

SHIFT GEARS ON EDUCATION

 YOUTH
CAPITAL

**TOO MUCH OF A CHILD'S SUCCESS
IS STILL DETERMINED BY
THINGS FAR BEYOND THEIR
CONTROL.**

The quality of their school, the community in which they live, and the colour of their skin - to name but a few. These factors set different rules and expectations for young people who are navigating their way through the education system. We know that the stakes are high: Almost half of Grade 1s will not make it to Matric,¹ half of enrolled undergraduate students will not graduate within six years and most TVET students do not complete their qualification.^{1,2}

All children have the right to quality education. But in a focus on expanding access to education, we have lost sight of the importance of completion. Now we have to sharpen our focus - getting everyone who starts, through school, university or college also has to be the shared goal of our society.

LESS THAN

A

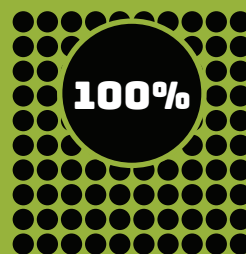
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CHANCE

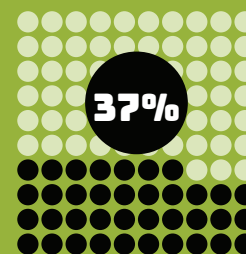
The long-standing goal of South Africa to achieve universal enrolment in basic education has very nearly been achieved. Every year across the country, thousands of young children embark on their first day of Grade 1. Buoyed with the hope and expectations of their families, they plan to spend the next 12 years laying the educational foundations for their future.

However, if we fast forward seven years, there is a good chance that a third of these children will have already repeated a grade at least once.^{3,4} When they reach grade 9, about 20% could repeat this grade alone.³ Thereafter, school is no longer compulsory for learners. As a result many will leave school for good – under the wrong assumption that they have failed, when really they had less than a 50% chance of completing to begin with.¹

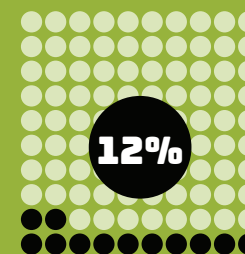
LEARNER DROPOUT RATE FROM GRADE ONE TO UNIVERSITY^{1, 19}



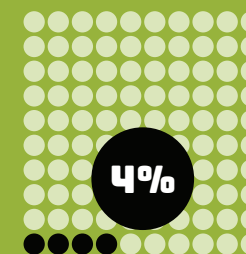
**ENROLLED IN
GRADE 1**



**PASS
GRADE 12**



**QUALIFY FOR
UNIVERSITY**



**GRADUATE WITH
A DEGREE**

WHAT IS CAUSING SO MANY LEARNERS TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?



**POOR QUALITY
TEACHING &
HIGH EDUCATOR
ABSENTEEISM**



**POVERTY,
HUNGER AND
OVERCROWDING**



**COMMUNITY
VIOLENCE**



**PHYSICAL AND
LEARNING
DISORDERS**
(Often undiagnosed)



**LACK OF A
CARING,
SUPPORTIVE
ADULT**

Various systematic issues push learners out of school instead of nurturing their development. In South Africa, the overall quality of teaching is poor, with many teachers lacking the relevant content knowledge they need to teach.⁵ This, coupled with high levels of educator absenteeism, overworked teachers⁶ and overcrowded classrooms, creates an environment for learners to fail grades early, and often repeatedly, until they feel totally unable to learn.^{3,7} Many of them will develop reading capabilities far below what is required for their grade level, while others will have undiagnosed learning disorders.⁸

Outside of school, learners face social and economic barriers that make it very difficult to learn. **More than half of young people live below the poverty line** and are faced daily with issues such as overcrowding,^{9,10} food insecurity^{9,11} and community violence.¹²

As vulnerable young people struggle in school, their families and communities are often ill-equipped or over-burdened to support them, leading to a sense of isolation and pessimism. This results in cycles of poor performance and reduced resilience, ultimately leading to dropout.¹³

By focusing only on *access* to basic education, without due attention on how to enable *success throughout the system*, we miss out on the full potential of all our young people. In 2016, the vast majority of 25-34 year olds reported that they had completed primary school,¹⁴ but **only 52% had completed their secondary education.**¹⁴

At the end of each year, South Africans open their newspapers in anticipation of celebrating the learners who passed Matric and sympathising with those who didn't. However, the thousands of learners who have been lost along the way, without even making it to Grade 12, remain invisible to both the public and the education system.

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WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE NEED.



To receive their certificates for the qualifications they have completed. Young people need these certificates in order to prove their qualifications to potential employees.



A national catchup strategy for those who are still in learning institutions but lacking basic foundational skills, and for those who have already dropped out.



Improved data tracking systems to ensure that young people's progress throughout their education journey is being monitored, and that when a problem arises it can be identified and dealt with swiftly and appropriately.



Appropriate wrap-around support in school and in post school learning institutions. This support should be informed by the realities and burdens that many young people face, and must include both financial and psychosocial support.

The majority of those who complete a learnership or apprenticeship are more likely to go on to find employment within one year and earn significantly more once they complete their qualification.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LEARNERS LEAVE SCHOOL?

For those who do not make it to Grade 12, it is possible to go directly from Grade 9 into Technical & Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges – at least on paper. However, only 9% of 15 - 24 year olds who left school after completing Grade 9 enrolled in any kind of post-school education in 2016.¹⁵ Compounding this, some colleges attempt to drive up pass rates by increasing enrolment criteria – only accepting candidates with a Grade 11 or 12 qualification for NCV courses, when on paper the requirement is Grade 9.²

For those who want to pursue an artisanal career, there are few opportunities for apprenticeships and learnerships, and they are mainly concentrated in big metros¹⁶⁻¹⁸. With that in mind, the low national participation rate of young people (0.4% of 20-24 year olds) - relative to the needs of the South African economy - isn't surprising.^{16,19} However, whether this is due to a lack of interest, awareness or opportunity is unclear. Yet, this is a missed opportunity to drive up employability; the majority of those who complete a learnership or apprenticeship are more likely to go on to find employment within one year and earn significantly more once they complete their qualification.^{18,20}

Unfortunately, for those who do make it into further education, the drop-out rates are also high. Although there is limited data on final graduation rates at TVET, it appears that as few as 10%, on average, who start NC(V) courses at Level 2 complete the full Level 4 qualification in six years.² Throughput rates are especially low in more technically demanding programmes, such as engineering and IT-related courses.²¹

While 12% of Matriculants get to enrol in university - only half of these students will complete their education within six years.¹ **The legacy of apartheid means that students who come from under-resourced schools are far less equipped**, and less supported, to manage the demands of post-school education, especially in the field of science and technology. Consequently, students from these schools are far more likely to drop out of their degree programmes.²²

WHAT FACTORS PLACE ADDED PRESSURE ON STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY?



**FINANCIAL
RESPONSIBILITIES
AND STRAIN**



**LACK OF
EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT**



**CULTURE SHOCK
AND SOCIAL
EXCLUSION**

MANY ASSUME THAT A LACK OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES IS THE ONLY FACTOR THAT FORCES STUDENTS TO DROP OUT.

It is a major factor, but is often over simplified when considered only in terms of fees and academic resources.

The double burden of a vulnerable household and a lack of financial resources places extreme pressure on students. Even among students who receive the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), around 30% drop out within their first two years of study.^{24,25}

Therefore, while financial strain cannot be understated, the lived experience of being a vulnerable student is more complicated. Culture shock, combined with social exclusion pushes marginalised students out of the university system.^{26,27} In fact, a bursary programme that aims to holistically support students at two of the top universities in South Africa reported that only 18% of its students believed that the most powerful impact of the intervention was financial and material support. On the other hand, 50% felt that psycho-social and community support were the most valuable aspects.²³

WHY IS THROUGHPUT A PRIORITY?

Levels of education are crucial to a young person's ability to remain engaged with the labour market; and become employed. The proportion of people participating in the economy (by either being employed or looking for work) increases dramatically for those who have at least a Matric.²⁸ Moreover, labour absorption rates show that higher levels of education increase a person's employability. **Forty nine percent of working-age people with Matric are employed, compared to 84% of working-age university graduates.**²⁸ However, it's important to note that racial inequality adds complexity to rates of employment even in light of education levels. For instance, a cohort study in the Western Cape highlights that unemployment, two years after graduation, amongst black graduates entering the labour market for the first time is 20%, compared to only 4% amongst their white counterparts.²⁹

On the other hand, leaving school without *completing* a qualification is a major constraint to young people who need to signal their competencies to employers in a tough job market. Over and above that, it's also an incredibly inefficient use of public finances.

Almost every child in South Africa enrolls in basic education – a significant achievement since democracy. However, for our nation to flourish we need to make the most of this time. **We have to ensure that all learners are not just going to school, but are benefitting from a quality learning experience and leaving with a recognised qualification.** Our 26 universities and 50 TVET colleges enrol around 2 million students annually; but less than half of them will leave with the skills and competencies they need to thrive, and grow the economy.³⁰

Improving the efficiency of our education systems – at a basic and higher education level – would both unlock the potential of more young people; and improve economic growth through an expanded skills base. With that in mind, focussing on *successful completion* by all learners and students is key to the long-term trajectory of South Africa.

THE LINK BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION.

Percentage of the total population who are either employed or actively looking for work²⁸



49%

WITH LESS THAN MATRIC



69%

WITH MATRIC



85%

OTHER POST-SCHOOL GRADUATES



89%

UNIVERSITY GRADUATES



A cohort study in the Western Cape highlights that unemployment, two years after graduation, amongst black graduates entering the labour market for the first time is 20%, compared to only 4% amongst their white counterparts.²⁹

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