Education and the status of e-learning in a post -apartheid South Africa
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Summary (Abstract)
Prior to 1994 the South African education system was based on racial lines. The race and colour of one's skin determined where one lived, schooled, worked, played sport and socialized. The education system at both school and higher education levels was also run on racial lines with no attempt at co-ordination and collaboration. The unequal funding and different resource policies of the State resulted in huge discrepancies in the quality of education offered to the various race groups.

1994, heralded a new democratic Black majority government which had the daunting task of dismantling the segregated education system in order to create a single coordinated system for all, irrespective of race and colour. Several Acts, policies and structures were put in place to address the huge inequalities and discrepancies in the education system. The first priority was building schools and classrooms and providing the basics, suck as water, electricity and sanitation. Even now, ten years after democracy, the government is still struggling to level the education field. Consequently, computer studies, online and e-learning are not on the priority list of the Department of Education. However, the previously advantaged schools and universities have computer facilities which could match the best in the world. Thus, a decade later, the majority of the education institutions are still trying to address the ills of apartheid.

Historical Background
The Education System prior to 1994

South Africa prior to 1994, was ruled by the White minority Nationalist Party which advocated apartheid and segregated systems in all phases of life including, social, economic, politics and education. Therefore education was based on racial lines. This was reinforced by the Group Areas Act which set aside specific areas for the various racial groups. Not only were people confined to these areas but all aspects attendant to living, like schooling, recreation, commercial activities etc had to take place within the specified boundaries. Thus it was impossible for a Black child to attend a school in a White area and vice versa. In other words the colour of one's skin determined where one was forced to stay, school, work, play sport and travel within the country.

The South African education system was designed by the apartheid regime to keep the four main population groups separate by providing them with their own facilities. Whites, Blacks, Indians and Coloureds had their own separate

education departments, all with their own schools, colleges for teacher training, technikons and universities. The Nationalist Government created seventeen education departments within the four provinces. Within these four provinces, the government further created self-governing Black states, and Black homelands. The seventeen education departments were independent in the sense that each had its own unique curriculum, policy, examination, education facilities and administration. The various departments had separate and unequal conditions of service and the salaries paid to staff also differed drastically. Each department operated separately and there was no co-ordination nor co-operation among them.

The State also discriminated according to racial lines the financing of these education departments. A White student was funded almost ten times more than that of a Black student at both school and higher education levels. This resulted in huge discrepancies and inequalities in the education system. The following table consists of Teacher/Pupil ratios by race at the school level:

Africans	1 : 41
Whites	1 : 19
Coloureds	1 : 23
Indians	1 : 31

(Krige, et al : 1994: 66)

The matriculation examination like all other levels of examination was different and separate for each of the racial groups. Higher education with 21 Universities and 15 technikons also reflected the architecture of the apartheid policy of the State. Universities, technikons and colleges of education (teacher education) were established by the State to provide higher education for the different race groups. The physical location, structure and infrastructure of these institutions further disadvantaged the poor and rural communities. This led to the higher education sector being classed as historically disadvantaged institutions (HDI's) (Non-whites) and historically advantaged institutions (Whites) (HAI's)

Education in a post - apartheid era

2004 saw South Africa celebrate ten years of democracy. Within this period the education system has undergone transformation and change. The first Black Education Minister, Prof S. Bhengu in the Education White Paper 1 (1995:5) stated that "education and training must change. It cannot be business as usual in our schools, colleges, technikons and universities". Various education acts and policy documents were released to map the way forward to create a single coordinated education system. In effect this meant the dismantling of seventeen education departments.

Today there are nine provinces with their own provincial education department but administered from a single centralized education ministry. All nine provinces

are treated equally and all education institutions have a common curriculum, policy and funding is the same and access to education is open to all, irrespective of colour, race, language, creed or status. One of the main components of the Education White Paper 1 (1995) was ten years of free and compulsory education for all children and equal access to all educational institutions. All schools follow a common outcomes based education curriculum and the matriculation examination is a common one.

Higher education has also undergone transformation which drastically changed the higher education landscape. The Department of Education released several policy documents to assist in creating a single coordinated higher education system. Several education acts were passed by the State to drive the transformation process. For the first time, structures like the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) were established to assist the Department of Education to implement its new policies and procedures. Presently the higher education sector is being restructured through mergers and incorporation. This restructuring process has resulted in the closure of all colleges of education (teacher education), and has reduced the number of higher education institutions from 36 to 21 (NPHE: 2001). The National Qualification Framework, the Programmmes and Qualifications Mixes, Higher Education Quality Committee programme accreditation and the institutional audit framework have been published to work towards some uniform standards and raise the quality of education and training in the once uneven and unequal higher education sector.

PRESENT STATUS OF EDUCATION

It must be acknowledged that the present government was successful in integrating the various education departments under a single Education Ministry. Despite this achievement, there are huge disparities in the provisioning a legacy left by the past apartheid education system. Today there are still schools with no electricity, inadequate classrooms, water, sanitation and telephone lines. Many classrooms are over-crowded and the teacher-pupil ratio has not changed much. The proposed average teacher-pupil ratio is one educator for forty pupils in the primary schools and one educator for every thirty-five pupils in the secondary schools.

Thousand of students still walk and travel to schools especially in the rural areas for several hours per day. Against this the previously White and Indian administered schools are relatively well resourced and located mainly in urban areas.

In the higher education sector the historically disadvantaged institutions were fraught with student unrest mainly related to financial problems. Having run up huge debts they are struggling to provide proper facilities for the disadvantaged students. Further, the funding formula for higher education institutions in the past

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was also based on racial lines. The Education Ministry set up National Working Group (NWG) in 2002 to advise it on reshaping the landscape of higher education. It formulated an associated set of performance indicators and linked benchmarks to guide its recommendations. The NWG reduced the number of higher education institutions from 36 to 21 through mergers. (NWG Report: 2002). All except two HDI's were either incorporated or merged with previously HAI's. This resulted in staff migrating from HDI's to HAI's which further disadvantaged the HDI's under the new dispensation.

Against this background, it is interesting to note that while South Africa is often regarded as part of the third world, there are pockets of first world education facilities. Parallel to this, this developing African country also has the poorest of infrastructures where poverty, unemployment, crime, diseases are the order of the day amongst the majority of the Black citizens. Since the dismantling of apartheid, the living conditions of the majority of the rural inhabitants have not changed much and the gap between the haves and the have-nots is still the same.

Presently, the well resourced schools and universities attract the cream of students from the upper class, irrespective of race and colour. However, the majority of the poor rural and township pupils still reside in areas which are regarded as coming from disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

The status of e-learning in education

Most of the previously White and Indian schools have well equipped computer laboratories and facilities. In contrast, schools in the rural areas and for most Black pupils are still under-resourced with overcrowded classrooms, no electricity, water or telephone lines. There is an attempt by the present government to address this problem through the publication of the White Paper on e-education in 2003. Nonetheless, e-learning is not a priority at the present time in the education in South Africa. The top priority is the leveling of the educational environment and providing open and free access to education to all children irrespective of race and class. The Nelson Mandela Foundation in partnership with industry has been building schools in rural areas and for disadvantaged communities. These schools have the modern and technological facilities but have a shortage of qualified teachers. While a concerted start has been made to address the huge backlog, there is a long way to go before the educational field is leveled.

The higher education sector experiences the same problems and challenges. The Universities of Cape Town, Pretoria, Stellenbosch and Free State boast world class computer facilities, infrastructure and programmes that can match the best. The HDI's, namely the Universities of Zululand, of the North, Venda, Transkei have huge financial debts and are struggling to maintain the present

buildings and facilities. At these institutions the computer facilities and the information management systems are outdated and in a poor state.

As earlier reported the higher education landscape in South Africa is presently facing many complex challenges in an era of restructuring and transformation. E-learning is relatively new in South Africa. In fact, there is an increasing amount of e-learning taking place on campus in the traditionally contact institutions. Many higher education institutions have gone for distance education which is electronically based. Only a few institutions, namely Tshwane University of Technology, University of Pretoria and Stellenbosch University have initiated some in-house projects on on-line and e-learning. The University of Free State is advertising an e-degree in conjunction with a foreign provider. These institutions have the financial backing to innovate and offer various modes of delivery. The situation in South Africa is summed up by le Grange (2004:88) "university policies and reported research on e-learning often reflect a superficial treatment of these matters by framing them largely in technical and/or managerial terms around issues related to instructional design, institutional aims and so on. The targets and requirements set by Stellenbosch University that modules should have a minimum electronic presence within three years reflects such an approach".

Conclusion

E-learning and online education is not a priority of the Education Department and the higher education sector in South Africa. The country is still trying to grapple with and address the disparities and inequalities of the past regime. However, commerce and industry have already embarked on e-banking, online banking, e-shopping and online financial transactions. Education is lagging behind. This is primarily due to the dismantling of 17 separate education departments and in turn creating a single coordinated education system.

One of the consequences of the segregationist policies of the apartheid State was the isolation of people whose integration now is made difficult. For example, the diversity of languages encountered today, makes the medium of instruction, English, a contentious and debatable one. While the boundaries are now open to all, South Africa is on the brink of providing online and e-learning for all its inhabitants. The present African National Congress (ANC) Party Government is advocating a society free of oppression and discrimination where its people have opportunities of open access to education and training at all levels and to all corners of its borders. The White Paper on e-education (2003) is intended to fulfill this vision of the present government.

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