

An exploration of the Annual National Assessments for Grade 9 mathematics

Background

Faced with overwhelming evidence that the problem of poor educational outcomes in the South African school system starts long before the Grade 12 year, the government has adopted various interventions aimed at addressing this. One of these was the Annual National Assessments (ANA) in mathematics and literacy.

Administered in 2014 to more than 7.3 million learners in Grades 1 to 6 and Grade 9, the ANA was met with significant resistance from unions and was not run again. As it did not have time to mature into an established assessment indicator, this study was set up to see how well it worked in two provinces (the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal) and then use the findings to recommend how the ANA could be improved and implementation enhanced in the future.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to investigate the factors which limit or enhance the validity of the mathematics ANA programme at Grade 9 level. It also aimed to critique the Grade 9 mathematics assessment tools and implementation of the ANA, and explore the extent to which stakeholders are using the information gleaned from the ANA to improve learning and teaching.

Findings

Using a mixed-methods approach, including teacher questionnaires and interviews, the following key findings emerged:

- Some teachers felt that the purpose of the ANA needed to be clarified so that the assessment could be better aligned to the purpose, because preparing learners for an assessment like the ANA is different from teaching the content.
- Many teachers thought the curriculum was overloaded and felt under pressure. Frustration was expressed about the sequencing of the topics as well.
- The extent to which mathematics teachers work together as a team differs according to the quintile of the school: well-resourced Quintile 5 schools worked better and provided more support to one another than the less resourced no-fee schools, revealing that the disparities have more to do with the ways in which the subject head supports and organises the subject team than actual resources.

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