
South Africa's adult educators in the community college sector: Who they are and how they view their training, their work and their position

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the work context of South Africa's state-employed adult educators. It is based largely on a recent cross-sectional study of adult educators commissioned by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which draws on the DHET's database of adult educators and qualitative information gained from visits to adult education and training centres in all nine provinces. The study enquired into adult educators' working lives, their qualifications, their sense of whether their training was adequate, the issue of further training, their understanding of their work, their conditions of service and the support they believe they need. The study showed that the number of adult educators employed by the DHET is declining steadily and that the working conditions of adult educators are uneven: a few work in fairly well-resourced urban centres, but many work in poor conditions, with little support. Nevertheless, the study indicated that almost all the adult educators view their role in a positive light. Confident of support from one another, they have a definite shared identity as a social group and express a strong commitment to their learners and the communities in which they work. Overall, they constitute a group with strong, yet poorly tapped, potential to contribute to positive community development.

KEYWORDS

Adult educators, adult learning and education (ALE), lifelong learning, community colleges, community learning centres, adult learning centres

Introduction

The literature attests to the benefits of adult and community education in spheres that are central to shared daily life (see Neville, O'Dwyer & Power, 2014; Milana, Rasmussen & Holford, 2016; Iníiguez-Berrozpe, Elboj-Saso, Flecha & Marcaletti, 2020). If the status of occupations depended on evidence of their value to society, adult and community educators would be highly regarded and handsomely remunerated. Yet, internationally, adult and community education tend to be underfunded when compared to schooling and tertiary education (Benavot, 2018); adult educators have long perceived their position as the neglected stepchildren in the great education family (Bowl, 2017). The picture is even starker in South Africa.

Background

People regarded as those with the greatest need for adult education and therefore the prime 'clients' for the sector are adults who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). In 2020, about 17 million people in South Africa aged between 15 and 60 (approximately 40% of the total population) were classified as NEET (Khuluvhe & Negogogo, 2021). The COVID-19 lockdown exacerbated the situation, and the proportion of adults who are NEET rose to 43% in the third quarter of 2020 (Stats SA, 2021) as employment opportunities were demolished when the lockdown forced businesses to stall operations, contract or close down.

Partly because of this, and despite universities having more than doubled their intake since 1994 to more than a million students (DHET, 2019a), the number of young adults (aged 15–34) who are NEET rose to 8,8 million in 2020 (Stats SA, 2021). NEET status correlates strongly with poor levels of education (DHET, 2019a). This situation suggests that adult learning should be advanced as a vital catalyst in the transformation of the lives of disadvantaged adults because of the known positive influence of education on employability and income. It also suggests the need to expand the provision of adult education, with increased numbers of adult educators serving this expansion. This is expressed in government policy and should translate into more employment opportunities and more secure employment for adult educators.

In the *National Development Plan for the Implementation of the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training System 2019–2030* (DHET, 2019b) the objective was that by 2030 there would be a million learners registered in the new Community Education and Training College (CETC) system.¹ To achieve this objective within the 17 years between the drafting

¹ This new Community Education and Training College (CETC) system, presented as part of a strategy to revitalise and expand South Africa's adult and community education system, would employ a large number of adult and community educators. As an early step towards the new system, the old Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) were administratively shifted from the provincial education departments to the national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)'s Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system and nominally clustered into nine community colleges (one per province) with a plan ultimately to have one in every district.

of the plan and the target date of 2030, it would have been necessary to attract a steadily increasing stream of adult learners into the state system, but this did not happen (Aitchison, 2002; 2003; 2018). A well-funded and successful adult literacy campaign was conducted from 2008 to 2016, but this offered only minimal basic literacy and numeracy that was not capitalised on with recruitment into more formal Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) (DHET, 2017:387–414).

Since 2015 the number of adults choosing to register in the state adult education system has in fact steadily declined. This decline puts the social and economic goals flagged in adult education policy ever further out of reach and reduces the employment opportunities of adult educators in the system.

Decline in number of learners in adult education system

By the first quarter of 2020, the total number of adult learners registered in the country had declined to 180 468 (DHET, 2021) – a 34% reduction since the high level of 2016.

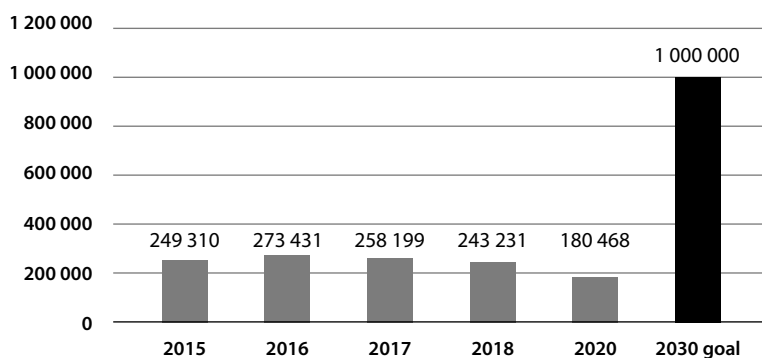


Figure 1: The current CET learner situation vs the 2030 goal (DHET, 2017 and DHET Webinar, 2021)

Because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown, the policy goal of a million learners by 2030 was adjusted downwards in 2021. This overall trend and the slow development of the new community college system, now further held up as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, does not augur at all well for the prospects of the CETC system and its educators. The question remains whether there is the political will to implement the system described in this policy (DHET, 2013).

State system adult educators – antecedents of their current circumstances and status

In the early 1990s, when a substantial number of adult educators were employed in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), church-based organisations and workplace literacy

programmes in industry, training for adult educators was carried out largely in the organisations they worked for. Operating in a sphere without much regulation, these organisations trained their educators in line with their particular aims, using a wide variety of methods (Harley, Aitchison, Lyster & Land, 1996:435–492). At the more conservative end of the spectrum, the NGO Operation Upgrade offered basic functional literacy in workplace programmes for organisations that employed large numbers of unskilled workers (e.g. timber companies); at the more revolutionary end, Freirean-inspired initiatives offered education for liberation and consciousness-raising. This gave rise to a heterogeneous spread of basic training and certification of adult educators in universities, technikons and training organisations. These qualifications, held by many educators who have worked in the field for decades, appear to be categorised on the NQF as Level 5 ‘ABET Practitioners Certificates’ (Land, Mbhamali & Mukeredzi, 2021). The ABET Institute of the University of South Africa trained more than 80 000 such educators, many of whom were the backbone of the Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign (DHET, 2017).

By the late 1990s, the majority of adult educators were employed in the state sector. Most were qualified school teachers with a few days’ training as ‘orientation’ to adult education behind them (Harley et al., 1996:435–492). Non-state provision of literacy and basic education dwindled with the ending of anti-apartheid donor funding and new directions for funding such as the HIV/Aids pandemic, but its ethos undoubtedly inspired some of the intentions evident in current policy documents and new initiatives.

Current employment status of state adult educators

In 2021, it is difficult to find paid adult educators who are not employed in the state system. After 1994, there was a general demise of what had been, in the 1980s and 1990s, a substantial and busy NGO adult literacy sector (Miller, 2011), and a similar decline in the employment of trainers in industry as under-educated employees completed a basic education or were replaced with younger, better-educated applicants. Since 2015, when they were shifted from the provincial departments of education, adult educators have been directly employed by the DHET along with lecturers at TVET colleges and tertiary institutions; they are now referred to by the DHET as ‘lecturers’, even though this label is not descriptive of what they have to do as teachers of school-equivalent education for adults.

From the perspective of adult educators, the shift to the DHET has not been a positive one; many of them feel that they are now worse off because, in their perception, they receive even less support than they did from the provincial departments.

Number of adult educators

Data from the DHET’s EMIS system supplemented by figures from a DHET publication (2019b) show a decline in the number of adult educators employed by the state, from 15 991 in 2015 to 14 259 in 2016, to 14 014 in 2017 and 12 975 in 2018. In 2021, DHET estimates

suggest that it has risen to 13 607, but this is still 15% fewer than there were in 2015, and fewer than the 14 373 adult educators employed in state-run adult learning sites in South Africa in the 1990s (Harley et al., 1996).

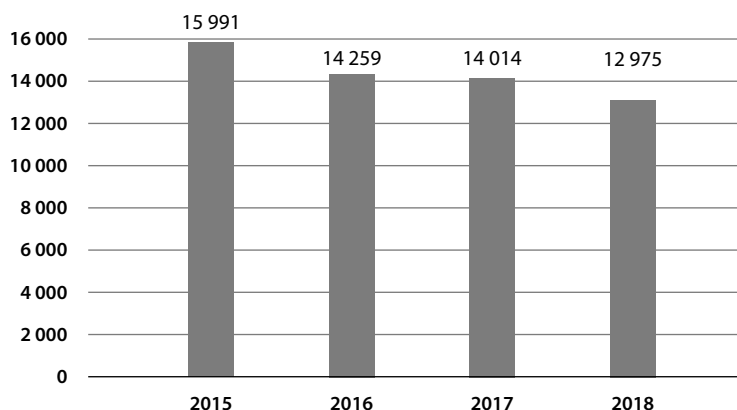


Figure 2: Adult educators in employment in South Africa, 2015–2018 (DHET, 2019b)

In individual provinces, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Western Cape suffered a steady decline in the number of adult educators between 2015 and 2018. The Northern Cape and North West provinces bucked the downward trend, with more educators employed in 2017 than in 2015, but their numbers dropped in 2018 after a 2017 peak. In Limpopo, the number of educators employed dipped steadily from 2015 to 2017 and then increased in 2018.

Table 2: Number of educators per province, 2015–2018 (DHET, 2019b)

NUMBER OF EDUCATORS PER PROVINCE	2015	2016	2017	2018
Eastern Cape (EC)	2 952	2 863	2 788	2 497
Free State (FS)	523	868	913	862
Gauteng (GAU)	2 246	2 245	2 097	2 131
KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)	5 250	4 030	3 717	3 124
Limpopo (LIM)	1 430	1 122	995	1 295
Mpumalanga (MPU)	1 862	1 308	1 470	1 297
North West (NW)	944	1 040	1 244	1 005
Northern Cape (NC)	56	163	170	161
Western Cape (WC)	728	620	620	603
National	15 991	14 259	14 014	12 975

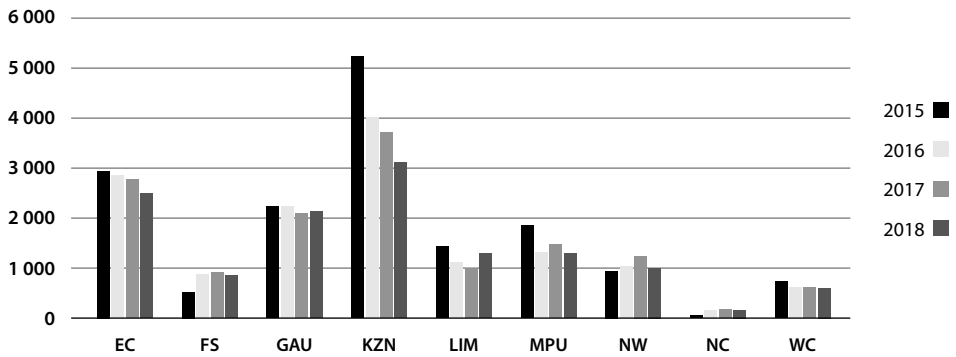


Figure 3: Graphic comparison of adult educators per province, 2015–2018 (DHET, 2019b)

The figures above are based on returns submitted to the DHET's EMIS system by the Community Learning Centres (CLCs) and their satellites. More recent figures are not available. Since not all CLCs submit returns, these numbers are lower than the actual number of educators in the field, but the downward trend is likely to reflect reality. This contraction contrasts sharply with the expansive tone of the White Paper (DHET 2013), DHET's policy on minimum requirements for adult educators (DHET 2015b), the *National Policy on Community Colleges* (DHET 2015a), and the draft National Youth Policy 2020–2030 (Department of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities 2020).

The provinces with the most adult educators are KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape, with 24% and 19% respectively, followed by Gauteng with 16%. Other provinces have between 5% and 10% of adult educators each, except for Northern Cape, which has by far the fewest, with only 1%. Generally, the numbers roughly correlate with the number of adult learners in each province.

Regarding the gender breakdown, a substantial majority (76,5%) of adult educators are women and only 23,5% are men. This is the general pattern for all the provinces, as shown in the graph below.

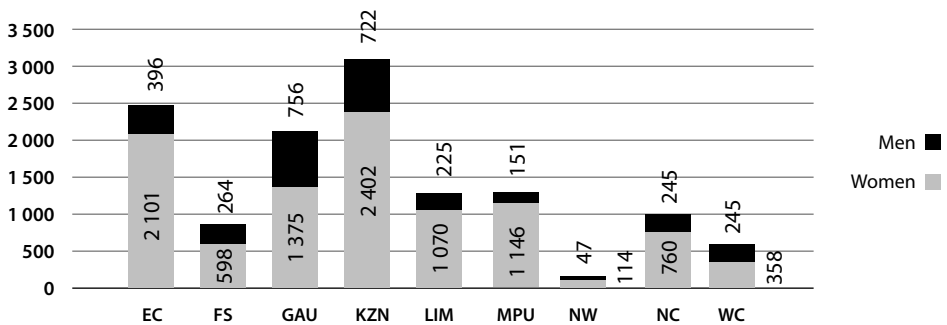


Figure 4: Adult educators by gender per province (DHET, 2019a)

Qualifications of adult educators

The DHET's 2015 policy on the minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications for educators and lecturers in adult and community education and training promotes the development of well-qualified professional educators. This policy stresses the need for 'appropriately qualified, versatile, competent AET educators and CET lecturers' (DHET, 2015b:6) and advocates

articulation pathways that take the range of qualifications of adult educators and CET lecturers into account to ensure that people who hold any of these qualifications have access to an appropriate HEQSF-aligned qualification that will enable their further development (DHET, 2015b:7).

In terms of this policy, only educators who hold qualifications at NQF Level 6 and above are considered to be professionally qualified.

Estimates received from the DHET based on 2020 returns from CETC principals show that on the basis of this policy the currently active teaching corps is severely underqualified, with only 64% regarded as professionally qualified with at least REQV 13, which is basically NQF Level 6 and above (Land et al., 2021).

Regarding NQF levels, verified 2017 data from the DHET's EMIS system showed that 19% of adult educators employed in South Africa held qualifications at NQF Level 4, with no further academic development or any professional training; 16% held only a Grade 12 and 3% held only technical training, such as N4, N5 or N6. A further 20% held an NQF Level 5 qualification, which, in terms of the new policy, is seen as an entry-level qualification and no longer as a professional qualification. Educators with this Level 5 certificate should now be employed as 'associate educators' with inferior conditions of service.

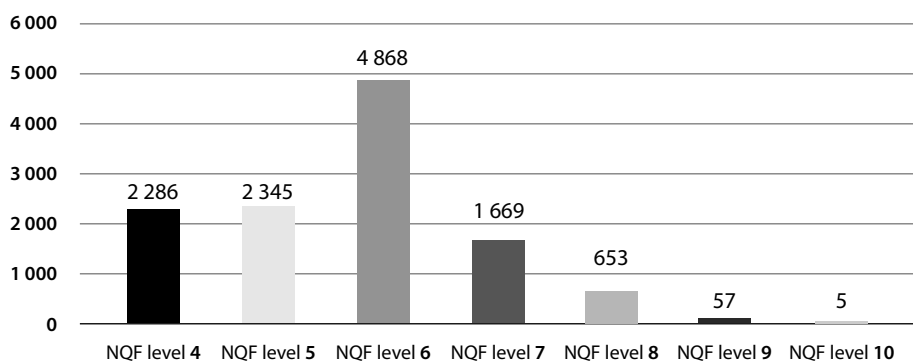


Figure 5: Adult educators' NQF levels, 2017 (DHET, 2017)

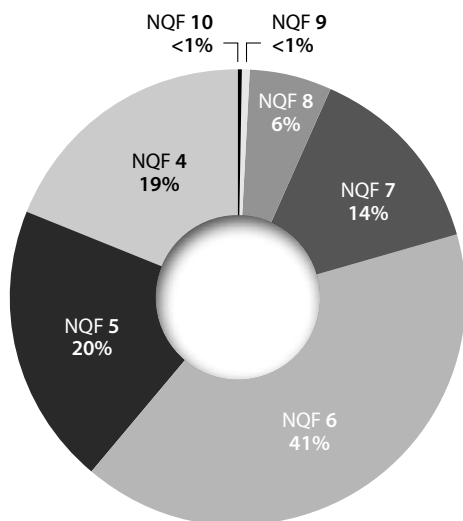


Figure 6: Adult educators by NQF level, 2017 (DHET, 2017)

The spread of qualifications held by adult educators in 2017 and on which these graphs are based ranges from NQF Level 3 to NQF Level 10:

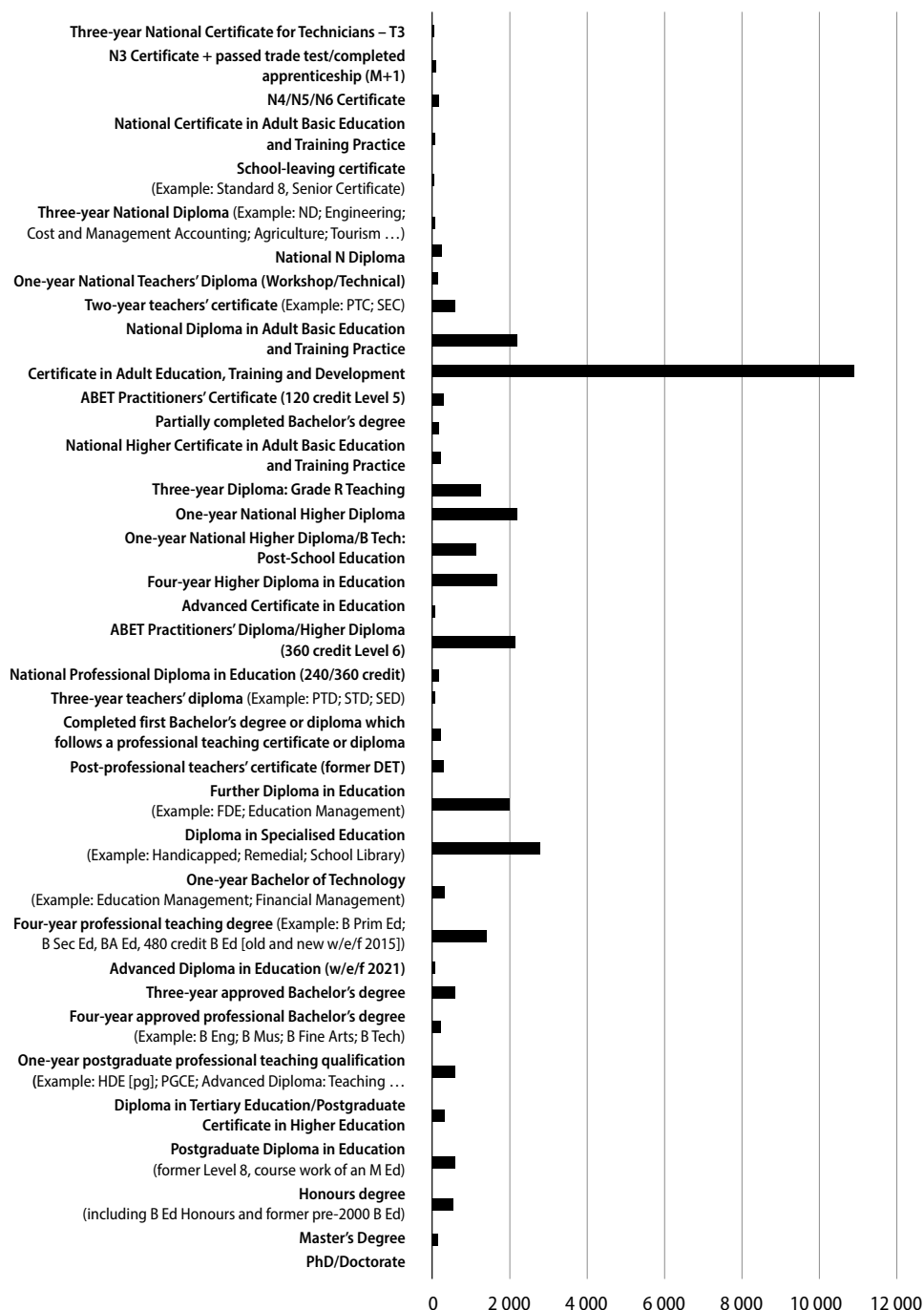


Figure 7: Adult educators' spread of qualifications (DHET, 2017)

As the graph above shows, current adult educators have a wide spread of qualifications, of which the most commonly held by far in 2017 was the NQF Level 5 certificate in ABET teaching. However, it must be remembered that in these returns, educators list all of the qualifications they hold and not only their highest qualifications. An analysis of the highest qualifications listed by adult educators showed that:

- 36% of them had some kind of training in adult education or adult basic education;
- 25% had no training in teaching adults but did hold a qualification for school teaching; and
- only approximately 20% of them hold a graduate-level diploma, a degree or a post-graduate qualification – although they are keen to improve their qualifications.

Unverified data received from the DHET, based on principals' 2020 returns stating Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) levels, suggest that whereas 19% of state-employed adult educators are still unqualified, 44% are on REQV 13. This suggests that a significant number may have improved their qualifications from NQF Level 6 to NQF Level 7 since 2017.

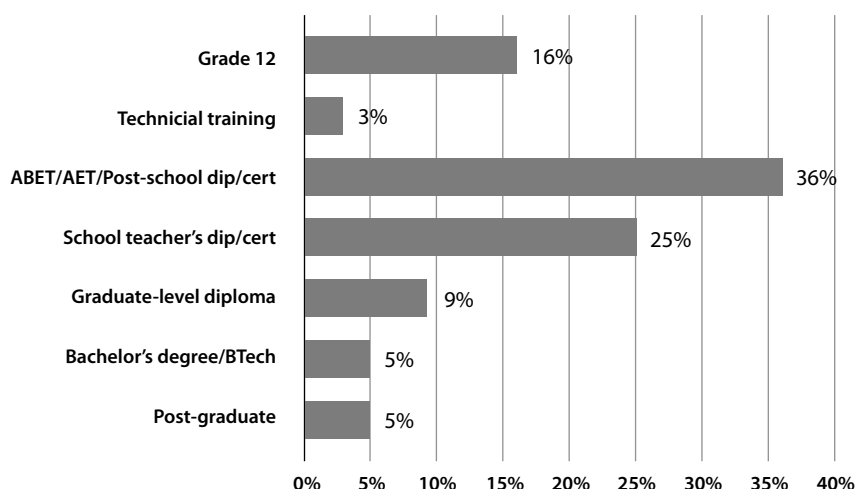


Figure 8: Adult educators by type of qualification (DHET's EMIS system, 2017)

The Auditor-General's (2014) report on the country-wide audit of adult education and training centres conducted in 2011 and 2012 noted the lack of measures to track and report on the extent and effect of underqualified educators. However, the report linked the poor success rates of adult learners to the poor quality of teaching by underqualified educators who struggled to interpret the curriculum and lacked basic teaching skills and strategies. Unfortunately, a large proportion of adult educators are still teaching without the benefit of any training.

A vision for the adult educator

The DHET (2015:10) has set out an elevated vision of what the professionally qualified adult educator should be capable of. Principles that are specifically relevant to the development of AET educators and CET lecturers and their work in ACET institutions and other settings include the following:

- Embracing the concept of lifelong learning, recognising that learning takes place throughout a person's life and in many forms;
- Recognising the specific holistic nature of lifelong learning, which includes the cognitive, emotional and cultural aspects of learning;
- Promoting the values that underpin an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom;
- Respecting and encouraging democracy and fostering a culture that promotes human rights;
- Pursuing excellence and promoting the full realisation of the potential of every learner and member of staff, tolerance of ideas and appreciation of diversity;
- Promoting optimal opportunities for adult learning and literacy, for knowledge development and the development of skills in keeping with international standards of academic and technical quality; and
- Recognising ACET as part of continuing education and training in the PSET sector, including the overlaps and articulation of ACET with technical and vocational education and training and higher education and training in the quest to achieve an integrated PSET system.

It is clear from the above description of adult educators' qualifications that this vision is still a mirage. However, a recent initiative that may improve the prospects for those adult educators who are in a position to take advantage of it is the DHET's European Union-funded Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme (TLDICIP). This programme is aimed at enhancing South African universities' capacity to educate and train educators, including adult educators, and has piloted a curriculum for the new NQF Level 7 Advanced Diploma in Adult Education and Training. Different versions of this qualification were offered for the first time at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in 2020.

Cross-sectional study of adult educators and adult education programmes

In this next section, we consider adult educators' own articulation of their work and their social identity as adult educators in South Africa based on the findings of *A cross-sectional study of adult educators and adult education programmes* (Land et al., 2021). The study was commissioned by the DHET as part of its TLDCIP.

During 2018 and 2019 researchers from the DUT's Adult and Community Education unit visited 44 CLCs across the country to interview adult educators working there. In each province, at least one urban and one rural CLC, a CLC in a prison and, where possible, an NGO offering some kind of adult or community learning were visited. This study aimed to inform planning for the provision of training for educators in the post-school sector, particularly in view of the planned expansion of community colleges. Therefore, the study enquired into their working lives, focusing on:

- adult educators' education levels;
- their understanding of their work;
- their sense of whether their training was adequate; and
- the support they need.

At each site, the researcher would interview the centre manager and run a focus-group discussion with educators who were available and willing to participate (making up a sample of approximately 150 adult educators in all). Following this, and provided the research participants were willing, the researcher would photograph the centre. All the sites were visited. By April 2019, all the sites shown below had been visited and data were analysed in terms of the themes noted above:

- KwaZulu-Natal – four CLCs and one NGO
- Eastern Cape – five CLCs
- Free State – five CLCs and one NGO
- Gauteng – five CLCs and one NGO
- Mpumalanga – six CLCs
- Limpopo – three CLCs and one NGO
- North West – three CLCs and one NGO
- Northern Cape – three CLCs and one NGO
- Western Cape – three CLCs and one NGO.

Thematic data analysis showed that, across provinces, educators raised the same issues and made very similar claims. This contradicted our expectations that different provincial contexts would give rise to differences in what adult educators communicated to researchers.

Social identity of adult educators

According to Tajfel's social identity theory (Brown, 2020), self-esteem, a sense of belonging, confidence in potential agency and resilience are all to be gained from identifying with a group of people one sees as similar to oneself. Identity as a member of a social group is based on our categorising people we encounter as being either within or outside the group we identify with. This categorisation provides us with a framework for understanding our social environment, informs our expectations of other people and influences our behaviour since we tend to conform to what we understand to be the norms of the group we identify with. In comparing our 'in-group' with others, we tend to find ways to foreground the perceived strengths of the group (McLeod, 2019). Group identity tends also to be stronger in groups who see themselves as comparatively disadvantaged and disempowered. The data collected indicate that adult educators have a strong sense of identity as a minority group.

Educators across all the provinces are sensitive about the low status they feel they have in relation to school and TVET educators. The vehemence with which adult educators expressed their sense of shared indignation at their perception of low status resonates with the hypothesis in social identity theory (Brown, 2020) that strong association with the group can increase their sense of well-being in the face of the stigmatisation that they perceive. Many believe that the DHET deliberately neglects them, seeing them as simply not worth much attention. Statements from adult educators included:

We are trying to uplift the community but there is no recognition, even from the Department of Higher Education and Training.

We felt excluded from the Department [of Higher Education and Training].

Learners are still waiting for 2017 results. The Department doesn't give a good reason for not giving out the results.

We have learners with disability and the centre manager reported to the Department, several times and no help yet. They say there are no funds, but these interpreters are needed since this area has a lot of deaf citizens.

Educators in prisons believe that they are tolerated with resentment by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) since adult learning is not the primary focus of prisons and their classes interfere with the primary focus of keeping prisoners securely contained. This runs counter to the DCS's stated policy mandate to 'develop the Department of Correctional Services into an institution of rehabilitation' (DCS, 2021).

What adult educators teach

What adult educators teach is determined by the official unit standards for the AET/ABET levels offered, and the levels offered are determined partly by the demand for them and partly by posts approved by the DHET. Changing demand from learners has resulted in a shift upwards in what is taught at CLCs, some of them offering only AET/ABET Level 4 (NQF 1, equivalent to Grade 9) and at FET level (AET Levels 5–7), the Amended version of the Senior Certificate.

Across all provinces, educators reported increasing difficulty in recruiting learners to register for AET/ABET Levels 1 and 2 (equivalent to school Grades 1–6).

Where AET Levels 1, 2 and 3 are still offered, educators teach literacy skills in local indigenous languages, English, and Mathematical Literacy/Numeracy. At AET/ABET Level 3 (equivalent to school Grades 7–8), some educators also teach introductory courses to the subjects offered at AET Level 4.

At AET Level 4, adult educators teach English, Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy, Ancillary Healthcare, SMME, Human and Social Sciences, Travel and Tourism, Life Orientation, Early Childhood Development (ECD), Wholesale and Retail, Natural Sciences, and occasionally, Arts and Culture, and Information and Communications Technology (commonly called ICT).

At a few CLCs, adult educators teach non-formal options such as sewing, beadwork, gardening, coaching for learners' licences and, very occasionally, computer skills.

Programmes run in prisons appear on the whole to be far better resourced than those offered in other CLCs. Although educators complain of difficulties with logistics for classes in prisons in that prisoners must be accompanied by a guard to and from classes, and sometimes are prevented from attending classes for various reasons to do with prison procedures, they are at least provided with teaching and learning materials and stationery, and have access to electricity, water and toilet facilities.

The fact that the number of adults choosing to learn at CLCs is steadily dropping is a clear sign that what adult educators are required to teach is not attractive to the adults they are trying to recruit.

What adult learners want them to teach

Many adult educators receive repeated requests from community members for learning options that they are unable to meet and expressed their frustration at not being enabled to access training or make any progress towards meeting these requests. Most commonly, people ask for skills training, particularly computer skills, catering, agro-processing, plumbing, bricklaying, plastering, electrical work, carpentry and administration skills. Few CLCs have

access to the facilities needed for teaching these skills – most use school classrooms after hours – and very few adult educators are trained to offer these skills, although many are keen to gain this training.

Where centres do not offer Grade 12, there are many requests for it, as well as requests for AET Level 4 subjects, particularly Ancillary Healthcare and ECD, since armed with AET Level 4 certificates in these subjects, learners have greater chances of employment or income-generation.

Adult educators are disheartened that these requests are not acceded to.

Adult educators' sense of their own training

Adult educators readily expressed their need for further training, most commonly in:

- further training to improve their capacity to teach what they already teach;
- workshops to keep them abreast of current developments in what they perceive as a fast-changing teaching environment;
- training in assessment and moderation;
- computer skills;
- remedial teaching; and
- meeting their learners' need for skills development.

Many adult educators stated their need for developmental workshops 'so that we can teach effectively', but, nevertheless, perhaps as part of affirming their identity as members of the group of adult educators, and with reluctance to admit to weakness in the group, state that they regard their initial training as adequate. This insistence may derive from a sense of loyalty to the organisation at which they were trained and an unwillingness to denigrate it, or possibly from a fear of jeopardising their continued employment by expressing misgivings about the adequacy of their training.

Some under-trained educators who stated that they had no need of further training are perhaps unaware of how further training could benefit them. Also, in some remote rural areas, educators are so used to working on the basis of inadequate training that they are not even aware that as educators they need more understanding of the subjects they teach, of adult learning and of effective teaching techniques.

Adult educators' sense of the roles they play

Adult educators share a sense that they have a lower status and earn less than educators in mainstream schools and TVET colleges, but believe that they have a strong work ethic, support one another and make real differences in the lives of their learners. In the expression of this shared sense of identity, they epitomise an aspect of Tajfel's social identity theory

(McLeod, 2019) which sees people searching for positive distinctiveness in their group as opposed to other groups. This positive group identity extended to their shared conviction of how committed adult educators are to their learners and to helping their learners find solutions to problems in their domestic, social and financial lives. Equally common was a sense of teamwork and cooperation among adult educators. This was another demonstration of a shared perception of group solidarity and cooperation in the face of commonly felt disadvantage and a lack of acknowledgement from established authorities. Adult educators said:

You become a mentor. Adult learners have different problems from home. For instance, some of them are married, they come from disadvantaged families, they are preoccupied. As a mentor/educator you have to motivate them.

We do good work helping people who did not get a chance to learn.

We help learners who are rejected from school because of their age, and help them to achieve.

It is fulfilling working with people who are sure what they need. We are changing their lives not only academically but the behaviour as well. They change at times even though they were badly behaving. That makes us feel good.

Seeing them [the learners] becoming somebody in the community like businessman, ward councillor is good.

We even visit the learner at home to understand reason for being absent or dropout.

We take extra hours for the benefit of learners without being paid.

We go an extra mile in order for learning and teaching to flow as expected.

This commitment does not lead to good academic results overall in the state adult education system. In 2018, of the nearly 90 000 who registered for AET/ABET Level 4, although the pass rates for some subjects were above 70%, overall, only 31% of learners completed the course, 28% dropped out and 41% failed (DHET, 2019a).

However, for many learners there are more important gains to be made than passing school-type examinations, and there is a strong sense among adult educators in all the provinces – even among those who teach only a few hours per week and earn very little – that they are enabling their learners to improve their lives. These educators derive satisfaction from seeing their adult learners grow in confidence, become less dependent on others and apply the skills they have gained in their classes to actual situations, or find employment or get promoted. Adult educators often try to help learners solve serious social and financial problems or cope

with difficult situations. They therefore see their roles as including social mentorship and support. Community educators in one NGO, concerned about the safety of young learners who did not conform to gender-related expectations in their community, acted to protect them:

We involve SAPS because they will need protection orders. Communities want to kill them for what they are and they call them demons and other names.

Educators in prisons cope with particular difficulties and describe both the frustration of working with unpredictable obstacles such as lockdowns, searches, court appearances ('You are improvising every day,' they say), and times of great fulfilment. This happens when prisoners gain skills and understanding that may help them play a constructive role in their families and communities after their release. A number of these educators spoke of having a mission to persuade their learners to learn skills that they could use to support themselves and focus on living positive lives after their release. Educators in prisons say:

[in this prison] educators treat learners as their own child to assist them have a better future if they got released one day.

The education we are giving them is assisting offenders a lot, they register with TVET Colleges.

Educators even use their own resources to help the learners, use their [cell phone] data to get information [for the learners].

In some prisons, some of the educators are themselves prisoners. They say:

It keeps our minds active.

It keeps us busy when we are sitting in our cell - it is keeping us away of silly things.

Award ceremonies motivate other inmates to do well and to take education serious.

Prison educators acknowledged that some learners are re-arrested and returned to custody after their release, but spoke of the satisfaction they feel when prisoners' parents and community members praise them for improving their learners' behaviour. They state that family members are sometimes grateful to them for enabling prisoners to become providers for their families. Some prison educators reported that their ex-learners now conduct awareness programmes in schools, churches and other community gatherings, where they raise awareness of the negative consequences of being convicted of crime and of imprisonment. All of these successes could be seen, in terms of Tajfel's social identity theory (Brown, 2020), as instances of the search for the positive distinctiveness of their own group, since they imply that they make more of a difference in their adult learners' lives than mainstream school educators do in their young learners' lives.

Adult educators' enthusiasm for their work may arise from the immediacy of the results they see when adults apply new skills to situations in real contexts or to the satisfaction derived from adult learners' becoming more independent and increasingly proactive in their everyday lives. The stakes are higher in prisons since their educators teach adults who have offended society and who, given that South Africa has one of the highest recidivism rates in the world (Shishane, 2020), stand a high chance of continuing along a destructive path. The accounts of learners' successes accentuate how unfortunate it is that a low proportion of South African prisoners attend classes. Statistics are not available, but some of our prisons have no education programmes at all. Among the prison learning centres visited, the rate of participation in education programmes ranged from less than 1% of the prisoners held at the prison to 15%. A common lament among educators working in prisons was that prison management did not see education as a priority and that it made little effort to shape the logistics of prisons to ensure that prisoners had access to education programmes or that, once enrolled, the inmates could attend classes regularly.

Advantages adult educators see in their work

The first advantage adult educators noted is that teaching adults is easier and more pleasant than teaching children. Since adult learners are not required by law to attend classes, only those who choose to be in class attend and educators do not have to try to force unwilling learners to study.

Second, they described the satisfaction experienced when their learners progress educationally, noting that few jobs yield the special kind of satisfaction that comes from restoring lost rights.

A third aspect of their work valued by many educators was confidence in effective teamwork at their CLCs; encouragingly, this appears to be a common experience among adult educators across the provinces, stressing the support they give and can expect from one another. In this, adult educators reflect a key component of social identity theory: that the strength of people's identification with an in-group is associated with a bias towards their own in-group (Brown, 2020). Related to this may be the appreciation of effective leadership, expressed by some educators who felt that their CLC manager facilitated their work well.

Another advantage is seen by some simply in the relief from deprivation that adult education offers, and some educators expressed gratitude at the provision of learning materials and equipment, or at receiving invitations to attend training workshops.

Problems and disadvantages faced by adult educators

Although some urban CLCs now accommodate adult educators in working spaces that are conducive to effective teaching and learning, for many adult educators, particularly those in rural areas, little appears to have changed in their conditions since the mid-1990s. Many of them lack the basic facilities needed for adult classes (DHET, 2017; Land et al., 2021).

The problems adult educators cope with relate mainly to their working conditions, with no job security, a lack of resources, poor support, a lack of opportunities for professional development, and often unsafe premises, especially during winter when darkness falls early, and they risk being attacked on their way home from class. Another common complaint related to having insufficient paid teaching time to complete the required work. Adult educators who are paid for very few hours per week (usually because they do not have many learners) were particularly aggrieved about having to cover as much work as educators who are paid for more hours per week.

In addition, learning and teaching materials are supplied for some subjects only, or just one copy of a required resource is supplied and, predictably, adult educators who are compelled to teach without resources, or must find and pay for their own, are clearly in difficulty. Many reported that they manage by borrowing books from school teachers and collect cash from their learners to travel by taxi to a photocopy shop and get copies printed. Although a few adult educators reported that they work closely with DHET officials, most feel that they are not actively or adequately provided for and sustained. Educators working in prisons and paid by the DCS tend to feel particularly marginalised. In a sharp reflection of social identity theory's premise of the perception of one's group as separate and perhaps in competition with comparable groups (Brown, 2020), some believed that DHET officials looked down on them because they work in prisons and deliberately excluded them from communications sent by the DHET to adult educators teaching in CLCs outside prisons. An especially embittered statement was:

They treat prison educators as outsiders and they just see prisoners as not worth bothering about.

For adult educators at CLCs housed in schools, the perceived stigmatisation of adult learning has been aggravated by the shift of control from the DBE to the DHET, which has created logistical problems for them. Now that they are no longer under the provincial departments of education, some host schools are less willing to accommodate their CLC, with staff at these schools saying: 'We don't know you anymore'. At one school, which apparently charged the CLC to use their premises, educators reported that:

Now SGBs [School Governing Bodies] want more money per month. The agreement was R2 500. Now the SGB wants more money for us to use the premises.

Finally, adult educators expressed concern about their own lack of capacity to meet requests for learning from the communities surrounding them and are unhappy about the dearth of further training opportunities open to them, especially as they cannot afford the few that are offered. University fees range upwards from R20 000 per annum for part-time qualifications and this is clearly beyond what adult educators can afford on their wages.

It is likely that this sense of continued relative deprivation affirms the sense that adult educators have of themselves as a minority group. In situations such as this, their identification with the group is a strong influence on their self-concept and behaviour (Brown, 2020), so that they affirm and strengthen each other's sense of deprivation, pointing with bitterness and indignation to hardships they put up with. For example:

One educator had to go 3 months without receiving a salary which was enough to put him in bad books of credit rating ... damaging his ... reputation.

Some educators have worked in advance [while they wait for their contracts to be approved] but cannot claim to be back paid for the months they worked without getting paid.

You feel that the centre is like a dumping ground for dropouts, thieves and disables. Some of the learners are awaiting trials so they use the centre as a reason to escape being held in prison.

Educators earn stipends with no medical or housing benefits.

One educator has been teaching for more than 20 years and will retire with no retirement package.

We have no job security – we don't know what will happen tomorrow about our jobs.

In facing these problems and attempting to ameliorate those that they can, adult educators try to act as a group. In doing this, they gain confidence that their perception and understanding of the problems they deal with is accurate, and their chances of achieving positive change for themselves is increased if they act as a group rather than individually (Brown, 2020).

Many adult educators, particularly the worst resourced, have very low expectations and hopes. At some remote rural centres, educators assured researchers that they had no problems, while to the researchers, multiple problems were obvious. These included:

- no office space or office furniture;
- inadequate learning and teaching materials;
- no cupboards to store the little material they had; and
- broken or undersized desks.

At one remote rural CLC, which had no electricity or copying facilities, educators who were trying to teach from a single copy of the learning materials complained only of the lack of access to toilets and drinking water. In this, they epitomised adult educators in rural areas who are so accustomed to severely inadequate resources that it does not occur to them that they or their learners should have amenities appropriate to learning in the 21st century and

the digital era. Where outsiders see glaring needs and an absence of resources, they see normality. At another, similarly poorly resourced CLC, educators said:

We have no toilets and no taps. But we get electricity from neighbourhood, we pull it by extension cord [here the electricity was being tapped from an Eskom line via an illegal connection].

Conditions of service of adult educators

Historically, state-employed adult educators had far inferior conditions of service than those of school teachers. Most were temporary employees on 11-month contracts with none of the benefits that ordinary school teachers had (Harley et al., 1996). Earnings were based on qualifications and hours of teaching, so the remuneration received by adult educators varied according to their contexts. In past years, adult educators at state-run centres were paid via a claim system in which educators would submit claims for hours they worked monthly. The system was cumbersome, slow, unreliable and vulnerable to fraud.

According to both DHET officials and adult educators at CLCs, this claim system is being replaced by yearly renewable contracts with salaries or stipends paid monthly. Although adult educators see this as a positive change, many believe that they are not adequately remunerated for the work they do. Since there is great variation in their rates of pay, there is also a risk of envy and resentment associated with different levels of earnings. Adult educators without job security are understandably prone to leaving to pursue any contract that offers more security than they have.

Educators who work at some prisons are paid by the DHET and at other prisons by the DCS. At the time of the data collection for this study, rates of pay appeared to range from about R9 000 per month for educators at the start of their career to approximately R30 000 per month for managers of centres. In the few NGOs encountered, the earnings of educators vary widely, with some people working as volunteers and others earning moderate salaries.

It has long been argued that adult educators in the state system should have conditions of service similar to those of permanently employed school teachers. There has not been much movement in this direction, although there is a reduction in the use of school teachers working after hours in CLCs to gain extra income, and the move away from the claim system to annual contracts is a positive change.

A negative side-effect for educators of the DHET's *Policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications for educators and lecturers in adult and community education and training* (DHET, 2015b) is that educators with a Higher Certificate in ABET, which at least was a genuine adult educator qualification, were no longer considered professionally qualified and therefore also not eligible for any permanent posts on offer.

Support that adult educators ask for

Educators' appeals for support were touchingly modest and remarkably similar in all provinces, mirroring problems in their working lives, and showing their awareness of the need to develop skills for the digital age. Among wishes for improved work conditions, they state that they need, for example:

- More support from DHET. They only call us to get reports and information. They don't support us.
- Materials for skills training for livelihood, like sewing, fashion designing, baking, welding, catering.
- Not just one copy of a textbook.
- More paid teaching time so we can complete the work.
- Training so that we can teach the skills.
- Transport for learners in winter to stop them dropping out.
- We need to learn computers.

Adult educators' understanding of current developments in the field

Very few of the adult educators interviewed had any understanding of the new CETC system that, on paper, has already been implemented. They reported having heard that there was to be a change linked to the shift of adult education and training from the provincial education departments to the DHET, but they had no knowledge of policy documents such as a national policy on community colleges (DHET, 2015a), or of the *National Development Plan for the Implementation of the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training System, 2019–2030* (DHET, 2019b), or of any new possibilities for learning that should be integral to the new system. Some knew of the change in administrative structure so that CLCs would be clustered, but none of them had heard anything about the non-formal learning offerings, proposed partnerships or the improved conditions for educators and learners in the new system. A common expectation among them about the changes they had heard of was that their position is likely to get worse. Adult educators expressed what they knew of the CETC system in statements such as these:

It doesn't really make sense to ground people.

We know about it and it doesn't change anything, it's not well applied. Only the change of name.

We are a community college, we have main centres and have a satellite which form this centre.

Conclusion

In 2000 the Department of Education received a substantial report on adult education practitioners (Khulisa Management Services, 2000) noting the problematic conditions of service, the need for professionalisation and the lack of data. Among the solutions proposed were:

- a thorough overhaul of the conditions of service;
- proper job descriptions;
- a cluster management system;
- better career mobility;
- adequate pre-service training and access to further qualifications; and
- performance criteria against which educators and centre managers could be evaluated.

It noted the extreme frustration of the adult educators. This frustration continues in 2021 as adult educators relay requests for development to the DHET, but without success. For them reality lags sadly behind the bright bold world of policy that sketches a vision of growing numbers of adult educators and adult learners teaching and learning in well-resourced centres, enjoying the benefits of life-enhancing formal and non-formal learning.

In summary, the study showed that adult educators see themselves as having lower status than mainstream educators and are aggrieved that they receive little provision, official support or acknowledgement for the work they do. On the other hand, they have a strong sense of commitment to one another and to their learners and derive great satisfaction from enabling some of their learners to make positive life changes.

The overwhelming sense one has of adult educators in this country is that with their commitment and desire to serve, they embody enormous potential for benefit, especially for disadvantaged communities, but that the potential remains largely unsupported and untapped.

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