

# ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING: CHALLENGES IN LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES

More than two decades after 1994, challenges in achieving universal literacy and education in South Africa remain. The Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority commissioned the HSRC to assess challenges in adult education and training at municipalities. *Prof Modimowabarwa Kanyane* reports on the findings.

After 1994, South Africa experienced socio-economic challenges due to widespread low levels of literacy, high rates of unemployment and poverty among its majority populations.

These low levels of literacy and numeracy were a by-product of apartheid's inferior quality Bantu Education system, which played a significant role in entrenching inequalities and poverty along racial and gender lines.

The new dispensation had to restore trust in the education space and ensure that citizens who had been born and lived in those difficult years receive a second chance to be educated through the provision of Adult Education and Training (AET). However, more than two decades after 1994, challenges in achieving universal literacy and education remain.

## **The importance of AET**

Research shows that educated people have a greater probability of being employed and it is important that training needs are based on the need to acquire skills that are in demand in the job market.

Effective AET promotes confidence among the adult population and this elicits active engagement in the social, economic and political development of the country.

The Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) was established in 2000 to facilitate skills development at municipal level across South Africa.

It has enabled training for thousands of people, but commissioned the HSRC to find out why some municipalities still struggle to enrol participants and why some learners fail to complete their studies.

The findings of the HSRC study show that there are several challenges in the provision of AET in municipalities. Some pertain to learners' attitudes and personal circumstances, and others are structural and institutional or peculiar to a specific municipality.

Many people still refer to AET as "night school" meant for uneducated people or for old people in a community

***Slow adoption of the AET concept***  
About a decade ago, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) adopted the use of the concept of AET instead of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET).

This represented a paradigm shift from adult education to adult learning based on the fact that learning takes place throughout a person's life and in many forms. Unlike ABET, AET also includes informal learning and lifelong skills training. The findings of this study show that the shift from ABET to AET has been rather slow among the relevant stakeholders. The LGSETA itself still refers to ABET and not AET in most of its reports.

***Stigma attached to AET***  
The stigma attached to the perceived inferiority of AET also accounts for why fewer students enrol every year.

Many people still refer to it as "night school" meant for uneducated people or for old people in a community.

***Absenteeism and dropping out***  
AET classes are characterised by absenteeism and dropping out. Learners miss classes mostly because of personal social challenges such as poor time management, behavioural traits such as heavy drinking or personal matters such as health and marital problems. Some learners opt out of programmes for no specific reasons.

Others feel discouraged during the course, failing to cope with workload and drop out at the end. They also drop out if the course content is "too easy" and perceived as boring.

***Teacher/facilitator absenteeism and turnover***  
When a facilitator does not pitch up for class or resigns and the service provider fails to find a replacement, lessons are cancelled and learning is postponed.

***Unsupportive supervisors***  
The role of line managers or supervisors of adult learners are crucial. Some do not give employees space and time to join the AET programme, especially if classes are conducted during the day. This may interrupt workflow, so supervisors are reluctant to release employees to attend.

***Transport***  
Some learners cited transport costs as the main reason for absconding or dropping out of the AET programme, especially in municipalities where AET classes are located a distance from the learners.

### **Lack of incentives**

AET classes offer neither stipends nor food so learners would rather attend learnerships that offer stipends or even food during class.

### **Conflicting priorities between work and learning**

Many students face the decision whether to opt for AET classes or to work overtime and earn extra money.

Employees who qualify for overtime allowances often prefer to make more money through standby allowances than attend AET classes. Some learners dodge work by pretending to be attending AET classes. Attending AET is similar to 'delayed gratification' and learners prefer opportunities that reward them immediately. Unemployed learners have to juggle between working informally and attending AET classes.

### **The relationship between LGSETA and municipalities**

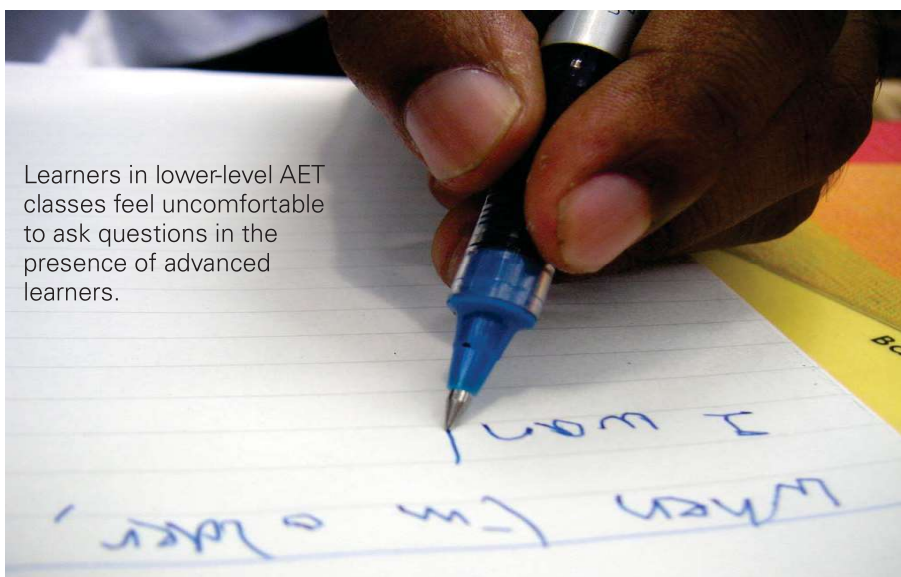
Municipalities feel that LGSETA timeframes are sometimes too tight thus affecting both municipality and service providers to have all the logistics done timeously, including the necessary documentation. As a result, municipalities forfeited some of the LGSETA grants for AET. In some cases, the LGSETA funding allocation was inadequate and those municipalities had to provide additional funding to offer the training.

### **The condition of learning facilities**

The learning environment plays a significant role in the way learners perceive the AET classes. In one municipality, the venue was too cold and learners felt uncomfortable. In other cases, learners were not informed on time of abrupt venue changes.

### **Mixing of intergenerational and different language learners**

Given the National Qualifications Framework training bands, AET classes sometimes combine learners from different levels (one to four). Learners in lower levels expressed unhappiness with this arrangement, as they felt uncomfortable to ask questions in a class consisting also of more advanced learners. Mother-tongue learners — often older people who never attended school — struggle in classes consisting of learners of all levels since they need additional assistance from teachers, which is time consuming.



Learners in lower-level AET classes feel uncomfortable to ask questions in the presence of advanced learners.

### **Quality assurance**

Skills development facilitators are employed by municipalities to ensure quality, for example by tracking the progress of municipal employees who participated in training programmes. However, it is difficult to monitor quality for non-employee learners who attend through the DBE.

### **Concluding remarks and recommendations**

As a country with challenges in addressing structural poverty and issues of inequality, education can become a vehicle to facilitate upward social mobility, but also to address structural inequality in the future. The researchers made the following recommendations:

- Learners interviewed indicated that there is need for the municipalities to provide transport to learning centres so that they can afford to attend classes.
- The Department of Higher Education and Training needs to rethink levels of AET to ensure that the learners can ultimately progress to Grade 12.
- Skills development facilitators recommended that they need a strategy to attract learners to enrol in AET for example, providing standardised incentives such as stipends, which are commonly provided in learnership programmes.

- There was a rather slow adoption of the term AET in most studies. Most studies analysed in this research still make use of the old acronym ABET instead of AET. Using the correct term will help to enforce new thinking about lifelong adult education and skills training away from the narrower "night school" concept.
- Finally, the interplay of inter-governmental relations among LGSETA, municipalities and the DBE is critical and all parties must have uniform quality assurance control of this AET programme. The LGSETA and the DBE must work together as a cluster to have an integrated quality assurance mechanism for employees and non-employee learners.

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### **Full report:**

[http://cdn.lgseta.co.za/resources/performance\\_monitoring\\_and\\_reporting\\_documents/AET%20Research%20Project.pdf](http://cdn.lgseta.co.za/resources/performance_monitoring_and_reporting_documents/AET%20Research%20Project.pdf)

