Examining Inequality in South African Education

Inequality can be assessed based on a number of characteristics. We use the 2013 General Household Survey (GHS), the 2011 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to examine inequalities which exist within the South African education system, in relation to wealth, sex and population group.

54.96 million
South African population (2015)

0.63
South Africa's Gini coefficient* (2011)

*The Gini coefficient is the measure of income inequality.
South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world.

$5,902
South African GDP per capita (2015)

20.2%
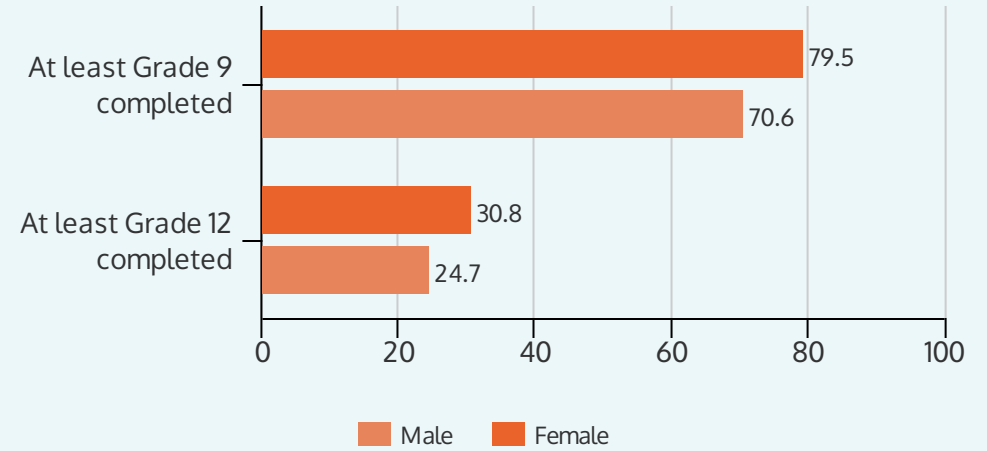**Percentage of South African population living in extreme poverty (2011)**

(OECD, 2015; StatsSA, 2015; Worldbank)
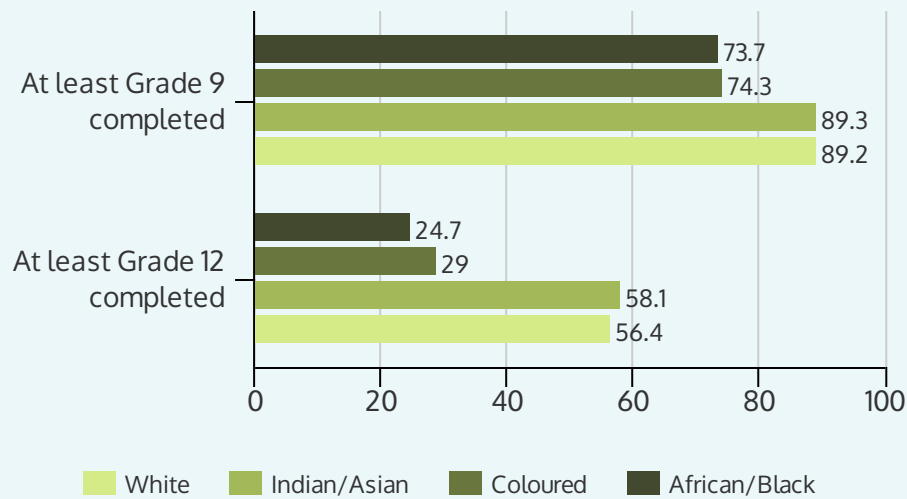

Educational attainment and enrolment

Percentage of population with no formal education or highest level of education less than Grade 7

	20-29 years old	40-59 years old	60+ years old
♂	8%	20%	40%
♀	5%	23%	48%

Percentage that have completed Grade 9 or Grade 12 by sex (15-24 year olds)

At least Grade 9 completed: 79.5 / 70.6
At least Grade 12 completed: 30.8 / 24.7

Male Female

Percentage that have completed Grade 9 or Grade 12 by population group (15-24 year olds)

At least Grade 9 completed: 73.7, 74.3, 89.3, 89.2
At least Grade 12 completed: 24.7, 29, 58.1, 56.4

White Indian/Asian Coloured African/Black

University participation rate by population group (18-29 year olds)

African/Black: 3.2
Coloured: 3.1
Indian/Asian: 9.2
White: 18.7
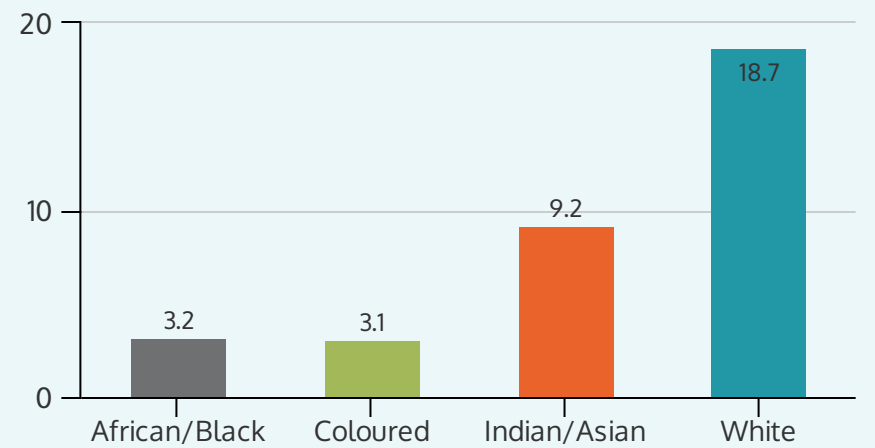
(GHS, 2013)

Learning achievement

Basic reading ability* (PIRLS)

Sex

♂ 52%   ♀ 62%

Wealth
(Average learner scores)
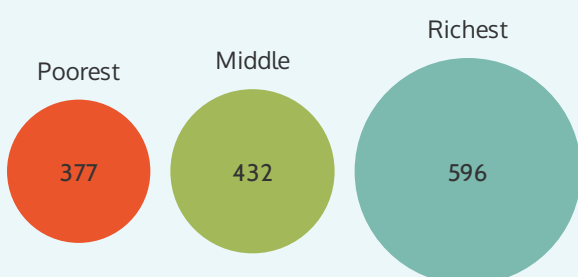
Poorest 377   Middle 432   Richest 596

Basic mathematics ability* (TIMSS)

Sex

♂ 23%   ♀ 25%

Wealth
(Percentage of learners achieving at or above 400)

Low 18   Medium 20   High 46

Basic science ability* (TIMSS)

Sex

♂ 24%   ♀ 27%

Wealth
(Percentage of learners achieving at or above 400)

Low 19   Medium 20   High 48
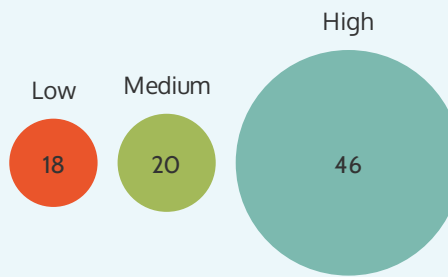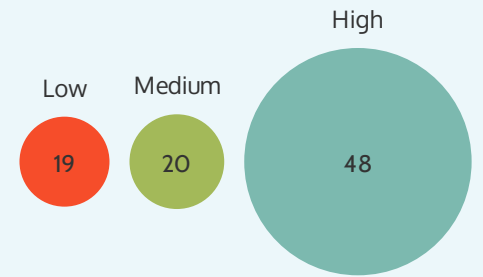
(PIRLS, 2011; TIMSS, 2011)

PIRLS was conducted at the Grade 5 level with 3515 learners receiving instruction in English or Afrikaans. The sample is therefore not nationally representative.
* The minimum competency level for PIRLS and TIMSS is 400.
** PIRLS: indicator used was general home resources; TIMSS: the number of home study supports was used as a proxy for socio-economic status.

timsssa   HSRC

There are many different layers of inequality. It is important to understand the inequalities which exist within educational systems in order to assist policy makers to develop effective policies for improving education.