

Teacher supply and demand by 2030: Securing SA's future

By [Angie Mtshekgga](#)

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As South Africa marks Teachers' Month, coinciding with last week's ceremony honouring the best in our teaching cohort, it's imperative to recognise the vital role teachers play in moulding our nation's future.



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The public sector's successful resolution of teacher shortages means our educators are no longer merely on “survival mode” even though resource constraints remain.

Their impact, frequently extending beyond the classroom, is immeasurable. The significance of the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme in bolstering South Africa's teaching profession is commendable. Here in black and white are facts and figures about teachers in SA today.

Since its inception, the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme has facilitated the training and integration of new teachers into our educational system.

From 2007, marking the year when bursars completed their studies and became eligible for placement in 2008, up to the most recent data for 2023, a cumulative total of 52 099 teachers have successfully completed their training through the Funza Lushaka programme.

This underscores its success in supporting teachers and rejuvenating the nation's educational system with well-trained professionals.

The impact of Funza Lushaka on teacher placement: A decade in review.

As we delve deeper into the data related to the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme, another significant aspect comes to the fore – the successful placement of these trained educators within our educational system.

This ensures that our investment in human capital translates into tangible benefits for our learners and the broader education sector.

From 2013 to 31 August 2023, spanning a decade and seven months, we have witnessed impressive placement rates across our Provincial Education Departments (PEDs).

Eastern Cape: Out of 6,608 trained teachers, 4 869 have been successfully placed, representing a placement rate of 74%. However, 1,739 remain unplaced.

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Free State: Here, we see a higher placement percentage. Of the 3 092 educators, 2,752 have found positions, marking an 89% placement rate, leaving only 340 unplaced.

Gauteng: This province has seen the training of 9,423 teachers, with 8 002 of them (or 85%) being effectively integrated into schools. However, 1, 421 are still seeking placement.

KwaZulu-Natal: With 9,012 trained educators, 6,908 have been placed (77%), while 2 104 await placement.

Limpopo: This province boasts one of the highest placement rates at 94%. Of 4,623 educators, 4,347 have been placed, leaving a mere 276 unplaced.

Mpumalanga: Here, 4,006 teachers were trained, and 3,161 (or 79%) have been placed, leaving 845 awaiting placement.

North West: An impressive 96% placement rate is observed here. Of the 2,543 educators, 2,436 have found their roles in the education system, with only 107 still unplaced.

Northern Cape: Another province with an excellent placement rate of 96%. Of 1 166 educators, 1,115 have been effectively placed, and 51 remain unplaced.

Western Cape: From 6,867 educators, 5,127 have been successfully placed, making the rate 75%. However, 1,740 educators are still seeking placement.

Of the 47 340 educators trained over the past decade and seven months, 38 717 have been effectively placed within our educational system, representing an overall placement rate of 82%.

While this achievement is worth celebrating, the data also underscores the need to address the 8 623 educators awaiting placement.

In other words, since 2013, 38 717 out of 47 340 Funza Lushaka graduates have found placement in schools, representing approximately 81.78% of these graduates. This translates to an average placement of about 4,300 graduates per annum.

To put this into perspective, Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme graduates placed in schools account for 20-25% of all graduates absorbed into the public education system each year. This figure is a testament to the programme's significant contribution to rejuvenating the teaching profession.

The financial magnitude of investing in tomorrow's teachers

However, a programme of this magnitude comes with substantial financial commitment. Between 2007 and 2022, the cumulative financial outlay for the scheme across all participating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) amounts to a staggering R13 115 645 580.95.

These figures highlight the vast number of future educators being nurtured through the programme and the immense financial commitment to ensuring their readiness to shape the next generation.

It's essential to view this not merely as an expenditure but as a significant investment in the future of South Africa's basic education system.

Investing in today's educators for a brighter tomorrow

In 2023 alone, across all HEIs, some 10,864 students have been funded to pursue their dreams of becoming educators. This comes at the cost of the fiscus of R1, 164,539,332.47. This figure showcases a substantial investment into nurturing teaching professionals who will go on to play an integral role in our basic education system.

It's worth noting that behind each bursary is an aspiring educator, a beacon of hope equipped to inspire our nation's youth. This investment signifies belief in the transformative power of education and those who deliver it.

Teacher supply and demand by 2030

The department's research indicates two major factors: the ageing teaching workforce, which necessitates a new influx of educators, and a surge in learner numbers due to population growth.

Given the current learner-educator ratio (LER) of 29.8:1, we employ around 405,000 educators in the public sector. However, by 2030, to maintain this LER, we'd require about 428,000 educators.

Failing to meet this could result in the LER spiking to 31.6:1, signifying larger class sizes and potentially diminishing the quality of education. The challenge is further compounded when considering that funding plays a significant role in our ability to recruit and maintain these educators.

But here's the silver lining: there's already a surplus. Every year, while 31,000 fresh teacher graduates step out, only 18,000 to 20,000 are absorbed into the public sector, creating a significant reservoir.

However, quantity alone isn't the solution. As the curriculum evolves with the Three Streams Model focusing on technical vocational and technical occupational streams, the quality and specialisation of training become paramount.

Our bursary schemes must pivot, possibly minimising the general academic stream and emphasising the new curricular needs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angie Mntshenga is the Basic Education Minister in South Africa.

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