

PRIORITISING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

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KwaZulu- Natal has become known for its shortage of qualified and competent professional primary school teachers. This is especially evident in the predominately rural areas of this province. Out of the nine provinces in South Africa, KwaZulu- Natal was the worst affected when it came to under and unqualified teachers.

This is mainly due to the fact that KwaZulu- Natal is largely rural and this makes it extremely difficult recruiting qualified teachers specifically in subjects such as mathematics, science and home language. These are subjects in which learners are performing poorly, and subjects for which rural schools, in particular, are struggling to attract teachers.

Teachers prefer to teach in urban areas while rural post remain unfilled or when filled, the teachers who take these post tend to be unqualified and inexperienced (SACE; June 2011). In addition, teaching education became more centralized and located mostly in urban areas. This made access to Higher Education less accessible to students from rural areas. Therefore, young people who could have become teachers in rural areas, are unable to enroll at Higher Education Institutions in urban areas mostly due to financial reasons, thus, a potential group of teachers who could be more willing to teach and remain in rural areas was lost (Gordon, 2009).

Research argues that local teachers are less likely to choose to migrate to urban areas if they have some ties to the local community. This means that if teaching qualifications were to be presented in these rural areas, that those who attend them would be more likely to remain in their local areas and provide much needed teaching in these areas, willingly (SACE: 2011; Bennell: 2004).

To address the shortage of qualified teachers in the predominantly remote areas of the province, the Department of Education in KwaZulu- Natal (KZN DoE) recruited and provided unemployed matriculants in 2012, from the UMkhanyakude, Sisonke, UMzinyathi, UThungulu and Zululand district, with bursaries to register for either a Bachelor of Education (B Ed) Foundation Phase Teaching or B Ed Intermediate Phase Teaching programmes offered by SANTS Private Higher Education Institution. By doing this the KZN DoE is directly addressing the shortage of qualified and skilled foundation and intermediate phase teachers in areas where the greatest need exist.

SANTS' B Ed programmes directly address the shortage of qualified foundation and intermediate phase teachers by providing access to recognised quality Higher Education qualifications in predominant rural communities. More than 800 B Ed student teachers are enrolled and registered at SANTS at 9 Student Support Centres across these five districts of KwaZulu- Natal.

These 4th year B Ed student teachers are currently completing their last Workplace Integrated Learning (WIL) session at primary schools in this province as the majority will be completing this 4 year B Ed qualification by the end this semester. WIL is a school practical component of the B Ed programme that takes place at functional schools.

Recent research by JET Education Service, an independent education research institution, found that the majority of our B Ed students' classroom performance, who were at time of the study in the mid of their 3rd year of the B Ed programmes in KZN, already met both the outcome of the B Ed programmes (what is expected of a Newly Qualified Teacher) and the minimum standards set out by the policy on teacher education qualifications, called the "Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications. This study mainly focused on our student teachers WIL session purely because students' classroom performance reflects their disciplinary knowledge (content of the subject like for example maths or language), content knowledge (theory, research and pedagogical skills) and the ability to translate this to learners in an effective manner.

The purpose of this the WIL is to provide student teachers the opportunity to become acquainted with formal teaching in a practical school situation and to apply theoretical knowledge gained to the learning child. This is in line with The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (Government Gazette: 15 July 2015).

These student teachers are from the communities of KwaZulu- Natal. These student teachers are receiving recognised quality Higher Education in their community and they will be ploughing their knowledge and skills back into these communities where the greatest need exist.

Reference

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