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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BANTU EDUCATION ACT OF 1953 AND IMPLICATIONS ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN BLACK SCHOOLS: A SOCIAL JUSTICE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) caught the world education systems by surprise and inflicted a deep-felt disruption in the previously disadvantaged black schools in South Africa. Even before the outbreak of the pandemic, the previously disadvantaged black South Africans schools experienced an educational resource backlog. These challenges dates back from the days of apartheid where Hendrick Verwoerd, the then minister of native affairs promulgated the Bantu Education Act of 1953 where the provision of substandard education for black people was officialized. This Act was based on the assumption that blacks are inferior in society and thus have to receive an education system which is second-rate. The aim of this conceptual argument is to present the critical and analytical association between the ramifications of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 on the provision of educational resources and the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the previously sidelined black schools. This paper is a conceptual argument and draws from a plethora of extant literature and is undergirded by theory of social justice as advocated by John Rawls. Further the paper also locates its thesis from Nancy Frasers' conceptions of social justice. This study is crucial in contributing to the body of knowledge on the provision of educational resources in schools and in particular-conscientize relevant education authorizes in the South African context to seriously address educational backlog in previously disadvantaged black schools.

Keywords: Apartheid, democracy, educational resources, black schools, social justice, redistribution, Bantu Act of 1953

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INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 caught the South African schooling system, particularly black schools napping. The pandemic has successfully disrupted the schooling system and the Department of Basic Education has to close schools for about a prolonged period due to this deadly and disruptive pandemic. The schooling system was characterized by occurrences of opening and closure especially when positive cases were identified (RSA, 2020). During these periods of reopening and closure, the previously disadvantaged schools experienced zero teaching in the main as compared to the privileged schools formerly known as model C schools. Most of the schools which were privileged, whites in particular continued with online teaching because they are technologically advantaged as compared to blacks (Black, Spreen, & Vally, 2020). Even pre- Covid-19, the technological inequalities were very glaring between former model C and black disadvantages schools (Govender, Breed, Bailey, Dignum, Havenga, Govender, Mentz and Dinmun, 2012). For the technologically advantaged former model C schools, teaching and learning was conducted online through technological platforms such as zoom, teams, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. Taking the argument further and in support of the assertions above, Spaul (2020) posits that "E-learning was for the middle and upper classes leaving behind the working class to fend for themselves. While parents across the cities are deeply concerned about their children's education, many do not have the access to devices, data, electricity or stationery to make remote learning a possibility"

Learners in the townships and rural villages mostly wandered in the streets even though the government called for communities to stay home to prevent the spread of the pandemic. In supporting the disruption of COVID-19, Rawat and Choudhary (2020) posit that

the novel corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic presently is a vigilant situation and all including teachers and students have been advised to remain at home so as to maintain 'social distancing' and stop the chain of virus spread. As stated earlier, the main objective of this conceptual argument is to present the critical and analytical association between implications of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 on the provision of educational resources and the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the previously sidelined black schools.

The protocols of covid-19

Covid-19 started spreading from Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China, in December 2019 (World Health Organisation, 2020). The World Health Organization working with other countries traced the rapid spread to other countries and South Africa was not excluded and it also experienced huge numbers of infections. On the 5th March 2020, the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize confirmed that the virus has indeed spread to South Africa, with the first known patient being a male citizen who tested positive upon his return from Italy. In response to this deadly spread, the president of South Africa, Ramaphosa Cyril, then established a structure called the command council to advise him. In his Statement of measures to combat COVID-19 epidemic on 15 March 2020, the following measures were introduced: Physical and social distance measures in the public spaces prevent transmission between infected individuals and non-infected individuals and protect those at risk in developing serious illnesses. These steps include physical isolation, reduction or cancelation of mass events and minimizing cramped environments in various settings (e.g. public transport, restaurants, bars, theatres, schools, churches), working at home, staying at home and promoting modifications for employers and educational establishments. The movement interventions were aimed at avoiding and

restricting the flow of the virus from one location to another.

These measures meant that even schools have to close completely. Schools which were privileged, particularly those with technological advantages decided to provide online tuition. Learners were given work to do through different online platforms which minimized the impact. In most predominantly black schools, no teaching was conducted. This was as a result of lack of technological infrastructure. As the virus was spreading and authorities realized that there would be no cure in the near future, they decided to reopen the schools under very strict measures. Social distancing was to be practiced, schools to have clean running water, learners to wear masks. In most of the black schools, these measures proved very difficult to follow because of the inequalities which date back from the promulgation of the notorious Bantu Education Act of 1953. Pre Covid-19 pandemic, despite lack of adequate and socially just resources, schooling in the black communities continued.

A brief history of Bantu Education Act of 1953

The education system during the minority apartheid government was skewed and only the white minority received quality education as compared to other races and blacks in particular (McKeever, 2017). Each of the four different races namely whites, Indians, colored's and blacks had their own education systems. The system was not unitary but administered differently. These also influenced the manner in which educational resources were provided. The minister of Native Affairs promoted the promulgation of the Bantu Education Act. "In 1953, Hendrik Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, (from 1950-1958) and Prime Minister from 1958-1966, piloted the Bantu Education Act after it was given a go ahead by the then apartheid parliament. This introduced an education policy that was depicted as one "based on the assumption of an inferior potential in

African minds" and as "explicitly designed to prepare blacks for an inferior place in society" (Giliomee, 2009).

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 was designed to perpetuate the exclusion of certain sections of society and in these cases, urban and rural black learners from receiving quality education. McKay (2007) holds the view that "the government designed this Act to give Africans an education conforming to their needs and opportunities as a separate community". The main philosophy that informed this Act can be captured by the words of then Minister of Native Affairs, articulated during a debate in parliament in September 1953 this way:

"There is no place for him [the black child] in the European [white South African] community above the level of certain form of labour.....Until now he has been subject to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze (Verwoerd cited in Troup, 1976, p.22)".

I argue that this divisive decision had long-lasting negative repercussions on the education future of black children and was a fertile ground for the furtherance of educational inequalities and the springboard for the lethal destruction of the black education system by COVID 19 pandemic. The rationale for my thesis is that the backlog as a result of the enactment of the Bantu Education Act created the problems on the provision of socially just educational resources which is still felt in black schools today. To indicate that there is still the backlog of socially just educational resources, Draga (n.d) is of the view that the majority of learners attend classes under trees and in buildings that are crumbling.

The skewed distribution of educational resources: a deliberate apartheid government project

The South African education system was deliberately founded on racially segregated grounds. Apartheid was

introduced in 1948 by the Afrikaner nationalist government and from the beginning, the intentions of this government was to ensure that the black society is treated differently in terms of distribution and access to resources. Apartheid left South Africa with a deeply unequal and dysfunctional education system (Moses, van der Berg and Rich, 2017). The distribution of learning structures, such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories and toilets were decided on the basis of privilege which, in the main benefited white communities and Afrikaners at large (Spaull, 2013).

The Non-Governmental Organizations such as churches realized that there is a serious need in blacks' communities to provide schools with resources that are just and fair. Churches started establishing its own schools with better resources such as classrooms, ablution facilities, libraries and laboratories. In desperation to perpetuate educational inequalities and targeting black communities in particular, the apartheid government crushed all the interventions and intentions of nongovernmental organizations such as churches to assist those who were excluded from structures of privilege by design. This was done through taking control of the education system and closed all the missionary schools except the Catholic schools (Overy, 2002). This process resulted in the perpetuation and the furtherance of the creation of schools of privilege in South Africa. These privileges are still spots of existence and continue to persist and entrench the vestiges of spatial inequalities that seem insurmountable for the new government. This inhuman educational resource distribution impacted on the human dignity of black learners particularly in township and rural areas. To this end, learners from white communities benefited because they were provided with adequate learning structures of privilege which are still evident in their communities currently. On the contrary, the black majority attend classes under

conditions that are socially not just. This point is affirmed by Draga (n.d) when arguing that "Crumbling classrooms, horrendous bathrooms, cracked fences, and non-existent libraries and laboratories remain a reality for thousands of school-going children across South Africa".

This statement symbolizes the degree of the challenge regarding not only the infrastructural makeup of the schools in South Africa, particularly township and rural schools, but also the inadequate and lack thereof of basic educational resources required in a normal educational setting. The pre-conditions for the reopening of schools was based on the availability of such resources which are absent in the majority of black schools. For this reason, Draga identified 23 589 schools with infrastructural challenges ranging from libraries, laboratories, no water supply, no electricity and falling buildings. How does one then fathom to ensure that education progress in the midst of the ravaging and deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

The democratic dawn of hope in providing socially just educational resources deferred

By the time of political transition in 1994, there were nineteen different racially based education departments dispensing an unequal system justified by an ideology of cultural and ethnic difference. When the new democratic government was established in 1994, top on its agenda was to redress the imbalances created by the past racially based apartheid government. When the doors of democracy opened, the new government through policy initiatives sought to equalize opportunity for historically disadvantaged racial, ethnic and economic groups through schooling and education (Carter, 2012). A transformative constitution which sought to promote social justice in all spheres of society including the education system was negotiated and developed. "This constitution is described as a

transformative document which sought to make every South African have a better life" (Draga, n.d). The Bill of Rights which is part of the constitution sets out the fundamental rights of all people in South Africa; including the right to a basic and quality education.

Despite the new democratic government with its promises to build new schools and increase classrooms in the previously disadvantaged black schools, there are still a large number of learners in black schools still having classroom problems. At the same time, there are still learners who attend under trees and dilapidated classroom (Startz, 2010; Spaul, 2013). This problem is also exacerbated by the increasing number of learners in the black communities. Questions have been raised whether the government has the political will power to address this challenge. In 2013, the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga published legally binding Norms and Standards for school infrastructure (Spren and Vally, 2006). This was as result of the pressure from the social justice groups such as Equal Education and Section 27. These norms and standards compelled government to ensure that every school is provided with water, electricity, internet, working toilets, safe classrooms with a reasonable number of learners. These conditions are critical and pre-conditions for the reopening of schools during this reign of the COVID pandemic.

It can be argued that almost thirty years after the democratic era and South Africa having a constitution which promises citizens the right to basic quality education, the Department of Basic Education still have not yet provided the majority of black communities townships and rural schools with educational resources that promote socially just education spaces. This was confirmed by the Minister of Basic Education in her address on the closure of schools that a sizeable number of schools in the rural villages still lack basic ablution facilities and running water.

Supporting the arguments above and in demonstrating that inequalities still exist today in the South African education system, Amnesty International in its recent of 2020 titled "Broken and Unequal, the State of Education in South Africa" argues that: "*South Africa is failing too many of its young people when it comes to education. Although it has made a quality education for all pupils. The system continues to be dogged by stark inequalities and chronic underperformance that have deep roots in the legacy of apartheid, but which are also not being effectively tackled by the current government. The result is many schools with crumbling infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and poor educational outcomes*". (Amnesty International, 2020).

As argued, the outbreak of COVID-19 caught the majority of these schools unprepared because the majority of black schools in rural and township have no basic running water, socially just ablution facilities to help fight the pandemic. The socio-economic inequalities is a reality even during the promised new dawn by the new African National Congress and demonstrating this truth, it is reported that by the beginning of 2019 nearly 4,000 schools were still using pit latrines, 117 which are essentially single pits covered with a wooden or concrete slab with a drop hole with a structure around it for shelter and privacy (Amnesty International, 2020). In this conceptual article, it can be argued that the inadequate or lack thereof of educational resources in predominantly black rural and township schools can be problematized as perpetuation of social injustice. It is further argued that the provision of resources on the basis of race which dates back from the provisions of the infamous Bantu Education Act for political expedience promote the social injustice agenda and perpetuated the unpreparedness of the education system during the outbreak of COVID-19.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Social justice from Rawlsian perspective

Rawls (1971) can be considered as the advocate of social justice. He was of the strong views that all individuals are expected to be treated fairly, equally and justly and should enjoy equal rights and opportunities. His arguments centers mainly around matters related to equal rights, social inequality and the fair distribution of benefits to society, and in this case educational resources that are socially just and fair. Rawls (1971) notes that every rational person deserves primary social goods such as rights, liberties and opportunities. Rawls' "principle of justice as fairness entails two critical sub-principles, namely the principle of equal rights which indicates that each person is to be granted an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with similar liberty for everyone else. Based on this assertion of Rawls, all schools irrespective of race are to be provided with educational resources which are socially just, fair and conducive. The way educational resources were provided during the apartheid government promoted social injustice in the sense that distribution of the educational resources was unfair and unjust because it was racially biased.

The educationally enabling resources such as buildings, teaching and learning materials, laboratories, libraries were unequally distributed during apartheid era (Van Rensburg, 2014; Bhorat and Kanbur, 2005; Greenberg, 2004). As argued earlier, the previously disadvantaged schools in townships and rural villages were not provided with adequate and appropriate resources for learning like their privileged counterparts. This contributed towards the promotion of social inequality which is still evidenced currently in the South African education system (Badat and Sayed, 2014).

Nancy Frasers' 3-dimensional social justice framework

Nancy Fraser contributed a lot on the scholarship of social justice and analysis of contemporary societal developments from a normative theoretical perspective (Dahl, Stoltz and Willig 2004). "Her analytical framework is applicable to current, empirical studies of struggles about recognition and she relates them to classic struggles of redistribution" (Dahl, Stoltz and Willig, 2004). The framework of Nancy Fraser is deployed in this study to analyze how education resources were distributed during apartheid and the implications they have on the education system of the previously disadvantaged black township and rural schools.

Fraser's work draws on 3 dimensions namely recognition, redistribution and representation. Fraser positions' the struggles of the recognition of cultural differences, redistribution of resources at the top on the agenda of her discourses. Fraser is of the view that social justice requires the elements of recognition and redistribution. During Apartheid government, the distribution of educational resources was skewed on the basis of race (Giliomee 2009). The black South African majority was not recognized and were not even represented in parliament because they were deliberately denied the right to vote. Educational resources were provided on the basis of privilege based on race and this resulted in maldistribution and misrepresentation. Fraser uses the notion of bivalent collectivity which means both recognition and redistribution are not mutually exclusive but are intertwined (Robeyns, 2003). She argues that a bivalent collectivity is a group of people that suffers both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition (Robeyns, 2003) of which blacks constitute this group.

She further argued that the bivalent conception of justice which includes both distribution and recognition should not be reduced to the other and the distribution of educational resources should be conducted on the participation parity principle (Fraser,

2008).__Even though currently, the majority of black South Africans have the voting rights which is a form of representation, the system in the main exclude blacks from participating in economic structures as equals (Fraser, 1998). Similarly, Cazden (2012) is of the view that in the educational meaning of redistribution, resources require that more equitable distribution should be the principal thing and the previously disadvantaged and those denied access should be provided with such opportunities. For Keddie (2012), to achieve equitable distribution dimension of resources, equity in schooling policy should be a precondition.

A comparative analysis of unequal learning conditions

In the next sections, focus will be on the comparison of the provision of education in different communities.

Education provision through the lens of under-privileged black schools



Figure1: Underprivildged learning space



Figure 2: Underprivildged home space



Figure 3: Inadeqaute clean running water



Figure 4: Socially unjust school building

The figures above indicate an education system that was and still part of the previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa. As argued earlier, this was a consciously designed strategy by the former racist apartheid government. It is unfortunate to note that this state of affairs in the education system is still evident more than two decades after the new government took over. There are huge numbers of learners who are still without proper sanitation, proper and habitable classrooms, without adequate teacher learner support materials. At the same time many schools who are not yet technologically ready despite the talk of the Fourth industrial revolution. The absence of technological tools does not only affect learners and teachers, but also school management teams, especially in dep rural areas. The absence of technological tools means that these schools cannot provide tuition to learners during the period when schools were closed for a prolonged period as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. When schools

experience prolonged closure due to the pandemic, learners from these schools were left educationally destitute and this state of affairs further promotes inequalities in the education system.

Education provision through the lens of the minority privileged schools



Figure 5: Privileged home learning space



Figure 6: Socially just learning space



Figure 7: Clean running water



Figure 8: State of the art school building

The figures above (figure 5, 6, 7 and 8) depict the provision of the education different from the scenarios painted in the first four figures 1, 2, 3 and 4. These figures provide an insight understanding of the education provision for the schools which benefited during the apartheid and further perpetuated during the current democratic era. These figures (5,6,7 and 8) depict learners who are attending public schools like those in figures (1,2,3 and 4) with the sharp contrast regarding the provision of the learning resources and spaces. For an example, a deep contrast can be that of technological resources where, figure 6 demonstrates a classroom fully equipped with computer laboratory where each learner has his or her computer. It can be clearly seen that these learners are under the supervision of three teachers comfortably seated on the chairs whereas the previously disadvantaged are uncomfortably seated on the floor. Figure 3 indicates that learners in the disadvantaged schools are required to go and get water outside the school whereas their counterparts are having tap water as demonstrated by figure 7.

One of the requirements of hygiene measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 is for schools to have adequate clean running water to ensure that they wash their hands regularly. In the absence of such, it is difficult for learners in black schools to do such. It must be stated that most of these schools do not have running water in their communities, let alone the schools. The technological contrast

between the technology driven classroom where each learner is provided with a computer under the tutelage of not only one teacher, but a number of them as reflected in the figure implies that online learning was and will only be provided to the privileged schools during this COVID - 19 testing times. The horrendous conditions under which black learners are subjected to go against Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which enjoins all countries to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education (Hak, Janouskova and Moldan, 2016). These conditions will further subject under-resourced schools to low learning outcomes and low throughput rates. The impact of the pandemic on education is likely to be most devastating in countries with already low learning outcomes, high dropout rates, and low resilience to shocks.

Practical recommendations for schooling system post the pandemic and future pandemics

The virus-induced disruption offers an opportunity for all actors in the education sector to rethink the system and discuss how to educate future generations (d'Orville, 2020). The reality is that this pandemic is not here to stay. It will pass and life has to continue much and as result normal schooling will resume. Therefore, COVID-19 must be seen as an opportunity to force education bosses and researchers to think how the future will look like post the pandemic. It thus critical that we need to take a deep breath and reimagine education post the pandemic. The following recommendations are based against the backdrop of the theories of social justice as espoused by Rawls and Fraser discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Flowing from this assertion, in this article, I argue that the following recommendations are fundamental for the South African education post COVID-19.

Creation of socially just and safe learning spaces

Even though the new government post-apartheid tried to provide socially just classrooms by building schools for the previously disadvantaged black communities, there is a need to do more by building adequate classroom spaces, particularly in places where learners still attend under trees and in buildings that are not socially just and those posing a risk to the safety the schooling communities. As figure 4 indicates, there are still learners who attend classes under horrible conditions.

Fast tracking of the technology driven curriculum

The South African government and those who are trusted with the provision of the education have not taken the technology driven curriculum seriously particularly in black communities. Many disadvantaged schools, however, did not have the means to facilitate satisfactory online learning (Parker, Morris & Hofmeyer, 2020; Spaul, 2020). The education system be characterized by the hybrid schooling system wherein both virtual and face to face particularly in the previously disadvantaged black schools should be used for teaching and learning. This should include the provision of technology devices to both teachers and learners. Access should also be accompanied by ensuring that teachers are trained to be proficient in handling such instruments. Finally, digital beneficiation is critical in that the technological intervention should benefit the schooling agenda by ensuring that teaching and learner performance are improved.

Immediate provision of running and drinkable water to all previously disadvantaged schools

The provision of clean and drinkable running water is a constitutional basic right. As indicated in figure 3, the education authorities need to ensure that all schools in the villages and townships are provided consistently with clean running water.

These recommendations have been suggested and are critical in ensuring that the past injustices are speedily addressed.

Limitations and direction for future studies

The primary limitation of the study is that it is not an empirical study which collected data from participants to hear their views on the implications of Bantu Education Act of 1953 and its implications of inadequate resources on the COVID-19 pandemic. The study relied on extant literature. Besides, this study was limited to Apartheid government and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and did not dig deep on the failures of the democratic government on redressing the provision of education system problems. Flowing from the assertions above, it is recommended that the future studies consider deploying a qualitative study which will include the use of participants. The perceptions of participants will enhance the study and provide a better understanding of an analysis of Bantu Education Act and its implications on the COVID 19 pandemic in the schooling system.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to provide an analysis of the association between the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and the effects of inadequate educational resources on the COVID 19 pandemic. In exploring this purpose, a number of themes were discussed. The article focused on the outbreak of the pandemic and how the South African government under the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa and his command council dealt with the outbreak of the pandemic. One of which was the closure of all schools. The study further gave a detailed exposition the education system and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 promoted by Hendrik Verwoerd. Under this Act, blacks who were referred to as the "bantu" were viewed as inferior and thus receiving substandard educational resources. The study additionally focused on the failed attempt of the new democratic

government decades after ascending government offices to provide socially just educational resources. This article was framed within the social justice theories of Nancy Fraser and John Rawls. Furthermore the graphical anatomy of the comparison between the affluent and the underprivileged was provided. The discussions clearly indicate that, the Bantu Education Act can be associated with the back log of the provision of socially just educational resources to schools. Based on this conclusion, it can further be argued that these laid the perfect recipe for the disastrous consequences of COVID-19 on the education of the black majority.

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