Open Learning in South Africa

1. Education and Training in South Africa

South Africa has a large youth population. According to Statistics South Africa, 48.43% of the South African population is younger than 25 years old. In 2013, youth accounted for 55.7% of the working age population aged 15-64 years, yet they are disproportionately represented among the employed (40.4%); the unemployed (67.4%); the discouraged work-seekers (66.5%) and among others who are not economically active (67%). They furthermore reported that the unemployment rate among the youth rose from 32% in 2008 to a high of 35.8% in 2012 before declining slightly to 35.4% in 2013. This situation points not only to a grave wastage of talent, but also to possible serious social disruption.

Of importance, is that the levels of education play an important role in the unemployment rates faced by young people. The rate for those with a tertiary qualification was the lowest among both adults and youth, yet among young people it was still more than three times that of adults.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of public investment in education in the world. At about 7% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 20% of total state expenditure, the government spends more on education than on any other sector. The Minister of Finance, in his budget speech on 26 February 2014, announced that 20% of government expenditure for 2014/15 will go to education, amounting to R254-billion.

School life spans 13 years or grades, from grade 0, otherwise known as grade R or “reception year”, through to grade 12 or “matric” – the year of matriculation. General Education and Training runs from grade 0 to grade 9. Under the South African Schools Act of 1996, education is compulsory for all South Africans from the age of seven (grade 1) to age 15, or the completion of grade 9.

General Education and Training also includes Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), which is available to adults who want to finish their basic education.

Further Education and Training takes place from grades 10 to 12 in schools, and also includes career-oriented education and training offered in other institutions – Technical and Vocational (TVET) Colleges, community colleges and private colleges. Different programmes are offered in the post school education and training sector including University and University of Technology programmes, TVET College programmes including the
National Certificate Vocational (NCV) and NATED (N1-N6) programmes, apprentice programmes, learnerships, work integrated learning programmes, internships and short skills programmes.

The responsibility for education is shared by two ministries/departments, namely the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), formed in 2009 when the former National Department of Education was split into two separate departments. The Department of Basic Education deals with all schools from Grade R to Grade 12, and adult literacy programmes, while the Department of Higher Education and Training deals with all post-school education and training programmes, including Universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges (former Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges), Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and Adult Education and Training. It is also coordinating the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa.

In 2013, there were 12,489,648 learners in ordinary public and independent schools in South Africa, who attended 25,720 schools and were served by 425,023 educators.

According to figures from the Department of Higher Education and Training (2012 HEMIS database, Oct. 2013), 953,373 students (281,280 undergraduate certificates and diplomas, 500,430 undergraduate degrees, 149,026 postgraduates and 22,637 occasional students) were enrolled in South Africa's public higher-education institutions in 2012. Staff permanently employed by these institutions numbered 48,340, with 17,451 of those instruction and research staff.

In 2012, public higher education institutions produced 165,986 qualifications at all levels, with 35,617 qualifications in the human and social sciences; 46,044 in business and management; 35,478 in education and 48,848 qualifications in science, engineering and technology.

Since 2009, the DHET has also been responsible for TVET Colleges, community colleges and private colleges. There are currently 50 registered TVET Colleges in South Africa. In the 2013 White Paper on Post School Education and Training, the focus of FET Colleges was elucidated and the name changed to TVET Colleges to align it with their vision and focus. There are currently 657,000 students (headcount) enrolled in TVET Colleges (28 February 2014) with 45,604 staff. TVET Colleges are offering trimester, semester and year courses that resulted in the number of students enrolled at a specific time are varying, depending on the time of year.

The White Paper on Post School Education and Training sets 2030 enrolment targets of 1.62 million in public universities, 2.5 million in TVET colleges, and 1.0 million in community colleges and 0.5 million in private institutions.

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the South African government student loan and bursary scheme, was established in 1999 to make higher education possible for financially disadvantaged students. It provides loans and bursaries to students at all
25 public universities and 50 public TVET Colleges throughout the country. NSFAS funding has grown from R441 million in 1999 to R8.5 billion in 2013 and over R9 billion in 2014.

The DHET is also responsible for skills development in the post school education and training sector through the implementation of the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998, as well as for the Skills Development Levies Act. In 2013-2014, 14,973 matriculants and 23,823 unemployed learners completed learnerships and 74,132 employed learners and 18,853 unemployed learners completed skills programmes through this initiative. 18,110 artisans qualified in the same time.\(^1\) The DHET, through the Sector Education and Training authorities, increased spending from R2 151 275 000 in 2011/12 to R2 504 203 000 in 2012/13.\(^2\)

2. **Open Learning Policy and Legislative Context**

Open learning was already made policy in the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training where it defined open learning as an approach to learning that removes barriers to learning and encourages the development of open learning approaches, since it resonates with the values and principles of the national education and training policy and has applicability in virtually all learning contexts. Open learning therefore is an approach which combines the principles of learner centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems. South Africa has taken a position that open learning has no conceptual value as a synonym for distance education, technology enhanced learning, e-learning, blended or online learning and can include any of such approaches and modalities.

The DHET is finalising a policy framework for the provision of distance education in South African Universities. This document sees distance provisioning as an integral part of the post-school system in general, and more specifically in higher education. It addresses the barriers of cost of studies, access to learning opportunities and time constraints. It encourages the collaborative development of high quality learning resources, improved access to and use of appropriate technologies, supporting a wider range of post schooling study options, technological infrastructure for post schooling, as well as shared learning and support centres. Although we concurred that distance education is not synonymous to open learning, the proposed enabling environment to be established, will definitely open up learning opportunities for post school education and training.

The most significant policy development for the implementation of open learning (including distance education and open educational resources) in South Africa is the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013). It acknowledges the competing challenges to increase enrolment, throughput and curriculum relevance within a system and infrastructure

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\(^2\)SETAs’ summarized Expenditure per Learning Programme for 2012/13 financial year (8 May 2014).
that is already under strain. It furthermore highlights the need to cater for a very wide variety of potential student needs – including mature adult learners needing to learn and work at the same time, as well as younger people who may have dropped out of the schooling system due to financial, social, learning and other barriers to success. It directs towards access not only to a wide range of alternative kinds of programmes, but also to more flexible modes of delivery, which do not require them to attend classes very regularly, at fixed times and at central venues.

It states that open and distance education will be expanded in the post school education and training system and place distance education as a pivotal part of the system, including investment in curriculum design and materials development; access to these learning materials; meaningful formative and summative assessment; accreditation; investment in decentralised student support and increasing use of educational technology.

Furthermore, in the White Paper, Open Educational Resources (OER) has been made policy in the post-school education and training system. The DHET supports efforts that invest a larger proportion of total expenditure in the design and development of high quality learning resources, as a strategy for increasing and assuring the quality of provision across the entire post schooling system.

3. Distance Education in South African Public Institutions

In 2000, the Department of Education conducted research into open learning in General and Further Education in South Africa. One of the recommendations that the DOE adopted from the research is that open schooling is not a desirable intervention in South African schooling. Since then, public schooling has not adopted distance education approaches in schooling. However, the DBE has adopted an OER strategy and is progressively making textbooks, learner workbooks and teacher resource/support materials available as OER.

Distance education is an integral part of the post-school education and training system. Ten of the 23 existing universities (excluding the two new universities) are offering distance education programmes with a headcount of 387,134 (40.6% of the total enrolment), with the University of South Africa accounting for 336,221 of these students.

Thirteen of the 50 TVET Colleges are offering programmes through distance in 35 different campuses across the country. There are currently 9,530 students enrolled in distance education programmes with Majuba TVET College (4,513) in KwaZulu-Natal and Tshwane North (2,131) in Gauteng having the highest number of distance education students.

Private universities and colleges are major providers of distance education in South Africa.

The DHET is developing a National Open Learning System in which different courses and programmes can be offered and will first pilot the Occupational Certificate Electrician NQF level 4. This will be an innovative use of open and distance education in theoretical, practical and work integrated learning skills development.
The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) plays a pivotal role in distance education in South Africa to contribute to the development of new models of open and distance education practice, that accord with and take forward the values, principles, and goals of the evolving education systems in the Southern African region. It pays particular attention to the appropriate use of technology in education and most recently established a Kenya-based initiative, OER Africa, to promote the development and sharing of OER on the African continent.

4. Open Educational Resources in South Africa

OER activities are taking place across the education and training system in South Africa.

Some universities are active in the movement. Examples are:

- University of Cape Town (UCT) has launched its OpenContent Portal.
- The University of South Africa (Unisa) is developing a module for the OER University (OERu).
- The University of Pretoria’s Veterinary Science has an OER initiative around Continuing Professional Development and has launched an OER portal for Veterinary Sciences.
- The University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) is producing resources for an Advanced Certificate in Teaching which will be made available as OER.
- UKZN also led a South African Development Community (SADC) process to produce materials for carers of orphans and vulnerable children.

There are specific OER projects and programmes running within the DBE and DHET such as the Kha Ri Gude Guides for adult literacy and the School Workbooks and the Thutong Portal which contains a range of OER, funded by the DBE. The DBE, in collaboration with the Shuttleworth Foundation, has produced OER textbooks for Mathematics and Physical Science and are providing it to all learners in the system. With support from the Zenex Foundation OER for the ‘Fundamentals’ for Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners were developed.

The DHET Foundation Phase Support Programme at universities is producing OER for the training of Foundation Phase teachers, e.g. in the Eastern Cape consortium. The DHET is also developing OER for the Open Learning System.

A range of SAIDE OER projects (Study of Education, Caring Schools, Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) Maths, Principal’s Guide to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Vocational Educator Guide, Household Food Security resources, etc.) have been developed as OER. SAIDE also manages regional OER projects (OER Africa, Health OER, AgShare and African Storybook).
5. **Top Priorities**

The following priorities were identified:

- Development of an enabling environment (enabling policies, strategies and partnerships) including an open learning advocacy strategy; policy on open educational resources; an institutional mechanism to take forward open learning; facilitate distributed learning; and develop a network of ICT-enabled centres and providers.

- Collaboration between different departments such as Department of Communications; Department of Basic Education, Department of Higher Education and Training; Department of Science and Technology and Rural Development to build a coherent open learning system based on enabling technology infrastructure.

- Development of a National Open Learning System that cuts across institutional types and sectors in which different courses and programmes can be offered.

- Develop open learning opportunities for the education and training system, including skills development in different sectors.

- The establishment of partnerships in the delivering of courses and programmes, especially at TVET college level and including livelihoods and health programmes.

6. **Conclusion**

South Africa recognised that to increase access to educational opportunities, the implementation of open learning in an organised, articulated, structured and systematic manner is essential. In specific the DHET supports the development of open learning opportunities as part of the post-school system. There is an intention to connect education institutions and curricula to emerging networks and information resources, and to promote innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning.

South Africa has embraced distance education as a pivotal component of its education and training system and is pursuing legislative, policy and strategic processes in implementing open learning.

7. **Bibliography**


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