

The 2022 School Monitoring Survey

History as a subject taught in the FET Phase

1. Introduction

The proposal for history to be made a compulsory subject in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase in South African schools has been a topic of considerable discussion in recent years. The idea was raised during the 2015/2016 Education Budget Vote Speech, as an effort to foster better social understanding, social cohesion, and advancing the ideals of a democratic South Africa. History can play a crucial role in achieving these goals by enabling learners to critically engage with the influence and impact of colonialism, apartheid, and the liberation struggle on their lives.

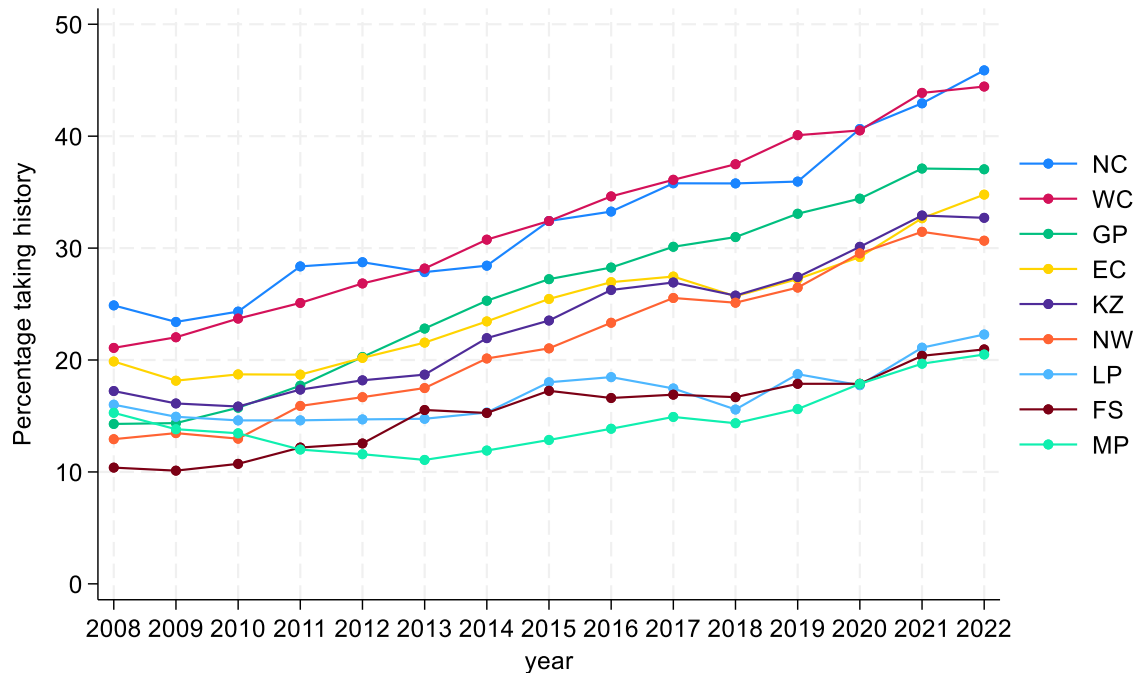
The Department of Basic Education 2022 School Monitoring Survey (SMS) collected information to obtain views and perceptions of teachers, mainly from secondary schools regarding the current status of History in secondary schools; making History a compulsory subject in the FET phase given that it is already taught until grade 9; on the importance of decolonising the curriculum; and knowledge of issues relating to the decolonisation of the curriculum. This is the first SMS where information was collection on this topic.

This policy brief is based on the perceptions of FET teachers for Grade 9 and 12, as well as principals regarding the teaching of History and their views on whether History should be made compulsory. It explores the desirability and anticipated implications of making History a compulsory subject in South African Basic Education. It also considers the decolonization of the curriculum based on the recommendations of the 2015 Ministerial Task Team (MTT) in guiding this policy direction.

2. Context: Existing participation in history at NSC level

Nationally, the percentage of NSC candidates taking history has increased substantially from about 16% in 2008 to about 32% in 2022. This is an encouraging trend if we accept the importance of our young people having a knowledge of history. However, it is still a long way away from universal participation. There are significant differences in history participation across the provinces, as Figure 1 shows. Mpumalanga, Free State and Limpopo have the lowest participation rates (about 20%), while participation is about 45% in the Northern Cape and Western Cape. It should also be noted that participation in history is significantly higher amongst Black and Coloured NSC candidates (about 33%) compared to White and Indian candidates (about 12%).

Figure 1: Percentage of NSC candidates taking history by province



Source: DBE calculations using National Senior Certificate data, 2008-2022

3. Design of the School Monitoring survey

The SMS sample was based on 1000 public ordinary schools offering grade 6 and 1000 schools offering grade 12. Data was collected using the following five interview schedules: Principal, Grade 3 educator, Grade 6, 9 and 12 educators, and the Inclusive education facilitator. In addition, a Document Analysis and School Observation Schedule were also administered.

The main quantitative data collection was complemented by qualitative data collection in 90 schools, 10 in each province.

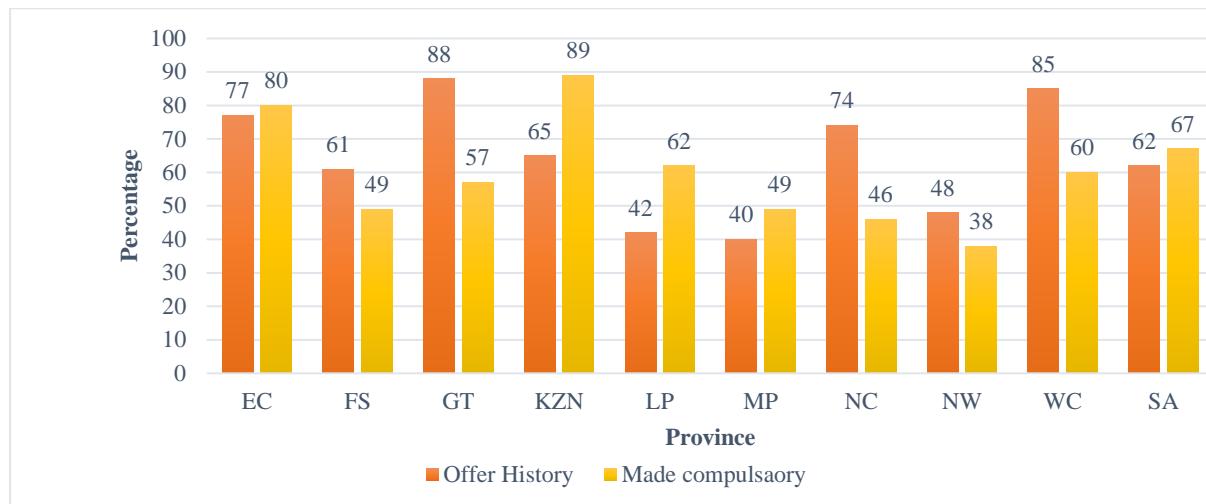
4. What have we learnt through the 2022 School Monitoring Survey?

For this Priority Area, the focus was on obtaining views and perceptions of teachers, primarily from secondary schools regarding:

- The current status of History in secondary schools;
- Making History a compulsory subject in the FET phase given that it is already taught until grade 9;
- The importance of decolonising the curriculum; and
- Knowledge of issues relating to the decolonisation of the curriculum debate and importance.

Secondary school principals were asked whether their school offered History and about their views on whether they feel History should be made a compulsory subject. the graph below represents their views by province.

Figure 2: Percentage of secondary schools that offer History and principals that feel History should be made a compulsory subject by province



Source: DBE School Monitoring Survey 2022

According to the findings, 62% of schools offer History at the FET phase, and 67% of principals are of the view that it should be compulsory for Grades 10 to 12. Provinces like Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and Northern Cape have the highest proportions of schools offering History. However, there is limited support for making History compulsory, with the strongest support coming from principals in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Notably, the relationship between offering History and supporting its compulsory status varies across provinces, with some provinces showing weaker support despite having a high percentage of schools offering History.

Making History compulsory found favour amongst 67% of all school principals. However, this is not very different to the number of schools offering History, at 62%. The relationship between provinces that offer History and those that support making it compulsory was also varied. The next phase of work in this area may first be increasing voluntary uptake and the current content.

Support for making history compulsory was greater in schools that already offer history, that have at least one qualified history teacher, in non-fee schools, and where principals agree with decolonization agenda.

An analysis of NSC data showed that small schools (fewer than 30 NSC candidates) were about 10% less likely to offer history as a subject in grade 12 compared to large schools. This is because small schools have fewer educators and therefore tend to offer fewer subjects. These sorts of practical constraints would need to be carefully considered before making history a compulsory subject in the FET phase.

Furthermore, Principals were given three options regarding the status of History as a subject:

- Option 1: revise the History curriculum,
- Option 2: make History compulsory for all learners, or
- Option 3: increase the use of African languages as languages of instruction.

Revising the History curriculum received the most support (44%), followed by increasing the use of African languages (45%). Making History compulsory had the lowest support (28%) out of the options available, with the Eastern Cape showing the highest support (38%) and Gauteng and the North West having the lowest (17%).

Qualitative responses from school principals

During the interviews with school principals, they expressed a strong belief in the necessity of decolonising the curriculum. They emphasized that History should be presented in a manner that is contextually relevant to South African learners, specifically tailored for this country, rather than simply adopting content copied from other nations.

Some principals expressed concerns about potential political debates that could arise from a decision to make History compulsory. On the other hand, some believed that if History were to be made compulsory, it should be done meticulously and accurately, which might require a significant amount of time to implement properly. One principal expressed that history should be an optional subject, stating, "Let those who love history take it. There must be choice, not compulsory."

5. Policy Context

5.1 Ministerial Task Team on making History a compulsory subject for FET Learners

In 2015, the Minister of Basic Education established a MTT, which was prompted by the belief that learners lacked knowledge about their country's History and the significance of History in fostering patriotism. The concern was that young individuals failed to recognise and value both their own country's History and that of Africa. It was widely felt that History plays a crucial role in motivating the collective spirit of the nation and is not simply treated as an ordinary subject. The Minister also expressed concerns about the content of the History curriculum and the teaching methods employed in schools.

The MTT had the mandate to advise on the feasibility of making History compulsory in the FET phase; to advise on where History should be located in the curriculum; to review the content and pedagogy of the History curriculum to strengthen History in the curriculum; and to investigate the implications of making History a compulsory subject.

The MTT recommended in 2018 that History be made a compulsory subject in all schools up to Grade 12 as part of the overall focus on decolonising the school curriculum, and as part of enabling learners to become more active and critical citizens by being able to engage critically with the influence and impact of colonialism, apartheid, and the liberation struggle on their lives. The MTT made this recommendation keeping in mind the greater goal to empower young South Africans with values, attitudes, and behaviors that could better contribute to nation-building, social cohesion and national reconciliation, and that would embed a body of knowledge that would enable the 21st

century generation with the skills to comprehend how they become both national and global citizens.

5.2 Current Status of History Education

The FET History Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) consists of sixteen topics, from Grades 10 to 12. In Grade 10, there are six topics, evenly divided between European history and African and South African history. Grade 11 covers five topics, with two focusing on European history and three on African and South African history. Grade 12 includes six topics, three of which cover South African history, two are focused on world history and one on African history. Despite the inclusion of some topics on African and South African history, the representation of African history remains limited, especially pre-colonial African history.

It is important to address this imbalance and expand the focus on African history, especially the contributions and achievements of pre-colonial African civilisations. A comprehensive and inclusive curriculum that embraces the diverse histories of all regions can contribute to a broader understanding of the world's cultures and promote respect and appreciation for each other's past. To achieve this, continuous evaluation and improvement of the curriculum is necessary to foster a fruitful educational experience for South African learners.

5.3 Comparative Country Case Studies

When examining the inclusion of History in the educational curriculum across various African countries, some countries treat History as a distinct subject, separate from Geography, while others integrate it with Geography into a broader subject known as Social Studies. Tanzania, Chad, Madagascar, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) offer History as a separate subject at both primary and secondary school levels. While Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Malawi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and several others integrate History with other subjects at the primary level and then offer it as a separate subject at the secondary level. In South Africa, Botswana, and Nigeria, History is integrated into the curriculum at the primary and secondary school levels, and at the senior secondary level, it becomes an elective or optional subject. In Kenya, History is an integrated subject at both the primary and secondary levels. Therefore, making history a compulsory standalone subject all the way to the end of secondary school would be unusual in an international context.

6. Summary and Recommendations

The teaching of History as a subject in schools plays a crucial role in empowering young South Africans with values, attitudes, and behaviours that are important for nation-building, social cohesion, and national reconciliation. The SMS, which is nationally representative, provides important feedback from the sector on this important priority area since the Ministerial Task Team report.

To improve the teaching of History and the decolonization of it, the following recommendations are proposed, taking into consideration the views expressed by school principals during the SMS 2022:

1. Curriculum Revision: Develop a revised History curriculum that includes a broader range of topics, including local and African History.

2. Teacher Training: ensure that teachers are properly trained to teach History.
3. Availability of resources and learning materials: ensure that there is the availability of diverse and culturally sensitive resources for History education, i.e. textbooks and online resources that reflect the decolonised curriculum.
4. Ongoing research: collaborations between the DBE, academic institutions, historians, and educators to ensure ongoing research and development of effective teaching methods and resources for History Education.

By implementing these recommendations, South Africa can enhance the teaching of History, promote its decolonisation, and empower young individuals with a deeper understanding of their history and its significance in shaping the nation.