



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ADULT EDUCATORS FROM 2002 TO 2012

Johnson Lineo^{1†} --- Quan-Baffour Kofi Poku²

^{1,2}Department of Adult Basic Education & Youth Development, University of South Africa

ABSTRACT

The University of South Africa (UNISA) celebrated its 140th birthday in 2013. Various schools and departments in the University are taking stock of how they evolved and developed during the post-centenary era. Since 1995, UNISA has offered literacy programmes primarily to about 45 900 youths and adults who were historically and politically excluded before 1994. In line with the idea that learning is ubiquitous, lifelong and “life-wide”, the study was underpinned by human development and social impact assessment theories. The research questions; what benefits were accrued as practitioners and what new innovations and strategies can ABET deploy in its current teachings were meant to assess the effectiveness of programmes offered at UNISA. Quantitative survey corroborated with qualitative approaches through online web interviews to trace a population of 1,500 UNISA alumni graduates in adult education from 2002 to 2012, in three provinces, KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. The quantitative survey yielded 900 responses, and a sample of 45 respondents from the three provinces participated in the qualitative interviews through work place visits, emails and telephone. The alumni were adult education practitioners in community development, youths, social auxiliary workers, Kha Ri Gude literacy coordinators and adult educators with government departments, municipalities and non-governmental organisations. Among other things revealed in the findings, there was an expressed disappointment among some respondents regarding how their ABET certificate and diploma qualifications have promoted their personal development, but undermined by some institutions. However, the majority believed they had made meaningful contributions in improving the socioeconomic conditions in their communities. The study concluded that adult literacy should be extended by equipping the adult education practitioners with various skills to promote community development and career paths. These could include soft skills like e-learning and entrepreneurship skills.

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† Corresponding author
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Keywords: Effectiveness, Former graduates, Professional development, Socioeconomic conditions, Social impact assessment theory, UNISA Alumni, Adult educators.

Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of very few studies which have investigated how adult learners who have completed their studies through distance education with UNISA feel and react to the new changes in the discourse, and how they feel about their qualification and its contribution in the real world of work.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every development programme or project is developed to address a certain identified needs of specific people. Programme development is a conscious and logical effort to look objectively at the situation and come up with an estimate of what needs to be done and how (Gboku and Lekoko, 2007). The authors posit that in both developed and developing countries, programme development have to align to the needs and aspirations of the people they are meant to help. Braimoh (1995) further observes that whether in developed or developing contexts, the success of programme development relies amongst others, the people's needs to acquire skills in different vocations or professions through education and training. Participants of education and training programmes are normally practitioners, experts and development workers whose knowledge and skills are used in the programmes for their effective implementation, evaluation and lessons for further developmental and sustainable programmes. Through teaching and learning, institutions of higher education can embrace training of practitioners and professionals as a vehicle towards achieving programme development in various situations. For these reasons, the development of adult basic education and youth development at the University of South Africa (UNISA) trains educators for adult education programmes. This article addresses the effectiveness of such programmes through the adult education practitioners and educators who graduated from the years 2002 – 2012.

When people speak of adult education, they often consider it to be confined to adult basic education and training, literacy campaigns and issues only. This is a misconception as the trajectory of adult education programmes comprises a wide range of diverse programmes, activities and social spectrum of the society. This, however, should not be seen to mean that adult education is a general qualification where all meet the requirements, or where any “Dick, Tom and Harry” can find a home. Primarily, adult education is a field of study with its own theoretical underpinnings, principles and specialised epistemological characteristics and requirements. Nafukho *et al.* (2005) observe that emphasis of an adult person and the principles of andragogy make adult education a unique field of academic study that denotes the entire body of organised educational processes, whatever the content, level, or method; and whether formal, non-formal or otherwise.

The authors further observe that adult education programmes are derived from social, cultural, political and economic factors in the society. These factors in turn affect opportunities and access to adult education programmes. Some people tend to confuse adult education with continuing education. Tahir (2000) in Nafukho *et al.* (2005) defines continuing education as a “subset of adult education that seeks to positively link the needs and aspirations of individuals with educational

activities for the full development of their potentialities and for the socioeconomic and political development of a nation-state". Hence, the urge for this study by the two academics involved in adult education to assess the alumni's successes, aspirations and further needs in their personal and professional development and the development of their society. Since 1995, UNISA has been offering certificate and diploma courses in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). The qualification was offered to teachers and practitioners who wished to specialise in the teaching of adults and those who were involved in community development work in communities or NGO activities. In 2008, the Institute of Adult Basic Education & Training became the Department of ABET and Youth Development, which later became part of the College of Education (CEDU). In order to provide its graduates with career paths higher qualifications in adult education, B Ed. Honours and Master's degrees were introduced, (UNISA, 2012).

Kha Ri Gude¹, a national literacy campaign aimed at eradicating illiteracy amongst adult and youth in South Africa, would be a failure without trained adult educators directly involved in the community literacy campaign. Women's empowerment and sustainable livelihoods are achievable if qualified adult educators and practitioners apply appropriate teaching and learning methods for adults and volunteers in communities. There are many programmes that we can illustrate on how adult education becomes a multi-disciplinary approach to social conditions and other developmental factors applying in diverse environments. The context of adult education and training is therefore never fixed, but always changing. Whichever way one looks at adult education but health practitioners cannot handle primary health care without the intervention of health and village health workers, particularly in developing countries, where they participate in adult education courses. Some Adult Education programmes over years have faced public criticisms that they are too formal and inflexible, while others felt they were too flexible, not too formalised and grounded in theory. Commenting on adult education discourse, Welton (1995) posits that adult educators, who may be fortunate to secure full-time employment in various fields, operate under very demanding and challenging conditions, with a lack of resources; yet they are expected to work in a "massified" market with overwhelming demand.

One of the pioneers of ABET Professor Veronica McKay, relates the history of adult education programmes in UNISA as having gone through colossal evolution. From humble beginnings, ABET has formalised its academic qualifications, giving hope to adults who were historically marginalised and left out of the educational realm. The ABET department at UNISA was instrumental in national literacy projects that were instituted after 1994. It is this historic hallmark that makes ABET a unique department that provides education and training for those aspiring to become educators, teachers and adult education practitioners (McKay, 1998). The Department of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and Youth Development of the University of South Africa (UNISA) started offering certificate and diploma courses for adult learners in 1995. It was noted that over 20 000 adult learners were registered for the two qualifications, and have since

¹ Kha Ri Gude is a Venda (one of South African 12 official languages) word meaning, "let us learn". It is also a national literacy campaign established to eradicate illiteracy in South Africa since 2008.

graduated. By the time of its 140 years centenary in 2013, UNISA had recorded about 45 906 ABET graduates in its database.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was two-fold. Firstly, it was to trace ABET educators and practitioners to assess their experiences in practice, how the training has benefitted them socio-economically like personal growth, livelihoods and development of their communities. Thus the study was aimed at assessing whether there were benefits accrued from participating in ABET programme offered by Unisa.

Secondly, UNISA is a world-renowned open distance learning (ODL) institution. The ODL landscape is moving towards open distance e-learning (ODEL). The study therefore explored how technology and the evolution of e-learning could enhance a career in Adult Education practice, and how ready adult learners, educators and practitioners were in migrating from old ways of learning to the digital era. E-learning was not effectively used for ABET courses for the period under study but it was imperative to hear their views on how they perceived the modern teaching and learning practices of the e-learning have benefitted them, in their lifelong and long-term educational pursuit currently and in the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is imperative to understand why adult education programs are associated with literacy campaigns and issues as mentioned above. For this study, the association of adult education with literacy and development is explained. UNESCO's mandate and understanding is used in context to illustrate the point. Since its inception in 1945, UNESCO's mission has been to contribute to the building of peace, poverty eradication, lasting development and intercultural dialogue with education as one of its principal activities to achieve this aim. The Organization is committed to a holistic and humanistic vision of quality education worldwide, the realization of everyone's right to education, and the belief that education plays a fundamental role in human, social and economic development. Amongst its educational objectives, UNESCO supports the achievement of the Education for All (EFA) and the response to other contemporary global challenges through education in areas such as the sustainable development, HIV & AIDS, human rights and gender equality. Being the only UN agency mandated to deal with education, its educational development programmes range from literacy and non-formal, pre to high education and technical vocational education and training, (Retrieved from www.unesco.org/education on May 2013). Literacy Day is an event celebrated annually on the 8th September in which UN member countries embrace education (literacy)-for-all. This is also the time for countries to reflect on the challenges that still hamper development and adult literacy. UNESCO's literacy campaigns serve as a platform on debates for those who see a link between adult education, literacy, lifelong learning, development and people's empowerment, (Richmond *et al.*, 2008). In its Strategic Plan for 2014 – 2021 UNESCO points out the unfinished EFA agenda based on literacy demographics. While significant progress was made in eradicating illiteracy worldwide, UNESCO notes the challenges that still faced some developing countries, in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa regarding literacy. The plan notes

that by 2015, about 743 million adults will still be illiterate and this goal is far from being achieved, (UNESCO, 2014).

It is for these reasons that the UNISA ABET is regarded as a programme embarking on and implementing literacy campaigns such as the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) and the on-going Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaigns. In this study, the literacy educators and coordinators tell their lived experiences and how they managed to improve their professional development and turn the illiteracy crisis into opportunities for themselves and their communities. A South African legendary musician, Siphosiphiso “Hotstix” Mabuse, is one of the champions who heard the clarion call for lifelong learning some three years ago, when he made a decision to study and acquire his Grade 12 (Matric) certificate through adult education programmes which are offered at Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) across the country. When he was asked why he had registered, he said, “where there is a will, there is a way, and indeed lifelong learning is an opportunity never to be undermined”. Mr Mabuse was a guest of honour at the ABET department’s annual UNESCO Literacy Day event. He emphasised the significance and important role of distance education as truly symbolic of the impact adult education and lifelong education is having on those who are inspired to learn, regardless of their age but mainly the adults and youth. He commended South Africans for taking adult education seriously for those who had missed the opportunities of education-for-all in the past, particularly the adult population.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper is grounded in the social impact assessment theory which was propounded by Habermas (1979) and expounded by Dietz (1987). Social Impact Assessment (SIA) may be described as the consequences, effects and value of a particular project or programme on its clients, beneficiaries and the community at large. The theory postulates that the outcome of impact assessment informs policy. As Habermas (1979) points out, decision-making with regard to social impact assessment integrates values and scientific analysis. Indeed decisions on programmes or projects (continuity, revision or disbanding) could be made on the basis of the value and perceptions of the public, beneficiaries, participants and community members. Thus interest groups publicize the impact of any particular project or programme. Impact assessment also can clarify the implications of a policy and lead to ‘fine-tuning’ of a project or programme. Technical analysis may be used to justify decisions which are made on a political basis (Dietz, 1987). Thus this study envisaged that the findings would inform some UNISA’s policies and practices regarding adult education programmes.

Habermas’ theory of social impact assessment has implications for development programmes and projects in that it advocates for a pragmatic mode where discussion by an informed public integrates values and scientific information (Dietz, 1987). The theory can be used as a tool to inform the public and encourage their participation in policy issues. It may also reduce the disproportionate influence of special interest groups in the decision-making process. As Dietz (1987) affirms the theory can make the consequences of programmes or projects more comprehensible and salient to the public. Thus the theory has implications for this study because of its reference to local communities and beneficiaries of projects. It indicates that ordinary people at

the grass roots level are important in assessing social impact of a project or a programme that seeks to improve their lives; in this case the adult education programmes offered by UNISA. As beneficiaries of the Adult Basic Education and Training, the graduates were in a better position to provide candid views on the value or weaknesses of the programme. Positive views on the project, for example, can lead to its continuity while a negative or critical one may lead to revision or discontinuity. [Dietz \(1987\)](#) attests that benefit-cost analysis is justified as a means of increasing the efficiency of public resource allocations. Indeed it is through assessment that the real impact of a project or an academic programme on its beneficiaries can be made known. The assessment of social impact of a project may be done through qualitative and quantitative research approaches, as has been the case in this study.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a collaborative qualitative inquiry primarily, and a quantitative survey to collect data. The collaborative inquiry is described as an approach where those directly affected by the phenomenon or research problem participate and form the unit of analyses, by collaborating in the process and forming themselves into an organised group, (Tolbert 1981; 2001 in [Savin-Badin and Major \(2013\)](#)). The authors further note that collaborative qualitative inquiry originated from the social constructivism in which research takes place in the context and contact of everyday life. The impact of their work places, school encounters, community engagement experiences were assessed and how they were attributed to their personal development as adult educators and practitioners. The quantitative survey was followed by qualitative approach in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 respondents from the three provinces. The sample of 45 respondents in qualitative interviews was based on availability of those who could be contacted by either visiting them at their work places, schools, projects and also through emails, and mostly through telephone interviews.

Adult education practitioners from three provinces KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng and the Eastern Cape were purposively selected as a sample for this study; because of the high numbers of ABET students from those provinces. Their numbers covered scholars and educators, adult educators and community development practitioners.

Tracing and updating records with alumni is a daunting experience. Usually there are challenges with the personal data because the demographics of former students and graduates have changed or are non-existent. Individuals' mobility, especially in South Africa, is a reality, ([Tlale, 2013](#)).

The study focused on alumni of the ABET programme over a period of 10 years in the three provinces of South Africa. According to the UNISA Alumni database (2013) enrolment rates in ABET discipline from 2002 to 2012 show an increase in adult participation in the following sequence, in all nine provinces.

Table-1. Enrolment figures from 2002 - 2012

Provinces	Enrolment figures	%ages
Kwazulu Natal	22 950	50
Gauteng	13 770	30
Eastern Cape	4 590	10
Other 6 provinces (Northern Cape, North West, Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Western Cape & other countries)	4 590	10
Total enrolment: 2002 - 2012	45900	100%

While the study focused on the three provinces, some alumni who were originally from those provinces had since moved to other provinces for socio-economic reasons like marriages, relocation, transfers and new employment opportunities among others. Despite the promulgation of the 2009 Regulation of Interception of Communications and Communications-related Information Act (RICA) in South Africa, where people should “rica” their mobile phones for tracking purposes, people still change their personal mobile phones from time to time. Amidst the challenges in locating the alumni, a tracer study is imperative if the ABET department was to evaluate the impact of its programmes on former graduates and be informed by their practical and emerging experiences, successes and challenges. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study, in which all provinces were given equal number of 500 participants. A selection of those with email addresses were purposively selected to participate in the study. A total of 1500 respondents were sent questionnaires online. Of the 900 that were returned, 450 were from Kwazulu Natal (50 %); Gauteng with 270 translating at (30 %), and the Eastern Cape 180 at (20 %).

Table-2. Sampling frame

Provinces	N = 900 survey respondents (Quantitative)		n = 45 interviewed participants (Qualitative)
Kwazulu Natal	450	50%	15
Gauteng	270	30%	15
Eastern Cape	180	20%	15
N = Quantitative; 900 n = Qualitative; 45	N=900	100%	n=45

The participants came from diverse experiences like those in government and municipality employees and NGOs, public adult learning centres and the unemployed. From these diverse programmes, the quantitative data were complemented with qualitative interviews using social networks such as telephone and mobile phones, emails, through twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook to explore the experiences and progress of the graduates over a period of 10 years, from 2002 to 2012. The interviews were conducted from November 2013 to February 2014, by two research assistants and a team-leader.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Within a period of 10 years from 2002 to 2012 (period for this study) the highest enrolment happened between the years 2008 – 2010, in the three provinces. However, it was worth noting that the enrolment dropped again between the years 2011 – 2012. In total, there were 45 900 students enrolled in ABET courses from 2002 - 2012. Of the students enrolled from 2002 – 2012, 20 293 were females, translating to 65 % and only 15 784 males at 35 %. From the figures, it is conceived that there are more women in adult education programme than men, with KwaZulu Natal province enrolment of 50 % followed by Gauteng with 30 %, 10 % for Eastern Cape, and other provinces sharing the 10 %. Sixty-one % of the 45 participants that were interviewed for the study were adults between the ages of 41 and 65 years, with 39 % adults and youth from 18 to 40 years. There are more, older people in the programme than the youth.

5.1. Enrolment Demographics

Within the 10 years, it was observed that ABET enrolments were 32 % at certificate level and 50 % at diploma level. At higher levels (first degree and postgraduate levels), the enrolment figures were consistently lower (18 %). There could be many reasons for that. Initially there were no ABET postgraduate qualifications before 1998. After completing the diploma, the students would go to other disciplines and other universities confirming the notion that many people still use the ABET diploma as a stepping-stone into other careers (in other words, for access). Traditionally, ABET qualifications were set at higher certificate and diploma levels only. That has since changed as the programmes lately introduced and pitched the B.Ed Honours and Master’s levels in 2000. However, this is about to stop as the department has proposed advanced and postgraduate diploma programmes in adult education discipline. This is a good growth as some universities are slowly phasing out ABET qualifications.

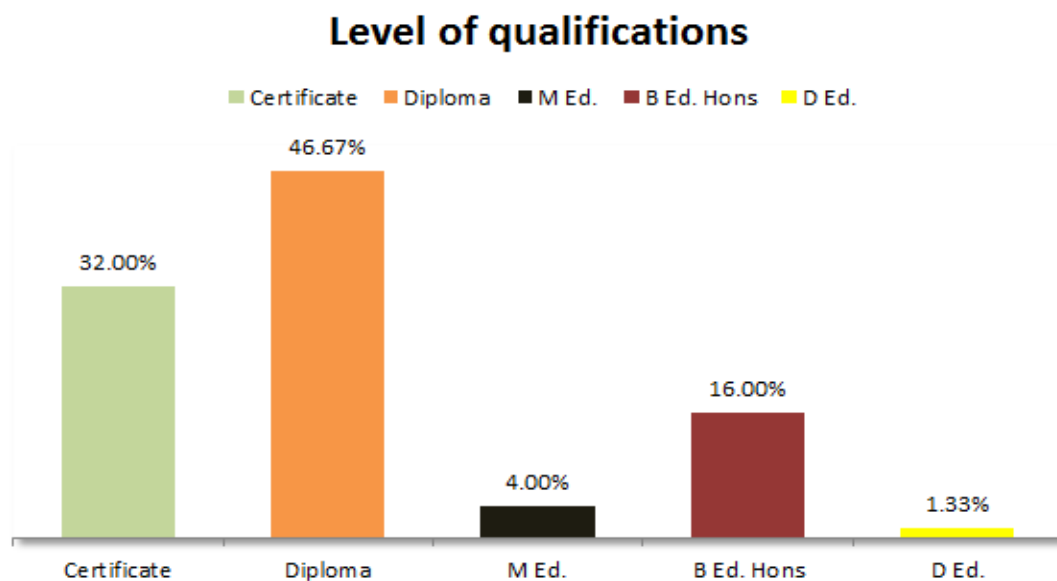


Figure-1. Level of Qualifications in 2002 - 2012

5.2. Is ABET A Career Or An Access Route?

The study was able to locate where the adult educators, graduates and practitioners were. The idea was to also establish what, and which programmes they were engaged in, their popularity, what their career prospects were and how they saw the relevance of their qualifications to the current trends and landscape in an open distance e-learning. Of the 900 participants in the survey, 738 translating 82 % were employed, 9 % (66 participants) were also furthering their studies at postgraduate levels through distance. This means they were working while studying. Sixty-three practitioners (7 %) were self-employed, 81 (9 %) were unemployed and 18 participants 2 % were pensioners.

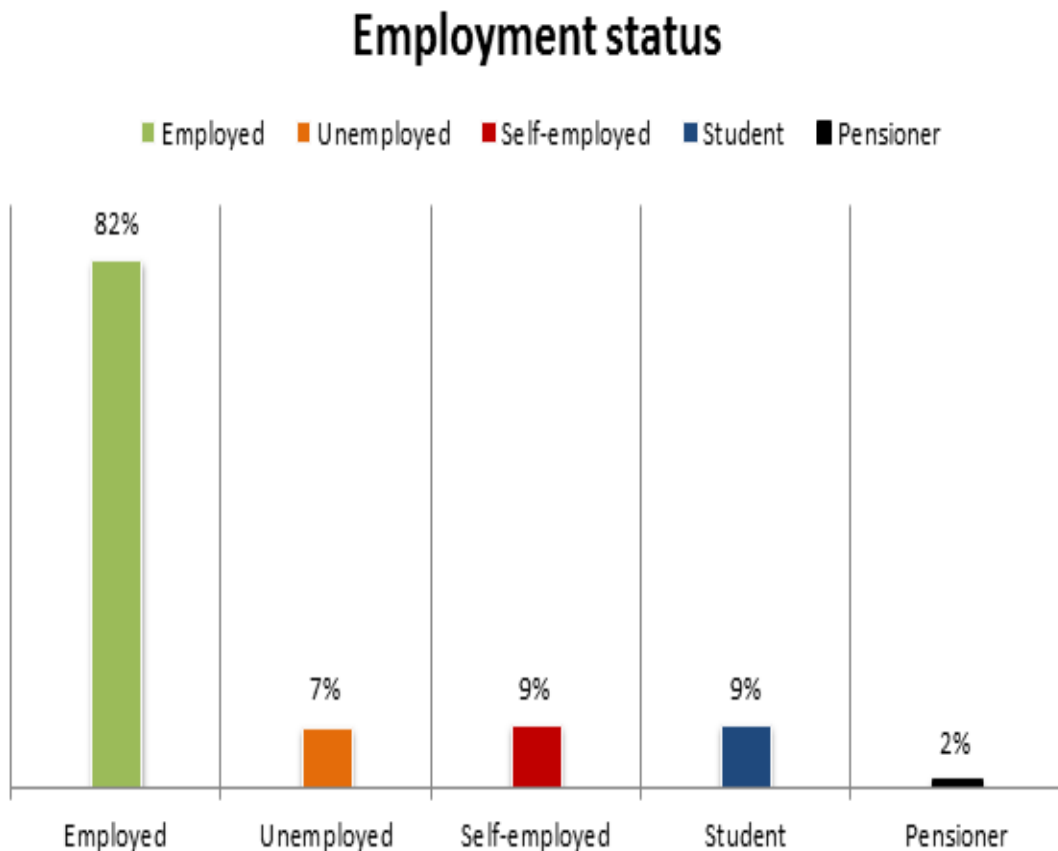


Figure-2. Adult Education practitioners' employment status

Those employed stated their employment is mainly in government and municipality (public sector), where they work as community development workers, administrators, social services and welfare officers to mention a few. Those employed with the private sector (21 %) were providing community development work and services, as educators, or employed in management and administration. Only 15 % work within educational institutions as teachers, educators, facilitators and tutors. Within civil society, only 9 % of the practitioners are employed in providing services as social welfare officers, education and development training, or in administration and management. Prominent individuals have also featured as ABET graduates. Among them is the United Nations

Ambassador on Malaria Programmes in Africa and currently a UNISA Board member, and legendary musician, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, who obtained her B. Ed degree in Adult Education. Another renowned singer and legend, Spho "Hotstix" obtained his Grade 12 (Matric) qualification through ABET bridging studies. The influence and impact of ABET programme was felt in the work of the public adult learning centres (as they are called in South Africa) where adult learners like *Hotstix* learned from through qualified adult educators.

On whether the respondents consider ABET as an academic career or an access or a bridge career, the respondents said unfortunately the adult basic aspect of the qualification was still regarded as a bridging course for those who wished to improve their formal qualification and advance to other levels.

One response read, "I did ABET modules to upgrade my aggregate in order to be able to register for another degree. I did not want to be a teacher/educator. I just went to "bridge-up" my entry requirements and I succeeded." One practitioner remarked. *"As an educator, I am convinced this is a good thing ABET is doing, and teaching of adults is the most rewarding work I have ever done in my life,"* one practitioner wrote. One lecturer in another department was quoted telling his potential students that if they did not meet the minimum entry requirements, they could register with ABET department. While this was not a bad idea, the misconception that ABET is only an "access bridge" towards other qualifications should be corrected and clarified.

The study revealed some personal experiences of practitioners showcasing how their qualifications have yielded positive results, and the impact they have in equipping them with academic qualifications and careers. However, the majority of those who participated from the three provinces said adult education programmes were still undervalued and not regarded as having sound academic recognition, prominence and standing in some companies, departments, in communities and by society at large.

In some areas in South Africa, educators (as they are called) were still regarded as inferior in qualifications and positions to mainstream school teachers. For this reason the adult educators felt discriminated against by policies and practices that undermine qualified adult educators, mostly those working in previously known public adult learning centres (PALCs), now called community colleges. Adult educators were of the opinion that the adult education profession was still undervalued and considered inferior to teaching of children (pedagogical teaching career). They further opined that institutions of higher education that still provided adult education as a career should advocate for, position and market it to the policy-makers. It was also noted that institutions of higher education did not have many of their graduates employed as educators, teachers and lecturers.

This showed that universities lose their qualified academics to other sectors. Maybe the time has come for the institutions to revive its academia by placing the right people in the right jobs; in this regard the ABET educators should be the ones educating in the field. One practitioner said she tried scouting for jobs with academic institutions, but realised that what she would earn in private sector was more than what universities could offer her. She noted, however, that it was some time ago, and added that "perhaps the salaries in academic institutions have improved to attract more of

their academia”. That implied therefore that qualified ABET practitioners, perhaps look for greener pastures with other sectors, rather than working in colleges of education and universities.

5.3. Remuneration

Related to the above issue of where adult education practitioners were, comes their remuneration for their work as professionals. ABET or adult education practitioners appeared to be amongst the highest paid professionals. About 31 % earn between R10,000 – R20,000; 30 % within R5,000 - R10,000 bracket, while 15 % within the highest echelons earn R20,000 to R50,000 per month. While the study revealed that the majority of ABET practitioners were employed and earning modest living wages, the practitioners did not think it was easy for them to secure a decent permanent job as adult education practitioners. But those who managed to get employment acknowledged the value of their UNISA qualification as it had changed their lives for the better; “... the qualification has catapulted me to higher ranks in my job,” one practitioner disclosed. About 50 % responded that ABET certificate and diploma qualifications had facilitated their upgrading of their qualifications.

However, 65 % concurred that the upgrading of their qualification was not in the adult education, but in other disciplines. It was also noted during the study that in South Africa, the retirement age in most sectors like the government, some public agencies including the institutions of higher education is 65 years. Sixty-one % of the 45 participants in the study were adults between the ages of 41 and 65 years. The researchers were deeply concerned that if the majority of adult education practitioners are old people close to retiring age, there would be a vacuum as they reached the retirement age. For this reason, the discipline continues to be a critical scarce skill in South Africa. This means more adult educators must be produced by academic institutions, otherwise South Africa faces a serious shortage of adult educators in the future.

Those who considered themselves lowly paid (R500 – R5 000) which is 24 % of the participants in the survey (216 of the 900 respondents) were mostly working with the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) within the municipalities, small income generating projects and civil society organisations. They expressed frustrations of lack of recognition of their ABET qualifications. Some educators in the public adult learning centres also shared similar sentiments where they still run from pillar to post within both the departments of Basic and Higher Education. It is the belief of the authors of this article that with the advent of new policy on public adult learning centres becoming community colleges and the conception of technical vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, adult education practitioners will be better positioned to advocate for the rights of the practitioners.

Income levels

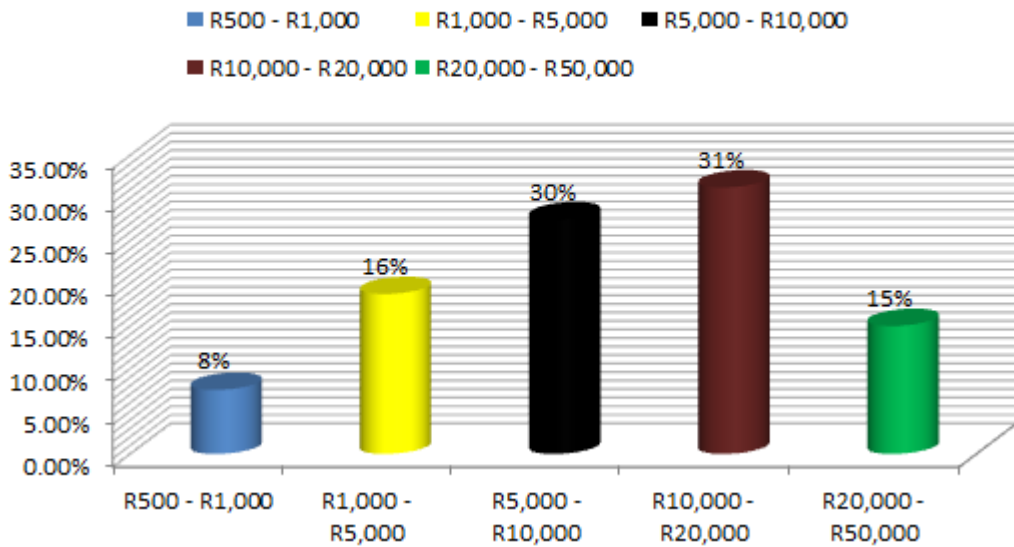


Figure-3. Income levels of ABET practitioners

5.4. Community Upliftment

With regard to responses on how adult education programmes and discourses contributed towards community upliftment, 60 % (540 of the 900) in the survey strongly agreed that their knowledge, skills and expertise acquired through ABET practice greatly contributed to their communities and their workplaces. This was also confirmed by the 45 respondents who were interviewed. Their skills were utilised by the municipality in Extended Public Works Programmes (EPWP), civic education, community development, adult literacy projects, income-generating activities, social clubs, small and medium enterprise, administration of projects and non-governmental organisations interventions and social services. The participants added that their ABET qualifications had made a major contribution towards the economic, political and social development in South Africa in many respects. “Being a qualified practitioner, gives one confidence, self-esteem and courage to lead people especially in community development projects and work,” one participant said. Eighty five % (85 %) of the respondents (900 participants in the survey) were convinced that adult education was still a career of choice for anyone with passion for working with people. Some participants were of the view that more qualified adult educators and practitioners were needed. They said they still regarded adult education as a scarce skill which should generate more public workers to serve the South African society. They further added that adult education was needed mostly in informal settlements, townships and rural areas, where there was still under-development, high illiteracy rates and high levels of poverty.

5.5. E-Learning Prospects

Nafukho *et al.* (2005) reiterate that e-learning is a learning that utilises the information, communication technology (ICT) as the main medium of instruction. Examples may include online instruction or an adult learner browsing the Internet for educational purposes. There are many e-

learning resources today that can do so. While most of the graduates in the study were not exposed to e-learning methods of teaching and learning during their study (2002 – 2012), knowing their preferences and experiences would be beneficial for ABET course organisers at UNISA. The contemporary use of technology for teaching and learning is a phenomenon this study could not ignore for adult education practitioners and learners. During the study it was revealed that the most popular social networks used by adult educators and practitioners were the e-mails and mobile phones. Asked why that was so, 30 of the 45 participants interviewed (67 %) cited the easy accessibility and connectivity as main reasons. About 95 % of South Africans have mobile phones or can access them through their family members, spouses, children or neighbours. Another reason mentioned was their user-friendliness within the adult population ranging from between 35 – 67 years. Those who were employed and could afford laptops have bought them and use 3G modem to access emails. Those in the formal employment sector use such facilities from their work places. On open distance and e-learning, the practitioners saw no reason why ABET practitioners should be excluded.

“Technology is part of lifelong learning encapsulated in adult education principles. We cannot be left behind as a discipline. Adult educators need technology as would anyone in any career,” one practitioner remarked. While social networks and facilities were used by the participants mostly for work-related purposes and personal uses, the unilateral conclusion was that if they could use it, they could also be used for study purposes for those who were engaged in further studies.

Ninety-three % of the respondents had access to email services and would wish to be contacted by emails and smses. The study noted that the respondents or ABET graduates had access to personal computers as they were able to access their emails, and contended that communication and learning can effectively be done through emails, despite the challenges of intermittent connectivity in some areas in South Africa and other developing countries. While South Africa is one of the African countries with high mobile connectivity, only 20 % of the respondents were keen to be contacted through their mobile phones. The 80 % of adult educators preferred email access and contact more than mobile phones, and that therefore means that perhaps, unlike many young people, adults prefer emails to receiving messages on mobile phones.

Other social networks that were regarded by the participants as still way beyond their reach, accessibility and use, were mentioned as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. The participants regarded them as not too relevant to their e-learning needs. Only 12 % of the ABET practitioners have Twitter and Facebook connectivity. Those who did not have Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp accounts assumed they could still get similar services offered on those through their emails and smses on their laptops and mobile phones, respectively.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The evolution of the ABET Institute, into academic department: ABET and Youth Development is seen by many as a partial solution to addressing the plight of the young who are left out of the realm of mainstream schooling system. The system infrastructure still excludes many young people who are absorbed and could benefit from adult education programmes offered by open distance e-learning at UNISA. The ABET and Youth Development Department is playing a

critical role in addressing this vacuum. It was, however noted by the study that the youth still do not regard adult education as a pathway or a career path to take. It would be prudent for ABET department to be aggressive in their marketing and public relations exercises. The misconceptions should be addressed by clarifying the importance of adult education as an integral part of lifelong learning and whatever stigma goes with it is for '*adults only*', must be clarified. Both young and old should feel similarly welcomed and fit to engage in adult education, formal education without prejudice or any form of discrimination. While ABET does not have to necessarily be linked to only an access and bridging programme for many, this can be of great benefit to young people. However, as mentioned earlier, ABET can certainly offer more than just being a bridge to other qualifications. As a result of paucity of suitably qualified local people, the department might have to rely on expertise from outside the country for survival.

2. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of adult education practitioners who were able to secure employment were paid substantially well. Many of them were absorbed in government, municipality and the private sector. Investigating the reasons for unemployment would assist the UNISA-ABET department to assess which direction could be taken, changed or adapted to ensure its graduates' qualifications could improve their livelihoods and become useful to their personal development. This challenge is not only unique to ABET; indeed, the problem of unemployment faces every faculty and sector, and whichever solution ABET could derive would certainly benefit other departments and the unemployed adult and youth population in South Africa. In addition, the participants noted that the department should be rigorous in marketing the discipline and bring it to the attention of the unemployed and drop-out youth who struggle to find places in other educational institutions.

3. The study concludes that UNISA needs to evaluate and revisit the new curriculum challenges in order to address gaps in the contemporary issues facing adults and youth in South Africa. ABET practitioners need systematic support and mentoring to make meaningful contribution in their personal development and in improving the socioeconomic conditions in their communities.

4. The new UNISA teaching and learning business model should be incorporated into the open distance e-learning (ODeL), where E-tutors are fully engaged in online learning. Lastly, the department of ABET in UNISA must market its qualifications through various media and social networks to attract more postgraduate students to fill the vacuum. While the practitioners and adult educators agree that UNISA should be more into e-learning, they believe the e-learning is a process that would take some time to be fully implemented. Other blended modes of learning were still recommended.

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