CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

This research set out to investigate, through a quantitative analysis of access and participation in schooling, whether or not South Africa has fulfilled its constitutional obligation of providing access to basic education for all and how far it has gone with making further education and training ‘progressively available’. What do the results in Chapter 4 reveal about South Africa’s achievement of universal access to education? Has South Africa attained universal access to basic education as required by the constitution? Is further education being made progressively available?

Writing on universal access in the 1980s and early 1990s international observers and analyst have argued that attaining NERs of 90% to 92% was the maximum that could realistically be expected in terms of achieving universal education for both developed and developing countries (Hawes, 1983; Williams, 1983; Colclough & Lewin, 1993). These estimates were based on an analysis of international enrolment trends at the time, which found that the average NER for developed countries was 92% (Colclough & Lewin, 1993, pp.18-19). It was also believed that enrolling anything more than this would be almost impossible to achieve as the ‘the last 10%’ includes ‘a high proportion of children from very “marginal” groups’, for whom providing education is difficult and expensive (Williams, 1983, pp.160-161).

If one accepts that universal education is attained when an NER of 90% to 92% is achieved, then with a 92% primary NER and an 89% NER in the basic phase, it would appear at first glance that South Africa has achieved universal primary education and is very close to achieving universal basic education. With these levels of access, it could be argued that South Africa has not only achieved the goal of universal primary education set out at the Education For All conferences held in Jomtien in 1990 and Dakar in 2000, but has, in fact, surpassed it by including two years of junior secondary school in basic education. This is reinforced by the fact that gender does not significantly influence access to primary and basic education.
However, a more comprehensive analysis of the data reveals that universal access to basic education for all has not yet been achieved. If one looks at the data disaggregated according to province, it can be seen that universal education does not apply equally across the provinces, and there are huge variations between the provinces. Provincial NERs at primary level range from 87% to 101%, and at basic education level NERs vary from 85% to 96%. Only five provinces have primary NERs in the 90% to 92% range or above: namely the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the Northern Cape. At the basic education level this applies to only two provinces – the Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape.

While access is affected by provincial location, it would appear that the historical legacy of the province and its relative wealth and present level of advantage do not always seem to affect access in a way that one would have expected. Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, despite their historical disadvantages and their positions as the two poorest provinces in the country, have high levels of access to schooling (overall NERs of 88% and 91% respectively), while the Western Cape and Gauteng, despite being wealthier provinces with the highest levels of household income, have relatively low levels of participation (overall NERs of 82% and 85% respectively). While it is evident that the relative wealth of a province does not mean that access to education in that province will be better, the reasons for this anomaly need to be further researched. It is highly possible that issues such as race, levels of urbanisation and historical patterns of schooling are influencing access to education in ways that need to be investigated.

Ninety-two percent was seen as the maximum feasible target for the NER in the early 1990s as this was the average NER for developed countries at the time. Since then the average NER for regions such as Western Europe, North America, East Asia and the Pacific has increased, reaching 96% in 2001 (Unesco, 2004, pp.292-293). It could be argued that it is unfair to compare the level of access of a developing country like South Africa to that achieved by highly industrialised, developed countries in Europe, North America and East Asia and that perhaps different standards of achievement in terms of access need to be established for developing countries. However, the disaggregated provincial analysis shows that some provinces in South Africa, such as the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, have achieved primary NERs
comparable to, or within reach of, 96%. These provinces, furthermore, are not the relatively wealthy, more urban provinces. They are, in fact, among the more impoverished provinces, with large rural populations. If these provinces, despite their relative disadvantages, can achieve NERs comparable to those of developed countries, it is not necessary to establish different standards to judge levels of access in developing countries. If the rate achieved by developed countries is considered to be a realistically achievable objective for universal education, and, therefore, 96% is now seen as the benchmark for attaining universal education, then South Africa still has some way to go to achieve universal education for all in many of its provinces.

Furthermore, as discussed in the literature review, the concept of universal education must go beyond a quantitative expansion of schooling and must include the notion of the provision of quality education. The process of attaining universal access to education must be related to the quality of schooling offered and the attainment of knowledge and skills. If retention is low and repetition high and a significant proportion of participants in education system have not learnt much after a number of years in school, then the attainment of universal education must, as Hawes (1983, p.127) states, be considered ‘bogus’.

In South Africa qualitative improvements have not kept pace with the quantitative expansion of the system. As a result there are still high rates of grade repetition, children dropping out of school for periods of time, large numbers of school-aged children out of school, and a large number of children failing to complete their education. In this respect then as well, South Africa still has some way to go to achieve universal education for all.

With regard to making further education and training progressively available, this would appear to be an area of concern. While the NER for secondary education increased between 1997 and 2001 from 57% to 61%, most of this improvement is likely to have occurred in the two secondary school grades that make up basic or compulsory education. After compulsory education ends participation in education begins to decline, with children dropping out in increasingly greater numbers in grades 10, 11 and 12. The biggest decline is linked to the massive drop-out of learners going from grade 11 into grade 12, as weak grade 11 learners are being
discouraged by their schools from progressing to grade 12 if it is thought that they might not pass the matric examination. While 665 000 children of compulsory school-going age (7 to 15 years) are not in school, almost 900 000 children aged 16 to 18 years are out of school. Access to the further education phase is a problem for both males and females, but it appears that males are less likely to continue with and complete their education than females. As many of the learners dropping out of school before grade 12 are not finding their way into further education and training institutions or adult education institutions, they are effectively being excluded from education.

It is difficult to assess whether or not further education has been made ‘progressively available’ as no baseline was ever established for this phase and no goals or benchmarks, such as a certain NER by a certain date, were ever set against which to judge the extent to which access has been made ‘progressively availability’. So while the secondary NER increased between 1997 and 2001, it is hard to judge where on the continuum of progressive improvement this can be placed, especially as the improvement was accompanied by a decline in GER. It is also difficult to know if all the improvement occurred in the junior secondary phase which is part of compulsory education or whether some improvement was recorded in the further education phase. The failure to set benchmarks for making further education and training ‘progressively available’ is symptomatic of the fact that, as the DoE states, it is ‘not obliged to ensure universal enrolment’ in the further education and training phase. As long as grades 10 to 12 are not considered to be part of basic education and the DoE has no obligation to ensure full access, it is possible that progress in further education and training will be slow rather than quick. Progress will also remain slow as long as pressure to produce good matric grades results in schools limits the number of children progressing into grade 12.

A limitation that faces all researchers who undertake a quantitative analysis is the quality of the available data. This too, has been a limitation of this research. Previous claims about the level of access to education (Department of Education, undated (a) and 2003a; Perry & Arends, 2004) have been limited by the fact that they were estimates based on projections or models. By using population and enrolment data from the same year (2001) this study has been able to overcome this restriction by
calculating indicators of access and participation based on actual numbers rather than estimates. However, the inconsistencies and inaccuracies in both the population and enrolment data for 2001 made it difficult to undertake a really rigorous assessment of access. Accurate and consistent data are essential if one is to evaluate trends, identify areas of concern and facilitate planning. While much progress has been made with regard to the provision of education information since the mid-1990s, when a national integrated education management information system (EMIS) was established 6, the data collected by the ASS are still inadequate. The ASS data are incomplete and there are inconsistencies in the data which means that their accuracy cannot be relied on. The data are so problematic that very few provincial education departments even use the data, preferring to use the Snap Survey data as they are seen to be more accurate and timeous. But, the Snap Survey does not collect the level of data that is asked for in the ASS, which means that education departments cannot undertake the level of analysis that would enable them to monitor access, quality, efficiency and policy implementation.

One possible reason for the problems with the quality of the ASS is that the survey form is very long. The 2001 ASS was 23 pages long and required over 80 pieces of information to be filled in, much of it very complicated and time consuming to collate. As a result, schools do not always fill in the survey or they do not fill it in completely and accurately. In addition few schools get any feedback from the provincial departments in respect of the information they provide and, therefore, they see little value in completing these forms accurately. The Snap Survey, on the other hand, is very short, requests the most basic information, it is quick and easy to capture, and it is clean. It is probably the fact that it is concise that ensures that the data collected are relatively complete and accurate. If useful information is ever to be collected through the ASS, it is suggested that the DoE consider shortening the ASS and making it easier for schools to complete. Much of the information collected in the ASS is not required every year and could be collected every three or five years. Examples of these sorts of data in ASS include: information on learners by grade according to home language; learners by grade according to age; learners according to language of

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6 The first year in which common data, based on common descriptors, were collected for each and every school in the country was 1997. So by 2001, common data for the country as a whole had been collected for only five years.
teaching and learning; functions performed by governing bodies; learners by special education need, by gender and by home language; information on extra-curricular activities; information on physical facilities; failures; and information on repeaters. Much of this information is requested every single year and what is provided is so bad that it cannot be used anyway. Reducing the amount of information required in the ASS would improve the completeness and accuracy of the data provided.

If real progress in attaining full access to education at both the basic and further education levels is to be achieved, rigorous qualitative research must be undertaken to complement any quantitative analysis so that appropriate policies can be put in place that respond to the barriers that are preventing this from taking place. This research paper has identified several areas of concern that require further investigation so that the exact extent of their impact on achieving universal education can be assessed and, if necessary, appropriate responses put in place.

Further research is needed to focus on identifying the reasons for the high repetition rate, especially among boys, the obstacles that force children to drop out of school both temporarily and permanently, and the problems which are preventing children from entering grade 1 at the correct age. This would include issues such as hunger and malnutrition, cognitive barriers, the quality of the education provided, provision of resources, the curriculum, transport problems, economic pressures to work, the demands of family responsibilities, and the role of age-grade regulations in preventing access to education. Further research is also needed to ascertain why more wealthy provinces have lower enrolment rates than more impoverished provinces.

One factor which will have an enormous impact on maintaining existing levels of access to education and improving on them in the future, is the high rate of HIV/AIDS in the country. HIV/AIDS will impact on access to education in two respects. Firstly, it will affect the provision of education through increased debility and mortality of teachers, as well as the departure of teachers for other professions that are also being affected by HIV/AIDS (Badcock-Walters, Desmond et al., 2003, p.4). Secondly, HIV/AIDS will affect access to education through increasing the need for children to care for family members who are ill or for younger siblings, through fewer resources being available in HIV/AIDS-affected homes to pay school fees and other costs.
related to schooling, through learners dropping out or being withdrawn from schools as they become orphaned and poverty increases, or through the increased need for children to become breadwinners (Coombe, 2002, p.9; Case & Ardington, 2004). The consequences of this would be that orphans, at-risk children and those in HIV/AIDS-affected homes might not enrol in school, delay enrolling, attend school erratically, repeat grades or drop out in large numbers (Coombe, 2002, p.8). It is anticipated that the number of AIDS orphans will rise from 200 000 in 2002 to almost 2 million by 2010 (Coombe, 2002, p.8). By 2015, when the epidemic is expected to peak, about 10% of South Africa’s population (between 3.6 million and 4.8 million children) will be orphaned (Coombe, 2000).

In conclusion, while South Africa has made great strides in providing access to education, universal access has not yet been achieved and providing access to education for all will be extremely difficult. South Africa is faced with the challenge of providing education for the last 10% to 20% of children who have been excluded from school and for whom providing education is costly as this group comprises ‘a high proportion of children from very “marginal” groups’ (Williams, 1983, p.161). In addition to this South Africa is also faced with the problem that its capacity to sustain and improve on the current levels of access is threatened by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Future progress in terms of access to and participation in education must continue to be monitored, and in order to do so it is essential that good accurate and consistent data is available.