

Review

Adult illiteracy in South Africa post 1994: Policies and programs – a chronological account

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The approach of South Africa to Education for All (EFA) is that EFA is not a new initiative to be implemented, but it provides the opportunity to strengthen existing education development and reform in the system. Consultation has characterised policy development and implementation context in post-apartheid South Africa. The challenge is to enhance and extend partnerships and collaboration with civil society and other partners in the areas of policy compliance and quality education outcomes. To this end various initiatives to reduce adult illiteracy rates in the country have been implemented and the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign is one of them. The campaign used the 2001 Census of 9.6 million illiterate adults in South Africa and to half the illiteracy rate by 2015 in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

Key words: Education for All, Millennium Development Goals, Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign, Democracy, Poverty Alleviation, Expanded Public Works Programme, Literacy, Learner Assessment Portfolio.

INTRODUCTION

Some Developing Countries (DCs) engage in a number of efforts to entrench the democracy and redress a myriad of social ills. There is altruism that a viable democratic system may promote the respect for human rights, freedom and equip its citizenry knowledge and skills. However, the democratic systems in the DCs are confronted with myriad challenges that include unemployment, poverty, civil wars, inaccessible and poor quality education, HIV/Aids and many more socio-economic ills. What is clear is that the advancement of democracy requires individuals with skills who can function as effective citizens of their own countries. There is a consensus that in democratic systems, education and

training policies and programs should be crafted to accommodate disadvantaged groups.

Policymakers and planning agencies should make efforts to craft policies and programs that would increase educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups. The disadvantaged groups include the unemployed, illiterate individuals who never attended schools and those who dropped out of schools. Of the three groups, the illiterate group is the one that tend to be ignored as governments determined their priorities. Included in the illiterate group are the children, unemployed youth, adults, and women. In general, these groups are located in rural areas, farms, and in informal settlements.

The disadvantaged individuals do not have the basic reading and numeracy skills. That means these individuals are unable to understand basic reading, counting of money, signing of contracts, etc. These basic skills are

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necessary for acquiring further qualifications that may lead to better job prospects. Lack of these skills may lead to the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty and inability to understand basic health information. The advancement of technology exacerbates the marginalization of the illiterate group even further where basic information skills are necessary to function in a modern society.

The purpose of this article is to outline the chronological developments of addressing illiteracy in South African since the new dispensation. The article also discusses the historical and political factors and policy frameworks that laid the basis of the past and current illiteracy programme and their potential impact. While the article makes reference to the adult education, it mainly focuses on literacy developments.

BACKGROUND

Prior to and in the 1990s, small and uncoordinated non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided literacy programme that taught people to read, and to understand printed text. The programme also taught people to communicate through writing. Such programmes were only provided in local vernaculars and in English. Various Freirian approaches of conscientisation were adopted in NGO projects aligned to the democratic struggle (Aitchison, 2003). During the late 1970s and the 1980s, NGOs, adult education units at universities and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) advocated for a new adult basic education. These developments in adult literacy later formed the basis for the Department of Education to formulate the Interim ABET Guidelines in 1995 (ABET Institute, 2002).

Literacy and adult basic education providers such as Project Literacy gained national significance in the late Eighties. These initiatives served as a steady gravitational force towards cooperation between politically-correct NGOs and others such as Operation Upgrade and Project Literacy. From 1996 onwards, major foreign funders began to limit provided funding to NGO sector because their grants were mainly made through the newly established democratic government (Aitchison et al., 2000).

According to Aitchison et al. (2000) major South African Funders of NGOs included the Independent Development Trust (IDT), the Joint Education Trust (JET) and the Transitional National Development Trust, provided modest amounts to literacy and ABET work by private and business sector foundations. With transition to a democratic society, the government started paying attention to adult basic education within the new educational policy frameworks. The policy framework indicates the basis and intensions of the democratic

government to seriously address illiteracy and adult education.

New dispensation

Policy formulation has been an integral part of a larger process taking place in the development of a new policy framework for all aspects of the education and training system in a democratic South Africa. The following policy evaluation signalled the new democratic government's vision and commitment to socio-economic and political developments.

The constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No.108 of 1996)

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognises basic education as a human right. Clause 29 .1 (a) of the Constitution enshrined the right to basic education, including adult basic education, which signals the constitutional obligation of the state to provide it (Constitution of the Republic, 1996).

The national education policy act (No. 27 of 1996)

The National Education Policy Act allows the Minister to determine some of the directive policy in line with the Constitution of RSA. The act allows the Minister to implement national literacy related policies and programmes. Some of these principles, in line with the protection of the fundamental rights of every person relate to literacy education and include the right of every person to:

- i. Basic education;
- ii. Use the language and participate in the cultural life of his or her choice within an education institution;
- iii. Be instructed in the language of his or her choice where it is reasonably practicable; and respect of his or her education.

The white paper on education and training in 1995

The White Paper on Education and Training (DOE 1995) states that *'the right to basic education . . . applies to all persons, that is to all children, youth and adults'*. Basic education is thus a legal entitlement to which every person has a claim. The DoE ABET sector that include NGOs, parastatals, the private sector and other government departments sketched a vision for ABET: 'A

literate South Africa within which all its citizens have acquired basic education and training that will help them effectively to participate in socioeconomic and political processes to contribute to reconstruction, development and social transformation' (DOE 1997a). The core values adopted for South Africa are human dignity, liberty, justice, democracy, equality and national development

Policy document on adult basic education and training in 1996

The formulation of a policy for ABET was shaped by three policy frameworks, namely the National Education Policy Act No. 27 (RSA 1996), the White Paper on Education (DOE 1995) and the South African Qualifications Authority Act No. 58 (RSA 1995). The ABET policy (DOE, 1997a) developed by the ABET sector was to serve the needs of a wide range of learning constituencies. These constituencies include organized labour in the formal economy, the self-employed and the underemployed, unemployed adults and youth in urban areas and settlements, the rural unemployed and female heads of households in both urban and rural areas.

Language in education policy in 1997

The Language in Education Policy of July 1997 (Department of Education 1997a) forms part of a national language plan for South Africa and draws on the constitutional provisions that recognise cultural diversity as a valuable asset, promote multilingualism, support the development of official languages and respect all languages in the country.

The adult basic education and training act (No. 52 of 2000)

The significance of ABET was clearly captured with the promulgation of the ABET Act No. 52 (RSA, 2000), which provides for the establishment of governance structures for public and private ABET centres. Other state departments and the ABET sector viewed this as a vehicle in the social, political and economic change of the country. The broad legislative and policy framework is currently being implemented through a range of plans, programmes, projects and campaigns. The analysis of the above-mentioned policy frameworks shape the definition and principles applied in the concept of literacy.

The concept "literacy" in the context of adult education in South African context

In South Africa, adult education needs emerged from the

socio-political history, which is characterized by policies of separate education and unequal facilities for South Africa's different population group. An understanding of adult education is closely linked to an appreciation of political purposes of adult education.

In order to determine the number of adults who are illiterate or who lack basic education one needs to be able to answer the following questions:

- i. Who is an adult?
- ii. What is literacy and functional literacy?
- iii. What is basic education and training?

South African government statistics have tended to use 16 years and older in definition of an "adult" because 16 years was the minimum school-leaving age in the white and Indian education systems (Harley et al., 1996:17). UNESCO (2008:12) defines the term an "adult" as a term comprising a wide range of concepts:

- i. The word may refer to a stage in the life of the individual (he/she) is first a child, then a youth and then a adult.
- ii. It may refer to status – an acceptance by society that the person concerned has completed his/her novitiate and is now fully incorporated into the community.
- iii. It may refer to a social subset – adults as distinct from children.
- iv. It may include a set of ideals and values – adulthood.

The policy frameworks and the concept of literacy as perceived from the South African perspective, guided the developments of the national and provincial literacy programmes.

Implemented programmes informed by the policies

The Ithuteng campaign

In 1995, the Department of Education issued the Interim Guidelines For: A National ABET Framework in September 1995 as part of International Literacy Day celebrations. The Interim guidelines, outlines the overall vision for provision, assessment, outcomes in language and numeracy in ABET and served as an interim ABET policy (Department of Education, 1995). **The guidelines were a collaborative effort of various stakeholders and provided a basis for the establishment of a national system of ABET in the country (Ministerial Committee on Literacy, 2006).**

The Ithuteng "Ready to learn" Campaign was launched by the then Minister of Education, Prof Sibusiso Bengu, on 6 September 1996 as part of the International Literacy Day celebrations. This became a historic moment

because it was the first time in the South African history that the state became involved in Adult Education and Training as a pivotal player, facilitator and co-ordinator (Department of Education, 1997).

Ithuteng Campaign was a step towards the implementation of policy and the constitution. The Minister had set aside R50 million once-off budget to start the national campaign with an aim of mobilising 10 000 learners per province. The campaign had targeted learners in ABET levels 1 and 2 and implementation was to take place in Public Adult Learning Centres.

On the other hand, the National Literacy Cooperation (NLC) also launched the NLC's One Thousand Learner Unit, also a pilot project that was launched in collaboration with the Department of Education on 11 February 1996. More than 135 000 learners registered in Provincial Literacy Campaigns (PLCs) because of the Ithuteng Campaign (Parliamentary media briefing, February 1999).

However, though supported by the Ministry, Ithuteng had challenges. It failed in the following aspects:

- i. It was poorly organised with no national plan
- ii. It was the first time provinces ran a campaign and had limited capacity
- iii. Educators were poorly trained and reading materials, especially in the mother tongue, were not available (Aitchison et al., 2000: 40-42, 146-147)
- iv. There was no advocacy strategy, educators had to mobilise learners
- v. There was no quality assurance strategy for both PLCs and the National Literacy Campaign (NLCs) Thousand Learner Unit, these ran parallel
- vi. All eleven languages including Braille were not recognised in the campaign
- vii. It became a one-year project
- viii. It did not reach many communities; and
- ix. It did not have an assessment component.

The aforementioned challenges guided the DoE to craft a comprehensive ABET system that was a precursor to the development of the Policy document on Adult Basic Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997) and the Multi-Year Implementation Plan (Department of Education 1997b). Masifundisane Literacy Campaign, a provincial literacy campaign was launched in KwaZulu-Natal to address illiteracy challenges.

Masifundisane literacy campaign

Masifundisane Literacy Campaign was a response of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government to the high illiteracy rates which existed in the province in 2005 (Masifundisane Literacy Campaign, 2006). There were at

least 1.2 million people in the KZN Province who cannot read and write. The programme was a three-year campaign which sought to eradicate illiteracy in KZN. Within 12 months, 76 000 had enrolled and 8 000 of them completed the course.

Masifundisane literacy campaign challenges

There are barriers which stand in the way of this access to literacy viz:

- i. Distance between home and a site of learning
- ii. The friendliness of the education and examination system
- iii. Time at which classes are held
- iv. The ability to buy or access learning materials
- v. Eye-sight problems
- vi. Foreign language challenges
- vii. Unfriendly and incompetent tutors
- viii. Relevance of the curriculum which does not appear to be the immediate daily needs of the learners

The current national literacy campaign was established following the Ministerial Committee on Literacy in 2006.

The current national literacy developments

Ministerial Committee on Literacy

The Minister of Education established a Ministerial Committee on Literacy (MCL), which was required to *inter alia* develop a strategic plan for a mass literacy campaign in South Africa in February 2006. The Campaign aims to enable about 4.7 million illiterates who had never been to school to achieve a level of basic literacy, and thereby enable South Africa to fulfil its commitment made at Dakar in 2000 of reducing illiteracy by 50%. The name Kha Ri Gude means "Let us read together". The MCL's report and the detailed operational plan for implementation were tabled and approved by Cabinet on 29 November 2007 (Ministerial Report on Literacy, 2007).

The Ministerial Report of 2006 drew upon the National Census of 2001. The proposed targets will be adjusted in accordance with the proposed National Census in October 2011 (Table 1; National Census, 2011). The following figures, drawn from the 2001 National Census were stated as targets for the campaign in the Operational Plan approved by Cabinet in November 2006.

Curriculum

The curriculum for the Campaign is equivalent to ABET

Table 1. 2001 General Population Census.

Level of education	Number
Total adults with less than grade 7* (including those with no schooling)	9.6 million (32%)
Total adults with no schooling	4.7 million (16%)

*Note that many adults with 5 years of schooling may be illiterate. The campaign pre-tests its learners. (Ministerial Report, 2006)

Table 2. Enrolments of Learners since 2008.

Eastern Cape	109 633	148 084	135 141	136 799	129 999	114 647	774 303
Free State	15 406	52 323	52 409	54 781	49 834	45 601	270 354
Gauteng	31 827	81 152	87 043	85 543	86 402	87 497	459 464
KwaZulu Natal	72 032	135 443	131 359	145 475	129 357	119 886	733 552
Mpumalanga	28 792	58 624	51 786	55 577	50 894	47 761	293 434
Northern Cape	31 928	8 141	8 275	12 839	8 785	14 098	84 066
Limpopo	45 928	106 463	100 965	97 217	97 164	90 283	538 020
North West	34 317	30 607	31 532	35 803	32 685	32 157	197 101
Western Cape	11 999	13 166	12 771	15 415	15 044	14 434	82 829

The Campaign has reached 3 433 123 illiterate adults at the end of 2013.

level 1, and the teaching of the required skills is integrated into the relevant context and focuses on various social issues. Hence the materials simultaneously focus on a range of life skills such as budgeting; hygiene and health (including dealing with HIV and AIDS); livelihoods; nutrition; anti-xenophobia; environmental education; active citizenship – thus providing a sound platform for continued as well as lifelong learning (Department of Education, 2007).

Kha Ri Gude mass literacy campaign

The Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign also coincide with and contribute to the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012, which was coordinated by UNESCO and is a component of the global drive to achieve Education for All by 2015 (Education for All, 2002). The Literacy Decade reaffirms *“that literacy for all is at the heart of basic education for all and that creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy”* (UNESCO, 2004).

Number of learners reached

Government had R6,1 billion for spending over five-years since 2008 to enable 4,7 million South Africans to

achieve literacy by 2012 (Table 2). Progress included the enrolment of 1,000,000 learners; recruited and trained 34 444 volunteer educators, 3 444 volunteer supervisors and 175 volunteer co-ordinators. (DoE, 2010). To date, 3.4 million learners have been reached enrolled in the programme.

At Dakar in 2000, the Education for All commitment was to “achieve a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”. South Africa’s EFA literacy target requires, using current estimates, alphabetising about 4.8 million adults (Department of Education, 2002). Though the combined efforts of state ABET, business sector, NGOs and the Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign could indeed reach this goal. The Kha Ri Gude campaign has shown that a well-researched plan (in which academic and other expertise is constructively used), allied to good implementation management, can indeed deliver and by all means meet EFA goals.

Training and quality assurance

Kha Ri Gude Campaign does not only look at recruiting learners but offering quality programmes as well. Coordinators are offered pre-service training which provides a number of training activities which learners must do during their training sessions. Coordinators are then required to offer the same training to Supervisors, who in turn train volunteer educators. These volunteer

educators then familiarise themselves with the training materials, the methodology to be employed in teaching literacy and numeracy, the necessary campaign administration and how to conduct the assessment activities in the Learner Assessment Portfolios (LAPs). These are monitored by supervisors and coordinators.

Learner assessment portfolios

The coordinators carry out site-based moderation and verification of the LAPs. The Kha Ri Gude Campaign collects the LAPs, check and capture marks for each learner so as to allow the South African Qualifications Authority to do verification of the LAPs and carry out statistical analysis of the marks. SAQA then records the learners who have completed the programme on a National Learner's Record Database so that learners may be certificated.

Number of learners reached

Government is spending R6,1 billion over five-years since 2008 to enable 4,7 million South Africans to achieve literacy by 2012. Progress thus far includes the enrolment of 1,000,000 learners; recruited and trained 34 444 volunteer educators, 3 444 volunteer supervisors and 175 volunteer co-ordinators (DoE, 2010).

At Dakar in 2000, the Education for All commitment was "achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults" (Education for All, 2002). South Africa's EFA literacy target requires, using current estimates, alphabetising about 4.8 million adults (Department of Education, 2002). Though the combined efforts of state ABET, business sector, NGOs and the Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign could indeed reach this goal. The Kha Ri Gude Campaign has shown that a well-researched plan allied to good implementation management, can indeed deliver and by all means will meet EFA goals.

Advantages

Kha Ri Gude Campaign has amongst others the following advantages:

- i. It has a national plan adopted by Parliament
- ii. It is well-funded as compared to former adult literacy campaigns
- iii. It has a Unit within the Department of Basic Education that manage

iv. More than 200 co-ordinators are employed and trained. Co-ordinators also coordinate the campaign in provinces to oversee the smooth running of the campaign, they report at national level

v. 4000 supervisors monitor and advice Volunteer Educators

vi. 40000 Volunteer educators recruit and train learners in various literacy sites in both rural and urban areas

vii. Monitoring and support is done on a regular basis

viii. The campaign has reached out to the deaf and blind learners.

ix. The campaign has won a number of Awards

Challenges

Despite the above-mentioned advantages the Campaign has the following challenges:

i. Volunteer Educators do not receive stipend on time and that frustrates them.

ii. Teaching and learning takes 6 months and after that the stipend stops and their bank accounts become dormant, when the next cycle comes and they are paid, they cannot receive their stipend because money lies somewhere in that bank until a new account is opened.

iii. Monitoring and evaluation to ensure effectiveness of the campaign.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the programme should recruit for the next cycle whilst teaching and learning takes place. That continuous training takes place so that stipends should not stop abruptly. Clearly, the SANLI campaign and the work undertaken by the UNISA ABET Institute may be seen as a valuable "pilot" for any larger literacy campaign. In the interim, it is necessary for other government agencies to continue to provide basic education. In the section that follows, two of the main ABET providers (both of which are associated with the Ministry of Labour and not Education) appear to be leading the struggle for a literate South Africa.

CONCLUSION

The new South African government has clear intentions to address the illiteracy challenges and equip its citizen with knowledge and basic skills. This article discussed the policy framework that informed the literacy programmes. The article also outlined the chronological developments with regard to literacy and adult education.

More importantly, the article discussed the current initiated conceptualised with the UN Mandate to the illiteracy citizen by 50% by 2015. According the current rate of implementation, South African is well on its way to reach 50% goal by 2015, and thereby fulfil the Education for All declaration.

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