

CHAPTER 4

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES FOR ASSESSING LEARNING NEEDS FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The theoretical exposition presented in the previous chapter provides a clarification of the community education process and in particular of the ten phases of this process. This exposition has therefore paved the way for achieving the main purpose of this research, namely to investigate methods and techniques that can be implemented to assess the learning needs of individuals and communities in the community education process, in order to provide relevant community education programmes.

This chapter is essential for this study since it allows for the investigation of methods and techniques for assessing learning needs upon which community education programmes can be based, which is the main task of the present study. In order for any community education programme to be implemented, the educational and learning needs of the community must be identified and assessed. The assessment of educational and learning needs should not be done in a haphazard manner, instead it should be undertaken in a systematic, formalised and accountable manner. This chapter therefore seeks to investigate those methods and techniques which can be used in assessing learning or educational needs of individuals and communities.

4.2 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES FOR ASSESSING LEARNING NEEDS FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The two concepts, namely **methods** and **techniques**, need to be explained briefly in the context of this discussion. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990: S.V **method**) defines **method** as a special form of procedure in any branch of mental activity, or a scheme of classification. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990:S.V **technique**) further explains a **technique** as a means of achieving one's purpose, especially skillfully. It is evident that these concepts are not synonymous but one encompasses the other. **Method** is used in a broader context while **technique** is used to specify.

4.2.1 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

4.2.1.1 General background

The identification and analysis of learning needs of individuals and institutions form the fourth phase of the community education process. This study and in particular this chapter focusses on needs assessment for community education programmes.

According to Suarez (1994:4057) it is the intent of needs assessment to identify areas in which deficits exist, desired performance has not been attained, or problems may be expected in the future. The results of needs assessment are then used for further action such as planning or remediation to improve the situation.

Suarez(1994:4057) further writes that educational needs have been assessed and analyzed for centuries. However, formalized assessments of educational needs were not conducted on a widespread basis until the middle of the twentieth century. At that time, public and professional demands for more systematic and accountable processes of providing education led to the emergence of information-based models for educational planning and evaluation. ... this process was called "needs assessment".

The determination of needs is such a broad concept, applicable in so many situations, that a common conceptual model and set of needs assessment procedures have not emerged. Instead, the literature describes a number of conceptual and procedural approaches. Some are drawn from definitional and philosophic differences while others seem based on the task at hand.

Major variations in needs assessment appear in:

- the definition used for the term “need”
- the purposes for which needs assessments are conducted
- the standards by which needs are identified, and
- the strategies and procedures used in the process (Suarez, 1994:4057).

4.2.1.2 Conceptualisation

In the discussions and practices of needs assessment there are different meanings linked to the concept of **need**. In order to avoid the controversy regarding definition of the concept of **need** for needs assessment, there has to be a development of a universally accepted conceptual meaning of needs assessment.

The concept of **needs assessment** refers to any systematic process for collecting and analysing information about the educational needs of individuals, groups or organisations (Knowles, 1971:86)

Suarez (1994:4056) defines the concept of **needs assessment** as an information gathering and analysis process which results in the identification of the needs of individuals, groups, institutions, communities or societies.

Suarez(1994:4057) further points out that the majority of needs assessment studies, however, have been based on a variation of one of three definitions of the term “need”:

- The most widely used definition of “need” for needs assessment is that of a discrepancy. This definition, introduced by Kaufman(1972), suggests that needs are areas in which actual status is less than targeted status.
Another commonly used definition of “need” is that of a want or preference. Stufflebeam et al (1985) refer to this definition as the “democratic view” of needs (i.e. a need is a change desired by a majority of some reference group).
- A more stringent and less used concept of need with regard to needs assessment studies is that of a deficit. A need is said to exist if an absence or a deficiency in the area of interest is harmful.

4.2.1.3 The Purposes of Needs Assessment

The main objective of needs assessment in the community education process, is the assessment of learning needs for community education programmes. In line with the above idea Suarez (1994:5058) outlines the following purposes of needs assessment:

- Providing information for planning is the most common reason given for conducting need assessments.
- The diagnosis or identification of problems or weaknesses is another common purpose of needs assessment.
- Needs assessments are components of several evaluation models. These assessments are part of the evaluation process and may have as their purpose determining areas of weakness prior to the implementation of a given form of instruction or treatment, determining gaps in implementation, or determining the status of performance at intervals during the development or implementation of a treatment.
- Needs assessments are also conducted to hold educational institutions accountable for their efforts.

With regard to the objective of needs assessment in relation to community education Delaney and Nuttall (1978:3) write that: Needs assessment studies have both an immediate and an ultimate purpose. The immediate one is to identify unmet needs. The ultimate goal is to provide

information for planning services that will meet these needs. Needs assessments are conducted to identify, organize, and document information about unmet needs.

4.2.1.4 Why a needs assessment?

A condition for the success of a community education programme is that it must address real community needs. These community needs must be assessed.

According to A Guide To Needs Assessment In Community Education Report (1976:4) a formal assessment of needs takes much of the 'guesswork' out of the programme development process, and provides a basis for setting objectives and measuring results. The services and activities offered in community education programmes are not limited to those that are strictly 'educational'. Programmes can cover a broad range of other human service areas, such as recreation, culture, health, environment, social development, vocational training, and protection of the individual. The wide ranging scope of possibilities must be related to other institutions in the community who have similar objectives.

4.2.1.5 Needs Assessment Strategies and Procedures

It has been established that needs assessments are conducted for a variety of reasons in many different situations and to identify many types of needs (i.e. learning needs). Therefore the strategies and procedures used to conduct such assessments also differ a great deal. The following discussion will look into the various procedures or stages which are common to many needs assessment research projects:

- o **Preparing to Conduct a Needs Assessment:** Like other forms of inquiry, preparing to conduct a needs assessment requires decision to conduct such a study, determining the purposes the assessment is to serve, and delimiting the areas in which the study is to

concentrate. In addition, because educational needs are based to a large extent on the values of the institution or society in which they are to be determined, procedures must be incorporated into the process to ensure that these values are represented (Suarez, 1994:4058).

- o **Designing the Needs Assessment:** Good designs for needs assessment begin with a clear specification of the focus of the study. This includes a delineation of the specific purposes of the study, the areas in which needs are to be assessed, and the type of needs to be identified. Complete designs would include procedures for analyzing data and reporting results (Suarez, 1994:4059).

- o **Assigning Priorities to Needs:** Needs assessment studies may result in the identification of many needs. To be of maximum use, identified needs should be placed in order from most to least crucial. The process of setting priorities can be seen as a complex analytical process.

Lund and Mc Gechan (1981) for example, suggest specific criteria for analyzing needs that include:

- How many people are affected?
- What would be the consequences if the needs were not met?
- Is this a need that can be met by an educational activity?
- Is this a critical need that should be met before other educational needs are addressed?
- Will resources (funds, staff) be adequate to meet those needs? (Suarez, 1994:4059)

- o **Reporting and Using the Results:** A particular characteristic of needs assessment studies is the intended utility of results. Whether for planning, problem-solving, setting criteria for evaluation results, or praising or censuring education efforts, the final stage in the process is intended to be one of active use of the findings (Suarez, 1994:4059).

4.2.1.6 Needs Assessment in the Planning and Evaluation Cycle

It is imperative that community education programmes are evaluated regularly to determine whether they in fact are contributing to the satisfaction of community needs. Furthermore, those activities which are currently under way in the community can be used as building blocks for future programmes. Changes and new events in the community may be producing new needs to which community education programmes should respond.

According to A Guide To Needs Assessment In Community Education Report (1976:4) there is a series of processes which must be repeated during the life of a community education programme. Together they form the cycle of planning and evaluation which functions continuously throughout the duration of a programme. Figure 4.1 indicates what the processes are and the order in which they take place.

4.2.1.7 Precautions in Needs Assessment

One has to take certain precautions when assessing the learning needs of communities.

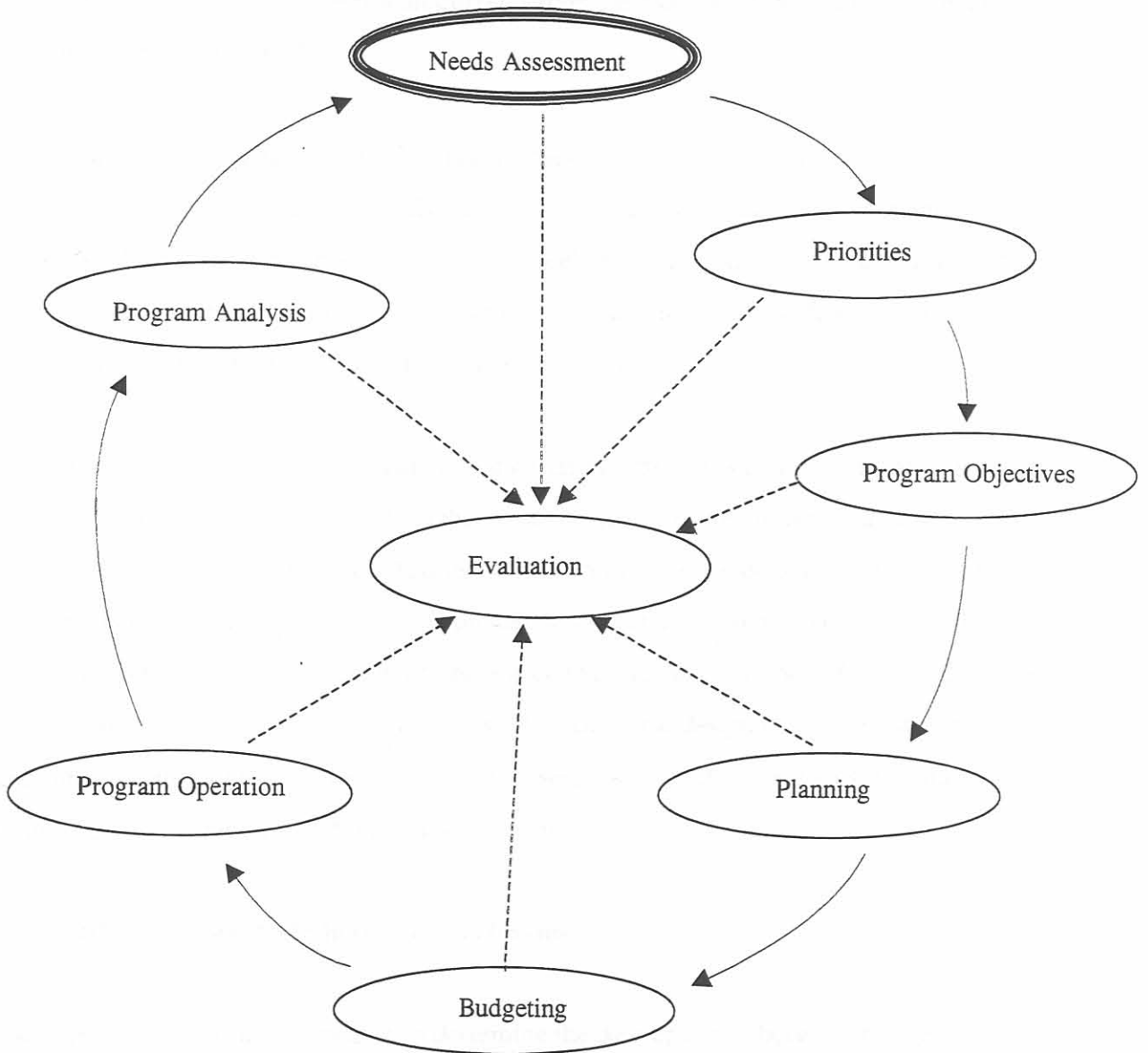
The following is a list of factors which can cause problems in assessing needs (A Guide To Needs Assessment In Community Education Report, 1976:6):

- o **Rapid shifts in citizen perceptions of need:** In some instances, programmes have been installed based on considerable evidence of a need in one year, only to have a complete change in attitude the following year. The community education programme must have the built-in flexibility to handle such rapid changes, to make adjustments in citizen need perceptions to account for these shifts in attitude.
- o **Media influence:** Television and newspapers play a large role in influencing citizens' perceptions of community needs. A TV series referring to a target group, such as migrant

FIGURE 4.1

NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN THE PLANNING AND EVALUATION CYCLE

(cf. A Guide to Needs Assessment in Community Education Report, 1976:5)



workers, or current problems such as drug abuse, can cause an instant demand for services that may not be sustained over time.

- o **Citizen disillusionment:** Most formalized needs assessments involve citizen surveys. One should however be conscious of the problems involved in relying too heavily on such surveys. One problem with citizen surveys is that they tend to raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled.

- o **Lack of data on future needs:** The methodology of needs assessment is aimed at gathering information about individual and community needs in the community at the time. Projecting what may happen next week, next month, or next year is at best an unproved process. To minimize the amount of “guessing” involved, assessment should be a continuous process, receptive to constant change.

From the preceding discussion it is evident that needs assessment is a method meant for collecting data which eventually result in the identification of needs of individuals, groups, institutions or communities. It should further be mentioned that needs assessment is a process. As a result, there are certain strategies and procedures which need to be taken into cognisance when conducting needs assessment. It also emanated that the most common objective given for conducting needs assessment is that it provides information for designing community education programmes. In the context of this study needs assessment therefore provides information for designing relevant community education programmes.

4.2.1.8 Needs Assessment Methods and Techniques

The objective of a needs assessment is to determine the discrepancies between the needs of the community and the services and programmes available to meet those needs.

In the community education process a number of methods and techniques can be applied to assess educational and learning needs, for example:

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Survey research methods or needs surveys
- Research reports
- Group discussion
- Observation
- Small group techniques
- The key-informant method
- The community-forum method
- The social indicators method
- The combination method.

The following discussion will focus on a detailed description of the different methods and techniques:

4.2.2 QUESTIONNAIRES

4.2.2.1 General background

Wolf (1994:4882) defines a questionnaire as : “ A self-report instrument used for gathering information about variables of interest to an investigator. It consists of a number of questions or items on paper that a respondent reads and answers". Nowadays the questionnaire is one of the commonly used instruments to gather data, however, Du Toit (1992:100) states that the questionnaire as such dates back to 1847, when it was used as a research instrument for the first time by Horace Mann.

According to Wolf (1994:4882) a questionnaire, as a self-report instrument, is based on three assumptions. These are:

- the respondent can read and understand the questions or items;
- the respondent possesses the information to answer the questions or items;
- the respondent is willing to answer the questions or items honestly.

These assumptions may or may not be warranted for a particular questionnaire in a particular study. Accordingly, the assumptions often have to be tested through adequate developmental work before a questionnaire can be used with confidence. Such developmental work often includes interviewing, piloting, and pretesting.

Du Toit (1992: 101) is of the opinion that there are many theories about the exact nature of a questionnaire. It could be a series of written questions on a specific subject which require answers from a person. It could also be a systematic collection of questions sent to a universe of respondents to obtain data. It is therefore a method of collecting data that cannot be obtained personally. According to Mulder (1986:4) researchers generally use questionnaires when a large group of people are involved and they wish to deduce laws or generally valid rules from the responses of the subjects. Lien(1980:162) adds that questionnaires are used for the collection of basic and supplementary information for specific purposes, such as securing responses for use in validating information collected through other techniques as well as sampling pupil opinions and attitudes.

The variables of interest for which information is sought in a questionnaire can be quite varied. This is also the case with a questionnaire designed to assess learning needs of individuals and communities for a relevant community education programme. The questionnaire can include factual questions about the respondent, such as age, sex, ethnic group, and occupation; attitudes, opinions, interests, beliefs, aspirations, and expectations; past, present and planned activities in the community; memberships in various groups/organisations; and perceptions of various matters. The list of what can be included in a questionnaire designed to assess learning needs of communities is almost without limit. Wolf (1994:4882) adds that what is included in a questionnaire will obviously be limited by the purposes of a study, by what can reasonably be asked in a questionnaire, and by time constraints.

With regard to constraints Wolf (1994:4882-4883) continues to state that :

- An investigator should limit the questions or items in a questionnaire to variables of primary interest. Each question or item should be explicitly or implicitly related to a particular research question or hypothesis.

- The second constraint on what will be included in a questionnaire involves the sensitivity or delicacy of the content of particular questions or items. Matters of a personal nature such as sexual behaviour and attitudes are a case in point. Many individuals do not wish to reveal their attitudes and behaviour in an area that they consider to be a matter of privacy.

- The third constraint as to what will be included in a questionnaire is time. Respondents cannot be expected to spend a great deal of time answering a questionnaire. Experience with adults suggests that 30 minutes is about the upper limit that can be expected in the way of answering time when questionnaires are administered in a group setting. When questionnaires are mailed to respondents, about 15 minutes appears to be the limit of respondent time.

In his study on the assessment of the educational needs of Hmong adults, Walter (1994:41) also stresses the importance of questionnaires as a method in the assessment of educational and learning needs.

4.2.2.2 Questionnaire development

As the community educator will probably use the questionnaire more than any other research tool in conducting his programme of community-based research, it is vital that he develops a thorough understanding of all aspects of its use. It is important to learn when the questionnaire should and should not be used, and this calls for an understanding of its relative strengths and weaknesses as a research instrument (Burbach and Decker, 1977:117).

In developing a questionnaire for assessing learning needs of individuals and communities the researcher has to consider certain steps, criteria and guidelines for an effective questionnaire.

With regard to developing a questionnaire, Wolf (1994:4883) remarks as follows:

A well-made questionnaire is highly deceptive. It appears to be well-organized, the questions are clear, response options are well-drawn and exhaustive, and there is a natural ordering or flow to the questions that keeps the respondent moving toward completion of the questionnaire. These desirable attributes and the deceptive simplicity of a well-made questionnaire do not spring naturally out of the process of questionnaire construction but are the result of a great deal of painstaking developmental work.

Wolf (1994:4883-4885) further describes the steps that are needed to achieve such a result as follows:

- The identification of variables
- Translation of variables into questions
- The pilot stage
- Refining the questionnaire
- Field testing the questionnaire.

Du Toit (1992:103-106) puts forward a number of guidelines for developing an effective questionnaire:

- Neatness and conciseness
- Each item should be clear and unambiguous
- The questionnaire should be as comprehensive as possible
- Clear instructions should be given
- Each item should deal with only one idea
- Questions should be objective
- Questions should move from the general to the specific
- Questions can be categorised

- Avoid descriptive qualifiers
- Responses should be easy to tabulate, summarise and interpret
- Make provision for adequate code numbers.

4.2.2.3 Types of questionnaires

Questionnaires that are developed in order to assess learning needs of individuals and communities for community education programmes are subdivided according to the way they are administered to respondents. Generally, there are mail questionnaires, self-administered questionnaires and group-administered questionnaires.

Oppenheim (1976:32) states that the chief advantage of the mail questionnaire is cheapness. Since it does not require a trained staff of field workers (who may also incur considerable travel and maintenance expenditure), virtually all that it requires is the cost of the planning and pilot work, printing or duplicating expenses, sampling, addressing, mailing, and providing stamped, self-addressed envelopes for the returns. Oppenheim (1976:33) also adds that the processing and analysis are usually simpler and cheaper, and are made possible by use of computers.

According to Oppenheim (1992:103) the self-administered questionnaire is usually presented to the respondents by an interviewer or by someone in an official position. The purpose of the inquiry is explained, and then the respondent is left alone to complete the questionnaire, which may be sent in or collected later. This method of data collection ensures a high response rate, accurate sampling, and a minimum of interviewer bias, while permitting interviewer assessments, providing necessary explanations (but **not** the interpretation of questions), and giving the benefit of a degree of personal contact.

Oppenheim (1992:103) points out that the group-administered questionnaire is also largely self-explanatory and is given to groups of respondents assembled together, such as invited audiences. Depending on the size of the group and its level of literacy, two or more persons will see to the administration of the questionnaires, give help where needed (in a non-directive way),

check finished questionnaires for completeness, and so on. Sometimes, variations in procedure may be introduced. Groups of forty can readily be controlled in this way, but contamination (through copying, talking, or asking questions) is a constant danger.

4.2.2.4 Types of questions

Basically speaking, there are two types of questions which can be used when compiling a questionnaire for assessing learning needs of individuals and communities. They are open or unstructured questions and closed or structured questions.

According to Du Toit (1992:102) in open questions people are expected to answer in their own words. Open questions leave everything to the discretion of the respondent. They are free to answer in their own words. No alternatives are given. Oppenheim (1976:41) concurs by saying that open or free-answer types of questions are not followed by any kind of choice, and the answers have to be recorded in full. The chief advantage of an open question is the freedom that it gives to the respondent. Free-response questions are often easy to ask, difficult to answer, and still more difficult to analyse.

On the other hand Du Toit (1992:102) writes that closed or structured questions are worded in such a way that short, concise answers can be given. These questions require a simple “Yes” or “No”, or the person can choose from a number of alternatives. This type of questionnaire is easy to fill in, less time consuming, confines people to the questions, is relatively objective and acceptable. It is also easy to tabulate and analyse and is less open to misinterpretation. In line with Du Toit, Oppenheim (1976:40) gives the following definition: “A closed question is one in which the respondent is offered a choice of alternative replies. He may be asked to check or underline his chosen answer(s) in a written questionnaire, or the alternatives may be read aloud or shown to him on a prompt card or a slide.”

There is a variety of learning needs that exist in communities and can be identified through the use of questionnaires. Some of the examples include the following:

- functional literacy
- numeracy skills
- personal development
- consumer education
- parental and family education
- health matters
- community resources, etc.

4.2.2.5 Advantages of questionnaires

Questionnaires developed for assessing learning needs for community education programmes, including questionnaires for any field of research, have some advantages.

Du Toit (1992:124-125) lists the following advantages of questionnaires:

- It is an economical way of collecting information for both researcher and subject, since it saves time, inputs and costs.
- If subjects are scattered over a wide area, the questionnaire is a better method of collecting data.
- Where a large group of people are covered, the questionnaire method also makes batch administration possible. The larger the group, the greater data reliability will be.
- Questionnaires are easy to plan, compile and administer.
- If carefully and correctly compiled, the researcher can ask anyone to administer questionnaires on his or her behalf.
- It is generally regarded as a reliable instrument for collecting data.
- Information of a personal nature is often readily given, particularly if subjects remain anonymous, or even if the assurance is given that the information will be treated confidentially.
- A questionnaire places less pressure on subjects because they can complete it in their own time.
- A questionnaire can help subjects by focusing their attention on significant items.

Because it is in writing and is accompanied by clear instructions, greater uniformity is achieved in the answers given. Questionnaires do not allow too much variation in answers.

- It can serve as a preliminary instrument to collect data which can subsequently be followed by an indepth study.
- This method allows subjects to use their own language to state their case. Written data are more reliable than oral responses.

4.2.2.6 Disadvantages of questionnaires

Even a well-made questionnaire with all the desirable attributes has certain disadvantages. This statement also applies to a well-made questionnaire for assessing learning needs of individuals and communities.

On this note Du Toit (1992:125-126) identifies the following disadvantages of questionnaires:

- The reliability and validity of a questionnaire is usually low, for it is difficult to control.
- The subjects who react may not be a representative section of the population. They are possibly more responsible people and may also be in favour of the research. The opinions of the subjects who failed to react to the questionnaire will always remain a mystery.
- If a question is incorrectly understood or the answer is incomplete, nothing can be done about it, whereas any misunderstanding can be cleared up immediately in the case of an interview.
- Because many questionnaires are fairly rigidly structured, they should not be used to determine such things as emotions or sentiments. Emotions and sentiments are also difficult to express in writing.
- Many subjects prefer not to put controversial issues in writing.
- Some fields of research are so sensitive, delicate, confidential or complex, that it is difficult to formulate questions about these matters.
- Many subjects fail to answer questions completely honestly. Instead, they give the researcher the answer they think he or she wants to hear.

- Questionnaires cannot be used for illiterate people or young children.
- Some subjects regard questionnaires as unimportant and answer the questions haphazardly and without the necessary enthusiasm and seriousness.
- Researchers cannot determine whether subjects are unwilling or evasive; an interview will reveal such attitudes almost immediately.

In spite of disadvantages, the questionnaire remains an invaluable instrument in any research, including that in the community education process. There is no doubt that it plays a vital role in research methodology and overcomes the problem of contact between researcher and subject. Researchers who intend using questionnaires should ensure that they satisfy the criteria laid down and follow the correct guidelines; researchers must also understand the mechanics and the possibilities of their questionnaires.

4.2.3 INTERVIEWS

4.2.3.1 General background

One of the research techniques that can be used in assessing learning needs for community education programmes is the interview. According to Behr (1983:144) the interview is a direct method of collecting information in a one-to-one situation. In line with Behr, it becomes evident that an interview is where a person interviews another person and notes responses, using structured or unstructured questions. Du Toit (1992:80) writes that most people are able to acquire the skill of interviewing, although to become adept at it requires practice, devotion and hard work. In idiographic research researchers often have to deal with sensitive issues, where the purpose of the interview is to collect information that the interviewee will not impart to just anyone. It is necessary, therefore, to build up a relationship in which the interviewee will be prepared to talk about him- or herself and discuss matters that the interviewee would normally not raise in an ordinary conversation. It is this very divulgence or uncovering that distinguishes an interview from a normal conversation.

Interviews are a simple, straightforward, but rather subjective means of data collection. Interviewing simply involves deciding what information you want and from whom, designing a set of questions, and asking them of those people (Burbach and Decker, 1977:66).

4.2.3.2 Kinds of interviews

With regard to interviews, Oppenheim (1976:30) presents the following comments: There are many kinds of interviews, such as the journalistic interview, the employment interview, and the therapeutic interview. Here we are concerned only with the data-gathering or research type of interview. It consists of three interacting variables: the respondent, the interviewer, and the interview schedule or questionnaire. Each of these, as well as the interview situation, can have an important influence on the results.

Two kinds of interviews can be used particularly for the identification of learning needs for community education programmes, viz the person-to-person interview and the telephone interview (A Guide To Needs Assessment In Community Education Report, 1976:18):

- o **Person-to-person Interview:** The person-to-person interview is the type preferred by many experts in the field. It is usually conducted "door-to-door," although the "man-on-the-street" approach has also been used successfully. The "door-to-door" method must include the design of a questionnaire in advance and the selection of a sample group of residences and businesses to be surveyed. The "man-on-the-street" method also requires a questionnaire in advance and includes selection of a proper location and proper timing for conducting the survey.

Advantages of the "person-to-person" approach are: (1) more insight into problems and needs can be obtained by asking questions, (2) it yields the highest percentage of responses per individual surveyed. Disadvantages of the "person-to-person" approach are: (1) it is the most expensive approach, (2) interviewers must be trained, (3) results can be subjective because of interviewers' biases, and (4) personality clashes can

develop, resulting in skewed data or no data at all.

- o **Telephone Interviews:** The telephone survey has enjoyed increased popularity in recent needs surveys. It involves the development of a questionnaire and selection of representative numbers to be dialed by the interviewer.

Advantages of telephone interviews are: (1) less threatening than "door-to-door", (2) the chance for more detailed insight into the nature of citizens' problems and needs, and (3) the ability to reach a relatively large section of the population. Disadvantages of the telephone interview are: (1) their expense, (2) that many people, particularly low-income people, do not have phones, (3) unlisted telephone numbers, and (4) the need for extensive training of volunteers.

4.2.3.3 Types of interviews

Research interviews that may be used in assessing learning needs of individuals and communities are usually divided into two broad categories, namely structured and unstructured interviews.

In the structured interview, the interviewer usually takes the lead and definite guidelines are followed because the interviewer requires specific information. This type of interview is invaluable for collecting information from groups of interviewees. It is therefore ideal for nomothetic research (Du Toit, 1992:82).

Keats (in Keeves, 1997:307) has the following to say about structured interviews:

Although it is not always apparent to the interviewer or the respondent, all interviews have a structure of some kind. An effectively structured interview has three main phases. The interview begins with an introductory phase in which the credentials of the interviewer are established and accepted, rapport between interviewer and respondent is developed, and an

appropriate language style adopted. This phase is often used to obtain background information. In the second phase the main content of the interview is developed. In general, less threatening content will be addressed first, followed by the more detailed exploration of the topic, characterized by probing and elaboration of the interview structure. The third and final phase is the denouement, in which the interviewer concludes the interview and releases the respondent.

With regard to the unstructured interview the interviewer usually does not take the lead. The interviewer conducts the interview without any preconceived ideas. In this way he or she endeavours to reach the person (Du Toit, 1992:92). The art of unstructured interviewing is that the questions should appear to arise **spontaneously** from the conversation. Under no circumstances may the interview deteriorate into an inquisition. If interviewers ask questions too directly, the interviewee may become defensive and hostile and will be unwilling to divulge information. Interviewees should be encouraged to talk freely and voluntarily offer information that they deem to be significant (Du Toit, 1992:92).

Du Toit (1992:92) further cites the following aspects which are important in unstructured interviews:

- active listening
- open questions
- keeping records of data.

The community educator can either use the structured or unstructured interview to assess a variety of learning needs in order to design a relevant community education programme. The learning needs may include the following:

- social coping skills
- domestic economy
- the raising of levels of awareness about existing opportunities
- parental education, etc

4.2.3.4 Components of interviews

Like any other type of interview, even the interviews which may be used for assessing learning needs of individuals and communities also need to consist of certain components of interviewing.

In line with the above statement Miller and Cannel (in Keeves, 1997:366) express the following: The four main components of the interviewer's job are: (a) to introduce the interview to the person and convince him/her to accept it and to apply him/herself diligently to the responding role, (b) to administer the questions using standardized procedures, (c) to follow up those responses which are inadequate - those which fail to fulfill the objectives of the question - using acceptable, nonbiasing techniques, and (d) to record the response accurately and completely.

Miller and Cannel (in Keeves, 1997:366-368) further mention that these components of interviewing will require the following techniques:

- **Introductions:** The purposes of the introductions are to encourage the prospective respondent to agree to be interviewed and to accept the respondent role wholeheartedly.
- **Administering the questionnaire:** Questions often are accompanied by instructions providing cues on the exact kind of information desired and how to be efficient in responding.
- **Follow-up of inadequate responses:** If the respondent has performed his or her role properly, the interviewer's task is simply to record the response.
- **Recording responses:** Accurate recording of the response is the last component of the interviewing task.

4.2.3.5 Techniques of interviewing

Interviewing is a research technique. It is therefore imperative for the researcher who uses interviews for collecting data for use in assessing learning needs for community education programmes to have certain techniques of interviewing.

Keats (in Keeves, 1997:308) points out that whether for selection or for data-gathering in research, good interviewing requires the development of an integrated repertoire of techniques, which includes speaking skills, listening skills, skills of concept acquisition, and skill in the interpretation of verbal and nonverbal messages. One of the most important attributes of the good interviewer is the ability to show empathy with the respondent.

Keats (in Keeves, 1997: 308-309) further presents other techniques of interviewing as follows:

- As verbal interaction is the principal mode of communication in interviewing, it is necessary for the interviewer to cultivate a mode of speech that is clear, delivered at an appropriate pace, and moderate in pitch and volume.
- Listening skills are perhaps even more important than speaking skills.
- Non-verbal behaviour can enhance or detract from demonstrating active listening. There are many cultural differences in the nuances of interpreting non-verbal cues.
- Cultural norms govern the distance between interviewer and respondent that is acceptable. Within the context of the cultural norm, the acceptable distance also varies according to the topic, the genders of interviewer and respondent, the place in which the interview takes place, and the attitudes of the respondent.
- Another important function of non-verbal cues is the expression of feelings. There is cross-cultural evidence of the universality of the meaning of facial expressions of the primary emotions of anger, sorrow, fear, and joy, but cultural differences are found in the more complex emotions, and, even more importantly for the interviewing situation, in the degree of openness or inhibition acceptable for their expression.

4.2.3.6 Requirements for good interviewing

Du Toit (1992:81) writes that the success of a research interview depends largely on the extent to which the researcher succeeds in establishing rapport with the subject. Rapport indicates a comfortable relationship between two or more people - a relationship of trust.

Even interviews meant for assessing learning needs of individuals and communities for community education programmes need to have certain requirements, particularly the relationship of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Du Toit (1992:81) further mentions three important requirements for good interviewing:

- Orienting the interviewee
- The conduct of the interviewer
- The influence of the environment.

The following is a discussion of these requirements for good interviewing:

- o **Orienting the interviewee:** According to Du Toit (1992:81) every interviewee should be oriented towards the research interview so that the interviewee has some idea of what is expected of him or her. In this case interviewees should be made aware of the intention to identify learning needs in their community. This is done by way of a brief introduction prior to the start of the interview. Concerning the orientation Branigan (1985:201) provides the following guidelines for an effective introduction:
 - Keep the introduction short
 - Word the introduction realistically
 - Make the introduction nonthreatening
 - Keep the introduction serious
 - The introduction should be neutral
 - The interviewer (researcher) should present the introduction in a pleasantly firm, decisive manner, but should not appear to be bullying the subject.

- o **The conduct of the interviewer:** Because an interview is not an ordinary conversation, the interviewer should tone down his or her own personality to ensure that the presence of the interviewer does not overwhelm or threaten the interviewee (Du Toit, 1992:82). Du Toit (1992:82) further adds that the interviewer should avoid talking too much, being too direct or trying to impress the other person with personal opinions. It is important

that the interviewee becomes the one who talks too much about the existing learning needs.

Mackay (1973:8) and also Behr (1983:146) suggest the following guidelines which apply to prospective interviewers:

- They should have an easy-going and relaxed attitude.
- They should be good listeners.
- They should avoid interjections, except when it is necessary to explain something.
- They should not allow the interviewee to deviate from the subject.
- They should under no circumstances become involved in a debate or argue with the subject.
- Questions that may embarrass the interviewee should be avoided.
- They should be flexible and be able to see the interviewee's point of view.
- They should not be biased and have preconceived ideas about the interviewee.

- o **The influence of the environment:** The interview should be held in private, and possible interruptions should be avoided. If possible, the interviewee should be familiar with the environment. The arrangement of furniture in the room influences the atmosphere. For instance, if the interviewer sits behind a desk, this could create an impression of authority and distance. There are no hard and fast rules here: interviewers should use their discretion depending on the individual in question and his or her circumstances (Du Toit, 1992: 82-83).

Of importance here, is the main aim of the interview, which is to identify learning needs for community education programmes.

4.2.3.7 Advantages of interviews

The fact that interviews are commonly used to gather data proves that they have certain advantages as a technique of research. Because of its advantages, the interview is a suitable technique which can be used in collecting information used to assess learning needs for community education programmes.

According to Lien (1980:148), apart from obtaining information, interviews can also be used to interpret data or information such as test results or a profile of results. The greatest advantage of the interview in the hands of a skilled interviewer is its flexibility (Oppenheim, 1976:31). This enables the interviewer to make adjustments as the situation requires (Du Toit, 1992:80).

Kerlinger (1986:440) and also Behr (1983:145) cite the following practical examples of the advantages of flexibility:

- The interviewer can explain to the interviewee the purpose of the study.
- The researcher can make sure that the interviewee knows what is expected of him or her. If, for example, the interviewee misinterprets a question, the researcher can make an explanatory remark.
- If, in the course of the interview, the interviewee appears to be unmotivated or loses interest, the interviewer can encourage him or her to continue.
- The flexibility inherent in interviewing is especially useful in dealing with children or uneducated people.
- Questions concerning interviewees' expectations, aspirations and fears can be formulated in such a way that accurate information is gathered.
- Interviewing makes it possible to explore answers further: thus the interviewer can determine the reasons for a particular answer given by the interviewee.

4.2.3.8 Disadvantages of interviews

Unfortunately, even though the same interview questionnaire can be used by many interviewers in a standard interviewing procedure, there will always remain differences in the way in which questions are put to each respondent and these may have an important influence on the results. It may also happen that what is understood by the respondent and what is recorded or noted down from the respondent's answer will be selective and possibly biased (Oppenheim, 1992:97).

Interviews cost money. There are travelling and subsistence expenses to be met, as well as payment to the interviewers - even when the interview is unsuccessful (Oppenheim, 1976:32).

Interviewing is one of the most useful methods of collecting data which can be used in assessing learning needs of individuals and communities for community education programmes. It is a skill, however, that demands careful preparation and much practice. As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of communication and collaboration. Finally, it is deeply satisfying to researchers who are interested in others' views or needs.

4.2.4 SURVEY RESEARCH METHODS

4.2.4.1 General background

In the community education process survey research methods can be used to gather data which may assist in assessing learning needs for community education programmes. A survey is a form of planned collection of data for the purpose of description or prediction, as a guide to action, or for the purpose of analyzing the relationships between certain variables. Surveys are usually conducted on a large scale. To gather data, surveys use questionnaires and interviews, attitude scales, projective techniques, and various related methods (Oppenheim, 1976:1).

According to Rosier (in Keeves, 1997:154) survey research methods in education describe procedures for the collection of information associated with education. This information is used to extend understanding of educational issues and to assist in the development of educational policy.

The survey approach provides for the collection of information from a sample of the entire population of the community. The survey approach provides results that are the most scientifically valid; it is the approach most capable of eliciting specific information from individuals. Its weaknesses are that it tends to be relatively expensive and requires a knowledge of research procedures and statistical analysis (Decker et al, 1988:53).

With regard to the assessment of learning needs using the survey approach, Decker et al (1988:53) state that assessment of community needs is the responsibility of everyone. The survey helps to identify the needs of the community as seen by the people.

It is evident that in the context of this study surveys can be used to assess learning needs of communities after which community education programmes can be designed and operated.

Three developments have influenced the methodology of survey research. First, the technology of sampling has reached a high level. Second, many techniques have been developed for collecting valid and reliable information from survey respondents. Third, the availability of computers and survey research software has facilitated the analysis of this information (Rosier in Keeves, 1997:154).

4.2.4.2 Purpose and types of surveys

Researchers even in community education conduct surveys for various reasons or purposes. Rosier (in Keeves, 1997:154) points out that surveys are conducted to accomplish two main purposes. First, descriptive or enumerative surveys are used to obtain information. Second, analytic, explanatory or comparative surveys are designed to examine relationships

between variables (e.g. learning needs) in the survey.

Oppenheim (1976:8) refers to the descriptive survey as the census type and to the analytic as the relational type of survey. The purpose of the descriptive survey is to count. When it cannot count everyone, it counts a representative sample and then makes inferences about the population as a whole. The job of such surveys is essentially fact-finding and actuarial - although it should be added that the data thus collected are often used to make predictions.

It is this kind of analytic, relational survey, set up specifically to explore the relationships between particular variables, that is sometimes referred to as "the poor man's experiment", since its design is quite similar to that of laboratory experiments (Oppenheim, 1976:9).

There are other types of surveys which can be useful at the hands of the community educator with regard to the identification of learning needs. The following discussion will focus on a description of these surveys:

- o **Agency surveys:** Interviews with agency representatives should be constructed by use of a questionnaire in line with the "common language" categories. Questions should be directed at finding "gaps" in community programmes that the people have noted from their experiences and in validating available statistical data and the common language categories.

If there is a public or private information and referral agency in the community, a key person there should be interviewed and an analysis made of information collected from citizen inquiries to find out the nature of the most frequent requests for services. This will indicate citizens' self-perceived needs while the data from agency questionnaires indicate agency-perceived needs (A Guide To Needs Assessment In Community Education Report, 1976:14-17).

- o **Citizen Survey:** A direct survey of citizens relative to their perceived needs, interests, and wants should be conducted. Past needs assessments, both for community education programmes and for other community service programmes, have utilized citizen surveys as the basic ingredient in the assessment process. As a result, a great deal of material is available, ranging from extremely simple to highly complex, about how to gather information from the local citizenry (A Guide To Needs Assessment In Community Education Report, 1976:18).

- o **Mail-Out Survey:** The mail-out survey involves developing a questionnaire and finding the addresses of a representative number of individuals in the community.

Advantages of the mail-out survey are: (1) low cost, (2) the chance of more honest answers, and (3) its practicality in rural areas. Disadvantages of the mail-out survey are: (1) the usually poor response rate (less than 25 percent), (2) the difficulty in selecting representative addresses, (3) it eliminates responses from illiterates or those not familiar or conversant in questionnaire language, and (4) responses to questions are less "open-ended" than with person-to-person interviews (A Guide To Needs Assessment In Community Education Report, 1976:18).

With regard to the purpose of surveys, Rosier (in Keeves, 1997:154) adds that the purposes of a survey influence the formulation of the research questions to be examined, the way it is conducted, and the presentation and dissemination of the findings.

4.2.4.3 Survey research cycle

The time frame of surveys differs considerable depending on the nature, type, purpose of the survey and other relevant variables. There is also no exception to surveys undertaken with regard to community education.

According to Oppenheim (1976:1-2) a social-research study may last from a few months to many years, but most surveys go through the same stages or cycles of stages. We may distinguish the following:

- Deciding the aims of the study and the hypotheses to be investigated.
- Reviewing the relevant literature, discussions with informants and interested bodies.
- Designing the study and making the hypotheses specific to a situation (making the hypotheses operational).
- Designing or adapting the necessary research methods and techniques, pilot work and revision of the research instruments.
- The sampling process: selection of the people to be approached.
- The field-work stage: data collection and returns.
- Processing the data, coding the responses, and preparing punch cards.
- The statistical analysis (simple at first, but becoming more complex, testing for statistical significance).
- Assembling the results and testing the hypotheses.
- Writing up the results, relating the findings to other research, drawing conclusions and interpretations.

In line with Oppenheim, Rosier (in Keeves, 1997:156) states that one helpful way to understand the range of components of a typical survey is in terms of a “survey research cycle”. He emphasizes that both in its planning and execution a survey may be conducted more effectively by reference to the logical demands of the cycle, as summarized in Figure 4.2.

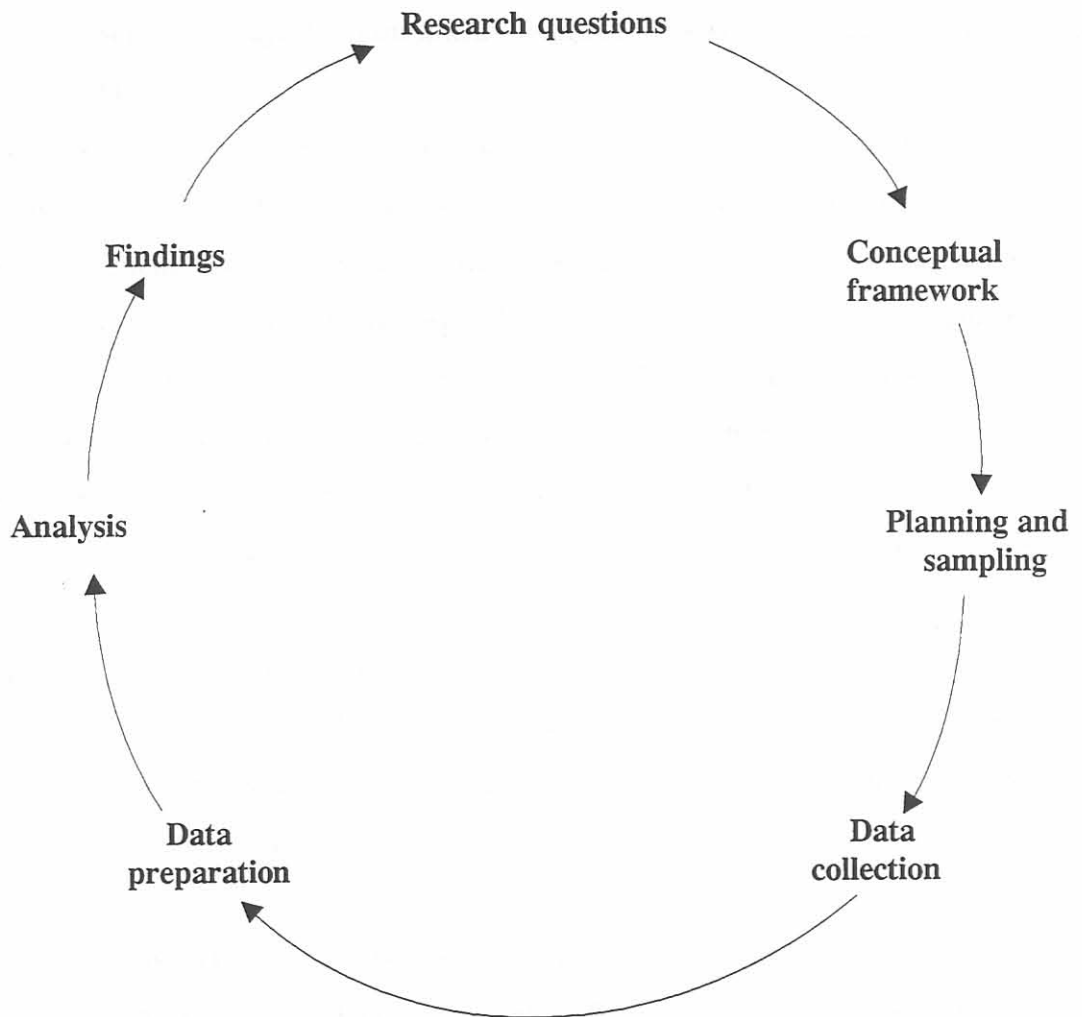
Rosier (in Keeves, 1997:156-161) further describes the stages of the cycle, which are also applicable in community education, as follows:

- **Research questions:** The starting point for a survey is a clear statement of the research questions it is designed to answer. The finishing point is a set of results which addresses these research questions.

FIGURE 4.2

SURVEY RESEARCH CYCLE

(cf. Rosier in Keeves, 1997:156)



- **Conceptual framework:** At the second stage of the cycle, the ideas or components included in the research questions should be specified more precisely in conceptual terms.
- **Planning and sampling (survey instruments):** The term “instruments” refers to the range of questionnaires, interviews, tests, and attitude scales used for the collection of data in a survey. The instruments should be linked to the concepts included in the conceptual framework.
- **Data collection:** The data collection stage of the survey research cycle involves identifying the survey respondents and collecting the desired information from them.
- **Data preparation and management:** The data preparation stage of the cycle starts with the raw information collected from the respondents (e.g. learning needs), and concludes with the data carefully organized as computer files ready for analysis. This stage is concerned with checking and coding data, and building the data files.
- **Analysis:** Analysis can commence once the data file has been adequately prepared. In terms of the logic of the survey research cycle, the earlier stages of the cycle should anticipate the analysis stage.
- **Findings:** The last stage of the survey research cycle involves the presentation of the findings, which should link to the original questions. This final stage should also include a discussion of the strength of the findings, and of the extent to which they may be generalized.

From the preceding discussion it is evident that a survey is an operation of some complexity and, therefore, a first requirement is the development of a good plan. It follows that the conduct of survey research should follow a logical process, which in this study is referred to as a ‘survey research cycle’. Normally, the success of the research study is not guaranteed by following the cycle, but it may enhance confidence in the management of the survey. No single study can ever identify all the learning needs in a given community or find all the answers, so that one cycle may lead to another as findings from one survey lead to new questions for future surveys in community education.