

Matric results: Learner retention should be at forefront

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On Monday, 5 January 2015, Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga announced the 2014 National Senior Certificate (NSC) results for the country and the provinces. The results were received with mixed feelings and in the spotlight was the national retention rate.



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According to Jessica Shelver, spokesperson for Debbie Schäfer, Western Cape Minister of Education, the matric results have to be interpreted in a holistic manner that clearly summarises the learning journey of the Class of 2014 through focusing on two indicators, retention and number of bachelor degree passes. Are these indicators enough to tell the whole story?

Shelver stated that Western Cape had achieved the highest retention rate of 63.8% using Grade 10 as the baseline year in the learner survival analysis.

With the government pushing for Universal Primary Education (UPE) access, the enrolment at Grade 1 has significantly increased therefore a closer analysis of the key drivers of learner churn should be conducted on a continuous basis. The national education plan assumes that primary school progression will improve automatically as a result of interventions designed to improve initial access and educational quality, however, improving the quality of education alone does not imply that learner survival will be improved as shown by the data from the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) that exhibits a very high variation between mathematics test scores (a crude indicator of educational quality) and survival rates to Grade 5 (mainly determined by the cumulative dropout rates).

In as much as the retention rate and number of bachelor degree passes are measured they do not tell us the whole story of the learning journey.

Indicators that the department can add to its analysis, among others, include:

- Velocity of progression through the system of learners.
- Survival analysis of learners per topic, subject, city, district, gender, type of school.
- Over-age enrolment as a result of repetition and other factors.
- Commencement and duration of remedial actions for learners at risk of dropping out.
- Grade-specific progression bottlenecks.

To effectively contribute to the reduction of the dropout rate, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has to:

- Fully analyse the causes and effects of repetition of learners.
- Improve monitoring, accountability and incentives across the whole education value chain.
- Invest heavily in community-wide educational intervention programmes that promote Individual Social Responsibility (ISR) which in turn strengthens the learner support system.

As a recommendation, the DBE can consider automatic promotion as an alternative to forced repetitions.

ABOUT EDZAI CONILIAS ZVOBWO

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