

DEMAND AND SUPPLY OF TEACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA



01 OVERVIEW

A recent report by Van der Berg, Gustafsson, and Burger (2022)¹, commissioned by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), shows that South Africa will face a massive shortage of teachers in the next 10 years. This scale of teacher shortages and the need to train thousands more teachers are unprecedented in our history, and require urgent policy attention from government and universities. For this reason, Resep is currently embarking on a major three-year research project of teacher demand and supply, to expand on this study and to investigate possible new opportunities that may arise from this demographic crisis.

02 MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 Roughly half of publicly paid teachers in South Africa will retire in the next 10 years

Analysis of PERSAL² data shows that 48% of publicly paid teachers in South Africa are 50 years or older and will therefore exit the teaching profession in the next 10 years (see Figure 1). This will create a large need for new teachers to replace teachers who have left they system in the next 10 years.



FIGURE 1 Age distribution of South African public sector teachers, 2014 vs. 2017

1 Van der Berg, S., Gustafsson, M., & Burger, C. 2022. *School Teacher Supply and Demand in South Africa in 2019 and Beyond: A study undertaken for the Department of Higher Education and Training*. Department of Higher Education and Training, Pretoria.

2 Personnel Administration and Salary System of the Department of Basic Education.

2.2 The demand for new teachers will double in the next 10 years

The projections indicate that to meet the future demand for teachers, the annual production of Grade 1 to 12 teachers will need to increase from a current level of around 30 540 to 59 034 by 2030 (see Figure 1).

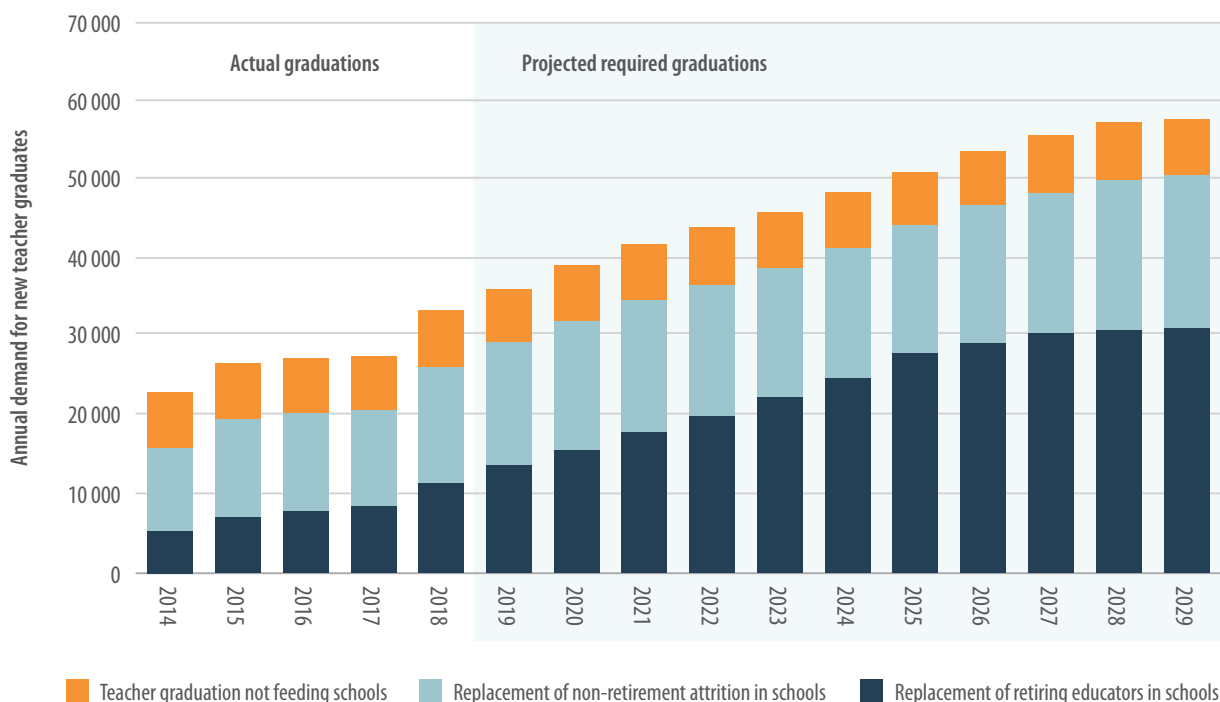


FIGURE 2 Projected demand for teachers to 2029

2.3 More teachers are needed to reduce excessive class sizes

While South African overall LE ratios fall well within norms agreed upon by unions and government³ (40:1 for primary schools and 35:1 for high schools), class size data shows that approximately half of primary school learners are in classes with more than 40 learners. Calculations of required LE ratios at the grade level indicate that more new teachers will be needed to reduce the number of classes that exceed 40 learners in the coming years. That is, more new teachers will be needed not only to replace retiring teachers, but also to reduce class sizes.

2.4 Slow teacher flows through universities constrain teacher supply

There are two qualifications that qualify individuals to become teachers in South Africa, namely an undergraduate Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, and a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), which is offered for individuals who already have an undergraduate degree in another field. Both qualifications can be pursued either full-time or part-time. Analysis of graduation rates show that the supply of teachers is constrained by slow flow-through rates especially among BEd students: Only 57% of full-time BEd students who enrolled in university in 2010 completed their degree within the minimum time-frame of four years. There are also significant differences across population groups (see Figure 2). Flow-through rates of part-time BEd students were even lower, with fewer than half (49%) of these students completing their degrees within eight years. Pass rates for the one-year PGCE are much higher, with 90% of the 2014 full-time cohort obtaining this qualification in the minimum required time.

3 Education Labour Relations Council Resolution 4 of 1995: Guideline on learner:educator ratios. <https://elrc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/1995-No-4.pdf>

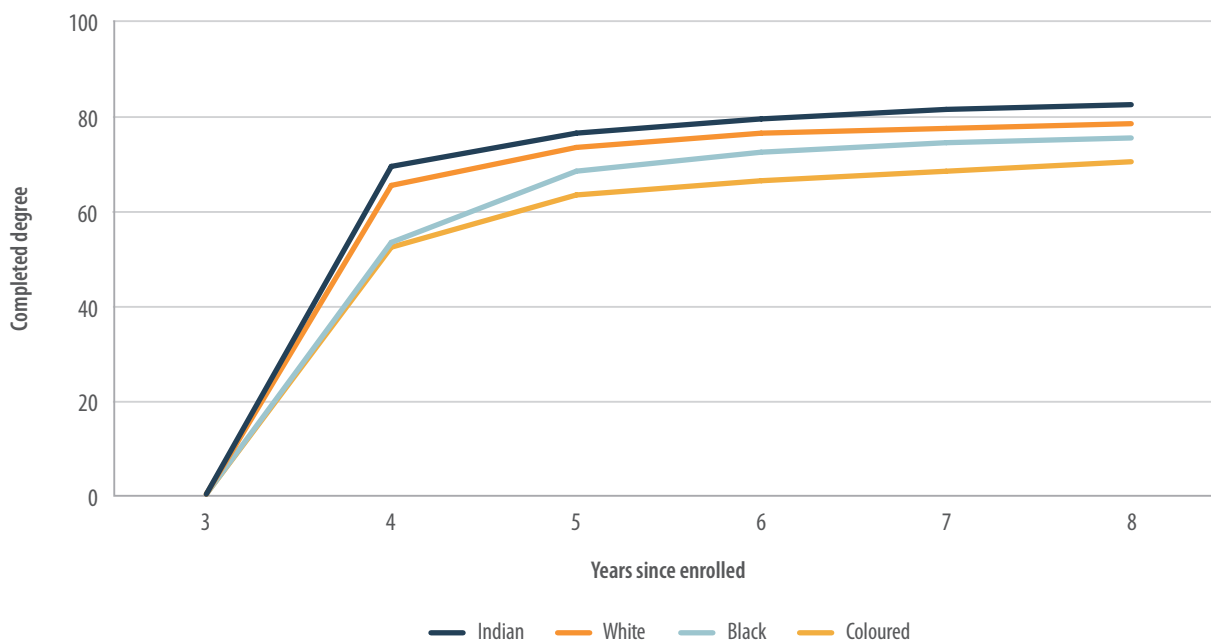


FIGURE 3 Cumulative percentage of 2010–2011 first-time entering full-time BEd students who completed degree by population group and year

2.5 Many BEd and PGCE graduates do not become public service teachers

Many individuals who qualify to become teachers do not enter the public teaching profession. Tracking BEd and PGCE graduates into the public payroll (PERSAL) database shows that less than half (44%) of the 57% of full-time BEd graduates who had enrolled in 2010/11 had entered PERSAL the year after graduating. In other words, only 25% of the initial 2010/11 full-time BEd cohort had entered PERSAL within five years of enrolling. The proportion of part-time BEd students who joined PERSAL was even lower, with only 19% of the original cohort joining PERSAL within eight years of enrolling. PGCE graduates were more likely to enter PERSAL, with 63% of full-time and 31% of part-time PGCE students joining PERSAL within four years of enrolling in their programmes.

It is unclear why many teaching graduates do not enter the public teaching profession. While some may enter the South African schooling system in another way (e.g. as teachers in private schools or SGB teachers⁴ in public schools), this does not account for all the slippage between student graduations and joining PERSAL – private schools, school governing bodies and special needs schools employ only about 17% of all teachers. More information is needed regarding what happens to such graduates. In particular, it is necessary to find out whether or not they form an important part of the ‘reserve teacher stock’, teachers who join PERSAL but who have not been observed in HEMIS since 2010 and matric data since 2008. This would imply that most of this reserve stock has qualified as teachers before 2010.

03 POLICY SUGGESTIONS

3.1 Increase the number of qualified teachers

An almost immediate expansion of enrolments in teaching qualifications is required to meet future demand. To increase graduate teacher supply will require both that universities expand their capacity to train teachers, and that there are enough potential students to enrol in such courses.

⁴ School Governing Bodies (SGBs) can appoint teachers with funds collected through school fees. Teachers with such appointments are not captured in PERSAL since their salaries are not paid by the Department of Basic Education.

3.2 Encourage enrolment shifts from part-time to full-time

As graduation rates are much higher among full-time than part-time students, encouraging more students to enroll in full-time teaching qualifications may accelerate teacher graduation. This may require an expansion of bursary schemes like Funza Lushaka, since part-time students often face financial constraints that prevents them from studying full-time. The recent expansion of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to more students may also aid in enabling more students to enroll in full-time teaching programmes.

3.3 Entice more teacher graduates to actually enter teaching

As has already been shown, a substantial number of teachers who qualify every year do not enter the teaching profession. It is possible that a tighter job market because of an economically difficult period may make teaching a more attractive proposition, in which case some of this shift may happen automatically as teaching's relative attractiveness improves.

3.4 Enable and encourage teachers to postpone retirement

Improved health has increased life expectancy, placing retirement systems under pressure due to the increased number of years that people live on average after retirement. In such circumstances, some employees may be attracted to schemes that allow them to supplement their retirement income and reduce the period of retirement by working till an older age. This can be encouraged by offering more teachers contracts to teach for a few years longer. If such contracts are made attractive enough, they may assist in postponing retirement for some teachers, thereby reducing teacher attrition. This may be of considerable value in flattening the curve of the demand that has to be met by raising production of teacher graduates.

3.5 Attract graduates without a teaching qualification into teaching

Currently, first-time graduates with Bachelor's degrees other than in teaching need to enrol for an additional year of study to obtain a PGCE if they wish to enter teaching. For some, this may be a disincentive to consider teaching rather than another career, given the additional cost of studying and the additional year that they would have to study. Offering alternative routes to entering teaching while also obtaining a teaching qualification may attract more people into teaching. An alternative, for instance, might be to offer a short induction teaching course before they start to teach, with subsequent part-time studies to complete a PGCE.

3.6 Appoint more foreign teachers

One possible way of expanding domestic teacher supply would be to import teachers from other countries that have substantial numbers of unemployed teachers, such as Lesotho, Botswana, India or Canada. The advantage of such an approach is that teachers could be imported for limited contract periods to assist in the period when the annual supply of new teachers produced by the university system is under strain, and such contracts could be planned to run out in the subsequent period, when the need for new teachers to join the public service is reduced.

04 CONCLUSION

Meeting the demand for public sector teachers that is currently increasing so rapidly will be extremely difficult, and therefore requires urgent policy attention. It is crucial that policy makers and universities debate the policy options outlined above, in particular which combination of options is most feasible, since it is unlikely that any single option on its own will address the upcoming shortage of teachers in the country. It will take considerable effort for the school system to surmount the severe challenge of teacher supply that it is faced with.