

Abstract

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, significant strides have been made in (ensuring equal access to) education. With that Section 29 of the highest law in the land – the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) – has made provision for the realisation of a basic education for all citizens. Moreover, significant portions of the national budget have since been set aside annually in ensuring the realisation of this right. Yet, the quality of education remains unequal across municipal space(s), even against the backdrop of the amalgamation of previously disadvantaged spaces (such as Luphisi) with affluent areas (such as Mbombela/Nelspruit). This has resulted in the persistence of ‘two worlds of education’ within municipalities as in the case of Mbombela Local Municipality. A world of well-resourced schools and exceptional matric pass rates flourish in Nelspruit/Mbombela, while a world of impoverishment and low academic performance rates is experienced in Luphisi. This research refers to this predicament as ‘structural inequalities between Model C and Rural Schools’ resulting in spatial educational inequalities.

The research explores the problems re structural inequalities between Model C and Rural Schools, using the case of Sdungeni Secondary School in Mbombela Local Municipality’s Luphisi village to uncover these hindrances. The report departed by focusing on birth location and the socioeconomic background of learners and how this has a great influence in the kind of education a learner is likely to receive. Using the qualitative method of enquiry, which is a multi-layered type of research technique that crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subjects, the study arrived at presenting a cohort and demonstration of multiple truths rather than ‘a single truth’. The research brought to light that whilst the government has made concerted efforts at ensuring the equal structures of education in different municipal spaces, these efforts are still hampered by class (as a residue of apartheid) as well as government’s adoption of neoliberalist policies which further perpetuate the rich-poor divide. It was also noted that the confusion regarding the governance of schools – due in large part to traditional and/or structural issues – may be hindering the upgrading of rural schools with amenities and higher grades. Consequently, schools – by virtue of their location, morphology, still play a significant role in reproducing and perpetuating social class divisions as well as ordering different societies according to their ‘latently prescribed’ nature(s) of function.