

IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF TEACHERS (INSET): STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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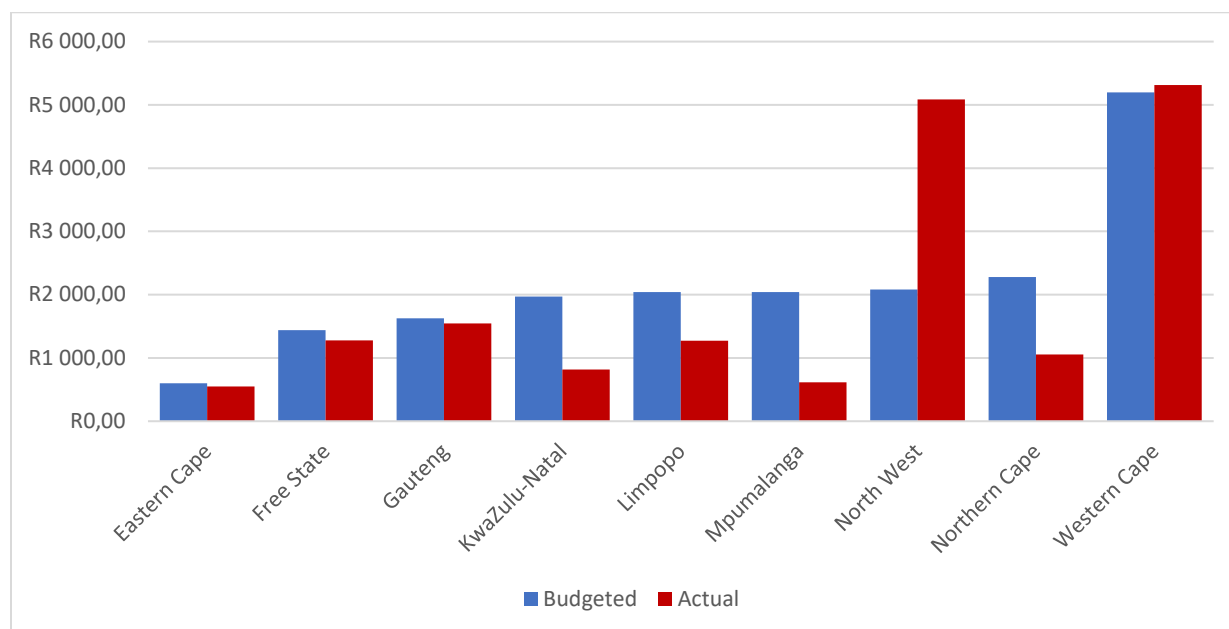
South Africa's education curriculum is constantly evolving, while the classroom environment facing teachers is changing just as rapidly. At the same time, teachers have to grapple with a legacy of Apartheid training, and instability in the teacher training infrastructure during the post-apartheid era. These two trends - shifting curricula and problems in teacher education - mean that in-service training of teachers (INSET) remains absolutely essential to better equipping educators and building a better functioning education system.

And yet INSET remains a troubled system that too often fails to properly provide for the needs of teachers. Overburdened educators rarely have the time or capacity to focus on the type of consistent training that functional INSET programmes require. While national policy initiatives – such as the “Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa” – emphasise the importance of in-service training, implementation is often scatter-shot and without proper mechanisms to assess its effectiveness. Constant changes to the curriculum and growing mistrust between educators and their departments makes for a difficult institutional environment to address these issues, while an ever tighter budget makes it difficult to justify resources for teacher training when core education priorities are so demanding.

While some of these problems represent structural barriers that are inevitable with in-service training, a number of the barriers can be addressed by a more focused and streamlined design for in-service training. A realignment of how training is managed can help address three key barriers.

First, INSET training is chronically under capacitated across the education system. In-service training is generally overseen by provincial departments, which invest varied amounts in human resource development. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, budgeted spending per teacher differs radically across the provinces. Of the nine provinces, all but two spend less than R2000 per educator on human resource development. Many of the worst performing education provinces - including the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu Natal - also spend the least on human resource development per teacher. In addition to poor budgeted expenditure levels, seven of the nine provinces underspend their human development budget, indicating poor institutional capacity to take advantage of the financial resources available.

Figure 1: Human development spending per educator, 2012/13



Chronic underspending on in-service training raises serious question on the structure of INSET administration. While provincial departments hold the education mandate, they often lack the capacity to manage complex systems like in-service training. Many of the provinces with the most vulnerable students are also provinces where poor governance and a lack of resources makes leave education department ill-equipped to meet the needs of learners. The result is a regressive distribution of training resources, in which the richest provinces with the least need have access to the best training systems. While the national department of education does have a human development budget, spending is negligible relative to the provinces – and, as discussed later, this may need to be reconsidered.

Second, and similarly related to the targeting of training to the points of greatest need, is the lack of a functional teacher evaluation system. Teacher evaluation has been a long running point of contestation in South African schools, with teachers complaining of an overburdening of paperwork related to evaluations, a lack of understanding in evaluations for the difficult circumstances in which many teachers work, and distrusting a system of evaluation that has historically been used to punish, rather than capacitate underperforming teachers. The Department of Basic Education’s Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) is just one of a long run of failed evaluation systems, that lacks both the vital support of educators and the systemic capacity to accurately find problem areas.

While there are clear issues with teacher evaluation, a working evaluation system is absolutely essential to properly direct interventions such as in-service teacher training. At present, training programmes are largely assigned on an ad-hoc basis, rather than to the points of greatest need. And while less rigorous decision-making processes, like direction from senior teachers and

principals, can fill the gap to an extent, INSET will always be limited in its effectiveness so long as the teacher evaluation system remains dysfunctional.

Third, are problems with the structure of in-service training itself. While this varies substantially, a few issues are cross-cutting. One example is the questionable use of online platforms for teacher training. While these platforms, such as the DHE's Moodle platform, do make a contribution, they are not an adequate replacement for continuous, real-life training. In other cases, sporadic and short-term courses offer a small burst of support, rather than the ongoing long-term peer education that has proved more effective globally.

Perhaps as worry is the lack of information of INSET programmes. There is extremely little centralised information on in-service training in all its variations across the provinces. The lack of information makes it hard to understand what works and what does, or to undertake any process of aligning the quality of in-service training to a single successful standard.

Moving forward on in-service training is a complex matter. The main problem for policymakers is that there is a lack of feedback in the education system to guide their efforts. The lack of teacher evaluations and the lack of feedback on training programmes makes it difficult to know where there is need for training, and which training actually works. The result is likely to be a scattershot of ad hoc policymaking that is unlikely to deliver the results that are needed.

The core strategy for improvement of INSET must be, first, a **restructuring of the institutional responsibilities for training**, in which the national Department of Basic Education takes on a large role than the provincial departments. Specific training requirements in provinces should be met by provincial administrations, but a more centralised system will better allow for building the systems needed to make change through in-service training. Second, the national department of education should undertake a **scoping study of existing in-service programmes**, to build a basis on which to compare the various provincial approaches, and assess with how they align to the national vision for teacher training. The same study should be able to identify where gaps exist and where programmes should target problem areas.

Finally, a handful of **pilot schools** should be selected to pilot the new national INSET programme. These schools should be chosen based on need, both of the teachers and the students. A limited rollout will allow for close testing of the training programme, and - importantly - will allow for consistent support over a period of time, rather than the hosting of one or two workshops with little follow up. The building of something bigger will need to be based on these few test cases. In-service teaching doesn't seem to have worked in a major way anywhere in South Africa, at least not yet. An institutional redesign will not fix this problem, but it will create the necessary preconditions to begin building a better system. Placing the programme in a central institution (the DHE) that can evaluate and build something new, and approaching it in an incremental and open way, will allow for the development of a working training system in the long term.