

SYNTHESIS OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The discussion in Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research in relation to the three broad themes identified. Chapter 5 offers the overview, synthesis and recommendations and confirms the results of the research study. The overview of each of the preceding chapters is given to explain the correlation between the collected data and the research question formulated at the outset of the inquiry. This chapter summarizes the findings of the entire study and provides conclusions; it points out the limitations and makes recommendations for further research.

Participants revealed their level of understanding of concepts used in the research. I was confident that I had established an emotional connection with each group to contribute to the rapport within the focus group discussions and individual interviews. The final analysis revealed that I had extended my experience and knowledge of teachers' responses to and their understanding of the learning area. I am hopeful that the recommendations of this research could later lead to the improvement of service delivery in the learning area.

5.2 OVERVIEW

The study undertaken with secondary school teachers focused on their understanding, response to and implementation of Life Orientation at schools. The learning area teachers were able to voice their concerns about the emotional implications of the conditions in which they work. Their responses illuminated their knowledge of Life Orientation and the manner in which they experienced the implementation of curriculum change in the learning area. The study specifically focused on secondary schools, which range from Grade 8 to Grade 12 since these teachers taught both in the senior Phase and Further Education and Training Band. The following overview reflects the gist of each of the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER 1:

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and preliminary literature review in relation to the problem statement, objectives and aims of the research. The objectives of this study assisted me in designing the questions that guided the study. In addition the theoretical framework, Bernstein's (1977) Structural Curriculum Theory pertaining to the structuring of the learning area content, formed a suitable foundation for the study. It could also prove beneficial to teachers who use the method of "framing" to pace the learning area content of Life Orientation. The chapter includes the definition of concepts relevant to the topic under study and brief introductory discussions of the research design, research methods, data analysis, research population and ethical measures. I also explained my role as researcher in the study. I did not base my study on the different concepts Life Orientation as a compulsory learning area, the purpose of the learning area in South African schools, the implementation of the learning area in schools and the complications affecting the intended outcomes. I considered subjective evidence provided by other researchers as outlined in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2:

Previously conducted studies and literature that were relevant to my study are discussed in this chapter. It is apparent from literature that the teachers' shortcomings regarding their understanding, response to and implementation of Life Orientation result from policy changes and their personal ignorance of curriculum policy changes. It is also apparent that the learning area teachers' competency was not improved by the many Departmental workshops that were organized as these were poorly planned and executed. Literature studies in respect of the implementation of Life Orientation in the Senior Phase include those of Christiaans (2006), Prinsloo (2007) and Van Deventer (2008). I concur with the above researchers who indicate that even though teachers have the policy and guidelines of the Life Orientation programmes, they are sometimes inclined to ignore the policies and the implementation is not effectively done. Life Orientation programme implementation and integration are still a challenge. My empirical research in Chapter 4 is congruent with Bowe *et al.* (1992) who indicate that when policy makers at national and provincial level produce policy while teachers are not well

vested in policy implementation, the implementation is not easily accepted by teachers (Chapter 2).

CHAPTER 3:

In this chapter the research design, research methods and theoretical framework of the research are discussed as they form the foundation of the research itself. The Structural Curriculum Theory (Bernstein, 1977) justifies the research of teachers' responses in terms of Life Orientation. A core task of Structural Curriculum Theory is to identify and transform knowledge which is considered educationally meaningful into learning activities as part of the learning area curriculum that needs to be implemented. The discussion within the context of this study, included the manner in which learning area teachers' selected content knowledge that they considered meaningful for the design of learning activities in Life Orientation.

A discussion of the qualitative and interpretive qualities of the study also features in this chapter. This entails a concise explanation of the research methods used, including the research design and data collection strategies. These details clarify the manner in which I was able to enter the life world of the secondary school teachers within their school context and how this process assisted me in understanding them as human beings. In addition the research methods allowed me to comprehend the respondents' reality in terms of their social relationships, values, knowledge, attitudes and responses with regard to Life Orientation. The focus group and semi-structured individual interviews, field notes or reflexivity are described in detail as strategies to present in-depth information about the topic under study. The necessary ethical measures were adhered to and the data analysis was conducted according to the descriptive analysis and coded with the help of an independent coder. Relevant themes, categories and sub-categories were confirmed with the independent coder to allow discussion of the findings in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4:

Chapter 4 presents a concise discussion of the findings of the study in relation to the themes that emerged from the research. I submit the findings within a naturalistic setting where the participants were free to express themselves. The relevant themes highlight the fact that teachers are expected to teach the learning

area according to policy, including changes provided by the Department of Education. It was also discovered that teachers read but did not understand how to interpret the policy and curriculum. Hence, the curriculum that outlines the content to be taught per grade was not fully understood by the participants. A few participants were positive and tried their best to implement the curriculum effectively but most participants were confused and delayed or ignored implementation of the learning area. It is evident that Life Orientation presented a challenge to teachers who were unable to frame and classify the content. This inadequacy culminated in frustration and emotional stress among the participants.

5.3 SYNTHESIS OF THE FINDINGS IN TERMS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

By combining the findings of the various research strategies I was able to respond effectively to the research questions mentioned in Chapter 1:

1. How do teachers understand, respond to and implement the Life Orientation curriculum in schools?
2. What are the policy and curriculum requirements and components of Life Orientation that need to be addressed?
3. How are Life Orientation teachers affected by curriculum change?
4. What is the difference between Life Orientation policy provision and educational practices regarding Life Orientation?

5.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: HOW DO TEACHERS UNDERSTAND, RESPOND TO AND IMPLEMENT THE LIFE ORIENTATION CURRICULUM IN SCHOOLS?

- **Teachers were uncertain, confused and lacked commitment with regard to the implementation of the learning area (Chapter 1 paragraph 1.1; Chapter 2, paragraph 2.3; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2.4)**

Life Orientation teachers share common misconceptions and lack clear understanding of what is expected of them to teach Life Orientation. Consequently teachers are ignorant, frustrated, uncertain and confused about Life Orientation implementation. The participants were not learning area specialists. As a result they did not feel committed to teaching Life Orientation as they lacked the necessary

confidence to do so. In addition, they lacked proper in-service training and guidance at school level. This resulted in despondency, uncertainty and lack of dedication.

- **Teachers responded emotionally to the implementation of Life Orientation (Chapter 2 paragraph 2.6, 2.6.1, 2.6.2, 2.6.3, 2.6.4; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.1.1)**

Participants expressed the opinion that the confusion, uncertainty and lack of guidance and support from officials from the Department of Education, Heads of Department and principals gave rise to emotional reactions among many teachers. Subsequently, these learning area teachers developed fear and frustration and began to acquire negative attitudes towards the implementation of Life Orientation.

- **Teachers expressed positive attitudes towards the implementation of Life Orientation (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.6.2; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.3.1)**

Teachers at one school were positive and influenced others positively with regard to the implementation of Life Orientation curriculum. They collaborated with others and were committed to share knowledge and skills to transform curriculum content and put ideas into practice. They were motivated to learn from one another to become effective teachers. On the other hand, teachers with negative attitudes lacked knowledge and guidance that resulted in despondency, fear and resistance.

- **Life Orientation has a low status among teachers. Life Orientation teachers are labelled as ineffective (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.9; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2.2)**

The data collected was incongruent with the studies done by Prinsloo (2007), Christiaans (2006) and Van Deventer (2006); in Chapter 2, paragraph 2.9, it is pointed out that Life Orientation, according to the researchers and participants, often has a low status among Life Orientation teachers (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2.2). They are labelled as unproductive teachers or made use of by school leadership because they are considered redundant. The importance of the learning area is disregarded at schools hence the learning areas were allocated to teachers to fill up their timetables.

- **Teachers delayed the implementation of Life Orientation (Chapter 2 2.7; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.3.2a)**

Jones (2006) indicated that for curriculum change to happen, the school management team must consider and demonstrate commitment to it. The school's management team ensures the curriculum delivery (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.7). This is contrary to what I discovered in this research. Teachers delayed the implementation of the learning area by acknowledging their ignorance with regard to understanding and innovation of the learning content and express the emotions of anger; this is communicated as a feeling of blame towards the learners. Teachers lack knowledge and competence due to a lack of empowerment in the learning area. Others blame the delay for implementation on the poor attendance of learners and lack of support from the Department of Education officials and Heads of Department at schools (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.3.2a).

- **Teachers resisted curriculum implementation (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.6.1; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.1.1, 4.3.3.1c & d)**

From the literature in Chapter 2, paragraph 2.6.1 is evident that teachers resist curriculum change because of fear and the perception of change as a threat to the teachers' comfort. I concur with Margaret (1986:352) that teachers cope with curriculum change in their own ways and according to their individual analysis of the situation. In this study teachers acknowledged that they resist curriculum implementation for different reasons, for example, they are not learning area specialists, and they are allocated the learning area without their consent or without any in-service training (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.1.1). As a consequence most teachers are indecisive and refuse to adapt to or adopt the learning area curriculum (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.3.1c & d).

5.3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE POLICY AND CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS AND COMPONENTS OF LIFE ORIENTATION THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED? (CHAPTER 2, PARAGRAPH 2.4)

The findings below provide a short description of the requirements and components from the policy for Life Orientation; this is followed by a short discussion of the findings from the empirical data.

- **Teachers accepted that the source of the content to be taught to learners in different grades were the policy documents (National Curriculum Statement) and the Learning Area guidelines from the Department of Education (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.4; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2.3)**

Teachers acknowledged that Life Orientation was structured to educate learners about their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democratic, multicultural and multi-religious society (Prinsloo, 2007; Van Deventer, 2007; Rooth, 2005; & DoE, 2002b). Life Orientation provides four learning outcomes in the Further Education and Training (FET) Band and five learning outcomes in the General Education and Training (GET) Band (Intermediate and Senior Phase). The focus areas for Life Orientation in the FET Band are Personal Well-being, Citizenship, Physical Development and Recreation, and Career Guidance. The focus areas in the Senior Phase are Health Promotion, Social Development, Personal Development, Physical Development and Movement, and Orientation to the World of Work. For each of the focus areas teachers need to understand how to apply and implement the prescribed assessment standards to achieve each learning outcome. Each learning outcome is informed by assessment standards. In this study participants revealed that they did not know how to interpret the assessment standards to achieve the expected learning outcomes. They also declared that teacher support in the form of workshops was insufficient. They were confused about how the curriculum components should be implemented (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2.3).

- **Teachers should be knowledgeable and skilful in implementing the curriculum (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.3, 2.4.1)**

Although the policy of the Department of Education expects Life Orientation teachers to be qualified and competent interpreters of the learning area, the majority of participants stated that they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to implement Life Orientation. This is congruent with Christiaans (2006) in Chapter 2 paragraph 2.4.1 and the findings from this research that teachers feel that they have not been adequately trained to implement the curriculum content; therefore their teaching is ineffective. At some schools Life Orientation is allocated to teachers who are regarded as ineffective teachers. Teaching the learning area is also allocated to some teachers to fill up the timetables.

Outcomes-based Education is a new approach to teaching; teachers find the mode of teaching difficult to understand and implement, especially those without in-service training. Teachers need to have knowledge and skills of the content in order to assist learners to achieve the learning outcomes in the Outcomes Based Approach.

- **Life Orientation teachers should understand and put policy into practice by designing lesson plans and learning activities (Chapter 2, paragraph, 2.4.1.1, 2.5; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2.3)**

Teachers who were interviewed accepted the fact that the Department of Education expected them to understand the Curriculum for Life Orientation and put it into practice by designing corresponding learning activities. However, since teachers did not understand how to implement the policies they overlooked official statements.

In contrast to the Department of Education's expectation of teachers, participants in the research indicated that curriculum documents are not read as they merely receive these and file them. Teachers are reluctant to read and understand policy documents such as curricula and guidelines for Life Orientation. Teaching is therefore executed without clear co-ordination of the philosophical framework which underpins their practice. This confirms what Datnow and Castellano (2000) have found, namely that challenges that teachers experience with regard to the understanding, interpretation and implementation of the policy result in an inferior quality of teaching in Life Orientation.

- **Life Orientation teachers should be subject specialists (Chapter 2, paragraph, 2.4.1; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2.2)**

Christiaans (2006) concurs with the Department of Education that teachers should be learning area specialists (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.4.1). In this research participants acknowledged that the Department of Education required that all teachers appointed to teach Life Orientation were knowledgeable and competent subject specialists. It has been determined that the learning area Life Orientation was not regarded as an important learning area in schools. Consequently, as mentioned above, the learning area was taught by teachers who were regarded as ineffective or teachers from other fields of specialisation whose timetables need to be filled.

- **Teachers should improve their knowledge and skills through in-service training (Chapter 2, paragraph, 2.4.2)**

The Department of Education provided in-service training sessions in all districts (regions) nationally and teachers were expected to attend prescribed sessions. Christiaans (2006) and Carl (2002) concur with the Department of Education about the importance of in-service training. In contrast Merideth and Wai-Wam indicated that short-term training is not successful due to time constraints. The research has revealed that the in-service training sessions were not sufficient because teachers were still confused and uncertain about the implementation of the curriculum. Teachers did not use the in-service training sessions as a platform for networking to exchange ideas for enrichment of the learning area.

- **Teachers should be innovative designers and developers of the curriculum (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.4.1, 2.5; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.1.1)**

The teachers who participated in the study declared that if they were able to design lesson plans, activities and assessment strategies they would have better control over the content and scope of the formal curriculum. Bowe *et al.* (1992) relate that teachers are silent and overwhelmed with work, which is beyond their control. They have to implement a policy which they have had no share in designing. In this research teachers indicated their lack of understanding of policy implementation. It has been found that teachers are ignorant with regard to lesson planning. Hence, some taught only to comply with a superior's request; others ignore and resisted implementation of the new curriculum.

- **Teachers should expand their network and collaborate to improve knowledge and skills (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.8.2; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.3.1a)**

Hart (2009) indicates that teachers are used to working in isolation and lack experience of sharing on the professional basis. In this research participants indicated that they cannot collaborate to transform the curriculum content or put ideas into practice or even share the knowledge gained from the workshops. The participants were emphatic that in-service training workshops allowed teachers from different schools and districts (regions) to communicate, share solutions to

problems and to exchange views. Teachers stressed that they should have learning area workshops within their specific schools. The Head of Department and the school management team ought to therefore provide leadership and manage the effective implementation of the learning area in the school. The teachers from only one school attempted to work as a team but it was found that the other schools had not collaborated to improve their implementation of the components of the learning area.

5.3.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: HOW ARE LIFE ORIENTATION TEACHERS AFFECTED BY CURRICULUM CHANGE? (CHAPTER 1, PARAGRAPH 1.1; CHAPTER 4, PARAGRAPH 4.3.3)

- **Teachers responded in different ways to the challenges they faced when implementing Life Orientation in schools (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.1, 1.2; Chapter 2, paragraph 2.6, 2.6.1, 2.6.2, 2.6.3, 2.6.4; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.3)**

In Chapter 1 the Introduction and the Rationale of the literature study reveal that many teachers are uncertain, confused and ignorant about the implementation of Life Orientation

Some teachers refused to adapt their traditional teaching to Outcomes Based Education. Teachers resisted curriculum change and demonstrated a sense of ignorance because they lacked initiative when they faced challenges to implement Life Orientation. They become frustrated, confused and delayed implementation or ignored the new curriculum.

- **Teachers experienced feelings of helplessness and a lack of confidence (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.6; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2.2)**

Participants expressed a feeling of helplessness and a lack of confidence due to insufficient knowledge, skills, training and support from the Department of Education and the Heads of Department at schools. These findings concur with Van Deventer and Van Niekerk (2009) who reveal that some teachers are not qualified to teach Life Orientation. Prinsloo (2007) and Van Deventer (2009) indicate that the socio-

economic circumstances, cultural background and differences of learners in the school system present challenges to teachers.

- **Some teachers demonstrate a positive attitude to the implementation of Life Orientation (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.6.4; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.3.1)**

Drake and Sherine (2006) indicated that when working with a complex, conceptual-rich curriculum, different teachers make different choices of adaptation. Teachers balance their own ideologies and past pedagogical practices. Participants at one school accentuated a proactive approach and adapted to the new curriculum. They realized that Life Orientation was important to learners. The teachers were not subject specialists but the collaborative support amongst them had led to a positive attitude towards the learning area. The teachers found it easy to adapt to the new Outcomes Based Education approach to teaching and learning.

5.3.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 4: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE ORIENTATION POLICY PROVISION AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES REGARDING LIFE ORIENTATION? (CHAPTER 2, PARAGRAPH 2.4, 2.5; CHAPTER 4, PARAGRAPH 4.3.2.1)

- **Teachers admitted that they are often unsure about the policy provisions as they do not read the documents in relation to the Life Orientation curriculum (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.5; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.1.1, 4.3.2.1)**

Smit (2001) views policy as a process rather than a product that involves negotiation while Bowe *et al.* (1992) indicate that that the policy “spaces”, “silences” and contradictions remain the teachers’ resource to develop and this could reflect the practical situation in this research. Some participants indicated that they had policy documents at their schools, while others said that they did not have them, even though policies were filed in the offices of the principals or Heads of Department. The study found that teachers conceded that they lacked initiative and displayed ignorance when faced with the implementation of the Life Orientation curriculum policies. Such participants admitted that they ignored the policy document and guidelines. Some participants mentioned that they were waiting for

the Department of Education officials to visit the school for support in the learning area. However, other participants pointed out that they did consult the policy documents but these were sometimes difficult to comprehend and implement.

- **Teachers do not know how to interpret the policy documents for curriculum implementation (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.5; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2)**

Vulliamy *et al.* (1997) indicates that policy implementation should be part of policy formulation and should not be seen as an add-on element. Teachers at school appear to be disconnected policy receivers and “absorbing implementers to deliver.” The research findings indicate that some teachers became despondent, frustrated and ignored policy implementation. Other participants presented the content but were unsure whether they were doing justice to the learning area.

- **Teachers find it difficult to implement the new Outcomes Based Education approach to teach Life Orientation (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.1, 1.6; Chapter 2, paragraph 2.3; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.1.1, 4.3.2.1)**

Bennie and Newstead (1995) indicate that assessment standards indicate progression between the grades at school. Teachers do not take note of this progression and determine the relevant activities for different grades. These activities need to be taught in the outcomes-based approach. The awareness of the assessment standards in the policy assist teachers to achieve the intended outcomes. The research participants stated that they were ignorant about the Outcomes Based Education approach in terms of teaching Life Orientation. They did not know how to interpret and put into action the assessment standards as prescribed by the Outcomes Based Education approach and National Curriculum Statement. They were not learning area specialists and did not have the knowledge and skills to be effective facilitators. As a result they procrastinated or ignored the correct implementation of the learning area. Participants complained about the lack of support from the Department of Education and insufficient guidance and support from the Heads of Department at schools.

- **Participants say that Life Orientation is imposed upon them (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2; Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.1.1)**

Christiaans (2006) concurs with the findings from this research that new or inexperienced teachers are selected to teach the “easy” learning area, and the learning area teachers are swapped around during the course of the year. Due to the lack of specialist teachers in the field of Life Orientation and the low status the learning area enjoys among staff members, the learning area was allocated to teachers who were regarded as ineffective or to teachers from other learning areas to fill up their timetables. The learning area was often allocated to some teachers without prior consultation. Participants were of the view that the learning area was imposed upon them and this resulted in ineffective implementation of the curriculum. Teachers became despondent and frustrated because they felt overloaded (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.3.2).

- **Teachers do not regard change in curriculum as useful (Chapter 2 paragraph, 2.6.1; Chapter 4, paragraph, 4.3.3.2)**

Fullan (2001) indicates that teachers are not convinced about the usefulness of innovation which is an element of change. I concur with Fullan, teachers who were interviewed said that they did not see any merit in curriculum change, that they had an overload of teaching responsibilities and that the many innovations in teaching confused them. They also admitted that they lacked initiative and therefore displayed ignorance when confronted by the many challenges in implementing Life Orientation curriculum policies. Some participants indicated that they ignored the official policy documents and guidelines. However, the teachers acknowledged that Life Orientation was important for the holistic development of learners.

- **There is a lack of collaboration and collegiality among teachers Chapter 2, paragraph 2.8.3; Chapter 4 , paragraph 4.3.3.1)**

Hart (2009) indicates that the teachers’ work load leads to a lack of collaboration. This was confirmed by this research; participants conceded that they do not collaborate. If Life Orientation was allocated to just any teacher at school it was difficult for teachers to collaborate and generate a climate of collegiality to meet the needs of the curriculum. The interviews established that participants acknowledged that together they could give meaning to the learning area and use their abilities as

sources of information to interpret the learning area content. Learning area teachers indicated that they did not meet as a department at school to share ideas, interpret content knowledge and design learning activities.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The research aims of this study were to establish the extent of the secondary school teachers' understanding, response to and implementation of Life Orientation. The findings are noteworthy since they reveal that the learning area teachers are receptive to talk about shortcomings and that collaboration could assist them in mastering the challenges presented by the learning area.

In the light of the research findings the following recommendations can be made:

- The Department of Education should increase school-based support visits and monitoring by district officials. These visits should be more intense and should include practical demonstrations of curriculum implementation. District officials must monitor progress by following-up previous visits.
- Heads of Department should exercise control and provide guidance with regard to curriculum implementation.
- Learning area teachers and the Heads of Department should be empowered by the Department of Education through scheduled workshops. Specific emphasis should be given to the interpretation and practical implementation of the learning area policy components.
- Heads of Department should deliberately create opportunities for Life Orientation staff to collaborate to exchange creative ideas and information that will improve teachers' understanding and interpretation of the curriculum.
- Schools should acknowledge the status and importance of the learning area. Life Orientation should not be disregarded and deliberately allocated to ineffective teachers or to fill up gaps in the timetable of teachers. Teaching Life Orientation should not be imposed on teachers.

- Higher Education Institutions should have programmes that will prepare teachers as specialists in Life Orientation as a learning area. The Department of Education and Higher Education Institutions should actively recruit students to become specialists in Life Orientation as a learning area.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research is recommended on the following:

5.5.1 THE IMPACT OF IN-SERVICE TRAINING ON THE TEACHING OF LIFE ORIENTATION AS A LEARNING AREA

In Chapter 1, the Rationale (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2) and the Problem Statement (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.3) of the study revealed that Life Orientation is not effectively implemented. The problem with the ineffective implementation of Life Orientation was discussed from my personal experiences as the Senior Education Specialist of the learning area and a pilot study at few schools in the region (district) under study. The pilot study revealed that although in-service training workshops were held by the Department of Education, teachers seemed to be uncertain and confused with regard to the implementation of Life Orientation (Chapter 1)

In Chapter 2, a comprehensive literature review was provided on policy and curriculum; expectations of curriculum implementation from the Department of Education were discussed, as well as teachers' reactions to curriculum implementation, support provided, workload pressures and their attitudes and beliefs. The literature review gave me an in-depth understanding of teachers' reactions to change in relation to the impact of support from the Department of Education and the school management teams (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.7).

The empirical data revealed that teachers acknowledge that the in-service training workshops that are held by the Department of Education do not contribute sufficiently to the effective implementation of Life Orientation (Chapter 4, paragraph, 4.3.2.1). Teachers feel that workshops presented by the Department of Education do not address the problems they experience in their understanding and implementation of Life Orientation. It seems that the support or lack thereof from the

Department of Education and from the heads of departments in schools do not contribute to the improvement of the implementation of Life Orientation because teachers show traits of despondence, frustration, procrastination and resistance to the implementation of Life Orientation (Chapter 4, paragraph, 4.3.3.2a, 4.3.3.2b).

A study on the impact of in-service training of the teachers teaching Life Orientation will significantly contribute to the relevance and appropriateness of workshops and support for Life Orientation provided by the Department of Education and management teams at schools.

5.5.2 THE STATUS OF LIFE ORIENTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

A preliminary literature review has revealed that the higher education institutions offer little or no programmes in Life Orientation. This was also revealed (Chapter 4 paragraph, 4.3.2.1) by participants who mentioned that they were not educated about Life Orientation due to a lack of programmes at higher education institutions. A few participants mentioned that they did attend courses in Life Orientation at higher education institutions, but according to them the programmes were not relevant to the new curriculum and to the diverse educational contexts in South Africa. A study on what, where and how Life Orientation is implemented in higher education institutions could highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the programmes with regard to the new curriculum and the needs of teachers. A study on the status of Life Orientation at Higher Education Institutions could be of great significance for the Department of Education, teachers and Higher Institutions of Education to address the educational needs of teachers for the effective implementation of Life Orientation.

5.5.3 THE LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES ON LIFE ORIENTATION

In Chapter 4 (paragraph 4.3.1.2) Life Orientation was perceived by principals, heads of departments and teachers to be of a low status and an unimportant learning area. Participants mentioned that Life Orientation is allocated to teachers who are regarded as ineffective in schools and to the principals, heads of departments who are more committed to management tasks and cannot attend classes regularly (Chapter 1). Life Orientation is allocated to teachers with other fields of

specialisation to fill up their timetables as periods in which they can relax due to the fact that Life Orientation is not assessed formally.

It would be interesting to investigate how learners perceive Life Orientation as a learning area which, according to the research findings, is not effectively implemented and regarded as an unimportant learning area.

5.6 LIMITATIONS

It is imperative to appreciate that this study of the secondary school teachers' understanding, response to and implementation of the learning area Life Orientation was subjected to limitations as with any other qualitative research study. My role within the context of this study was that of a researcher with experience of Life Orientation as a specialist in the Province of Mpumalanga. I admit that some of the impressions I had formed prior to the study would in some way cloud my interpretations of the reality as presented by the participants. However, I also tried to embark on the research without pre-conceived ideas that could have affected the collection and discussion of the data.

It was difficult for me to ensure that the discussions with the focus group interviews remained confidential even though it had been stated in my letters requesting for permission (McMillan, 2008:227). Sometimes I got the impression that as a result of my position in the Department of Education the participants were concealing the truth. My interpretations were prone to be prejudiced by personal "intuition values, beliefs, knowledge and experience" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:60). Some of the participants in the study could not have felt comfortable to be questioned by a stranger from the regional (district) office about aspects of Life Orientation. These were some inconveniences that I had to endure in the process of the research and were unavoidable. Most of the Heads of Department preferred to be interviewed separately from the focus group, which might be considered a form of discrimination. The data gathering process became problematic when some appointments I had made with principals teaching the learning area were not honoured and I was unable to trace them at the appointed time. I also had to

contend with some of the learning area teachers who were absent from school for a long period of time and as a result could not be interviewed.

5.7 METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

The methodology used in this study (Chapter 3) assisted me in answering the research questions and in achieving the aims stated in Chapter 1 of this research. The literature review in Chapter 2 was comprehensive and current. The literature throughout the chapter is relevant to the topic and gave me an in-depth understanding of the topic, the research problem and questions. It was informative and was used to clarify or emphasise findings. The theoretical background (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.13) and power of evidence from the literature (Chapter 1 and 2) support my research, research methodology, data analysis and provided a framework for my research approach. The literature and theoretical framework also assisted me to present and contextualise my strategies and arguments.

The qualitative research methodology used in Chapter 3 produced useful insights from the participants. Teachers' interaction in the focus group and individual interviews assisted participants in providing rich data. The process allowed me to function at an interpretivist level in order to attain a "holistic" insight into the phenomenon under study.

With the focus group interviews (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.14.1.2; Chapter 3, paragraph 3.5.1.1) I could reach more participants simultaneously, effectively and cost effectively. The sample size of my report increased by interviewing several people at once. The group discussion produced data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in the group setting (Chapter 4). Participants listened to others' verbalised experiences, stimulated memories, ideas, and experiences. The focus group members discovered a common language to describe similar experiences. This enabled me to capture the "native language" or vernacular speech" to understand the discussions. The focus group interviews provided an opportunity for learning and disclosure among colleagues in the same learning area.

The number of focus group members was not large enough to be a representative sample of the population of Life Orientation teachers in South Africa. Therefore data obtained from the groups is not necessarily representative of the whole population. Focus group interviews were in some cases disturbed by overindulgence by some members. As an observer I guarded against my method of questioning that included how questions were phrased and posed. I was continuously aware of my position as a Senior Education Specialist so that I could get relevant answers from the participants that I had to suppress my opinions during the discussion.

The face-to-face interviews (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.14.1.2; Chapter 3, paragraph 3.5.1.2.) allowed me more opportunity to assess the participants' understanding and interpretation of questions and to provide clarification for any confusion or uneasiness that might arise about the meaning of the questions or the responses. I was able to probe for additional information or more complete answers, and to encourage answers to sensitive questions. The face-to-face interviews allowed me the opportunity to present material to participants and obtain their reactions. This research strategy assisted me in establishing a relationship of trust with the participants and in soliciting answers to questions which the participants might otherwise have been reluctant to answer in the focus group interviews. However, I guarded against influencing the results intentionally or unintentionally which might have violated consistency in measurement. I noted that some respondents could be sensitive to clues that I presented verbally and non-verbally. The mentoring I received from the University of Pretoria assisted me in ensuring that I understood the way in which I could inadvertently influence responses, the importance of not doing so, and the proper techniques that can be used to elicit the needed information without affecting the integrity of the interview.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the problems experienced by teachers who are presenting Life Orientation as a learning area. The lack of support from the Department of Education and from Heads of Department in schools contributes to despondence, frustration, procrastination, resistance to the implementation of the Life Orientation curriculum. Ignorance amongst the teachers presenting the learning

area creates feelings of helplessness and fear of implementing the learning area. A major problem is the incompetence of teachers in interpreting the policies for effective teaching practice. Findings of and recommendations made in this study to address the problems experienced by teachers are crucial for the implementation of the learning area Life Orientation at schools, Higher Education Institutions and the Department of Education.

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