

**RE-TRAINING THE TRAINER:
EXPLORING STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS TO
RETRAIN ADULT EDUCATORS IN NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

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ABSTRACT

Education is a right and in line with this constitutional provision the South African government created a directorate for adult basic education to ensure that all illiterate adults in the country have access to basic education. In pursuing this noble aim the directorate of basic education in 1995 opened learning centres for all illiterate adults throughout the country. From didactic point of view the teaching of adults differs significantly from that of children and to equip adult educators who teach at the adult learning centres with the relevant skills for teaching adults the University of South Africa started to offer formal training for basic education teachers. Since 1995 the university has trained over 20,000 educators through the open distance delivery mode at both certificate and diploma levels. Most of the educators trained by the university are employed by the nine provincial departments of education to teach adults basic education. This author, one of the trainers for over two decades, has observed a lack of staff development programmes for the adult education teachers to enhance their teaching practices. This paper used the qualitative research methods in the form of focus group interviews to explore the staff development needs of adult educators in the North West Province. A total of 400 adult educators participated in the study. The main findings included: the need to institute an advance diploma in adult education to allow educators who are in possession of the diploma in adult basic education entry into the Honours' B.Ed. programme to assure them of a career path, the need to provide educators with in-service training to improve their teaching skills and the need to evaluate the programme in order to make its curriculum more effective in addressing the socio-economic problems of the country.

KEYWORDS

Staff development, adult educator, career path, socio-economic

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world education has been recognized as the tool for social, economic and political development and for that reason all democratic countries have declared it a human right issue. In line with this fact (i.e. education is a right) the South African government created a directorate for adult basic education to ensure that adults who did not get the opportunity to attend school in their youth could be provided with basic education. Without basic education and training rural black illiterate adults might remain cut off from the social, economic and political activities of the country. To ensure that all citizens could participate in the socio-economic and political activities of the country a policy for adult basic education and training was enacted in 1997. The ABET was in response to the demand for basic knowledge and skills for millions of adults, especially rural women. In 1995 the new directorate therefore made basic education available and accessible to all illiterate adults in the country. The ABET policy framework (1997) envisaged a literate South Africa within which all its citizens have acquired basic education and training that enables them to be effective participants in socio-economic and political processes and to contribute to the reconstruction, development and social transformation (Department of Education, 1997:16).

At the time basic education programme started in the country there were no trained adult educators and since the teaching of adults differs significantly from that of children the University of South Africa started to provide formal training for basic education teachers to enable them use the relevant teaching methods for adult learners. Since 1995 the University's department of Adult Basic Education has trained over 20,000 adult educators through the open distance delivery mode at both certificate and diploma levels. Most of the educators trained by the University of South Africa are employed by the nine provincial departments of education to teach basic education to adults.

An important feature of the contemporary world is that any knowledge and skill acquired through training soon becomes obsolete due to knowledge explosion. This makes it crucial for individual employees to be multi-skilled in order to adapt to the changing demands of their career. In view of this fact organizations that want to increase productivity must provide their employees with continuous professional development programmes to keep them update with new knowledge, skills and information to enable them remain relevant to the employer. As one of the trainers of adult basic education educators[ABET] since 1995 this author has observed a lack of continuous professional development programmes for the adult educators trained by the University of South Africa to enhance their teaching practices.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The desire to explore the continuous professional needs of adult educators motivated the author to engage in this research. The objective of this study was therefore to explore staff development needs of adult educators who have been trained by UNISA since 1995 and are teaching basic education to adults at the various ABET centres in South Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Experiential Learning Theory

This study is underpinned by the experiential learning theory propounded by David Kolb (1971). Kolb (1984:41) posits that knowledge results from grasping and transforming experience. Experience is at the core and pre-requisite of most adult learning endeavours. The experiential learning theory provides a holistic model of the learning process and multi-linear model for adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow, and develop (Kolb, Boytzis & Mainemelis, 1999).

The theory portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience -- Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) -- and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience -- Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE). The four stages indicate that individuals first of all acquire concrete experiences which in turn promote observation and critical reflection. These reflections are incorporated and refined into abstract conceptions. The abstract concepts serve as a basis for deriving various implications. In real life situations experience comes to individuals in a variety of ways- tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on our senses and immersing ourselves in concrete reality, while others tend to perceive, grasp, or take hold of new information through symbolic representation or abstract conceptualization i.e. thinking about, analyzing, or systematically planning, rather than using sensation as a guide (Kolb et al 1999:3). In the same way transforming experience takes place in a number of ways. While some individuals would prefer to watch closely the activities of other people and imitate their actions, others tend to prefer putting their knowledge and experience into practical use.

The theory has implications for continuous professional development or staff development of adult educators. Being adults, the educators might rely more on reality rather than imagination and can rely a great deal on information from in-service trainers in order to choose the appropriate course of action to enhance teaching. In an in-service training context, basic education teachers may

require situations that can promote collaboration with other people in finding practical solutions to problems related to their teaching practices. Thus through the provision of in-service training or continuous professional development the educators of basic education programmes may have the opportunity to learn new knowledge and skills that can improve their teaching practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Staff Development: A justification

Staff development is a priority in any organization that seeks to improve staff knowledge and skills in order to improve quality of its product, increase productivity and gain a competitive edge over its competitors. Through constant training of staff an organization can empower its employees to achieve optimal performance and meet its set objectives. In-service training or staff development can be seen as a deliberate attempt to provide learning to employees to enhance their knowledge, skills, attitudes and performance. Vemic (2007:211) affirms that the strategic procedure of employee training and development needs to encourage creativity, ensure inventiveness and shape the entire organizational knowledge that provides the organization with uniqueness and differentiates it from the others. Over the years training in organizations has been recognized by many as an extension to the educational process within business and administration (Talbot, 2011:1) because the core of any training endeavour is either the acquisition of new knowledge and skills or the consolidation of previously acquired ones. Training of staff is thus a cyclic process since there is always a need for employees to enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Staff development does not imply only obtaining new knowledge, abilities and skills, but also the possibility to promote entrepreneurship, introduce employees to changes, encourage the changes of their attitude, introduce the employees to important business decisions and involve them actively in the process of decision making (Vemic, 2007:211). There are many reasons why an employer should provide in-service training for employees. These may include deterioration of performance, change in work process or materials, job redesign, and new employees. In an era of increased knowledge escalation, outdated of existing one and technological advancement no professional can wait without becoming abreast with his or her subject and how to teach it (Bondesio & de Witt, 2010). Indeed in the contemporary world of knowledge economy, globalization and competitiveness any organization that ignores training, retraining or continuous professional development of its staff might not be able to remain

relevant, serve and retain its client or achieve its set objectives. It is for this reason that organizations such as educational institutions must provide their staff with retraining opportunities to make them up to date in knowledge and skills.

Many educational leaders have come to realize that a continued in-service training programme is a prerequisite nowadays when striving for an effective, goal-directed system of education (Bondesio & de Witt, 2010:275) in the ever changing contemporary world. In educational organizations such as the school the knowledge and skills of teachers must be constantly upgraded by the employer because of changes in curriculum, introduction of new courses and the skills for teaching them. The changes in the school curriculum, subjects taught, syllabus and methods of teaching are dictated by the current socio-economic needs of society. As such changes take place in education and in teaching in particular, the teachers' knowledge of the subject and the skills for teaching it become inadequate for effective teaching and the best way to enhance their teaching performance is to provide them with the opportunity to learn through workshops, seminars, refresher courses and subject related clinics. In the context of the school staff development as described above offers a relatively cheaper way of retraining teachers because it offers the employer with the opportunity to keep teachers at post, make use of real life situations and the available resources of the institution. Above all it can reduce errors, repetition, and promote quality teaching among teachers.

Staff development or in-service training can be formal or informal. The Formal in-service training which usually takes the form of workshops, refresher courses, seminars and subject directed clinics are deliberate opportunities created for educators to enhance their knowledge and skills. The informal type of staff development could be mentoring or coaching of the new or novice teacher by an experienced staff member. All the two forms of staff development aim at promoting learning of new knowledge and skills among employees.

Although staff development is an important strategy to upgrade knowledge and skills of teachers it must not be imposed on them if it is to achieve its goal of improving teachers' content knowledge and teaching methods. The point of departure for implementing any effective staff development initiative is for the employer to do some needs analysis on the teachers in order to establish their strengths and weaknesses in the subjects they teach. Where the educational leader realizes that some staff members are not performing work or tasks as effectively as they should because of a deficiency of knowledge or skills, or someone needs to learn new knowledge and skills in anticipation of some future change in the work s/he undertakes staff development must be provided to keep them up to date. Bondesio & de Witt (2010) affirm that regular opportunities should be created for all teaching staff to help them to adapt to new circumstances and demands so that they can keep up with advances in both



subject knowledge and educational methodology. Since particular training needs may not be general to all employees the employer must make conscious efforts to identify the learning needs of teachers before the relevant interventions are put in place.

The identification of staff development needs of teachers in a school may be done through interviews, questionnaires and observations by the school management team made up of heads of departments or senior teachers and the principal. Once the learning needs are identified the trainers should then set training goals and provide the appropriate interventions to bring about the achievement of the training goals. In a formal staff development the trainers must make use of the problem-centred approach where participants have the chance of dealing with some of the real teaching related problems they encounter on daily basis. Such an approach could assist participants to acquire knowledge and skills which can minimize weaknesses and improve their teaching performance. There is a synergy between the theoretical framework and the literature sections of the study. Both aspects of the study emphasise the importance of staff development as better strategy to revamp the knowledge and skills of educators. As Bondesio and de Witt, (2010) assert in any occupation continued professional growth is of cardinal importance, but in the education profession it is paramount for the outstanding fulfillment of tasks.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research methods to explore the continuous professional development needs of adult basic education educators in the North West Province. The researcher believed that the continuous professional development needs of ABET educators in that province might be similar to those in other provinces and that the findings and recommendations might be, to a very large extent, used as the basis for continuous professional development training programme for all ABET educators in South Africa. A qualitative explorative (Creswell, 2007; Meadows, 2003) method was employed in finding out what skills and knowledge ABET educators need to enhance their teaching practices. The researcher deemed ethnographic and phenomenological approaches the most suitable for the study because of their value in the research of this nature. Apart from describing the target group the use of the phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to understand the participants' personal meanings they might construct from their daily or 'lived experience' (Johnson & Christenson, 2000) as educators trained to teach adults. Welman, Kruger & Mitchel (2007: 192-193) affirm that the primary task of ethnographic study is to uncover and explicate the ways a group of people understand their settings and take action to manage their situations, problems and difficulties for better improvement. Phenomenological research on the other hand focuses on the understanding of social and psychological phenomenon from the perspectives

of the people involved. It is more concerned with how participants in the study experience a particular phenomenon (Welman et al, 2007).

Population and Sample

As a trainer of ABET educators in the North West since 1996 the researcher was aware of the existence of UNISA ABET graduates who teach in the province. He therefore targeted ABET centres as sites for meeting the educators for exploring their continuous professional development needs. The researcher contacted the ABET education officials in the province who provided him with 875 names of UNISA ABET trained educators, working under their supervision. Using the random sampling technique the researcher selected 400 educators out of the total population of 875 from the geographical areas of Vryburg, Kuruman, Taung and Atamelang to participate in the exploratory study. In selecting the participants the names of ABET educators from each of the 4 education districts where the study was conducted were listed on separate sheet of papers and each uneven number was picked. With the permission of the education officials from the selected sites the participants were contacted and informed of the purpose of the study and their role in the investigation. The data collecting instruments (interview items) were tested on four educators at one ABET centre which was not included in the study. The instruments were then refined before undertaking the field work.

DATA COLLECTION

After selecting the participants the researcher contacted the ABET centre managers of the selected educators to arrange for focus group discussions. A total of 40 focus group discussions made up of 10 participants per group were conducted between February and June 2012. The discussions focused on the kind of qualifications of participants, when the qualifications were obtained, number of years of teaching since obtaining the qualifications, whether they have done any further courses or attended any in-service training since they started teaching, whether participants have experienced any problems regarding their initial training and qualifications as educators of adults and the kind of continuous professional development programme they might require to enhance their teaching practices. Each focus group interview took place at the respective learning centres of the participants and lasted for one and half hours. The researcher learnt from the ABET education specialists at the regional office that classes at the various centres started at 2 pm from Monday to Thursdays and in order not to disrupt the teaching programme of the participants the researcher arranged with them to do the interviews before classes started.

At the beginning of each session the researcher first introduced himself and the topic for discussion. After posing the question he listened to the discussion, observed and made copious notes from the responses participants provided as the interviews proceeded. To ensure that all pertinent information were captured the researcher sometimes requested participants to repeat their responses and often followed up with probing questions.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the participants through focus group discussions were analysed manually through the use of open coding approach. The aim of the analysis was to understand the various constitutive elements in the data through an inspection of relationships between concepts, constructs and variables and to see whether there were any patterns or trends (Mouton, 2004). To make the analysis simple and manageable the data were broken down into smaller units with each of the units arranged under an appropriate and a specific theme.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an important element in qualitative research which relates to the level of dependability or reliability of the data gathering instruments, the process followed in gathering the data, the quality of data gathered and their validity. To ensure trustworthiness in this research all responses were written down or transcribed verbatim. The researcher kept a journal for the field work in which whatever he heard, saw and observed were recorded. He employed various techniques to achieve and maintain the dependability and credibility of the final product of the empirical study. For example throughout the interviews the researcher frequently requested respondents to repeat or clarify their responses to ensure that only the correct answers were recorded. Again triangulation was achieved by comparing the responses of the participants from the different groups.

Ethical consideration

The question of ethics is very important in an empirical study which involves human lives and to adhere to important ethical principles and considerations the researcher sought permission from the local adult education authorities [i.e. chief education specialist and centre managers] and obtained an informed consent from the participants in the study.

Again as a measure to ensure confidentiality and anonymity the researcher did not record names and voices of all the participants in the investigation.

Finally the researcher informed all the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and anyone could withdraw from it whenever they wanted to do so.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

After collecting the data the researcher arranged and analysed them under the following themes:

i). Demographic profile of participants

The participants' ages ranged from 20-50 years with majority of them i.e. 95% (n=380) being in their middle age (41-50 years). A very small number (20) constituting 5% of the participants fall between 20-30 years of age. The demographic profile of the participants was important to the study in that it indicates the participants who are in their early adulthood and those in middle or later adulthood stages. The age range relates to the staff development needs of the educators because the younger the educator the more likely s/he might not be able to handle adult learners as adults. It is possible that most of the adult learners in the basic education programme are either far older than some of the educators or at the same age. Adult learners need to be treated as adults hence educators should have knowledge and training in the skills for teaching adults. When adult learners are treated like child learners they might resent by dropping out of the course and for this reason the educators should have training in the methodology of adult teaching and learning.

ii). ABET qualifications of participants

Apart from matriculation and or senior certificates the responses gathered from the qualifications of the participants provided two types of adult educators- Certificate and Diploma holders. Of the 400 participants 366(91.5%) have completed the UNISAABET teachers' Diploma while 34 (8.5%) of them have the ABET training Certificate. Although all of the participants have training and qualifications for teaching adults the background of the 34 certificate holders might be inadequate since the duration of the certificate course is only 1 year compared to the 3 year diploma in adult teaching. The difference in the qualifications warrants staff development opportunities for the educators. As one of the participants affirmed;

Although I trained to teach adults I cannot say I know everything about ABE teaching. Many changes are taking place now in education in general and in ABET in particular. ABET educators must attend some workshops to upgrade our knowledge.

iii). When ABET teaching qualification was acquired and teaching experience

The focus group discussions also revealed that 87.5%(n=35 groups) or 350 of the participants obtained their ABET training between 1996-2000 and 12.5% (n=50) between 2001-2010. This information indicates that a large number of the ABET educators might lack current knowledge and teaching skills in ABET because they obtained their training for over 14 years ago. One of the group members affirmed this in the following words;

'Although I obtained my diploma from UNISA I still feel that after many years of qualifying as ABET educator I need to sharpen my knowledge and skills if I were to be abreast with the new developments in ABET teaching'.

As a sequel to the above information was the question of participants' teaching experience. The responses indicated that 76.5 % (n=310) have taught adults on the basic education programme since 1996 while 23.5 % (n=90) indicated that they have been teaching adults since 2005. The focus group discussions also revealed that all the participants have an average of 7 years experience in teaching adult learners with over 76% teaching for 17 years. This is an indication that the participants have been in the business for very long and might have confidence and skills of teaching adult learners. An old lady from one of the groups had this to say;

I was one of the first ABET educators at the Lesedi learning centre when it started in 1996. I love teaching adults and will continue teaching here till I retire in 4 years' time.

iv). Challenges faced by UNISA ABET graduates

The groups were unanimous in their responses to whether they experienced any problems teaching with the ABET certificate and Diploma. The participants confirmed that the initial training in ABET has given them the needed confidence to teach adults but added that they felt it has taken too long for UNISA to provide them with the next level of training to make them more competent, confident, knowledgeable and skillful in their career. The above response is an indictment on UNISA because there seems to be no direct continuity for those who completed the diploma to do any further studies in ABET beyond that level. The diploma does not qualify them to proceed to the Honours B.Ed degree programme and this causes some frustration among the ambitious educators who would like to study further in their chosen field. As one educator aptly lamented;

I want to do further studies in ABET even beyond the Honours B.Ed but last year when I enquired at UNISA regional office in Kimberley I was told I do not qualify to register for the Honours degree with ABET Diploma. This frustrates me a lot. It seems I have hit the wall.

Again all the groups (n=40 i.e. 400 participants) lamented that their work is not permanent and at the beginning every year they have to apply for the same posts they occupy and that their remuneration is calculated by the number of hours they teach. This response indicates that the ABET educators do not seem to be treated the same way by the employer the mainstream school teachers although most of them hold diploma as their school counterparts. This poor condition of employment- temporary appointment- might mean no promotion and career path for the ABET educators.

Thirty eight groups out of 40 (making 380 participants) reported that apart from teaching basic education to adults they also teach two types of matriculation revision classes. The two type of matriculation repeaters come from what they referred to as the old standard 10 and the National School Certificate. All these repeaters who attend ABET classes to improve their standard 10 or matriculation symbols are early adults. The participants acceded that they do not have the content knowledge to teach some of the mainstream subjects which they never studied at school or as part of their training as ABET educators. Moreover employers do not provide them with training to update their content knowledge in such subjects.

As one participant affirmed;

I do not see how grade 12 repeaters should be brought to ABET centres for us to teach them. We are not trained to teach matric subjects. I think there is some confusion regarding what ABET is all about. If the employer wants us to teach matric repeaters then it must provide us with some in-service training.

The information above does not only compromise quality of teaching but might cause de-motivation among the educators as the employer requires them to teach subjects they know very little about.

v). Any Continuous Professional Development for ABET educators

Regarding opportunities for continuous professional development all the 40 groups (400 participants) agreed that they have not been attending in-service training or workshops to upgrade their knowledge and skills since they started teaching as ABET educators. The participants agreed that

they have attended the annual literacy day celebrations organized by the provincial ABET department but those meetings do not address their Continuous Professional Development needs (upgrading of teaching skills).

One of the educators affirmed;

School teachers often get the opportunity to attend workshops and in-service training but we ABET educators have no such training. Is it because we are regarded as temporary educators by the employer?

vi). Kind of CPD they may require to enhance their teaching

As regards the kind of continuous professional development (CPD) programme they thought might address their staff development needs and thus enhance their teaching practices the groups raised two important issues. They would like to see the UNISA ABET programme evaluated through need analysis to enable the planners, organisers and presenters to diversify the programmes to include more skills and entrepreneurial courses. They also would like to see a course that can articulate or provide the ABET diploma holders entry into the Honours B.Ed. with specialisation in ABET.

The two issues raised by the participants are very pertinent to the goal of the ABET programmes - poverty alleviation. As educators on the ground who interact with the youths and adults they understand the learning needs that can address the socio-economic ills of the learners and their respective communities. Thus if the ABET courses are diversified those who do the UNISAABET courses can learn more relevant job related skills which they can cascade them (through teaching) to adult learners and the youth for self-employment activities.

Again an articulation of the curriculum could allow many educators in possession of the ABET diploma to gain entry into the Honours B.Ed and possibly engage in Masters' and Doctoral research studies. The current situation puts the ABET diploma graduates at a disadvantage because they do not qualify to register for the Honours B.Ed with specialization in ABET.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the staff development needs of UNISA ABET trained adult educators in the North West province. Data were collected through the qualitative research method in the form of focus group interviews. A total of 400 UNISAABET trained adult educators participated in the study and the main findings included: the need to institute an advance diploma to enable educators

in possession of ABET diploma to gain admission into the Honours' B.Ed. programme to assure them of a career path; the need to provide educators with in-service training to improve their teaching skills and the need to evaluate the programme in a bid to make its curriculum more effective in addressing the socio-economic problems of the country.

Based on the findings outlined in the pages above the study concludes that:

- i). The North West provincial ABET department should provide continuous professional development for its ABET educators to enhance their teaching practices and
- ii). UNISA must revamp the curriculum of ABET Programmes to include more entrepreneurial and practical skills if its courses were to remain relevant to the socio-economic needs of South Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings the study recommends to the provincial department of ABET to re-think the use of continuous professional development programmes to re-skill adult educators teaching at the various ABET centres in the province. The University of South Africa should also transform the existing ABET certificate and diploma curriculum to be more relevant to the socio-economic needs of the country.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this case study are based on qualitative interviews conducted with 400 adult educators in the North West province. Although the use of a case study allowed an in-depth study of the particular phenomenon it might have some limitations relating to generalization of the findings. The conclusions of the study should therefore be interpreted against the potential limitations as outlined above.

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