

The development of national standards for adult educators in Namibia

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Abstract Since gaining independence from South Africa in 1990, Namibia has placed considerable emphasis on education, including adult learning. As a means of improving the quality of adult learning, the Namibian Ministry of Education commissioned the development of national standards in 2010 to express competency requirements for adult educators. Particular attention was paid to the views of adult learners who participated through thirty focus groups. The participatory process revealed that the work of an adult educator is more complex and demanding than had previously been appreciated. The required competencies were categorised under four headings: (1) *Knowledge as an adult educator*, (2) *Practice as an adult educator*, (3) *Relationships as an adult educator* and (4) *Ethics and professionalism as an adult educator*. The Namibia Qualifications Authority, acting under its legislative mandate of setting occupational standards for occupations, jobs, posts and positions, approved the national standards in 2011.

Keywords Adult learning · Standards for adult educators · Namibia · Competencies of adult learners · Adult learners · Evaluation of adult learning · Expectations of adult learners

Résumé Élaborer des normes nationales pour les éducateurs d'adultes en Namibie – Depuis son accession à l'indépendance de l'Afrique du Sud en 1990, la Namibie a fortement privilégié l'éducation, y compris celle des adultes. En vue d'améliorer la qualité de l'éducation des adultes, le ministère namibien de l'éducation a commandité en 2010 l'élaboration de normes nationales, énonçant les compétences

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requisites chez les éducateurs d'adultes. Il y a été accordé une importance particulière aux opinions des apprenants adultes, qui ont participé au processus lors de 30 groupes de discussion. Cette démarche participative a révélé que le travail de l'éducateur d'adultes est plus complexe et exigeant qu'on ne le supposait auparavant. Les compétences requises ont été répertoriées selon quatre rubriques : 1) *Connaissances de l'éducateur d'adultes*, 2) *Pratique de l'éducateur d'adultes*, 3) *Contacts de l'éducateur d'adultes*, enfin 4) *Déontologie et professionnalisme de l'éducateur d'adultes*. L'autorité namibienne des qualifications, dotée d'un mandat conféré par la loi d'établir des normes professionnelles pour les métiers, emplois, postes et charges, a approuvé ces normes nationales en 2011.

Zusammenfassung Die Entwicklung staatlicher Normen für Lehrkräfte im Bereich der Erwachsenenbildung in Namibia – Seit der Unabhängigkeit von Südafrika im Jahr 1990 legt Namibia einen besonderen Schwerpunkt auf die Bildung, einschließlich der Erwachsenenbildung. Um die Qualität der Erwachsenenbildung zu verbessern, hat das namibische Bildungsministerium im Jahr 2010 den Auftrag erteilt, staatliche Normen für die Anforderungen an die Kompetenz der Lehrkräfte im Erwachsenenbildungsbereich zu entwickeln. Mit besonderer Aufmerksamkeit wurden die Meinungen von erwachsenen Lernenden gehört, die sich in dreißig Fokusgruppen beteiligt haben. Das partizipatorische Verfahren hat gezeigt, dass die Arbeit einer Lehrkraft im Bereich der Erwachsenenbildung komplexer ist und höhere Anforderungen stellt, als man dies bislang wahrgenommen hatte. Die erforderlichen Kompetenzen wurden in vier Kategorien eingeteilt: (1) *Das Wissen von Lehrkräften in der Erwachsenenbildung*, (2) *die Praxis von Lehrkräften in der Erwachsenenbildung*, (3) *die Beziehungen von Lehrkräften in der Erwachsenenbildung* und (4) *die Ethik und Professionalität von Lehrkräften in der Erwachsenenbildung*. Gemäß ihrem gesetzlichen Auftrag, Beschäftigungsnormen für Berufe, Jobs, Ämter und Positionen festzulegen, hat die Namibia Qualifications Authority [etwa: Behörde für Bildungs- und Berufsabschlüsse] die staatlichen Normen im Jahr 2011 gebilligt.

Resumen El desarrollo de estándares nacionales para educadores adultos en Namibia – Desde su independencia de Sudáfrica en 1990, Namibia ha puesto un considerable énfasis en la educación, incluyendo el aprendizaje de las personas adultas. Con el fin de mejorar la calidad del aprendizaje de las personas adultas, el Ministerio de Educación de Namibia encomendó en el 2010 el desarrollo de estándares nacionales que definan las competencias que deben reunir los educadores adultos. En este sentido, se ha otorgado una especial atención a los puntos de vista de los educandos adultos, que participaron en treinta grupos de referencia. El proceso de participación reveló que el trabajo de un educador adulto es más complejo y exigente de lo que se había considerado previamente. Finalmente, se establecieron cuatro categorías de competencias requeridas: (1) *Conocimientos como educador adulto*, (2) *Práctica como educador adulto*, (3) *Capacidad de relación como educador adulto*, y (4) *Ética y profesionalismo como educador adulto*. Actuando bajo el mandato legislativo de establecer estándares ocupacionales para empleos, puestos y posiciones, la Autoridad de Cualificación de Namibia aprobó los estándares nacionales en el 2011.

Резюме Разработка национальных стандартов для работников сферы образования взрослых (эдукаторов) в Намибии – С момента получения независимости от Южной Африки в 1990 году в Намибии стало уделяться больше внимание образованию, включая и образование взрослых. Для улучшения качества образования взрослых Министерство образования в Намибии принялось за разработку национальных стандартов в 2010 году для того, чтобы определить компетентностные требования для работников сферы образования взрослых. Особое внимание уделялось мнениям взрослых учащихся, которые участвовали в тридцати экспериментальных группах. Полученные данные показали, что работа эдукатора предъявляет особые требования и является более сложной, чем это считалось ранее. Требуемые компетенции были распределены по категориям по четырем направлениям: 1) *знание как эдукатор*, 2) *практика как эдукатор*, 3) *взаимоотношения как эдукатор* и 4) *этика и профессионализм как эдукатор*. Квалификационная комиссия в Намибии, действующая на основе законодательного мандата по выработке профессиональных стандартов для профессий и должностей, утвердила данные национальные стандарты в 2011 году.

Background

The authors of this note, both consultants based in Namibia, were engaged by the Ministry of Education in Namibia to assist in the development of national standards for adult educators. Through a process that took most of 2010, the standards were developed. In view of the widespread trend for the introduction of such standards, as a means of improving the quality of adult learning, it is hoped that this note may assist other countries which are contemplating a similar measure.

Namibia is a Southern African country with an arid climate and a diverse population in the region of two million people. Mineral riches make it a middle-income country, but with extreme levels of inequality. Since gaining independence from South Africa in 1990, Namibia has placed considerable emphasis on education, including adult learning. The National Policy on Adult Learning (Ministry of Education 2003) defines adult learning as

the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities undertaken by adults and out-of-school youth, which results in the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to enhance the quality of life.

Why national standards?

National standards for adult educators serve as benchmarks that describe what adult educators are meant to do and act as indicators of professional performance. They are public statements of what the relevant, national stakeholders expect of people who facilitate education or development programmes with adult learners regarding:

- what abilities they are expected to have;
- the quality indicators proving that each ability is held; and
- the circumstances in which facilitators are expected to be able to demonstrate each ability.

Standards can be used by adult educators for self-review, to provide reassurance that they are good at what they do, and to identify areas for improvement and enhancement. They can also be used by adult learners to identify what they can reasonably expect from the person who is facilitating their learning ... and point out when they believe they are not being treated well as adult learners. Those responsible for the development of adult educators can use standards for curriculum development, assessment and the composition of qualifications to be registered on any national qualifications framework. In particular, standards can be used for identifying the qualification components and their required combinations (the curriculum) and the details for each component – the syllabi, course notes and course materials. Employers of adult educators can use standards for recruitment processes, for transparent performance appraisal and to guide ongoing professional development.

At the outset the authors clarified with a reference group of stakeholders appointed by the Ministry of Education the nature and purpose of the national standards to be developed. The structure and format of the already approved national standards for teachers would be taken into account. The stakeholders in adult education in Namibia include the Ministry of Education (which runs the National Literacy Programme), several other Ministries, including those concerned with health, agriculture, environment, gender, information, prisons and safety and security, the Namibian College of Open Learning, the Polytechnic of Namibia, the University of Namibia, a wide range of non-governmental organisations and a number of larger corporations,

International benchmarks

The first step was to compile a desktop study of other countries' existing standards for adult educators. Those from Estonia, the State of Maryland in the USA, New Zealand, Switzerland and South Africa were the best examples readily available. Later researchers may perhaps be able to trace others, but it would seem that not many are in existence, or have come to fruition through publication. Common areas of competency that were found in these standards were

- planning and designing adult learning;
- managing, guiding and delivering (or facilitating) adult learning;
- creating and maintaining an environment conducive to adult and lifelong learning;
- assessing adult learning and using the results of assessment; and
- practising personal and professional development in adult learning.

The analysis of the different standards was done through a matrix showing similarities, and differences, in the competencies specified in each country. The matrix is unfortunately too large to be included here.

Data gathering

In May 2010 the authors began to distribute a data-gathering instrument (see Fig. 1) to identify expected abilities and traits.

Frequent follow-up was required as some respondents found that completion of the forms required time to consider in detail the attributes of an adult educator – the complexity of which had perhaps previously been underestimated. To make the process more accessible, some respondents were therefore interviewed individually or in focus groups. Seven of the thirteen administrative regions were visited with a representative from the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Adult Education. The support of key institutions such as the Namibian College of Open Learning, the University of Namibia, the Polytechnic of Namibia, several non-governmental organisations, private sector bodies and Regional Education Offices was obtained. Significantly, District Adult Education Officers were trained to conduct focus group discussions and this brought in a rich harvest of views from adult learners. The data gathering process therefore took much longer than anticipated. Ultimately, however, contributions were received from:

- 30 focus groups of adult learners, including literacy learners and distance education students
- 11 other focus groups, usually mixed stakeholders
- 24 Ministry of Education staff members
- 64 tutors of the Namibian College of Open Learning
- 16 students of adult education – each reporting on a buzz group¹ discussion
- 27 professional adult educators not working for the government.

Focus on the views of learners

Of special interest in this study were the views expressed by the many adult learners who took part. As previously mentioned, the learners participated through focus groups in the regions included in the study. Groups ranged in size from six to twenty-five and the majority were female (though, unfortunately, some facilitators did not provide a full record of learners in their reports). Participants from the National Literacy Programme were from stages 3 and 4 of the programme and had therefore probably had several years of exposure to the programme. Participants from the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) were in the Pre-Entry to Tertiary Education (PETE) programme which enables disadvantaged learners to gain access to science courses in higher education. The questions discussed were:

¹ A buzz group is a small, impromptu group which is formed during a meeting or a learning session and is designed to get participants who might not speak up in a large forum to contribute to the discussion of an idea.

Respondent Details

Key Roles

In the table below, list as many roles or activities you think should be required of an adult educator – what should an adult educator be required to do?

When you have finished, identify the FIVE most important roles or activities. Put the number 1 alongside the most important, the number 2 alongside the next most important, etc. until you reach number 5.

Please now complete one of the following sheets for EACH of the five roles or abilities you have numbered:

Role or Activity:
What KNOWLEDGE must be held in order to do this?
What SKILLS must be held in order to do this?
What personal ATTRIBUTES must be held to do this?
What key DOCUMENTS influence how this should be done?
What key documents are PRODUCED when doing this?
What PEOPLE are interacted with in this? What interactions with others are involved?
What would INDICATE that this was being done satisfactorily?
What would indicate that the adult educator was NOT EQUIPPED for this role or activity?

Significant Characteristics

What do you consider to be the key features that distinguish ADULT EDUCATION from other education sectors (i.e., General, Vocational, Higher)?

What do you consider to be the key characteristics that distinguish ADULT EDUCATORS from educators in other education sectors (e.g., teachers, vocational trainers, academic lecturers)?

If you were writing a JOB DESCRIPTION for an Adult Educator, what key requirements would you put in place?

Are there different types of Adult Educators? What does EACH type share with other types? How are they different from other types?

Performance Requirements

If you were in charge of giving a national award or citation to the best Adult Educator in Namibia, what would be the key CRITERIA you would set in order for the award to be made?

Other requirements

Please make comments on any other contents that you would like to see included in the national standards for Adult Educators.

Fig. 1 Extract of questions from the information-gathering sheet concerning adult educator competencies

- What should an adult educator be able to do?
- What are the differences between adult education and other kinds of education? and
- If there was a prize for the adult educator of the year, what criteria should be considered in evaluating the candidates?

Of primary concern to learners was the attitude of the adult educator rather than their subject expertise. Learners wanted to be respected, to be listened to and to have their experience of life recognised. They expected adult educators to show love and care “from the heart”, to be polite, peaceful and kind. Educators should reach out to everyone, especially the introverted, and create a comfortable atmosphere. Learners expected a positive attitude, encouragement and “a happy face”. They expected the adult educator to be committed and serious about their work, but to have a good sense of humour.

When it came to content, adult learners stressed that they were looking for something to improve their lives and solve daily problems. They wanted relevant, recent information. They wanted knowledge and skills that would enable them to take part in decision-making. Adult educators should be able to identify learners’ needs and respond accordingly. Educators should be flexible. They should be able to explain the importance of adult learning.

In terms of methodology, the learners wanted the adult educator to give a chance to each learner to participate in the activities to be carried out. Educators should take time for in-depth explanation to ensure that the learners understood. They should teach adults differently than children since adults have other roles in society. The educator should be an initiator and be creative, innovative and resourceful, to make learning interesting and motivating. Educators should not teach the same way every day. They should use a lot of different materials, equipment and methods to make a lesson interesting. They should be willing to be asked questions by adult learners and prepared to give answers. They should compose songs and poems. They should use physical stretching and exercise to energise learners. They should use role plays and debating sessions. They should exchange roles so that the teacher becomes the learner and the learners become the teacher. Learners wanted a growing sense of self-respect and personal empowerment.

In practical matters learners were very clear that they expected the educator to arrive early, prepare the venue, and to be modestly dressed, “with no political T-shirts”. Adult educators should also be able to perform administrative functions, and keep the group on task.

Finally, learners required that the adult educator should be a person of good ethics, a role model, someone who keeps confidences, treats people equally and is able to control their temper.

A matrix of competencies

All the inputs from the various stakeholders on what an adult educator should be able to do were analysed on six spreadsheets and eventually synthesised in a matrix

of Key Abilities, and the special requirements associated with each were identified. The main organisation of competencies suggested was in terms of:

- knowledge as an adult educator;
- practice as an adult educator;
- relationships as an adult educator; and
- ethics and professionalism as an adult educator.

This choice was influenced by the structure of the Professional Standards for Teachers in Namibia (Ministry of Education 2006).

With the approval of the reference group for the concept set out in the matrix, and a proposed format for the standards, the authors set about producing a first draft of the National Standards for discussion with the reference group, which was accomplished in August 2010. The consultants sought to be true to their sources and to produce standards appropriate for the Namibian context. Following the advice of the reference group, a Consultative Edition of the National Standards for Adult Educators in Namibia was produced in September, and on 27 October 2010 a National Consultation was convened in Windhoek. Following the presentation of the Standards by the authors, participants in the Consultation worked in five groups to scrutinise particular sets of the standards, and many useful suggestions and comments were gathered for consideration in producing the final set of standards (Ministry of Education 2010).

The Draft National Standards, being 36 in number, as outlined in Table 1, were approved by the Ministry of Education in December 2010. In January 2011, when this note was completed and submitted to the editor of this journal for peer review, the Ministry was working on an implementation plan. Professionalisation of adult education was discussed at a major national conference on education in June 2011, and towards the end of 2011 the Namibia Qualifications Authority, acting under its legislative mandate of setting occupational standards for occupations, jobs, posts and positions, approved the national standards. The two major institutions involved in the training of adult educators, the University of Namibia and the Namibian College of Open Learning, were aligning their curricula with the standards as this article went to press.

Conclusion

The participatory process undertaken in Namibia for the development of the National Standards for Adult Educators revealed that the work of an adult educator is more complex and demanding than had previously been appreciated. The most valuable contribution in the formulation of the standards came from adult learners who eagerly expressed their views through focus groups. Participants in the process have begun to self-reflect and conceive, with some excitement, how the Standards could be used to improve the quality of adult education programmes, activities and facilitation. The next challenge is the demanding task of implementing the Standards through formal systems.

Table 1 List of the national standards for adult educators

Code	Competency area – Knowledge as an adult educator	NQF Alignment
A1	Demonstrate an understanding of core characteristics of adult learners	4
A2	Demonstrate an understanding of core characteristics of adult learning and facilitation	7
A3	Demonstrate familiarity with content material relevant to an area of knowledge and skills development in adult learning	6
Code	Practice as an adult educator – Literacy and numeracy development	NQF Alignment
B1	Develop literacy skills in adult learners using Mother Tongue	4
B2	Develop literacy skills in adult learners using English	5
B3	Assist adult learners with language and literacy in other curriculum contexts	5
B4	Develop numeracy skills in adult learners	5
B5	Develop mathematical skills in adult learners aligned to upper primary education outcomes	6
B6	Develop mathematical skills in adult learners aligned to secondary education outcomes	7
Code	Practice as an adult educator – Design and implementation	NQF Alignment
B7	Create awareness of and apply problem solving techniques with adult learners	5
B8	Develop awareness of and use of technology in an adult learning context	4
B9	Identify the learning needs of an adult learner	5
B10	Identify the learning needs of a community	6
B11	Design a programme or course suitable for use in adult education	6
B12	Design an activity suitable for use in an adult education programme	5
B13	Adapt learning materials and develop supplementary learning aids for adult learners	5
B14	Design learning materials for adult learners	6
B15	Design learning materials intended for adult learners in self-led and self-directed learning	6
B16	Use diverse methods to facilitate adult learning	5
B17	Perform as an effective adult educator	7
B18	Establish and maintain discipline for and in adult learning sessions	5

Table 1 continued

Code	Practice as an adult educator – Administration and management	NQF Alignment
B19	Complete administration associated with an adult learning group	4
B20	Manage an adult learning centre	6
Code	Practice as an adult educator – Assessment and evaluation	NQF Alignment
B21	Assess adult learners using formative techniques	4
B22	Assess adult learners in summative situations	4
B23	Evaluate the effectiveness of an adult education activity or programme	6
Code	Relationships as an adult educator	NQF Alignment
C1	Assist the learning and personal development of adult learners with disabilities	5
C2	Promote healthy living with adult learners	5
C3	Provide information and advice relating to education and career opportunities	4
C4	Assist community development as an adult educator	6
Code	Ethics and professionalism	NQF Alignment
D1	Model social and professional responsibility as an adult educator	5
D2	Engage in lifelong learning as an adult educator	6
D3	Monitor and manage the work of other adult educators	6
D4	Participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of adult learning policies	6
D5	Undertake limited primary research activities as an adult educator	6
D6	Promote lifelong learning in and to adult learners	5

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The authors

Justin Ellis was born in South Africa and moved to neighbouring Namibia in 1972. He worked as a teacher and for two NGOs engaged in adult education. In 1978 he was expelled from Namibia by the South African administration apparently because of his part-time journalistic efforts. He sought refuge in Britain where he studied adult education at Manchester University and became the administrator of the Namibia Refugee Project which supported the SWAPO Women's Council Literacy Campaign in refugee camps in Angola and Zambia. Soon after independence in 1990 he was appointed an Under Secretary in the Ministry of Education and was responsible for establishing various programmes and institutions in adult education and culture. He served on the Board of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) for twelve years. He was the first programme manager of the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme, before retiring from the public service at the end of 2008. He is currently the manager of Turning Points Consultancy CC.

Brent Richardson originally hails from New Zealand but has been located in the Republic of Namibia since 2006. He has been working substantially in southern Africa since 1996. As well as being in the forefront of policy and systems development in standards-based assessment systems, Brent is also an active "customer" of such systems, gaining recognition for his specialist abilities in training and assessment through the gaining of credits for relevant, national standards. In 2008 Brent joined Edla Kaumbi in establishing the Namibian consultancy, Frameworks Africa Consultancy, with the purpose of assisting the enhancement of the performance of people, organisations and communities through improving access to and competence in knowledge and performance expectations.