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## Lockdown leaves 13 million pupils without adequate schooling

News24 Wire



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### **The PSC noted when schools reopened, it was clear some did not meet all the prerequisites for the reopening as indicated by the minister of basic education.**

As Covid-19 hit South Africa and schools closed as a result of the lockdown, approximately 13 million pupils were affected and left without any form of adequate schooling.

This according to the Public Service Commission's (PSC) quarterly bulletin which looked at the period between 1 April and 30 June 2020.

The bulletin, titled Pulse of the Public Service, focused on governance matters in the public service sector, including service delivery during the lockdown and the overall number of complaints and grievances handled by the PSC until 30 June.

Following lockdowns by countries around the world, the adoption of remote learning was seen as the solution to schools being closed.

However, the PSC said Covid-19 exposed the glaring inequality in the education system as it became manifest in the digital divide of online learning between and within countries, including high-income countries to support online learning during school closures.

"The situation is worse in middle- and low-income countries in which the majority of learners do not have sufficient access to the internet or the necessary devices to enable online learning at home," it added.

#### **Affected**

"South Africa fits into this latter category in which learning has all but ceased for millions of learners since the beginning of the lockdown."

According to the PSC, 13 million pupils were affected and could not school remotely.

It added only 20% of schools had access to internet connectivity for teaching and learning purposes, according to a study by JET Education Services. Furthermore, the reality is that many of these learners do not have access to stable electricity, television and internet connections at their homes, which exacerbates the struggle to gain a quality education.

"The question is, should schools be opened or closed and do school closures increase inequality and poverty given that schools provide essential meals to hungry children? There are no easy answers, however, solutions must be found." [\(https://citizen.co.za/\)](https://citizen.co.za/)

"For countries in which schools have massive resource and infrastructure constraints, it is almost futile to speculate on the benefits of the 4th Industrial Revolution [4IR] or even some of the modern technology that many in the enfranchised classes take for granted."

The PSC said possible solutions to the problem could include turning to education programmes on lower-technology options like television and radio to dramatically increase access to remote learning.

"One such tool that South Africa can leverage on is Interactive Radio Instruction," the PSC said.

"According to the World Bank report on Improving Education Quality through Interactive Radio Instruction, the concept is to combine broadcast radio or another audio medium with an emphasis on active learning to improve educational quality.

"However, it is different from the conventional distance learning programmes because the intention is not just to increase access but more importantly to improve educational quality."

#### Reopening of schools

The PSC noted when schools reopened, it was clear some did not meet all the prerequisites for the reopening as indicated by the minister of basic education.

This includes instances where the supply of personal protective equipment was not sufficient, equipment such as thermometers were dysfunctional as they provided wrong readings, and the still present issue of pit toilets.

"To observe social distancing, the Department of Basic Education ensured that an average of 20 learners were accommodated per class. This is indicative of the historical infrastructure challenge. Provision for isolation rooms was also not provided in the majority of schools."

The PSC provided feedback to the department on the improvement of conditions in anticipation of the other grades returning to schools as the Covid-19 regulations are eased.

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