
STUDENT TEACHERS FROM RURAL KWAZULU- NATAL GRADUATES

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SANTS Private Higher Education Institution celebrates the graduation of 776 student teachers, who completed a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase Teaching or a Bachelor of Education in Intermediate Phase Teaching degree.

The KwaZulu- Natal Department of Education and SANTS Private Higher Education Institution headed an initiative in 2012 to provide unemployed youth, from rural areas of this province, with the opportunity to pursue a career in teaching. This partnership commenced in 2013 when these graduands were proud recipients of bursaries awarded to them by the Department of Education of this province. SANTS registered these students and provided intensive support to these students through sessions facilitated at nine Student Support Centres in the five districts of Kwa-Zulu Natal. These five districts were: Umkhanyakude, Sisonke, Umzinyathi, Uthungulu and Zululand.

The rationale for the programmes is two-fold. First, the programmes respond to the skills needed in the country, which is also articulated in the 2015 research report by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE). This research report identified the need for approximately 30 000 new teachers yearly, between 2013 and 2030. It posits that the teacher shortage is particularly acute in the Foundation Phase, specifically teachers able to use an indigenous African language as the language of teaching and learning. This is especially evident in rural and remote areas, but particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, which has become known for having the most under- and unqualified teachers in South Africa.

Second, and given SANTS' mission to reach and attract students from diverse, primarily but not exclusively rural and socially disadvantaged contexts, the programme is framed around conceptions of access and equity. Such conceptions not only subscribe to the South African constitution ideals that views access to education "as a basic human right" (as cited in du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014:189) but also draws on Wally Morrow's (2007) work on access and by implication, equity to situate its rationale. Morrow (2017) distinguishes between "formal" and "epistemological" access with the former defined as physical access to an institution(s) of learning. In other words, this type of access is dependent on the institution's admission rules as well as students' personal finances (Morrow, 2007). The second type of access that Morrow (2007) refers to is epistemological access to education which he defines as access to the types of learning and knowledge sources that institutions such as universities and tertiary institutions offer.

The National Plan for Higher Education (February, 2001) acknowledges the efficacy of creating equitable access opportunities through a distance modality stating that it "... indicate(s) the growing responsiveness of institutions both to changes in learning and teaching technology but also to the needs of learners who are in employment who need to work to meet study costs" (Morrow, 2009:152). As a Distance Higher Education Institution, SANTS was able to offer the Foundation and Intermediate Phase programmes in ways that address the contextual realities students in rural contexts face, which includes lack of proximity to affordable higher education that does not remove them from

communities that once qualified, they might seek to impact. The mode of delivery created equitable and affordable access opportunities for students without them incurring high financial costs (e. g. accommodation, which is by far the most expensive component of tertiary education). At the same time, it increased the possibility of students remaining in their respective communities once qualified, thus contributing to the skills, equity, and quality education imperatives of the country.

This cohort of 1287 students registered in 2013 for a Bachelor of Education in the Foundation Phase Teaching or Bachelor of Education in the Intermediate Phase programme. This accumulates to a Graduation Rate of 60.3%. A Graduation Rate is the percentage of first time, first year undergraduate students, who complete their programme in the minimum period. For example, a four year programme, entering students who complete within 4 years, are counted as graduates. The national average across the 23 Public Universities in South Africa is 33%, for both contact and distance modes of delivery. The University of South Africa (UNISA), which have a similar mode of delivery as SANTS, has an average graduation rate of 7%. To put these numbers in context, for every 100 students who register for a 4 year undergraduate programme, only 33 students registered at a public university, 7 students from UNISA and 60 student from SANTS will graduate in the given time.

Government has also begun to address the quality of teachers and Initial Teacher Education programmes by implementing the policy on The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) in 2011. SANTS commissioned JET Education Services to evaluate our B Ed graduands, while still in their third year of studies performance during their Practice Teaching session against the expected outcome of the B Ed programmes and standards set out by the *The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (MRTEQ). JET Education Services found that these student teachers already met both the outcomes of the B Ed programmes as well as the minimum standards set out by the MRTEQ. In other words, these third year B Ed student teachers met the criteria expected of newly qualified teachers, while still being students in their third year.

Professor Jean Baxen, SANTS' Executive Academic Director, emphasize that teaching is not merely about knowing the content. Rather, it is about knowing how to take the content and reproduce it in a way that produces optimal learning outcomes for all children irrespective of race, class, gender, cultural heritage, and sexual orientation. Teachers have to balance living life to the fullest, while at the same time being role models in schools, classes, and communities. Teachers also don't know everything and will continue to learn throughout their careers. Prof Baxen adds that South Africa needs resilient, flexible, adaptive, and passionate teachers who are prepared to navigate contextual realities to produce learning that offers children hope and possibility.

With this student cohort drawn from predominantly demographically marginalised communities in South Africa, SANTS addressed the skills, access, equity, and education quality concerns and needs of the country through, particularly, the Foundation Phase programme. The programme targeted African language speakers who are able to teach in the language of learning and teaching in this phase. SANTS' two programmes, the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase, whose graduands we celebrate in this graduation not only responds to the national imperatives for the need to qualify teachers in the these two phases, but also importantly, adheres to the policy on the requirements for teacher education qualifications. Thus, ensuring that we produce the kind of teachers that this country needs.

Should you have any additional questions please do not hesitate to get in contact.



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