

Capacity Building in Trainers of Technical Vocational Education and Training at the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)

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INTRODUCTION

The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) is a state-supported institution of learning with the key focus of providing educational opportunities to adults and out-of-school youth. Its programmes focus has traditionally be on Secondary Education, however as part of its diversification strategy, it implemented a range of Professional and Vocational Education programmes. The College introduced the following Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses at level 1 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in February 2013: Automotive Mechanics, Plumbing and Pipefitting, Welding and Metal Fabrication and Office Administration. Trainees in these programmes will progress until level 3 at NAMCOL depending on internal and external assessment results. These courses are offered on a full-time basis on outcomes-based education and training (OBET). The College envisages offering the courses on open distance learning (ODL) in the near future.

The College partnered with the Commonwealth of Learning for financial support to conduct Assessor, Facilitator and Moderator training for all TVET trainers and facilitators for the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) and Professional Programmes. In total, fifteen (15) staff members were trained.

This study aims at evaluating the Assessor and Facilitator training interventions and to determine whether the trainers have gained new knowledge and skills that will assist them to train and assess competently. Further, the study investigates opportunities for offering TVET through ODL.

TERMINOLOGY

Assessment College of South Africa defines the terms as follows:

Assessment refers to the structured process of collecting evidence of learners' work to measure and make judgments about the achievement or non-achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework (NQF) standards and/or qualifications.

Assessor refers to a person who measures the achievement of specified NQF unit standards or qualifications.

Facilitate means "to make easy, to provide". **Facilitation** no longer implies the transfer of skills or the offloading of knowledge. Rather, it refers to the process of making it easy for the learner to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes. The focus is on assisting the individual learner to become competent.

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) refers to the structure that organizes and classifies qualifications and competencies in a country. It consists of registered standards, units and qualifications at different levels of learning.

Outcomes-based Education and Training (OBET) is an approach to education focusing on the results or learning outcomes to be achieved rather than on the content of the learning. Learning programmes are designed to help learners achieve those desired outcomes.

Qualification refers to a planned combination of learning outcomes with a defined purpose(s) that is intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning. Qualifications can be made up of an agreed set of unit standards, or may consist of exit level outcomes and assessment criteria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The training of Trainers (also known as Instructors) in TVET is an important component of the successful implementation of such courses. Whether it is at school level or at vocational centre level, in both cases, TVET courses are best taught by well-qualified Trainers.

As TVET has traditionally been taught only through the contact mode of study, there is resistance in some education circles for the implementation of TVET in ODL, as is evident in discussions with stakeholders. NAMCOL experience similar challenges to what was discussed at the international conference on Vocational Education and Training through Open Schooling in February 2006 in India (COL & NIOS, 2006). The report explains that since there should be recognition of TVET through ODL from national agencies for accreditation and registration; there is need to meet the constantly changing requirements of technology and industry; there is need for use of ICTs for development of instructional material, programme delivery and support systems. In Namibia, in particular, there is a need for changes in wrong perceptions about the quality and value addition of TVET.

Namibia is in the process to develop a new school curriculum and TVET training will soon be introduced in the mainstream education. NAMCOL was pro-active by starting with such courses early, but was challenged with the shortfall of qualified TVET trainers in the country. There is a need to capacitate trainers with additional skills as required by the Namibia Training Authority (NTA). Two of such required training programmes are the Assessor and Facilitator trainings, to ensure that trainers are competent in these fields.

Since trainers in the field are training through contact mode, it is difficult for them to change to ODL, without understanding the dynamics of distance training. Therefore, NAMCOL is offering the courses through contact mode for small numbers of trainees in the first intake. However, the College intends to expand the programmes to more centres and require the trainers to be able to employ open distance learning methodologies.

It is also important that suitable materials are developed for both print and e-learning in line with open distance learning requirements. Since past materials development processes for TVET only provided for contact mode, the materials are not addressing the challenges of distance learning trainees. These challenges are not unique to NAMCOL as Pant and Verma (2013:5-6) explained in their article on VET training through ODL: challenges and strategies. They listed some major issues and concerns that needed to be addressed as: “develop suitable learning materials for learners, both print as well as non-print; designing and putting a well-conceived quality assurance programme in place to ensure quality in skill training; and encourage increasing use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and provide online learning to learners in difficult to reach areas” amongst others. These are the same challenges that NAMCOL is experiencing and need to find creative ways of addressing if TVET is to be recognised in ODL.

This is also in line with the thinking of INVEST who “challenges TVET teachers, managers and policy makers to change the way they think about how to provide technical and vocational skills training. It involves using educational media and technology in flexible approaches” (COL, 2013:1).

Content in technical subjects in TVET lean itself to wider integration of technology. Youth and young adults are forerunners in the use of technology, therefore in the facilitation of TVET content the trainees can make a huge contribution through audio and video clips, animations, simulations and other creative ways to make learning interesting and fun.

Kurnia, D. & Ilhamdaniah (2013) explain that “the quality of teachers determines the quality of education in general and occupational competence specifically.” Therefore, there is a need to improve the professionalism and skill levels of teachers in general and TVET teachers in specific.

The National Standards for Adult Educators in Namibia (MoE, 2010:99) describe similar approaches to learning and assessment. It also relates to competency-based assessment techniques where “learner progress is measured against learning outcomes and associated criteria. It is not measured against the level and degree of development of other learners.”

Both facilitation and assessment are important components of training where the skill level of trainers will hugely impact on the success of the training programme. Facilitation does not need to be through contact sessions. Once systems and suitable materials are in place, facilitation can take place over a distance and in the comfort of the home of the learner.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed methodologies were employed, where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected.

Questionnaires were developed, based on the training objectives, and distributed to candidates to indicate their knowledge, skills and experience before and after the training. The data from questionnaires were entered in Excel and analysed for common responses. The responses were recorded either in tables as quantitative data and then converted in charts; or recorded as quotes with reference to specific objectives of the training.

A focus group discussion was held with all participants and their reflections on the training are presented. Five (5) of the participants were interviewed for triangulation and to get clarity on some of the responses.

The facilitator was interviewed to get a perspective of the training interventions and what should have been achieved. Particular reference was made to the participation of trainees and their responses to the training.

In addition, three (3) trainers of technical courses were interviewed to gauge their views of offering TVET through ODL.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Below is a brief summary of each of the aspects of demographics that were considered for the participants.

Gender

There were two thirds males and one third females in the training. This selection was not by design, but rather due to staff members employed as trainers and their supervisors.

Age

The highest age group of respondents was between the ages of 20-30 years (33%). This was followed by the equal number of respondents between the age of 31-40 years and 41-50 years (27%) and the least respondents' age group was between the ages of 51-60 years (13%).

Highest Qualifications

The highest number of respondents had certificates (33%) followed by an equal number with diplomas and Bachelor degrees (27%) and the least respondents had Masters degrees (13%).

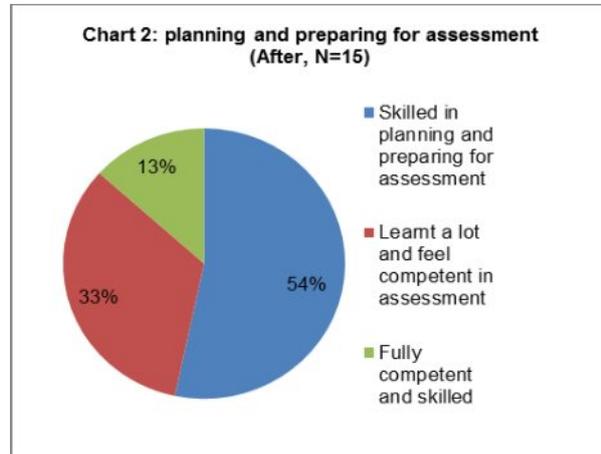
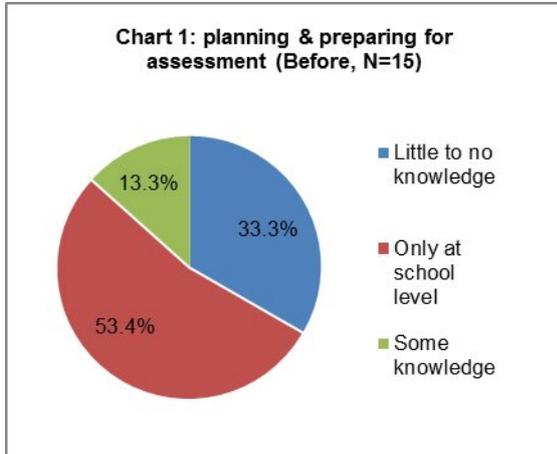
FINDINGS

The findings are presented under the headings of the two trainings that were conducted, namely Assessor and Facilitator training. Moderator training is excluded for the purpose of this paper.

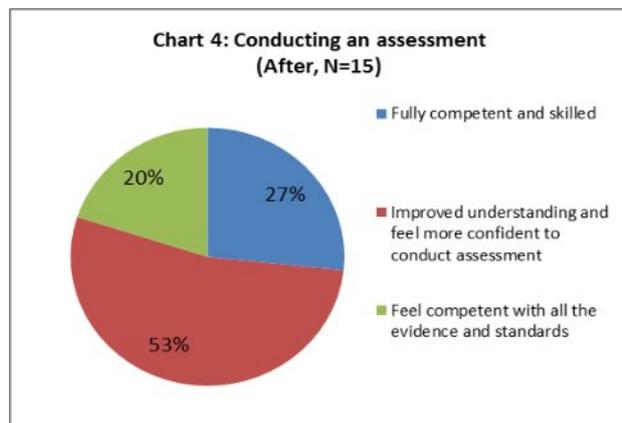
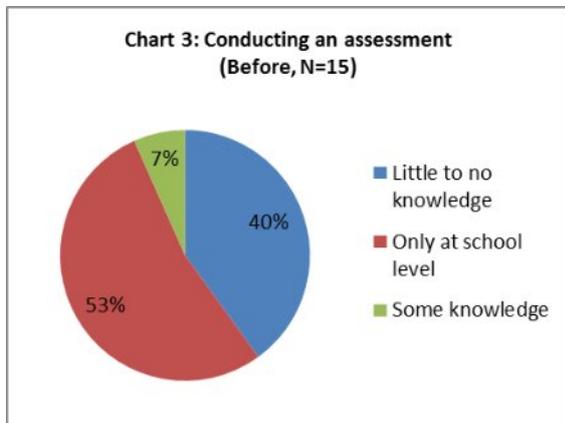
Assessor training focussed on the following aspects:

- Planning and preparing for assessment;
- Conducting an assessment; and
- Providing feedback to assessment candidates and other relevant parties.

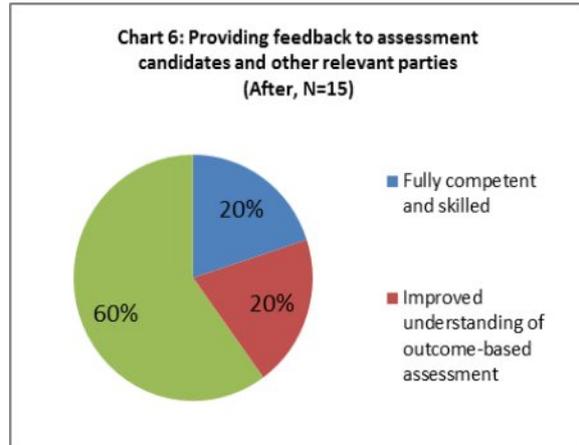
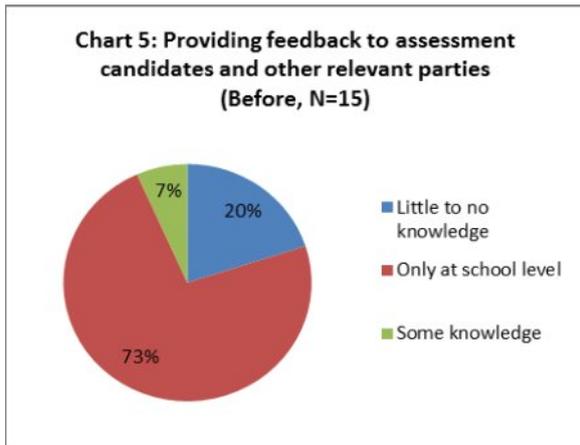
The charts below present the data before and after the training for each aspect.



Most of the participants (54%) had only done assessment at school level, while a third of them (33%) had little to no knowledge of planning and preparing for assessment. After the training, 54% of them felt they were skilled in planning and preparing for assessment, while 13% indicated that they were fully competent and skilled.



Before the training, 53% of the respondents had knowledge, skills and experience of conducting an assessment only at school level, followed by a number of respondents with little to no knowledge, skills and experience of conducting an assessment (40%). This changed to an improved understanding for 53% of them, with 27% feeling fully competent and skilled after the training.



An overall majority (73%) of respondents only had knowledge, skills and experience of providing feedback to assessment candidates and other relevant parties at school level with 20% having little to no knowledge. However, 60% felt competent in providing feedback after the training, with 20% each feeling either fully competent and skilled or having an improved understanding of outcome-based assessment. .

Facilitator training provided the TVET staff members with facilitation skills based on preparation and planning for facilitation, resources and all equipment involved in being a good facilitator and employing appropriate methods.

The intervention also addressed the following competencies in relation to facilitation:

- Setting up a professional facilitation plan;
- Preparing for facilitation;
- Facilitating using different thinking styles and methodologies;
- Identifying the different characters & personalities of students; and
- Evaluating facilitation using appropriate methods.

The majority of the participants (47%) had a reasonable background of facilitation and the different components of facilitator training since they were former teachers.

Some respondents (20%) indicated that they had little knowledge of facilitation since they were never formally trained in this area. In total, 33% of them indicated that they just do training in the traditional way as they have seen by example.

The Facilitator had the following to say:

“The group of participants was efficient and dynamic, which resulted in a very cooperative active learning environment for all participants. It was visible that the understanding of the participants has been developed remarkably and the personal and professional development was one of the major achievements of the course. Participants felt that they are now confident enough to conduct any facilitation that come across their way and that they are competent and fully equipped now.”

Both the participants and facilitator had positive feedback on the impact that the training had made on the TVET trainers.

Open Distance Learning

Interviews were conducted with three trainers to gauge their ideas on delivering TVET through ODL. Since they were never involved in offering the courses through ODL, they could not visualise exactly

how this would work. However, they expressed willingness to give it a chance, especially related to the theoretical parts. Interviewees indicated that trainees would be given all the course materials to study on their own and report to contact centres for discussions with trainers at particular intervals. Such contact sessions should be one to two weeks per month, depending on the volume of content and the length of the course. Most courses are expected to be six month long.

In addition, interviewees indicated that multimedia can be employed to assist trainees in understanding the content, but also to provide visual material for practical activities. A range of audio and video material, as well as animations are available for trainees to use, while studying on their own.

As far as practical work is concerned, interviewees indicated that trainees will need more contact time, as they might not have access to the necessary equipment and tools to practice the required skills. One of them expressed his concern as follows: "Although it might be possible to attach them to industry in their home towns, many of the smaller industries might not be operating on the required standards for them to receive the appropriate training. Hence, it will be important to have contact time to ensure that the required standards are met for external assessment."

DISCUSSION

The discussion focuses on the three areas for which data were collected and presented, namely assessor training, facilitator training and open distance learning. Both assessment and facilitation are key skills for trainers in the successful implementation of ODL programmes. Assessment in TVET is very unique and trainers need to be competent in ensuring that their assessment techniques are relevant and appropriate. Facilitation is different than teaching and the techniques taught in the training can be used effectively in ODL.

Assessor training

It is evident that the majority of these staff members did not know much of assessment in TVET before the training. However, after the training the majority of the participants have improved their knowledge, skills and experience in relation to planning, preparing, conducting, and providing feedback for assessment in TVET. They now feel competent and skilled and are able to conduct an assessment with confidence. Up to 54% of the respondents felt they were skilled in planning and preparing for assessment after the training; 53% of them experienced an improved understanding and felt more competent in conducting assessment and 60% felt competent in providing assessment feedback. This is an indication of the impact the training has made on the trainers.

The paper does not explore deeply into the methodologies employed in assessment in TVET training; however, it is important that the assessment is conducted in a fair and transparent way. Therefore, the trainers must be competent in assessment design and in conducting the assessment. In the case of outcomes-based and competency-based assessment, the trainees must demonstrate that they are ready for assessment, before they are externally assessed. Internal assessment is conducted by the trainer and when the trainee is competent, external assessment is conducted. This can become a very cumbersome process and hence the importance of continuing capacity building.

Facilitator training

The intervention on facilitation appears to have been conducted successfully. Although many of the participants were former teachers and thought that they understood facilitation, they realised during and after the training that facilitation is different from teaching. It is clear that they had little understanding of facilitation in TVET before the training.

After the training the participants were excited about their newly gained knowledge and skills. Hence, some of them indicated that they now know how to conduct facilitation, and understood the important role of the facilitator. It was interesting to note that they indicated that teachers would perform better in schools with this kind of training. This shows how they appreciated the methodologies employed in the training.

Having all the technology and opportunities provided by multimedia, it will be a waste if the trainers resort back to traditional teaching methodologies after this intervention. Multimedia provide opportunity to trainers in using the facilitation method as every trainee can progress at his/her own pace, while the trainer provides guidance, support and focus on difficult parts of the content.

Open Distance Learning

NAMCOL will be obliged to offer TVET through open distance learning as the College does not have sufficient funds to sustain the current practice of full-time tutoring of trainees. Most of the trainees have passed grade 12, which is registered at level 3 on the NQF, while the TVET courses are starting at level 1; and to be completed at level 3. Therefore, the trainees can be expected to master the content with relative ease.

One of the immediate challenges is that the course materials that are used are not developed for the ODL environment. Therefore, there is a need to revise the course material to meet the needs of distance learning trainees. In terms of multimedia, there is a wide range of open source materials available that can be used to supplement the print-based materials.

In view of the uncertainties expressed by the trainers who were interviewed, the College will have to develop a concept document to outline the implementation of TVET-ODL. The concept document can be developed with input from trainers, but also with best practice examples from the region and elsewhere in the world. Once there is clarity on how such implementation would take place and trainers are sufficiently capacitated for the implementation, the process can take its course.

CONCLUSION

Now that the trainers had been trained in facilitation and assessment it is important to monitor them in their training to determine whether the new knowledge and skills are utilised. This will provide an opportunity for further research in this area.

More work need to be done in mapping the way forward for the implementation of ODL; and especially the employment of Information Communication Technologies in TVET training at NAMCOL. The development and use of multi-media content is part of the strategies of the institution. Offering TVET through ODL will bring new inspiration and opportunities to this exiting field of training.

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