

The effects of apartheid on south african education politics essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Prior to 1994, South Africa experienced extreme racial segregation under the apartheid government. The focal point of this essay however, will be on the effects that the apartheid era in education that the South African government is still struggling to reverse today, sixteen years after the end of apartheid. The apartheid era systemically subjected the non-white population to a different and poorer quality of education from the white population. Following South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 the newly appointed government was challenged with the task of deracializing South Africa's education systems. Although South Africa has successfully made some commendable achievements, there are still challenges and failures that suggest the need for policy revision. Not all of these issues are a direct result of the apartheid era although many have at least some link. Based on the challenges such as the social fragmentation, HIV/Aids prevalence and poor quality education systems, some policy recommendations are suggested. These suggestions consist of limitations within themselves, especially because the natures of the majority of South Africa's challenges in the education framework do not have short term solutions.

According to South Africa's constitution as well as the United Nations, education is a basic human right, " Everyone has the right- (a) to a basic education; and (b) To further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible" (Constitution, 1996: 1257). Education increases the societal value of human beings overall. This is because it tackles several challenges found within society through female empowerment, reduction in child labor through a wider variety of

choices. It increases one's productivity level, literacy rates and helps fight against issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Overall, education stimulates development as a whole, from an economic and social perspective.

Therefore, it is of great importance that the South African government, or any government for that matter, should oblige to working diligently towards creating a sound policy framework. This investment has proven to be more than likely to reap great benefits for all.

In order for one to grasp an adequate understanding of South Africa's education sector, one must be familiar with its historical background. It is against this backdrop that the deeply embedded challenges facing South Africa today can be properly addressed. Prior to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa's policy framework was highly fragmented under the apartheid era, "historical fragmentation of the education system into nineteen education departments based on race and ethnicity" (Jansen, 2001: 45). Like every other aspect in South Africa at the time, the education sector was racially divided with white population attending the best quality education and the black population receiving a separate poor quality education. There was an unequal distribution of resources with a highly offensive syllabus. Policies such as the Bantu Education Act were put in place in order to reinforce the segregative ideologies of the apartheid legacy, "his legislation was intended to separate black South Africans from the main, comparatively very well-resourced education system for whites" (www.sahistory.org). 1994 marked the end of the apartheid era and South Africa's ANC-lead government was faced with the complex task of reversing the damages done by this powerful legacy.

Since South Africa's first democratic elections, much advancement has been made in the policy framework for education. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) immediately identified targets such as a curriculum change for all, the introduction of a compulsory ten years of schooling for all, a maximum of forty students per classroom and an increase in buildings and resources amongst other goals. The establishment of the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) (1996) and the South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) were introduced to promote school autonomy. As a result, there is now a multiracial composition of the majority of South African schools.

In order for one to recommend sound changes to South Africa's current policy framework for education, it is essential to develop an equally sound understanding of the challenges and failures of the current policy. Sixteen years post-apartheid, there is still existing strong evidence of this legacy's attitudes and mentalities. The failure to overcome the racial fragmentation is thus amongst the challenges facing South Africa's education system today. Following the disempowerment of the apartheid government, there was a great shift of black students from historically 'black' schools to 'colored/Indian' schools. Similarly, there was a heavy flow of 'colored/Indian' children to 'white' schools. Many children did not shift at all and there has been some flow of black children to white schools. However, there has been no shift to 'black' schools. Even within the so-called multicultural schools, there is still a clear fragmentation found on the school play grounds, "The racial discourse of apartheid has been sustained and carried into the new South Africa, even as the new state has struggled to assert itself." (Soudien,

2004: 91). In South Africa today, the racial demographics found within the classroom setting are usually predominantly 'white', 'colored/Indian' or 'black' depending on the school. There are still existing 'white' and 'black' schools. South Africa's policy framework for education is consequently faced with the challenges of breaking down the strong apartheid attitudes and mentalities.

Similarly, the South African education is divided by class. According to Soudien (2004), the deracialisation of the post-apartheid era forced South Africa's elite to maintain their dominant positions in society in ways other than race, but through class distinctions. "The modalities of the dominant group as it seeks to maintain its hold on the social orders." (Soudien, 2004: 105). As a result, there appears to be a class system divide within the South African schools with ones wealth as a determining factor of the school of choice. As a result of the racial and class divides, South Africa's education policy framework has failed to create the Rainbow nation ideology on which the Constitution is based on. It is impossible for the people of South Africa to develop together yet maintain attitudes that keep them apart. Schools do not just teach but shape and form the attitudes of its learners and should therefore be used as a mechanism to blur the cultural and racial boundaries. Furthermore, this social failure to integrate is argued to be a reflection of the South Africa's political divide.

A third major challenge for South Africa's education policy framework is the prevalence of the HIV/Aids virus. "African countries now account for globally 70 percent of new infections and four fifths of AIDS -related deaths." (Carr-Hill, 2002: 24). Statistics suggest that South Africa has proven to be no
<https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-apartheid-on-south-african-education-politics-essay/>

exception. HIV/Aids has had damaging effects on all aspects of society, however, this paper will be focusing solely on the impact on HIV on South Africa's education. Students, parents and teachers have been grossly affected by HIV/Aids and the virus has resultantly had hindering effects to the development of the education sector for many. Many children are forced to drop out of school for Aids-related reasons such as, poor health, to nurse infected parents, to generate income on behalf of ill parents and high poverty levels due to HIV parents being unable to generate an income for health reasons. " 87 per cent attend at the secondary level and only 20 per cent at the tertiary level" (Ramdass, 2002: 9). According to SA stats, there is a steady decline in enrolment from Reception to Grade 12 suggesting a steady drop-out rate. (Department of Education, 2009)." Children who have lost one or both of their parents are more likely to be removed from school, to stay at home and care for the sick." (Carr-Hill, 2002: 17). Many children have been subjected to poor quality schools from which they produce poor results under the strain of HIV ravaged homes. Further still, many are forced to work within the informal sector with limited if at all any education. It is thus impossible for South Africa to develop within this vicious cycle in which generations are consistently just as helpless as the ones before. The effects of HIV/Aids are found in predominantly black, rural areas. HIV/Aids has also had a hindering effect on the quality of teaching in areas with a high infection rate, " it is reducing the supply of qualified teachers and may disrupt schooling for a whole generation of children." (Carr-Hill, 2002: 12). There is inconsistency within schools where teachers are frequently absent on sick leave or die as a result of HIV/Aids. Students are less likely to remain

in school and those that do are far less likely to perform well under such conditions.

A fourth area in need of attention within the education sector is the quality of education. “ The schools are deprived of resources, facilities and qualified teachers. It is extremely unimaginable to have efficiency, effectiveness and quality in education under these circumstances” (Ramdass, 2002: 14). Many children attend schools that are poorly resourced, this has shown to have hindering effects on the performance of these children. The final weakness in the policy framework for the education policy for in South Africa is highly applicable to all areas of public policy. It is in a typical South African fashion that there is a gap between the creation of a policy and the actual implementation of the policy on the ground, “ policy/practice problem in South African education.” (Jansen, 2001: 41). The various challenges that have been explored thus far indicate that it is simply not enough to create policies. Government must follow through all policies extensively to ensure the proper implementation and avoid counter productivity. Furthermore, the lack of proper policy implementation is a reflection of the deep political contestation between South Africa’s policy makers where policies are used as ‘ political symbols’ rather than mechanisms for development.

It is based on the challenges and failures explored above that various policy recommendations can be suggested as a means of bettering South Africa’s policy framework for education. In an attempt to blur the existing cultural and racial boundaries government should encourage multicultural schools.

This can be done by declaring English as the only language used as a means of teaching within academic institutions in order to eradicate current

<https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-apartheid-on-south-african-education-politics-essay/>

language barriers. Furthermore, the curriculum in South Africa should be uniform across the whole state in order to encourage an equal quality of education country-wide irrespective of one's class or gender. School curriculums should be revised in order to accommodate a better understanding of all South African cultures. This is particularly effective during the foundational years, primary school, as it provides better exposure and in turn a more accepting mentality towards cultures other than their own. Teaching institutions do not only educate children but they play a fundamental role in shaping the norms, values and beliefs of its students. The South African education policy framework should therefore use this as a means of encouraging an education sector that is not disjointed by racial and class divides.

The second set of policy recommendations are in response to the negative impact that HIV/Aids has had on South Africa's education system, particularly in the poorer rural areas of the country. There are numerous ways in which South Africa's policy framework can reduce the HIV/Aids prevalence. The first and perhaps most important solution is to increase the awareness of HIV/Aids. This can be done in the form of awareness campaigns and advertisements as a means of educating the South African populations of the dangers of HIV, preventative methods and the appropriate medical treatment. Such awareness campaigns should be available in all of the official South African languages, in both rural and urban areas. An increase in the awareness of the effects and preventive methods of HIV/Aids is likely to reduce the new infection rate. Furthermore, HIV/Aids should be incorporated within all school curriculums in order to better-equip students from a young

age to cope with HIV/Aids. This includes the provision of psychological support within schools for students with HIV/Aids or from HIV-ravaged homesteads. This is likely to decrease the infection rate and reduce the Aids-related drop outs.

However, given the number of South Africans that are already HIV/Aids victims, it is not enough to simply educate the population about the proper medical treatment for HIV. This is likely to be of little use to the bulk of HIV/Aids victims that are unable to afford HIV/Aids medication and educate their children. Therefore, government should further reinforce the anti-Aids campaigns by subsidizing HIV/Aids medication in rural areas and provide free medication where possible. Protective commodities such as condoms should be provided free of charge by the government in public areas including higher education institutions. The availability of affordable HIV/Aids treatment and preventative methods is likely to decrease the number of Aids-related deaths and subsequently reduce the number of Aids-related school drop outs.

The third set of suggestions are in regards to the poor quality of education in many areas in South Africa, this is particularly the case on rural areas. The apparent fall in the government subsidization of schools has lead to an increase in the school fees. This has not only lead to the further exclusion of the less fortunate but compromises the quality of education due to the limiting budgetary constraints. A reported 63% of South Africa's Limpopo province is living in poverty (Thom, 2004), it is therefore no coincidence that Limpopo has consistently had the lowest matriculation pass rate between since 1994 (Department of Education, 2009). Poor quality education
<https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-apartheid-on-south-african-education-politics-essay/>

produces poor results. Therefore, the government of South Africa should allocate and fully utilize a larger portion of the national budget towards increasing the availability of good quality free education. In addition to this, government should fund and enforce campaigns that increase the awareness, particularly in the rural areas, of the benefits of gaining an education. This is expected to create a greater will to educate for both children and parents.

A final policy recommendation should be considered as a means to encourage the proper implementation of government education policy by closing the current policy/implementation gap. The government should build a strong relationship between public policy officials at a local government level and in doing so, create a link between the people for whom the policies have been created and those that create the policies. This is likely to be effective in many ways. Firstly, a direct link between the populations and policymakers better-equips policy makers to create policies that are more suitable for the populations. Policymakers will be in a better position to understand areas in need of attention and formulate policies that are likely to be effective within the area at hand. Secondly, the establishment of a solid local government will increase its capacity to ensure the proper implementation of policies on the ground and thus address the policy/implementation issue. However, in order to successfully maintain this link, the government must invest more resources into local government.

The policy recommendations proposed above are in light of the identified challenges of the policy framework for education in South Africa. However, like all other policies, there are limitations of the above policy suggestions <https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-apartheid-on-south-african-education-politics-essay/>

that must be taken into consideration. Firstly, the majority of South Africa's education challenges, namely race and class integration issues cannot be solved over night. These issues are deeply rooted in the powerful apartheid legacy that is still present today. The encouragement of multiculturalism, racially diverse teaching staffs and interschool activities are hardly enough to modify mentalities and attitudes of the population that were instilled for years under the apartheid era. Although the current population in school is too young to have experienced this first hand, these mentalities and attitudes are passed on from older generations. Therefore, the policy framework can implement various policies to encourage the break-down of racial boundaries, but it is only with time that these issues can really be watered down.

Secondly, the provision of free HIV/Aids treatment and contraceptives are argued to have negative societal spin-offs. The availability of free HIV/Aids treatment is argued to be a disincentive for the South African population to take precaution against contracting the virus. Furthermore, the promotion of free contraceptives may encourage sexual activity, particularly within the younger generation. This may have the unintended effect of increasing the rate of HIV/Aids infection, teen pregnancy and in turn, the negative effects of HIV/Aids on South Africa's education.

Thirdly, the majority of these policy recommendations ultimately require more resources from the South African government. The increase in the quality of free education, provision of free preventive AIDS treatment and medication, establishment of a competent local government all require an increase in government spending. It is near impossible for the South African
<https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-apartheid-on-south-african-education-politics-essay/>

government to afford all of these policies on its relatively limited budget considering the many other areas other than education in need of attention, for example, South Africa's health department. In addition, public officials are argued to make little difference to the implementation of policies on the grounds in many cases. Local government officials are prone to making selective implantation in their interest and ignoring those that they do not agree with. Therefore, the policy makers would be required to closely monitor the policy implementers. Finally, it should be noted that some of the policy recommendations used within this work have already, to varying extents, been implemented in the South African education sector.

In conclusion, there are various issues within the South African policy framework in need of urgent attention. The high HIV/Aids rates and poverty levels are perhaps the areas in need of the most urgent relief. On the other hand, areas of contestation such as racial and class social divides despite the numerous multiracial teaching institutions, suggest that the South African population requires more time to fully neglect apartheid mentalities and attitudes as well as long term policies. It is essential that South Africa's education department properly implements policies in order to avoid counter productivity. In addition, the monetary requirements of some of the suggested policies deem it near impossible for the South African national budget to accommodate. Overall, South Africa has achieved varying successes in the development of education but appears to have great room for improvement. In light of this, the South African government needs to properly recognize the economic and social benefits for all from a better-educated population.