



## **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION**

**September 2016**

### **OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF SACMEQ IV STUDY RESULTS**

#### **Introduction and background**

The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) is a collaborative network of 15 ministries of education who periodically conducts standardized surveys to assess the quality of education in Southern and Eastern Africa<sup>1</sup>. SACMEQ's mission is twofold:

- (a) To expand opportunities for educational planners to gain the technical skills required to monitor and evaluate the quality of their basic education systems.
- (b) In the process of pursuing its mission, SACMEQ generates research based information that can be used as evidence by decision-makers to plan and improve the quality of education.

SACMEQ research is informed by policy concerns identified by Ministers of the SACMEQ member countries<sup>2</sup>. The current focus is on reading and mathematics.

To date, SACMEQ has conducted four nationally representative school surveys in participating countries, namely, SACMEQ I (1996), SACMEQ II (2000), SACMEQ III (2007) and SACMEQ IV (2013). These surveys collect extensive background information on the schooling and home environments of learners, and in addition, test learners and teachers in both numeracy and literacy.

South Africa has participated in SACMEQ II (2000), SACMEQ III (2007) and SACMEQ IV (2013).

The National Development Plan (NDP)'s vision for 2030 is that South Africa should have access to training and education of the highest quality, characterised by significantly improved learning outcomes. The NDP proposes that specific focus in the period to 2030 should be the following:

- improving literacy, numeracy/mathematics and science outcomes
- Increasing the number of learners eligible to study maths and science-based degrees at university
- Retaining more learners
- Improving performance in international comparative studies

South Africa's basic education sector participates in a number of cross-national assessments of educational achievement, which makes it possible to compare the level of learning and knowledge of learners in South Africa with those from learners in other countries. These assessments include the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), the Trends in Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) and the Progress in

<sup>1</sup> SACMEQ website

<sup>2</sup> DBE presentation, 13 September 2016

Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS). The NDP has set three long-term targets in respect of two of these international assessments, as follows:

- To improve South Africa's average SACMEQ results for Grade 6 languages and mathematics from 495 to 600 by 2022
- To improve average Grade 8 scores in the TIMSS from 264 to 420 points by 2022
- Grade 8 scores in the round of TIMSS closest to 2030 should reach 500 points.

## Key findings on South Africa's performance

### a) Reading and Mathematics

**Table 3: Trends in achievement levels of Grade 6 learners in the SACMEQ countries**

	Learner reading score				Learner mathematics score			
	2000	2007	2013	Diff (2007-2013)	2000	2007	2013	Diff (2007-2013)
1. Mauritius	536	574	597	23	585	623	694	71
2. Kenya	547	543	601	58	563	557	651	94
3. Seychelles	582	575	602	27	554	551	630	79
4. Swaziland	530	549	590	41	517	541	601	68
5. Botswana	521	535	582	47	513	521	598	77
<b>6. South Africa</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>92</b>
7. Uganda	482	479	554	75	506	482	580	98
8. Zimbabwe	505	508	528	20	**	520	566	46
9. Lesotho	451	468	531	63	447	477	559	82
10. Namibia	449	497	599	102	431	471	558	87
11. Mozambique	517	476	519	43	530	484	558	74
12. ?		537	562	25		490	538	48
13. Zambia	440	434	494	60	435	435	522	87
<b>Tanzania</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>578</b>			<b>522</b>	<b>553</b>		
<b>Zanzibar</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>540</b>			<b>478</b>	<b>486</b>		
14. Malawi	429	434	494	58	433	447	522	75
<b>SACMEQ</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>77</b>

Source: SACMEQ Policy Issues Series, 2010 (for 2000 and 2007 scores); and, DBE (for 2013 scores)

## Key findings on South Africa's learner performance

The achievement results show that South African learners have considerably improved their performance across SACMEQ III and IV studies, by 63 points in Reading and 92 points in Mathematics. This compares favourably to the slight improvement in performance across SACMEQ II and III studies (by 3 points in Reading and 9 points in Mathematics).

South African learners have also achieved a mean score of 587 in Mathematics in SACMEQ IV, which is above the average score of 584 in the subject and have equalled the SACMEQ average score of 558 in Reading. In SACMEQ III, South Africa had underperformed in both reading and mathematics compared to the SACMEQ average.

### Issues for consideration

- It is commendable that the achievement results of South African learners in SACMEQ



IV have considerably improved, surpassing the SACMEQ average for the first time. This is a positive development towards achieving the NDP's target of improving South Africa's average SACMEQ results for Grade 6 languages and mathematics from 495 to 600 by 2022. However, more work needs to be done to ensure that the performance of South African learners in international standardised tests are comparable to the performance of learners from a country such as Kenya which has a similar level of development.

- The Department of Basic Education in its presentation has reported SACMEQ trends of 14 countries, yet a total of 15 countries participated in SACMEQ III (with Tanzania and Zanzibar treated as separate systems). Parliament should establish the reasons for reporting on 14 countries rather than 15 countries.
- Parliament should establish the identity of the country ranked number 12 in the SACMEQ IV results, as reflected in the Department's table. The scores reported for this country seem not to correlate with any of the previous records of SACMEQ. Similarly, the Department should clarify whether Tanzania and Zanzibar have been included in the Department's SACMEQ trends table since their scores do not seem to have been covered.
- It is commendable that the performance of Provinces such Limpopo and the Eastern Cape has improved significantly. It is also laudable that the top performing provinces in South Africa are also the best performing compared to other regions in SACMEQ countries.

→ Just to Commit those provinces of Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Western Cape on their improvement, it tells us that the intervention from the department is being taken very seriously - Keep up the good work.

(Health)

→ With regard to the drop in health knowledge - are you in a position to detect the cause of such drop, if yes is there Mechanism to assist <sup>that</sup> - Such a drop goes up? It is not your competency but it came to our attention, will you be able to get a report from the relevant department for our knowledge? It concerns us as a committee.