

Teaching as a career choice: attractors and deterrents identified by Grade 11 learners

Thomas Park

tp@sun.ac.za

Any strategic plan to address the predicted shortage of teachers will have to include the promotion of the teaching profession as an attractive career. This will, however, depend largely on how successfully the campaign takes into account the favourable and less favourable opinions and perceptions of learners about the education system as a whole and about teaching as a career. This research project focused on Grade 11 learners because this is the stage at which many learners are seriously considering different career options. The results obtained by this project highlighted specific attractors and deterrents that were identified by the respondents, which might influence their decision to consider teaching as a career. The prospect of working with children, sharing knowledge with others, playing an important part in the development of society in general, and making an important contribution to community development were experienced as strong attractors. In contrast, strong deterrents identified by the study were: the respondents' perception that pupils no longer respect teachers, their negative assessment of teachers' remuneration, the perceived unpleasant working conditions caused by poor discipline in schools, their observation that teachers do not look very happy in their jobs and the perceived extent of violence in schools.

Introduction

As in many other countries, including the United Kingdom and much of Europe, forecasts of teacher demand and supply in South Africa suggest a looming imbalance between the numbers of persons entering the profession and the real human resource needs of the South African education system. Research by Crouch for the Department of Education indicates that the total number of teachers enrolled in initial teacher programmes is far below what will be required to service the school sector in the next 30 years. His research exposes the fact that forecasts of teacher demand and supply are likely to lead to an alarming shortage of teachers in the near future. Crouch suggests that this is due in part to the AIDS epidemic, but also to an over-hasty administrative planning process to restrict teacher training capacity for financial reasons. He also points to a further complicating factor, namely to an uncontrolled (because uninformed) and relatively short-sighted negative perception on the part of young persons potentially interested in becoming teachers (Crouch, 2001:3).

One fairly direct way to assess teacher demand is simply to calculate the number of new teachers needed to replace the teachers that leave the system. In 2003, the number of teachers employed by public and independent schools in South Africa totalled approximately 362 600 (Department of Education, 2005:4). A study of long-term attrition rates reveals that there have been fluctuations in gross educator attrition during the last decade. The national attrition rate in 1997/98 was 9.3% (accelerated by rationalisation), declining to 5.5% in 2000/01 before beginning to rise again to 5.9% in 2002/03 (Mobile Task Team, 2005:26). The direct implication is that 21 300 teachers left the system in 2003. A recent survey by the Ministerial Committee for Teacher Education on the number of final year education students currently registered for teacher education programmes in South Africa showed that somewhere between 7 000 and

9 000 students would possibly qualify annually as professional teachers in the foreseeable future. Included in this statistic of newly qualified teachers, however, are a number of serving teachers already occupying posts, but who are currently enrolled for programmes through distance education. Figures on how many new teachers will actually become available for appointment at the end of the year are therefore difficult to determine accurately (W Morrow, pers. comm.). At this rate, the deficit of qualified teachers will increase by somewhere between 12 000 and 14 000 teachers per annum.

Although a head count analysis of teachers entering and leaving the profession may help to identify some of the prominent tendencies in teacher demand and supply it may not be accurate enough to form a sound basis for the educational planning of human resources needs. The Department of Education, in partnership with providers of teacher education programmes, will have to generate sufficiently accurate statistics to create precise models of teacher supply and demand for the country. A number of key variables should also be taken into account, such as the birth rate, mortality data, annual attrition rate, retention of learners in the system, distribution of teachers by phase, the demands of new curricula and the number of learners taking different subjects in the secondary phase.

Teacher supply in South Africa is also adversely affected by the drop in the number of student teachers over the last decade, especially in the period 1990 to 2001, in which the numbers declined roughly from 100 000 to 13 000. Consequently, fewer graduates have entered the teaching profession over the last decade, causing an undesirable effect on the age profile of teachers in South African schools (Bot, 2005:8).

A further negative influence in meeting the demand for teachers is the AIDS-induced decline in life expectancy of the South African labour force. This will undoubtedly have a severe influence on the prospective base of human resources overall. Educators have been identified as a high-risk group; the World Bank reports an HIV prevalence rate of 12 percent amongst educators. The implication is that by 2010 more than 50 000 educators will have died of this condition and that many more will be absent from work due to AIDS-related illnesses (Vass, 2003:193). This prediction is already evident in the relative proportion of terminations accounted for by deaths (excluding contract expiries), which has risen from 7.0% in 1997/98 to 17.7% in 2003/04 (Mobile Task Team, 2005:26). Besides the usual attrition, HIV/AIDS may lead to additional attrition among educators because morbidity and mortality contribute to stressful working conditions (Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer & Zuma, 2005:4). Taking into consideration the severe impact of this pandemic on teacher demand, it is estimated that to counteract the AIDS-generated educator imbalance some 20 000 new educators per year would have to be trained (Crouch & Perry, 2003: 496).

Forecasts of teacher demand and supply in South Africa could also be harshly affected by the present low levels of job satisfaction and high levels of job stress that are experienced by South African teachers. The results of a recent study funded by the Education Labour Relations Council revealed that 55% of educators intend to leave the education profession mainly because of unpleasant working conditions (Shisana, Peltzer, Zunga-Dirwayi & Louw, 2005:xix).

Promotion of the teaching profession

In this article I argue for greater attention to be focused on aspects that learners regard as positive (attractors) and negative (deterrents) about education and teachers as key variables in influencing their decision to consider teaching as a career. I argue that any strategic plan to

address the predicted shortage of teachers will have to include the promotion among learners of a perception of the teaching profession as an attractive career. The promotion of teaching, however, will depend largely on how successfully such a campaign analyses and responds to the existing opinions among learners and whether it adequately addresses both positive and negative perceptions among them of the education system and of teaching as a career. In this article I report on a research project that aimed to analyse and assess the opinions and perceptions of Grade 11 learners concerning the South African education system and teaching as a career. The project focused on Grade 11 learners because this is the stage at which many learners are seriously considering different career options.

Project to determine learners' perceptions and opinions

A questionnaire was designed to determine Grade 11 learners' perceptions and opinions of the following ten aspects, assessing each of which could be regarded as objectives of the study:

- the importance of good teaching for the successful development and progress of South Africa;
- the effectiveness of the present South African education system;
- the availability of teachers in South Africa;
- factors that contribute to the success of a school;
- the conduct of most of the teachers in their schools;
- their teachers' knowledge of their subjects;
- the general image of teachers in their communities;
- teacher remuneration;
- the attractiveness of education as a career;
- the influence other people on their decision to consider education as a career.

The objectives of the survey were transposed into appropriate questions to elicit the desired information needed to construct a picture of each respondent's perceptions and opinions of the education system and of teaching as a career. This was done so as to be able to identify the major attractors and deterrents. The objectives served as guidelines to ascertain what questions were needed in the questionnaire and what aspects would be extraneous to it. Although open-ended questions have the advantage of giving respondents greater freedom to express their opinions, it was decided to use closed-ended or fixed-alternative questions for the following reasons: (a) to limit the difference between more thoroughly articulate and less articulate respondents, (b) to prevent an unnecessarily long interruption of school time by limiting the time required to complete the questionnaire, and (c) to facilitate easier comparisons between the responses of the different cohorts in the target population (Questionnaire Design, undated). In all questions, itemized rating scales were used to give respondents a limited number of categories from which to select. The design also aimed to probe both dichotomous and multichotomous responses.

The draft questionnaire, which was made available in Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, was pre-tested in two stages to obtain feedback on and assess the content, wording, sequence and possible ambiguity of questions, the clarity of the instructions and physical characteristics of the questionnaire, as well as to determine the time required to complete the questionnaire (Questionnaire Design & Analysis, 1997). During the first stage personal interviews with lecturers and teachers were conducted and during the second stage a group of 30 Grade 11 learners was asked to complete the questionnaire under supervision, after which their interpre-

tations of and responses to the questions were assessed. After this pilot exercise the questionnaire for the survey was finalised.

As the total population for this research project (all South African Grade 11 learners) was too large to survey, convenience sampling as a non-probability sampling method was used to select a sample (Sampling Methods, 2004). A geographical area in the Western Cape in which a variety of high schools is situated was selected for the survey. Clearly this cannot be seen as representative of the entire population of Grade 11 learners countrywide. The eight high schools that were selected for the research project included Afrikaans, English and Xhosa-medium schools. The sample included boys', girls' and co-ed schools. First, permission was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department to approach the principals of high schools in the sample area. All eight schools agreed to participate. A set of questionnaires was completed under supervision in each of the eight schools.

The results of the survey

Section A of the questionnaire was designed to determine the biographical details of respondents. The questionnaire was completed by 1 094 Grade 11 learners. Of these, 629 (57.5%) were female and 465 (42.5%) male. A total of 1 086 learners responded to the question on home language, identifying themselves as follows: Afrikaans 730 (67.2%); English 116 (10.7%); isiXhosa 188 (17.3%) and Other 52 (4.8%). There were 1 082 responses to the question on population group, indicating Asian 9 (0.8%); white 352 (32.5%); coloured 517 (47.8%); Xhosa 195 (18%) and other 9 (0.8%).

The results of a recent informal survey conducted by Deans of Education in the Western Cape to analyse the current enrolments for initial professional education for teacher programmes at higher education institutions in the Province revealed figures that should be of great concern for education planners. The majority of the 2005 registered education students are female (79%) and white (52%). Taking the General Education and Training phase specifically, the corresponding figures are 84% (female) and 79% (white). For the purposes of this investigation, therefore, it was regarded as strategically important to assess trends regarding the relative perceptions about teaching as a career within different population groups, despite the sensitivity of racial classification.

Section B of the questionnaire consisted of eight items. These questions asked respondents to give their opinions on certain elements of the South African education system and on aspects of their own school environment. The following paragraphs set out the eight questions in sequence, each followed with a summary of responses. Significant trends in the responses of specific sub-groups are also reported.

Question 1

How important do you consider good teaching to be for the successful development and progress of South Africa? Mark one option only. (See Table 1.)

Comment: Regardless of their gender, population group or home language, the overwhelming majority of respondents regarded good teaching as essential and a prerequisite for positive development in South Africa. Less than one percent of respondents felt that good teaching had no influence on the successful development and progress of South Africa. On this question, there was a slight difference of opinion between the genders: more girls (82.3%, $n = 512$) than

Table 1 Importance of good teaching for the successful development and progress of South Africa (N = 1083)

	N	%
Extremely important; a prerequisite for successful development	863	79.6
Important, but not crucial	112	10.3
Of little importance; makes an insignificant contribution to the development of the RSA	19	1.8
It has no influence	3	0.3
Uncertain	86	7.9

boys (76.1%, n = 351) saw good teaching as extremely important. Although there were slight differences in the emphasis given, learners from all race and language groups regarded good teaching as extremely important for the successful development and progress of South Africa.

Question 2

How effective do you consider the present South African educational system to be? Mark one option only. (See Table 2.)

Table 2 Effectiveness of the present South African educational system (N = 1087)

	N	%
Very good: Answers to the South African educational needs	159	14.6
Good: Partly effective, but many adjustments need to be made	698	64.2
Poor: Mainly ineffectual and outdated	120	11.1
Very poor: Totally ineffectual	27	2.5
Uncertain	83	7.6

Comment: More than 60% of both boys and girls expressed a largely positive outlook on the present South African educational system, although there was a significant feeling that adjustments needed to be made. The strongest approval came from the Xhosa group: the Xhosa population group (36.1%, n = 69), largely overlapping with the group with isiXhosa as home language (34.4%, n = 67), assessed the effectiveness of the education system as very good in relation to the other subgroups, whose scores in this category varied between 5% and 12%. More than 65% of both the white (67%, n = 235) and coloured (69.3% n = 357) population groups judged the educational system to be good, but needing adjustments. 20.5% (n = 72) of the white population group rated the system as being poor, mainly ineffectual and outdated in comparison with the other subgroups, whose scores in this category were between 12% and 2.6%. The most unfavourable rating overall came from the group with English as home language (poor 14.7%, n = 17).

Question 3

What is your perception regarding the availability of teachers in South Africa? (See Table 3.)

Table 3 Availability of teachers in South Africa? (N = 1082)

	N	%
There are too many teachers; there is not enough work for them all	226	20.9
There are just enough teachers for all the schools	94	8.7
There is a shortage of teachers in certain learning areas only	436	40.3
There is a great shortage of teachers; many more need to be trained	208	19.2
Uncertain	118	10.9

Comment: The overall perception of shortage was highest among the white and coloured groups, with the Xhosa group being more divided in their opinion. Just under half of the learners from the white (44.3%) and coloured (47.1%) population groups perceived a shortage of teachers in certain learning areas only. The Xhosa population group departed from this trend with only 14.3% (n = 27) that perceived this kind of shortage. The largest concentration of responses from isiXhosa speaking learners indicated the perception that there was even an over-supply of teachers (48.7%, n = 92). A sizeable section of the Xhosa population group (24.9%, n = 47) shared the opinion of the white population group (25.7%) that there was a great shortage of teachers. The distribution of opinions according to home language revealed the same pattern, with isiXhosa-speaking learners again indicating in 45.1% (88) of the cases that there were too many teachers, whilst the majority of learners from other home language contexts indicated that there was a shortage of teachers in certain learning areas only.

Question 4

Which of the following factors contribute towards the success of a school? Please mark only the three that you consider to be most important. (See Table 4.)

Table 4 Factors contributing towards the success of a school

	N	%	Rank
Good principal	746	68.2	1
Sufficient classrooms	225	20.6	5
Good sports facilities	187	17.1	7
Well-equipped laboratories	64	5.6	13
Sufficient overhead projectors	43	3.9	14
Well-equipped computer room	175	16.0	8
Well-qualified teachers	695	63.5	2
Maintaining healthy discipline	436	39.9	3
Plenty of homework	35	3.2	15
A well-equipped library	140	12.8	9
Good safety and security measures	211	19.3	6
Smaller classes	270	24.9	4

Comment: All learners regarded the human part of the educational milieu as the most important factor contributing to the success of a school. This they did by indicating that they regarded a

good principal and well-qualified teachers as the two most important factors. A further nuance of this perspective was that the white (82.4%, n = 290) and English-speaking (85.3%, n = 99) learners attached significantly higher importance to these two aspects than the other population and home language groups. The next most important factors identified by learners in the sample were the maintenance of healthy discipline and smaller classes. Here too there was an uneven distribution of opinions, with the Xhosa population group ranking the maintenance of healthy discipline and smaller classes much lower than the other population groups. The Xhosa population group and those with isiXhosa as home language were the only groups that emphasised fundamental amenities, such as sufficient classrooms, well-equipped computer rooms and libraries, as contributing significantly to the success of a school. The only major difference between the opinions of boys and girls was that the boys ranked good sports facilities over three times higher in importance (28.3%, n = 131) than the girls (8.9%, n = 56) rated these.

Question 5

What is your general opinion of the conduct of most of the teachers in your school? Mark only one option. (See Table 5.)

Table 5 Conduct of most of the teachers (N = 1086)

	N	%
Their behaviour is always professional	292	27.0
Sometimes their behaviour is not professional	552	50.9
Their behaviour is mostly unprofessional	41	3.8
Their behaviour causes one to lose respect for them	200	18.4

Comment: The learner's opinion of the professionalism of their teachers tended to be positive, but not without qualification. Girls displayed a higher regard for the conduct of their teachers than the boys did: more girls felt that their teachers always behaved professionally (32.9%, n = 206), compared with the boys' opinions on this item (18.7%, n = 86), and only 15% (n = 94) of girls agreed that teachers' behaviour caused a loss of respect, compared with a larger proportion of boys (23.1%, n = 106) agreeing with this opinion. On average 33% of the white and Xhosa population groups responded that their teachers' conduct was always professional. The coloured population group scored their teachers lower (19.3%, n = 100) in terms of this category. The highest proportion of responses to this question showed that over 50% of learners viewed their teachers' behaviour as sometimes not professional. This view was held by about 50% of the coloured and white population groups, although only 35.4% of the Xhosa population group was of the same opinion. As a group, English-speaking pupils indicated the highest regard for their teachers' behaviour.

Question 6

What is your general opinion of your teachers' knowledge of their subjects? Mark only one option. (See Table 6.)

Comment: Taken together, over 60% of learners felt that their teachers had adequate and autho-

ritative subject knowledge, with just less than 20% feeling that teachers' knowledge was restricted to the textbook. But these trends contained a sharp difference of opinion between girls and boys: girls (76.6%) had a considerably higher opinion of their teachers' knowledge than boys (53.4%) had. A relatively high percentage (69.9%, $n = 246$) of the learners in the white population group indicated an opinion that their teachers possessed extensive knowledge of their subjects in comparison with the other population groups. Once again, the responses of English speakers followed a different pattern to other respondents, with learners more critical of teachers' knowledge — twice as many (31.9%) as the other groups expressed the view that their teachers know only what could be read in subject text books.

Table 6 Teachers' knowledge of their subjects

	N	%
Possess an extensive knowledge of and speak authoritatively on their subjects	665	61.6
Generally know only what can be read in the textbooks	200	18.5
Find it difficult to interpret the contents of the textbooks	43	4.0
Knowledge of the subject matter is totally lacking	13	1.2
I have no opinion about this matter	159	14.7

Question 7

What is the general image of teachers in your community? Mark one option only. (See Table 7.)

Table 7 General image of teachers (N = 1089)

	N	%
They enjoy high status and are highly regarded as very important persons	159	14.6
They enjoy a reasonable standard of status in the community	435	39.9
They have very little status in the community	148	13.6
The teaching profession is seen to be inferior	127	11.7
I am uncertain	220	20.2

Comment: The majority of both boys and girls expressed a positive opinion of the image of teachers in their community, with most of the girls (53.7%) and more than half of the boys (55.8%) indicating either a reasonable or, to a lesser extent, very high status and regard in the community. Responses suggested that among the Xhosa population group, teachers enjoyed a high status and were regarded as very important persons (the 32.3% response for this opinion was more than 20% higher than among the other population groups). Combining the top two categories of status, however, showed a closer correlation between all groups: 59.1% of isiXhosa-speaking learners, 58.6% of English-speaking learners and 51.6% of the Afrikaans-speaking learners thought that teachers enjoyed high to reasonable status.

Question 8

What is your opinion about teachers' remuneration (pay)? Mark one option only. (See Table 8.)

Table 8 Teachers' remuneration (N = 1089)

	N	%
Teachers are paid too much for the amount of work they do	67	6.2
Teachers' remuneration is realistic for the work they do	245	22.5
Teachers are paid too little for the work they do	423	38.8
I have no idea what teachers earn	354	32.5

Comment: Very few learners (less than 10% of all subgroups) were of the opinion that teachers were paid too much for the amount of work they did. The majority of boys and girls considered teachers' remuneration to be either realistic or too low, with the white and English-speaking population groups strongly indicating the opinion that teachers earned too little for the work they did (63.1% and 64.7%, respectively). A substantial proportion of learners in the coloured and Xhosa population groups (41.8% and 41.5%, respectively) stated that they had no idea what teachers earned.

Section C of the questionnaire contained two questions, requesting respondents to indicate if there were people who had (a) discouraged or (b) encouraged them in deciding whether to become teachers.

Question 9

Have any of the following groups of people ever dissuaded you from becoming a teacher? Mark all relevant options. (See Table 9.)

Table 9 People that have dissuaded learners from becoming a teacher

	N	%
Your parents	360	32.9
Your educators	312	28.5
Your friends	485	44.3
Your family	246	22.5
Members of your community	268	24.5
Foster parents	31	2.8
Total	1702	155.5

Comment: The advice to learners not to become teachers came mostly strongly from friends, parents and educators, in that order. For all groups, friends were cited as the most ardent advisors against teaching as a career, but there was more pressure from friends among boys (50.5%) than among girls (39.7%). As regards dissuasion from parents and foster parents, responses from the different population and language groups indicated that all learners received

very similar advice, but slightly more white learners (41.8%) and Xhosa learners (37.3%) were dissuaded by their parents and foster parents than was the case for coloured learners (31.3%). The role of teachers also varied between groups: more English-speaking learners (30.2%) than Afrikaans-speaking (29.5%) and isiXhosa-speaking (21.3%) learners reported that teachers advised them not to become teachers. isiXhosa-speaking learners also reported lower levels of persuasion against a teaching career from the family (11.7%) and community members (13.8%) than was the case among Afrikaans-speaking learners (negative family pressure 25.2% and community pressure 27.9%, respectively) or among English-speaking learners (21.6% and 20.7%, respectively).

Question 10

Have any of the following groups of people encouraged you to become a teacher? Mark all relevant options. (See Table 10.)

Table 10 People that have encouraged learners to become a teacher

	N	%
Your parents	248	22.7
Your educators	199	18.2
Your friends	138	12.6
Your family	152	13.9
Members of your community	172	15.7
Foster parents	37	3.4
Total	946	86.5

Comment: A comparison between questions 9 and 10 indicates that the negative advice to learners not to become teachers seemed to be much stronger than the positive advice to become teachers. In addition, there were notable differences in the ways that different population groups encouraged learners to consider teaching as a career choice: more than half (52.9%) of the Xhosa learners stated that parents and foster parents had advised them to become teachers. This was in contrast to the case for coloured (24.8%) and white (14%) learners. The teachers of Xhosa learners (26.7%) were most keen for their learners to become teachers whilst the teachers of white learners (16.8%) and coloured learners (15.7%) were much less encouraging in this regard. The responses in terms of language group yielded similar results: isiXhosa-speaking learners indicated by far the strongest encouragement from parents and foster parents (53.7%), with teachers (25%) also giving significant encouragement. Among Afrikaans speaking learners the strongest support also came from parents and foster parents (21.1%). English-speaking learners indicated that their teachers (24.1%) had encouraged them to become teachers more than their parents (14.7%), their family (11.2%) or members of their community (15.5%).

Section D, the final section of the questionnaire, invited respondents to indicate whether they were considering the choice of teaching as a career or not, and to give reasons for their answers.

Some respondents (11.6%) indicated that they were considering teaching as a profession.

More girls (13.7%) than boys (8.8%) indicated their intention to become teachers. In terms of population groups, more Xhosa learners (17.9%), followed by coloured learners (11.6%) and white learners (8%) said they were considering a teaching career. Similarly, on the basis of language grouping, more isiXhosa-speaking learners (18.6%) indicated teaching as a career choice, compared to 10% of Afrikaans-speaking and 9.5% of English-speaking learners.

Why learners do not consider teaching as a vocation (deterrents)

When asked to give their reasons for not wanting to follow a career in teaching, learners gave the following five reasons, in order of importance: *pupils no longer respect teachers* (53.8%); *teachers earn too little money* (41.5%); *poor discipline in schools creates unpleasant working conditions* (22.7%); *teachers do not look very happy in their jobs* (19.7%); *the violence in schools makes the teaching environment unsafe to work in* (15.9%). Boys and girls gave very similar responses.

Other reasons given by respondents for not considering teaching as a career were (in descending order of incidence): *there are not enough job opportunities for teachers* (11.6%); *there are not enough opportunities in the profession for promotion* (10.8%); *teaching as a career does not provide vocational security* (10.7%); *teaching offers no challenges* (9.5%); *I would not like to work with children when I am an adult* (9.3%); *teachers work too hard* (9.1%); *the status of teachers in the community is too low* (8.8%); *four years of study is too long to become a teacher* (8.3%).

In nearly all subgroups, the lack of respect for teachers by pupils was the most important reason why teaching as a career was not an attractive career choice, with the exception of the white (37.8%) and English-speaking (42.2%) learners who gave this as the second most important reason why they did not want to become teachers. The main reason given by white (59.7%) and English-speaking (58.6%) learners for not wanting to consider teaching was that teachers earned too little money. In contrast to learners from the white population group (4.8%) learners from the coloured (22.4%) and Xhosa (19.5%) population groups considered violence in schools an important deterrent. There were also striking differences between groups in the perceptions about poor discipline: the Xhosa population group did not consider poor discipline in schools as a reason not to become a teacher and ranked this very low (6.2%), whilst learners from the coloured (27.9%) and white (24.7%) population groups were more negatively influenced by perceptions of poor discipline in schools.

Why learners consider teaching as a vocation (attractors)

The five most important reasons given why learners did consider teaching as a vocation were that they would like to work with children (59.8%); teaching would give them the opportunity to work with people (33.1%); they were enthusiastic about knowledge and wanted to share it with others (30.7%); teachers played an important part in the development of society in general (22.0%); and teachers made an important contribution to community development (21.3%). Both male and female learners identified these five reasons as the most important motivations for wanting to become teachers.

The other attractors cited for considering teaching as a career were prioritised as follows: *I would like to become a principal one day* (18.9%); *teaching will provide a good future* (17.3%); *I have been inspired by my teachers' enthusiasm for the teaching profession* (13.4%); *it is easy for a teacher to get work abroad* (12.6%); *teachers get a lot of holidays* (11.0%);

teachers have high status in the community (10.3%); teachers don't have a long working day (10.2%); teaching as a profession gives one vocational security (8.6%); teachers are paid well (7.1%).

Among learners from the coloured population group, the reason "*teaching as a profession gives one vocational security*" replaced the item "*enthusiasm to share knowledge with others*" as one of the top five reasons. The white population group gave a low ranking (12th) to the item "*teaching provides a good future*", whilst the Xhosa group rated this reason 8th in priority.

The reasons given by the Xhosa population group and the isiXhosa-speaking group deviated somewhat from the general pattern. Whereas they also placed a desire to work with children first, the second most important reason stated was the desire to become a principal; third was their enthusiasm to share knowledge with others; fourth the opportunity to work with children; and fifth — a reason not mentioned by any other group — that they were inspired by their teachers' enthusiasm for teaching.

Comparison between those who did and did not consider teaching as a career

The "yes" group (learners currently considering becoming teachers) rated the importance of good teaching slightly higher (81.1%) than the "no" group (learners currently not considering becoming teachers) rated it (79.4%). The "yes" group exhibited a stronger sense of awareness of the shortage of teachers (22.8%) than the "no" group (18.7%). The "yes" group, however, had a much more positive view of the professional conduct of their teachers than did the "no" group (35.4% as opposed to 25.9%), a more positive view of the image of teachers within the community (26.8% as opposed to 12.9%), a more positive view of their teachers' knowledge of their subjects (66.9% as opposed to 60.8%) and of the effectiveness of the present education system (20.5% as opposed to 13.4%).

Conclusion

To ensure that the quality of education is not compromised and to maintain access to education for all, the previous Minister of Education, Kadar Asmal, recognised the fact that it will not be sufficient to ensure provision of physical resources only; Asmal also emphasised the importance of assessing, on a continuous basis, our human resources to ensure there is a sufficient number of teachers and that learners continue to be catered for in all schools throughout the community (Department of Education, 2002:16). To maintain the adequate flow of teachers into the teaching profession it is of paramount importance to keep this occupation an attractive career option for young people. This includes a holistic approach to teacher development that deals systematically with counteracting the factors that lead to negative perceptions among learners of a teaching career.

This research suggests that crusades to attract learners to the teaching profession should focus less on factors like vocational security, the status of teachers, the challenges offered by education, job prospects and promotion opportunities. Instead, serious attempts should rather be made to address deterrents such as the dropping levels of respect shown by pupils for their teachers, the poor discipline contributing to unpleasant working conditions in schools, and the increasing violence that makes the teaching environment unsafe to work in. The less positive perception that many learners have of the remuneration package of teachers and the uninspiring image of education portrayed by some teachers should also not be underestimated as powerful deterrents that dishearten learners and convince them not to become teachers.

The potential role of teachers as leaders in an emerging new South African society should also be articulated clearly in a more practical and specific way as respondents identified this factor as a strong attractor. To substantiate this perspective more forcefully, explicit positive attention could be drawn in a systematic way to the strategic role of teachers in the transformation of communities by their role of sharing knowledge, playing an important part in the development of democracy in general and making an important contribution to the development of community democracy and the development of citizenship at local community level.

Although training institutions as providers of teacher education programmes certainly have a huge responsibility to promote their products, this effort may be futile if the State as the main employer of teachers does not work seriously in tandem with training institutions to change the negative perceptions of prospective teachers about the environment in which they will have to work. The results of this study clearly indicated that the Department of Education as well as the Provincial Departments of Education should start to address the emergent disciplinary problems in schools and take active steps to support and promote the significant role of teachers in the development of communities.

The study therefore offers strategically important insights affecting role players at all levels of the education system. The emerging debate in South Africa on the implications of the knowledge economy for the education system has forced higher education institutions to reflect critically on their contributions to building the sorts of new knowledge that will position South Africa in the global economy and better enable the country to compete successfully in this global knowledge economy (Abrahams & Melody, 2005:7). There is little hope for the necessary sustained knowledge production by higher education if the school system fails to prepare learners for the challenges of higher education. A new constellation of national goals for social, economic and political development relies strategically on a restructured and re-orientated school system. The education corps works with human capital at a very receptive phase and teachers must be role models for learners in developing a culture of human rights, mutual respect, and an ethos of honest hard work to serve and develop the country (Western Cape Education Department, 2005:15).

Education is expected to perform a role as one of the most important engines of national development. There can be little doubt that this vision will be stillborn unless it can be carried into practice at community level by an effective teaching corps. Enticing a larger number of school learners of all race groups to become teachers and establishing an efficient cohort of teachers, education planners and providers will need to take accurate account of both attractors and deterrents as identified by this sample of Grade 11 respondents as potential teachers of the future.

References

- Abrahams L & Melody WH 2005. South African Higher Education in the "Knowledge Economy": Visions and Vignettes towards the Future. Perspectives on Higher Education 2005–2014. *SAUVCA Occasional Paper Series, Occasional Paper 2*.
- Bot M 2005. School Education in South Africa: Tracking Change over Ten Years. *EduSource Data News*, 48:1-10.
- Crouch L 2001. Turbulence or Orderly Change? Teacher Supply and Demand in the Age of AIDS. An occasional paper sponsored by the Department of Education, Pretoria.
- Crouch L & Perry H 2003. Educators. In: Kraak A & Perold H (eds). *Human Resources Development Review 2003*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

- Department of Education 2002. Conference on HIV/AIDS and the Education Sector: Together the Education Coalition against HIV/AIDS.
- Department of Education 2005. *Education statistics in South Africa at a glance in 2003*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Hall E, Altman M, Nkomo N, Peltzer K & Zuma K 2005. *Potential Attrition in Education: The impact of job satisfaction, morale, workload and HIV/AIDS*. Report prepared by the Human Sciences Research Council and the Medical Research Council of South Africa for the Education Labour Relations Council. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Mobile Task Team 2005. Educator Attrition & Mortality in South Africa. A Study into Gross Educator Attrition Rates and Trends, including Analysis of the Causes of these by Age and Gender, in the Public Schools System in South Africa 1997/8–2003/04. Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division (HEARD), University of Natal Durban.
- Questionnaire Design & Analysis* 1997. [Online] Available url: <http://www.tardis.ed.ac.uk/~kate/qmcweb/qcont.htm>
- Questionnaire design*. [Online] Available url: <http://www.lss.uce.ac.uk/1&project/QuantMethod/QuantQuestionnaire.htm>
- Sampling Methods* 2004. [Online] Available url: <http://www.statpac.com/surveys/sampling.htm>
- Shisana O, Peltzer K, Zunga-Dirwayi N & Louw JS (eds) 2005. *The health of our Educators: A focus on HIV/AIDS in South African public schools*. Report prepared by the Human Sciences Research Council and the Medical Research Council of South Africa for the Education Labour Relations Council. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Vass J 2003. The Impact of HIV/AIDS. In: Kraak A & Perold H (eds). *Human Resources Development Review 2003*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Western Cape Education Department 2005. Education 2020: A Human Capital Development Strategy for the Western Cape. Final Draft.

Author

Thomas Park is Dean of the Faculty of Education of Stellenbosch University.