

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 sketched the context of this study, arguing that the challenges the HEIs face with the integration of the SDA in their workplaces are an indication of the mismatch between the intent of the SDA, on the one hand and that of staff development in HEIs, on the other. It was furthermore explained that HEIs have made little attempt to understand the underlying intent of the SDA, and that they have therefore struggled to determine whether such an intent coincides with or differs from their view of staff development in HEIs. In Chapter 2 I discussed the history of the implementation of the SDA and that of staff development in HEIs, and I offered a succinct critical perspective of the underlying rationale for the implementation of the SDA and of staff development in HEIs. I also alluded to the mismatch between the rationale for the implementation of the SDA and that of staff development in HEIs (as tabled in §2.3.6). The literature study presented in Chapter 2 is not aimed at the methodologies that HEIs employ in training or developing their staff members; but instead at highlighting the underlying assumptions and theoretical basis that inform the very nature of the SDA, as opposed to those that inform staff development in HEIs, as well as the challenges that these differences hold for staff development in HEIs. For this reason, the literature review has been positioned so that it could reveal the absence of dialogue between HEIs and the ETDP SETA as well as the fact that the results of this absence of dialogue has not yet been explored scientifically, especially as regards the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design used for the empirical part of the research as an extension of the theoretical reasoning in the first two chapters. Using a critical interpretative approach, this study explores the perceptions of the Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs) in HEIs with regard to the effect of the SDA in staff development in HEIs.

The chapter is divided into two sections providing the golden thread that runs towards an integrated approach to achieving the aims of this study. Section 3.2 explains the theoretical and ontological underpinnings of Critical Theory as an epistemological paradigm. Section 3.3 describes the design of this study against the background of this epistemological paradigm. As stated in Chapter 1, empirical and non-empirical data collection methods were employed in tandem for this study, because these combined methods enhanced the



critical⁴⁷ qualitative nature of this study. In §3.4 details about the research programme are outlined while, in §3.5, the research methodology employed in this study is explained, as well as the points made by critical theorists about the methodological approach of Critical Theory to empirical research. I also analyse the Habermasian triple hermeneutic approach. This chapter concludes with a description of the methods that I have employed to enhance the validity of this study as well as a short description of the limitations of this study.

3.2 Implication of Critical Theory for research: background to the research philosophy of this study

Critical Theory, as a research framework, is well established as a rigorous discipline and has been employed by notable academics in the social sciences, such as Reason and Bradbury (2006), Valentin (2006), Henning (2004), Box (2005), Denzin *et al.* (2005), Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004), Neuman and Kreuger (2003), Ritzer and Smart (2003), Alvesson *et al.* (2000), Carspecken (1996) and Carr (1995). These authors' use of Critical Theory as a basis for the construction of knowledge, acknowledges the importance of Critical Theory in the broader domain of critical qualitative research.

In Chapter 2 I explained that this critical interpretative study is set against the backdrop of Critical Theory associated with Jürgen Habermas. Habermas's version of Critical Theory was selected for two reasons: (1) Habermas is considered to be one of the most influential contributors to current Critical Theory (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000; Held, 1980), and (2), I have – as a result of my own academic and intellectual schooling – a close affinity with Habermas's ideas on the epistemology and methodology of the construction of knowledge. The following sections briefly discuss the ontology, epistemology and methodology associated with Critical Theory.

3.2.1 Ontology of Critical Theory: background to the design of this study

One description of Critical Social Theory is that it seeks to bring to the fore the structures of socio-economic classes, that are taken for granted. In other words, the theory holds that the organisation of society should empower human beings to rise above the constraints placed on them by socio-economic classes and related ideologies which tend to control people

⁴⁷ Critical refers to researchers who are concerned about social inequalities and who are directed towards positive social change (Carspecken, 1996:3).

(Crossley, 2006:180). This refers to the emancipatory⁴⁸ interest of Critical Theory. By revealing (or bringing to the surface) the taken-for-granted structures and views of communities (which were formed in a historical, socio-economic and political context), Critical Theory serves to counteract people's false consciousness (assumed reality). This implies that critical theorists support an ontology of historical realism (Neuman and Kreucer, 2003:84; Ritzer and Smart, 2001:180; Snyman, 1993:170; Held, 1980:15). Historical realism holds that reality is shaped over time by socio-economic and political factors to such an extent that reality becomes inappropriately accepted to be “real”, thus restricting⁴⁹ understanding or allowing a dominant “one-sided⁵⁰” view of society, which is nothing more than an ideology (Denzin *et al.*, 2005:193 and 305; Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:118; Neuman, 1997:75). Habermas (1979) states, therefore, that it is not power, expertise or science and technology that validate arguments, but that people are able to reach consensus in an open dialogue by questioning and reflecting on one another's viewpoints, justifying their own arguments or amending their assumptions.

The critical theorist's view of the objectivity (validity) of knowledge is that it is shared, it is neither a neutral nor a value-free position as is the case with positivism. Habermas (1979:78) proposes in this regard: “If consensus is reached under circumstances such as power, it means that ideologies have been disputed through critical reflection.”

Against this backdrop, the ontological stance of knowledge in the present study is that the embedded (underlying) historical, socio-economic and political values attached to the challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA should be revealed through a process of dialogue and reflection. Dialogue and reflection are proposed as methods to expose the underlying historical interests and values attached to the experiences (challenges) that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA. The above-mentioned description of the ontological (nature of reality) aim of Critical Theory asks the question: “What is the specific nature of the relationship between the knower and the known, in other words, what is the epistemology that Critical Theory espouses?”

3.2.2 Epistemology of Critical Theory: background to the design of this study

⁴⁸ Kincheloe and McLaren (2000:282) argue that one should be careful when using the term “emancipation” since: “no-one is ever completely emancipated from the social-political context that has produced him or her” (Kincheloe *et al.*, 2000:282).

⁴⁹ Kincheloe *et al.* (2000:283) assert: “All of us are hegemonized as our field of knowledge and understanding is structured by a limited exposure to competing definitions of the socio-political world. Our understanding, which is socially determined, is thus restrictive.”

⁵⁰ One-sided also refers to one-dimensionality: a world in which the monopoly of the powerful is contained. The holder of power controls everything, from the products that are consumed to the consumer's thoughts (Snyman, 1993:169).



With regard to the epistemological interest of science (also referred to as the interest of truthful knowledge) (Mouton, 2003:138), this study is based on Habermas's notion of knowledge production (Habermas, 1971). Other critical theorists may have many different interpretations, but Habermas's thinking has been selected for this study. Habermas (1971:308 to 310) asserts that the knowledge-constitutive interests⁵¹ of humans are predominantly founded on empirical-analytical science which permits deductive thinking, inferences or law-like hypotheses. Critical theorists are not satisfied with the logical knowledge produced in the empirical-analytical or historical-hermeneutic sciences because facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideology (Blundel, 2006:49; Henning *et al.*, 2004:23; Neuman *et al.*, 2003:89; Carspecken, 1996:3). Critical theorists, therefore, encourage the use of a critical epistemology that is aimed firstly at going beyond the goal of the empirical-analytical and historical-hermeneutic sciences that validate objective truth which is detached from values (implying that this truth is independent of values). Secondly, this critical epistemology seeks to expose the views people take for granted in order to emancipate people's thinking.

The validity of the knowledge-constitutive interests of critical theory is established in the concept of self-reflection (which by implication is value-laden or subjective) and which can, in principle, be emancipatory. Critical theory does not intend simply to construct reality (knowledge), or to: "leave everything as it is ... [its] intention is transcendental" (Snyman, 1993:170). Gaining understanding through reflection emancipates the mind (by gaining consciousness⁵²), allowing people's minds to rise above the utterances of normal speech. Against this background, the epistemological stance of knowledge creation which is followed in the present study is that knowledge findings are value-mediated. Thus, by exposing frozen views (value-laden ideologies) it could lead to emancipatory ends. In other words, revealing the underlying rationale for and meaning of staff development in HEIs and the challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA, could, theoretically, assist in revealing the perceptions of the SDFs with regard to the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs.

3.2.3 Methodology of Critical Theory: background to the design of this study

⁵¹ Habermas (1979) views the knowledge-constitutive interests of humans as follows: beings who firstly control nature to survive, secondly communicate in an understandable language, and thirdly are self-determining. In other words, people construct knowledge to pursue these three interests.

⁵² To be conscious that "facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription" (Henning *et al.*, 2004:23).



As explained in the previous section, scholars working in the critical emancipatory paradigm are concerned with moving beyond the goals of the empirical-analytical sciences to produce nomothetic knowledge (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 65). Critical Theory, therefore, prefers to construct truthful knowledge as a reflective process brought about by means of dialogue, self-reflection⁵³ and interpretation (Carr *et al.*, 1986: 136), thus reflectiveness serves to bring to the fore the underlying taken-for-granted⁵⁴ values that should form part of understanding. The moment this happens, the ideology's "grip on people's thinking is broken" (Snyman, 1993:170). In this study, the question could, for example, have been asked: "How can SDFs better implement the SDA in HEIs' staff development practices?" However, this would not have questioned the origins of the implementation of the SDA and staff development in HEIs. Asking the first kind of question would have perpetuated the status quo as far as the implementation of the SDA is concerned, and similarly that of staff development in HEIs. By contrast, questioning the historical, social and political significance of the SDA and of staff development in HEIs would consciously and unconsciously challenge the status quo of the SDA and that of staff development as a social phenomenon. The challenge in this study was consequently to break the grip that taking things for granted has on people's thinking. The challenge was not only to determine the match or mismatch between the aims of staff development and those of the SDA in the HEIs', but also to reflect (explain) why HEIs encounter challenges with the implementation of the SDA in the context of staff development.

The present study is, therefore, structured in a way that is aimed at questioning the rationale for the implementation of the SDA and that of staff development in HEIs, as well as the match or mismatch between these reasons in order to shed light on the challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA. Achieving the above-mentioned aims would, however, entail creating, at an epistemological level, a critical distance⁵⁵ between the symbiotic interaction between humans and facts (refer the rationale of the second question in the example quoted in the previous paragraph) to construct meaning. For this reason, Critical Theory is the paradigm of choice as it allows a critical distance by means of reflection, critique and dialogue as a means of moving beyond the grip of ideology (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004:31; Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:144; Neuman, 1997:74; Carr *et al.*,

⁵³ Habermas (1974:22) views self-reflection as central to becoming aware of ideologies that blind people's views to alternative views. He argues: "Self-reflection brings to consciousness those determinates of a self-formative process of cultivation and self-formation which ideologically determine a contemporary practice and conception of the world."

⁵⁴ In this context, the term "taken for granted" refers to people's unquestioned beliefs (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:136).

⁵⁵ Critical distance refers to knowledge that is constructed "outside" (external reality) humans without detaching the subject (human being) from the object (the phenomenon) (Snyman, 1993:171).

1986:132). To this end, the methodological framework of Critical Theory is established by the concept of reflection, interaction and dialogue (Neuman *et al.*, 2003:89; Cohen *et al.*, 1996:6). Habermas (1979) argues that truthful knowledge is established when researchers enter into dialogue to reach understanding (*Verständigung*) and consensus (*Einverständnis*). Knowledge is, therefore, not truthful when it is deduced (inferred) from law-like hypotheses based on empirical content (refer §3.2.2). This is perhaps one of the core reasons why critical theorists object to the traditional methodologies for substantiating truthful knowledge (Carr *et al.*, 1986:134; Carr, 1995:49).

As Critical Theory is not intended to eliminate empirical research (Bohman, 1999:59), its task must be to bring together different methods of study. Habermas, for example, turned to psychoanalysis for methodological guidelines on self-reflection (Habermas, 1974). Although Habermas singles out psychoanalysis as one methodology that would support the reflective nature of humans, he argues for a pluralistic theoretical and methodological approach, thus recognising that the various approaches (empirical-analytical and historical-hermeneutic) have relative legitimacy on their own merits (Habermas, 1988:3). Following this reasoning, this study views knowledge construction as a process of reflection, interpretation and dialogue, drawing upon empirical and non-empirical data. Drawing from empirical and non-empirical data could be referred to as pluralism or a mixed-methodology approach (Neuman *et al.*, 2003:82). Against the above-mentioned background of ontology, epistemology and methodology associated with Critical Theory, the next section discusses the design and methodology of the present study.

3.3 Research philosophy of this study

This study is set against the paradigmatic backdrop of the intersection between interpretivism and critical theory and concerns a critical interpretation⁵⁶ of the rationale for the implementation of the SDA and the rationale for staff development in HEIs in order to understand the challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA. Because it is essentially a power discourse, consciousness and political emancipation are central to understanding the SDFs' perceptions of the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. Political activism is not the aim of this study, nor is it aimed at finding solutions to the mismatch between the aims of the SDA and those of staff development in HEIs. The

⁵⁶ Interpretation in this context refers to the commutative act of claiming the validity of knowledge (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:110 and 119).



primary aim of this study is, instead, to raise people's consciousness through understanding (which is essentially emancipatory).

Chapter 1 explains that the challenges that HEIs face with the implementation of the SDA indicate that there is a mismatch between the aims of the SDA and those of staff development in HEIs. My personal view as participant-observer is, therefore, that the reasons for this mismatch cannot be regarded as natural (a phenomenon occurring without a social and historical context), neutral (devoid of certain interests or political views of people) or rational (produced only through deliberate, conscious thought for a specific purpose). My position in this study is that I do not regard social conditions and dominant modes of thought as natural, neutral and/or rational (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:144). This study used a participatory research design in attempting to understand the challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA. The present study is articulated in terms of an ontology of historical realism, transactional epistemology⁵⁷ and a participative research methodology to construct knowledge by means of critical reflection and dialogue⁵⁸ (Denzin *et al.*, 2005:187; Kemmis, 1995:3; Carspecken, 1996:9; Carr *et al.*, 1986:149).

Section 3.2.1 argues that traditional research avoids the position of having to research underlying feelings, values, etc. by clinging to objective neutrality⁵⁹ in the research process (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005:305; Carr *et al.*, 1986:131). In this sense, objectivity becomes no more than a manifestation of dominant views (Neuman, *et al.*, 2003:89, Kemmis, 1995:2). By contrast, critical theorists seek democratic⁶⁰ dialogue and critical reflection as a means of looking behind the facts, to reveal feelings or taken-for-granted views or values so as to achieve knowledge construction (Carr *et al.*, 1986:144). This does not, however, mean that natural science is without value. Different forms of science not only employ different modes of reasoning, but also serve different kinds of interests (Bohman, 1999:59). The justification for my choice of a participative research design is, therefore, that

⁵⁷ Transactional epistemology in this context denotes that knowledge is not a given, but is subject to continuous empirical study (Carspecken, 1996: 10).

⁵⁸ Box (2005:11), Kemmis (1995:1) and Neuman *et al.* (2003:84) refer to dialogue as dialogic or dialectic because the intent of dialogue is to bring to the surface any tensions, conflicts or contradictions in social relations towards change.

⁵⁹ Objectivity in this context refers to the positivist approach to gaining an objective reality, free of individual bias and subjectivity, by relying on inferential empirical methods (Denzin *et al.*, 2005:12).

⁶⁰ Park (2006:83) postulates that Critical Theory is allied to the ideas of democracy, by referring to knowledge constructed "by the people for the people" (Park, 2006:83).

the primary aim of this critical study is to go beyond⁶¹ the visible experiences of the challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation the SDA.

This study takes as its subject matter the nature of the meaning attached to the implementation of the SDA and of staff development in HEIs in order to bring to the fore the challenges and vested interests affecting the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. Gaining a common understanding of the rationale for the implementation of the SDA and for staff development in HEIs could reveal that underlying truths might be the outcome of certain antecedent causes (which we may not know of at present) which could be the core reasons why HEIs encounter challenges with the implementation of the SDA. It is my contention that the more we know of the underlying meanings attached to the SDA and those attached to staff development in HEIs, the better our understanding of their reciprocal value, match or mismatch will be. The above-mentioned aims of this study consequently require that understanding should be constructed in a critical reflective⁶² manner with the aid of a specifically and conveniently selected (purposive⁶³) participant group.

The selected participant group consisted of the SDFs employed in Gauteng HEIs, as discussed in Section 3.3.3. Box (2005:5), Kincheloe *et al.* (2005:325), Henning *et al.* (2004: 16), Alvesson *et al.* (2000:139) and Carr (1995:50) assert that a participatory methodology is the preferred strategy when the researcher's purpose is to promote critical reflection towards achieving self-knowledge, which would not only "enlighten" the participants about their perceptions and misunderstandings but also emancipate them from the irrational perceptions inherited from habits and tradition – which are essentially aspects of an ideology. As Willig (1999:43) advocates, the critical researcher, therefore, works qualitatively, allowing for reflection on the grounding of actions or views to acknowledge the relations between power and knowledge. In this way, information can be collected for use in a discourse analysis. This background indicates that the design of critical research is intended to pursue critical reflection and interpretation, which move beyond the surface meanings of the text or communication between the research participants and the researcher. To this end, this study's research design employs empirical and non-empirical elements to capture as much reality as possible (Denzin *et al.*, 2005:11; Willig, 1999:43).

⁶¹ The term "beyond" refers to my endeavour firstly to gain an understanding of the reasons for the implementation of the SDA as well as those for staff development in HEIs, and therefore to identify or expose the challenges HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA.

⁶² Miles (2001:23, 24) and Alvesson *et al.* (2000:144) comment that the critical researcher promotes critical reflection to bring ideological patterns to the fore, not only as regards the aim of study but also as regards the researchers themselves.

⁶³ Purposive refers to a small group of selected participants who are knowledgeable about the object of study. Researchers handpick the sample of participants on the basis of their judgement of the participants' typicality (Stake, 2005:451, Neuman, *et al.*, 2003:211).

The interplay of the empirical and non-empirical studies that are pivotal to this study is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

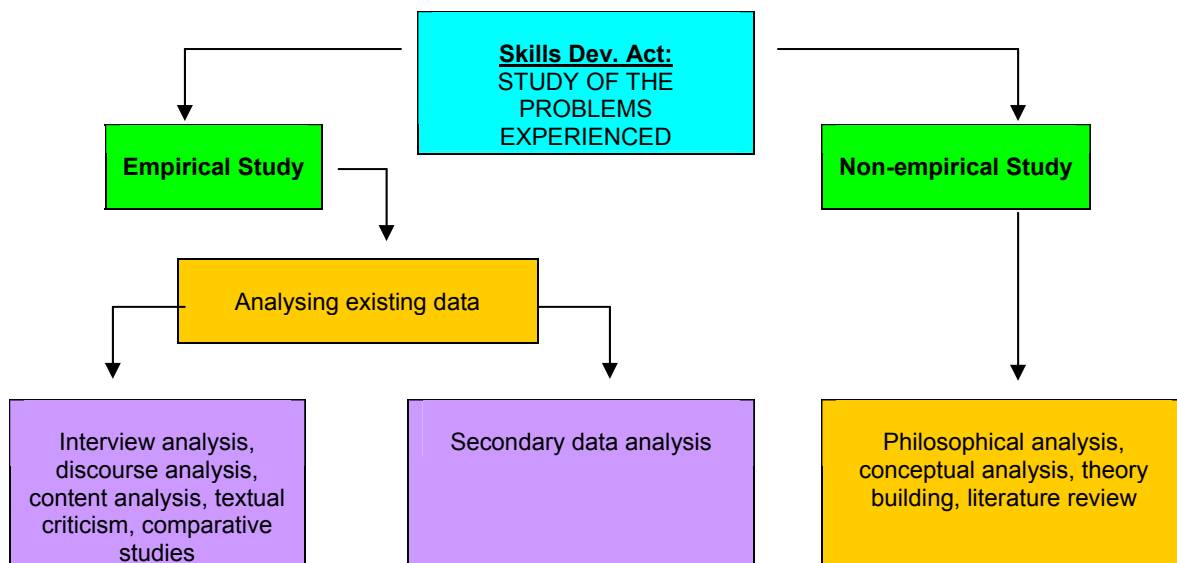


Figure 3.1 Typology of design to construct an understanding of the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs.

Figure 3.1 indicates that the design framework of this study is tailored to explore the mismatch between the rationale for the implementation of the SDA and the rationale for staff development in HEIs, as a means of shedding light on the problems that HEIs experience with the implementation of the SDA. The research design, therefore, employs empirical as well as non-empirical studies. The empirical study consists of an analysis of empirical data (which, at a later stage, is mirrored against the analysis of the non-empirical data⁶⁴) within the broader critical research framework of this study (at macro-research level). On the one hand, data analysis proceeds from formal techniques for data collection, which could include face-to-face and focus-group interviews, content analysis, textual criticism and statistical data analysis. On the other hand, non-empirical data analysis consists of philosophical analysis, conceptual analysis, theory building and a review of the literature, and represents the broader research framework of this study (the epistemological intersection between interpretivism and critical theory).

Although empirical and non-empirical studies are employed in separate units of analysis, both kinds of studies (analyses) form an integrated whole aimed at constructing an understanding of the match or mismatch between the rationale for the implementation of the SDA and the rationale for staff development in HEIs, in order to gain an understanding of

⁶⁴ Both at micro-research level.

the challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA. The empirical and non-empirical studies therefore connect theory with praxis.⁶⁵ Figure 3.2 depicts the research design employed to achieve the aim of this study.

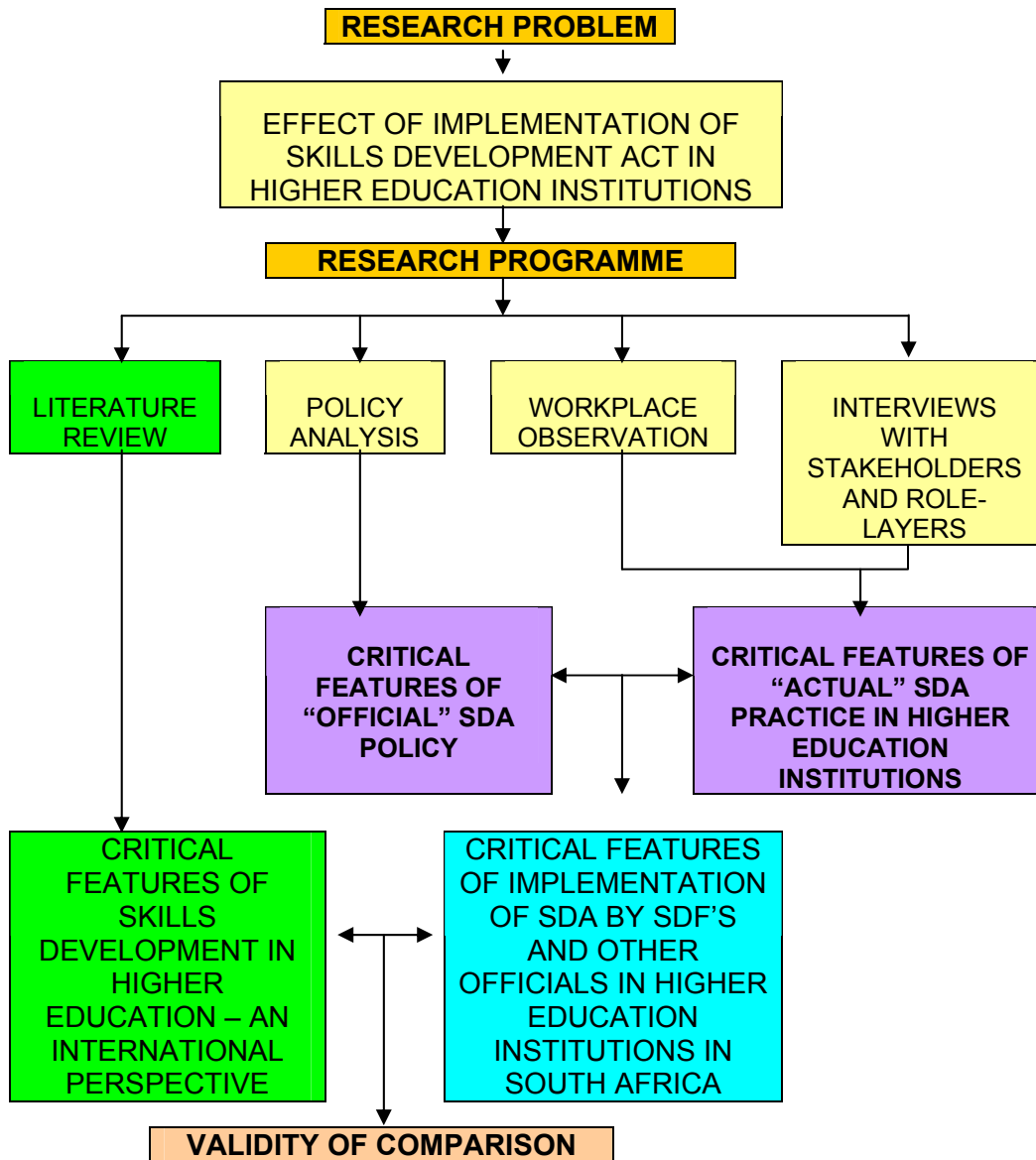


Figure 3.2 Graphic illustration of my research design to gain an understanding of the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs

Figure 3.2 indicates that our understanding of the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs will be determined by the validity of the comparison between the critical features of skills development in HEIs and the critical features of the implementation of the SDA by SDFs and other officials in South African HEIs. Our understanding of the critical features of

⁶⁵ Praxis in critical research means a cycle of action-reflection-action, the purpose of which is "not to produce an object or artefact but to realize some morally worthwhile good" (Carr *et al.* 1986: 83; Carr,

skills development in HEIs is informed by a literature review of skills development in HEIs (discussed in Chapter 2, §2.1). Our understanding of the critical features of the implementation of the SDA by SDFs and other officials in South African HEIs is based on a comparison between the critical features of the official SDA (informed by the literature review) and the critical features of actual SDA practice in HEIs. The critical features of actual SDA practice in HEIs are derived from policy analysis, workplace observation and interviews with SDFs and other role players. Although critical theory does not favour the prioritisation of empirical material⁶⁶ (in this study, the literature review on the critical features of skills development in HEIs and the analysis of the SDA), Alvesson *et al.* (2000:144) nevertheless state that empirical material contributes (*inter alia*) to understanding in a critical research orientation. Their view is that the aim of critical theory research is to move beyond surface meanings. Meaning is, however, sought from empirical and non-empirical material in a *triple hermeneutic*⁶⁷ manner.

The following section explains the research programme.

3.4 Research programme⁶⁸

Data collection started in 2002, when a myriad of relevant documents, reports and statutory legislation (Acts) on skills development in South Africa were scrutinised. Although the study was informal at that stage, I analysed these scripts according to a critical interpretative approach, paying particular attention to non-neutral phenomena (i.e. whether the rationale for the implementation of the SDA contradicts the rationale for staff development in HEIs, indications of injustice such as domination, control, repression and self-direction). Although it may seem somewhat contradictory, I took a realist stance (i.e. social reality is “out there” to be discovered) during this particular phase of data collection. It was necessary to remind myself constantly that what I was observing was what my senses – continuously shaped by

1995:68).

⁶⁶ Critical theorists do not generally use empirical material (text or similar empirical research material) because empirical material does not reveal its “unambiguously ...deep structures” (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:137).

⁶⁷ This means that the researcher not only interprets the phenomena (*simple hermeneutics*), in an attempt to develop knowledge about this reality (*double hermeneutics*) but also to balance what appears self-evident on the one hand, and that which can be taken for granted on the other (*triple hermeneutics*) (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:144). McCarthy (1994:245) asserts that researchers could create a triple hermeneutic orientation by exposing the origins of social beliefs and practices “in contingent historical circumstances to dispel their appearance of self-evident givenness”.

⁶⁸ The research programme describes the process followed in the collection and analysis of data, not only to fulfil the requirements for this study but also to ensure the quality of the project, since critical qualitative research practice calls for an audit trail to demonstrate the self-correcting mechanisms that ensure its quality (Mäkelä and Turcan, 2006:131; Morse *et al.*, 2002:3; Kelly, 1999:427).

social, political and cultural forces (in other words my epistemological inclination as explained in §3.2.1) – informed me of.

During the informal data-collection period, I found that the available documentation was written either from a calculated political point of view, making broad and sweeping statements about the necessity for skills development in South Africa, or offering statistics on who needs to undergo this kind of training. In addition, although the documentation notes the various challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA, very little was attempted to understand the underlying intent of the SDA and therefore to determine whether and why such an intent coincided with or differed from the view of staff development in HEIs. This finding was my reason for undertaking an in-depth literature review of the rationale for the implementation of the SDA and the rationale for staff development in HEIs, and therefore for determining if and why there was a difference in intent (refer Chapter 2).

After 2006, I started compiling a portfolio containing notes of self-conscious critique, as well as interpretations from my field notes, including the literature pertaining to the documents gathered from the ETDP SETA and the training and development policies obtained from the HEI where I am employed. To gain an understanding of the rationale for staff development in HEIs, I furthermore had the opportunity to correspond with Mr David Denton, former Director of Staff Development at Glasgow University (Scotland), who is a distinguished scholar, renowned leader and the author of various articles on staff development in HEIs in Europe and the UK. This fortuitous e-mail correspondence led to a continuous sharing of insights in this particular PhD study. It was, therefore, expedient to formulate and commence implementing a formal strategy for data collection and analysis. It had to be a design strategy that would allow me to move beyond the surface meaning of what the research participants (SDFs) would communicate to me. Accordingly, I developed a data collection and data analysis process that would suffice in this regard.

The data collection and data analysis processes used are demonstrated in Figure 3.3 on the next page.

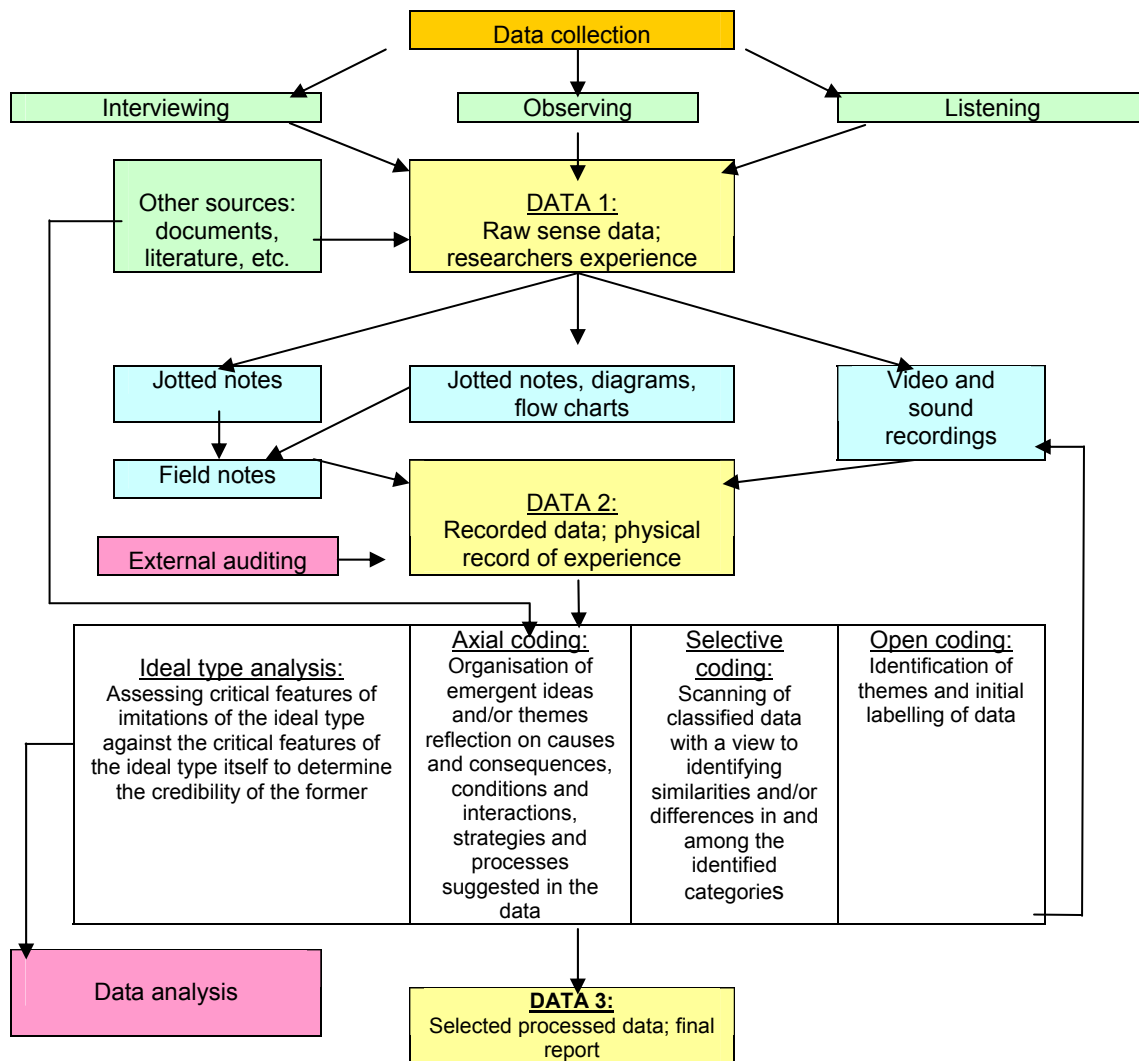


Figure 3.3 Graphic illustration of data collection and analysis process

Figure 3.3 shows that the final report has been drawn from raw sense data (including the researcher's experience), recorded data (physical record of experience) and selected, processed data. Raw sense data consists of empirical data (i.e. interview analysis, content analysis, textual criticism, comparative studies and secondary data analysis) and also non-empirical data (i.e. philosophical analysis, conceptual analysis, theory building, literature review). The raw sense data were based predominantly on self-conscious criticism,⁶⁹ which refers to the previously explained methodological choice of Habermasian triple hermeneutics. The recorded data consisted of jotted-down field notes, diagrams and/or flow charts, as well as a video recording of a focus group discussion and sound recordings of interviews and observed workplace experiences. The raw sense data, as well as the

recorded data, were analysed by means of an ideal-type analysis; axial, selective and open coding; for processing by means of computer-aided qualitative data-analysis software (*Atlas.ti*TM). The recorded data as well as the results of the analysis were shared with the expert group (refer particulars of expert group: Addendum C). The role and function of the expert group (audit function) are described in Section 3.4.2. The following sections outline the process of data collection and analysis.

3.4.1 Formal data collection strategies

The data collection process had been continuing, albeit informally, since the initiation of this study. Informal data collection included the documentation of field notes and personal observations over the period 2002 to 2008 as explained in the previous section. The formal and systematic data collection process began in March 2007. The approach taken to the formal data collection was a mixed-method approach, using non-empirical data (review of the body of scholarship) in conjunction with the empirical data obtained from the SDFs (refer description of participant group in the next section). Section 3.4.6 describes the various techniques (semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews as well as policy and other relevant documentation) used for collecting the empirical data. Using these techniques, the aims of the study was to confirm what is known about the rationale for staff development in HEIs and to gain an understanding of the unique critical features of staff development in South African HEIs. In other words, the aim was to gain an understanding of the meaning of staff development in HEIs, as currently influenced by the implementation of the SDA. A further aim was to determine the underlying reasons for the challenges that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA.

3.4.2 Participants

In this section I acknowledge the importance of selecting the participants who assisted in bringing to the surface the underlying unheard voices that reflect the full complexity of the findings of this critical interpretative study. I conducted in-depth interviews with a purposeful sample (Toma, 1999:546) of seven full-time Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs), each responsible for the implementation of the SDA at one of the seven HEIs in the Gauteng Province of South Africa (refer explanation of the role of the SDF in Chapter 1, §1.4.4). I began the process of selecting my sample by contacting the Human Resources Director at each HEI by letter (refer Addendum F) and telephone, explaining my study in some detail. I then asked the Human Resources Director for permission to conduct interviews and

⁶⁹ Kincheloe and McLaren (2005:305) refer to self-conscious criticism in the sense that researchers try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform

relevant documentation with his or her HEIs' SDF. I contacted the SDFs by letter, briefly explaining the study and asking them to participate in it (Toma, 1999:546). It should be noted that these SDFs and I share the same work profile, in that we all work in the niche area of staff training and development in our respective HEIs. Their participation was voluntary and with informed consent (refer Addendum A), not only from the particular SDF with whom I had engaged, but also from his/her senior colleague at the particular HEI. The SDFs' anonymity and the confidentiality of their information were guaranteed, and in addition the participating SDFs were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. None of the participating SDFs withdrew, however. All the participating SDFs consented to having the interviews recorded (refer Addendum B). Moreover, I adhered to the ethical principles as set out by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria.

Two members of staff who were not drawn from the above-mentioned HEIs, but who were thoroughly conversant with the SDA and who had been involved in the implementation of the SDA (one member retired in 2005) in an HEI in South Africa, also willingly committed themselves to this study. Their role as external auditors of my research project merits their title: the expert group. Their role in the research programme (depicted in Figure 3.3) was to act as my reference group, with whom I discussed my data collection strategies and the critical interpretation of data for validation purposes (refer Addendum C). They offered constructive suggestions with regard to my critical interpretation of the data collected and they helped me to identify information which I had not yet obtained. In addition they made proposals about the formulation of the semi-structured questions used during my face-to-face and telephone interviews with the participating SDFs. I had the opportunity to pilot the semi-structured interview questionnaires which I had developed with their assistance before my interviews with the participating SDFs, and I consulted the members of the expert group before and after each round of data interpretation.

There was participative stability among the participants, since no participant resigned as SDF during this study or withdrew from the research. Although one of the participating SDFs was promoted to Registrar at the start of the formal data collection phase, he remained involved throughout the project. Continuity among the target group was a feature that I had identified as central to my research.

their research as well as their own subjective reference claims.

3.4.3 Research sites

In terms of research sites, all the HEIs where the SDFs participating in this study are stationed, are easily accessible by road. The following are the HEIs where dialogue and interaction with the respective SDFs took place:

- University of Pretoria (UP)
- University of South Africa (UNISA)
- University of Limpopo, Medical Campus (UL-MEDUNSA)
- University of Johannesburg (UJ)
- Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)
- Vaal University of Technology (VUT)
- University of the Witwatersrand (WITS).

All the above-mentioned universities are in the Gauteng Province and are within one and a half hour's drive (vehicle) from my workplace (UP). The SDF of the VUT was the furthest away (approximately 150 kilometres from Pretoria) and the nearest was the SDF at the University of Pretoria. The following research activities were carried out on the above-mentioned research sites:

- Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with individual SDFs.
- Discussions on the staff training policies and relevant documentation that are not usually accessible on the HEIs Internet website.
- Observation of staff development activities managed via the office of the participating SDFs.

Besides actually visiting the SDFs at the above venues, I kept in constant contact with them during the formal data-capturing period of this project, either through telephone interviews or via e-mail. In addition, they all verified my interpretation of their views before I wrote the final chapter of this study (Chapter 5).

3.4.4 Support systems

In order to execute this study successfully, I relied on several support systems, namely:

- An information specialist from the Department of Academic Information Services at the University of Pretoria (Main, Groenkloof and Mamelodi Campuses) for assistance with inter-library loans, information searches and journal specifications.
- The staff members of the Department of Education Innovation, University of Pretoria, with special reference to the loan service division.

- Ms Patience Teffo and Mrs Pramesh Mooloo, both from the Learning and Development Division at the University of Pretoria, who became my close confidantes in this research. I am especially indebted to their willingness to arrange visits to the SDFs and for allowing me to reflect with them on my interaction with the SDFs.
- Several academically more experienced colleagues, in particular my study supervisor Professor Ferdinand Potgieter, at the North-West University; and Doctors Claire Wagner and Rinelle Evans, both senior academics at the University of Pretoria, who were willing to act as critical discussants of my efforts.
- Professors Elsie (Liz) Greyling and Nico Sauer who not only served as valuable critical discussants but who also took part in the data analysis phase of this study.
- Specialists in staff development in HEIs, outside my office environment, whom I had contacted electronically and who sent supportive responses.

3.4.5 Personal role in research process

Since January 2006, I have been able to regard my role of researcher as that of an informed research outsider, with a view to constructing understanding as a critical friend.⁷⁰ In this way, I endeavoured to move beyond the surface meaning of what is captured in text, and what I experienced or heard during dialogue with the research participants (SDFs). This implies that I positioned myself in accordance with a critical qualitative research paradigm, interpreting phenomena from the outside⁷¹. As is characteristic of critical qualitative research, I declare my realisation that, consciously or subconsciously, the visible ways in which I differed from the research participants with whom I interacted may have influenced my judgements and interpretations. My personal value orientation⁷² before the commencement of this study appears in Addendum D. As I do not belong to the same ethnic groups of the majority of the SDFs, I acknowledge that I belong to the white ethnic grouping in this country (Wedekind, 1997:346; Mouton and Marais, 1996:83) and that it might have influenced the dialogue I had with the research participants. I chose not to reveal my gender or religion since I believe that neither of these factors would have had a marked influence on my dialogue or the critical interpretation of data. (The fact that I am a

⁷⁰ Carr *et al.* (1986:161) claim that the researcher should be seen as a “critical friend” because the aim of his/her research is to help construct an understanding of the context and situation in which he/she works.

⁷¹ Carspecken (1996:42) comments that the researcher “speaks” alone by taking an outsider's position when interpreting phenomena.

⁷² Carspecken (1996:41) proposes that critical researchers should expose their value orientations before entering the field, firstly to check on biases and secondly so that reader may question the researcher's findings and, to a certain extent, “see behind” the values that might have governed the researcher's analysis and report.

male is obvious, in any case.) Although I worked closely with the research participants (described in §3.4.2), my research was primarily done independently, though I consulted my supervisor as the need arose. As a doctoral student, I was responsible for:

- designing the data collection instruments;
- obtaining permission and adhering to ethical research principles;
- conducting the interviews;
- keeping informal field notes;
- transcribing and analysing the audio- or video-recorded data;
- coding the data using *Atlas.ti*™; and
- compiling the data analysis report.

My role also included an extensive review of the current literature about skills development legislation and staff development in HEIs. I also consulted my colleagues and the expert group as and when the need arose (as explained in the previous section). My initial findings were discussed with my supervisor before being documented and finally being submitted in hard copy format and on compact disc.

3.4.6 Instrumentation for data generation

In this study, field notes, a critical interpretation of relevant documents as well as the critical interpretation of my dialogue with the participating SDFs accounted for the informal and formal collection and generation of data. I turn now to an explanation of the various instruments that I employed to gather data. The first instrument was semi-structured face-to-face interviews.

The reason for conducting semi-structured interviews with the participating SDFs was to obtain the rich primary data for determining the critical features of staff development in HEIs, as influenced by the implementation of the SDA. In other words, my intention with personal engagement with the SDFs was not only to elicit more meaningful data than would have been gained with distant engagement, but would also “capture the status and emotions of staff [SDFs] ... after implementation [of the SDA], with the value of distance from the initial process” (Anon., 2008:11). The formulation of the initial interview questions was, therefore, pivotal to determining the critical features of staff development in HEIs before and after the implementation of the SDA. Owing to the critical interpretative nature of this study, the initial questions had to be broad enough to provide sufficient flexibility to explore a phenomenon in detail but could also be narrowed down to the focus of the study. I also considered each question in terms of its relevance to the broader research question.

Consequently, a list of initial⁷³ broad overarching questions was formulated, based on the results of the literature review (refer Chapter 2) of the rationale for staff development in HEIs and the implementation of the SDA in the SA workplace.

The following broad overarching questions were formulated:

- What are the meaning and reasons for staff development in HEIs?
- What education, training and/or development programmes or other opportunities considered to be staff development are utilised to reach the objectives of staff development and why? and
- What is the meaning of the aims of the SDA perceived from HEIs' point of view and what challenges do HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA and why?

The three questions stated above were central to achieving the aims of this study. A set of semi-structured interview questions, relating to each of the three broad overarching questions, had to be formulated. The benefit of formulating the set of semi-structured questions was that it would elicit debate in cases where the participating SDFs did not voluntarily supply sufficient information. It should, however, be noted that the purpose of compiling the set of semi-structured interview questions was not primarily to make statistical comparisons among the participant group. The aim was rather to identify emerging ideas and understanding from the participants' responses. For this reason, a statistician was not consulted for assistance with the drafting of the semi-structured questions.

The semi-structured interview questions were finalised after consultation with the expert group (refer §3.4.2) and with my supervisor. In other words, the semi-structured interview questions were reviewed with the expert group and with my supervisor to determine whether these questions would elicit the data that I needed (Anon., 2008:15). The questions were formulated in English only, as this was mutually agreed to be the common language of communication between the particular SDF and myself. During the development phase of the semi-structured questionnaires, changes were made to the set of questions. These changes included eliminating various unnecessary questions and finalising the order of the questions. Since the aim of my interviews (face-to-face or telephone) with the selected SDFs was not intended to influence the SDFs subjectively, the order of the questions was of particular importance. The semi-structured interview questions were prioritised firstly to

⁷³ Pidgeon and Henwood (2004:630) point out that in exploratory research, the researcher often sharpens and refines questions as the process of data analysis proceeds. In other words, the

establish rapport with the SDF, and secondly to determine the tradition and context of staff development at their particular HEIs. Thereafter, questions were asked to reveal the problems that HEI encounter with the implementation of the SDA. It was consequently envisaged that information, critique and debate would occur spontaneously during the latter phase of the interview.

The relationship between the final interview schedule and the aim of the study is shown in Table 3.1. The rationale for each question is apparent from this description. The final interview schedule consists of nine items. Probing questions depended entirely on the nature of the discussions between the SDF and me, and are not documented here.

Table 3.1. The study objectives in relation to the semi-structured interview questions

Objective 1: To determine the biographical profile of participant group	Semi -structured interview questions developed
To determine whether the participant is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ the mandated SDF of the particular HEI; ➤ traditionally in the position or was he/she only in the position after the implementation of the SDA; ➤ nominated to manage or co-ordinate the education, training and development on an institutional level or only for a certain category or portion of staff members; 	Are you the appointed SDF of your institution? Since when? What are your responsibilities? Name of the department(s) or division(s) that manage and/or co-ordinate (general term SDF mentioned) in your institution? What are your relationship and responsibilities with regard to these department(s) or divisions(s)?
Objective 2: To determine the critical features of skills development in HEIs. The critical features that emerged from the literature review indicate that staff development is:	Semi-structured interview questions were developed to determine the underlying reasons for and goals of staff development in HEIs:
a historical (widely published) function in HEIs;	What general term is used in your institution that refers to the education, training and development of staff members? Why is it called (general term SDF mentioned) and since when? Is there a (general term SDF mentioned) policy in this regard? When was this policy developed and implemented?
includes formal (programmes leading to a qualification), non-formal (structured programmes that could be registered and quality assured by the CHE) or informal programmes (such as unrecorded subject-matter debates, reflection sessions or participation in conferences, workshops and seminars). However, informal development is the least recorded form of development, although it is viewed as the most applicable method of learning in HEIs.	What are the different strategies that your institution considers as (general term SDF mentioned)? Since when? Is (name each strategy) accredited on the NQF? Why? Name the strategies that your institution would not include in your annual skills plan or report. Why can these strategies not be included in your annual skills plan or report? Is any form of recognition issued to the participant by your institution after the completion of a programme? Is there an overall budgetary provision for the different strategies? Since when and why? From where does this budget allocation stem?
concerns the furthering of a university staff member's knowledge, skills and potential in harmony with the requirements of the HEI;	What is the purpose of each of these strategies? Why? By what means are the (general term SDF mentioned) needs of

researcher could pose additional questions or change the initially formulated questions as a result of the iterative process between data analysis and conceptualisation.

	individuals determined? Since when and why?
reaches beyond the mere improvement of skills and is an all-encompassing term, referring to the programmes, structures, policies and processes for staff development; and	What in the policy or practice do you regard serve the interests of all staff members in this institution? Why and since when? Could you provide any documentation to this effect? What is provided for in the policy to manage and support the (general term SDF mentioned) of employees at your institution? Is these strategies bound to the current job of the individual? Why? Which of these strategies are considered skills programmes?
viewed inclusively. In other words, opportunities are available and/or provided to all categories of staff members on an equal basis.	What is provided for in the policy to manage and support the (general term SDF mentioned) with specific reference to designated employees (as referred to in the SDA) at your institution? (general term SDF mentioned) of all staff and designated staff members? Are any of these strategies available exclusively to certain categories of staff in your institution? Why?
Objective 3. To determine the critical features of the implementation of the SDA by SDFs in HEIs in SA. The critical features emerging from the literature review indicate that the critical features of the “official” SDA are:	Semi-structured interview questions developed to determine the critical features of “actual” SDA practice in HEIs:
a fairly new piece of legislation in SA.	Is there a committee in your institution to deliberate on (general term SDF mentioned) matters in the institution? Since when? What are the name and function of this committee in your institution?
based on the rationale that investment in education and training would lead to SA’s socio-economic development.	What does your committee state as the aim or motivation for the implementation of the SDA? Why?
seen to benefit all (inclusive policy) but the measures taken to prioritise development of designated groups typify the SDA as exclusive.	What is your belief regarding the aim or motivation for the implementation of the SDA? Why?
that HEIs are co-responsible for funding the education and training of not only their employees but also the unemployed population of the country; and secondly the SETA structure that serves as external monitoring system.	What challenges need to be addressed regarding the planning or reporting of (general term SDF mentioned) in relation to the ETDP SETA requirements. Why? What opportunities are available to share information about (general term SDF mentioned) between your institution and the ETDP SETA? What are the challenges you face when sharing or trying to share information with the ETDP SETA?
gives prominence to credentialed training, namely NQF-accredited education and training programmes. This implies that HEIs' education and training programmes for staff members should be developed on the basis of unit standards, be accredited on the NQF and be registered with the ETDP SETA.	What challenges need to be addressed regarding the planning or reporting of (general term SDF mentioned) in relation to the ETDP SETA requirements. Why? Which of the training strategies that you have implemented are considered skills programmes that are credentialed and accredited on the NQF?

It should be noted that another question: "Explain your role and responsibilities with regard to staff development in your particular HEI and why", was also included in the broad overarching question objectives. This question was added for the following reason: during

consultation⁷⁴ with the expert group, one of the members noted that the role and function of the SDF *per se* as well as his/her visibility or stance in the particular HEI should be determined in order to establish whether the researcher was entering into a dialogue with the “correct” person. In other words, the information should be sought from the person who by the nature of his/her job was knowledgeable about staff development matters in the particular HEI, and who was also responsible for managing the implementation of the SDA.

The study was planned to start with questions about the practice of staff development in the particular HEIs selected for this study. The rationale was to ensure firstly that conflict would not arise between the aims of staff development and the aims of the SDA, and secondly I did not want to be perceived as confrontational. I knew that one of the challenges I would face was that the implementation of the SDA had already influenced the context of staff development in that particular HEI. The initial phase of the interview was, therefore, planned to establish rapport. Anon. (2008:13) refers to the steps that the researcher plans to follow in his/her interview as the interview protocol. I therefore opened the interview with a word of thanks for the opportunity to interview. I then explained the goal of the interview as well as the ethical considerations (Addendum E). Thereafter, to ensure that a clear (subjective) distinction was drawn between staff development and the SDA, I asked the SDF after each answer, whether his/her view or experience had been the tradition in that particular HEI, whether it had been a response to the implementation of the SDA or whether it had evolved since the implementation of the SDA.

It should be noted (as explained previously) that before the interviews commenced, I obtained permission from the particular participating SDF and his/her senior colleague to conduct the interview. A sample letter requesting such permission appears in Addendum F. I considered collecting the data during the universities' academic recess, but as I found that the functions of the SDFs were not bound to these timetables, the meetings were scheduled to take place when it was convenient for the particular SDF.

In the majority of cases the interviews were scheduled to take place early in the mornings⁷⁵ to counteract any disturbance from daily activities. I felt welcome in the presence of the participating SDFs and I believe I was not perceived as someone affiliated to a completely unknown organisation or staff development (Mouton and Marais, 1996:81). The face-to-face interviews ranged from two to three hours in duration. During my first face-to-face interview

⁷⁴ During the first consultation with the expert group, I discussed the aim of the study and explained the rationale of the broad questions I had formulated in consultation with my study supervisor.

⁷⁵ In working hours, because I did not wish to intrude on the private lives of the participating SDFs.

with the SDFs, I explained that our discussions and their identity would remain confidential. I also briefed the participating SDFs about the intention of the study, explained how I would report their contribution and said that I had drafted a set of predetermined semi-structured interview questions to stimulate dialogue. I also stressed that the questions had not been sent to them in advance as the idea was that their answers should be spontaneous, not prepared beforehand.

During the face-to-face interviews the participating SDFs spoke freely and I rarely needed to probe points to capture more in-depth data. Eventually, I succeeded in conducting one face-to-face interview with all seven participating SDFs. In cases where I had more than one face-to-face interview, the other interview was merely a follow-up interview intended to extend and corroborate the data obtained from the first interview.

I recorded all interviews using two cassette players (one as a backup). My experience of using a compact, digital electronic audio recorder (Sony Digital Voice Recorder ICD-MX20) had been satisfactory. The sound quality was clear and its small size did not seem to attract attention. Owing to unforeseen power outages, I had to rely, however, on my backup battery-powered cassette recorder more than once. Unfortunately, the disturbance involved in setting up the backup recorder was noticeable. Immediately after the interviews I sent a follow-up letter to the participating SDFs, thanking them for their co-operation. The data analysis processes are described in Section 3.5, whereas the collection of the face-to-face interview data is described in Chapter 4.

My second strategy was semi-structured telephone interviews. The telephone interviews were used only after conducting the face-to-face interviews. The telephone interviews were aimed at reflecting on our face-to-face interviews and at extending and corroborating the data capturing. The telephone interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participating SDFs and lasted from 40 minutes to an hour. One telephone interview was held with each of the seven SDFs individually. My primary reason for using telephone interviews was to allow me to read my notes relating to the transcriptions, without showing the highlighted parts of the SDFs' interview transcriptions, as they might have perceived this as investigative. Secondly, conducting the telephone interviews from my office allowed me to arrange the pages of the particular SDF's transcribed interview next to one another to give me an overview of the transcription. The telephone interviews were conducted (at my expense) from the privacy of my office (a "Do not disturb" sign was placed on my office door). I also closed the blinds of my office to avoid being distracted by the outside world. The speakerphone was switched on during the telephone interviews (with consent),



allowing me to record the conversations with the same tape recorders used in the face-to-face interviews. The SDFs interviewed over the telephone seemed to focus on answering questions. The data analysis process is outlined in Section 3.5., and reported in Chapter 4.

My third strategy was the critical interpretation of the policy documents I had received from the SDFs. In my first face-to-face interview with each participating SDF, I had asked them to send me an electronic copy of their institution's staff development policy or any document(s) explaining the staff development portfolio of the particular HEI and secondly, any letters or memoranda from their department/division to a head of department or staff member at their institution. I had informed them of the rationale behind my request to them to send these documents to my office electronically, namely to save the cost of re-typing them for data analysis purposes. There were two important reasons for asking them for this information. The first was to determine whether the requested policy or portfolio documentation was consistent with what the SDF had explained or talked about during our face-to-face interviews. The second was that the internal letters or memoranda would indicate whether their title as SDF was visible in the particular HEI. Five of the participating SDFs sent me a total of 13 documents. The data analysis is outlined in Section 3.5, and the collecting of the above documentation is reported in Chapter 4.

My fourth strategy was a focus group discussion with the SDFs. The use of focus groups as a research technique is described as a semi-structured group discussion which is facilitated by a discussion leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of obtaining information by means of group interaction on a certain topic (McClafferty, 2004:187). This discussion was scheduled for late October/early November 2007. Due to official work constraints, the focus group discussion could only take place on 3 June 2008 at Birchwood Lodge in Johannesburg. Six of the seven SDFs (Gauteng HEIs region) participated in the focus group discussion. The aim of the focus group discussion was not only to reflect on the data obtained but also to gain a greater understanding from our interaction so far. Since the data had been obtained on an individual basis, the aim of this round of reflection was to obtain further information from the participating SDFs about the challenges that HEIs encountered with the implementation of the SDA. In addition, by its nature, a focus group discussion creates synergy among the group members, building on individual contributions (Parker and Tritter, 2006:26; Niewenhuis, 2007:90). The group discussion required me to play a new role as facilitator among the participants. Instead of a one-on-one discussion between the individual and me, I now had to focus on capturing the perceptions expressed by the participants, and also to record on a digital video camera the interaction among the participants.



The approach during the focus group discussion was at first a welcoming address followed by an overview and explanation of the research topic and aims. Questions were thereafter asked for group discussion purposes. The perceptions of the SDFs were written on a flip chart and then summarised. Care was taken to balance the role of researcher with the role of moderator in accordance with the dynamics of the focus group discussion, to ensure an interactive and participative discussion atmosphere in which all participants had an opportunity to share their views (Denzin *et al.*, 2005:704; Breen, 2006:464; Mertler, 2006:97,98).

The basic questions for group discussion were as follows:

- What is your understanding of skills development in Higher Education? Why do you call it Skills Development?
- What are the principles for the management of skills development in Higher Education?
- Do you emphasise return on investment?
- Why are we talking about formal, non-formal or informal development, while the SETA terminology refers to education and training?
- Why do you think is it important to have informal development as part of staff development?
- In terms of percentages would informal development be equal to formal development or non-formal development?
- Can support staff easily attend formal education in your institution, similarly also informal or non-formal development opportunities?
- Why do you think is the Skills Development Act called the Skills Development Act and not something else?
- Before the Skills Development Act came into being, did your institution budget for staff development?
- If HEIs are not legislatively compelled to pay the 1% of their payroll, would they still budget for staff development?
- Do the national skills development targets match your institution's employee development targets?

The questions were limited because of time limitations dictated by the personal work schedule of each participant (an average of four hours) and to account for the complexity and dynamics of interaction within a group discussion. Comments from participants led to responses from other participants in the focus group discussion. Though the focus group

discussion was recorded on video, the camera was set-up in a way that would conceal the faces of the SDFs, and ensure their anonymity.

The spoken and visual information from the group discussion was subsequently used for the purpose of critical data analysis. The data analysis is outlined in Section 3.5. and Chapter 4 contains a report on the data collection and data analysis from the focus group discussion with the SDFs, indicating the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. It should be noted that the interpretation of the data was submitted to the expert group (as explained previously) for assessing the procedures I had followed and to verify my interpretation of the data.

3.5 Data analysis

This section outlines the process of data analysis that I followed in this study. I drew on Miles's and Huberman's (1994) notion that qualitative data analysis is an interactive process of data reduction, displaying data as well as drawing and verifying the conclusions. This involves the deconstruction of the textual data into manageable categories, patterns and relationships (Neuman, 1997:418; Mouton, 2003:108). Partington (2003:113) states that there is little standardisation with no absolutes where a specific type of qualitative data relates to a specific process of analysis. Each qualitative data analysis is regarded to some extent as a uniquely designed event. With the preceding in mind, the data analysis of all data captured was done according to a *content analysis process* as recommended by Gall *et al.* (1996: 322), Henning *et al.* (2004: 104-109), De Vos *et al.* (2005:334) and Roberts *et al.* (2006: 43). The following procedures were followed for the data analysis:

- Recording of data by means of note taking and audio recording of responses.
- Responses were transcribed verbatim.
- The entire transcribed text and notes were read at first to obtain an overall impression of the content and context.
- Codes were identified and assigned. *Codes* are the names or labels assigned to identified units or segments of related meaning in the notes and transcripts (Henning *et al.*, 2004:104; Neuman, 1997:422; Weisman *et al.*, 1995:219). The coding process furthermore consisted of three steps as described by Neuman (1997:422-424) and Angot and Milano (2007:139), namely open coding, axial coding and selective coding (refer to Figure 3.3).

The data analysis process served as a framework which enabled a systematic, organised and logical step-by-step approach to the data analysis and allowed the researcher to move beyond mere descriptive, comparative and explanatory ends to discover the rationale behind and motivation for responses (Thiétart, 2007:361). The various steps of analysis were also regarded as procedural guidelines and not as rigid steps like those of a recipe (De Vos *et al.*, 2005:334). Firstly, an explanation is given of the manner in which the text was prepared for analysis purposes. Secondly, the approach required to ensure a critical interpretation of data is explained. Lastly, the computer-aided data analysis process and interpretation are discussed. The findings of this study, as an integrated set of data with reported evidence, are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.5.1 Preparing the text for analysis

The data-capturing methods described in Section 3.4.6 (instrumentation towards data generation), were used for data analysis purposes. There were a total of 177 pages of empirical text. I refer to this text as empirical text, since I also captured the non-empirical data (my literature review), representing approximately 18 hours of audio-taped interviews from the seven participating SDFs – six women and one man. The 177 pages of empirical text consisted of the transcribed responses to each question posed during the face-to-face and telephone interviews, as well as the documentation sent to me by the SDFs.

Once the interviews had taken place, each interview was transcribed verbatim.⁷⁶ I hastened to transcribe each interview while it was still fresh in my mind. Although the transcription of the interviews was time-consuming, it enabled me to recognise and recall views which had not been very prominent during the interviews with the participating SDFs. For clarity purposes, I highlighted my speech in bold type, keeping the SDFs speech unmarked. Once I had completed the transcriptions (including checking for typing errors), I printed them and stacked them next to one another on a table. Then the documentation received from the SDFs was also printed and placed below the transcriptions of each participating SDF, grouping together all the information collected from a particular SDF. I kept the transcriptions of the focus group discussion as a separate unit of analysis.

The next step was to attach alpha-numeric keys to the document groupings, marking the face-to-face interviews with an F, telephone interviews with a T, policy documentation or any other document received from the SDFs with a D and the transcription of the focus group discussion with a G. After that, another alphabet letter indicating the particular HEI

⁷⁶ I hereby claim an accurate and valid presentation of what the SDF said.

from which the data had been collected, was entered before the F, T, D or G letter on the texts. Since the anonymity of HEIs had to be ensured, I used seven letters of the alphabet, which identified each of the seven HEIs. Lastly, since I had conducted more than one face-to-face interview with some SDFs and received more than one document from the SDFs, I added a numeral to the alphabetic letter (e.g. D1) as an indicator of what round, interview or document I was working with. After attaching the above-mentioned alphanumeric labels to the text, information could be retrieved for verification purposes. Finally, the texts were ready to be uploaded (entered) in a computer-aided data analysis program (discussed in §3.5.3) for data analysis purposes. Subsequently, the analysis of text became a source of interaction between my conscious and unconscious mind in and outside⁷⁷ the context of the text. In preparation for data analysis, the next section explains how I ensured a critical interpretative perspective in identifying and labelling the units of meaning (themes) in the text.

3.5.2 Ensuring a critical interpretative perspective

The approach I followed when reading through the text entered on the computer-aided data analysis program was figuratively to “squeeze” meaning from the textual documents (data). Accordingly, I positioned myself to determine the following:

- What concepts emanated from the data. In other words, what concepts pertaining to staff development in HEIs were noticeable and why? How do they relate to my literature review?
- What values and assumptions underlie the concepts or structures and practices of the account as explained to me by the SDFs and what alternative viewpoints (values and assumptions) could there be?
- Had the emerging account of staff development in HEIs as explained to me by the SDFs become rigid, so that it was no longer open to change, or was it open to reinterpretation?
- Were terms used in a general or technical way? and
- What did the text reveal or conceal, and why?

In other words, I made a concerted effort to take a historical and critical realist approach towards revealing the meaning in the texts, which was congruent with but not restricted to my literature review (Chapter 2). I consequently also had to ensure that I questioned my own and

⁷⁷ Alvesson *et al.* (2000:136) state that it is important for critical researchers to maintain a distance from what is visible in the text, in order to highlight the underlying social and historical values that could dominate the context of that reading.

the participating SDFs' beliefs about certain phenomena. In addition, I had to refrain from making value judgements about the SDFs, and instead sought to establish whether or not the participating SDFs' beliefs were dominated by one-sided arguments or traditions in that particular HEI or as an SDF group as a whole. In an attempt to remain true to a historical and critical realist approach, I described alternative⁷⁸ viewpoints concerning what the SDF(s) had said in an attempt to clarify the phenomena or determine how their views had formed over time. I did not, however, attempt to look for answers. Instead, I attempted to interpret the phenomena critically. This entailed that my method of gaining an understanding was to grasp the social meaning constituting the social reality of the SDFs (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:144; Carr *et al.*, 1986: 135) from a true Habermasian triple hermeneutic⁷⁹ approach. In this way, I not only interpreted the apparently visible data but also searched for underlying meaning (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:144) and variations in meaning (Mäkelä and Turcan, 2006:124). It should be noted that during this phase of analysis (what I prefer to call my first-glance analysis) I studied the transcriptions obtained from each SDF as separate entities. Not only did I aim to search for “evidence” to justify the questionnaire objectives (refer Table 3.1) but also to extract meaning from the transcribed verbal communication from each HEI's SDF as a separate entity. I attempted to integrate the meaning that I sought from a SDF, by comparing it with the meaning that I extracted from another. This, however, proved cumbersome. In addition, the amount of text that I had to analyse was enormous. At this point I switched to using *Atlas.ti*TM - a computer-based system for analysing qualitative research data.

3.5.3 Computer-aided data analysis

After preparing the texts for data analysis (refer §3.5.1) the data analysis process ensued. I chose the *Atlas.ti*TM computer-aided data analysis programme since it: “provides an unusually wide range of powerful tools for theory building, such as network editor that allows you to graphically create, manipulate, and examine the logical relations among your codes” (Weisman and Miles, 1995: 204 and 217), and I also judged that this route would confirm the findings of my study. In §3.3, I argue that the empirical as well as non-empirical data are employed to form an integrated whole aimed at constructing an understanding of the match or mismatch between the rationale for the implementation of the SDA and that for

⁷⁸ Alvesson *et al.* (2000:136) caution researchers that an alternative view might lead to dominance over the established order. For this reason, I did not pose counter-views as utopian views but instead attempted to clarify the phenomena.

⁷⁹ The researcher goes beyond the individual's interpretation of phenomena to critique what appears self-evident on the one hand, and that which may be taken for granted on the other (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000:144).

staff development in HEIs. I therefore applied the same process as described for the empirical text (refer §3.5.1) to the non-empirical data.

The first step of the computer-aided data analysis process consisted of loading (entering) relevant sections of the aforementioned 177 pages of empirical text as well as 40 pages of non-empirical text I had prepared (refer §3.5.1) in *Atlas.ti*TM. The unstructured relevant textual data pages (empirical data) that were entered as primary raw data files on *Atlas.ti*TM for data analysis and interpretation purposes are presented in Table 3.2 and Table 3.3. I present Table 3.2 as a summary of the document identity codes and the number of converted empirical textual pages that were captured per instrument. In Table 3.3 I present the number of interaction opportunities with the SDFs, categorised per instrument applied.

Table 3.2 Summary of raw data files with identity codes entered on *Atlas.ti*TM for data analysis according to instrument applied

Instrument	Primary documents in <i>Atlas.ti</i> TM	Number of transcribed pages of textual data
Face-to-face interviews	RF1, RF2, UF1, UF2, VF1, VF2, WF1, XF1, XF2, YF1, YF2, ZF1	65
Telephone interviews	RT1, VT1, XT1	12
Documentation received from HEIs	RD1, RD2, RD3, RD4, UD1, UD2, VD1, WD1, XD1, XD2, XD3, XD4, YD1, YD2	65
Focus group discussion	GD1	10
Total		177

Table 3.3 Summary of the raw data files (according to instrumentation applied to data generation) entered on *Atlas.ti*TM for data analysis from each HEI

HEI	Face-to-face interview	Face-to-face interview	Telephone interview	Documents received				Focus group	Textual pages
R	RF1	RF2	RT1	RD1	RD2	RD3	RD4	G1	
Pages	6	5	4	8	5	2	3	10	43
U	UF1	UF2		UD1	UD2				
Pages	7	4		9	11				31
V	VF1	VF2	VT1	VD1					
Pages	6	2	5	9					22
W	WF1			WD1					
Pages	7			11					18
X	XF1	XF2	XT1	XD1	XD2	XD3	XD4		
Pages	6	4	3	4	5	2	8		32
Y	YF1	YF2		YD1	YD2				
Pages	1	11		9	4				25
Z	ZF1								
Pages	6								6
Total									177



The term Hermeneutic Unit in *Atlas.ti*TM refers to a computer file into which all associated material pertinent to a particular project is placed (Weisman *et al.*, 1995:217). All the captured textual data relevant to my entire thesis (177 pages of empirical text as well as 40 pages of non-empirical text) was located in two separate Hermeneutic Units of *Atlas.ti*TM. The empirical textual data was labelled PhD SDF voice, and the non-empirical textual data was labelled PhD public literature voice.

The next step of the analysis involved firstly the selection of units of meaning from the 40 pages of non-empirical textual pages, and secondly the 177 pages of empirical data, which I considered important. This arbitrary selection of segments of text, ranging from word(s), sentence(s) or paragraph(s) in the *Atlas.ti*TM program is called a quotation (Weisman *et al.*, 1995:219). Once a text segment (quotation) has been selected, a code is assigned to the text segment while an alpha-numeric identifier is automatically assigned in the *Atlas.ti*TM program to the quotation, e.g. P1:1 12 – 24. This assigned identifier allows for easy cross-referencing to textual data from the empirical or non-empirical data. The first number indicates from which primary document the quote was derived, the second represents the number of the code that has been linked to it and the last set of numbers refers to the start and end line of the quotation.

As the process of code creation progressed and similar meanings of quotations occurred, the codes previously attached to quotations were selected. I specifically mention this method of code creation to indicate that I did not attach codes to quotations from a set of predetermined codes. Doing that would have biased the research analysis towards a positivistic approach where meaning is deduced from causal laws over which humans have little control. An inductive coding approach was, therefore, followed by making inferences (finding meanings) from the data. This indicates that when coding the quotations, I used a system of open⁸⁰ coding which entailed finding and naming units of meaning. In addition, I endeavoured to choose appropriate keywords in the quotations to capture the meaning of a quotation. The process of assigning codes generated 1 028 quotations and 385 codes relating to the empirical data (PhD SDF voice) and 556 quotations and 79 codes relating to the non-empirical data. Furthermore I distinguished between the codes on the basis of the explanations for the "what" or "why" questions, by attaching notes (called memoranda in the *Atlas.ti*TM program) to certain quotations.

⁸⁰ Mäkelä *et al.* (2006:13) and Neuman (1997:422) view open coding as the researcher's first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories (also referred to as themes). However, marking the text and then giving it a name or theme is merely a low level of abstraction arising from the researcher's initial research question (Neuman, 1997:422).

When reading all the codes I had assigned to the text, I realised that some of the codes related to one another, and could therefore be grouped into families. Accordingly, the next step was to categorise⁸¹ the assigned codes with their attached identifiers into families as a means of filtering the information or showing comparisons or relations between data sets (Weisman *et al.*, 1995:220 – 220). The assignment of codes to families with different connections or crosscuts is known as axial⁸² coding (Neuman, 1997:423). It is, however, important to note that during the assigning of codes phase, I realised that in addition to assigning certain units of meaning to the text, I had to distinguish between the data captured from the SDFs. In other words, I realised that I could not generalise on the basis of one SDF's opinion. I therefore decided to attach units of meaning per SDF. It should be noted that identifying certain terminology or propositions relating to staff development in HEIs in general and marking them as units of meaning per SDF was not difficult, since my semi-structured interview questions were formulated to capture the data in this way. However, although I did ask “why” questions, the interviewees did not explain their reasons for saying or thinking something⁸³. For this reason it was difficult to identify verbal quotes and describe the underlying meaning attached to the above-mentioned terms or explanations (in other words the explanation of “why” questions).

I followed a critical interpretative approach as outlined in §3.5.2, as a means of assigning codes to the families. This resulted in various codes being grouped into families and then I attached the memoranda of my thoughts and reasoning to these families. In other words, my memoranda connected the visible data with the theoretical background of this study (Human Capital and Social Capital Theory). The categorisation was done manually by marking codes that fitted into a certain family. Marking codes in pencil (erasing marks and re-assigning them) permitted reshuffling the codes into families (refer, for example, to Addendum G). As explained above, grouping several codes into a family led to a continuous cycle of analysis, resulting the merging (grouping) of various codes into families. Then I

⁸¹ Carspecken (1996) asserts that the coding structure the researcher generates during his/her first stages of coding (open coding) is still “raw, because no organisation of the codes has taken place. Redundancies and intersection between codes exist and researchers need to pull these codes together” (Carspecken, 1996:14).

⁸² Neuman (1997:423) explains that during the process of axial coding, the researcher moves towards identifying the axis of key concepts in analysis, which means that a researcher operates at a conceptual level here.

⁸³ The difficulty I experienced could be attributed firstly, to such an intense focus at times on the discussion between the SDF and me on certain discussion topics that the expression of underlying meaning was neglected. Secondly, it might have been merely difficult for me to explain the “why” questions in words. However, I knew that the critical interpretative approach to our conversation could be taken later and if necessary, I could return to the SDF to gain clarity in my understanding.

renamed the families, assigning to them either a personal or documented view heading relating to the non-empirical data.

The criteria I used to label a family were derived from the codes that had been merged, in order to remain as close to the data as possible. When labelling families I attempted to move beyond the description of subjective experiences of the SDFs to reflect⁸⁴ critically on the coded units of meaning based upon the interviews with the participants. As regards the empirical data, however, the headings for families were those assigned to the non-empirical data (excluding “personal view” or “documented view” headings). Some overlap between responses (quotations) in families did occur where a response referred to two or more families, and therefore had to be placed in two or more families. Not all the families were therefore mutually exclusive. Finally, I assigned several family codes to a network to identify meaningful relationships among the data sets. From this point onwards, I report on and discuss the data analysis of each of the two hermeneutic units (PhD SDF voice and PhD public literature voice) first separately and then as a single data set.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the data captured in relation to the main research question. My interpretation endeavours to describe the research findings in a logical sequence which is integrated with the relevant literature, in order to substantiate the findings. I spent a great deal of time considering the possible conclusions and consciously monitored my personal bias continuously. Reflecting on the relevant evidence from the research, I have made certain recommendations for further investigation in Chapter 5. Overall, I have reported my analyses and interpretations as precisely and as without prejudice as possible. The issues related to the validity and reliability of my study is discussed in more detail in the following section.

3.6 The reliability and validity of this study

This section is less about explaining the concepts of reliability and validity, and more about indicating how the verification strategies integral to the study and the self-correcting mechanisms in conducting the study itself, determine the reliability and validity of the study.

As this study did not entail statistical sampling (described in §3.3), traditional reliability indices within a rationalistic paradigm were not deemed appropriate. Instead, I followed the

⁸⁴ Critical theory also demands that researchers engage in self-reflection and thinking about the process of research itself to avoid reproducing taken-for-granted constructs (Alvesson *et al.*, 2000).



verification strategies of Morse *et al.* (2002) and Anon. (2008:15) to ensure the reliability and validity of my research. This entailed the following:

- The extended period over which I had worked on this study validated my personal observations based on the interviews with the SDFs.
- My critical interpretation of data is tendered only when it can be supported by the information captured from the participating SDFs. My values concerning this research were candidly explained prior to the elicitation of qualitative data (refer Addendum D).
- I ensured congruency between my research questions and the methods (techniques) that I followed to capture data.
- I ensured that I put the same questions to each SDF.
- I ensured that my sample was appropriate, in other words, I ensured that this study was conducted with the participants (SDFs) who best represented or had sound knowledge of the research topic. Furthermore, it was not at all difficult to establish rapport and trust with the SDFs during data capturing, as they already knew me personally. The authenticity of my face-to-face interaction with the SDFs produced rich descriptions of the participating SDFs' experiences, which enhanced the findings.
- I ensured that I collected and analysed the data concurrently. In addition, triangulation by means of multiple data collection instruments and the consultation of all role players strengthened the internal validity and reliability of my research. This included a peer review by my expert group of the draft sections of this study and their comments on my theorising. I acknowledge that my data analysis was given to two different analysts to verify that they concurred with my own data interpretation (Anon., 2008:15).
- I ensured that I summarised key individual respondent claims in the form of key propositions related to the aim of the study and main research questions (Anon., 2008:18). In addition, the ideas emerging from data were confirmed from the supporting evidence drawn from the quotations⁸⁵ (Anon., 2008:18). Not only did *Atlas.ti*™ facilitate my task but it also enhanced my analysis and made data segments easily accessible and available for scrutiny by the research community.

My trail of evidence is therefore tangible and as trustworthy as I could possibly get it to be, showing a transparent and reliable methodology and making this study easy to replicate. The utilisation of *Atlas.ti*™ also enhanced the precision with which I conducted the

⁸⁵ When using *Atlas.ti*™ the term quotation refer to a selection of segments of text ranging from word(s), sentence(s) or paragraph(s) that provides a unit of meaning (refer §3.5.3).



research process and this potentially helps to authenticate this study. Finally, the systematic collection and detailed reporting of my procedures and the decisions I took as well as a careful explanation of my understandings, strengthen the reliability and validity of this study.

The collection of the interview data is reported in Chapter 4, with the purpose of indicating the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs.

3.7 Methodological constraints

This study was conducted from a critical interpretative epistemological base, implying that I have excluded positivist tenets. Frequencies⁸⁶ among answers were, however, used as a basis for critical interpretation. Moreover, I acknowledge that my observations may be fallible⁸⁷. This section is a personal reflection on the research process and indicates any adjustments that may have been necessary so that the reader can appreciate the context in which my research claims are made in Chapter 5, as well as the possible constraints of this study. It should be read in conjunction with the anticipated limitations of the study, as described in Chapter 1.

Mouton (2003:110) comments that the main sources of error that may occur in analysis are potential researcher bias and lack of rigour. My data were carefully collected and my evidence was thoroughly documented in an attempt to counteract any personal prejudice. Any possible personal bias was limited by triangulating the data obtained from several instruments. Moreover, the reputable data analysis software package used in processing my findings should assist in refuting any accusations of flawed or substandard research. It should be noted, however, that this study does have certain limitations which might have influenced the findings. The first limitation is that only the data relating to the research topic were selected, although rich and extensive data were obtained by using several instruments. The remaining data will, however, be used later when preparing articles for publication and papers for conferences. The second limitation was that only SDF staff members in HEIs were interviewed. In retrospect, representatives of the ETDP SETA might also have been interviewed to determine their views on the underlying reasons for the SDA. At the time of the interviews, however, they were not deemed important to the research study. Finally, in view of my role as a white male researcher during the interviewing and data analysis process, my ethnic status and gender might have affected the reactions of some of the SDFs during interviewing.

⁸⁶ Frequencies refer to how many times it occurred.

⁸⁷ In qualitative research the danger always exists that the researcher has not exhausted all possible interpretations of the data.



As stated in §3.3.6, *Personal role in research process*, I do not, however, believe that my ethnicity had any adverse effect on the data or the research process, although there is no firm evidence to prove or disprove this contention. If anything, my presence seemed enough to produce a positive reaction. Another limitation is that the participants' opinions may have been attenuated and altered by my interpretation, even though I attempted to portray the participating SDFs' experiences and views as accurately as I could. My attempt to make sense of others' experiences and views obviously means that my text is selective and partial. Nor can I claim a complete lack of bias, since in terms of critical theory, no interpretation can be completely objective when choosing a participative research design counteracted by individual bias, since understanding is reached by the participant group and not one-sidedly by the researcher such as in positivistic and interpretivist research.

Chapter 4 contains an integrated analysis of the findings obtained from the methods and materials used in this study.