

EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ADULT LEARNERS AT PUBLIC ADULT LEARNING CENTRES

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**EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS
OF ADULT LEARNERS
AT PUBLIC ADULT LEARNING CENTRES**

by

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This dissertation is dedicated
to my family:
my husband Themba Alexious Dladla;
my children Lindani and Lindelani.
Your support and patience have inspired me
to complete this study.

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Abstract

The main objective of this research was to explore the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at Public Adult Learning Centres. A total number of eighteen adult learners from three Public Adult Learning Centres in Nkomazi East Circuit at Ehlanzeni District participated in the study. The study was qualitative in nature using the interpretive paradigm. Data was collected through focus group interviews, individual interviews and observation.

The study revealed that adult learners have mixed feelings and opinions regarding their experiences at Public Adult Learning Centres. Results indicated that some adults found their experiences interesting and enriching and have positive attitudes towards the teaching and learning at Public Adult Learning Centres, while others were frustrated with the lack of teaching and learning resources, and the poor management at the centres.

Adult learners seem to regard education as important and they received satisfactory support from their families, communities, teachers, employers, and fellow adult learners, as well as financial support from the Department of Education. Findings revealed that adult learners find it difficult to understand the content of subjects and to cope with the pace of teaching. Participants had different views about the language of instruction. Some preferred English for employment and social purposes while others preferred the vernacular so as to have a better understanding of the content and to pass the subjects. These learners preferred that the content should prepare them for employment and for coping with day-to-day activities in rural areas. Responsibilities at home, becoming a learner at an elderly age, being involved in seasonal jobs and catching up work after absence were some of the challenges that adult learners experienced.

From the results and findings of the study, recommendations were made to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning and functionality of Public Adult Learning Centres.



Lists of Key Words and Acronyms

List of Key Words

- ✦ Adult Education
- ✦ Adult Basic Education and Training,
- ✦ Adult learners
- ✦ Adult Centres
- ✦ Public Adult Learning Centres



List of Acronyms

AAAT	Applied Agriculture and Agricultural Technology
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AET	Adult Education and Training
CASS	Continuous Assessment
CGB	Centre Governing Body
DoE	Department of Education
EFA	Education for All
FET	Further Education and Training
GETC	General Education and Training Certificate
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	Information and Computer Technology
LTSM	Learner, Teacher and Support Material
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PALCs	Public Adult Learning Centres
SGB	School Governing Body
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise



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Chapter 1

Background and Orientation

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates experiences and perceptions of adult learners at Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) and how they cope with learning. The majority of these learners live in rural areas. They are unemployed, dropped out of school before reaching Grade 10, and want to complete their schooling and subsequently get employment. Some of them have never been to school due to poverty, disabilities or a lack of support from parents. According to Section 18 of the Adult Basic Education and Training Act (No 52 of 2000) of the Republic of South Africa, it is mandatory for public centres to admit learners and meet their educational requirements without discriminating against them. Therefore it is the responsibility of the Government to provide adult learners with the necessary support to enable them to learn and develop to their full potential.

Gravett (2005:7) defines an adult learner as *a person whose main life is not related to education*. Whereas the main life task of a child is to attend school, adult learners usually have other responsibilities in various roles, such as worker, employer, spouse or parent. As a result adults typically add the role of learner to their other full-time roles (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). PALC learners bring their adult roles with them into the educational setting even though their involvement in education may sometimes not be a direct extension of these roles. The multiple roles of adults often become a major problem in any adult educational endeavour (Squires, 1993).

Adult learners are totally different from mainstream learners. Mainstream learners are defined as learners who attend school on a full-time basis; their schools operate seven hours per day from Monday to Friday. Their programmes are presented in a public school building and are classified as either primary or secondary, while learners at PALCs are referred to as those learners who are learning on a part-time basis with programmes that operate only two hours per day during the afternoons from Monday to Thursday (Department of Education, 2008). PALC instruction can take place in schools, churches, prison cells, community halls and any other place deemed conducive to learning. PALCs provide learning opportunities ranging from

basic literacy at Level 1 up to Level 4. Learners at PALCs are those learners who expect to obtain General Education and Training Certificates (GETC) at the end of Level 4.

The table below shows the General Education and Training Certificates in Adult Education and Training (AET) from the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Policy Document (1997:20).

Table 1.1: General Education and Training Band in Adult Education and Training

According to the Mpumalanga Department of Education AET Provincial Regulations (2005:6, 4) the state subsidises all PALCs in the following ways:

- Remuneration for educators
- Providing centre managers and administration staff
- The provisioning of study material
- The provisioning of buildings and office equipment
- Maintenance.

1.2 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The following key concepts are used in this study:

1.2.1 ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ABET)

Defined as the general conceptual foundation towards lifelong learning and development, including knowledge, skills and attitudes required for social, economic

and political participation and transformation applicable to a range of contexts (Department of Education, 1997:11). ABET is very flexible, developmental and it targets the specific needs of particular audiences while it also provides access to nationally recognised certificates.

1.2.2 ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING (AET)

According to the Mpumalanga Department of Education pamphlet (Viva AET viva, 2009), AET is an Adult Education and Training programme that gives adult learners and out of school youth the chance to learn how to read and write so that they can pursue various career pathways. This type of learning should be relevant, build learners' experience and should promote further learning.

1.2.3 ADULT LEARNING

This is the identified learning style of those who bring significant lived experiences to their learning as well as clear and pragmatic goals (Gravett, 2005:7). Adult learning is characterised by self-direction, application and an egalitarian relationship with the instructor.

1.2.4 ADULT LEARNERS

Typically these are those non-traditional, mature adults who choose to seek an education for immediate application of knowledge (Gravett, 2005:7). For the purpose of this study the term *adult learners* refers to a person who is 16 years of age or older; who has left the ordinary conventional schooling system prematurely, for socio-economic reasons, or who has never had any formal education, and who has assumed the responsibilities of adulthood. Because of adult learners' age and experience, they call for a style of instruction that values leadership within their own learning process.

1.2.5 EXPERIENCE

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2005) experience means knowledge that one gains about life and the world by being in different **situations and meeting different peoples, or the process of gaining this. In this study experience refers to the knowledge and skills that adults gain over a period at PALCs.**

1.2.6 PERCEPTION

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2005) defines perception as the way in which one thinks about something and one's idea of what it is like. In this study perception refers to adult learners' views on and opinions of PALCs

1.2.7 PUBLIC ADULT LEARNING CENTRES (PALCs)

Historically better-known as *night schools*, these centres are the key sites for the provision and delivery of education to adults. PALCs provide learning opportunities to adults from basic literacy to Grade 12, using the infrastructure of primary or secondary schools (Department of Education, 2008:27).

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

AET is an important sector of education because it deals with economically active, illiterate and semi-literate people. It is a sector of education that is directly linked to development in South Africa (French, 2003). Rule (2006:1) succinctly supports this development function of adult education and training by emphasising that development in the coming decade depends on the children of today and development today depends on the adults of today.

This study is limited to PALCs in the Ehlanzeni District, a Malelane sub-district of the Nkomazi East Circuit. It would have been valuable to extend the research to other sub-districts in Ehlanzeni but due to constraints pertaining to funds and time it was not possible. Moreover, there are more centres in the Malelane sub-districts compared to other sub-districts; I hoped to obtain sufficient relevant data based on the experiences and perceptions of the learners in this specific district.

The former Minister of Education in South Africa, Professor Kader Asmal, called on all South Africans to work together to address the problem of illiteracy among adults in the country (Department of Education, Tirisano, 1999). Professor Asmal (Department of Education, Tirisano, 1999:6) mentioned that no South African citizen should be illiterate in the 21st century. However, some are still illiterate and it is of prime importance that a social movement be mobilised to ensure that those who do not have the skills of reading, writing and numeracy are made to learn. This may be perceived as a call for everyone involved in PALCs to ensure that learners' challenges that are apparent in these centres are improved. PALCs must become more conducive educational environments that promote effective learning.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Adult learners are viewed as the pillars of learning at PALCs as a centre cannot be a centre without learners. The goal of the research is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs and how they cope with learning. Insight into the learning experiences and perceptions of adult learners has been gained by investigating their experiences and perceptions in Nkomazi PALCs. The need to understand what adult learners themselves experience is essential since they are actively involved in PALCs and are the immediate sources of possible improvement to the community.

1.4.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do adult learners experience and perceive the teaching and learning at Public Adult Learning Centres?
2. What are the challenges that influence adult learners' experiences and perceptions of the Adult Learning Centres with regard to the following?
 - (a) Teaching and learning
 - (b) Support from teachers and family
 - (c) Attendance of learners at PALCs
 - (d) The operation of PALCs.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.5.1 BACKGROUND OF ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SOUTH AFRICA

This section provides an overview of the historical background of adult education and training in South Africa. In the historical background the history of Adult Education and Training is outlined briefly. According to the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) database of completed research in South Africa, numerous researchers have studied the field of Adult Basic Education. Research themes include *curricula design, policy analysis, effectiveness of Adult Basic Education programmes, development of Adult Basic Education, problems affecting teachers and learners and the criteria for the evaluation of programmes*. However, it should be noted that specific research pertaining to the experiences and perceptions of learners at adult learning centres is very limited; hence the need for this research.

Societies are continually undergoing change that have a direct impact on the aim of Adult Education and Training. South Africa is no exception as it is in its nineteenth year of democracy after so many years of political isolation due to apartheid. For many years there has been no officially recognised framework for adult education in South Africa (Aitchison, 2003:5). Consequently the efforts to implement adult education were executed in a disjointed manner (Vakalisa, 2000:20). During apartheid the focus of Adult Education and Training was limited to the westernisation of black adult learners by providing them with a religion-based Christian education (Sibiya, 2004:41). However, the beginning of the 20th century saw the development of Adult Education and Training; not only as a structured activity but also as an important undertaking (Aitchison, 2003:5). This beginning was marked by the emergence of so-called *night schools* that provided basic education to adult learners. However, there was a limitation on the number of night school programmes because they operated outside of Government regulations and did not have Government financial support (Nkosi, 2007:6). This lack of Government support created a serious academic resource crisis. In 1946 the Government appointed the Eybers Committee that recommended the subsidisation of all bodies involved in the provision of Adult Basic Education (Aitchison, 2003:5). This committee forced the Government to support PALCs financially.

The outbreak of World War II with its demand for skilled black labour meant that it was necessary for black adults to have a basic education (Nkosi, 2007; Sibiya, 2004). This accelerated the growth of these schools. The promulgation of the Bantu Education Act in 1953 introduced apartheid into education (Mda & Mothata, 2000). This Act halted the expansion of *night schools* because it was declared unlawful to provide education to blacks outside of the officially recognised schooling system (Aitchison, 2003; Nkosi, 2007; Rule, 2006; Sibiya, 2004). As a result the role played by night schools was soon assumed by non-governmental organisations; some of them were recognised by the Government. In the 1970s; the Government reintroduced night schools as state-controlled adult education centres (Aitchison, 2003; Nkosi, 2007; Sibiya, 2004). These are still operational today although they are now called PALCs and are hosted by mainstream State schools while receiving some funding from the Government.

Baatjes and Mathe (2004:20) assert that by the 1990s the definition of the term *Adult Basic Education* had been extended to include a training component for adults and thus became Adult Basic Education and Training. In October 2000 the Adult Basic

Education and Training Act, No. 52 was introduced (Rule, 2006:21). The act was the equivalent of the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 with the only difference being that the first act regulates all schooling processes for adults in need of basic education, while the second one regulates all schooling processes of children in the mainstream daytime schools. The Government Gazette (2000:2) outlines the goal of the Adult Basic Education and Training Act as *to regulate Adult Basic Education and Training; to provide for the establishment, governance and funding of public adult learning centres; to provide for the registration of private adult learning centres; to provide for quality assurance and quality promotion in adult basic education; to provide for transitional arrangement*. It was hoped that this act, through the mandate mentioned above, would, among other things, make the following possible:

- The establishment of a national, harmonious and effectively operating adult basic education and training system to assist in the restructuring and transformation of centres for purposes of fulfilling the imperatives of a post-apartheid democratic South Africa – as in, by way of example, the redress of past discrimination in education and ensuring accessibility of education to all (Government Gazette, 2000).
- The advancement of the needs of the Republic, labour market centres and their surrounding communities and the further serving as a complementary support system to the country's skills development strategy (Government Gazette, 2000).

The Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor set up a ministerial committee on July 25, 2007 to draft a Green Paper on a revamped Adult Education and Training System for South Africa (Department of Education, 2008). The intended objectives of the committee were established as follows:

- To draft the Adult Education and Training Green Paper for the Minister's Consideration.
- To investigate the nature, structure, content and relevance of the new Adult Education and Training qualifications.
- To consider the legal implications for a new Adult Education and Training system with particular regard to the current AET Act (No. 52 of 2000).
- To make recommendations on relevant programmes to be offered by the Department of Education. This would include the appropriate providers for such programmes considering the current and possibly expanded institutional landscape.

- To review relevant international report on adult education and lifelong learning in making recommendations about a revamped AET system.

The approval of the Green Paper in 2009 led to a change from the concept of Adult Basic Education and Training to the concept of Adult Education and Training. This concept was gazetted and is used in South Africa today as a policy that governs the AET system.

1.5.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theoretical frameworks were used as a basis for the analysis of the data for this study. The first draws on the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:13) in which he uses the bio-ecological model to explain the development that occurs in the child as a result of the relationship that exists between the learner and its environment. The bio-ecological theory is based on the interdependence and relationships between different organisms and their physical environment. By utilising this model, the challenges of PALC learners may be understood as a result of numerous factors interacting, including biological, environmental and socio-economic factors. One of the factors that plays a role in the experiences and perceptions of learners at PALCs has to do with their own personal make-up and how they perceive themselves as learners experiencing teaching and learning challenges at these PALCs. Thus the bio-ecological perspective enables one to link this understanding of how experiences and perceptions of learners at PALCs form part of the macro-system. This involves dominant social structures as well as beliefs and values – how individual factors that lie within the learner create a tendency to succeed or fail in spite of the social context.

The second part of the theoretical framework discusses the phenomenological approach to the self-concept. This part of the discussion provides the theoretical underpinnings of the self-concept construct and how it has developed over time. This discussion also sharpens the theoretical framework for this study in that it narrows the macro-system to focus on the micro-system. It does so by highlighting a possible way of understanding how the self-concept is linked to academic achievement in the face of experiences and perceptions of PALCs' adult learners. The goal is to understand what within the learners' environment serves as assets that enable them to develop a positive self-concept in relation to their academic endeavours to overcome their experiences of learners at PALCs during the process of learning.

This is linked to the third part of my researcher's theoretical framework, the asset-based approach. An asset-based approach places emphasis on what is currently present in the environment; it sets out to identify the abilities inherent in individuals in their environment. It does not start with what is absent or problematic. It has a strong internal focus, indicating that problem-solving and mission development need to come from within. The asset-based approach is relationship-driven and should be based on the strengths and talents of the individuals involved, and not on weakness or problems. Relationships need to be built and rebuilt constantly (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2003:10). This part of the framework informed the data collection process, particularly in terms of identifying existing internal and external assets.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PARADIGM

Qualitative research is an approach that focuses on the need to understand the phenomenon that is being studied (Burns & Grove, 1997:27). Since the concept of an *emergent design* looks at the variables in the natural setting in which they are found, the research was positioned in a qualitative research paradigm. Research was therefore conducted in a naturalistic setting, specifically within PALCs to gain an understanding of and insight into the learners' responses to AET centres (Creswell, 1994:2, 147; De Vos, 2000:273; Mouton, 2001:270, 278). Such research is based on values and value judgements of both the researcher and participants (Smit, 2001:59). Thus this qualitative study allowed for the interpretation and reconstruction of information since it revealed experiences and perceptions of adult learners at Public Adult Learning Centres (Burns & Grove, 1997:67). A qualitative approach assumes that for interpretation, inter-subjective personal knowledge is needed (Mouton & Marais, 1994:205).

Within this qualitative, interpretive study, the interactive contact between me/interviewer and the adult learners resulted in the submissions of learners in terms of PALCs within Adult Education and Training. A qualitative research method enabled me to interact with participants when gathering data so that different perspectives could be captured accurately. This method helped me to select participant rich information. I used both primary and secondary sources for gathering data. PALC learners constituted primary sources of information while relevant literature on the topic was used as a secondary source. Hence the research aim was

to ascertain the natural setting within PALCs contexts regarding AET from the adult learners' *assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs and values* (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:55). However, it was not scientifically possible to generalise the conclusions reached in this study to other studies but the emergent or developing conclusions are nevertheless important in terms of added knowledge. The research design constituted focus group and individual interviews as well as observations as discussed below and in Chapter 3. Most scholars agree that focus group interviews help researchers to have a bright understanding and to understand the cultures of learners (Cortazzi, 1993:1).

1.6.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design made it easier to ensure valid research and it served as the framework with a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed during the research project (Mouton, 1996:10). Mouton (2001:55) refers to research design as a major plan that guides the research. The focus is on the product and formulation of the research problem as a point of departure where logic is a focus of research. The purpose of a research design according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:22) is to ensure that a plan that will generate valid and credible evidence and conclusions is being put in place for the research.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) research designs may be classified into two major categories: quantitative and qualitative. This study was undertaken to explore the experiences and perceptions of adult learners in three PALCs in the Malelane sub-region of the Nkomazi East Circuit. The purpose of the research was not to generalise the analysis of the findings but rather to determine whether the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PACLs are conducive to effective teaching and learning. The research focuses primarily on obtaining insights, first-hand information and perceptions of how learners respond to their experiences while attending PALCs. In view of this focus the research was conducted in a qualitative manner.

Qualitative research is an interpretative, naturalistic and inductive approach (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996). It allows for the collection and generation of rich descriptions of experience and is flexible yet rigorous in terms of the procedures to be followed in the collection and analysis of data research. A qualitative approach to this investigation gives the researcher the opportunity to investigate learners' lived experiences, behaviours,

emotions and feelings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998:10). It enabled the researcher to obtain and present rich verbal descriptions and gain insight into the complexity of the adult learners' experience at PALCs. It elicited participants' experiences or perceptions and produced descriptive data in participants' own spoken words (De Vos, Strydom & Fouche, 2005:79). In this study PALCs' learners attending the three Nkomazi centres were the sole focus of the research.

The study is underpinned by the use of the interpretive paradigm. The reason for using the interpretive paradigm is to describe and analyse the individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions of the participants (Ward, 2008). I interpreted phenomena in the same way as the participants explained them. It was important for me to become immersed in the situation and the phenomena studied (Patterson, 2008).

1.7 DATA COLLECTION

Various strategies and interrelated data collection activities were used to gather data and answer the research questions (Creswell, 1994:110; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:674; De Vos, 2000:340). In this qualitative research design data analysis and data collection occurred simultaneously. The methods used for data collection in this study were influenced by the research questions and design.

1.7.1 DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS

Data was collected from PALCs' female learners through focus group interviews and individual interviews. These strategies subsequently sanctioned descriptive research observation (McMillan, 2008:277-279).

1.7.1.1 Focus group interviews

A focus group interview is described as a group discussion in which a small number of participants, which could be six to twelve, discuss topics of special relevance to the study under the supervision of the researcher (Hoberg, 1999:136). Focus group interviews help the researcher to glean various views from participants in one session; these enhance the credibility of findings and triangulate data obtained through other qualitative methods (Woodhead & Moss, 2007). Focus group interviews with adult learners provided insights and first-hand information on their experiences and perceptions of learning at Nkomazi PALCs. The researcher asked

adult learners about their experiences and perceptions pertaining to learning, investigated support given to them by teachers, family and community employers, departmental officials and explored the ways in which they assisted them in learning as adults.

The groups met once as required by the established research process. A context was created within the group setting, where participants spoke freely and openly, exemplifying dynamism and energy as respondents reacted to the contributions of others (Louw, 1993). In addition the focus groups made it possible for participants to explore different points of view and formulate and consider their own ideas and understanding (Louw, 1993).

Different techniques such as clarification, paraphrasing, summarising, probing and minimal verbal including non-verbal responses were used to *mine*, *uncover*, and *extract* existing knowledge (Gibson-Graham, 1994). Focus group interviews of 30 to 45 minute duration were recorded and transcribed verbatim, thus enhancing the validity by providing accurate and complete records of each session. Thereafter themes and categories were obtained to initiate discussion in relation to research questions. A research diary and recording was the tool the researcher used to record observations and experiences in the data collection process (Morse & Field, 1996:91).

The advantages of using focus group interviews in this study, according to the Tutorial letter (103/2002:17), were the following:

- The focus group discussion was conducted as an open conversation in which each participant was free to participate actively. The fact that the researcher was actively involved in guiding and interacting with PALC learners made them feel at home and they were encouraged to display behaviour and attitudes they might not have displayed during individual interviews.
- The groups engaged in the discussion were homogeneous groups of PALC learners and were able to focus their discussion on the given topics.
- The actual interview focused on the subjective experience of the people who had been exposed to the situation. In this case, the participants were engaged in the situation (PALCs).

1.7.1.2 Individual interviews

De Vos et al. (2005:298) define interviews as social interaction in which meaning is necessarily negotiated between a number of selves. Standardised open-ended interviews ensure sufficient collection of information while they permit participants freedom of response and description to illustrate concepts, thus creating meanings that ostensibly reside within participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995:3). This type of interview was used in order to understand the central themes of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Kvale, 1996:174). PALC learners were interviewed in the three centres. Interaction between participants and me was accomplished through simple comprehensible language. A recorder assisted with the recording of the data and with focusing on the meanings of words for interpretation when the data was analysed (Weiss, 1998:154). Best and Kahn (1989:201) maintain that interviews are often superior to other data gathering devices that are used because interviews can be used to gather data that is directly focused on the research objectives.

The advantages of open-ended interviews in this study, according to Henning (2004:57), are the following:

- Interviewers can probe into more depth to gain a clearer understanding of the phenomenon under discussion.
- The limits of research participants can be tested.
- Cooperation is being promoted while rapport is established.
- Focus is maintained to avoid losing direction on the purpose of the research.
- Interviews are flexible.
- They can result in answers that are not expected and that may facilitate an unexpected relationship.

1.7.1.3 Participant observation

Henning (2004:85) asserts that direct observation means that the observer performs some of the everyday actions on site while observing what participants do and say. The researcher becomes part of the action for some time in order to gather as much information as she can. Participant observation in the three PALCs provided me as the researcher with rich data on how adult learners experience learning in their day-to-day attendance at the three centres. Day-to-day operations of the three PALCs were observed. Observation was allocated only one day per centre. By engaging in participant observation I obtained first-hand data on how learners cope in attending PALC classes. I observed how teachers apply control measures for learner

attendance, how they control classroom management, the relevancy of learning, teaching and support material. Learning versus working conditions at PALCs was also observed. Participant observation assisted me in seeing whether there are measures taken or used by teachers that can assist adult learners as they attend.

1.7.1.4 Recording of information

Interactions with participants were voice-recorded when engaging in focus group interviews and individual group discussions (Patterson, 2008; Woodhead & Moss, 2007). The recording of conversations afforded me the opportunity to refer to their notes during data analysis and interpretation (Patterson, 2008; Woodhead & Moss, 2007). Verbatim accounts of conversations and direct quotations from documents were captured in the research that enriched the depth and quality of the data collected.

1.7.2 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

There is no single method for the selection of research participants in qualitative research, but there is a relative consensus among qualitative researchers that participants should be selected in terms of the contribution that they would be able to make in terms of the research purpose (Grinnell, 1993:153; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:169). By implication research participants should be good informants, people with a good understanding of the culture being studied and with the ability to explain what is going on in their lives. The selection of participants in qualitative research is therefore not random but purposeful.

The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalise (Struwig & Stead, 2001:121). The three centres were used as centres where empirical data was collected. Adult learners who have first-hand, quality information on the experiences and perceptions of learning at PALCs were used as participants.

The AET Provincial Regulations (2006:5) confirm that twenty adult learners per level or class denote the existence of a centre. Each PALC has approximately 80 learners and eleven educators. Adult learners from the three PALCs who participated come from varied age groups, have varied years of experience as adult learners and comprised two Level 3 learners and two Level 4 learners from each PALC. All participants were females. There is an indication that women are more desperate for education than men; hence most PALCs consists of adult women.

The three PALCs were selected because they had been in service for a long time. Adult learners were varied regarding their years of experience attending PALCs. Learners' experiences and perceptions assisted me in focusing on the research questions. Participation in the study by each adult learner was voluntary. It was expected that all the identified and willing experienced learners of Levels 3 and 4 were included to participate in the focus-group interviews but only four were allowed. However, the follow-up individual interviews included four adult learners from each centre. According to Sarantakos (2000:156) qualitative research sampling is relatively limited, based on saturation and not representative. The profiles of adult learners interviewed in terms of age, experience, and levels have been captured in the table below:

Table 1.2: Profiles of participants

Centres	Ages	Experience at PALCs	Gender	Level
A	Between 45 - 50	3 - 4 Years	6 females	3 - 4
B	Between 43 - 50	3 - 4 Years	6 females	3 - 4
C	Between 40 - 50	3 - 4 Years	6 females	3 - 4

1.7.3 SELECTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The centre managers of three PALCs gave permission for conducting the research. Adult learners currently attending PALC classes at Centre A, B and C were identified and asked to be involved in the study. The reason of the study was explained to them via the letter of consent, with emphasis placed on confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation.

The participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and on their envisioned role. A consent form was given to the centre manager of Centre A, B and C PALCs and the participants respectively. In addition they were given a fair explanation about the procedures that would follow the discussion of the potential discomforts that they might expect to experience from the study, (particularly regarding disclosure during the focus-group interviews).

1.7.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The final stage of data reduction, presentation and interpretation is data analysis (Sarantakos, 2000:210). Qualitative data analysis is primarily a process of organising data into categories and thereby identifying different patterns and relationships among the categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:461). The main research question was posed at the beginning of the interviews and other questions followed according to the participants' answers (Weiss, 1998:83; Kincheloe & Tate, 2000:213). Data was collected and processed by forming meanings, themes, sub-themes and general descriptions of the experience analysed in the PALC context (De Vos, 2000:273).

1.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Lincoln and Guba (1985:290) warn that *the value of any inquiry depends on the extent to which the relationship between its 'central question' and outcomes promotes confidence in the 'truth' value of the data obtained and the credibility of the probe as such*. To ensure confidence, accuracy and truthfulness during the focus group discussions with the learners, I used a tape recorder as indicated in the data gathering instruments section above and all interviews were transcribed. It was my responsibility as the researcher to approach my endeavours reflexively, implying that I had to participate in self-reflection that could be carried out by keeping a self-reflective journal from the inception to the completion of the investigation.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.9.1 INFORMED CONSENT

At the onset of the research informed consent was gained regarding the participants' envisaged role, the procedures that could be followed, as well as a description of the benefits that they could expect from the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2010:51).

1.9.2 ACCESS TO USE PALCS

Access to use the PALCs for conducting the research was facilitated through the centre managers of each of the three PALCs as indicated above. The procedures of how the research process would be conducted were discussed with the centre manager, particularly in terms of gaining access to interview the learners and to use facilities such as the classrooms and staffroom of the centre. In order to gain acceptance by participants, I, the researcher, used data gathering methods and followed a process of research that enabled me to build trust with the participants slowly without intruding in their personal lives.

1.9.3 PROTECTION FROM HARM

In this research harm might entail harming the participants' development, loss of self-esteem and stress (Deiner & Crandall, 1978, in Bryman, 2001:479). To ensure that participants were protected from harm the research processes were discussed with the centre managers of the PALCs as well as with the participants prior to engaging in the research as a preventative measure. During the research process the participants were continually reminded that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time they wished to do so for any reason. This would ensure that their rights were protected at all times and that they remained participants voluntarily. I gave them my contact details as well as those of my supervisors in case they needed to alert anyone of any issues that might be of concern to them.

1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has some limitations that emerged from the research aims, research sample, research design and methodology. As such, the research findings and conclusions are unique. I tried to carry out the research on learners' experiences and perceptions to gain a broad view of their experiences. I sampled only three centres in one district without considering other districts in the province. Having more districts in the province would have made generalisation easy. I used only a qualitative research method. The addition of a quantitative method might have increased the chances of having more data but I decided to choose only a qualitative method because of time constraints.

1.11 SUMMARY

CHAPTER ONE introduces the topic of this investigation and the necessity of conducting this type of research. The experiences and perceptions of learners at PALCs with special reference to the Nkomazi East Circuit are highlighted and the importance of community education for the empowerment of adult learners is discussed. The focus of this study in terms of its background, its rationale, problem statement, research design and methodology, trustworthiness and ethical considerations is explored.

CHAPTER TWO is a literature review on PALCs. I attempt to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER THREE provides a detailed account of the research design and the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR presents findings from the data analysed and also a discussion of the data collected from documents.

CHAPTER FIVE summarises the findings, provide conclusions and recommendations for further study. The focus and procedures are outlined. The chapter ends with concluding comments.



Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 the introduction to the study is outlined. In this chapter I explore the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) and form a conceptual basis for this study by exploring the insights of the different writers with regard to education and literacy, education and the position of women in a pre-democratic era. South African Adult Education and Training is also discussed. Theoretical frameworks based on the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs with special reference to bio-ecological theory, phenomenological approach and asset-based approach are discussed.

2.2 EDUCATION AND LITERACY

The term *education* is derived from the Greek word *Edsouke* meaning to *appear or to become visible* (Griessel, Louw & Swart, 1993:1). It is a process that begins at home when adults guide their children. Although this kind of education forms only the basics in the life of a child, it is important because much of it contains the norms and values without which the child grows without direction. The home provides informal education that is directed towards the social, physical, spiritual, and emotional development of a child. As children grow older, certain relevant skills are demanded of them, which may not be able to be provided at their homes, and this is where formal education becomes a necessity. Formal education is the type of education that is structured and aims at guiding the child, systematically focusing on perceptual and mental abilities with the aim of leading the child to maturity and to self-realisation (Griessel et al., 1993:4). The school is where educative teaching takes place and skills that include reading, writing and numeracy are taught. The main task of education is to facilitate understanding, acceptance and the constitution of the world by means of orientation. This means that human beings who are in an ever-changing environment have to be guided in such a way that they do not only gain reading, writing and numeracy skills, but are also capable of facing the demands made on them by life. Education should lead people to discover their hidden talents, to be economically active in their communities and to be able to engage in the social and

political areas of their lives. This is supported by Strauss and Corbin (1998:2) who assert that modernisation, progress and economic rationality are social consequences that are assumed to follow from education.

If people are developed holistically, education will succeed in providing them with a balanced personality, which shows inner stability and steadfastness. Education provides basic knowledge and the acquisition of capabilities that enable one to make one's own decisions. There are people who have not had the chance of receiving this type of education; there are also those who went to school but received such poor schooling that they have virtually no reading skills and lapse into illiteracy. Technological advances place high demands on individuals to engage in lifelong learning.

The challenges indicated above require an education system that can embrace all people, regardless of age, colour, race or gender. It is through PALCs that people who were excluded from formal schooling can enter into the education system in order to develop competencies. Adult Education and Training (AET) is the kind of education that is formal but can be taught in a non-formal way in informal situations. Teaching can take place in mainstream schools in the afternoon. It can also take place in churches, prison cells, community halls and any other place deemed conducive to learning. The provision of AET ought to ensure that adults are empowered to become active participants in their communities. Education and the building of a literate society is not just a process of obtaining reading and writing skills. As asserted by Freire (1989:7), literacy should not be seen as merely a technical skill that needs to be acquired but as a compulsory foundation for cultural action to ensure freedom, a central aspect of what it means to be self; it should contribute to the liberation of one and to one's full development.

Functional literacy differs in every group or community. What is regarded as illiteracy in South Africa, for example, might differ from what is regarded as illiteracy in other countries of the world. In First World countries people may be regarded as illiterate because of a lack of skills that are needed to be able to compete with the ever-changing technology. South Africa, as a developing country with a high number of people who cannot read and write, regards such people as being illiterate.

Harley, Aitchison, Lyster and Land (1996:3) define *literacy* as an aspect that creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of society where man

lives. Literacy helps stimulate initiatives and man's participation in the creation of projects, and opens the way to the mastery of techniques and human actions. Illiterate people who discover their inability to engage with the written word often develop a negative attitude towards themselves; they begin to doubt their own intelligence, thus perceiving themselves as useless beings with no contribution to make in a family and community life. The poor, marginalised, unemployed and illiterate are the people who tend to live in other people's shadows, hampering development and creativity in their societies. Rogers (1994:35) holds the view that the illiterate are in a *culture of silence* from which becoming literate will release them.

Malicky, Katz, Norton and Norman (1997:1) argue that literacy involves understanding oneself within the socio-political context and engaging in the setting to promote change. Thus, one may say that people who are illiterate do not fit into society. Instead, they can be helped in such a way that they become aware of inequalities and contradictions in the economic and social structures, and then bring about positive changes and development. Literacy skills, therefore, form an important basic ingredient of education. It is an important tool to bring about change in the life of people, making them aware of their capabilities and how they can be socially and economically active in their communities.

2.3 EDUCATION AND THE POSITION OF ADULT WOMEN IN A PRE-DEMOCRATIC ERA

Women in South Africa in the pre-democratic era were marginalised and discriminated against due to their status of being female. It was mostly women from rural areas who were exploited. These women were expected to make their contribution to the tribal economy, while their husbands were migrant workers in urban areas. Poor women from remote rural areas, with no education, were to keep the subsistence economy functioning. Bhardwaj and Vijayakrishnan (1998:46) are of the view that women in rural areas with reduced access to educational facilities, and where poverty is rampant, are found to be much more disadvantaged than their city counterparts. These poor adult women who depend on subsistence farming had to starve in times of drought while their husbands who had the economic power, minded little about their families back home. Once men leave to seek employment in urban areas, some never return home (Barrett, Dawber, Klugman, Odery & Shindler, 1984:148). Most of the families in rural areas are female-headed and they are

poverty-stricken. Poverty may cause families to be unstable and may encourage women to marry at a young age.

Women were given scant attention as subjects for scholarly inquiry or were entirely ignored (Dekker, 1993:05); this ignorance led to the low status of women. In the absence of proper education that leads to no decent work, families were run on a very low income or with nothing at all. Their children received less parental care and they were undernourished. Hunger, poor nutrition, lack of clothing and overcrowded shacks were typical conditions for these women and their children. Women have been left behind for a long time due to patriarchy. These factors have had a marked impact on women.

From the earliest stages of their development, women have had no assertive person to identify with positively, except for their mothers who were also treated as second-hand citizens. This is asserted by Goosen and Klugman (1996:2) who state that *South African women's lives have been so influenced by race and class identity – powerful indicators of oppression, exploitation and deprivation – that is often difficult for us to separate out the effects of gender*. Women seem helpless because of their position in society. They have no one to represent their needs and interests in parliament. There used to be no policies to cater for their well-being. The long distances that children had to travel to school discouraged most girls from pursuing education. Most families could not guarantee the safety of their children, especially the girls. Furthermore, poor families could not afford to send girls to schools. The introduction of Bantu Education put pressure on Africans as they were expected to pay a higher proportion of the cost of educating their children than in the past (Omer-Cooper, 1994:169). Lack of education thus became a contributing factor in the powerlessness of women.

2.4 POVERTY AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF RURAL WOMEN

Lack of education has subjected rural women to poor socio-economic conditions. Poverty can be described as a situation in which people are ensnared in a social environment that is characterised by apathy, fatalism, lack of aspiration, exclusive concern with immediate satisfactions and recurrent ratification of delinquent behaviour (Gilbert & Gugler, 1997:118). In simple terms one can describe poverty as the lack of basic human needs such as food, housing, water, electricity, sanitation, employment, education and health facilities. Without these basic needs life is

unbearable and people often fail to achieve their aspirations. However, one cannot assume that absence of education is the root source of poverty or that poverty grounds illiteracy. But what is true is that the two cannot be divorced from each other; they go hand in hand, and the lack of one has an impact on the other.

Education may cause the poor to become more aware of their status and encourage them to try to better their way of living through all possible means they can think of. Most people who live in poverty are not even aware that they are impoverished because they have never known any other life than theirs. Their poverty is aggravated by the fact that, most often, poor people are far away from urban areas where life is quite different. They stay in rural areas or squatter camps, which are mostly remote, with minimal basic services. They live in self-centred societies.

Rural South African women depict *a culture of poverty*. The culture of poverty is worsened by the fact that some parts of society's organisation are based on the inequitable division of the necessities of life and other material means. Certain groups of people are advantaged while others are not. The centralisation of basic services, which favour whites and the black elite, has crippled poor rural women whose income, if any, is so low that they cannot put bread on the table. If ever black rural women were employed in the previous political dispensation, they were labourers or domestic workers. Most of them were exploited because if one considers their typical day at work and their salaries, there is no balance. Unemployment and low paying jobs remain a challenge for rural South African women. When there is no employment, there is no money for the family to survive and this invariably leads to poverty.

Working on farms is another alternative means of employment for South African women despite the fact that farm workers are the most exploited workers in the South African labour force. Despite the appalling conditions on farms, most rural women think that any kind of job is better than nothing at all. Farm life has worsened the social conditions of women because in most cases they are not conducive to human life; for example, there are often no toilets, no clean water, clinics or schools for their children, and housing conditions are unhealthy. These conditions have made women vulnerable to diseases such as cholera, HIV/AIDS and many more. Poverty leads to poor health conditions. Poor people cannot meet the economic costs of sicknesses; hence, poor rural women are vulnerable to hardships, malnutrition, high

birth and death rates. Giddens (2001:499) argues that a high level of illiteracy is linked to poverty and ill health; infant mortality and high fertility support this opinion.

Rural health services, if present, are less effective than in urban areas. Unhealthy conditions make women vulnerable to deprivation. In these circumstances women become poorer and weaker, which leads to a relatively low level of drive, diffused personality structure, social backwardness and a feeling of uneasiness in society. Lack of education and employment could lead to a lack of logical reasoning among rural women as many of the illiterate women are ignorant of HIV/AIDS and practise unsafe sex. The fact that they are illiterate withholds them from engaging in open discussion of health-related matters that affect them and their families. Literacy will empower them to read more about diseases; will enable them to feel free to engage in discussions at various forums organised by the municipalities and communities. It can also make them aware of the consequences of their actions (Shilubane, 2007:41). *Drought also increases poverty, more especially in rural areas because these families depend on the produce of the land. The high illiteracy rate among rural women causes the lack of agriculture skills, which are skills that could help maximize their production. The poor rural women have no alternative if rain does not fall, except to live and die in poverty.* Democracy cannot survive when the masses live in poverty (Pampallis & Motala, 2001:17)

2.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHANGE AND THE NEED FOR A LITERATE FEMALE POPULATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since the 1990s South Africa has been faced with make or break challenges, not only in the political arena but also in several other areas, including education and health. South Africans have to strengthen the four foundations for success, which according to Lessing (1994:3), are:

- a growing economy that provides opportunities for all people;
- an active education system that helps and develops all individuals;
- communities that are physically and psychologically healthy;
- a feasible political arena.

The country's main concern should be to provide an effective education system that will serve and develop its citizens, especially women, as they have been left behind for a long time. Culture does not remain static; as society changes, culture also changes, leading to a new way of looking at life. The new Government, with its

policies to address the gender inequalities through affirmative action, has changed the role of women where we now see women in paid employment and having a new role. There is a shift in the lives of women from powerlessness, childbearing and rearing individuals to becoming economically active people.

Women's lives are not situated solely within the private sphere but women have to engage in government and non-government organisations. Dekker (1993:6) are of the opinion that gender equality has been aligned to human rights and bolstered by specific legislation through women organisations. Women are now able to place their issues on national political agendas. The Government is fighting for women's rights and equality. However, women in the remote rural areas can hardly see any change in the country. *Their illiteracy ... makes them feel powerless with no voice. Their lives are still imprisoned in their families. Adult education can be used to play a vital role in unleashing the potential of those who are poor, unemployed rural women whose situation, despite the changes from apartheid to a democratic government still remains deprived, oppressive and negative* (Le Roux, 1997:45).

Change in South African society necessitated a change in education. A democratic society has made it possible for all to have a culture of learning, as entrenched in the Freedom Charter to create a challenging education and training system that will warrant that all human resources and potential are developed. Urbanisation has also led to the demand for a literate population. Women, whose mobility was restricted by influx control during the apartheid era, are now free to visit their husbands in cities and seek employment. City life places demands on rural women. There is a high demand for literacy in urban areas. For example, to walk around town one needs to be able to read road and warning signs. Harley et al. (1996:49) assert that the motivation for women to access education is urbanisation where most rural people are moving from rural areas to urban areas to look for employment. This, according to them, places high demands on them because they have to cope with street signs, notices, notification forms and other print media.

The use of the Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) needs some literacy and skills; hence illiterate women see themselves as misfits in cities. This may encourage them to change their traditional way of life to a new economic role demanding functional literacy. The South African education system has responded to the above changes by providing education to all citizens with no regard to race, colour or gender and age throughout the country. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, section

29(1) declares that everyone has the right to basic education, together with adult basic education and to further education, which the State, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996:14).

The political change, employment, urbanization and the new role of South African women place a demand on the acquisition of literacy. We are presently living in a literate world; literacy has become a criterion for human existence. Even the lowest paid jobs, such as domestic work, general worker at government, cleaner in a supermarket needs education. There has been a shift in the economy. Women seek education because they want to move beyond their restrictive homes and achieve personal goals and regain their independence. They no longer want to seek assistance in writing curriculum vitae and reading letters, report cards for their kids, circulars at work, because they feel this is embarrassing and leads to a life without privacy (Shilubane, 2007:41).

Technology, which is growing fast in South Africa, and the use of mobile phones may influence women to be functionally literate. To perform daily transactions at banks, the post office and other shops requires literacy skills. The demands made by technology are emphasised by Kell (2004:28) who point out that humans are functioning in a world that is characterised by objects in motion, ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technology and techniques that imply a world of flow. The mothers as the first teachers of their children at home will excel in this role if they are educated. Children become motivated if they see their parents interested in learning. In this way, they will be cultivating a culture of learning.

2.6 LITERACY, EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The family is regarded as the most important component in human life. It is here where values, norms and standards of expected behaviour are set. A happy, orderly, motivated family is likely to produce children who are self-confident, full of courage, initiators and willing to reach greater heights. The same applies to a family with literate mothers; they can provide good hygiene for children by reducing the contamination of food with germs and other diseases such as cholera, which are a threat to human life. Literate mothers will be able to participate in their children's education. Freire (1989:viii) points out that literacy must relate directly to life.

The ability to provide a firm and literate environment at home provides a secure environment, full of love. This statement indicates that children who grow up in a literate environment, full of love, care and happiness are at an advantage by the time they are enrolled at school. Literate mothers are able to space their children's births and provide good nutrition for their children. Spaced births enable mothers to recuperate after giving birth and to nurture their children. The mothers' educational experience and family economic standing are the two most important predictors of a child's success in school (Sondra & Hayes, 1996:6).

According to Malicky et al. (1997:5), to empower is to enable those who have been silenced not to speak, to enable the self-affirming manifestation of experiences mediated by one's history, language and traditions, and to permit those who have been relegated economically and culturally to claim in both respects a status as full partaking members of a community. Literacy will help women to discover their hidden potential, to eliminate the elements that were responsible for their powerlessness. An increase in the ability to read and write makes women develop pride and sense of belonging to the rapidly changing environment of literates. Empowered women will have a voice against sexual harassment, rape, and unpaid labour and become conscious of their rights. The provision of adult education in general and literacy in particular can empower women, mostly those in rural areas, where men still hold the traditional view to be assertive and more confident in trying to solve problems that concern them and their families.

The attendance of adult classes may enable women to break away from their traditional role and meet with others to share ideas. In this way they will be active in their communities and be able to engage themselves in community development programmes to uplift their standard of living. It is true that literacy may lead to development and higher economic growth. However, one must be aware of the fact that those women who are in a culture of poverty, isolated from all reconstruction and development strategies, can retard development if they are not taken on board. This may cause yet another poor illiterate generation.

Children of the poor, staying in informal settlements, may resort to crime because of a lack of skills. This does not mean that children in squatter camps are less intelligent. They may be intelligent but the problem is that if they do not go to school where their intelligence is directed, they may become delinquents. A country that has a high crime rate does not attract tourists and investors who bring money into it. It is

therefore essential that literacy programmes are planned and developed in such a way that they reach those in need. The role of education should be to improve the position, role and status of women so that they have the freedom of making good choices for themselves, and become responsible. According to Lombard (1992:425), the empowerment of women can be achieved by the following:

- Promoting literacy among women.
- Developing skills among women.
- Making women aware of the role that they themselves can play in the acquisition of skills.
- Promoting the role of women in family, marriage and community life.

The above-mentioned facts may surely lead to the empowerment of women. Women cannot be empowered without education and training. Women need to be educated so that they become empowered.

2.7 SOUTH AFRICAN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Since 1994, ABET has stayed a fundamental human right. Adults who have missed education can only be reached through the provision of ABET. The ABET Act No. 52 of 2000 conceptualises Adult Basic Education and Training as subsuming literacy, post-literacy and lifelong learning. Basic Adult Education and Training is intended to develop literacy by empowering individuals and groups to become generally efficient in their own societies; providing skills development and training with the goal of helping adult learners attain economic functionality to promote income generation and higher productivity as well as foster a culture of lifelong learning and continuous growth (Department of Education, 2000). *Adult Education and Training forms the basis of lifelong learning and it serves as an important tool in the process of social revolution and a base for economic growth* (Department of Education, 1997:9). Women with special needs and the previously disadvantaged can now register at PALCs for teaching and learning. PALCs classes aid them to develop their full potential and to be involved in opportunities for further education and training, should they wish to do so. Adult learners have this opportunity to utilise these fully, irrespective of challenges they experience while they are attending PALCs.

While South Africa was not part of the initial 1990 Jomtien World Education Forum Conference held in Thailand on Education for All (EFA) as a result of international isolation, the education policy and programmes developed since the start of the

democratic transformation show alignment with the EFA goals and priorities. After the 1994 democratic elections *South Africa embraced and expressed a commitment to the EFA goals* and participated in monitoring EFA implementation and consequently submitted the status report for 2000 and 2002. The 2002 Status Report on EFA indicates that South Africa does not have a separate EFA plan, instead its *education reform initiatives were integrated into national strategic plans, policies and programmes for education* (Department of Education, 2002:4). The report states that *monitoring and evaluation of EFA goals were carried out, using information collected within the education system itself, information and data mainly from Statistics South Africa and supplementary information from other research and statistical agencies*. According to the report, adult education and training comprises the following:

- Adult Education and Training, *which is equivalent to education activity at National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 1, which is a constitutional right in South Africa*.
- Adult Education and Training, which may be NQF Level 2 to 4 and represents activity in the FET band of education and training.
- *Literacy initiatives that enable participation in AET NQF Level 1 activities as they increase the number of people with basic education in a society and the average number of years of education and training in the population* (DoE 2002:45). PALC learners fall under this category and all their experiences and perceptions are encapsulated in AET NQF Level 1 which is Level 1 to 4 (see page 2, Table 1.1).

The report underscores *the provision of constitutionally mandated AET Level 1 qualifications by all in the population who have not completed at least nine years of schooling, as well as the involvement in ABET of those who have had no formal school* (Department of Education, 2002:45). In 2002 the goals for EFA with regard to ABET in South Africa were about providing the necessary infrastructure that will allow adult learners to participate in lifelong learning. The other goal was to prioritise the development of accredited ABET Level 4 programmes and to mobilise significant non-public resources in the delivery of these programmes in PALCs, businesses and communities.

One of the key goals for ABET, particularly with regard to adult literacy, is in increasing literacy rates among close to seven million adults aged 20 years or more who have not completed the seven grades of primary education. The target of this goal is to halve the illiteracy rate by attaining an average increase in the number of

people within the ages of 16 and above who are functionally literate by just under 470 000 annually from 1996. The 2002 Status Report was positive that South Africa was on track towards realising the literacy targets as long as the number of learners advancing from Grade 9 remained at levels above 470 000 per year. This, according to the report, would enable the EFA goals to be achieved before 2015 for AET.

However, most PALC learners do not complete AET Level 4 because of their commitment to other outside programmes besides their school work. The focus of the campaign is on recruiting and training learners and volunteer teachers, as AET teachers are moving swiftly to mainstream schools, leaving learners without teachers. If adult learners are without the teacher in front of them they drop out of the system and tackle other community projects for which they are paid. The campaign also focuses on developing language-relevant materials in all curriculum areas as well as developing a management system for literacy programme delivery to ensure sustained quality of delivery, freely available resource material and appropriate adult learner assessment and teacher support material. This, together with the training of AET officials and the provision of Adult Learning and Teaching Support Materials, are the interventions that are supposed to facilitate the attainment of the EFA targets in South Africa by 2015.

Therefore, what is indicated as conditions for success in achieving EFA targets in South Africa depend largely on external and systemic factors. However, what affects learner retention rates in AET programmes is a combination of internal and external factors. This suggests that the internal micro aspects existing within individual PALC learners are not taken into consideration at the level of policy planning. Therefore end-user perspectives are not fully incorporated into a strategy to implement EFA effectively within communities. The experiences and perceptions of PALC learners are not visible enough to be known by decision makers so that they can be considered as a way to improve the AET sector in South Africa. Moreover, once again the focus is on gaps rather than on assets.

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review on experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs indicates that the experiences of learners can be regarded from an array of viewpoints. Any study on PALCs should be responsive to the well-being of the learning atmosphere, with the aim of identifying areas to be improved. Based on

PALC effectiveness research, the healthiness of any learning environment is determined by whether the centre is effective or not in terms of its learners.

In this study I used three theoretical frameworks to analyse the data. The first draws on the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, in Swart & Pettipher 2005:13) in which he uses the bio-ecological model to explain development in the context of the system of relationships that makes up a learner's environment. The bio-ecological theory is based on the interdependence and relationships between different organisms and their physical environment. These relationships are seen to be whole. The whole is as important as another in nourishing the cycles of birth and death or rejuvenation and decay, which together guarantee the survival of the whole system. It is a version of systems theory concerning complex influences and interactions amid individuals and contexts obvious in education, PALCs and classrooms.

2.8.1 THE BIO-ECOLOGICAL THEORY

This research project adopted Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory. According to Stokols (1995:287) a major strength of ecological theories is that they integrate strategies of behavioural change and environmental enhancement within a broad system-theoretical framework. A key feature of bio-ecological models is that they incorporate two or more analytical levels; for example personal, organisational and society, and permits researchers to observe both individual and aggregate displays of learning problems and influences of community interventions (Stokols 1995:287).

The bio-ecological model has the following principles (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:13):

- Development occurs in increasingly complex reciprocal interactions (bi-directional influences) between systems (micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system and chrono-system) (see Figure 2.1).
- Development is a product of the characteristics of a person, that is, their biological make-up, the environment and the nature of the outcome you are examining.
- Proximal factors (factors that are much closer to the person such as his immediate family and family environment) are more influential than distant influences.

Bronfenbrenner identified five systems that interact and have an impact on individuals and within which the individual is embedded (Swart & Pettipher 2005:10-11).

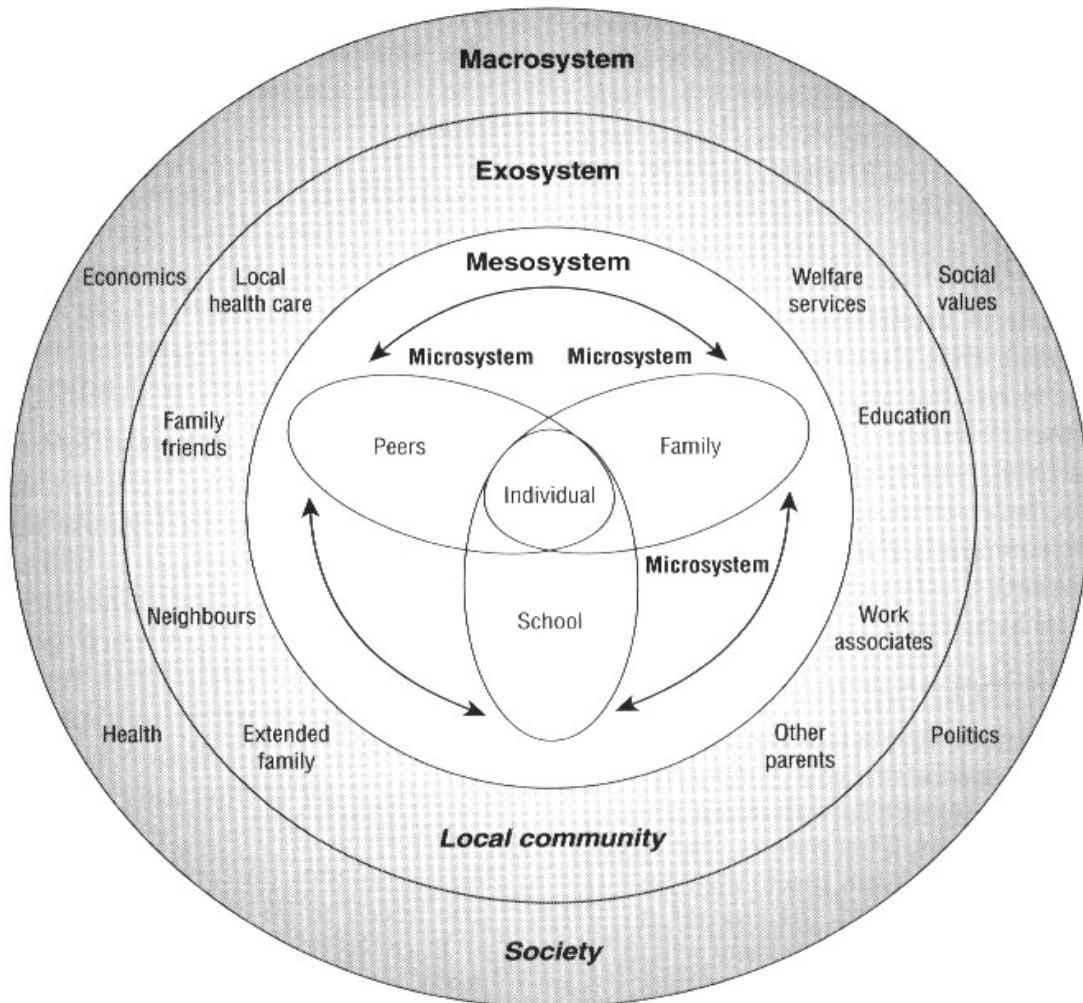


Figure 2.1: The Bio-Ecological Model Layout (adapted from Swart & Pettipher 2005:11)

Micro-system

This is an arrangement of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face location with particular physical, social and symbolic structures that invite, permit or inhibit engagement in continued, progressively more complex interaction with an activity in the close environment, such as family, school, peer group and workplace. It is an environment (Jansnoski & Schwartz, 1985:437) in which the developing person employs a good deal of time fetching in activities and interactions. The micro-system in this study focuses on experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs, such as parents

raising children at home, being responsible for household chores, adults who are not used to learning and whose previous knowledge is very limited, committed to work, have to be engaged in community ceremonies and their immediate environment that includes family, school, indigenous neighbourhood or community institutions such as the school, religious organisations as well as the precise culture within which the family associates (Huitt, 2009:4).

■ **Meso-system**

The system includes the connections and progressions taking place between two or more sites containing the developing person, such as relations between home and centre, centre and workplace. In this study the meso-system (which is a set of micro-systems associated with one another) refers to the relationship between adult learners' PALC, workplace, mother-child interactions, educators, churches and social institutions involved in activities such as education (Huitt, 2009:5).

■ **Exo-system:**

This links the micro-systems with one system that the individual does not directly function in but has an impact on them. An example would be the PALC learners' support system in the neighbourhood, interactions with the PALC, church or extended family members.

■ **Macro-system**

The macro-system consists of the all-embracing pattern with particular position to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards and life course options that are entrenched in each of these broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:40). In this study a macro-system engulfs social interactions in the alteration of adult learner at PALCs in relation to their thoughts, attitudes and behaviour in response to the actions and feelings of the others. Examples are culture, values, customs, and laws.

■ **Chrono-system**

This encompasses changes in the life course in family arrangement, socio-economic status, employment, place of residence or degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life (Bronfenbrenner 1994:40). For the purpose of this study a chrono-system refers to the statement that environmental settings have multiple physical, social and cultural dimensions that can influence a variety of learning outcomes,

including physical learning status, developmental maturation, emotional well-being and social cohesion (Stokols, 1995:285).

Systems are patterns of organisation whose individuality becomes more than simply the sum of their parts. Each system functions in stable and foreseeable ways that contribute to its steadiness, yet retains the possibility of flexibility and change. Human society, the individual person, or the situation is theorised as a system of different unified and dependent levels in constant dynamic interaction, so that change at one level has an unavoidable, although not necessarily foreseeable effect on the levels. As a result change is implicit not as a linear causality but rather as spherical and involving the interrelatedness of all aspects of a situation – there is an acknowledgment and acceptance of some degree of unpredictability (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:12).

In applying this model to the experiences and perceptions of learners, it becomes pertinent that experiences of adult learners should be understood as a result of numerous factors interacting, including control measures for learner attendance, classroom management, relevancy of teaching and learning support material and learning versus working conditions. Therefore, addressing the issues around learners' experiences and perceptions cannot be done by focusing on the environment only, as policy studies on EFA have been doing. It must also involve studying the elements within the individual learner at a PALC. This perspective connects individual psychological development to social context and the system within it.

In this regard there are experiences that learners are faced with at PALCs. According to the bio-psychosocial model, the Department of Education might focus on these experiences as part of the social context. In addressing the experiences and perceptions of adult learners holistically, one needs to consider their control measures, physical resources, communicative skills, psychological (emotional) as well as the social aspects (Simeonsson & Rosenthal, 2001:9). A factor that plays a role in how adult learners acquire learning has to do with their own personal make-up and how they perceive themselves as they attend their PALCs.

Thus, the bio-ecological perspective enables one to link this understanding of how PALCs form part of the macro-system, which involves dominant social structures as well as beliefs and values of how individual factors within the learner create a

propensity to succeed in spite of the social context. To do this, I had to draw on the second part of the theoretical framework to discuss the phenomenological approach to the self-concept, drawing on the work of Carl Rogers (1951, 1959). This part of the discussion provides the theoretical underpinnings of the self-concept construct and how it has developed over time. This discussion also sharpens the conceptual framework for this study in that it narrows the macro-system to focus on the micro-system by highlighting a possible way of understanding how self-concept as a factor is linked to experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs.

2.8.2 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE SELF-CONCEPT

The phenomenological approach to humanities is a viewpoint that attempts to understand man through the imprints of those that are being observed and not through the eyes of the observer. It seeks to understand how the individual views himself; how his needs per time, feelings, values, beliefs about a situation and unique insight of his environment encourage him to behave as he does (Burns, 1982:19). In this sense, behaviour is seen as a function of the personal meanings attached to an individual's perception of past and contemporaneous experiences and perceptions.

Perception is a central concept in phenomenology and refers to the processes of selecting, organising and interpreting material into a coherent construction of the psychological environment. We are therefore concerned with the personal meanings that exist for any person at any instant and which determine his behaviour. According to Burns (1982:20), Carl Rogers appropriated phenomenology, with the perceived self-concept as its core, to underpin his developing client-centred approach to psychotherapy. These are the basic premises of the phenomenological approach as developed by Rogers:

- Behaviour is a result of one's perceptions.
- These perceptions are phenomenological and are not real.
- Perceptions most importantly have to be related to the existing organisation of the field, the pivotal point of which is the self-concept.
- The self-concept is both a perception and a concept round which collected values are interjected from the cultural pattern.
- Behaviour is then controlled by the self-concept.
- The self-concept is a result of the relationship of the individual per time and space that also determines the behaviour in a consistent manner.

- Defence strategies are used to prevent incompatibilities occurring between experience and the cognised self-concept.
- There is only one basic drive, that of self-actualisation.

However, Burns (1982:30) cautions that self-concept development is fraught with problems due to the lack of agreement over definitions of the self-concept, inadequate research techniques that are hard to validate and the weakness of self-report techniques that require the subject to respond truthfully and willingly. Self-concept measurement, theory, research and application have historically emphasised a largely theoretical, global component of self-concept and reviewers have discovered the lack of theoretical models or defining and interpreting the construct.

Shavelson and Bolus (1982:3) broadly define self-concept as how one perceives oneself. These perceptions are formed through one's experience with and explanations of one's environment and are predisposed especially by underpinnings, evaluations by weighty others, and one's ascriptions for one's own behaviour (Shavelson & Bolus 1982:3).

Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) went further to define the construct with seven critical features:

- (a) It is prepared or designed, in that people categorise the vast amount of information they have about themselves and narrate the categories to one another.
- (b) It is multi-dimensional, and the particular sides mirror the category system adopted by a specific individual and or shared by a group.
- (c) It is ordered, with sensitivities of behaviour at the base moving to inferences about self in sub-areas, then to insinuations about self in academic and non-academic terms, and then insinuations about self in general.
- (d) General self-concept is steady, but as one slopes self-concept becomes increasingly condition-specific and as a consequence less stable.
- (e) Self-concept becomes increasingly multi-faceted as the individual develops from infancy to adulthood.
- (f) It has both an expressive and an evaluative dimension so that individuals may describe themselves (e.g. I am glad) and evaluate themselves (e.g. I am performing very well).
- (g) It can be distinguished from other concepts such as academic achievement (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982:3).

Of particular interest here is how the academic self-concept influences experiences and perceptions of adult learners, specifically at PALCs. The goal here is not to study the theory; instead, through extrapolation from research findings, the researcher seeks to provide a framework for understanding how, by enhancing the self-concept of adult learners, one can add value to their experiences and perceptions at PALCs. This understanding also provides a platform to effect personal agency in adult learners for them to determine, through asset-mapping and mobilisation, factors within their learning environment that could aid their acquisition of learning by enhancing their self-concept. This study is oriented more towards applying the theory of Shavelson and Bolus (1982:3) and expanding the scope of self-concept research to non-traditional learner groups like adult learners who are typically not included in research on self-concept.

My goal is to comprehend experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs in this study. During the process of learning at PALCs, one is concerned with how this perception enhances or undermines the learning process. The premise is that how one perceives PALC is a product of how one perceives oneself as a successful or unsuccessful adult learner. Therefore, depending on the adult learners' self-concept, experiences and perceptions can be viewed as a challenge or way to face the world with confidence. The drive of this study is to have an understanding of what within the adult learners' environment serves as assets that enable them to develop a positive self-concept in relation to their academic endeavours to acquire learning. This links to the third part of the theoretical framework.

2.8.3 THE ASSET-BASED APPROACH

In studying the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs using the asset-based approach I made selections from all angles to undertake this challenge from the angle of analysing assets within the individual learners as part of their bio-ecological system. For this approach it is evident that every programme is important in our communities. PALCs are present in our communities to uplift the standard of adult learners so that they can become independent in whatever situation. If one is educated, one is independent in one way or another. One can read on one's own, calculate money, do shopping, and operate machines on one's own. There is freedom in education; hence these adult learners need education. For PALCs to be seen and be recognised in the community, communities need to see progress and change in those adult learners who participate in the programme.

In this section I have discussed the asset-based approach as a methodological strategy for this study. The purpose of this discussion is to profile a framework that has informed my data gathering process by drawing on literature on the subject.

2.8.3.1 A framework for mapping assets

In their study exploring a rural community's strategy for career education, Ebersöhn and Mbetse (2003) aimed to expand on the existing career theory models of intervention using an asset-based approach. Using a qualitative case study, stakeholders' suggestions of community-based resources, career education skills training and networking are discussed. The study concluded that parallels exist between an asset-based approach and indigenous knowledge systems with regard to career education. In contrast, this study does not focus specifically on experiences and perceptions of learners at PALCs and enhancing the academic self-concept of adult learners. However, it serves to illustrate how the asset-based approach can be utilised to empower communities initially deemed *lacking* and *poor* in order to discover and unleash their hidden social capital. The case study is situated within a rural community in Mpumalanga Province. Its population exceeds 850 000 with a high incidence of poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and orphans (Health Systems Development Unit, 2000, in Ebersöhn & Mbetse, 2003:9). Its relevance to this study is its demonstration of a research methodology aimed at developing a new narrative within impoverished and disenfranchised communities that facilitates a solution-focused approach to research. The study made use of focus group interviews in generating new ideas, strategies and hypotheses. The role of the researcher became that of helping the community to realise, appreciate and utilise their talent and assets and to supply information not readily available, establish social support and networks and forge linkages to access funding to enable communities.

Scales and Leffert (1999) profiled developmental assets that they define as the building blocks that all youth need to be healthy, caring, principled and productive. The original framework identified and measured 30 assets using more than 500 000 Grade 6 to 12 learners in more than 600 communities across the United States (Scales & Leffert, 1999:5). This framework was subsequently reduced to 40 asset structures grouped into eight categories representing broad domains of influence in young people's lives: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time representing external assets (relationships and opportunities that adults provide); commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity are internal assets (competencies and values that youth develop

internally that help them become self-regulating adults). This framework provides a broad methodology for categorising developmental assets. The table below summarises these:

Table 2.1: The eight categories of developmental assets

EXTERNAL ASSETS	
Support	These denote the ways in which individuals are loved, admitted and accepted. The support could come from various settings outside the family unit, in school, or religious congregations, being among extended family, or within other areas of socialisation.
Empowerment	Being able to feel safe and valued, the community's perception of adult learners and the chances they have to donate to society in a significant way.
Boundaries and expectations	Strong and reliable boundaries match support and empowerment. These may be known in the family, school and the community. They deliver a set of reliable messages about suitable behaviour and prospects across learning contexts.
Constructive use of time	Availability of activities that stimulate positive growth and contribute to the development of other assets.
INTERNAL ASSETS	
Commitment to learning	Developing an internal intellectual curiosity and the skills to gain new knowledge. This is linked to how motivated learners are to achieve and whether they express their curiosity and work ethic in homework and reading for fun.
Positive values	Positive values are important <i>internal compasses</i> that guide learners' priorities and choices.
Social competence	These are personal and interpersonal skills learners need to negotiate choices, options and relationships. These skills also lay the foundation for independence and competence.
Positive identity	Learners' views of themselves – their own sense of agency, purpose, worth and promise. This determines the learners' sense of powerlessness, initiative and direction.

(Adapted from Scales & Leffert 1999, pp. 5-6. Developmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development)

Scales and Leffert (1999:7) posit that research has shown that the more of these assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in risky behaviour (such as using alcohol or other drugs), and the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviours (such as succeeding in school or helping others).

2.9 SUMMARY

In Chapter 2 previously conducted studies and literature that are relevant to the researchers' study are discussed. The relationship between education and literacy, education and the position of adult women in a pre-democratic era, poverty and empowerment of rural women has been discussed.

The case of South African Adult Education and Training has also been explored. I have discussed how self-concept mediates the attainment of PALCs and adult learning outcomes within individual end-users. This section serves to indicate the needs-based approach undertaken by studies in this field, thus positioning my study and defining its rationale and contribution to the body of knowledge within this domain. This chapter also elaborates on the three conceptual arguments serving as the analytic and data collection framework for my study. In essence, it positions adult learners as co-constructors of their own learning and users of PALCs. Finally the chapter serves to define the key concepts in my study, namely academic self-concept, adult learners and an asset-based approach.

In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed account of the design and methodology approaches to the study by outlining the research approach that includes the selection of participants, research instruments, data collection, data preparation and data analysis, reliability and the validity of research.



Chapter 3

Research Method and Research Design

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 underscores the fact gained from the literature presented that illiteracy causes adult women to be voiceless and non-contributors to the reconstruction, development and social transformation of their communities and South Africa as a whole. The case of South African Adult Education and Training is explored and the three conceptual frameworks for data collection in this study are discussed. In this chapter I explain the design and methods employed in conducting this study in order to find answers to the research question. According to Cohen and Manion (1994) the purpose of any research design and methodology is to set out clearly all the procedures used in the study, with the aim of showing how findings have been arrived at and also ensuring that the procedures are clearly stated to allow for testing the validity of the results. This chapter explains the design and approach to the study by outlining the study's research approach, research methodology, research design, the selection of participants, research instruments, data collection, reliability and validity, credibility, authenticity, ethical considerations and data analysis.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The type of study undertaken here can be broadly described as qualitative and it falls within the domain of interpretive research.

Interpretivist research is categorised by a concern for individuals and its central endeavour is to comprehend the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000:22). This study is concerned with individual participants, their experiences and perceptions and the meanings they assign to their experience when acquiring learning as adults. Thus the aim of this study is to comprehend the subjective world of the end-users' experience. Interpretivist research determines how individuals interpret or give meaning to the world around them. To maintain the truthfulness of the phenomenon being investigated, interpretivist research places its focus on getting inside the person to understand from within. In order to achieve this in the current study I chose both individual and focus group interviews as they enable

the researcher to hear the learners' voices and begin to understand their culture from inside perspectives (Cortazzi, 1993:1). A researcher then finds it easy to obtain the end-users' perspective on their experiences and perceptions of acquiring learning at PALCs and how, despite the challenges and barriers that are being faced, they are able to attain their goals of attending and learning at PALCs.

However, in interpretivism, my role is not to simply to lay open the assets existing in their eco-system; instead I aimed to determine how these are organised to gain insight into the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs and classify these interpretations that have been identified into what Bryman (2001:15) calls a social scientific frame.

As a researcher using the asset-based approach my role could be better defined as a catalyst for change, and one that enables research participants to unlock their human capital. This is because the role of the research participants is more active rather than passive; they become the experts of their own environment, and they are given space to air their viewpoints and exercise their power by mobilising their own assets and achieve change. Hence my theoretical frameworks of the bio-ecological model, academic self-concept, and asset-based approach drive a positive interpretation of education in spite of systemic challenges and personal barriers of adult learners.

I recognised that my interests as a researcher could be described as *emancipatory* according to Kincheloe (1991:177, in Cohen et al., 2000:29). Kincheloe (1991) argues that emancipatory interests are concerned with *praxis*, that is, action that is informed by reflection with the aim to emancipate. The twofold intentions of this interest are to expose the operation of power and to bring about social justice as domination and repression act to prevent the full existential realisation of individual and social freedoms (Habermas, 1979:14, in Cohen et al., 2000:29).

While I acknowledge this, interpretivism was still chosen for the study because firstly the goal of emancipating the participants lies beyond the scope of my study. In order to be able to lay claim to any form of emancipation on the part of the participants, I would not only have to use the research to develop an agenda for altering the situation of participants as suggested by Cohen et al. (2000:30) but would also have to evaluate the achievement of the situation in practice. Such an evaluation would allow me to reconstruct reality in order to determine how one could do things differently, a process feasible using ideology critique and action research

methodologies (Cohen et al., 2000:30). As argued by other scholars, such a link has to be proven empirically even if these methodologies are used, and this is not the purpose of my research. Hence I did not seek to measure the self-concept of the adult learners at the beginning and end of the study. I can therefore not attest to any change in or impact on their self-concept as a result of the asset-mapping and mobilisation exercise.

I also understand that my role as a researcher and those of the participants are limited, especially in terms of political power. I realised that it would be naïve to believe that this study would have a meaningful impact on the workings of the national education system. Interviews and observation methods have been used on a single setting of the research; hence they have a very little generalisable effect. According to Cohen et al. (2000:32), enabling participants to mobilise their assets would not have led to any real change of power and decision-making because the system-makers remain with this kind of power and control. I was merely hoping to heighten awareness in their perception and how they interpret their reality from an individual and personal level. Still, this created a step in the right direction because as part of the main study this research initiated the process of critical inquiry into how the AET system of adult learners at PALCs is being implemented and the kind of impact it is having. Therefore indirectly and ultimately through the main study it could be possible to challenge the status quo and drive meaningful change for these adult learners. However, within the current scope of this study, this is not yet possible.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Best and Kahn (1989:89) describe qualitative research as a method that describes events and persons scientifically without the use of numerical data. The qualitative method is more open and responsive to its subjects, and the use of this method leads to a better understanding of the research problem. Qualitative methodologies share the following three assumptions:

■ A holistic view

This means that by means of the qualitative methods one tries to understand the phenomenon in its entirety in a bid to understand the situation; the researcher is able to enter into the life-world experiences and perceptions of adult learners who are at PALCs to answer the research questions.

■ **An inductive approach**

Qualitative research starts with a specific observation and moves to the development of general patterns that emerge from the study. The specific observation in this study is that adult learners have a variety of systemic experiences and perceptions as mentioned in Chapter 2. The results of this research should therefore, hopefully, lead to the formulation of general patterns to indicate if PALCs do assist adult learners or not.

■ **Naturalistic inquiry**

Qualitative research aims at understanding phenomena in their naturally-occurring states. The researcher collects empirical data to gain an understanding of the subject matter at hand through entering the life-world of participants who have been purposively selected. Entering the life-world of participants requires the researcher to go to PALCs and conduct individual and focus group interviews.

The use of the qualitative research method in this study ensured that the collection of data was less subjective because of the open-ended nature of the questions. Data was collected directly from the participants through various data-gathering instruments, as is discussed in the following paragraph. The researcher intentionally entered the life world of participants with the aim of collecting the information on the experience and understanding of PALC learners, bearing in mind the following aims of the empirical research:

- To identify the educational learning experiences and perceptions of adult learners through the process of learning in PALCs.
- To understand why these learning experiences and perceptions exist among adult learners at PALCs.
- To identify various factors that influence the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs.

The use of individual and group interviews and observations to gather data enabled the researcher to interact with participants to gain their views on the experiences and perceptions they have with regard to the effectiveness of PALCs at Ehlanzeni District. Polkinghorne (2005:138) asserts that the primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and to clarify experiences and perceptions as lived and constituted in awareness.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Mouton (2001:55) defines a research design as a plan of how one plans to conduct the research. Merriam (2002:6) describes research design to be similar to an architectural blueprint. It is a plan that has to do with assembling, organising and integrating information, which results in a specific end-product.

Selecting a particular design is usually determined by how the problem to be researched is shaped, by the questions it raises, the amount of control desired by the researcher in the study and by the type of end-product that is being desired (Merriam 2002:9).

Qualitative research focuses on the collection and interpretation of what could be referred to as *soft data* – impressions, words, sentences, photographs, pictures and symbols (Neuman, 2000:122). The collection and analysis of soft data, according to Neuman (2000:122) require research strategies and techniques that differ from those used by researchers who focus on hard data-numbers. By implication research designs aimed at the collection and analysis of soft data differ from research designs aimed at the collection and analysis of hard data. Moreover, because qualitative research is usually interpretive or critical in nature, the strategies and tools used for data collection and analysis are those that enable the researcher to collect rich, verbal or visual data that can be deconstructed and reconstructed again and again, until as much of the meaning as is possible has been extracted from the sources concerned.

Given the need to deconstruct and reconstruct data continuously in qualitative research, qualitative researchers tend to follow a nonlinear research path, applying what Neuman (2000:121) calls

... 'logic in practice', examining 'cases' or 'phenomena' as they arise in the natural flow of social life, their naturalistic settings and presenting authentic interpretations that are sensitive to specific social-historical contexts (Neuman, 2000:122).

Ehlanzeni District has a total of 71 PALCs with 7 616 AET learners and 537 AET educators (EMIS Data on PALCs, 2012). The sites were chosen because there is a high level of illiteracy in the area of Nkomazi; most of the centres are in this part of the district. There are 34 PALCs in Nkomazi (Malelane sub-district). The sites represents a typical PALCs within the semi-rural, rural, urban and informal

settlements in Nkomazi East Circuit. It comprises adult learners from varied age groups. The three sites draw adult learners from Sibhejane, Block C and KaMaqhekeza. Secondly, they were selected because a number of interested adult learners are available in this area; and the three PALCs have been in service for a long time. These three PALCs are surrounded by a big plaza with a number of shops with a large population in the area. A number of adult learners have enrolled in these PALCs. Another reason for selecting the Nkomazi East Circuit PALCs is because it was convenient for me as the researcher. The site for the research was chosen for its proximity to where I stay and for easy accessibility.

3.5 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER AND THE PARTICIPANTS

I as the researcher adopted the role of the interviewer, observer and interpreter when conducting this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:435). *In qualitative research, the researcher becomes an integral part of the research process and has to develop an ethic of trustworthiness.* Qualitative research is, according to Havernkamp (2005:246), relational. This means that I established ethical principles and standards by forming a good relationship with participants. I had to build trust and rapport with participants by clearly outlining the purpose of the study and affording the participants an opportunity to pose questions if they wished to. I needed to collaborate with the participants not only to build trust among them but also to build confidence within them and trust in the process of asset-mapping. I scheduled observation and interview dates with the participants in advance so as not to disrupt their working programmes unnecessarily.

Ethical considerations such as consent, harm and privacy were adhered to by keeping the information collected from participants anonymous and confidential. I constituted a firm foundation by explaining the procedures to be followed and what the study dealt with so that respondents could participate knowing what was expected from them. In this case only adult learners would be informed about the planned research. Centre managers and teachers were not actively involved but they had a clear picture of what was going to happen at each centre. Hence they rescheduled some of their activities in order to accommodate the researcher and the research process.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:290) warn that *the value of any inquiry depends on the extent to which the relationship between its 'central question' and findings evokes*

assurance in the 'truth' value of the findings and the credibility of the inquiry as such. During the research process I dealt with biases. Researchers, as indicated by Morrow (2005:254), should be self-conscious, critical and participatory analysts in order to be trustworthy. Failure of trustworthiness can cause harm to the research. The researcher must guard against harm by shouldering the responsibility of promoting the participants' welfare. In this research, harm might entail contributing to the participants' loss of self-esteem and stress (Deiner & Crandall, 1978, in Bryman, 2001:479). To ensure that participants were protected from harm, the research process was discussed as a preventive measure with the centre managers of the PALCs as well as with the participants prior to engaging in the research. During the research process the participants were continually reminded of their right to withdraw from the study should they wish to do so for any reason. This ensured that their rights were protected at all times and that they remained participants voluntarily. I gave them my contact details as well as those of my supervisors in case they needed to alert anyone regarding any issue that might be of concern to them.

3.6 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Tuckman (1978:226) points out that the researcher has the role of defining a population and selecting a representative group from this population to serve as respondents. In this study I involved only the adult learners who are presently attending PALCs. Only adult women were participants. A rural area in one circuit, which is Nkomazi East within one sub-district (Malelane), was proposed. The adult learners are the ones who were deprived of education before 1994. Purposive sampling was used that enabled me to choose cases that abound in data for thorough investigation as suggested by Heppner (2004:177) who maintains that purposive sampling provides the researcher with copious information about issues of pivotal importance for the research. Of the total of six PALCs of Nkomazi East Circuit, three PALCs were purposefully selected for the research. It was expected that all the identified and willing adult learners would be included to participate in the focus group interviews, of which there would be four. However, the follow-up individual interviews included at least two adult learners, one adult from Level 3 and one from Level 4 from all three centres.

A letter was written to the Regional Director and the centre managers of the three PALCs where the study was conducted to ask for consent to conduct the research

(see Appendix A). This was done in order to prepare participants for the study and for them to set time aside.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

For the purpose of this study data was collected through interviews as described earlier. All the participants were adult learners who were involved at PALCs Level 3 to 4 at the three identified PALCs. Entry into PALCs was gained through permission granted by the District Director. A copy of this letter of permission was attached to letters of request addressed to the centre managers of PALCs. Two months before the data collection procedure, briefing sessions were undertaken with the centre managers and participating adult learners. These briefing sessions entailed informing teachers who were not actively involved in the research process of the nature of the research and my expectations for the data collection process. The scheduling of the dates and times and final arrangements for the data collection process was done by the centre managers. A single classroom with an accommodation capacity of six was used for both focus group and individual interviews.

Table 3.1: Data Collection Schedule

Name of PALC	Stage 1 Purpose of visit	Stage 2 Purpose of visit	Stage 3 Purpose of visit	Stage 4 Purpose of visit
CENTRE A	Date:23/04/12 Negotiating with the centre manager to ask learners to become research participants	Date:15/05/12 Date:18/06/12 Interviews with learners and initial observations.	Date: 23/07/12 Verification of interview transcripts	Date: 30/08/12 Disengagement from the research field
CENTRE B	Date:24/04/12 Negotiating with the centre manager to ask learners to become research participants	Date:16/05/12 Date:19/06/12 Interviews with learners and initial observations	Date: 24/07/12 Verification of interview transcripts	Date: 30/08/12 Disengagement from the research field
CENTRE C	Date:25/04/12 Negotiating with the centre manager to ask learners to become research participants	Date:17/05/12 Date:20/06/12 Interviews with learners and initial observations	Date: 25/07/12 Verification of interview transcripts	Date: 30/08/12 Disengagement from the research field

Collecting and recording data from adult learners at PALCs was a four-stage process (see Table 3.1). I as the researcher, after having obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, took the *first stage* towards data collection, namely to contact those centre managers of the identified PALCs for the research. Meeting schedules were arranged that would be amenable to them and feasible for me in terms of deadlines I had to meet. On the day of the meeting I was introduced to the adult learners (participants) and the purpose was indicated to the participants.

Two dates were set aside for the *second stage*. The first date of the second stage was to meet the participants, engage in initial observations and conduct the focus group interviews. The second stage took place in May and June over a period of two weeks when I mainly observed adult learners when coming to attend their classes and during teaching and learning periods. This involved observing cooperation, attendance, control, the availability of resources, staff behaviour and the orderliness of the environment. The second date of the second stage was for the researcher to carry out the interviews with the four adult learners from each of the three PALCs. I used multiple methods for collecting data that included observations and interviews with the key participants. I described the methods in detail and discussed the process followed in gathering data through each method.

The first source of data was focus group interviews. During the focus group interviews I had to cut papers with labelled numbers to be used for the selection of participants; six adult learners who picked the first six papers formed part of the focus-group interviews. Educators and the centre manager in each PALC were present mainly out of interest. I felt grateful for their presence and they were very helpful as interpreters and the adult learners felt free to be part of the interviews. I recorded the discussions with a video recorder. The video recorder was necessary so that I could later reflect on the recordings to study the non-verbal communication cues of the participants.

The last two steps on this stage comprised a process to challenge the participants to think about how they can mobilise their assets and identifying stakeholders who can assist in their endeavours. I found this process for asset-mapping and the developmental assets framework suggested by Scales and Leffert (1999:5) useful because they served the purpose of an interview protocol. This framework (see Table 2.1) enabled me to categorise the list of assets that participants had identified. It also

allowed me to probe into the different areas where unidentified assets could be hidden. It provided a clear guide of what I needed to cover and the process that I would follow in facilitating the focus group interviews.

The process suggested by Eloff (2003:28) provided flexibility for me to ask questions arising from the conversation that were not initially included in the framework. In essence, this developmental asset framework served as an interview protocol for me as the researcher, and the discussion became semi-structured in format. As Cohen et al. (2000:314) note, an interview protocol ensures that even when some questions arise from the conversation, by and large, all the questions should be asked and similar wording used from interviewee to interviewee. The level of flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews allows for questions that are not directly relevant to a specific interviewee to be reworded or limited during the process of the interview. As noted by Eloff (2003:28), the suggestion of steps does not in any way imply a linear recipe for success. Eloff (2003:22) recognises that the challenges of the context may have the effect of not being linear and in turn, allowing the flexibility and structure that would enable me to interact authentically with the participants without losing overall sense of direction. As mentioned already, one of the challenges that I faced with the focus group interview was that the participants were unsettled by the researcher's focus on the assets rather than on problems. I was grateful for the flexibility of this approach because it meant that I could focus on their problems as a foundation to help increase their awareness.

The fourth stage of the data collection process did not actually involve data collection. Rather it signalled my disengagement from the research field to focus attention solely on the reconstruction of adult learners' responses in the interviews and the construction of my own research story (Berg, 1998:153). My last visit was therefore devoted to thanking the participants for their participation, informing them what would happen next in my research journey and wishing them the best for the road ahead.

3.7.1 DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS

Typical of qualitative research I used a variety of techniques and strategies to collect and to obtain information about adult learners' experiences and perceptions at PALCs. Verbal information regarding the adult learners themselves and their experiences and perceptions at PALCs was collected by means of interviews while

contextual information was gleaned from my observations of the naturalistic settings of the PALCs.

The main purpose of qualitative research is to provide evidence to make evident the characteristics of an experience (Polkinghorne, 2005:141). A qualitative researcher has a role in choosing the data gathering technique that will provide qualitative data; raw data be in the form of descriptions that increase an understanding of human life as lived. The qualitative research method has the following three types of data collection strategy:

■ **Interviews**

These are either individual or focus group interviews, which are open-ended in nature; interviews produce first-hand accounts of the experience.

■ **Direct observation**

Henning (2004:85) asserts that direct observation means that the observer performs some of the everyday actions on site and observes what participants do and say. The researcher becomes part of the action for some time in order to gather as much information as she can.

■ **Documents**

Documents are written sources about an experience. Documents that are relevant to the research question can be of value to the study in question.

The type of data-gathering strategy that a researcher chooses depends on the study in question. I used a strategy that has enabled me to dig below the surface to bring up experiential accounts in order to provide qualitative data. Taking note of Merriam's (1994:70) observation that interviewing is probably the form of data collection most commonly used in qualitative studies in education, I decided to use individual and focus group interviews and participant observations as the primary data collection instruments. These strategies are the ones that are most likely to inform the researcher of the character of the experience being studied.

3.7.1.1 Focus group interviews

According to Mosia (2011) *focus group interviews are relevant to this research since the method builds on a group process as a technique, not only increasing validity of the initial interview findings, but also increasing the credibility of the entire study*

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:360). Participants in the focus group interviews produced more data and valuable insights into the research problem among themselves. This form of group interview provided a range of responses from the free expression of the participants' views. Sensitive issues and personal feelings were raised and controlled because of their confidential nature; however, other participants expressed themselves freely among the group members (Silverman, 2004:71).

One session for each of the focus group interviews at three PALCs was used for data collection and participants were allowed to discuss their views openly according to the questions posed. The format was guided by the research questions mentioned in Chapter 1 in this thesis.

Table 3.2: Composition of focus groups

Centres	Age	Experience at PALCs	Gender	Level	Sample	Sample method
A	45-50	3 - 4 Years	Female	3 - 4	4	Purposive
B	43-50	3 - 4 Years	Female	3 - 4	4	Purposive
C	40-50	3 - 4 Years	Female	3 - 4	4	Purposive

The focus groups above (Table 3.2) were composed entirely of female adult learners. This seems to indicate that most PALCs are constituted of female adult learners.

The effectiveness of focus group interviews depends on how they are planned. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005:303) suggest that the planning of focus group interviews consists of five basic stages, which are planning, recruiting and conducting the group, and analysing and reporting. The following discourse shows how the researcher in this study planned to conduct the group discussion:

- I phoned the centre manager indicating the importance of the participants to be available on the stipulated dates. I indicated that participants had specific insight concerning the topics that would be discussed. This was done to motivate them to attend because adult learners are always busy and they could think of this as time-consuming.
- The venues of the discussions were the PALCs where they attended their classes. Adult learners were used to the location; therefore they felt comfortable.

- The arrangement of the tables was of such a nature that participants faced one another.

An interview guide was designed (see Appendix G). I asked ten questions only. With the participants' permission data recorded by an audio tape and handwritten notes that were later organised for interpretation was analysed. The focus group interviews were informal and allowed the opportunity for interaction among the participants in the group. Initially it was necessary to ease the participants into the discussions in order to create an amiable atmosphere that was not threatening. The fact that I was not only taking notes on what was said but also tape-recorded the participants' conversations with their permission made it easier for me not to remain a *disembodied* inquirer but a *co-creator* of the responses emerging from the interviews.

3.7.1.2 Individual interviews

An interview is a two-person conversation initiated by the researcher for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information. This information must be focused on the aims and objectives of the research problem. Best and Kahn (1989:201) maintain that interviews are often superior to other data gathering devices. This is so because one usually finds that people are more willing to talk than write. Interviews are used as a means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives. This is best described by Tuckman (1978:237) when he states that an interview provides access to what is inside a person's head; it makes it possible to measure what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs) and what he likes/dislikes (values/preferences). Research can also be used as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with two adult learners who are currently attending the PALCs and have a variety of experiences. Individual interviews were relevant because I could get first-hand information through direct verbal interaction. Participants were encouraged to answer in their own words, at length, in order to provide greater depth of response. To avoid chaos that could arise due to poor planning of one-on-one interviews, I established a relationship of trust with participants by prolonging my stay in the centres and assuring them of confidentiality. The table below (Table 3.3) explains the individual interviews.

Table 3.3: Composition of individual interviews

Centres	Age	Experience at PALCs	Gender	Level	Sample	Sampling method
A	30 - 40	3-4 Years	Female	3 - 4	2	Purposive
B	35 - 45	3-4 Years	Female	3 - 4	2	Purposive
C	40 - 50	3-4 Years	Female	3 - 4	2	Purposive

To ensure active participation and ownership of the process, I gave participants time to ask questions and raise arguments to note their expectations and concerns. Interviews allow the respondents as well as the researcher to move back and forth in time, to reconstruct what happened in the past and to predict the future; the use of open-ended interviews (Kvale, 1996:5; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:443) seemed to be a perfect match with the research purpose. Informed by the criteria for interviews discussed in literature on qualitative research, I decided on an interview schedule (see Appendix G for the complete interview questions) consisting of ten questions only.

The audio tape recordings assisted me with the flow of the discussions and not to waste time on writing, thus slowing down the pace of the interview. The tape recorder was always tested before the interviews for proper functioning. After each interview I listened to the audio-tape and compared the recording with the field notes.

Because the interviews were open-ended, and had the minimum number of pre-determined questions, they allowed me to ask clarification and/or more detailed explanations by means of in-depth probing questions when required. Consequently adult learners' responses became increasingly informal, resulting in interviews that felt and sounded more like purposeful conversations than interviews and yielded much richer data than would probably have been the case if the researcher had prioritised structure over content.

3.7.1.3 Observation

Since I had to visit PALCs in order to interview and talk with adult learners, I made use of observation as a means of collecting data. I jotted down in my notes the impressions of the physical and emotional environments in which the adult learners learned, analysing and reflecting on them every day when I left the centres. Operations of PALCs that were observed included learner attendance, classroom management, relevancy of Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM) and learning versus working conditions. The peculiarity of observation as a research process is that it affords one the opportunity to gather live data from naturally occurring social situations (Cohen et al., 2010). Robson (2002) argues that what people do may differ from what they say; therefore observation as a research instrument provides a reality check.

Observation data is sensitive to contexts and demonstrates strong ecological validity (Moyles, 2002). This enabled me to understand the context programmes, to be open-minded and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed while conducting the research and to discover things that participants (learners) might not talk about in interview situations.

I used non-participant classroom observations to enhance understanding of learners' experiences and perceptions in attending PALCs.

Observation assisted me in the following:

- I observed events (teaching and learning) as they occur in their natural setting (classrooms) while the data was being collected (Cohen et al., 2010).
- I was aware of my feelings and behaviour and as the conducting of observations was flexible (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001), I sometimes shifted focus when I noticed other things emerging that were different from my initial expectations.

The observation schedule was used to cross-check the learner participants' claims regarding their responses to the interview questions. Informed by the assumption that non-verbal communication, body language, tone, facial expression and gestures are often indicators of the *secret* information I wished to uncover, I jotted down notes on these during the interviews with adult learners and analysed these for meaning each day after the researcher left the PALCs and reflected on the data collected.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Researchers should consider analysing data in qualitative research in themes since it facilitates easy examination and interpretation of data collected (Patterson, 2008). De Vos (2005:271) maintains that data collection and analysis are tightly interwoven processes and must occur alternately because analysis directs the sampling of data. The data was analysed thematically according to the participants' responses to questions posed in the open-ended interview, focus group interviews and observations at PALCs. Thematic analysis is highly inductive; the themes emerge from the data and are not imposed by the researcher (Patterson, 2008). Themes are identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences and perceptions which often are meaningless when viewed alone (Patterson, 2008). In this study the researcher used the start list to develop the first level of codes, which were used to conduct the first level of analysis where the themes and categories were identified.

In the second level of analysis, themes that were related were grouped together to form domain analysis (Cohen et al., 2000:148)

Thematic analysis is a way of seeing as well as a process for coding qualitative information (Patterson, 2008). The researcher made many decisions about the process of identifying themes, and informed others why specific categories were chosen.

Transcriptions were analysed according to Tesch's (1990:117) method of data analysis (Creswell, 1994:154-155), which involved the following eight steps:

- Setting a sense of the whole by carefully reading through all the transcriptions and jotting down ideas as they came to mind. One document, the shortest and most interesting, was chosen and perused to consider the underlying meaning. Ideas were then written in the margins.
- Having gone through all the documents, the researcher was able to identify ideas that were listed and I grouped together similar ones into major and unique topics or themes.
- This list was verified by means of the data collected. Themes were abbreviated as codes and written along the suitable sections of the text.

- The most descriptive wording for each topic was decided on and then turned into a suitable category. Related topics were then grouped together. Lines were also drawn to show inter-relationships.
- A final decision on the abbreviated categories was made.
- Data belonging to each theme and category was gathered and thereafter a preliminary analysis was completed.
- All existing interviews were transcribed. (see Chapter 4, Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7).

3.9 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH

Best and Kahn (1989:160) describe *reliability* as the degree of consistency that the procedure demonstrates, whereas *validity* is that quality of a data gathering procedure that enables it to measure what is supposed to be measured. Researchers must deal with biases and represent reality. Morrow (2005:252) maintains that authenticity and fairness require that participants' understanding or appreciation of the construction of others should be enhanced.

Cohen et al. (2000:105) mention that in the past validity implied that instruments should measure what they were to measure, but validity has now taken many forms. Validity in qualitative research involves addressing issues of honesty, depth, richness and the extensiveness of the data. Validity is ascertained by spending sufficient time with participants and by using multiple sources of data collection. The practical way of achieving validity in qualitative research is to minimise the amount of bias as much as possible. Sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the participants and the content of questions, including the attitude and opinions of the interviewer. I used different methods of gathering data in this study and informed participants of the roles in the research to ensure they felt free to participate. An attempt was made to control feelings and to be gender sensitive when asking questions in order to avoid insensitive behaviour by both me and participants.

It is noted by Bryman (2001:272) that qualitative researchers usually make the mistake of mixing the terms *reliability* and *validity* when carrying out research. He proposes alternative criteria suitable for evaluating qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (in Bryman 2001:272) also mention that an alternative criterion should be in place for qualitative research. They argue that the simple application of quantitative evaluation measures in qualitative research assumes that a single absolute account

of social reality is feasible. They argue that there can be more than one account of social reality (Bryman, 2001:272).

In the tutorial Letter 103 for AET (2002:12) ways are suggested in which reliability and validity in qualitative research can be achieved. It is achieved through formulating questions clearly so that the meaning is unambiguous. The researcher can also rehearse questions with colleagues and experts so that the panel can rate the instrument in terms of its effectiveness. To ensure validity and reliability in interviews, I had to ask the most relevant questions which were phrased in the most unambiguous way. Meanings of terms had to be clearly defined so that they had the same meaning to all participants. Validity and reliability are essential for the effectiveness of any data gathering procedure (Best & Kahn, 1989:160).

3.10 CREDIBILITY

Credibility involves that the process of ensuring that the conclusions made by a researcher is acceptable to others. This is made possible by ensuring the research process is standard as expected by other researchers and it must be able to be verified by other researchers (Bryman, 2001:272). Triangulation is suggested as a very good technique to ensure credibility.

Bryman (2001:274) accepts the view that triangulation involves using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena. In this study I used secondary sources of information (books), visual, video data (camera) from the observations as well as interview data that was obtained from the participants. These methods of data collection facilitated triangulation as they allowed the use of multiple sources of data. This ensured that the data that was generated could be verified and cross-checked by me and the participants as the process of research unfolded. This promoted the credibility of the findings.

Other techniques to ensure credibility suggested by Bryman (2001:272) include participant validation. This method involves the researcher providing the people on whom research has been conducted with an account of the findings. The aim of the exercise is to seek validation, or otherwise, of the account that I have arrived at. In this study focus group interviews were used during the asset-mapping exercise to allow the participants to comment, add or change the data as I held-up the asset map on a flip chart in full view for them to see what I had recorded. This provided them

with the opportunity to check how I had captured their inputs and whether these were an accurate account of their inputs.

3.11 AUTHENTICITY

The criteria used to determine authenticity include fairness, which involves the research representing the viewpoint of the members of the research setting, ontological authenticity, the ability of the researcher to understand the social milieu and educative authenticity, that is whether the research helps members to appreciate better the viewpoints of other members of their social surroundings, catalytic authenticity, that is whether the research acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances, and lastly, tactical authenticity, that is whether the research has empowered members to take the steps necessary for engaging in action (Bryman, 2001:274). In this study I used the perspective of adult learners who attend PALCs. The above considerations enhanced authenticity in my researcher study.

3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE STUDY

Bless and Smith (1995:102) warn that lack of co-operation can be *disastrous* in research but remind researchers that participants have the right to refuse to participate and researchers have to respect this right. No person may be *bribed, threatened, deceived or in any way coerced into participation* (Tutty et al., 1996:40). Instead, they must be presented with all the necessary information regarding the nature and purpose of the study and then have to give or withhold their voluntary and informed consent. Moreover, they were told that their participation would greatly contribute to the knowledge base on the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs. Informed consent, according to Tutty et al. (1996:40), is consent given by someone who

“... fully understands what is going to happen in the course of the study, why is it going to happen and what its effects will be on him or her. By implication research subjects should be cognisant of the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research study” (Kvale, 1996:112).

Permission to conduct this research was sought from and granted by the Ehlanzeni District Director, after which the centre managers of identified PALCs were provided with copies of the permission letter (see Appendix B).

To ensure that adult learners who participated in the research were informed, the researcher visited them at their PALCs before collecting data. The purpose of these visits was to provide them with the kind of information they needed in order to make an informed decision regarding their possible participation. I did not in any way threaten or intimidate them into participating; their participation was entirely voluntary (see letters of consent attached as Appendices E and F). This consent was confirmed and obtained on a prepared form distributed and signed by the participants.

The research project posed no threat to the physical, psychological, legal and social wellbeing of the participants, as all participants were permitted to voluntarily withdraw at any stage of the proceedings, should they decide to do so (Kvale, 1996:112).

They were also given the assurance that no details that could identify them would be included in the research report. According to Neuman (2000:128) confidentiality implies that, while the researcher knows the names attached to specific data, she keeps this information hidden from the public. In other words, the identity of participants is not revealed to anyone at any time (Kvale, 1996:114). I also assured them that the tape recordings of the interviews would be safely stored and should be kept for five years once the research report was completed and thereafter would be destroyed.

Ethical considerations for this study were largely influenced by the ethical procedures for a master's degree in the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria. The procedure for the preparation of the ethical statement involved preparation, checking and approval related to written transactions that involved the student, supervisor and head of department, administration and the Research Ethics Committee. These procedures included, among others, ensuring that the ethical statement was submitted prior the acceptance of the research proposal and its approval depended on the successful defence of the proposal and ratification by the Research Ethics Committee.

3.13 SUMMARY

In this chapter I focused on the research methodology and design of this study. The qualitative research method was employed because of the empirical nature of this study. Multiple data collection strategies such as individual and focus group interviews were discussed. Observation was also done when the researcher observed the real situation at PALCs. The reasons for choosing these data collection strategies were highlighted. Data gathered and captured was interpreted and analysed as shown in the next chapter.

The next chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data that was gathered through documents and interview transcripts.



Chapter 4

Presentation and Discussions of Data

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the validation of the empirical data collected and audio-taped with the participants' permission. The participants' responses were documented during the focus group interviews and individual interviews with adult learners. Thereafter the data was transcribed, coded and explored within the context of emergent themes and categories relating to the manner in which the participants understood and responded to the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs (Miller & Brewer, 2003). The discussion follows a thematic pattern relevant to details of data but also takes cognizance of the research questions as indicated in Chapter 1.

I began by describing the internal and external assets identified using the framework by Scales and Leffert (1999:5-6). In each category the researcher indicated what adult learners as a group and as individuals identified as assets existing within their eco-system that indicates self-concept in educational learning experiences at PALCs. This part of the discussion drew heavily on the researcher's observations as well as the interviews the researcher conducted with the participants. The aim was to expose the fact that there are other internal and external assets that either inhibit or enable adult learners to continue with their academic endeavours of learning at PALCs. However, despite these experiences, participants utilised specific assets to overcome these experiences. From this discussion one is able to identify internal assets that lie within individual adult learners that serve to explain the gap between the practical and theoretical situation at PALCs.

4.2 ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA

Field notes were taken during the interviews. Audio recordings were also made in order to capture detailed information from the respondents. The data was later organised, described, classified and interpreted so that the researcher would not lose important information that could help in answering the research questions (Tim 2002:168). This statement suggests that in interviews, the most important part of the

editing process is to record the spoken words and then to transcribe them; field notes have to be read repeatedly and organised.

In the process of analysing the data for this study, the researcher identified categories that and organised them into formal theories. Themes and categories were generated from the data organised so that concepts were grouped together. The interpretation of the data suggested that the findings were trustworthy and congruent with the research questions. Although the collected data was classified into thematic groups, the researcher encountered situations where it became necessary to adapt the groups or themes as the research progressed.

In line with the view of Bogdan and Biklen (2007:159) that analysis involved working with data, organising it into manageable units and searching for patterns; data in this investigation was broken down into themes, categories and sub-categories that emerged from the documented and unedited audio recordings and field notes gathered from interviews with PALC learners. The subsequent contentions highlight the themes and categories that emerged from the interactions with the participants. It must be noted that discussions pertaining to the data collection strategy of *observation* are discussed separately in the last part of this section to ensure thematic discussion.

From the focus group interviews and individual interviews with adult learners attending PALCs, the following themes and categories emerged:

Table 4.1: Schematic summary of identified Theme 1, Categories 1-4

THEME 1: ADULT LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING
Category 1: Adult learners' level of understanding
Category 2: Language of instruction
Category 3: Teachers' level of instruction
Category 4: Assessment

Table 4.2: Schematic summary of identified Theme 2, Categories 1-7

THEME 2
ADULT LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT
Category 1: Support from the family
Category 2: Support from the community
Category 3: Support from teachers
Category 4: Support from employers
Category 5: Support from fellow adult learners
Category 6: Support from officials of the Department of Education
Category 7: Financial support

Table 4.3: Schematic summary of identified Theme 3, Categories 1-3

THEME 3
THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING PALCs
Category 1: To reduce poverty
Category 2: For economic growth
Category 3: Social aspects

Table 4.4: Schematic summary of identified Theme 4, Categories 1-3

THEME 4
CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ADULT LEARNERS AT PALCs
Category 1: Becoming a learner at an elderly age
Category 2: Seasonal jobs
Category 3: Catching up after absence

Table 4.5: Schematic summary of observations

THEME 5 OPERATIONS OF PALCS
Category 1: Control measures for learner attendance at PALCs
Category 2: Classroom management
Category 3: Relevance of learning, teaching and support material used at PALCs
Category 4: Learning versus working conditions at PALCs

4.3 THEMATIC DISCUSSION

4.3.1 THEME 1: ADULT LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

This thematic category illustrates the various learning experiences and perceptions of adult learners relating to the manner in which they learn in their classes at PALCs.

4.3.1.1 Category 1: Adult learners' level of understanding

This category refers to the level of understanding by the participants and whether they were able to grasp the content clearly. There were four participants in each focus group and two participants from each of the Centres A, B and C, who had individual interviews. Participants from each of the three focus groups and individual interviews in Centres A, B and C indicated that their teachers were very helpful but their own level of understanding of the content was very low. A participant from Centre A said that the teachers taught them and they were patient even though it took them too long to understand. They stressed the fact that they had gone to school many years before and were engaged in some life activities other than learning. Learning content had changed to suit the needs of contemporary society. New subjects and terminology were introduced and were called learning areas. Adults in Group A mentioned that the new learning areas, for example, Mathematics Literacy (ML), Small Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME), Applied Agriculture and Agricultural Technology (AAAT) and Ancillary Health Care (ANHC) were not taught when they were children. The content of the learning areas like ML and AAAT was

very difficult for them and needed more time to be understood. One of the adults in Centre A expressed her level of understanding as follows:

Because these learning areas are new to me, I don't have knowledge about them; there are number of challenges that are there and I sometimes write my work without any thorough understanding.

Participants in the focus group at Centre B confirmed that they just did the learning areas because they were compulsory for Level 4 but they did not fully understand the new curriculum. The experience of an adult learner at Centre B with regard to ML and ANHC was the following:

We are just doing the learning areas because they are compulsory; we will see the results at the end of the year. We do not understand them at all. The content is a little bit tough for us to understand. It needs more time and we are here just to get the AET Level 4 certificates for our promotion at work. We do not have time to repeat the level.

In contrast participants in Centre C had different views on the level of understanding learning content. They indicated that they needed all the learning areas, especially ML, SMME and AAAT. They found that the learning areas empowered them with skills to calculate their money, open small businesses, keep good records for their businesses and learn more about farming. These learners were also exceptional in the sense that they indicated that they needed to learn English. One participant in Centre C expressed her needs in terms of the learning areas as follows:

We want to learn these learning areas no matter how difficult they are, they are relevant to our needs. We need to open businesses at our homes. We do not want to be robbed of our money. We want to know more about farming. We are here to learn and not to play. Just give us all the information and give us more work so that we can do the calculations on our own. We want to speak and understand English better.

One adult from Centre C concurred with the group by saying:

I am a Zulu man; since I was born I speak, write, talk Zulu. I registered here at this centre because I wanted to learn English no matter what. I do not care whether the content is difficult or easy. What I know and am sure about is that at the end of the year I will be speaking, talking and writing my document in English. I want to talk with my supervisor at work in English without an interpreter in front of me.

In all three focus group discussions and in the individual interviews participants differed with regard to the level of understanding. Few individuals were positive and most participants were negative about understanding the work. What emerged, however, was that the content in the different learning areas was a challenge to them because of their ages and lack of contemporary content knowledge. The class for PALCs started at 14:00 daily. One participant said that this made it impossible for adults to attend all the classes because many adult learners were at work and others had family and community responsibilities.

4.3.1.2 Category 2: Language of instruction

Participants had different views regarding the language of instruction at PALCs. Most adults wanted English to be the prescribed language of instruction and of the learning material, while others wanted the vernacular (Siswati) to be used as the language of instruction.

Participants at Centre A did not want English to be the language of instruction. They wanted their teachers to teach them in Siswati. They emphasised that they did not understand English. Participants from Centre A were of the opinion that if the teacher used English during teaching and learning they needed an interpreter to interpret the content. They were worried that they would fail if they were taught through the medium of English. A participant from the individual interviews from Centre A mentioned the following in this regard:

English is a very difficult language of instruction. We learners are not passing at their schools because their teachers are teaching them in English. Please Sir, use Siswati so that we can understand what you are teaching today. We do not need English.

The above statements were supported by a participant from Centre C:

I want to be taught in Siswati because we are all Siswati people around this area. I see no reason for my teachers to use any language as a language of instruction other than Siswati.

Another participant from Centre A said the following:

At our church we sing hymns in Siswati, community meetings are shared in Siswati. Let us be taught in Siswati because it is our mother tongue. I will learn fast and understand better as an old woman.

Adults wanted to learn content that would help them at work and everyday life activities. The participants at Centre B mentioned that they would rather stay at home if they were not being taught about issues that would help them in their needs. Centre B adult learners adamantly demanded Siswati to be adopted as the medium of instruction for all learning areas. This was supported by statements from Centre B participants:

We have a lot of work to do at our homes. If this teacher does not listen to us, we are not coming tomorrow; we are going to our farms and plough our fields. We are here just because we need to read a Siswati Bible, not to learn English. If our teacher continues using his English we are leaving the centre. We have a lot of responsibilities other than attending here.

Participants in Centre C had different opinions regarding the language of instruction. They indicated that they needed to be taught in English because it is the language used in every sphere of life, including business, politics and work. Even road signs

are in English. The most common language that was used by everyone was English. Their feelings were supported by the following comments from one participant:

If we can be taught in English as a language of instruction here at our centres, we can pass all the learning areas because all the learning areas are taught in English. We have noticed that English is everywhere; for example toilet instructions are in English, road signs are in English, and even the recipes for cooking food are written in English. The better language to communicate with any person in this country is English. We also want to speak and assist our kids with homework in English at home.

A participant from Centre A agreed with the group from Centre C. She concurred with them by saying this:

I am not here to play games, I am here to learn. I need the relevant information. I need our teachers to use English as a language of instruction. I want to be a good chairperson of my society group. I need to write our minutes in English. I also need to assist my kids with their homework. I have always wanted to assist my kids in their early grades.

It seems that adult learners in the rural areas have different views about the language of instruction. Some participants focus on the importance of their mother tongue in their environment only, while others have a broader focus where English is needed as a medium of communication at work. It is clear that the learners would benefit more if the teachers could use English as well as mother tongue instruction.

4.3.1.3 Category 3: Teachers' level of instruction

All the participants from Centres A, B and C agreed that their teachers accommodated their different levels of education. Teachers were trying their best to accommodate all the adults in their classes but the learning content remained difficult for some of them. The teachers even worked extra hours just to assist those who did not understand any content during teaching and learning hours. A participant said teachers divided adults into groups to assist one another in certain tasks. To indicate that the teachers' level of instruction was adequate during teaching and learning, the following comments from a participant in Centre A were made:

I decided to leave school 20 years ago because I failed Mathematics yearly in the same class. I repeated the class for three years without passing. As I joined AET classes this year I was not coping with it in the first term but my teacher took an extra mile with me after each class session to assist me. I have improved and I am passing the subjects.

In supporting what was said in Centre A about accommodating teachers, an adult from Centre B agreed on the following statement:

We were having the same problems as a group not understanding the grammar during the class period. Our teacher told us to organise ourselves so that she could assist us just 30 minutes after classes. We tried that; we were forced by the situation that we need to understand the language better. She also gave us two sentences to write after each and every language period as extra work. We managed to understand and all of us passed the subjects at the end of the year.

Centre C participants differed from those in Centre B. They had different opinions pertaining to the teachers' level of instruction. Participants from Centre C indicated that there was less contact time for them as adults at PALCs. According to participants the teachers taught very fast as they wanted to finish their schedule on time and that compromised the quality of learning they received in their classes. Sometimes they saw their teachers once a week. They did not have time to do extra work. Only two hours per day were allocated for teaching and learning at their centre. A participant in Centre C expressed her frustrations as follows:

We have little information in this learning area. We need more time to be taught in class so that we can understand according to our pace; we are not kids, we are adults. Let our teachers teach us slowly and bit by bit. There is difficult terminology in this learning area. Let our teacher teach us alone for the four days.

One participant from the same centre (Centre C) had a different opinion with regard to the teachers' level of instruction:

Our teacher does not answer some of the questions we asked her during the period. She sometimes fails to answer us or does not answer at all.

A participant from Centre B then responded as follows about the teachers' level of instruction:

I do not understand my teacher when she is teaching. She seems not to understand the learning area herself. She becomes furious when I ask her a question. I have failed her learning area since I started here at this centre. She does not have time to teach us. She is always in a hurry.

It seems that adults find it difficult to understand the content of the subjects and to cope with the large amounts of information constituting learning area content. All participants agreed that the teachers were trying to accommodate them when teaching but it still remained difficult for them to cope with the pace of teaching and to understand the content. It seems that they need more hours of teaching and support from the teachers.

4.3.1.4 Category 4: Assessment

All three focus group participants from Centres A, B and C indicated that they did formative and summative assessment. The adult learners indicated that they completed assignments in the course of the year. They completed five formal assignments per learning area for six learning areas. They indicated that they had many responsibilities as parents and assignments were too much work for them. Moreover, they had to complete class activities for the six learning areas that served

as the basis for the formal tasks. They also indicated that they wrote half year examinations and final examinations at the end of the year. They mentioned that they did not cope; the work load was too much for them. Hence they absconded from tests and could not adhere to due dates for the assignments. A focus group participant from Centre A expressed her views about assessment as follows:

We do not want to do tasks or write exams, we just need to be taught various skills. We need to be taught skills on how to operate Automatic Teller Machines and to operate a computer for job purposes. That is why we do not come on the test dates to write.

A participant in the focus group from Centre C supported the views from the two centres as follows:

We do not want to be assessed because we do not have time to study at home. If they only teach us skills like carpentry, plumbing, baking and sewing we will be very happy and attend classes every day because we will be doing practical things. We will be marketable after our Level 4.

One participant from Centre B was also against assessment. She indicated her anger on the issue by saying the following:

I won't come to class tomorrow because they told us we shall be writing a Life Orientation test. They asked a lot of questions about HIV & AIDS while my sister has that disease at home. I once wrote the test on Mathematics Science and failed it. All adults laughed at me in class. I am not going to the centre tomorrow.

One participant from Centre C was also against assessment. She indicated her anger regarding the issue by saying this:

The teacher announced that we are going to write a class test next week Thursday. I will go and write it but if I fail, they won't see me again at their centre. I am old enough to learn. My kids are laughing at me if I show them my books. Yesterday I did not write the homework. The teacher said that she needs it tomorrow I am not going to the centre tomorrow.

Most participants were against tests and assignments. It seems that they wanted a more practical approach to the subject content and experiential learning should focus on things they need to cope at work and in everyday activities.

4.3.2 THEME 2: ADULT LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT

The interviews revealed the experiences of support adult learners receive from other people around them. It also revealed the support that is provided by various stakeholders that have an interest in PALCs.

4.3.2.1 Category 1: Support from the family

Participants from Centres A, B and C in the focus groups indicated that they need the support from their families to gain confidence to attend PALC classes. Participants indicated that their families did support them to attend PALCs. A participant from Centre A indicated the support they received as follows:

My grandchildren encouraged me to attend classes so that I can read a Bible on my own.

To show that families give support, a participant from Centre C made the following statement:

I registered with AET because my daughter told me to register so that I can assist her with homework and understand her school report card.

One participant from Centre B mentioned being fully supported by her family. She indicated the support as follows:

My husband asked me to attend PALC classes so that I can check our kids' progress of their school work.

During the focus group discussion participants from Centre A highlighted the support she receives from her children in doing their homework. The support they get from their families motivated them to attend classes every day. One of the participants from Centre A indicated the support she received as follows:

Since I started attending in this centre, our kids at home have assisted us with homework. They check our books and assist us where there is a need.

Participants from Centre B indicated that their families encourage them to attend regularly. A participant indicated the concern of her grandchildren as follows:

Grandmother, did you attend your PALCs class today? How much class work did you write today? Do you have any homework so that we can assist you?

From the data it is clear that the participants' families are supportive in their endeavour to uplift their level of education. Spouses, children and grandchildren encourage participants to enrol at PALCs.

4.3.2.2 Category 2: Support from the community

One participant from Centre B indicated that members of the community motivated them to attend PALCs because they knew that adult learners were going to gain the necessary information that they needed in their daily activities at home or their place of work. The following statement was made by a participant from Centre C who indicated that she was motivated by her congregation at church:

Before I started attending PALCs, I heard the local chief, pastor and individuals announcing at local gathering, church meetings and services about services offered at PALCs.

Participants from Centre B indicated that community leaders play an encouraging role in adult learners' decision to enrol. They indicated their motivation by community leaders as follows:

We came to register because our community leader told us about the importance of PALC classes when we were having a meeting on Sunday. After the meeting he announced about the classes that are taking place at AET and encouraged us to register.

Participants from Centre A indicated that being enrolled at PALCs provides status in the eyes of the community. One participant from Centre A indicated that the local women society of women regards them as educated:

I was voted as the secretary of the local society by all the women in this community because they said I am attending PALC classes; I will be able to write their minutes when we have meetings.

A participant from Centre B had similar experiences from her local society:

I am the treasurer of the local society group because they say I am knowledgeable as I am doing Small Medium Micro Enterprise at our local PALC; I will be able to calculate their money correctly.

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, given the history of South Africa, many, if not most adults from rural areas, are illiterate or have a low level of education. Not only the adult learners are ambitious to overcome the backlog of illiteracy but the community at large shares this goal.

4.3.2.3 Category 3: Support from the teachers

PALCs are available but if teachers who are the custodians of the PALCs are negative and pessimistic about the jobs they are doing, then teaching and learning will not be effective for adults. The attitude and values of teachers should show support, caring for and being passionate about the adult learners who attend the PALC classes. Participants from Centres A, B and C focus groups indicated that their teachers were accommodating and they supported them in their learning. It is just unfortunate that the teachers have a curriculum to follow that demands a fast pace of teaching. Participants from Centre A expressed the support from teachers as follows:

Our teachers love and care for us, they offer moral support, solve our problems and encourage us whenever we lose heart.

This support has been confirmed by a participant from Centre B:

Teachers help us a lot, they give us veggies, and they bring forms to us to apply for part time jobs.

Participants from Centre C also indicated the support they receive from their teachers:

They help us to write a curriculum vitae and when we have death in our families, they support us. They are good teachers but are sometimes too fast for us.

A participant from Centre C indicated that their teachers are quite concerned about their education. They even supported a learner who was ill. Teachers, who recruited some of the adults, did a follow-up when they did not attend classes. This was supported as follows by a participant from Centre B:

I have been absent from the centre for a number of days, but my teachers visited me to check what my problem was.

One participant from Centre A indicated that their teachers are very supportive, even in personal matters:

Before I could fill out my child's registration form, I used to take the form to my Level 4 teacher to fill it in for me. My teacher also read and explained to me English letters from my child's school.

Participants were encouraged by the support they received from teachers. The encouragement made them realise the importance of education and with this kind of support the community can only be educationally uplifted.

4.3.2.4 Category 4: Support from employers

Participants from Centres A, B and C in the focus groups commonly acknowledged the support they received from employers. Participants from the three centres indicated that their employers supported them in many ways while they attended PALC classes. Participants in this rural area work for Checkers, on farms and as domestic servants. The support they received from employers was acknowledged by participants from Centre A. One participant from Centre A, who works at Checkers, mentioned this:

We are allowed two days in a week by our employer to knock off at 14:00 instead of 16:00 so that we can catch PALCs classes.

Participants from Centre B acknowledged the support they received as follows:

We are allowed to work three days from 06:00 to 14:00 in a week by our employer; afternoons are reserved for class attendance.

Support from an employer in Centre C was indicated as follows:

Our employer allows us to swop leave with those who do not attend PALCs during examinations so that we get enough time to study for exams.

A participant from Centre A acknowledged the support from her employer as follows:

I am a domestic worker; during lunch hour my employer sometimes assists me with my homework if she sees me doing it.

A participant from centre B appreciated the support as follows:

My supervisor asked me to bring all the English homework with me to work so that she can assist me during lunch.

A participant from Centre C indicated the support from the employer as follows:

As you have passed Level 3 this year, continue with your Level 4 so that you will be able to get the certificate. When promotional post avails here, we can consider you as an experienced person in this company.

During the focus group and individual interviews with all the participants from Centres A, B and C, these adult learners acknowledged the sincere support they received from their employers and supervisors as the ones that gave them strength to attend PALCs. They appreciate the educational support they receive from their employers.

4.3.2.5 Category 5: Support from fellow adult learners

The focus group interviews that were conducted with participants from Centres A, B and C demonstrated that adult learners support one another. Support was demonstrated in various ways by all the participants from the three centres. Participants from Centre A said:

We are grouped as five adults for a class activity; we use one textbook to write class work and we are able to share the book.

Participants from Centre B demonstrated the support as follows:

We do not have enough textbooks: we decided to share the book by taking it one by one in our group per day until all of us have had it and get the information.

One participant from Centre A indicated that the support she received from fellow adults was amazing. She described the support she received as follows:

My child was ill one day and I had no money to take him to the doctor. My classmates heard about it, they collected money and came and visited me. I was so surprised with the support they gave to me. I took my child to the doctor with the money they had collected.

One participant from Centre C also indicated the support she received from fellow adult learners:

My husband was very ill. I never attended classes for a month. My classmates used to visit me twice per week for a support. They motivated me to go and write exams and I managed to pass to the next level.

4.3.2.6 Category 6: Support from officials of the Department of Education

The focus groups and individual interviews from Centres A, B and C revealed that adult learners have different views about the support they receive from the Department of Education officials. Some groups indicated dissatisfaction and unhappiness and some individuals indicated satisfaction.

Participants from Centre A expressed their feelings of dissatisfaction as follows:

We do not know the officials who are supporting us. But what we know is that we are supposed to be supported, and we are functioning under the Department of Education.

Participants from Centre B also indicate their unhappiness about the support from officials as follows:

We once saw our officials come to visit our centres once a month. They motivated us to continue to attend but they did not give us answers to all our questions that we asked.

Participants from Centre C expressed feelings of frustration as follows:

We once heard that we at PALCs also fall under the Department of Education, but we are not supported as mainstream schools. We only see officials during June and November examinations. We are dissatisfied about the way the Department treats our PALCs.

But one participant from Centre A had a positive opinion. She expressed her satisfaction and happiness as follows:

We are happy about the support we receive from the Department of Education officials although we see them once or twice a month. They used to come to our centre and motivate us.

A participant from Centre B expressed her satisfaction as follows:

Although I do not know how many times the officials from the Department of Education are supposed to come I used to see them at our centre for a visit. They also come during examinations. We become happy when we see them because it encourages us; it also indicates that what teachers are doing at PALCs has value.

4.3.2.7 Category 7: Financial support

PALC education is free and is supported financially by the Department of Education. Participants from Centres A, B and C were very excited in expressing their feelings on the financial support they receive from the Department of Education. A participant from Centre A expressed her feelings of financial support as follows:

We have no idea at all about the financial support we receive but we do not pay to attend PALCs classes. It is free of charge. We are very happy about the support that we receive as adults.

Participants from Centre B also shared same feeling about the financial support they received. The following feeling was expressed by a participant:

We do not pay school fees for attending PALCs classes; we just register and attend the whole year without any payment. We also get our report at the end of the year free and move to the next grade.

Participants from Centre C were grateful about the free education and recruitment by their teachers. A participant expressed her gratitude as follows:

We were recruited by our teachers to register with PALCs .They indicated that it is free, no fees attached. We did register and it is true; we do not pay any fees for our education.

4.3.3 THEME 3: THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING PALCs

The aim of PALCs is to reduce illiteracy and to empower adults with knowledge and skills. The acquisition of knowledge and skills enables adult learners to participate in the mainstream economy and to show improvement in their lifestyles. From this theme, three categories emerged.

4.3.3.1 Category 1: To reduce poverty

The literature study in Chapter 2 indicates that teachers at PALCs should pay attention to the lack of development and to poverty with the aim of identifying areas to be improved (Freiberg, 1999:20). Education, according to Rogers (1994:1), is primarily aimed at individual/personal growth and self-actualisation. All the participants taking part in this investigation come from poverty-stricken villages. Participants from Centre A agreed that they want to reduce poverty, giving the following statements:

When you are literate, you will not be poor in mind. You can fight to change for the better. Learning is important to empower us to be able to stand up and help our children so that poverty does not become a vicious cycle. Even though the majority of us are not employed, we can use the knowledge and skills gained to put food on the table like making a vegetable garden for our families. We also make jam because we have watermelons in the garden. If we produce more than is needed, we sell the rest and get money. We are being empowered.

One participant from Centre C agreed with the participants from Centre A:

Because of the knowledge I got from my centre I was able to make a big vegetable garden in my house; I'm selling vegetables to get money to pay for my kids' school fund. I am also teaching my kids to how make a vegetable garden on their own.

Participants from Centre B agreed on the statement cited by Centre A:

Although we do not have practical sessions in skills because of lack of funds at this centre we are able to encourage our children with their schoolwork as we can read and write. We can see if they are on the right track. We encourage them to work hard at school and motivate them to do their homework every day. We do not want them to be poor like us.

A participant from Centre B was excited about learning as she would be able to reduce poverty in her family. She said the following:

There will be no more cheating in my kids' school work. I will check them and encourage them to go to school to learn. I do not want them to be just like me, to learn in old age.

Participants from Centre C indicated the importance of having a Level 4 certificate to make it easy for them to be employable. They knew how to do the work but without a certificate they are not employable, and if employed, they are not paid in proportion to the skills they possess. The statements from Centre C participants illustrate the following:

We have been here since 2010; we started at Level 1; now we are doing AET Level 3. We intend to get Level 4 certificates so that we can be employable. We have been knocking at every door to look for work; they do not consider us because we do not have certificates.

We want to break poverty in our families by getting certificates and get a better job so that we can pay for our children's school funds.

A participant from Centre C concurred with other participants with regard to the value of certification. She agreed with them as follows:

Not one of my siblings has a certificate. I am attending PALCs just to get a Level 4 certificate in my family and it will serve as a motivation to my kids to learn, if they see me consistently attending PALCs classes.

Adult learning as indicated by participants is important because it benefits their families, communities and the nation. Poverty eradication is one of the Millennium Development Goals, which South Africa must achieve by 2015. The EFA Global Report (2005:31) indicates that education is crucial in order to eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, and curb population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy. Education that is linked with empowerment can reduce poverty.

4.3.3.2 Category 2: For economic growth

Poverty, including the feminisation of poverty, is one of the major legacies of the racist and patriarchal past that the democratic South Africa had attempted to address since the onset of democracy in 1994 (Beijing Report, 2005:4). PALCs may provide a key to education and should improve the lives of millions of people living in extreme poverty. Unemployment and poverty are affecting uneducated people because they are not active economically. The high numbers of uneducated people mirror the inequalities fostered during the apartheid era. The provision of PALC classes for adult learners becomes a need more than a want for their development. PALC classes empower adults to be able to start projects and gain budgeting skills. Participants from Centre A indicated that they benefit from PALCs. They benefit as follows:

Our interaction with other adults enabled us to think of ways of working in teams. Our teams were divided according to the needs and interests of adults; for example, those who wanted to start projects were grouped together so that we are empowered in that area. We have projects of our own.

Participants indicated that they felt empowered in such a way that they could start projects as teams. One participant from Centre B agreed with what was said by participants from Centre A by saying the following:

It is difficult to meet and interact with others if you do not involve yourself in community projects. Attending PALCs classes helped me because I was able to be in a group of adult learners and form groups and start small projects with the help of teachers.

Participants from Centre C also felt the same as those from Centre A about projects formation. Participants indicated the following:

We are able to farm on a small scale but produce in large quantities because we learnt good farming methods in AAAT. These projects help us because we get money to buy food and other family needs. SMME as a Level 4 learning area is needed when developing business plans.

Planning is important in human life. Someone who fails to plan lives a disorganised life and lacks responsibility. PALC classes that are effective provide planning and organising skills through Life Orientation, levels 3 and 4. Budgeting is an important skill because it helps learners to plan their income and expenditure. This is a skill that adult learners can pass on to their children by teaching them those skills at an early stage. Participants from Centre B, through their comments, showed how beneficial PALC classes are:

If you are educated or literate, you can plan how you will spend your money on food so that you will be able to buy food that will be enough for your children.

A participant from Centre B agreed on budgeting as a tool for planning:

I am able to save money for unforeseen circumstances. It is good to save money in the bank and I am able to do the transactions by myself.

The data gathered indicates that PALC classes empower adult learners economically. The Life Orientation programme helped them to have a purpose in life and to plan around that. The ability of adults to budget and save money as groups, which they share at the end of the year or buy groceries and share, shows that they are progressing.

Participants indicated that although their projects were not sufficient for their families, they felt that they were budgeting what they received and saving a small amount so that they could buy food in bulk at the end of the year. The budget and banking skills seemed to be helping them in changing their lives for the better. Empowered adults might be able to achieve economic independence. This is a very positive result for adult learners' backwardness (Bhardwaj & Vijayakrishman, 1998:49).

4.3.3.3 Category 3: Social aspects

Participation in social life is one of the indicators of the empowerment of adult learners. Participation can take various forms. The empowerment of adult learners enables them to speak in public because their engagement in PALC classes increases their self-confidence, self-respect and political awareness. Some of the forms of social integration indicated by participants, especially women, are their involvement in social clubs such as stokvels and burial societies. Participants indicated that they are able to take leadership positions in social clubs because learning has given them self-confidence.

This self-confidence was expressed as follows by participants from Centre A:

If you are not educated or literate, you have less information on things that happen around you. You fail to help yourself at home, in banks and small businesses.

Participants from Centre B expressed their self-confidence as follows:

PALCs classes have helped us to build our confidence in addressing people because when we were learning we had to stand up, discuss, and sometimes debate issues.

Participants from Centre C agreed on what was said at Centre B:

We are able to stand in front of people in meetings. We used to hide behind other people but now we are able to say what we want.

A participant from Centre A indicated her ability to participate in the education of her children. Learning also empowered a participant to become a member of a school governing body. She expressed her self-confidence as follows:

I can now take part in school governing body actions and help take good decisions for my children.

A participant from Centre B agreed:

I understand that I have involved myself in the education of my children. It is good to know how my children are taught and I want to help them in maintaining discipline. The welfare of my children is important.

Participants indicated their engagement in social clubs, which deal with investments, the buying of groceries and group schemes for helping others financially in cases of death. PALC classes empowered adult learners because they impart the knowledge they gained everywhere they go. Robinson (1999:14) maintains that education encourages people to analyse their problems and find ways of addressing them. The gains in adult learners' self-confidence and the changes in social relationships help adult learners to improve their quality of life. The findings indicate that learning makes it possible for adult learners to meet and discuss their social problems and find ways of addressing them. Debating and sharing information in class enables adult learners to share information and to see how people in other countries deal with issues that challenge them as individuals.

4.3.4 THEME 4: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ADULT LEARNERS AT PALCs

This theme indicates various challenges experienced by adult learners at PALCs. These challenges cause adults not to engage to their full potential as they attend. From this theme, three categories emerged.

4.3.4.1 Category 1: Becoming a learner at an elderly age

Participants from Centre C indicated that they learn best if their learning solves some of their problems. They indicated that the challenge they experience as they register at PALCs is that they do not learn from the first day what they are desperate to learn; they start with other activities. It takes some two to three years to benefit from the programme. Participants from Centre A indicated their frustration with becoming learners at an elderly age as follows:

We are very slow in doing what is expected from us to do in class. We need more time on one task as adults.

A participant from Centre A agreed with what was said by the participants at Centre A as follows:

I can do this assignment for three days; I won't submit it tomorrow. I still need more time to do it because of my family responsibilities.

Participants from Centre B indicated a challenge linked with the challenge raised by Centre A as follows:

We sometimes need a reason from our teachers why we are doing this activity because we are here to learn to play lotto and to receive messages from our cell phones without help.

A participant from Centre B supported the idea from Centre A as follows:

I am here to learn sewing, not to do assignments. I do not need to learn all the learning areas, they are difficult for me.

A participant from Centre B expressed her feelings of learning at an elderly age as follows:

My parents did not take me to school because our culture did not allow them to take a girl to school.

Participants from Centre C had different views on learning at an elderly age. These are their views:

We know what we are here for. Let our teachers teach us according to the schedules and finish within a stipulated time. We do not have other time; we are already above 45 years of age.

One participant agreed with the participants in Centre C, indicating why she learns at this age:

We are orphans at home, our parents died long ago; I am learning because I want to assist my siblings with school work as a first born sister. I can be very helpful to them if I am able to get my Adult Education and Training (AET) Certificate Level 4.

Adults have a reservoir of knowledge and experience that they gain in their day-to-day activities. Their learning needs to be effective and relevant to their own experiences and knowledge; what they learn must be useful for everyday use.

4.3.4.2 Category 2: Seasonal jobs

Some of the participants from Centres A, B and C indicated that attendance of PALCs classes is affected by seasonal jobs. They indicated that they do seasonal jobs; for example, harvesting of oranges at nearby companies. Participants indicated that they used to take part during these times to support their families. Participants indicated that they do not attend classes regularly. Some of the classes are too early for them to attend after work; some classes are very late for them; they have to rush

home to take care of their families and sometimes are too tired to attend classes for the day. Participants from Centre A expressed their feeling as follows:

We want both work and education. We need money to support our families as mothers. We also need education to reduce poverty in our families. Our teachers must understand that and assist us in giving the work that others have done when we were away.

One participant from Centre C expressed her views regarding seasonal jobs as follows:

As a single parent I need this seasonal job to get money to put food on the table and I also need to attend PALCs to learn various skills so that I end up having a business of my own.

A participant from Centre B confirmed what was said by the participant from Centre C as follows:

I am a mother of two kids attending PALCs classes. I sell vegetables at the market but the money is not enough to buy food for us. During seasonal jobs I leave the centre for some months and work for this company. This delays my progress to get a Level 4 certificate.

Participants from Centre B expressed their feeling on how they become affected by seasonal jobs as follows:

After we had left the centre for three months for these seasonal jobs, teachers continued with schedules. When we came back they were finished with the third quarter work. At the end of the year we did not pass; we have to repeat the level again.

A participant from Centre A, who was also affected, expressed her views as follows:

I would not allow my kids to leave school at an early stage because now I'm forced to work for four months and learn at the same time. It becomes very difficult for me to do that as an adult learner.

Participants from Centre C agreed:

Seasonal jobs do affect us a lot, because after a teacher has taught she cannot go back to the schedule to teach those who have been away for some months. That is why we are doing the same grade for the second time.

Although participants experience some challenges because of these seasonal jobs, they persevere because there is a drive that causes them to be self-directed and to take control of their life.

4.3.4.3 Category 3: Catching up after absence

Participants from Centres A, B and C indicated how difficult it is for adult learners to catch up with the work after their absence. One participant from Centre A indicated her challenge as follows:

My husband has been ill for two weeks. I could not attend for the two weeks. When I returned to the centre it was like two years. I was behind all schedules of homework, classwork and assignments. It was difficult for me to do all the work.

Participants from Centre B explained the difficulty of catching up after a few days as follows:

It is difficult for us to catch up the work done after two days. We were away for a church service just for two days. It was a nightmare when our teacher told us about the work we were supposed to do.

One participant from Centre C agreed:

It is difficult to catch up some work that has been done while you were away. I did not attend classes for a week. I was bereaved at that time. The work was so much that I decided to do some and leave the rest.

The above statement was confirmed by participants from Centre A:

To be absent from the centre just for one day makes it very difficult to catch up the work done by your fellow adults, especially for Maths Literacy.

Participants indicated that it was not easy for them to attend classes every day because of other commitments as parents and employees.

4.3.5 THEME 5: OPERATIONS OF PALCs(OBSERVATION)

In this study I observed how the PALCs under study operated. I wanted to gain insight into the PALCs' function as adults attended to gain a better understanding of how they experienced the classes. This enabled me to observe class attendance, teaching and learning at the relevant PALCs and also observe what happened before and after classes. I planned what was going to be observed and had a clear purpose. Four components were observed and were set out as categories:

4.3.5.1 Category 1: Control measures for learner attendance at PALCs

Good control and supervision are crucial for the effectiveness of teaching and learning at PALCs (Department of Education, 1997:9). PALC teachers know all the adult learners at the centre. It is their responsibility to design an instrument that can help them to have control measures for the adult learners; for example, an attendance register. Attendance registers can assist teachers to monitor the consistency of attendance of adult learners. It may also help teachers to monitor the progress of adult learners and to become familiar with their learning styles and the learning problems they experience.

In Centre A I observed that there is no attendance register or policy from the Department of Education that assists teachers to control learner attendance at the PALC. I observed that adult learners joined the class at any time and explained their reasons to the teachers; each centre has its own time for starting and ending classes. The centre manager, together with the Centre Governing Body (CGB) of each centre, decides on starting and ending times of the sessions but only two hours are prescribed per day (Department of Education, 1997:15). I observed that there is no timetable to monitor or to control the learners' arrival and departure from Centres A, B and C. Some learners were using public transport that had no fixed time to convey them to the centre. In Centre C there was a register designed by teachers in a school exercise book but it is not maintained regularly.

The data gathered through observation indicated that adult learners attend classes inconsistently and according to their circumstances at home. For instance, when they do not have money for transport to the centre, they simply stay at home until they get money. This could last until they receive their monthly grants from Government. If there is a problem that affects them at home, they stay at home until the problem has been solved and attended to. I observed that there is no proper control, monitoring, management and administration of adult learners regarding attendance at PALCs.

4.3.5.2 Category 2: Classroom management

Classroom management refers to all the actions that teachers take to organise the learners, space, time and materials to maximise effective teaching and learning. Classroom management, during teaching and learning, can be effective if teachers plan their lessons to accommodate the needs of all adult learners.

I observed that teachers who were teaching on the day of observation were well acquainted with the content of their learning areas, but their lessons were not carefully planned and classrooms were poorly organised. Teachers did not make any attempt to create an atmosphere that could promote a culture of learning. Teachers were using the classrooms daily but their classes were not functionally organised according to the learning areas (subjects) they are teaching. The reasons that led me to the above conclusion are that during the teachers' lesson presentations in their classes, I observed the following challenges in all the three centres:

- The teachers do not prepare well for the lessons.
- The resources/books are not organised before time.

- Time management is inconsistent. There is no fixed duration of lessons.
- The classroom walls have meaningless pictures for adult learners.
- Some adult learners do not pay much attention to the teachers because they bring their grandchildren to class.
- Chairs are often turned upside down and are not properly arranged.
- Classes are not clean and are littered with papers.
- Some classrooms are locked and no keys are available for the classes. Learners sometimes have to share a classroom; for example, Level 1 and Level 2 combined in one classroom.
- Classes are held after school hours of the mainstream school. PDNE (Please do not erase) (mainstream work) is written on part of the chalkboard.
- Teachers have to use only part of the chalkboard, while the chalkboard is the main teaching resource. Adult teachers are not allowed to open another classroom because only four classes are reserved as PALCs by the mainstream school. The result is that teachers make use of verbal instructions.
- Adult learners use their cellular phones at any time during lessons.

It was observed in all three centres that nobody is responsible for the cleanliness of classrooms for PALCs. Classes that are used by mainstream learners and teachers during the day are also used by adult learners in the afternoon. I observed that most of the time the first period is wasted, especially when organising keys and bringing chairs into classrooms. This results in teaching and learning becoming less effective at PALCs because of less time than the prescribed two hours per day.

4.3.5.3 Category 3: Relevance of learning, teaching and support material used at PALCs

The implementation of a successful Adult Education and Training (AET) lesson depends on the availability of Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM). Good LTSM enhances teaching and learning and could effectively include learners as active participants in teaching and learning. Adult learners are strongly influenced by the cultural influences in the community. This was observed during a discussion in a Life Orientation lesson. Adult learners at Centre A indicated that they were disappointed in the way their HIV book was put together and were of the opinion that some of the pictures were too explicit. During their discussion in Centre A the researcher overheard one learner saying the following:

These books have pictures of men and women who are naked. It embarrasses us to look at these pictures in this book. We do not want them. This is against our culture. We cannot discuss sexual matters with a teacher who is younger than us.

In Centre B I observed that adult learners avoid the use of the book on HIV and AIDS. However, in Centre C, learners were of a different view. They felt comfortable with viewing the pictures and reading the book. This is evident from the following comment the researcher overheard from the learners in Centre C:

At least we are able to understand how our bodies function. The pictures are good and we like looking at them while learning. The nurse who comes here to discuss HIV and AIDS with us is very good. She comes with big posters, which are relevant to what we are learning. We even see the pictures of women and men's sexual organs in the clinic; so there is nothing to hide.

4.3.5.4 Category 4: Learning versus working conditions at PALCs

In my observations in Centre A I noticed adult learners were sitting on small chairs meant for Grade 1 mainstream learners and not for them. The chairs inside the classroom were suitable for Foundation Phase mainstream learners and not for adult learners. There was no chalk at Centre A for teachers to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Teachers had to work from available prescribed books only.

At Centre B I observed that there was no teaching media for teachers to be used during teaching and learning. There were only two textbooks resulting in ten learners sharing one textbook. At Centre B teachers were seen having conversations outside their classrooms while adult learners were waiting in the classrooms. At all three centres (A, B and C) adult learners were running short of stationery. The researcher observed one learner who had three exercise books for six learning areas (subjects).

Learning, Teaching and Support Materials (LTSM) are vital tools that inform learning and enrich the teaching and learning encounter (AET Policy Document: AET, 1997:27). Teachers are expected to use a variety of LTSM in order to achieve the required outcomes. One teacher in Centre C made the following comment:

They do deliver a limited amount of stationery. There is a shortage of stationery and textbooks here in our centre. Very few textbooks for very few learning areas have been supplied by the Department of Education in this centre.

A teacher from Centre B said:

Without teaching and learning materials, effective teaching and learning can hardly take place here. Adult learners are provided with physical resources by mainstream teachers. If it happens that we receive the learner material, we received it late; this is not adequate for adult learners and it discourages the learners to attend the PALC next year.

Because of the lack of resources and insufficient working conditions of PALCs teachers are demotivated.

Teachers from the three centres mentioned that they do not have job security as they are contracted for only three years by the Department of Education. The movement of teachers to other schools is a challenge for PALCs because teachers get jobs in mainstream public schools. A teacher mentioned that teaching at PALCs is different and it is often hard to adjust. The movement of teachers affects the smooth running of PALC classes.

4.4 SUMMARY

This chapter explores the actual perceptions and responses of the adult participants within the context of the different data collection strategies employed. These strategies are focus group interviews, individual interviews and observation techniques.

Findings of this study indicate the experiences and perceptions of adult learners during teaching and learning at PALCs and reveal the level of understanding of adult learners, language of instruction, teachers' level of instruction and assessment of adults. Findings also indicate the experiences of support the adult learners receive from the family, community, teachers, employers, fellow adults, officials of the Department of Education and the financial support that boosts their confidence to attend PALCs classes. Adult learners also explained that there are challenges they experience as they attend PALCs, challenges such as becoming a learner at an elderly age, seasonal jobs and catching up after absence.

As the researcher observed operations at Centres A, B and C, findings indicated that there are no control measures for learner attendance at PALCs; there is poor classroom management. Also observed was the use of relevant learning, teaching and support material and the learning versus working conditions at PALCs.

The next chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the findings and makes recommendations.



Chapter 5

Synthesis of the Findings and Recommendations

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 the data collected by means of focus group interviews, individual interviews and observations is analysed, presented and discussed in relation to the five broad themes identified. Chapter 5 presents the overview, synthesis and recommendations for further study. The overview of each of the preceding chapters is given to explain the correlation between the collected data and the research questions formulated at the outset of the inquiry. This chapter summarises the findings of the entire study and provides conclusions; it points out the limitations and makes recommendations for further research.

I was confident that I had established an emotional connection with each group to contribute to the rapport within the focus group interviews and individual interviews. The final analysis revealed that I had extended my experience and knowledge of adult learners' responses to their understanding of Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs). I am hopeful that the recommendations of this research would later lead to the improvement of service delivery for adult learners at PALCs.

5.2 OVERVIEW

This study, undertaken with adult learners, focuses on their experiences and perceptions at PALCs. Adult learners were able to voice their experiences and perceptions about the teaching and learning at PALCs. Their responses illuminated their experiences and perceptions of learning, support and benefits experienced by adults as they attend PALCs and the manner in which they experience some challenges as they attend their classes. The study specifically focuses on adult learners at PALCs that attend classes for Levels 3 and 4. 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 the study

assisted the researcher in designing the research questions that guided the study. 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 the researcher in the study.

CHAPTER 2

Previously conducted studies and literature that was relevant to my study are discussed in this chapter. The relationship between education and literacy, education and the position of adult women in a pre-democratic era, poverty and empowerment of rural women are discussed.

The case of South African Adult Education and Training is explored. This chapter elaborates on the three conceptual arguments serving as an analytic and data collection framework for the study. The conceptual framework was drawn from the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, in Swart & Pettipher, 2005:13) which provided the analytical framework of the bio-ecological model, the phenomenological approach to the self-concept and the asset-based approach as a way to explain the role that adult learners play as co-constructors of their own learning and users of PALCs.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter the research design and research methods are discussed as they form the foundation of the research itself. A discussion of the qualitative and interpretive qualities of the study also features in this chapter. It entails a concise explanation of the research methods used, including the research design and data collection strategies. These details clarify the manner in which the researcher was able to enter the life-world of the adult learners within PALCs and this process assisted the researcher in understanding them as human beings.

In addition the research methods allowed the researcher to comprehend the respondents' reality in terms of their social relationships, values, knowledge, attitudes and responses with regard to PALCs. The focus group interviews, individual interviews and observations 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 descriptive analysis.

Relevant themes and categories were identified 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 adult learners' experiences and perceptions of teaching and learning, their experiences and perceptions of support, the benefits of attending PALCs and the challenges experienced by adult learners at PALCs. It was also discovered that there are no control measures for learner attendance at PALCs, as well as a lack of classroom management and other factors that influence adult learners' experiences and perceptions at PALCs. Some participants were positive about attending PALCs. The positive participants indicated the reasons or benefits. There were a few participants who were negative, and those participants experienced some challenges during their attendance at PALCs. These challenges culminated in frustration and emotional stress among those participants.

5.3 SYNTHESIS OF THE FINDINGS IN TERMS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

By combining the findings of the various research strategies, namely focus group interviews, individual interviews and observations, I was able to respond effectively to the research questions mentioned in Chapter 1:

1. How do adult learners experience and perceive teaching and learning at Public Adult Learning Centres?
2. What factors and challenges influence adult learners' experiences and perceptions at Adult Learning Centres with regard to the following?
 - (a) Teaching and learning
 - (b) Support from teachers and family
 - (c) Attendance of learners at PALCs
 - (d) Operation of PALCs.

5.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

How do adult learners experience and perceive teaching and learning at Public Adult Learning Centres?

Some participants were positive, happy, excited and accepted the situation, but some participants were frustrated, confused, and uncertain about the level of understanding during teaching and learning at PALCs (Chapter 4, section 4.3.1).

As can be seen in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.1.1 category 1), participants were frustrated with regard to the level of understanding the learning area (subject) content. Adults indicated, for example, that Applied Agriculture and Agricultural Technology (AAAT) and Mathematical Literacy (ML) are difficult. Participants attended PALCs because they had their own specific reasons or purpose, such as operating an automatic teller machine, calculating their pension money, or reading a Bible. Adults agreed that they were not attending PALCs to study all the learning areas that are offered but they want to study some of the learning areas, for example, English, and specific things that affect them in real life situations, especially at work.

Participants expressed different views regarding the language of instruction at PALCs. Some participants were against English as language of instruction and they wanted vernacular and other participants wanted English to be the language of instruction (Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.2 category 2).

Some participants want English to be the prescribed language of instruction as well as of the learning material. Participants agreed that most things are written in English; one example that participants tendered was that of road signs. Some participants were against using English as the language of instruction; instead they wanted vernacular, specifically Siswati, to be used as the language of instruction. Adults emphasised that they do not understand English; hence they fail some of the learning areas that are taught in English.

Participants responded positively with regard to teachers' instruction. All participants agreed that their teachers were accommodating (Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.3 category 3).

The findings indicate that participants agreed that teachers try their best to accommodate all adults in their classes. During the interviews with participants, there was an indication that teachers work extra hours to assist those who have not caught

up during contact time. Participants indicated that teachers even group learners to assist one another in their groups. Participants raised their concern during the interviews, saying that some teachers work very fast in their approach during teaching and learning because they want to finish their schedule in the stipulated time.

Participants expressed negative attitudes towards writing tests, completing assignments and doing homework (Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.4 category 4).

Participants agreed that irrespective of their negativity about assessments, teachers give them all types of assessment, formal and informal tasks to do. During the interviews the participants indicated that they are not comfortable with writing tests, doing assignments, projects and homework. Adult learners indicated that they have responsibilities that are priority at home and at work; they are in employment, have families to support and moreover, they have to attend PALCs classes in the afternoon.

Participants who were interviewed mentioned that they fail to concentrate and listen to their teachers in class, because by the time they reach class they are very tired and cannot cope with learning. Findings also indicate that participants do not have time to study for tests at home. Participants indicated that the work load is too much for them; hence they sometimes absent themselves from tests and submissions of assignments.

One participant indicated that as adults they just need skills such as sewing and baking. The participant further indicated that her focus is on practical things and not theoretical subjects such as Mathematics, which is very difficult for her.

While adult learners are engaged in teaching and learning at PALCs, they experience support from their families, communities, teachers, employers, fellow adult learners and officials of the Department of Education. Participants also experience financial support from the Government. They agreed during the interviews that they experience all necessary support from the above-mentioned stakeholders; their confidence is boosted and most are able to attend PALC classes (Chapter 4, 4.3.2.1 category 1; section 4.3.2.2 category 2; section 4.3.2.3 category 3; section 4.3.2.4 category 4; and section 4.3.2.5 category 5; section 4.3.2.6 category 6; section 4.3.2.7 category 7).

In the focus group and individual interviews participants indicated their families, communities, teachers, employers, fellow adult learners, officials of the Department of Education as sources of support. In the framework suggested by Scale and Leffert (1999:6) support assets refer to the ways in which individuals are loved, affirmed and accepted as adult learners attending PALC classes (Chapter 2, section 2.8). Adult learners indicated that they are motivated by the support they receive from various settings of social community.

One response from a participant (Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.1 category 1) indicated that her husband is very supportive; he even checks her progress with teachers.

Chapter 4 (section 4.3.2.2 category 2) shows that participants enrolled at PALCs because of campaigns that were run by community leaders and church pastors and even teachers to encourage all who are illiterate to register for PALC classes in order to improve the literacy level of their community. Findings indicate that communities are very supportive of participants' attendance, allocating them to be appointed to certain portfolios in community meetings, such as chairperson of the social club.

In Chapter 4 (section 4.3.2.3 category 3) participants indicate that teachers devote time to checking on adult learners who, for whatever reason, have been absent from classes. From the individuals there is evidence of recruiting them in their homes to come and attend PALCs and supporting them where possible.

Responses (Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.4 category 4) from participants indicate that some employers give them time to attend PALC classes. Individual participants indicated that some employers give them some time off during examinations.

Participants (Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.6 category 6) made both negative and positive comments about the support they receive from officials of the Department of Education. Some participants agreed that there is some support from the officials but they are dissatisfied and unhappy about the support that is insufficient. They indicated that officials visit them once a year or not at all. They indicated that those officials who visit them do not bother to solve their problems.

Responses from individuals at Centre A indicated that they are satisfied with the support they receive from the officials because they do come once or twice per month to motivate them to attend classes. Participants also mentioned that officials monitor the writing of examinations and encourage them to further their studies.

Participants indicated that they are happy about the financial support they receive from the Department of Education. They revealed that no fees are payable for their attending classes (Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.7 category 7). It is clear that all the participants from the three PALCs are aware of the positive value of the financial support they receive for their learning.

Participants feel that they are developed, empowered, and enlightened by the experiences from which they benefited during teaching and learning at PALCs (Chapter 4, section 4.3.3).

In Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.2 category 2) findings indicate that participants have learnt how to start projects for economic growth. Through Life Orientation (LO) as a learning area they have learned how to plan and budget. As some of the adult learners are working, participants indicated that they have gained knowledge on how to plan their income and expenditure. This is supported by Hake (1999:81) who maintains that literacy increases the availability of knowledge, which is responsible for de-traditionalisation, which is important in the transformation of modern societies. The findings have revealed that participants have been empowered regarding how to speak in public forums and to participate in social clubs (Chapter 4, section 4.3.3.3 category 3). During the interviews it emerged that the development of adult learners through education empowers them to mould their own actions and those of others to form part of the development and reconstruction of their communities. The women's engagement in small projects through the formation of social clubs and group schemes creates opportunities for them to be organised and take leadership positions in different community structures.

5.3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What are the challenges that influence adult learners' experiences and perceptions at adult learning centres with regard to the following?

- (a) *Teaching and learning*
- (b) *Support from teachers and family*
- (c) *Attendance of learners at PALCs*
- (d) *Operation of PALCs.*

Participants responded in different ways to the challenges they experienced during teaching and learning at PALCs. They indicated that becoming learners at an elderly

age, seasonal jobs and catching up after being absent from class are some of the challenges they experienced.

(a) Teaching and learning

Participants expressed a feeling of frustration that leads to a lack of confidence due to their age. Participants indicated that they are slow in doing their tasks. Findings indicate that various factors affect adult learning at an elderly age, such as family responsibilities, culture (a girl is not supposed to be educated), working at an early stage as an orphan and poverty in the family (Chapter 4, section 4.3.4.1 category 1). In Chapter 4 (section 4.3.5.3 category 3) participants indicated that some learning material is disturbing and should not be allowed to be taught. They indicated that some of learning areas contain difficult content. Other learners disapproved of the discussion of HIV and AIDS during Life Orientation lessons.

Nevertheless it seems that adult learners are able to apply their functional skills in their families and communities through the use of relevant learning and teaching support materials. For example, they are involved in their children's education and also in community matters; they have gained these skills in class through the use of relevant support material at PALCs. This notion is confirmed by Brizius (in [Malicky, et al., 1997:84](#)) who is of the opinion that if parents' skills are improved and they learn to value education, they will communicate the benefits of education to their children.

Teachers rely on the four classrooms that were given by the school governing body (SGB) for use. It is difficult for teachers to use classrooms according to the scheduled time as mainstream schools end at 14:00 while the adult learners' classes start at the same time. Adults are sometimes confused about the times that teachers start with teaching. This causes teaching and learning to start more than 30 minutes late (Chapter 4, section 4.3.5.2 category 2).

The resources available are not conducive to the teaching and learning of adult learners (Chapter 4, section 4.3.5.4 category 4). The poor learning and working conditions for adult learners and teachers at PALCs are demotivating. Adult learners use small chairs suitable for Foundation Phase learners. There is not enough learning material: adults have to share one or two books in the class. Stationery is insufficient for adult learners; they do not have exercise books for all the learning areas. No proper attendance registers are used due to a lack of administrative support from the Department of Education.

(b) Support from teachers and families

In Chapter 4 (section 4.3.2.1 category 1 and section 4.3.2.3 category 3) participants indicated that they are very happy and satisfied about the support they receive from their families and teachers. They are motivated by various family members at home to attend classes and when they reach PALCs they experience that teachers are also supportive.

(c) Attendance of learners at PALCs

In Chapter 4 (section 4.3.4.2 category 2) participants indicate that seasonal jobs affect their attendance of PALCs. They indicated that they need both education and a seasonal job. Furthermore, some adult learners are not employed; consequently the seasonal jobs help those who do not work to bring food for their families during those times. Participants who are not employed become engaged in seasonal jobs when called to do so. Hence they do not attend classes regularly; sometimes they arrive late for classes or do not attend classes at all. They are very tired after work and go straight home, not being able to attend classes. Participants also indicated that these seasonal jobs cause some of the adult learners to fail at the end of the year; some adults quit before they complete the programme, thus relapsing into illiteracy. They indicated that they keep on registering for the same level each year.

In Chapter 4 (section 4.3.4.3 category 3) participants indicated the frustration and difficulties encountered after absence from class. It is difficult for them to catch up work after they have been absent. Participants indicated that it becomes very difficult to understand the next level of work after missing earlier work.

(d) Operation of PALCs

Findings indicate that most adult learners who are attending PALC classes are affected by the lack of resources and the way PALCs are operated. There are no or poor control measures for learner attendance at PALCs (Chapter 4, section 4.3.5.2). Poor classroom management (Chapter 4, section 4.3.5.3), the lack of teaching and support material and learning conditions at PALCs are some of the other factors that affects and inhibit quality teaching and learning.

I observed that the administration and management at PALCs are poor. Only the centre managers take the responsibility for management of the centre. There are no deputy centre managers. No HoDs appointed by the Department of Education can

assist the centre manager. All the duties are performed by one person (the centre manager) who is paid by the Department of Education. The researcher observed that when the centre manager is away for a meeting, she/he has to appoint someone, sometimes the oldest teacher at the centre to take care of the administrative duties and control attendance registers.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the effectiveness and functionality of PALCs at Ehlanzeni District (Nkomazi East Circuit), the following recommendations are made:

- PALCs classes should start later in the afternoon to accommodate adults coming from work and to avoid clashes with mainstream schools.
- The Department of Education should provide more support with regard to management and administrative resources and teaching and learning material.
- A flexible programme should be introduced to accommodate adults with seasonal jobs and with catching up after absence; PALC teachers must make provision for those adult learners who have been absent for seasonal jobs and other valid reasons to be able to catch up.
- Teachers need training in the teaching of adults. Although teachers are qualified the adults do not always understand the content of the subjects. Teachers need to implement innovative teaching strategies to replace tests and assignments but that can obtain similar outcomes.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research is recommended on the following:

📌 Recommendation 1

Research should be carried out on teaching strategies for adult learners in rural areas. Most adults start from a level of complete illiteracy and have never been to school.

📌 Recommendation 2

Research should be carried out on how the Department of Education could effectively support PALCs. Public Adult Learning Centres need effective managers and resources (for example, contextually appropriate teaching and learning material) for effective teaching and learning.

Recommendation 3

Research is needed on the educational needs of adults in rural areas in order to provide a more flexible approach and context-based contents. Rural areas have, for example, seasonal jobs and need culturally and vocationally appropriate education.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research was conducted at three PALCs of the Ehlanzeni District (Nkomazi East Circuit), which are in the rural areas where there are a high number of illiterate people. It would be beneficial to extend the research to other districts of Mpumalanga province that are also affected by the same problem. However, it is believed that the problems and the aspirations of adult learners at Ehlanzeni are similar to those in other areas of the country, and the findings can be shared.

The researcher was given the impression that as a result of her position in the Department of Education, the participants were hesitant to participate. Some of the participants in the study at the beginning of the interview did not feel comfortable to be questioned by an official from the district office about aspects of their PALCs but they gained confidence as the interviews progressed. These were some inconveniences that were unavoidable that the researcher had to endure in the process of the research.

The research could have utilised a more varied profile of participants located within the various levels of PALCs. This could guarantee the authenticity of the data so that it represents all the perspectives of members of the research setting. Moreover, a longer period on site could have enabled the researcher to gain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomena, which could possibly have led to different conclusions from the ones made here.

5.7 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

The methodology used in this study (Chapter 3) assisted the researcher in answering the research questions and in achieving the aims stated in Chapter 1 of the research. The literature review in Chapter 2 is comprehensive. It provides an in-depth understanding of the topic, the research problem and questions. It is informative and was used to clarify or emphasise findings.

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

With the focus group interviews the researcher could reach more participants simultaneously, effectively and cost effectively. The sample size was increased by interviewing several people at once. The group discussion produced data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group setting (Chapter 4). Participants listened to others' verbalised experiences, which stimulated memories, ideas and experiences. The focus group members discovered a common language to describe shared experiences and perceptions. This enabled the researcher to capture the vernacular to understand the discussions. The focus group interviews provided an opportunity for learning. However, the number of focus group members was not large enough to be a representative sample of the population of AET learners 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 over-indulgence by some members. The individual interviews (Chapter 1, Chapter 3) allowed the researcher more opportunity to assess the participants' understanding and interpretation of questions and provide clarification for any confusion or uneasiness that might arise about the meaning of the questions or the responses. The individual interviews allowed the researcher the opportunity to present material to participants and obtain their reactions. This research strategy assisted the researcher in establishing a relationship of trust with the participants and in soliciting answers to questions that the participants might otherwise have been reluctant to answer in the focus group interviews. However, the researcher guarded against influencing the results intentionally or unintentionally that might have violated consistency in measurement. The study evolved in such a way that it catered for to the complexity of the participants. For instance, the fact that some of the participants could not understand English allowed the researcher to continue with the interviews through interpretation, using vernacular. This was more accessible to the adult learners and it provided a non-threatening way of expressing their views without feeling incompetent.

The observation period was easy for the researcher because then one observes what is happening during the teaching and learning phase without talking to any person. Learner attendance was observed; the starting and ending times of classes

were also observed. The researcher was merely observing without interfering with any programme at the centre.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This study highlights the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs. The lack of educational support from the Department of Education at PALCs contributes to despondency and frustration in the adult learners. Illiteracy, which links with poverty, unemployment and gender discrimination, has to be addressed and corrective measures implemented. Women who are poor, unemployed and with no opportunities for acquiring education and other benefits of life, can be engaged in PALC classes that will serve as an avenue towards enlightenment. Education at PALCs could release these adults from a sense of personal inferiority, relationship of dependency and subservience and allocate a new status and potential.

The offering of Public Adult Learning Centres classes is a formidable challenge, more specifically when considering meeting the 2015 Dakar Goals for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. Mobilisation and proper campaigning strategies for PALCs classes are of crucial importance so that all who are illiterate can obtain information and register at Adult Education Training Centres. The provision of PALC classes and relevant skilling under supportive environments will help in the reconstruction, development and social transformation of the country.

The findings of and recommendations made in this study to address the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at PALCs are important and valuable to adults who are at PALCs, those who intend to attend PALCs classes and all stakeholders who have an interest in AET.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter of request to the district director to ask permission to conduct research at ABET centres

Appendix B

Permission letter from the district director to conduct research at selected ABET centres

Appendix C

Letter of request to the centre manager to conduct research at Public Adult Learning Centres

Appendix D

Approval letter from the centre manager to conduct research

Appendix E

Letter of consent: Participant

Appendix F

Consent form for participants to participate in the research study

Appendix G

Set of interview questions for the focus group and the individual interviews

APPENDIX A

Letter of request to the district director to ask permission to conduct research at ABET centres

P.O.Box 1540
Appendix A
1320
22 May 2011

The Regional Director
Department of Education
Ehlanzeni Region
Private Bag X1014
Ka-Nyamazane
1214

Re: Request for permission to conduct research at selected ABET centres

I hereby request you to grant me a permission to conduct a research in the following ABET centres in your region:

- **Sibhejane ABET centre**
- **Mbazima ABET centre and**
- **Maqhekeza ABET centre.**

This is the requirement for the fulfillment of the requirements of the **Masters degree** in Adult and Community Education and Training at the University of Pretoria. The topic of my research is “**Experiences and perceptions of adult learners at Public Adult Learning Centres**”.

Thank you for giving attention to my request.

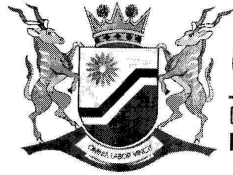
Yours faithfully

S.N. Dladla
Tel: 013 7660694
Email: sndladla67@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

Permission letter from the district director to conduct research at selected ABET centres

D



education
DEPARTMENT: EDUCATION
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Private Bag X 1014
Kanyamazane 1214
Government Building
Old Mgwenya College
Kanyamazane
Nelspruit RSA
Tel (013 766 0330)
Fax (013 794 3234)

EHLANZENI REGIONAL OFFICE SUB-DIRECTORATE GET

Litiko leTemfundvo Umnyango weFundo Departement van Onderwys Umnyango wezeMfundo


**MRS DLADLA SN
P.O. BOX 1540
MALELANE
1320**

**RE : PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SELECTED ABET
CENTRES**

1. Your letter dated 22 May 2011 refers.
2. Kindly be informed that permission is granted to you to conduct research at selected ABET centres as per your request.
3. You are reminded to observe the code of professional ethics throughout the period of the research.
4. Good luck for your studies

Kind regards,


DISTRICT DIRECTOR
MR MJ LUSHABA


DATE

Appendix C

Letter of request to the centre manager to conduct research at Public Adult Learning Centres



Faculty of Education

Dear

Request to Conduct Research at the Centre: Centre Manager

As part of my master's degree studies, I am currently preparing to engage in project-specific research related to the experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs). Details of the research project will be discussed with you at the information session which will be held on but are outlined again below for your convenience.

Title:

Experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres and how they cope with learning. The study will thus explore the experiences and perceptions in Public Adult Learning Centre and how learners cope with learning at the centre.

Research questions:

The following questions frame this study:

- What are the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at Nkomazi Public Adult Learning Centres?
- Why do these experiences and perceptions exist?
- What control mechanisms are in place in PALCs?

Ethical principles:

The researcher needs to apply for clearance from several authorities; among others the university and provincial Education Department before engaging in any form of data collection. Such clearance will only be granted if all participants have given their informed consent.

Autonomy and voluntary participation:

Adult learners legally have the right to decide on their participation. They will not be coerced. This means that neither the researcher nor the centre manager will exert inappropriate pressure or undue influence to recruit or retain participants. You will have all the information in order to make an informed choice. Prospective participants will have all the information in order to make an informed choice. They will be invited to attend an information session during which the research project will be explained in a language and fashion that they understand. They will have time to reflect on the information and ask for clarification. The researcher will be available to answer their questions truthfully and accurately in a reasoned response. They will have seven days to think about their involvement before signing the consent form. They also have the right to withdraw at any stage of the project without any negative consequence or penalty.

Full disclosure:

They will be provided with sufficient information about proposed activities, the expected benefits or material risks, i.e. anything that might influence their decision to participate or not. They will also be consulted during the research process and will be debriefed after the conclusion of the project. They may also have access to a summary of the research findings.

Confidentiality:

Although this study does not plan to delve into sensitive or personal issues, participants have a right to privacy and their anonymity will be protected, meaning that no identifiable information will be reported either in writing or orally. Codes and pseudonyms will be used to hide participants' identity. They have a choice of whether their responses and instructional behaviour should be known to more than the research team. The location and the name of the centre will also be changed to protect the identity of all concerned. All information will be stored in a password-protected computer to which only the researcher has access.

Safety of participation:

Participants will not be at physical or psychological risk or harm or any kind. This means that they will not be placed in circumstances that may cause undue stress, embarrassment or loss of self-esteem.

Trust:

I shall report our findings in a complete and honest way without any misrepresentation, using formal yet comprehensible English. I will not fabricate data or alter findings to suit interest groups. I shall give credit and acknowledgements appropriately and disseminate the practical implications of our research in a comprehensible way. As participants they will not be party to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Time frame:

Participants will be consulted and a convenient time of day and week will be negotiated with them for when interviews will be conducted, and when the researcher can observe any experiences of learners at the centre. Recording of voices during interviews will also be done and such sessions will be negotiated in accordance with their personal preference and the centre schedule.

Your co-operation would be highly valued. I look forward to your positive response which will start a mutually beneficial involvement.

Siphiwe Nonhlanhla Dladla
Student (University of Pretoria)
072 956 7475
013 766 0694 (W)

Appendix D

Approval letter from the centre manager to conduct research



Faculty of Education

Centre Manager

Approval Letter to Conduct Research on Experiences and Perceptions of Learners at Public Adult Learning Centres

This is to state that I, ----- a centre manager at ----- have been informed and fully understand the nature and purpose of the research project entitled *Experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres*. I thus agree to my centre being used as a research site in the study being conducted by Mrs Sipiwe Nonhlanhla Dladla, Department of Education, Mpumalanga.

A. Purpose:

I understand that this is not an experimental study and have been informed that the purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres and how they cope with learning. The study will thus explore the experiences and perceptions in Public Adult Learning Centres and how learners cope with learning at the centre.

B. Procedures:

Learners who have indicated willingness to participate will be interviewed. The researcher will conduct open-ended interviews and focus group interviews with the learners. The researcher will record during interviews. The researcher will also observe other experiences experienced by learners at the centre on agreed days. The researcher will not interfere or intervene in any learning activity presented at the centre and even in the classroom. All information collected will be used only for the purpose of analysis. Learners will be kept informed of the research process and will be debriefed after the conclusion of the project. The centre manager may also have access to a summary of the research findings.

C. Conditions of Participation:

- I understand that learners, even though they have agreed to participate, are also free to withdraw their consent and discontinue their participation at any time without negative consequences or penalty.
- They may do so by informing the researcher in writing or by telephone. They have been provided with contact numbers of the researcher and supervisor for this purpose.
- I am at liberty to contact the researcher at any time if I have any question or concerns about the study.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential.
- I understand that the findings of this study may be disseminated within an academic context.
- In addition to my general consent to take part in this study,
 - I agree to the occasional audio-recording of learners' activities in or out of the classroom. _____
 - I agree to take part in this study, but I do not agree to the occasional audio-recording of learners' activities in or out of the classroom. _____

I have carefully studied the above and understand this agreement. I thus freely consent and voluntarily agree that my centre may be utilised as a research site for this study.

Name of centre manager (please print)

Signature: _____

Contact Number (s): _____

Email: _____

Although I have signed, I would still like to know or suggest the following:

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this research or have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the researcher or supervisor at the given numbers at any time.

If you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted please speak to the researcher or the supervisor. If an independent person is preferred, consult the chairperson of the Ethics Committee (Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria)

Supervisor: Dr H. Dippenaar
Tel: 012 420 4007
Cell: 082 466 5875
Co-Supervisor: Prof. C. Hartell
Cell: 082 2022 122

Letter of consent: Adult Learners



Faculty of Education

Dear

Letter of consent: Adult Learners

As part of my master's degree studies, I am currently preparing to engage in project-specific research related to the experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs). Details of the research project will be discussed with you at the information session which will be held on..... but are outlined again below for your convenience.

Title:

Experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres and how they cope with learning. The study will thus explore the experiences of Public Adult Learning Centre learners and how they cope with learning at these centres.

Research questions:

The following questions frame this study:

- What are the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at Nkomazi Public Adult Learning Centres?
- Why do these experiences and perceptions exist?
- What control mechanisms are in place in PALCs?

Ethical principles:

The researcher needs to apply for clearance from several authorities, among others the University and Provincial Education Department before engaging in any form of data collection. Such clearance will only be granted if all participants have given their informed consent.

Autonomy and voluntary participation:

You have the right to decide to participate. You will not be coerced. This means that neither the researcher nor the centre manager will exert inappropriate pressure or undue influence to recruit or retain participants. You will have all the information in order to make an informed choice. You will attend an information session during which the research project will be explained in a language and fashion that you understand. You will have time to reflect on the information and ask for clarification. The researcher will be available to answer your questions truthfully and accurately in a reasoned response. You will have seven days to think about your involvement before signing the consent form. You also have the right to withdraw at any stage of the project without any negative consequence or penalty

Full disclosure:

You will be provided with sufficient information about proposed activities, the expected benefits, material risks, i.e. anything that might influence your decision to participation or not. You will also be consulted during the research process and will be debriefed after the conclusion of the project. You may also have access to a summary of the research findings that will be reported as group and not individual data sets.

Confidentiality:

Although this study does not plan to delve into sensitive or personal issues, you have a right to privacy and your anonymity will be protected; this means that no identifiable information will be reported either in writing or orally. Codes and pseudonyms will be used to hide your identity. You also have a choice whether your responses and instructional behaviour may be made known to more than research team. The location and the name of the centre will also be changed to protect the identity of all concerned.

Safety of participation:

You will not be at physical or psychological risk or harm or any kind. This means that you will not be placed in circumstances that may cause undue stress, embarrassment or loss of self-esteem.

Trust:

I shall report our findings in a complete and honest way without any misrepresentation, using formal yet comprehensible English. I will not fabricate data or alter findings to suit interest groups. I shall give credit and acknowledgement

appropriately and disseminate the practical implications of our research in a comprehensible way. As a participant you will not be party to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Time frame:

You will be consulted and a convenient time of days and weeks will be negotiated with you for when researcher's interviews will be conducted, and when the researcher can observe any experiences of learners at the centre. Recording of voices during interviews will also be done and such sessions will be negotiated in accordance with your personal preference and the centre schedule.

Your co-operation would be highly valued. I look forward to your positive response that would start a mutually beneficial involvement.

Siphiwe Nonhlanhla Dladla
Student (University of Pretoria)
072 956 7475
013 766 0694 (W

Consent form for participants to participate in the research study



Faculty of Education

Consent Form to participate in the Research Study pertaining to Experiences and Perceptions of Learners at Public Adult Learning Centres

This is to state that I, ----- a learner at ----- have been informed and fully understand the nature and purpose of the research project entitled *Experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres*. I thus agree to participate in the study to be conducted by Ms Sipiwe Nonhlanhla Dladla, Department of Education, Mpumalanga.

A. Purpose:

I understand that this is not an experimental study and have been informed that the purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of learners at Public Adult Learning Centres and how they cope with learning. The study will thus explore the experiences in of Public Adult Learning Centre learners and how they cope with learning at the centre.

B. Procedures:

During this process the researcher will conduct open-ended interview and focus group interviews with us as learners. The researcher will record during interviews. The researcher will also observe experiences of learners at the centre on agreed days. The researcher will not interfere or intervene in any learning activity done at the centre and even in the classroom. All information collected will be used only for the purpose of analysis. I will be kept informed of the research process and will be debriefed after the conclusion of the project. I may also have access to a summary of the research findings.

C. Conditions of Participation:

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences or penalty.
- I may do so by informing the researcher in writing or by telephone. They have provided me with the researcher and supervisor's contact numbers for this purpose.
- I am at liberty to contact the researcher at any time if I have any question or concerns about the study.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential.
- I understand that the findings of this will be disseminated within an academic context.
- In addition to my general consent to take part in this study,
 - I agree to the occasional audio-recording of learners' activities in or out of the classroom. _____
 - I agree to take part in this study, but I do not agree to the occasional audio-recording of learners' activities in or out of the classroom. _____

I have carefully studied the above and understand this agreement. I thus freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name of centre manager (please print)

Signature: _____

Contact Number (s): _____

Email: _____

Although I have signed, I would still like to know or suggest the following:

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this the research or have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the researcher or supervisor at the given numbers at any time.

If you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted please speak to the researcher or the supervisor. If an independent person is preferred, consult the chairperson of the Ethics Committee (Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria)

Supervisor: Dr H. Dippenaar

Tel: 012 420 4007

Cell: 082 466 5875

Co-Supervisor: Prof. C. Hartell

Cell: 082 2022 122

**Question to be asked in the interviews
(Focus Group and Individual Interviews)**

Main question: What are the experiences and perceptions of adult learners at Public Adult Learning Centres in Nkomazi?

First Set of Interview Questions

1. Questions Related to the Experiences and Perceptions of Teaching and Learning of Adult Learners at PALCs

- Tell me more about why you came to this centre.
- What is the most important thing that you have learned since you started coming here?
- Is there any support that you received from teachers, family, community, employers and officials of the Department of Education?
- What are the benefits of attending PALCs?
- What do you think contributes to the learner performance at this Public Adult Learning Centre?

Second Set of Interview Questions

2. Questions Related to the Factors and Challenges of Adult Learners' Experiences and Perceptions at PALCs

- What are the challenges experienced by adult learners at PALCs?
- What are the factors that cause poor operations of PALCs?
- Why do some learners leave centres during the course of the year?
- What do you think can be done to improve or maintain the learning situation at this Public Adult Learning Centre?
- What else would you like to say about this Public Adult Learning Centre?

