

Empowering a Dynamic Workforce: Policy-Driven Partnerships Between VET and Industry in Singapore

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Introduction



Crucial Role of TAE Sector:

The TAE sector is vital for Singapore's initial and lifelong learning and human capital development, addressing the evolving needs of a dynamic workforce and economy.



Strategic Focus on CET:

Singapore's CET system, characterised by strong government coordination through agencies like SkillsFuture Singapore, ensures continuous skill enhancement and adaptability of the workforce, setting it apart from decentralised Western VET systems.



Importance of Industry and Pedagogical Currency:

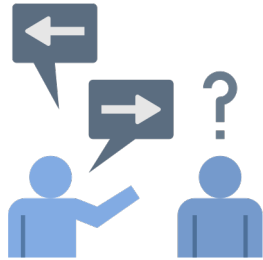
AEs and IPs must continuously update their skills and knowledge to maintain industry relevance and deliver high-quality training, ensuring the TAE sector's effectiveness in a rapidly changing environment.

Research Question



How can we ensure that adult educators remain up-to-date on their industry and pedagogical currency?

Literature Review



Vital but inconsistent understanding of “currency”

While remaining current is important for VET/TAE practitioners, inconsistencies in understanding how to define, measure, plan, and benchmark currency hinder opportunities for currency development (Toze & Tierney, 2010; Schmidt, 2019; Clayton et al., 2013)



Uncertainty over best practices and motivations for CPD to maintain currency

VET educators struggle to balance industry currency and pedagogical skills due to time constraints and diverse roles. Uncertainty about CPD best practices and motivations further complicates their efforts (Tyler & Dymock, 2019).

Discrepancies in CPD opportunities between full-time and part-time educators exacerbate the issue (Chen et al, forthcoming).

In countries like Australia, relaxed entry requirements have raised concerns about maintaining high educational standards (Smith et al., 2015; Smith & Tuck, 2023).

Methodology

Qualitative Methods

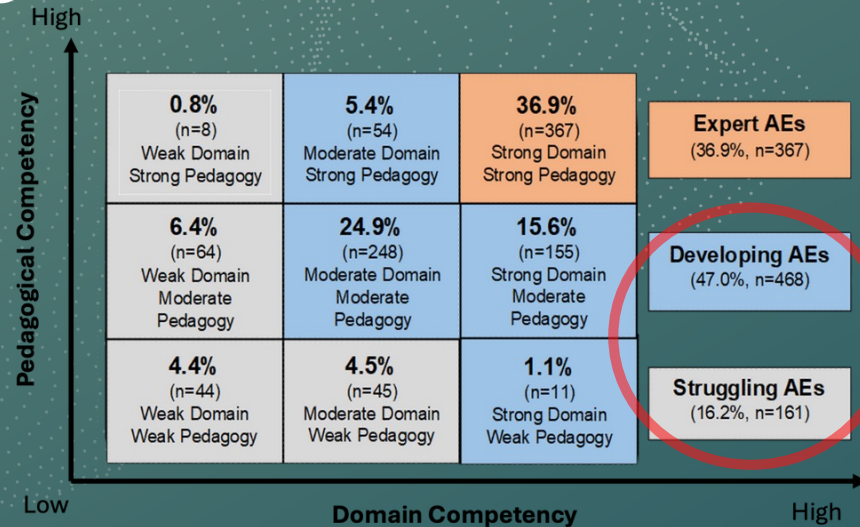
- Interviews and focus group discussions done with corporate firms, training providers, institutes of higher learning, adult educators, and industry practitioners

Quantitative Methods

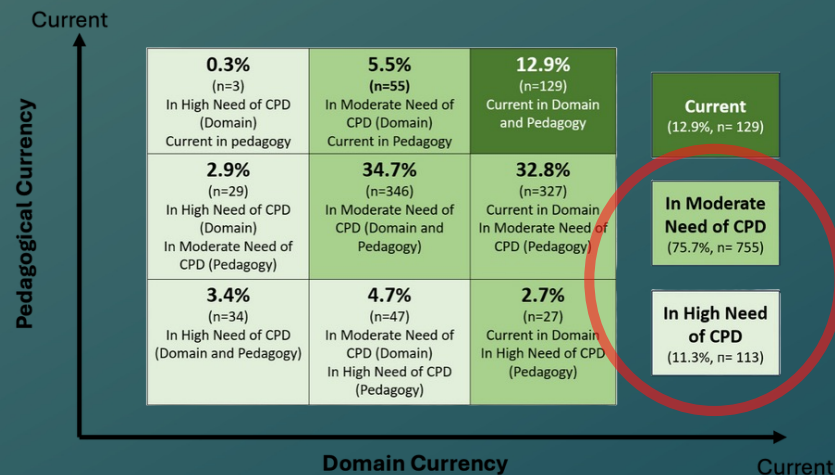
Survey done with over:

- 250+ training providers (including public, IHL, private, and in-house training providers)
- 1000 adult educators (including Training facilitator/lecturer, assessors, courseware developers, learning consultants/solutionist, curriculum leads)
- 200+ Other TAE professionals (including business developers, training managers, learning technology designers,

Findings



- **Expert AEs (36.9%):** These educators exhibit strong proficiency in both domain knowledge and pedagogical skills.
- **Developing AEs (47.0%):** These educators possess at least moderate expertise in either domain knowledge or pedagogy, indicating potential for further development.
- **Struggling AEs (16.2%):** These educators have weak proficiency in either domain knowledge or pedagogy, highlighting a need for targeted interventions.



- **Current (12.9%):** Only a small fraction of AEs reported being current in both domain and pedagogical knowledge.
- **In Moderate Need of CPD (75.7%):** A majority of AEs are in moderate need of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to maintain their relevance and effectiveness.
- **In High Need of CPD (11.3%):** A minority, yet significant number of AEs, are in high need of CPD, particularly in both domain and pedagogical areas.

Findings

Main barriers to developing industry and pedagogical currency



Barrier 1:

Absence of structured initiatives to support adult educators and industry practitioners to gain domain and pedagogical currency



Barrier 2:

Deficiency in support by both employers and TAE providers



Barrier 3:

Difficulty of developing the pedagogical acumen of Industry Practitioners.

Findings

Main barriers to industry and pedagogical currency



Barrier 1: **Absence of structured initiatives to support adult educators and industry practitioners to gain domain and pedagogical currency**

1. Lack of Structured Support:

- Companies do not have formal frameworks for IPs to share industry knowledge or transition into L&D roles, restricting knowledge flow within organisations and the TAE sector.

2. Operational Challenges:

- IPs face significant operational constraints and time limitations, making it difficult to balance core responsibilities with additional teaching duties.

3. Missed Opportunities for Career Diversification:

- The absence of structured pathways limits career diversification for AEs and IPs, hindering professional growth and the integration of practical industry insights into training programmes.

“It’s not so easy in terms of the opportunities, the time, and how it’s being structured and played out. If you are really an industry practitioner, you don’t have time to teach, honestly. And if you are teaching, you are in a different industry altogether. You don’t have time to get back and do the actual work. It is a very real struggle.”

— (Focus group participant A)

It’s a two-way kind of value proposition. We learn from [the industry] and they learn from us... so there’s a lot of avenues where our faculties engage. If we had been a pure teaching institution, then a lot of these [opportunities] would be closed [off], then you [would] have to go out to industry and you have to rely on their goodwill... (Professor from Institute of Higher Learning)

— (Professor from Institute of Higher Learning)

Findings

Main barriers to industry and pedagogical currency



Barrier 2: Deficiency in support by both employers and TAE providers

1. Lack of Recognised Value:

- Employers and TAE providers often fail to see the intrinsic value of fostering "dual professionals" with expertise in both industry and TAE, viewing such initiatives as non-strategic rather than beneficial to business performance.

2. ROI Challenges:

- The complexity of quantifying the return on investment (ROI) for collaborative knowledge exchange initiatives hinders support from organisational leadership.
- Effective collaboration requires comprehensive support, including financial backing, administrative assistance, and incentives, to enable industry professionals to contribute to educational roles without being burdened by additional tasks.

"If we expect [IPs] to be able to train [and] equip people with the industry practices, I think the best support would be providing the pedagogical support, as well as providing the necessary manpower to handle all the other administrative work. Training is not just about imparting of knowledge, [it's also about the] training process. If you have a very good teacher who is happy to impart knowledge and skills, but you [also] expect the teacher to prepare [the] curriculum [and] to do all the administrative work, it can be frustrating.

When we design certain programmes, we... segmentise the whole learning or training journey, such that there'll be a group of people who prepare the content, a group that will teach, and a group that will coach, and a group that will be the mentor."

— (Focus group participant B)

Findings

Main barriers to industry and pedagogical currency



Barrier 3: Difficulty of developing the pedagogical acumen of Industry Practitioners (IPs)

1. Discrepancy in Pedagogical Training:

- IPs conducting in-house training often lack the pedagogical training held by those offering publicly accessible courses, leading to a disparity in training quality.

2. Lengthy Certification Process:

- The extended timeline required to attain professional pedagogical credentials, such as the ACLP, deters IPs from pursuing these qualifications due to conflicts with operational demands.

3. Perceived Value of Pedagogical Qualifications:

- IPs themselves need to see the value in obtaining pedagogical qualifications, which can enhance their effectiveness as trainers and provide opportunities to transition to AE roles.

Existing policy options



SkillsFuture Queen Bee Programme

Industry leaders are appointed to mentor SMEs, ensuring training initiatives are aligned with current industry needs and trends.

Enhances skills development and organisational growth, maintaining industry and pedagogical relevance while increasing the scalability of training initiatives.



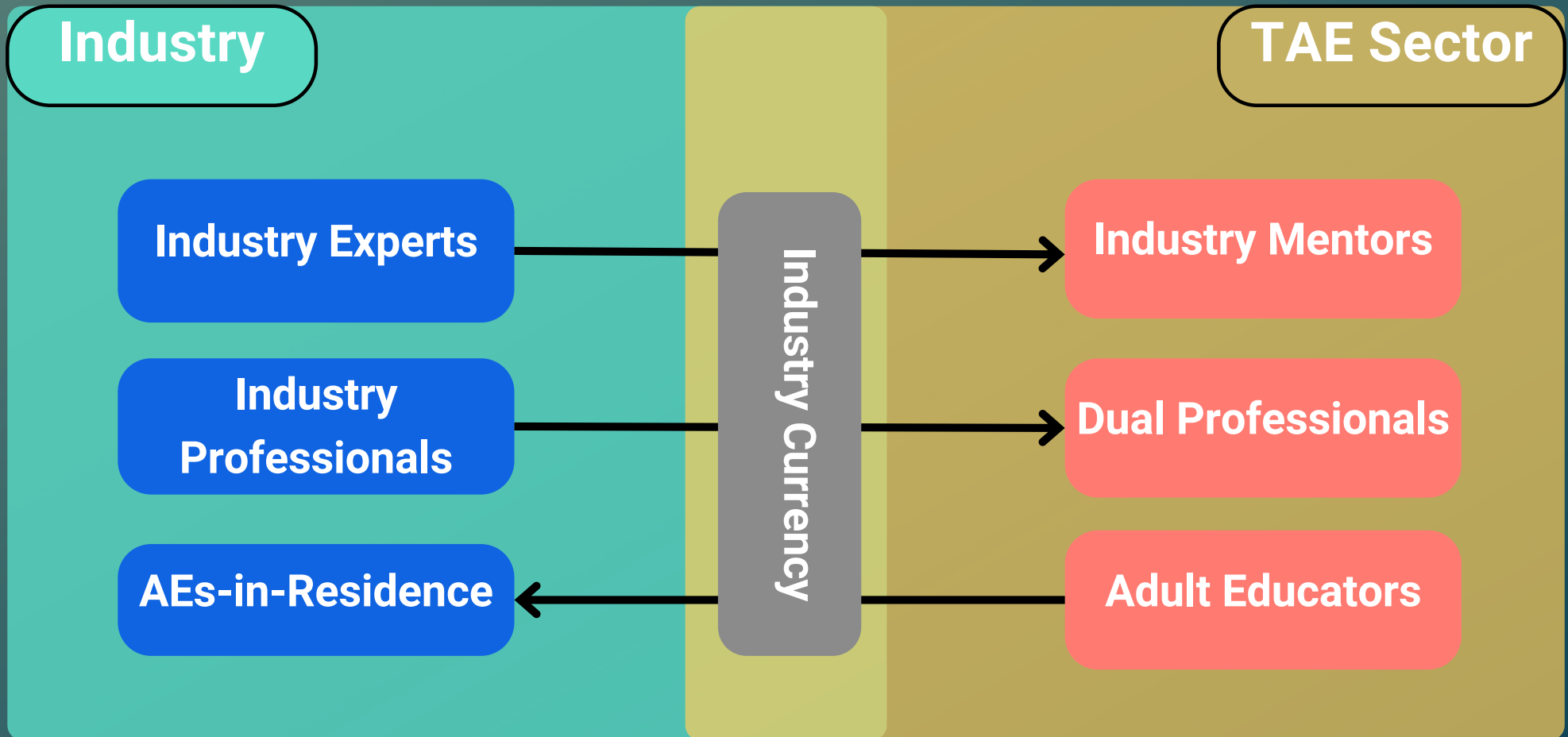
SkillsFuture Job-Skills Integrator Programme

Introduced in 2023 to optimise training provision and job matching by acting as intermediaries between industry, training providers, and employment partners.

Aggregates manpower and skills demand, activates training supply, and matches skilled workers to jobs, enhancing workforce adaptability and ensuring pedagogical relevance in the TAE sector.

Proposed Policy Recommendations

Enhancing the industry currency of educators through three pathways:



Pathway One

Industry Experts as Mentors in TAE Sector



Objective: Enhance Industry Relevance

- Engage senior industry professionals to act as industry mentors to align training with current industry demands. This ensures that educational content remains relevant and practical, reflecting the latest industry trends and needs.

Implementation: Structured Mentorship Programs

- Develop and implement structured mentorship programs where industry leaders actively guide AEs. These programs will include specialised workshops, talks, and hands-on mentoring sessions, facilitating the transfer of practical industry insights into the TAE curriculum.

Benefits: Improved Training Quality and Industry Connection

- Updating TAE courses with real-time industry knowledge improves the quality and applicability of educational programs. This approach not only keeps AEs current with industry trends but also enhances these industry experts' coaching skills, creating a mutually beneficial relationship that strengthens the link between industry and education.

Pathway Two

Creating a Dual Professional Track for Industry Practitioners - Industry and TAE:

Objective: Integrate Industry and Education

- Develop a dual professional track to integrate industry practitioners into educational roles, equipping them with essential teaching skills while leveraging their industry expertise to enhance training relevance and quality.



Implementation: Structured Training Programmes

- Establish specialised shortened training programmes that provide pedagogical training for industry practitioners, potentially leading to qualifications like the ACLP.
- Practitioners apply their industry knowledge to training, ensuring practical insights are incorporated. Periodic re-engagement in front-line operations is required to keep their industry knowledge up-to-date.

Benefits: Enhanced Training and Organisational Growth

- Combining industry experience with educational expertise improves the effectiveness and relevance of training programmes. This dual professional model ensures practitioners stay current with industry trends and enhances their teaching capabilities, benefiting both the organisation's training efforts and its overall growth.

Pathway Three

Adult Educators as AEs-in-Residence in Corporate Firms



Objective: Integrate Pedagogical Expertise into Industry

- Embed AEs within corporate enterprises to co-design training curricula and educational programs, ensuring alignment with adult learning principles and business needs.

Implementation: AEs-in-Residence Model

- AEs collaborate closely with industry practitioners to develop training content. They gain direct exposure to corporate environments, staying updated with industry developments and challenges. AEs maintain their roles in training organisations, bringing back current industry knowledge to enhance educational offerings.

Benefits: Enhanced Training Quality and Organisational Development

- Greater collaboration between the TAE sector and corporate firms enriches training programs with pedagogical insights and current industry knowledge. AEs act as change agents within companies, aligning training initiatives with strategic business goals and promoting a culture of continuous learning. This synergy fosters an adaptive TAE sector and builds a resilient, agile workforce.

Enhancing the Viability of the Three Pathways



Strengthen Collaborative Ties:

Establish robust communication channels via regular networking events, workshops, partnerships, and forums to facilitate dialogue among industry leaders, IPs, AEs, and educational institutions, fostering collaboration on industry trends, skill requirements, and innovative teaching methods.



Encourage Industry Attachments and Exchanges:

Facilitate industry placements and exchanges for AEs to gain practical knowledge and experience, enriching pedagogical practices and maintaining industry currency. Active engagement between TPs and IPs through partnerships and Memoranda of Understanding is crucial for ongoing professional development and insights.



Explore Co-Funding Arrangements:

Implement co-funding models between industry and the TAE sector to share financial burdens and foster joint ownership. This motivates collaboration on curriculum development and instructional strategies, aligning training programmes with industry trends and creating mutual benefits.

“When the only constant is change, the TAE sector must be the changemaker.”

Thank you!

Do you have any questions?