

The Impact of High school teachers' Strikes on the Quality of Students' Education and Further Education in The Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

South Africa is plagued by protests, including teachers' strikes. This study sets out to examine the impact of teachers' strikes on the quality of education students receive and the subsequent choice of university and programme. A sample of 112 social work students is randomly selected and a semi-structured questionnaire is administered. The findings show that the impact of teachers' strikes on students' quality of education and academic performance has been enormous. This has been gauged through the number of years students took to complete Matriculation (end of year) examinations and the number of times they wrote. This has thwarted the academic careers of some students who otherwise would have been in some of the top universities and/or preferred programmes. Hence, learners' right to quality education is compromised.

Keywords: Matriculation; teachers' strikes; right to education; academic performance; quality education; poor performance.

Introduction

The development of children is the first priority on the country's development agenda, not only because they are vulnerable, but because they are the supreme assets and also the future human resources of the country. Education bestows on children empowerment which enhances the realization of other rights such as political rights, right to housing; health care, food, water and social security rights. The education process requires one who is going to acquire new discipline and new information while on the other side, there ought to be one who imparts the professional knowledge that the one party has to acquire. This highlights the importance of both the learner and the teacher relationship within the education and learning process (Phillips, 2013). Noddings (2015), Tangwe (2016) stressed that main purposes of education is to nurture the intellectual growth of learners with the intention to develop not only the persons who are being educated but intended to benefit their families, communities and the country as a whole. The impact of education on the lives of individuals is therefore life changing as it allows them to live lives that are reasonable and further boosts the individual's sense of self and esteem. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs also revealed that it is through education that the needs for self-actualisation and growth can be achieved and that education enhances the ego and the dignity of the citizens. According to Tay and Diener (2011), education goes beyond benefiting the one educated person, but it also affects positively the lives of the people in the person's surrounding and also the economy in its entirety through taxation. Education provides individuals with skills to enter the labour market and in so doing; they contribute in the economy of the country (Fossen & Büttner, 2013).

The South African education system during the 40 years of apartheid was structured on racial lines; hence, education was discriminatory. South African disparities resulting from apartheid still pose challenges not only in the educational sector but also in the country as a whole. Despite the government's effort to rectify these imbalances in education so as to ensure the right to quality of education as enshrined in national, regional and international instruments, the legacy of apartheid is still visible. This problem is compounded by the South African higher educations have failed to transform (Cloete, 2016). The

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greatest challenge is in the poorer provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape where illiteracy rates are still high and matriculation (end of year exams) pass rates are low (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2015). The right to education is enshrined in section 29; sub-section 1 (a) which stipulates the right to basic education. Section 28, sub-section 2 reiterates the child's best interests as paramount concerning matters relating to the child.

It is not deniable that much has been done for democracy in 1994 to improve the quality of education in disadvantaged contexts. However, many still express the views that teachers are still too burdened by the constraints within their teaching environments. Consequently, improving the quality of education will warrant what Makina (2014:295) terms "a re-imagining of the entire education system, with a view of empowering the teacher." Attempts have been made by the government to strengthen the quality of education in South Africa. Government expenditure on education constitutes about 20 per cent of the government's total expenditure (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2015; Phillips, 2013). Notwithstanding the massive expenditure by the South African government on education, quality education remains elusive for the majority of children (Heystek, 2014; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit and van Deventer (2016). Smuts (2014) maintains that inadequate teacher training and conflicts between teachers' unions and the government department of basic education contributes enormously to the poor quality of education and poor students' performance. Similarly, Moletsane, Juan, Prinsloo and Reddy (2015) report that the quality of education and poor performance of learners also result from teacher absence from school, especially in schools in areas of multiple-deprivation.

Some politicians blamed poor quality education on local languages, but Desai (2016: 343) maintains that "there is a growing move towards using global languages such as English as media of instruction... the success or otherwise of using English as a medium depends a great deal on the context learners and teachers find themselves in." According to Hill (2016: 520), there is a complex link between race and the ways in which historically disadvantaged groups have engaged with the post-apartheid educational opportunity structure. Therefore, this has led to poor quality education among these groups. Wilson-Strydom and Okkolin (2016) drawing from capabilities approach, argue that it is important to take into account of both instrumental and intrinsic values of education and enablers such as domains of school, family and community for educational wellbeing and achievement. Despite this massive number of schools and students across the province, access to quality education and students' performance is troublesome (Wilmot & Dube, 2016; du Plessis and du Plessis, 2015).

The Bill of Rights on Labour Relations matter in section 23, sub-section 1 states that "everyone has the right to fair labour practices." Subsection 2 (c) also affirms every worker's right to strike (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This constitutional right of involvement in strike has yearly been put into practice by most teachers in South Africa. Many have argued that teachers' strikes in South Africa are influenced largely government's neoliberal economic policies (Amoako, 2012). Because of the teachers' frustrations with the government's neoliberal economic framework, unions have resorted to high level militancy (strikes). Not only are these strikes meant to increase salaries and working conditions, but also linked to broader social and political discontent such as poor service delivery, corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and growing inequality. These strikes are organised under the auspices of the National Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU); South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU); Confederation of South African Trade Union (COSATU); National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA); and sometimes backed by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS).

A debate is also raging regarding the incessant strikes that are organised in South Africa vis-a-vis the right to strike and the right to education. Some think that strike at the verge of students' examinations; teachers' strike could be "an unconstitutional infringement of pupils' right" because of the effect on students (South African Press Association [SAPA], 1999). The relationship between the learner/teacher is a key component that is ought to be considered in order to achieve quality education (Govender & Basak, 2018) and that is the teacher contentment over working conditions. This is a critical factor in then improvement and achievement of a concrete education system that should benefit the learners with good quality education (Phillips, 2013). According to Philips (2013), the smooth facilitation of quality education is dependent on the teachers as they are the ones responsible for facilitating the processes of educating people and their satisfaction with

their working conditions therefore becomes significantly important as they are the key role players in ensuring quality education.

However, Section 36 (1) provides for the limitations of rights and sub-section 2 stipulates that there should be no limits to any right enshrined in the Bill of Rights, except those in section 36 (1) (Republic of South Africa, 1996). According to Deacon (2014), although the “South African Constitution enshrines both children's right to a basic education and teachers' right to strike, a conflict between these two often occurs when the way in which teachers' unions conduct strike actions detracts from learners' education. Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the impact of teachers' strikes on the students' quality of education and the resulting programme choice and admission to university.

A lot has been written in newspapers and other media outlets about education in the Eastern Cape Province. However, there is a dearth of literature on the impact of teachers' strikes on the quality of education as well as academic performance of learners and how enrolment in tertiary institutions is affected. It is hope that the findings of the study will generate further debate regarding teachers' right to strike and learners' right to education. The findings will also be useful to educational authorities of the province through taking some important steps to redress some of the many problems facing education in the province. Finally, the study will contribute to knowledge base in the field of human rights, more specifically, learners' rights to education and trade unionism. The next section is a brief description of the problem and followed by the aim and research questions that guided the study. The methodology, findings and discussion sections follow in that order. The conclusion and recommendations are the last sections of this paper.

2 Problem statement

When teachers join strikes, there are usually disruptions of classes at the learners' detriment, especially the Grade 12 learners who have to write their final exams in preparation for entrance into tertiary institutions. Learners' school work such as finishing of the curriculum for tests and examinations cannot be achieved and this results in poor academic performance which is cyclical in nature. Many schools (about 40% in the country) were categorized as “underperformers” over the years in the Matriculation pass rate (Masitsa, 2013). It is an obvious situation that many of these schools are found in the Eastern Cape given its dismal performance in the School Certificate over the years (Kumalo, 2015). While teachers agree that teaching is a noble profession in the world, many blamed the government for undermining the teaching profession. Every year they have to beg for an increase in salaries through strike actions whose repercussions are pushed onto the learners (Amoako, 2015). As one teacher categorically maintains, “if we are unhappy we will pass the unhappiness to the pupils” (Matomela, 2010:8). It is also noted that the brunt of the strike will be borne by prospective first year applicants in university or what some writers call first time undergraduate applicants (Deacon, 2014). It is revealed that the matriculation results have continuously been dropping in the past decade, and more than 50% of learners drop out before they even reach matriculation (Kumalo, 2015). Because of the continuous teachers' strikes in the country, the grade 12 learners from poorer schools have been labeled as an abandoned generation who are going to crash out in their final exams, while some have castigated the strike as an unmitigated disaster for poor children (Wills, 2014). Regarding all the distractions and other factors that lead to learners right to quality education being derailed, Professor Jansen maintained that “the schools of the poor are routinely disrupted or trashed by adults, by unions, activists, gangsters, without an effective intervention” (SAPA, 2012).

3 Aim of the study and research questions

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of high school teachers' strikes on students' quality of education and further education in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What is the impact of teachers' strikes on the academic performance of learners?
- 2) What is the quality of education received by learners from the province?
- 3) How has teachers' strikes affected entrance to tertiary institution and programme of choice of learners?

4 Limitations of the study

The research findings are limited to the population that formed part of the study because the sample does not claim to be representative of all students in the Eastern Cape Province. Firstly, this is because, the University of Fort Hare (Alice

Campus) was purposefully selected. Secondly, parents, teachers, secondary and high school students as well as educational authorities of the Eastern Cape Province were not afforded the opportunity to participate in the study. This latter approach would have been able to provide a proper and a much clearer view of the impact of teachers' strikes on students' rights to education with some high level of certainty and accuracy; hence generalized findings to the entire province. Finally, because the issue of protests and strikes is a burning one in South Africa and generating much debate, this paper draws heavily from national newspaper articles.

5 Research Methodology

5.1 Research design: Quantitative

This study adopted a quantitative research design through a sample of students at the University of Fort Hare, who were surveyed to be able to ascertain the impact of teachers' strikes on students' quality of education. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people (Neuman, 2014), in this case, the students.

5.2 Sample and sample selection

In this study all the students at the University of Fort Hare, Alice campus (551) who completed their studies and passed Matriculation examinations in the Eastern Cape province made up the total population of the study. Therefore, international students, most of whom are Zimbabweans and other students from other provinces of South African were excluded from participating in the study. The estimated number of students on the Alice Campus of University of Fort Hare is 9000 while the entire student population is about 13000 on three campuses; Alice, Bhisho and East London (Vice Chancellor's Report to Senate, October 5, 2015). However, only a sample of 112 students was selected to participate in the study. Firstly, the University of Fort Hare purposefully selected while Social Work Programme from where the sample was drawn was randomly chosen. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample according to gender and year of study. The respondents were selected through the use of the simple random sampling technique. Simple random sampling allows each member of the subset to have an equal chance of being chosen (Stangor, 2011), thus, an unbiased representation of the group.

Table 1: Number of Social Work Students (Alice campus) in the Eastern Cape according to gender and the selected sample

Level of study	No of E. Cape Social Work Students		Total	Sample (selected using simple random sampling)		
	Male	Female		Male	Female	Total
Year One	16	39	55	3	8	11
Year Two	49	115	164	10	23	33
Year Three	39	109	148	8	22	30
Year Four	43	141	184	9	29	36
Total	147	404	551	30	80	110

Source: University of Planning Unit, University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus (October 26, 2015)

As mentioned earlier, social work students were randomly selected to constitute the sample as they made up the largest single department at the University of Fort Hare. More-so, the student population of this department is made up of young and older persons, especially with the scholarship programmes offered to more than 90 percent of them. This therefore provided an opportunity to get the younger and older generation of students who had experienced teachers' strikes during their secondary/high schooling before enrolling at the University. Fifty respondents were therefore selected within the four years of study; the number of students who were selected at each level of study was determined by the number of social work students from the Eastern Cape. A comprehensive list was obtained from the University Planning Unit from where the sample was drawn. Only those who had experienced at least one strike during their secondary/high school periods were selected.

5.3 Methods of data collection

There was one type of data collection method; a survey, which made use of semi-structured questionnaire that was, administered to 112 social work students at all the four levels of study. This was supplemented by secondary sources, particularly newspapers. The following databases subscribed by the University of Fort Hare were consulted for newspaper articles: SA News (Sabinet) and SA publications. Using semi-structured questionnaire in this study was very important because the researchers randomly selected 112 social work students to fill in the questionnaires. Although the questionnaire was a semi-structured one, the vast majority of questions were structured with only a few unstructured questions. The questionnaire was constructed based on research objectives of the study and was in different sections to reflect the objectives as well demographic profile of the respondents. The questionnaire was administered by the researchers during times when students were not having lectures. The questionnaires were self-administered as all the students were able to read and write.

5.4 Reliability and validity of data collection instrument

The type of reliability that the instrument of data collection; the questionnaire was subjected to is stability, reliability, which is reliability across time. It answers the question does the measure deliver the same answer when applied in different time periods? This was done through a test - retest method which ensures only external consistency and not internal consistency, which is common in the physical sciences. It implied that the questionnaire had to measure the same phenomenon more than once. This was done through piloting of the questionnaire to five students from another department, sociology. The actual administration revealed that the questionnaire was reliable as it measured the same phenomenon over time with the same results. To ensure the validity of the data collection instrument, face validity was adopted. The questionnaire was judged valid by two colleagues and two friends who all are university academics.

5.5 Methods of data analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of data (Stangor, 2011). Quantitative data from semi-structured questionnaires was analysed quantitatively with the help of SPSS. The questionnaires were personally edited and open-ended questions were coded and the data captured into the SPSS spread sheet. This was followed by cross-checking of data for transcription and capturing errors. The results were presented using figures and frequency distribution tables.

5.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical procedures are established in order to protect the physical and mental integrity of individuals, to respect their moral and cultural values as well as their religious and philosophical convictions (Neuman, 2014). In addition to their other fundamental rights as indicated above, there was the respect for privacy of the respondents whilst maintaining the highest level of confidentiality. An ethical clearance was sought from the University Ethics Committee.

6 Findings and discussion

6.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Data was collected from 112 students at the University of Fort Hare. Table 2 shows that the bulk of the respondents (73%) were females whilst 27% were males. According their year of study, table 2 reveals that 43% of the students were doing their fourth year at the university; 30% and 27% were in their second and third year level respectively. The least number of the respondents (10%) were doing their first year of study at the university.

Table 2: Gender and year of study of respondents

Gender	Year of study				Total
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	
Male	3	10	8	9	30 (27%)
Female	8	23	22	29	82 (73%)
Total	11 (10%)	33 (30%)	30 (27)	38 (43%)	112 (100%)

NB: Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers.

Table 2 shows that female students or respondents dominate the sample; from the first year to the final year. There are obvious reasons for this dominant of females in the social work programme. Some of the reasons include the fact that social work, nursing and education were originally thought to be the exclusive domain of women. Simply put, they were predominately employed in these professions as they were considered motherly and very caring of children, the elderly and the sick. Although things are changing, and men are penetrating many of these fields, they are still dominated by women in Africa as the findings reveal in the case of the social work programme.

The respondents represented 22 of the 30 districts in the Eastern Cape Province. Fig 1 shows the percentage of respondents from each of the districts. Fig 1 indicates that about 13 % of the respondents (14) were from King William’s Town; 11 of them represented by about 10 % were from the Port Elizabeth district. Ten each, made up of nine percent came from Butterworth, Cofimvaba and Fort Beaufort. Gramhamstown was represented by 8 respondents (7%) and the rest of the other districts had representatives ranging from one to six respondents.

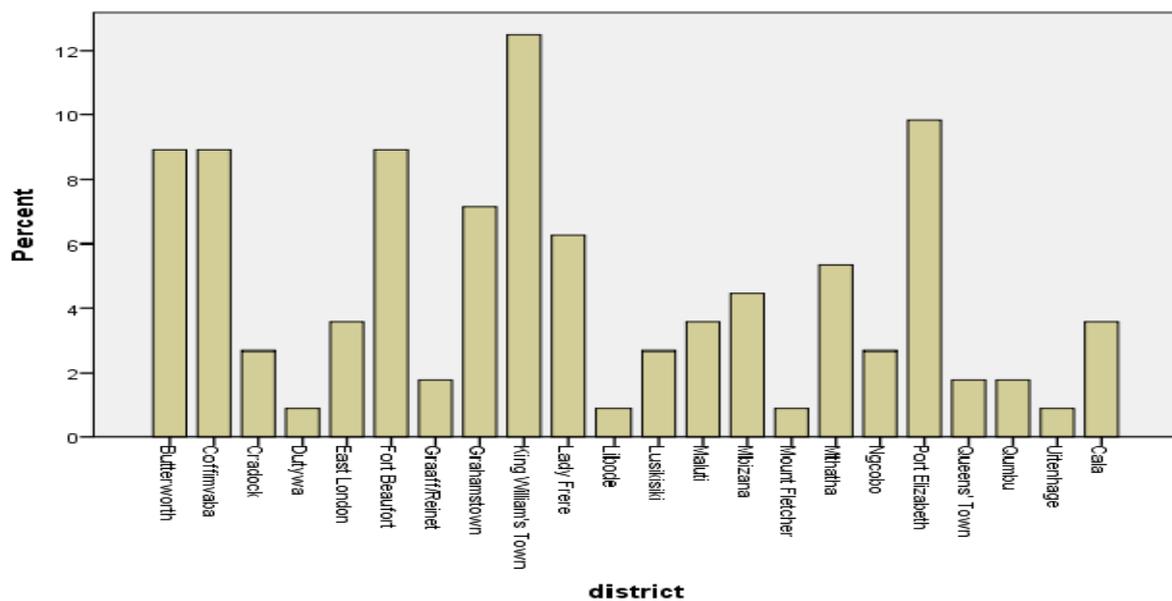


Fig 1: Distribution of respondents according to district

6.2 The impact of teachers’ strikes on the number of times respondents wrote examinations and the number of years completed secondary/high school studies

In order to determine the impact of teachers’ strikes on the quality of education and academic performance of the respondents, they were asked the number of times they had written matriculation examinations, the number of years they took to complete their studies. Also, they were asked the particular year that they completed their secondary/high school. Generally, Table 3 represents the respondents’ year of study and the number of times they wrote Matriculation in order to pass and proceed to tertiary institution.

Table 3: Respondents’ year of study and number of times written Matriculation

Year of study	Times written Matriculation				Total
	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	
Year 1	7	3	1	0	11
Year 2	27	3	2	1	33
Year 3	19	8	2	1	30
Year 4	23	10	4	1	38
Total	76	24	9	3	112

According to Table 3, a total number of 76 (68%) respondents revealed that they wrote only once with the bulk, 27 (24%) emanating from those that were in their second year of study. However the least number, 7 (6%) came from the students who were in their year one of their study. Further Table 3 indicated that 24 (22%) respondents said that they wrote two times whilst nine (8%) revealed that they had to undergo three times before passing their Matriculation examinations and only three (3%) who made up the least number sat for Matriculation examinations for more than four times. The findings point to the fact that 32% of the students wrote their Matriculation examinations more than once, two, three and four times. No one will dispute the fact that teachers' strikes could have contributed significantly to this; although there are other factors such as poverty and lack of teachers and books as well as infrastructure such as library and equipped classrooms. The end-result of all of these is the poor quality of education that is provided to students and the denial of their rights to education which many have described in various castigating terms, citing various legal instruments protecting children's right to education (Baker, 2013; Calitz & Conradie, 2013). Other factors have been reported as contributing to poor quality education, especially learning in English Language (Mohammed, 2018). The respondents highlighted the years they took to complete their studies. Cross tabulation revealed the results in terms of gender. According to table 4, the majority (47%) of the respondents finished their Matriculation within 12 years with 36 females (44%) exposing that they took 12 years to complete their studies whilst only 17 (57%) males finished their studies within that same period. This was followed by 22 (20%) respondents who finished within 13 years and the females dominated this category with 21 (27%). However, the least number of respondents 5 (5%) indicated that they took 17 years to complete the studies with 4 males (13%) and 1 (1%) female were in this category.

Table 4: Years respondents took to complete studies according to gender

Gender	Year to complete studies							Total
	12	13	14	15	17	18	19 +	
Male	17	1	0	2	4	3	3	30
Female	36	21	5	6	1	6	7	82
Total	53	22	5	8	5	9	10	112

The data in Table 4 can be summarised in a figure to vividly portray the number of years not based this time on gender as in the table, but on the general situation of the students.

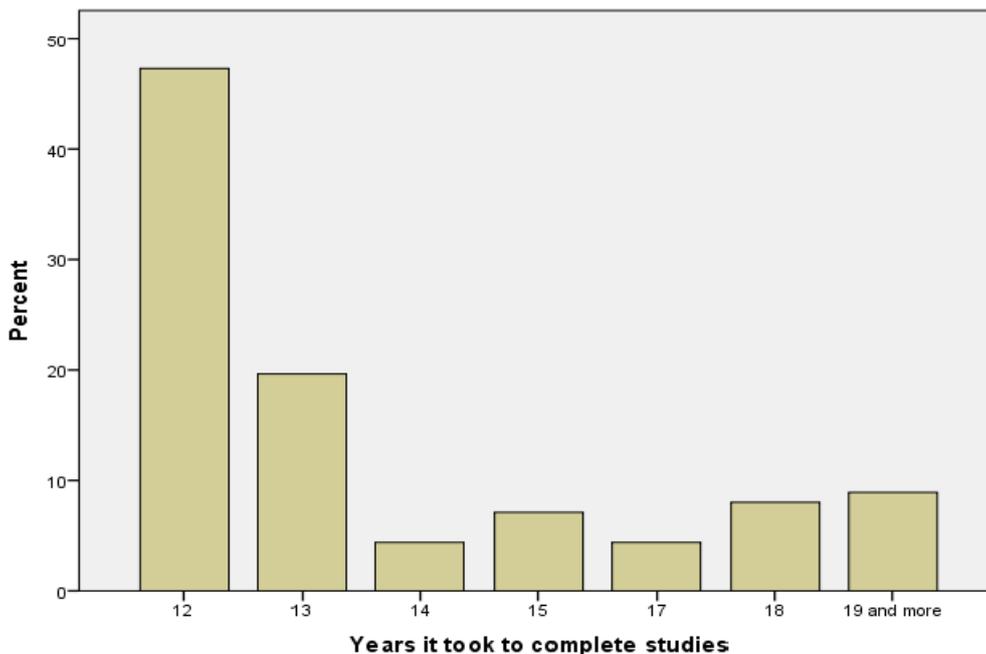


Fig 2: Year students took to complete the primary/high school studies

Fig 2 portrays that the majority of the students completed within the record time of 12 years and this was followed by those who took 13 years. However, the rest took 14 to more than 19 years to complete their primary/high school study which is unusual. It is astonishing that 10 students, 9% took 19 years and above to complete what is supposed to be 12 years. Undoubtedly, there are many factors, with teachers' strikes contributing substantially. One writer stated that, except one is blind to see the important role that teachers play in the education of the children and when they embark on a strike, they blind levels and destroy the nation (Geyer, 2014; Ineme & Ineme, 2016). Also, given the fact that the Eastern Cape is a poor performing province in Matriculation examinations over the years, teachers' strikes have worsened the situation; making many students to repeat Matriculation examinations more than twice.

Regarding the years that the respondents passed Matriculation exams, Fig 3 clearly outlines the frequency and the percentage according to these years. Accordingly, about 22% of the respondents indicated that they passed their Matriculation examinations before 2000, followed by 14 % who highlighted that they passed in 2008. Various years were also revealed which ranged from 2001 to 2011. The least number of respondents according to Fig 3 were found in 2001 and 2002 were 1% each indicated that they passed Matriculation examination during these two years. If all the students were passing their Matriculation examinations within the timeframe, that is 12 years; 11 (10%) students would have completed in 2011; 33 (30%) in 2010; 30 (27%) in 2009; and 38 (43%) in 2008. That is to say, if all went well, without teachers' strikes and other hindering factors, the students would have completed their studies in record time. However, because of these hindering factors, 63 students (56% of the respondents) took more years than required to complete and pass their Matriculation examinations.

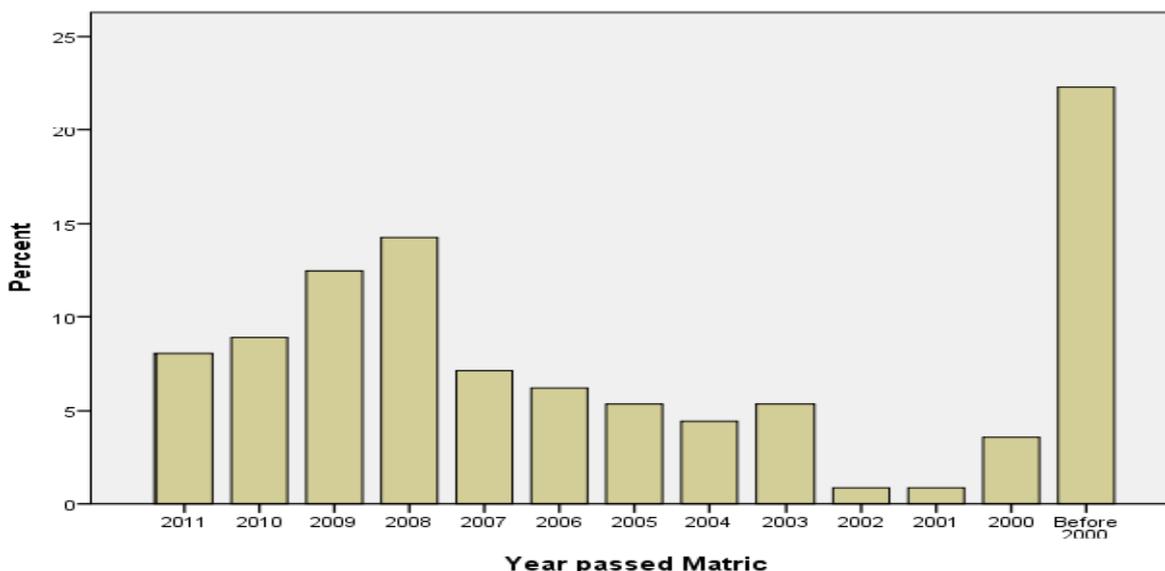


Fig 3: Year in which respondents passed Matriculation examinations

Invariably, teachers' strikes contributed to many of the 63% of students who were supposed to finish the Matriculation examination on or before 2008. Some authors have widely acknowledged hassle many students passed through to complete within record time (Kaburise, 2010; Masitsa, 2013; Kumalo, 2015). The findings reveal that about 46 % of the respondents passed Matriculation exams from some of the underperforming schools spread throughout the province while about 55 % passed theirs in average and above performing schools. A further analysis through cross-tabulation shows that of the 51 students who passed Matriculation in under-performing schools, 19, 16, 13 and three respondents were from years four, two three and one respectively. Therefore, this shows that most of them were in year 4 of their social work studies. The respondents further stated the number of teachers' strikes they had experienced. As shown in Table 5, 30% of the respondents experienced at least one strike, followed by 28% who experienced two strikes. Eighteen per cent of the

respondents had three strikes whilst the least respondents (4%) experienced between four and five strikes. Table 5 further 16% indicated that respondents maintained that they experienced more than 6 strikes. These percentages show that 70% of the students had observed at least two teachers' strikes and at most six or more strikes.

Table 5: Number of teachers' strikes experienced by respondents

Number of strikes	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	34	30	30
2	31	28	58
3	20	18	76
4	5	4	80
5	4	4	84
6 +	18	16	100
Total	112	100	

NB: Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers

The impact of the number of strikes on the academic performance of students is enormous and has been documented and lambasted by many writers in South Africa (Lindy, 2010; Baker, 2013; Deacon, 2014; Smith, 2014). The number of strikes in province affects the matriculation pass rate in a province known to be the worst-performing province. The results indicate that despite the strikes that were taking place, 68% of the respondents managed to write their Matriculation only once, preceded by 21% who had to sit twice for the Matriculation as shown in Table 6. Nevertheless, nine percent and three percent sat for the Matriculation exams for more than three and four times respectively. According to Modiaotsile (2012), an educated population remains the fundamental platform for meeting most of the other Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs), and a well-oiled education system is important for many reasons.

Table 6: Number of times respondents wrote Matriculation exam

Number of times	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1 time	76	68	68
2 times	24	21	89
3 times	9	8	97
4 times	3	3	100
Total	112	100.0	

NB: Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers.

6.3 The impact of teachers' strikes on academic performance and quality of education of students

The teachers' strike had various impacts on the matriculation as well as the teachers as shown in Table 7. Regarding intimidation due to the strike, about 63% of the participants agreed to the fact that there was intimidation of non-striking teachers whereas only 37% highlighted that there was no intimidation. Further, 61% also indicated that even the students were intimate with only 39% saying that they were not intimidated. The majority of the respondents (78%) showed that the exams were not interrupted whilst 22% actually agreed that the exams were interrupted. The respondents were asked whether they were taught by other teachers and 18% said yes whilst 82% said no. The teachers' strikes come against the processes of equipping and developing learners as it causes them to lose out on time that was meant to be used for academic activities. On the other hand, teachers' decisions to indulge on strike is usually a last resort after long negotiations with the employer. This means that there is a larger structure who's ignorance is costing the learners as the victims of teacher strikes and that structure is the government in which the education department is regulated and functions

under, the very same time promotes the right to education (Noddings, 2015). This therefore means that pertaining to the teacher strikes, the government as the employer and overseer of its citizens security, is failing to protect the learner's rights to education as it assumes two different roles. In this regard, the role as an employer and that one of being responsible for the protection of its citizen's wellbeing as reported by Noddings (2015). In establishing the essence and the value of education, it is important to first consider the impact of education in a life of an individual and how it develops and shapes their lives. Due to its significant impact on the dignity, identity and wellbeing of individuals, it had to be counted and recognised as a basic human right.

According to Table 7, the results further indicate that despite the strike the exam papers were, however delivered on time with 61% saying yes and 39% objecting to that. This means that the exams were not postponed as indicated by 71% of the respondents. In terms of the actual writing of the exams, 67% of the respondents revealed that there was smooth writing and invigilation of exams as compared to 30% who disagreed.

Table 7: Impact of teachers' strikes on various variables

Key variables of question	Yes		NO		Total	
	Freq.	Percent.	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent.
Different exam	17	15	95	85	112	100
Intimidation of students	68	61	44	39	112	100
Intimidation of non-striking teachers	70	63	42	37	112	100
Forceful closure of school	48	43	64	57	112	100
Taught by university students	29	26	83	74	112	100
Exams interrupted	25	22	87	78	112	100
Taught by other teachers not students'	20	18	92	82	112	100
Invigilation of exams by outsiders	20	18	92	82	112	100
Exam papers delivered on time	68	61	44	39	112	100
Exams disrupted by striking teachers	50	45	62	55	112	100
There were mark adjustments	46	41	66	59	112	100
Taught by peers	57	51	55	49	112	100
Taught by retired teachers	22	29	80	71	112	100
Smooth writing & invigilation of exams	78	67	34	30	112	100
Exams were rescheduled or postponed	22	29	80	71	112	100

NB: Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers

The factors in Table 7 show the impact of teachers' strikes on the quality and the right of students to education in the province. All of the factors have affected the performance and quality of education received by the students. The general cry has been the state of deteriorating nature of education in the country as a whole and the province in particular. Despite the promise of high quality of the provision of education (Jones, 2012), students have been betrayed by the system or authorities both at the national and provincial levels. Furthermore, the factors and the impact of teachers' strikes are felt most heavily in the rural areas and farm schools and those from the former Bantu education or homeland departments (Masitsa, 2013; Kumalo, 2015) and those not attending Model C schools (The Herald, 2010).

Mark adjustment or benchmarking of Matriculation results have become a contesting issue and has been criticized in many circles with educational authorities denying that such practices exist (Philips, 2013). However, the educational authorities have acknowledged their failure and poor performance of students resulting from teachers' strikes and other related problems confronting students (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2015). Nonetheless, the Minister of Basic Education has admitted there is a problem with the education system and the standards compared to other countries. This perhaps is the reason why the Minister of Basic Education decided to review and probe the Matriculation pass mark

benchmark through a Ministerial Committee that began work in 2013 (e TV Prime Time News, 2012).

This comes in the wake of criticisms from academics that the entrance requirements of four subjects with a pass mark of 50% and 30% in English language at university offering instructions in English as well as 30% for other subjects, which are optional, do not meet international standards. This committee will compare the value of the South African Matriculation pass marks with other countries and a recommendation forwarded to the Minister to review the Matriculation pass marks (e TV Prime Time News, 2012). The respondents outlined their opinions on the extent of the impact of teachers' strikes. Table 8 shows the students' opinions on various issues regarding their studies.

Table 8: Opinions of respondents on the extent of the impact of teachers' strikes on various variables

Key variables of question	To great extent	To some what extent	To a very little extent	To no extent at all	Total	
					Freq.	Percent.
Completed syllabuses of Matriculation subjects	72 (64%)	22 (20%)	14 (12%)	4 (4%)	112	100
Strike main driver of poor performance	42 (38%)	31 (28%)	14 (12%)	25 (22%)	112	100
Satisfaction with Matriculation results	52 (47%)	25 (22%)	20 (18%)	15 (13%)	112	100
Lost motivation to study	22 (20%)	28 (25%)	22 (20%)	40 (35%)	112	100
Stressed because of strike's impact	39 (35%)	28 (25%)	23 (20%)	22 (20%)	112	100
Satisfied with quality of education	41 (37%)	28 (25%)	25 (22%)	18 (16%)	112	100
All exams based on syllabuses					112	100

NB: Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers

Regarding the completion of the syllabuses of Matriculation subjects, Table 8 shows that 64% of the respondents indicated that to a greater extent the syllabuses were completed with only four percent saying that the syllabuses were to no extent at all completed. Further, 38% said that to a greater extent the strike was the main driver for poor performances and 4% highlighted that the strike was to no extent at all the drivers for poor performance as shown in Table 8. When asked about the nature of the exams, 57% explained that to a greater extent all exams were based on the syllabuses, 27% indicated to somewhat extent, 10% to a very little extent and five percent highlighted that the exams were to no extent at all based on syllabuses. However, despite the 20% respondents who indicated that they lost motivation to study, the majority of the respondents (35%) revealed that the strike did not make the students to lose motivation to study as Table 8 portrays.

The quality of education as perceived by students is illustrated diagrammatically as shown in Fig 4. Although 37% of the students said they were satisfied with to a greater extent of the quality of education they received, 47% were just satisfied to some extent while 16% were not satisfied at all. The South African quality of education has been demonstrated as not meeting international standards, hence, placed at the bottom of the ladder among many countries (Child, 2012:1; Baker, 2013). South Africans have also started doubting the quality of education students are acquiring (SAPA, 2012; Masitsa, 2013) and wondering if they have the skills to work (Phakathi, 2012; Deacon, 2014) and compete globally.

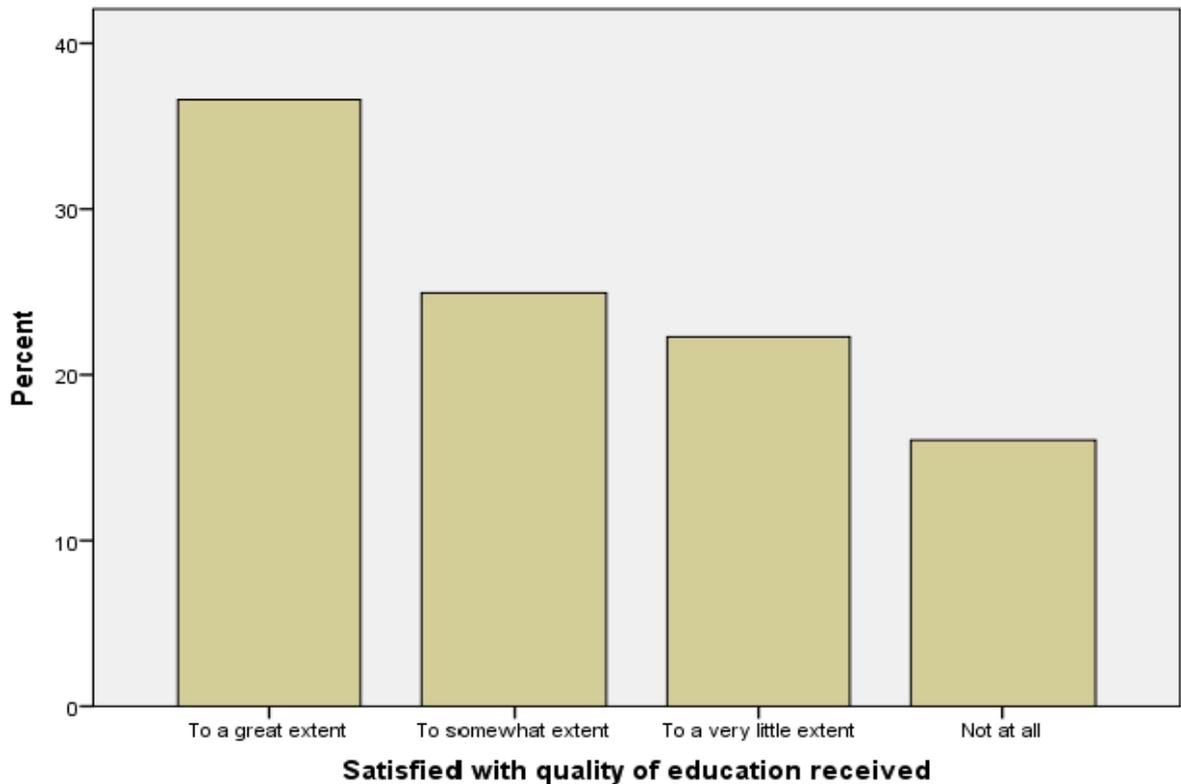


Fig 4: The extent of students' satisfaction with the quality of education they received

Similarly, students also voiced their opinion on the satisfaction of their Matriculation results despite teachers' strikes. Fig 5 shows that most of the respondents (47%) were satisfied to a greater extent while 22% were barely satisfied and the rest (31%) were not with their Matriculation results at all.

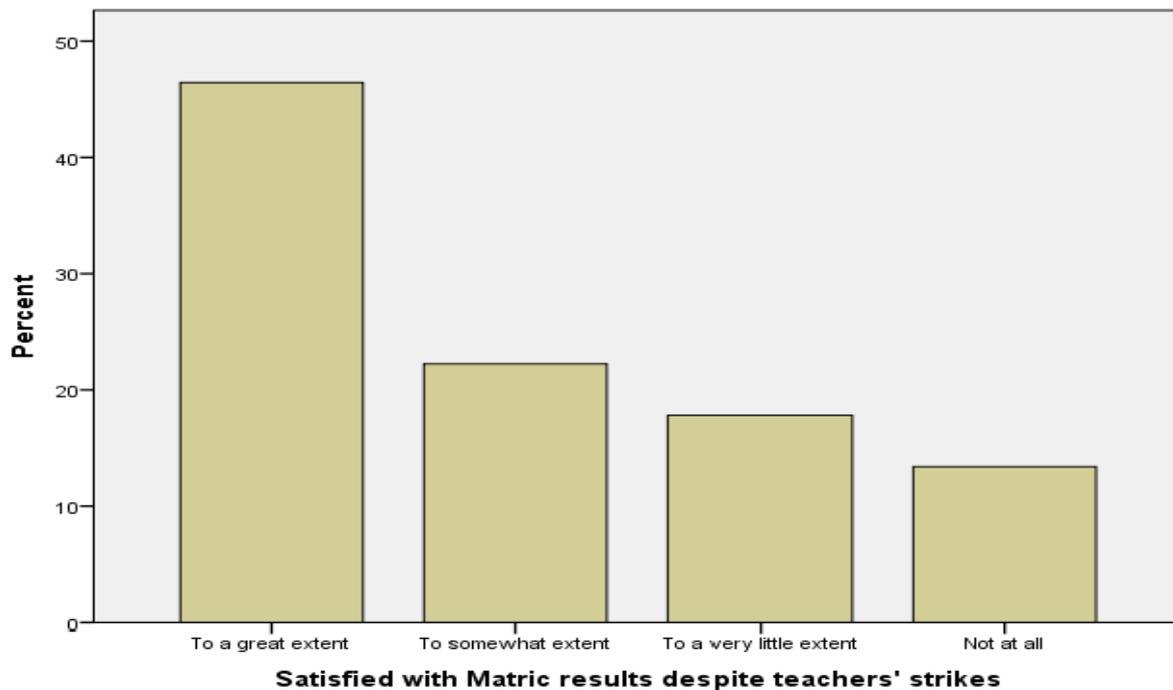


Fig 5: The extent of students' satisfaction of Matriculation results despite teachers' strikes

The impact of strikes on students overall performance, especially with the non-completion of the syllabuses of most subjects is overwhelming and has been reported widely (Philips, 2013; Deacon, 2014; Kumalo, 2015). The worst affected areas in the province in terms of performance in Matriculation examinations is the former Transkei areas and leaves the province to always stay at the bottom of Matriculation performance (Weekend Post, 2011). Thus, the right of students to quality education and right to education as enshrined in the Bill of Rights are disrespected.

6.4 The influence of strikes on students’ choice of university and programme of study

The strikes influence on students’ choice of university and programme of study is illustrated in Table 9. According to Table 9, 80% of the respondents showed that the strike did not hinder their university entrance with only 20% who faced obstacles. Of the 20% whose choices were influenced by the strike, nine percent indicated the choice of university, eight percent reported the choice of study programme and 10% said that it affected the year of entry into university. When asked about whether University of Fort Hare was the first choice, 65% said yes and 35% said no. Of the respondents that indicated that that University of Fort Hare (UFH) was not their first choice, they were further required to highlight the universities they had made their first choice.

Table 9: Influence of strikes on students’ choice of university and study programme

Key variables of question	Yes		NO		Total	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent.
Strikes hinder university entrance	22	20	90	80	112	100
Affected choice of university	10	9	97	87	107	96
Affected choice of study programme	9	8	98	86	107	96
Affected year of entry into university	11	10	96	86	107	96
Others than influence of university/prog.	73	65	39	35	112	100
UFH as first choice	80	71	32	29	112	100
Social work programme first choice	27	24	85	76	112	100
Finding it difficult at varsity of educational background						

NB: Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers

Fig 6 indicates the preferred universities. Nine per cent of the respondents mentioned Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) as their original preference but because of their metric results, they were forced to come to the UFH. Furthermore, Fig 6 indicates that 6% wanted to go to University of the Free State (UFS) but had to settle for UFH because of their poor Matric their results. Of the 112 respondents, only 69% had chosen UFH as their first choice of university while and the least (1%) respondents mentioned Stellenbosch and Rhodes University as their first choice of universities and not UFH.

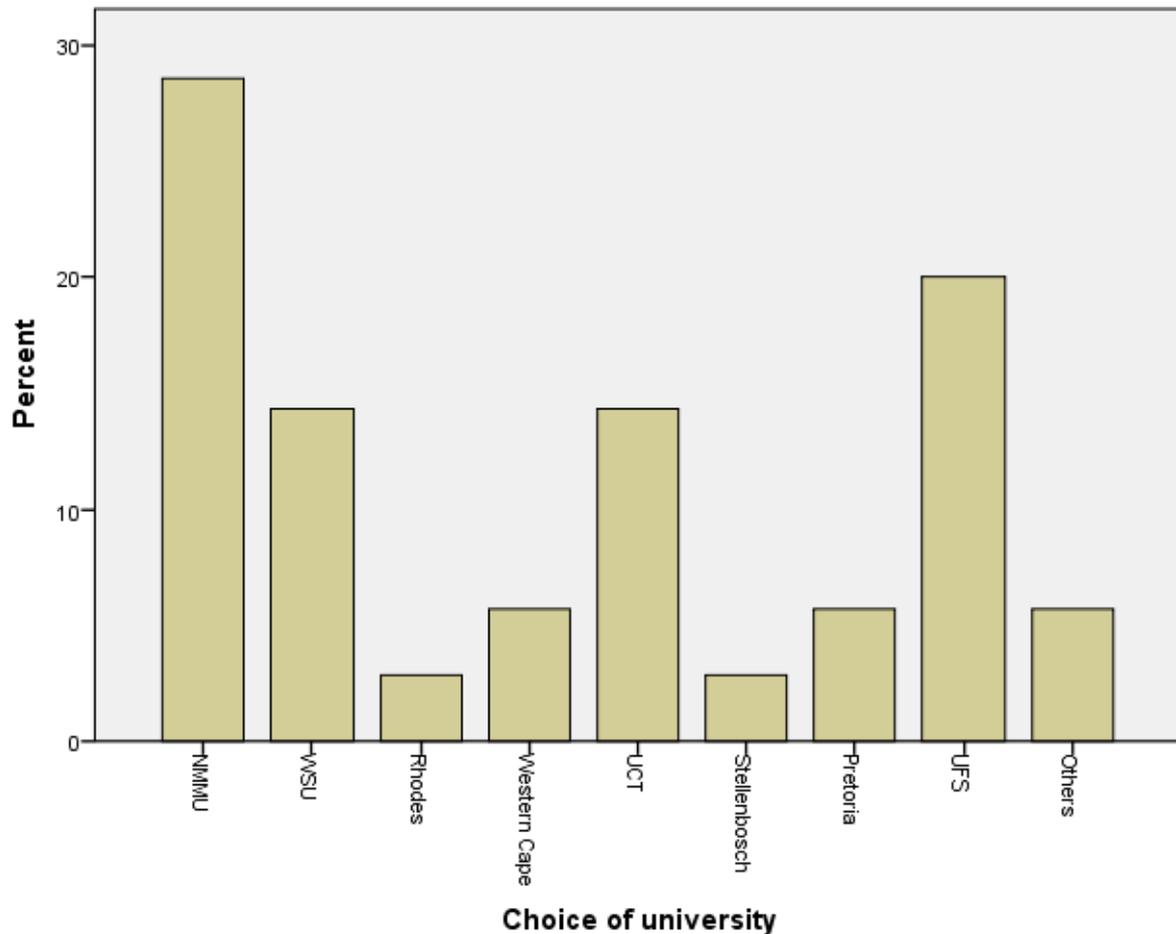


Fig 6: Preferred choice of University for respondents at the University of Fort Hare (UFH)

It should be noted that most of the universities that these learners wanted to enrol are first category universities (Universities of Free State, Stellenbosch and Cape Town; Rhodes and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Universities). However, others, such as University of the Western Cape and Walter Sisulu fall respectively within the second and third categories of universities in South Africa. By implication, these students; that is 31% stated that because of their poor Matric results, they had to enrol at UHF; otherwise, they would have been at other universities. The latter categories of universities (Walter Sisulu and Western Cape) might have been for convenience and not because they wanted to enrol in high class or first category university in the country. Nonetheless, the choice of university is sometimes influenced by other factors such financial muscles and location than only results of Matric though they are the primary factor that determines admission into university.

Related to the choice of university was the choice of study programme. According to Fig 7, about 71% had social work programme as their first choice with 29% refuted the fact that it was their first choice, that is, social work was not their first choice. As indicated by Fig 8, 12% of the respondents wanted to study sciences, 6% pure arts, 5% agriculture, 3% other social sciences and only 1% wanted an education as a programme of their choice. It should be stated that many of the social work students chose it because of the scholarships from the national and provincial Departments of Social Development. Nonetheless, Matric results might have caused the 29% to study social work against their original intentions, which they have indicated as being sciences, arts, agriculture, other social sciences, technology and education in that order.

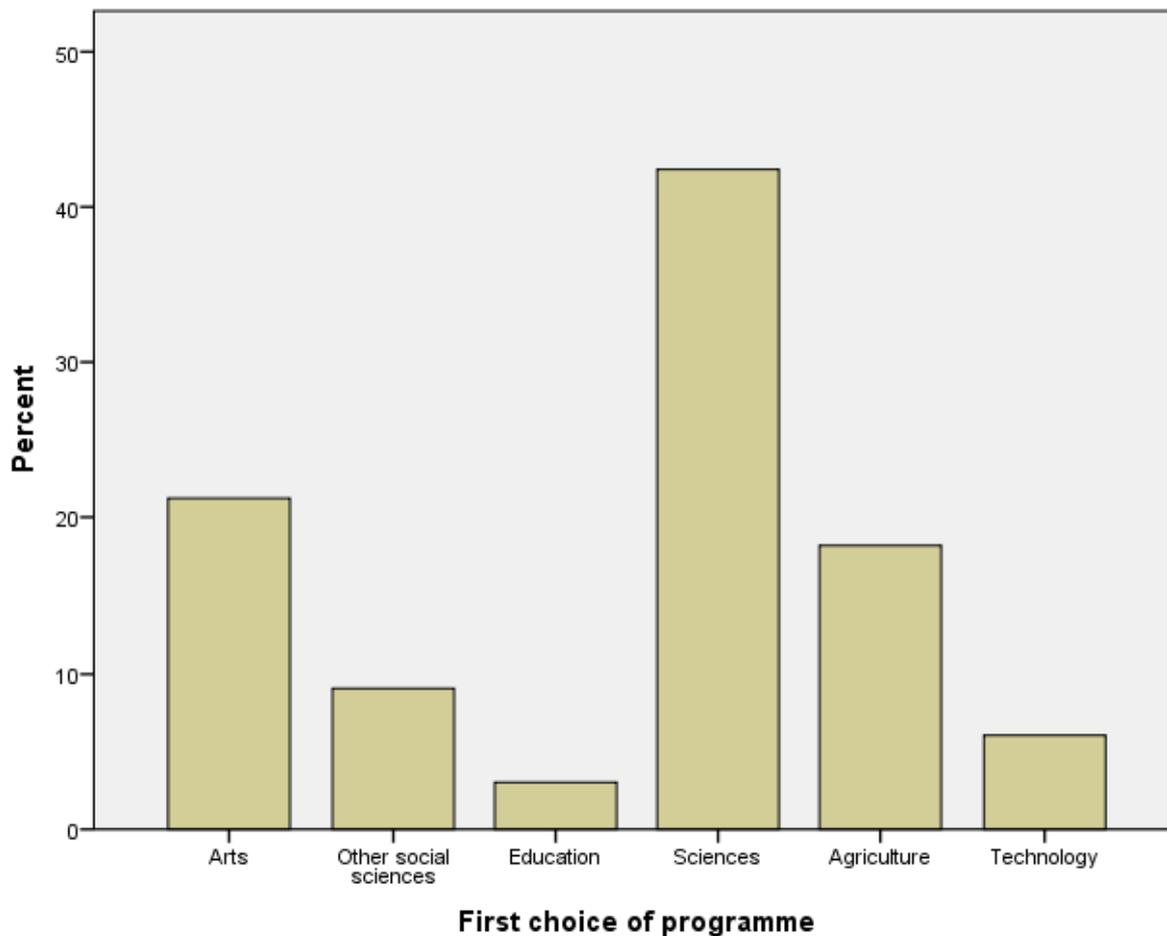


Fig 7: Preferred choice of study programmes other than social work

To enrol in sciences, students are expected to perform well in those related science subjects. Unfortunately, South Africa was rated the lowest country in an international measure of quality of Maths and science education (Gernetzky, 2012:1). This is coupled with the fact that many of the schools in the Eastern Cape Province are lacking enough science teachers, and facing numerous challenges, which inevitably lead to poor matric results. Hence, the province is always almost tailing other provinces in matric examinations (Kumalo, 2015).

7 Conclusion

The study had aimed to investigate the impact of teachers' strikes on the quality and academic performance of students in the Eastern Cape Province as well as chances of entry into tertiary institutions. The study has therefore synthesised both the positive and negative impacts incurred by students due to the strikes. Firstly, a good assessment was provided on the number of strikes. Teachers' strikes in the Eastern Cape had contributed to a further deterioration of the quality of education in the province. The province is already battling with problems such as insufficient teachers, less qualified teachers, infrastructure problems and mismanagement and corruption; and teachers' strikes have worsen the education system in the province, leaving students desperate for quality education and access to the right to education in a country and province which carries a huge chunk of the nation and provincial budgets respectively. In a highly unequal society, with high unemployment and poverty blamed exclusively on apartheid, the government's effort to eradicate poverty and inequality by providing quality education for all is therefore being hindered. It can be safely concluded from the findings that the society is at war with itself as striking teachers are adding to the poor academic performance of students that was already exacerbated by the apartheid regime.

Teachers' strikes negatively affect students' academic performance and ruin their chances of gaining admission into the

university and programme of study of their choice. The literature and the findings of this study have sufficiently demonstrated the role that teachers' strikes have on students' academic performance. It would be unfair to state that those who indicated otherwise do not constitute a significant number or percentage and therefore warrant discarding the negative impact on their studies. Apart from the findings which show the contempt expressed by students regarding teachers' strikes during their Matriculation examinations, many educational experts have expressed deep concerns with the handling of education issues and crises in the country. Literature review has also pointed out the disgust of parents against teachers' strikes as they hinder their children's academic performance and the quality thereof.

A good number of students also reported their inability to gain admission into category A universities such as NMMU and Stellenbosch as well as their preferred programmes of study. In essence, UHF and social work programme for these students were their last resort, having failed to gain admission in those universities and other programmes. It would therefore be appropriate to say that teachers' strikes have negatively affected the academic performance of many students as well as thwarted their chances of gaining admission into their preferred universities and programmes. Finally, because of teachers' strikes, many students have dropped along the way and terminated their education with huge consequences for their future. All of these point to the fact that students' constitutional right to education is impeded by teachers' strikes and indirectly condoned by educational authorities.

The quality of education received by students in the province is low. Teachers in the Eastern Cape each year fully participate in teachers' strikes organized by one union or the other for various reasons. Even if they are present, little time is spent in the classroom as the literature shows. The findings of this study indicate that because of strikes, some schools do not complete syllabuses of subjects; students are taught by peers and other stakeholders to catch-up with lost time. Again, the Matriculation mark adjustment reported some of the students contribute to poor quality education in the province. This perhaps explains why many of the students from this province performed dismally at the tertiary level with many repeating and/or dropping out of schools. In addition, the literature is very categorical about the poor quality of education that children are receiving from the Eastern Cape Province. Therefore, it would not be over-statement to say that the quality of education that students get is low, especially comparing to other provinces. To compare the quality of Matriculation level education internationally will be committing sacrilege. This speaks to the denial of access to the right to quality education to students in this province and South Africa as a whole.

8 Recommendations

The study warranted some recommendations, which are subject to serious debate among teachers, education experts, policy makers and other stakeholders in the field of education. The following are the recommendations: First, students should be given access to quality education as it is a fundamental right enshrined in the Bill of Rights and many regional and international legal instruments which South Africa is a signatory. This could be done through improvement of infrastructure, recruitment of qualified staff, proper payment of teachers and timely negotiations of salary packages. Secondly, education should be declared an essential service to stem the high number of teachers' strikes which is denying students, their constitutional right to quality education and in some places, lack of access to this right. Thirdly, salaries of teachers' should be negotiated every five years, taking into consideration inflation and other factors rather than a yearly issue which is devastating to the future of young South Africans. Finally, there should be an open debate on balancing the right of students to quality education and the right of labour to embark on strike action. Public gatherings or *imbizos* could serve this purpose.

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