

Education - Learner-to-educator ratio

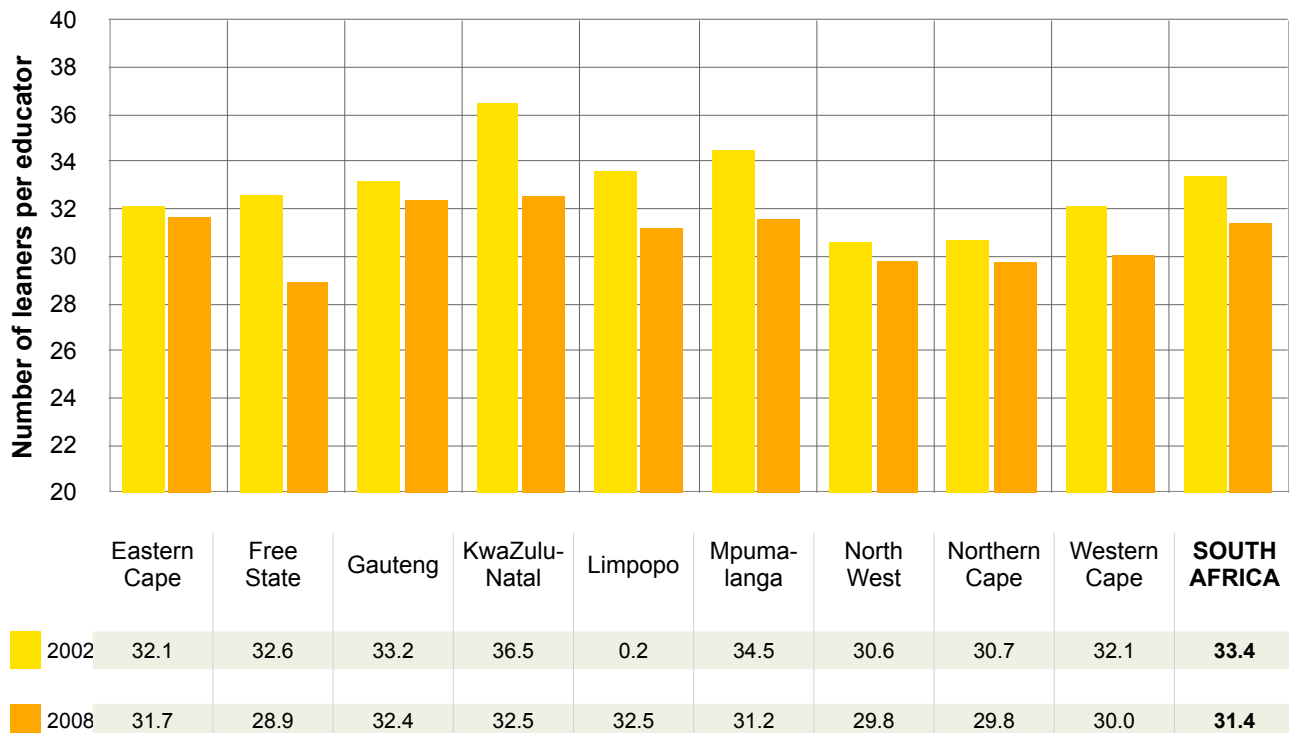
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Definition

The learner-to-educator ratio (LER) is the average number of learners per educator at a specific level of education, or for a specific type of school, in a given school year.

Learner-to-Educator Ratio for children enrolled in public schools in South Africa



- Source**
- Department of Education (2002 - 2008) *Education Statistics at a Glance 2000 - 2006*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
 - Department of Education (2009 - 2010) *Education Statistics in South Africa 2007 - 2008*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Note 1. The data are estimated from the new provincial boundaries and may not be directly comparable to the previous years

What do the numbers tell us?

The learning environment and the resources available to aid the learning process are vital factors that impact on children's ability to learn. Educators are key resources in that learning process. Learning outcomes are determined partly by the qualification and motivation of educators, but quantitative research has also indicated an association between learner-to-educator ratios and educational outcomes for children. ¹

The learner-to-educator ratio contributes directly to the quality of schooling offered. The more crowded the classrooms, the less educators are able to give personal attention to learners to help them along in the learning process. Learners in overcrowded classes may find it difficult to follow the lesson, or to ask questions when they do not understand the material taught. Moreover, in the context of HIV/AIDS and the high number of children affected by the pandemic, educators could play an important role in identifying and supporting children who are particularly vulnerable, and in linking them to appropriate support services within or outside the school. The larger the class, the harder it is for educators to know the circumstances of individual learners.

According to the Department of Education data, South Africa saw a slight increase in the LER for ordinary schools between 2000 and 2004, but has seen a decrease in the LER since 2004 (partly due to the inclusion of teachers employed by school governing bodies). The average LER in public schools in 2008 was 31.4, down from 32.4 in 2007. As can be expected, there are huge differences in the learner-to-educator ratio between public and independent (private) schools – at a national level, the LER in independent schools is approximately 16. The ratio also tends to be higher in primary schools than in secondary schools.

The national and provincial average LERs in public schools is within the nationally and internationally desired level – set at a maximum of 40 learners per educator in primary schools and 35 learners per educator in secondary schools. ² However schools – and classes – vary enormously in size, and some educators have classes of 50 learners or more. ³

One factor influencing the LER is the ability of schools to employ more educators when needed. Some schools are able to employ additional educators using school fees that they raise. However, schools that cannot collect (high) fees from their learners, are likely to have high LERs. High LERs may also be due to school mismanagement. ⁴

Technical notes

The ratio is calculated by dividing the number of learners by the number of educators for a specific school type (eg public schools). It is important to keep in mind that the ratio does not necessarily express number of learners per teacher: The number of educators may include principals, and other teaching support staff in schools. The department defines 'educators' as "any person who teaches, educates or trains other persons at an education institution or assists in rendering education services, or who renders education auxiliary or support services provided by or in an education department". ⁵

Strengths and limitations of the data

The education data are based on the Department of Education's annual SNAP ('snap-shot') survey, conducted across the country on the tenth day of the school year. Data are therefore based on information gathered on one day towards the beginning of the school year, rather than over the year as a whole. As this survey is conducted annually, data should be available on a yearly basis but are usually released two years later. Data processing systems differ across the provinces, with some more efficient than others.

The data collection and processing of this survey have been known to be problematic and even erroneous, and the accuracy and reliability of the data is therefore questionable. The Education Department has previously noted this problem, and there have been efforts to improve quality controls in recent years. The Department has signed the Protocol for Inter-Governmental Cooperation with Statistics South Africa, which means that data must comply with quality standards in order to be accredited as official national data. Statistics South Africa's Statistics Quality Assurance Framework (2008) provides data quality guidelines and monitors the quality of the statistics being produced in the country. This may help to ensure better data quality for the Department of Education.

Related links

- > [National Department of Education](#)
- > [Education Management and Information Systems \(EMIS\)](#)

References

- ¹ Crouch L & Mabogoane T (2001) No Magic Bullets, Just Tracer Bullets: The role of learning resources, social advantage, and education management in improving the performance of South African schools. *Social Dynamics*, 27 (1): 60-78; Simkins C & Paterson A (2005) *Learner Performance in South Africa: Social and Economic Determinants of Success in Language and Mathematics*. Pretoria: HSRC Press; Van der Berg S (2006) *How effective are poor schools? Poverty and educational outcomes in South Africa*. Stellenbosch University: Economic Working Papers 06/06.
See also qualitative studies:
Bray R, Gooskens I, Kahn L, Moses S & Seekings J (2008) *Growing up in the New South Africa: Childhood and Adolescence in Post-Apartheid Cape Town*. Unpublished Manuscript;
De Lannoy A (2008) *Educational Decision-Making in an era of AIDS*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cape Town.
- ² Crouch L & Perry H (2003) Educators. In: Kraak A & Perold H (eds) *Human Resources Development Review 2003: Education, Employment and Skills in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press & East Lansing : Michigan State University Press.
- ³ Phurutse MC (2005) *Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning in South African Public Schools*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. Report for the Education Labour Relations Council by a research consortium comprising the Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health Research Programme of the Human Sciences Research Council and the Medical Research Council; Serrao A (2008) New policies set to shake up education. *Daily News*, 2 August 2008.
- ⁴ Ibid; Bray R et al (2008) *Growing up in the New South Africa: Childhood and Adolescence in Post-Apartheid Cape Town*. Unpublished Manuscript; De Lannoy A (2008) *Educational Decision-Making in an era of AIDS*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cape Town.
- ⁵ Department of Education (2008) *Education statistics in South Africa at a glance in 2002 – 2008*. Pretoria: Department of Education: 4.



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