields such as Humanities, Science, Mathematics and languages and each subject has a subject officer and each field has qualifications managers managing a group of subject officers in a particular field. This model is followed by OCR, CIE, Cambridge ESOL and most the African countries. The advantage of this model is the combination of internal staff and contracted specialists assist to build internal capacity and as a results subject officers are very strong to an extent that they can be used to train teachers on issues that relate to the examination including unpacking the specifications.

The pyramidal structure comprises the chair of examiners, chief examiner and principal examiner. The question paper is set by a principal examiner who is an excellent teacher and has a track record of producing good results and the assessment instruments that the teacher developed as part of internal assessment are of the highest standard compare to other excellent teachers. After the paper has been set, it is submitted to a committee comprising of other principal examiners and

a chief examiner who are setting related papers. At the meeting the paper is reviewed and it is then submitted to next level that is the reviser. The reviser provides written comments on the draft and the provisional mark scheme. Then the paper is submitted to the scrutineer to check the paper without reference to the mark scheme to ensure that the questions can be answered in time allowed and ensure that there are no errors and omissions. Then the scrutineer checks the mark scheme to ensure that the answers are identical to those on the question paper.

Then the paper is brought to question paper evaluation committee chaired by the chair of examiners. Chief examiner and principal examiners must attend the evaluation meeting. The evaluation committee should include the reviser and may include members of the subject committee who possess relevant expertise. This process of evaluation should be organized by the subject officer. All these officials are appointed by the awarding body and there is no external experts appointed by Ofqual, it means that the question papers are developed entirely by the awarding body. The draft papers when they are submitted to the committee they must be accompanied by the reviser's comments and details indicating that criteria and content specifications have been met. The committee will seek to ensure that the challenge and level of demand of the question papers and mark schemes are maintained from year to year and results in reference to previous question papers. The committee will ensure that the question paper comply with the criteria in the specifications and is consistently of the highest quality. This is good practice. The committee will finally approve the paper.

### 3.11.1 The DBE

The DBE appoints four examiners including the chief examiner and one moderator and the Umalusi appoints two external moderators. The question paper is set by the four examiners under the leadership of the chief examiner. After the paper has been set, it is subjected to the internal moderator and then is subjected to external moderator and finally approved by Umalusi moderators. The DBE does not have full time subject specialists but the process is managed by assistant directors who are generic and do not make inputs into the papers. The process of setting question papers in South Africa is not rigorous despite the fact that there are more examiners setting papers compare to international countries. The weakness of this model in South Africa is the absence of full time specialists who in international countries are the final arbiter of the standard of papers and are also engaged in pre-testing of papers to ensure that the papers are valid. These specialists are also engaged in research about the performance of items and also apply measurement instruments such as Latent Trade theory, Rasch Model and Item Response theory to ensure that the items that are generated and incorporated into the paper are valid and reliable. This makes them to develop the sophisticated epistemological knowledge of their discipline.

The absence of a rigorous process of generating items or question papers is responsible for poor question papers being developed at all levels. Those that have been entrusted with the responsibility to improving question paper development have failed to replicate international standards. The process of setting common task is adopted from the DBE without questioning and districts are in the dark and they think it is the best process. There is a need for individual teachers to regain their freedom from the chains of common tests and national standards and begin to figure out the appropriate standards. This is a terrain which is dominated teachers elsewhere in the world and teachers should not dependent on national or district standards. Teachers should be critical and skeptical about any imposed question papers from outside the school. A healthy skepticism is essential and is the basis for transforming teachers into critical thinkers. As critical thinkers teachers can accept the current hegemony where standardized instruments are unleashed from the district without questioning the markers of those products called common question papers. International teachers would not accept tests set from outside

by senior departmental officials except from the independent examination board, they see this practice as an underestimation of their intellectual autonomy and authority in the classroom. There is a need for the DBE to strengthen teacher development and teacher assessment so as to ensure that each teacher is given the responsibility, freedom, autonomy and authority to develop their own standards.

### **3.12 Budget used in the management of examination in South Africa**

The question that can be asked in this section is that: Is the examination system in South Africa efficiently managed? The funds that are used in the management examination in South Africa are astronomical and higher than most examination bodies in the world. Money is invested in the running of examination rather on learner attainment and teacher development. There is a need to transform the model that is used in the running of examination in South Africa.

South Africa is using more money than any African country and it is using more money than the Scottish qualification Authority and Cambridge International Examination. Money is spent on a bureaucratized management of exams comprising of directors and chief directors while the management positions in managing exams in the world comprises of examination officers who are appointed in positions lower than directors.

The second aspect that incurs exorbitant amount of money is the concurrent functions between Umalusi, DBE, Provinces and Districts, all these four levels of governance monitor the examination centres during the conduct of examination, some deliver question papers daily to schools, many officials are displaced from their core responsibilities of managing the curriculum, assessment and teacher development to assist with the running of examination and we have become an examination and testing nation at the extent of quality education.

Another aspect is the printing of question papers where almost all provinces have acquired tenders for the printing of papers where billions of Rands are used, instead of printing papers in one central place like in the UK, nine provinces are printing papers and we are not benefiting from the economics of scale which if the system was centralised billions of money would have been saved and used for teacher development, building of schools, provision of resources to schools and learner attainment.

Another aspect which is munching the examination funds is the marking process where billions of money is spent on paying markers, senior markers, chief markers, internal moderators and centre managers and other administrative staff members. More money is also spent in paying for the marking centres most of them are former model C and this contributes towards maintaining these schools to continue being excellent learning centres. The last aspect in the development of question papers, moderation of school based moderation as well as other quality promotion activities such as the development of exemplars of assessment tasks and exemplars of Grade 11 question papers. There is also the Senior Certificate and the supplementary examination which are not necessary but they cost the DBE more money.

Lastly Annual National Assessments which are conducted in Grades 1, 2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 9 are not going to help to establish a standard at key stages of the system. It takes time to build a standard and these assessments are a total waste of money and are developed in order to hold teachers accountable. A system of testing millions of learners in all grades is unheard of in world and this type of system will compromise quality of question papers. The setting of question papers for ANA must be

seen as a process of setting standards in key stages of the system given the absence of a lower full scale examination. There is a need to systematically engage in the setting of appropriate standards that need to be attained by teachers in all Grades but this can be achieved through tests targeting a small sample in particular provinces. ANA results are not used to make judgement on learner performance for the purpose of promotion and therefore it make sense to reduce significantly the sample size and focus on a small sample which will yield more accurate findings. The inference that can be drawn on in-depth analysis of the ANA data from a small sample can will be more reliable, dependable and credible than the data emanating from all grades.

The moderation of school based assessment is also a function that is costing the DBE and provinces an exorbitant amount of money. There is a prevalence of concurrencies that are not necessary, For example, the district conduct moderation, province conducts twice in a year moderation and provincial moderators are paid, DBE conducts moderation twice a years and moderators are paid and Umalusi conducts moderation twice a years and moderators are paid. This money can be used appropriate to develop teachers and strengthen formative assessment and assessment for learning rather used for moderation of assessment tasks and learner evidence which have degenerated into auditing and "shadow marking". There is no quality emanating from these concurrencies.

#### **4. Recommendations**

There is a need to consider moving examination towards an independent examination board with clear mandate to run examination efficiently. The current managers sitting in comfort zones while using the exorbitant amount of money and these money keeps being escalated thereby leading to compromise in other critical functions of the DBE such as the monitoring of curriculum delivery, learner attainment and teacher development, improvement of the infrastructure.

The total amount of money used by the DBE and Umalusi should be reviewed and efficient measures such as the centralisation of examination functions should be considered. There is need to save cost and channel money into programmes such as teacher development, learner attainment and formative assessment and assessment for learning

There is need to review the model of setting question papers in South Africa. More resident specialists must be appointed and the appointment must reflect equity and proportional representations of all races in South Africa and the over-representation of one race must come to end.

There is also need to review the common tests and teachers must be given more responsibility, freedom, authority and autonomy to develop measurement instruments to measure the intellectual abilities of their learners. Each cohort of learners in each school is unique and standardised tests offend against the uniqueness of instruction in each and every classroom and this results in content validity being compromised thereby leading to massive failure of learners and later to drop out rate.

There is a need to review the assessment regime in South Africa which contributes to the following: Inflation of scores which undermine the credibility of the qualifications, common tests that lead to disempowerment of teachers and the lowering of the standards of teaching and learning.



School based assessment should be used for formative purposes to prepare learners for the examination, higher education and for the world of work. The scores that emanate for school based assessment are not reliable and valid and seek to inflate the overall results. These scores serve as constraints for the provision of diagnostic information that is essential for feedback, critical reflection and self-reflection which are necessary for improvement of teaching and learning.

It is proposed that scores emanating from SBA should not be included in final scores and this will encourage teachers to be as honest as possible in the assessment of learners so as to ensure that assessment for learning is promoted in the classroom. Recording scores brings with it validation mechanisms such as moderations and these compromise curriculum supports to teachers.

There is a need to review the current model used in the conduct of Annual National Assessment. The project must be scaled down to research approach where papers are developed and piloted and standards are then established and the tests must be administered in a selected sample of schools in particular provinces where only a limited number of learners are involved. Proliferations of testing disrupt the rhythm of the schools and teaching and learning depends on momentum and rhythm, which should not be disrupted. Punitive measures will not promote the quality of teaching and learning. The money can then be used to implement intervention strategies to address the deficiencies identified by the ANA results.

It is also recommended that ANA should not be conducted annually but after every three years to enable interventions to take in order to address shortcomings identified by the diagnostic instruments.

The management of examination in South Africa need to be reviewed. The managers of examination at DBE and PEDs are responsible for development policies and instruments that are disempowering teachers and learners. There is a need for the examination to refocus and develop a system which would accommodate learners from the impoverished communities. There is a need for revolutionaries to drive policies in examination environment to ensure that these policies benefit the poor. Currently policies are still developed by minorities who conceptualise them and impose them upon the majority of the people during consultations forums and Africans are still not being included at the conceptual level of policy formulation and are therefore excluded as thinkers. There is a tendency to exclude Africans in functions that requires intellectual labour such as question paper development and marking. Physical Sciences and Mathematics are dominated by minorities to satisfaction of Verwoerdian philosophy. After 20 years of democracy there is a need to appoint Africans as national examiners in Mathematics and Physical Sciences and they need to be appointed chief examiners and internal moderators in critical subjects and they also need to be appointed in the setting of common tests. More Africans with suitable qualifications should be appointed as chief markers and internal moderators. As a democratic country the system should ensure that all races are given the opportunity to function at all levels and there should not be a situation where there is job reservations, where lower posts are reserved for Africans and more senior posts are reserved for minorities.

It is recommended that there should be vertical and horizontal differentiation within the qualification to accommodate learners who are not academically strong. South Africa should return to two level qualifications to limit levels of differentiation within one question paper. Currently there are three differentiations within one paper, namely, Higher Certificate, Diploma, and Bachelor (The Ministerial Task team has recommended the forth level, Basic NSC). This is contrary to international standards. Rather than have supplementary papers and Senior Certificate that waist the tax payers

money use the money to develop papers for a lower level. South Africa can introduce NSC higher for learners who are not strong academically and NSC advance for strong candidates and develop question papers for these levels. Some questions can be same but more changing questions will be located into the NSC advanced. This will allow the NSC advance to increase the cognitive demand in order to prepare learners for University entry and NSC higher for school leaving certificate and vocation education.

There is a need for an examination in Grade 9 and Grade 10 to mark the end of generation education. The absence of the Generation Certificate shows that there is no recognition of prior learning and any person who failed Grade 12 is considered a failure. There is a need to create different educational pathways at Grade 9 and 10 in order to sort out learners that are academically strong and can be allowed to proceed to Universities and those that are not strong academically can be channelled to technical high schools and colleges to acquire vocational skills. Most of the learners are lost in Grades 9, 10 and 11 because of gate keeping mechanisms which are designed to paint a good picture about the Grade 12 results when in fact majority of learners are lost in the system before they reach Grade 12.

## **5. Conclusion**

There is a need for the radical transformation of the examination and assessment system in South Africa to create a suitable environment where teachers will acquire and demonstrate high level thinking. There is a need for the system to provide teachers, especially African teachers who were the mostly disadvantaged, with the opportunities to set question papers at national, provincial, district and cluster levels. Teachers must not be turned into robots where standards from the DBE, provinces and districts are delivered to schools without their inputs. All bureaucracies that are responsible for pressurizing the system such as the scores of SBA should be reviewed so as to ensure that teachers develop their own tasks under environment which is free from authoritarianism. There is a need to reduce the cost of managing examination in South Africa because these costs do not benefit the poor and there is also a need to strengthen teacher development strategies, teacher assessment and teaching methodologies, content knowledge and provide resources and the necessary infrastructure to schools in order to create an environment where all learners will achieve a high level of thinking irrespective of socio-economic conditions. It is hoped that this will reduce the drop-out rate and multiple failure rate and ensure that the majority of learners from the impoverished communities leave the education system with an appropriate qualification.