



CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter two I investigated the concept of human rights which I considered important since learners' right to education falls within the scope of human rights. It was also necessary to locate my study within the human rights conceptual framework as represented in social contract theory. This assisted me later during data interpretation, which is presented in chapters five and six. I focused mainly on learners' right to education. I reviewed the international and regional human rights instruments in order to trace specific provisions which concern learners' right to education, the recognition of learners' right to education in South Africa, the limitations thereof and some human rights that are directly and indirectly relevant to learners' right to education.

Chapter three linked the right to education with the development of understanding of human rights with the initial focus being the presentation of a critical review of international and South African research on learners' views, perceptions of rights and how the understanding of rights develops. The second focus was on aspects that influence learners' understanding of human rights. Thirdly a discussion of Kohlberg's theory of moral-ethical development was presented. Social contract theory and Kohlberg's theory are considered to be important for this study since they lay the basis for human rights understanding and how this understanding develops. Lastly, I dealt with scholarly views regarding the merits and limitations of Kohlberg's theory of moral-ethical development. As the right to education involves learners, parents, educators and the state, I included a review of research regarding parents' and educators' attitudes toward the rights of learners. This was deemed important because learners' understanding and views of human rights are mediated in some ways by their experiences of rights in their own lives (Ruck *et al.* 1998b:275); hence learners' attitudes and understanding of human rights may be influenced by the attitudes and perspectives of others (Campbell & Covell 2001:133).

The academic puzzle that guides this research is how learners understand their right to education. This study seeks to explore and analyse learners' understanding of this right and levels of human rights understanding at which learners operate. In this chapter I describe my knowledge claim, followed by the research philosophy, research design, methodology, research instruments, data collection strategies and data analysis procedures.

4.2 KNOWLEDGE CLAIM

At this point I present the justification for the theoretical foundation that underpins my study. The theoretical basis of this study stems from the research philosophy explained in section 4.3 (the



qualitative approach). It is from the lens of the interpretive or constructivist paradigms that I view the world of reality in this research study (Cohen *et al.* 2000:3; Guba & Lincoln 1998:206-207).

I discuss firstly the ontological and secondly, the epistemological positions of the interpretive or constructivist paradigm on which this study hinges. The interpretive or constructivist approach tends to move away from the assumption that the nature of knowledge is solid, absolute and based on universal truths, towards relative context-bound truths (Guba & Lincoln 1998:203). I concur with this viewpoint. As science is a search for the understanding of a phenomenon, I am convinced that there is no absolute, single, universal, interpretive truth (Mouton 1996:26; Denzin & Lincoln 1998a:27-3030). Truth is relative, that is, it is dynamic and constantly evolving (Cohen *et al.* 2000:23).

The basic assumption of the interpretive paradigm, on which this study is based, is the fact that the world is made up of multiple realities that can best be studied as a whole, while recognising the importance of the context in which the experiences occur (Henning *et al.* 2004:21). As what is considered to be truth changes over time and in context, people are constantly searching for new knowledge or what they can call basic knowledge about a phenomenon. This knowledge about a phenomenon is obtainable from various sources on which people rely, either through research, practical experience, expert's opinion, common sense, beliefs of what is right or wrong, intuition or from the subjective and diverse voices of individuals who view the specific reality in a holistic way. All these sources are legitimate and present the truth for a specific period (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:3; Cohen *et al.* 2000:3).

Truth is a matter of social construction, and should be based on the best informed constructions. What is real is the construction in the mind of an individual, and this is relative (Schwandt 1998:243). This means that people interpret reality as it presents itself to them at a specific time and in a specific context. Any one research finding that dominates as truth for a specific time period, may be challenged by other researchers who bring forth a new truth that rejects the dominating research, and is yet to be followed by other research with new findings. The truth is therefore constantly evolving. In this regard Kuhn (1970), as cited by Mouton (1996:16), concludes that the history of science can no longer be viewed in terms of the accumulation of facts and truth; he prefers the notion of science in revolution.

In the light of the aforementioned, I believe that learners construct their own realities and attach different meanings to their right to education. I view the truth not as an absolute that must be found by researchers, but rather as a phenomenon constructed or interpreted in the minds of individuals. This knowledge claim goes hand in hand with the qualitative research paradigm, since the intention is to establish how my respondents interpreted their 'truth' of the specific phenomenon of interest at certain times and in certain places.



This standpoint became even clearer when reviewing the historical development of the right to education. Although it ranks high on the list of other human rights, and despite its importance, it has rather belatedly been recognised as a human right (Volio 1979:19). Individuals had to first gain their independence (they attached greater importance to civil and political human rights) before recognising learners' right to education (Hodgson 1998:9). As the image of the child changed with time, so the right to education acquired greater significance. The next step was to incorporate this right into national human rights law (see § 2.3). Despite its recognition in international human rights treaties, there are still people who regard the right to education as a distant reality, depending on the contextualities in which this right is exercised, and their own constructions.

When people search for the truth in their real world, they invoke experiential knowledge and give meaning to their own truth as lived experiences, which results in subjective meaning being attached to the phenomenon (Cohen *et al.* 2000:6; McMillan & Schumacher 2001:396). I have followed the subjective, qualitative, interpretive paradigm in this research study. This approach assumes that knowledge is subjective (Guba & Lincoln 1998:107). People and societies construct their own realities. The researcher and the researched are assumed to be interactively linked as they are both physically present during the data collection process and the findings are a result of joint constructions. The results of this research are based on learners' understanding of their right to education from the concept of reality as reported by my respondents, and are subjective rather than objective, as the positivist approach suggests (Guba & Lincoln 1998:212).

I concur with the views of Guba and Lincoln (1998:107) that individuals' constructions of reality can be best elicited and understood through interaction among and between researcher and respondent. During the data collection process, I interacted with my respondents whilst viewing reality from a different perspective. I realised that learners under investigation create their own different reality, based on interpretations and understanding of their right to education as experienced within their environment. I was able to report learners' understanding of their right to education not solely from my own understanding, but as a joint and consensus construction between the learners and myself (Henning *et al.* 2004:22). In South Africa, the right to education is entrenched in the Constitution. People attach individual, subjective meaning to the interpretation of human rights. I assumed that learners' understanding of human rights may differ from other people's understanding of the phenomenon. I believe that learners' interpretations of their rights exhibit different levels of human rights reasoning. I endeavoured therefore to understand the right to education not only from my own understanding, but also from the learners' point of view (Merriam 2001:6).

The above paragraph explains the ontological and epistemological position from the interpretive or constructivist standpoints which I chose to follow. My understanding of reality is that



knowledge is not only gained through the authoritative voices of researchers as Cohen *et al.* (2003:3) note, but also through subjective experience and many voices of individuals. The environment in which individuals live is understood as a whole and individuals construct their own meanings from the information that they obtain, either through their senses (experiential), reasoning, research or belief systems, according to how reality presents itself. The knowledge that learners give subjective meaning and interpretations to their rights and reason at different levels will help education planners formulate a curriculum and compile learning experiences in accordance with learners' levels of human rights reasoning. Educators will be able to strategise at an advanced level in order to accelerate the rate of the development of understanding. How learners' conceptualise their rights and the phenomenology of exercising these rights may be of value when designing structures and procedures for implementing learners' rights in a manner that is protective, especially of their right to education. In the next section I present the research philosophy and approach that underpin this investigation.

4.3 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

This case study seeks to explore, understand and analyse learners' understanding of human rights and their right to education in particular. Although learners have the right to education by virtue of being human, they are not born with the knowledge and understanding of what it means to have the right to education, how to exercise this right effectively and how this right may be limited. I am of the view that learners would be able to make more meaningful and effective use of their rights and even reason at higher levels of human rights understanding if:

- they are made aware of their right to education through curriculum interventions;
- they are exposed to human rights experiences in a practical way; and
- they are involved in solving human rights dilemmas, during which their right to education is at stake on a daily basis.

Knowledge of human rights is derived not only from educators' interventions, but also through real life experiences. In this way, learners are able to attach their own meanings to the phenomenon. My personal subjective constructions of this phenomenon have influenced me in my choice of research philosophy and guided my epistemological and ontological assumptions and methodology.

I assume that learners' perceptions and views about human rights (in particular the right to education) cannot be fully understood through numerical means (quantitative methods); therefore I chose to embark on a qualitative mode of inquiry. I also assume that there are multiple realities and those who are socially involved, construct reality as individuals and collectively as society (Merriam 2001:4; Guba & Lincoln 1998:206; McMillan & Schumacher 2001:396). I construct my own truth as I perceive it. Learners construct their own truths (Smit



2001b:69) in terms of their own frame of references. This is in line with Schwandt (1997:137) who holds that qualitative research philosophy opposes the existence of universal truth.

I assume that learners' understanding of human rights may differ from my own understanding of this phenomenon. This presupposes that I attach meanings and make my own interpretations of reality and my respondents do the same. My role was to take an inter-subjective and interactive stance and become involved (that is be physically present) in the data collection and interpretations of reality (Guba & Lincoln 1998:207; McMillan & Schumacher 2001:35). The nature of knowledge that was acquired from this encounter is subjective, personal and derived from joint social constructions (findings were created as the research proceeded). In this regard Gay and Airasian (2000:220-223) believe that qualitative research observations and interpretations contain much of the researcher's being. It is difficult to say that the findings of a qualitative investigation present reality solely as perceived by the respondents (detached from the investigator's values, beliefs and world views). If that were the case, it would imply that in qualitative research verbatim transcript of interviews are presented (Blaikie 2000:252) without any interpretation by the researcher. The main concern in this study was understanding the phenomenon from the participants' views and not from the researcher's viewpoint. The results of this study are subjective and are time- and context-bound.

Following the research philosophy (interpretive, qualitative paradigm) as explained above, research methods were used that resonate with the subjective, time and context bounded nature of truth. The qualitative case study method was chosen, as it is commonly used in human and social sciences (see § 4.5) and the data was obtained through focus group discussions and face-to-face, in depth, interviews (see § 4.6.1.2 and § 4.6.1.3). This was done in order to elicit information about learners' understanding of the right to education directly from learners who were actually receiving their education in the school context.

The literature presents two broad approaches to research: qualitative and quantitative approaches. Both these approaches have merits and demerits. The qualitative approach provides contextualised data and assumes that human behaviour cannot be understood without reference to the meanings attached to reality by those involved in a particular situation (Guba & Lincoln 1998:197). Through the lens of the qualitative approach, it is possible to construct reality as seen through the eyes of the respondents. The qualitative approach is concerned with the discovery and understanding of the meanings seen from those who are researched (learners), comprehending their views and perspectives of the world, rather than those of the researcher (Kvale 1996:31; Blaikie 2000:249; Gay & Airasian 2000:204; Smit 2001a:57).

Learners' thoughts, feelings, conduct and aspirations about their rights cannot be fully evaluated or measured in numerical or quantitative terms. The qualitative mode of inquiry allows the researcher to study events and situations as they manifest themselves in a context and in time,



and to try to understand the ways in which individuals try to make sense of their lives (Van der Merwe 1996:28). Events have to be allowed to speak for themselves rather than be judged by the researcher. My study investigated learners' understanding of the phenomenon of human rights from their perspectives and then these findings were reconstructed/reinterpreted. The qualitative approach does not predict or claim rigidity or complete objectivity, but it ensures that research is value-laden (Guba & Lincoln 1998:199). In this regard, the epistemological foundation of qualitative study is based on a non-judgemental stand and understanding of whatever patterns or themes might emerge from the data (Gay & Airasian 2000:205).

The qualitative, interpretive approach was deemed to be appropriate as the aim of this study is an attempt to understand learners' recognition of their right to education and not to deduce universal laws or to predict universal generalisations (Henning *et al.* 2004:21). From the qualitative view of knowledge (subjective), it cannot be claimed that this research will produce rigid and objective findings. I was continuously involved in interpreting the findings of my research (Guba & Lincoln, 1998:199). In this regard, Gay and Airasian (2000:219) maintain that there is as much of the researcher as of the respondents in research findings, which results in a combined construction. The subjective and relative truths that learners attribute to their rights are of paramount importance in this study.

4.4 WORKING PREMISES

After 1994 South Africa emerged from the isolation resulting from apartheid and adopted a new Constitution based on values of equality, human dignity and freedom (Rautenbach & Malherbe 1998:6; Dlamini 1997:40; Van Raemdonck & Verheyde 1997:245). The new Constitution guarantees human rights including learners' right to basic education which is provided for in section 29(1)(a-b). This section compels the state to take reasonable steps or measures to make further education progressively available. South Africa also ratified several human rights treaties and thereby confirmed her commitment to upholding human rights for her citizens, including learners (see § 2.5). The right to education is significant in that it has a role in developing learners' personality, talents and potential, preparing them for adult life and developing their respect for their parents, human dignity, the natural environment and one another's cultural and natural values (Volio 1979:24; Van Beuren 1995:253; Singh 2003:16; CRC(1989) Art 29(1)b) (see § 2.5.7). In her literature review Peens (1998:9) notes that education is essential for the development of the individual, as well as the nation. Without skills and knowledge, the future of a country is doomed.

In developed countries such as England, Finland, Canada and America there has been an increase in the amount of literature and research on learners' rights in legal spheres and perceptions of rights in general (Abramovitch *et al.* 1993:313; Abramovitch *et al.* 1995:1; Cherney & Perry 1996:243; Grisso & Pomicter 1977:333; Helwig 1995:152; Melton & Limber



1992:174; Ruck *et al.* 1998a:404 & 1998b:275) (see § 3.2.1.1). However relatively little research has been done in South Africa regarding learners' understanding and perceptions of their rights in general (Peens 1998:24) or the human right to freedom of expression in particular (Van Vollenhoven 2005:7). Although one may draw from other scholars' findings, it remains important to investigate what learners in young democratic countries such as South Africa know and understand about human rights, as knowledge and truth are relative concepts. It is important for comparison and evaluation purposes to survey research in areas similar to the topic of this thesis.

The first study to elicit information directly from learners was conducted by Melton (1980:186), who found that both developmental factors and socio-economic background influence learners' understanding of their rights. He identifies three levels of developmental progression in learners' understanding of their rights which coincide in many respects with aspects evident in Kohlberg's theory of moral development (see § 3. 5).

The violation of learners' right to education was prevalent in South Africa prior to 1994 and is still so today. This is evident from persistent media reports of issues of violations happening in schools. In the past, the authoritarian philosophy based on different historical and cultural backgrounds socialised the people of South Africa into disrespecting others' rights and today citizens are still not accustomed to exercising human rights to the fullest (Van Vollenhoven 2005:4). The previous chapter discussed the extent to which the political environment affects people's perceptions of human rights (see § 3.4.6). In a democracy where human rights are known, understood and internalised, learners should understand exactly what it means to have the right to education and how to exercise this right. Learners should know that this right is not absolute and can be balanced in terms of the limitation clause (section 36) of the Constitution by laws of general application (Bray 2000b:35).

Although South Africa has declared her intentions to uphold human rights and redress past imbalances (preamble of the Constitution) and the education authorities intend to respect learners' right to education, it is uncertain whether they appreciate what learners understand about this right. It is of great importance to investigate learners' views and understanding of their right to education and to determine further the levels at which they understand their right to education.

In this regard the premises that underpin my investigations are:

- (1) Some learners have limited knowledge of their right to education.
- (2) Some learners do not know how to exercise their right to education.
- (3) Learners employ various levels of human rights understanding when dealing with dilemmas where the exercise of their right to education is in conflict with the school authorities .



Under my first premise I assumed that some learners

- (1a) know that their right to education involves responsibilities
- (1b) know that through the realisation of their right to education an array of opportunities can be created
- (1c) confuse their right to education with other human rights
- (1d) do not know who the beneficiaries of the right to education are.

Under my second premise I assumed that learners would

- (2a) perceive their right to education as absolute
- (2b) not know how to limit their right to education.

In terms of my third premise I assumed that

- (3a) Learners employ various levels of human rights understanding when dealing with dilemmas where the exercise of their right to education is in conflict with the rights and duties of the school authorities .

The right to education is linked with many human rights. Violation of other human rights may impact directly or indirectly on the realisation of learners' right to education. My investigation centred on learners' understanding of their right to education within the school context, from the perspective of how they understand and give meaning to the realisation of this right.

4.5 RESEARCH STRATEGY

Case studies differ according to the aims they set out to achieve. A useful strategy is to ask 'how' and 'why' questions (Blaikie 2000:254). The main research question that underpinned this study was 'how do learners understand human rights, especially their right to education?' The main focus of this case study was not to discover the universal, generalisable truth (Hammersley & Gomm 2000:3) any other researcher would be able to reproduce; instead it was to **explore, understand** and **interpret** learners' understanding of human rights with special emphasis on their right to education. This study may be described as subjective and interpretive (see § 4.3) and therefore be inclined to create particularised knowledge.

When choosing a particular research methodology the questions, purpose and unit of analysis should be taken into consideration. Cohen *et al.* (2000:181) define a case study as "a study of an instance in action". The case used for investigation involved an instance of learners' understanding of their right to education. It involved a study of a purposefully sampled, single case (see § 4.7). Learners' understanding of their rights within the parameters of the school was explored and their levels of understanding were determined. My reason for choosing the school context and investigating one topic was to explore, understand and interpret learners' understanding of a single phenomenon (Yin 1993:33). An attempt was made to minimise the



aspects that could influence learners' understanding of their right to education by sampling a homogeneous group and binding the topic into the context within which the data was interpreted (Merriam 2001:27; Blanche & Kelly 1999:126). Learners' construction of reality is understood more clearly when the context within which their interpretations rest is described together with the demographic profiles of the respondents (see Table 4.1). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:399), this can be viewed as an exploratory case study as it may open the way for further studies and generate new researchable hypotheses. Merriam (2001:38) calls this an interpretive case study as it examines initial assumptions on which to base other studies.

The main purpose of my study was not to make a value free (objective) description of how learners understand their right to education in the school context, but to probe their understanding and interpretations of their rights. This implies that the subjective values and interpretations of the right to education, which learners brought into this research study, were regarded as important. The respondents' social experiences, values and beliefs were not perceived as wrong or inferior to my point of view, but only as different (Neuman 1997:38). In this research study the emphasis was on the fact that reality is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by those experiencing it, and may thus exhibit different world views. In this regard I concur with Henning *et al.* (2004:25) who argue that there is no value free or bias free research as the results of a study conducted under the qualitative paradigm reflects the stance which the researcher adopts.

Given the school environment as the context, the learners' perception of the phenomenon of 'human rights understanding' could be examined in a bound context. Schwandt (1997:13) indicates that a case study is an empirical inquiry that aims at investigating a contemporary phenomenon. The phenomenon in this study is 'human rights knowledge and understanding' in the real life context (the school) (Miles & Huberman 1994:25). This study focuses on the understanding of dynamics present within a single setting, which is unique or particular and bounded within the context (Huberman & Miles 2002:8). The qualitative case study method was the method of choice as I strove to portray the reality of a particular situation (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:182), and to capture a comprehensive description of the participants' 'lived' experiences together with their thoughts and feelings (Gay & Airasian 1992:202). Learners' thoughts, feelings, behaviour and aspirations cannot be assessed or captured in numerical or quantitative terms but through qualitative methods; a case study being one such method.

The main criticism and shortcoming leveled against a single case study approach is that it is considered to be the 'weakest' style of research, as it tends to produce casual and context bound findings and not universal generalisations (Vidich & Lyman 1998:74). To counter this criticism, I used various methods of data collection and produced a consistent and revealing description of, and perspectives on, the sample, site and context of the study. The results obtained from this case study, although highly contextualised, are of great significance as they



shed light on learners' levels of human rights reasoning and understanding. In the next section I discuss the data collection techniques used for this study

4.6 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process for this study consisted of three stages and lasted about eight months. I commenced with data collection during April 2005, paused during the last quarter of the year as learners were preparing themselves for final year examinations, and resumed the process again in early 2006. Most of the data analysis was carried out manually. The following sub-sections present my data collection plan and strategies.

4.6.1 Data collection plan

According to Yin (1993:40) a case study that uses a single means of collecting data is criticised as being unreliable. Using multiple sources of data is more advantageous as it enhances the validity and reliability of the data. The qualitative case study provides such opportunities (Huberman & Miles 2002:9). The data was collected in three stages, using the following three methods: a questionnaire, focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews (see figure 4.1):

4.6.1.1 Questionnaire.

In stage 1, 48 learners completed a questionnaire. The data gathered by means of the questionnaire served to confirm the demographics of the learners I was working with, namely grade 9-12 learners, within the ages of 15 and 18 years and belonging to one cultural and socio-economic group. The reason for selecting this single group was that I wanted to control other variables that might influence learners' reasoning and understanding of their rights, especially when dealing with vignettes, and to give an illuminating description of the sample and site (Melton & Limber 1992:176-197; Muianga 1998:278; Bohrnstedt *et al.* 1981:455; Mehan 1992:34) (see § 4.7). These descriptions are important in order to establish the context within which the findings were made. To ensure a high response rate and to reduce time wastage, I administered the questionnaire in a controlled group environment during one single sitting. I had the chance to explain some of the items about which learners were not clear (De Andrade & Ross 1999:331; McMillan & Schumacher 1993:238). Before administering the questionnaire I introduced myself, explained the aim of the research and the confidentiality of the responses.

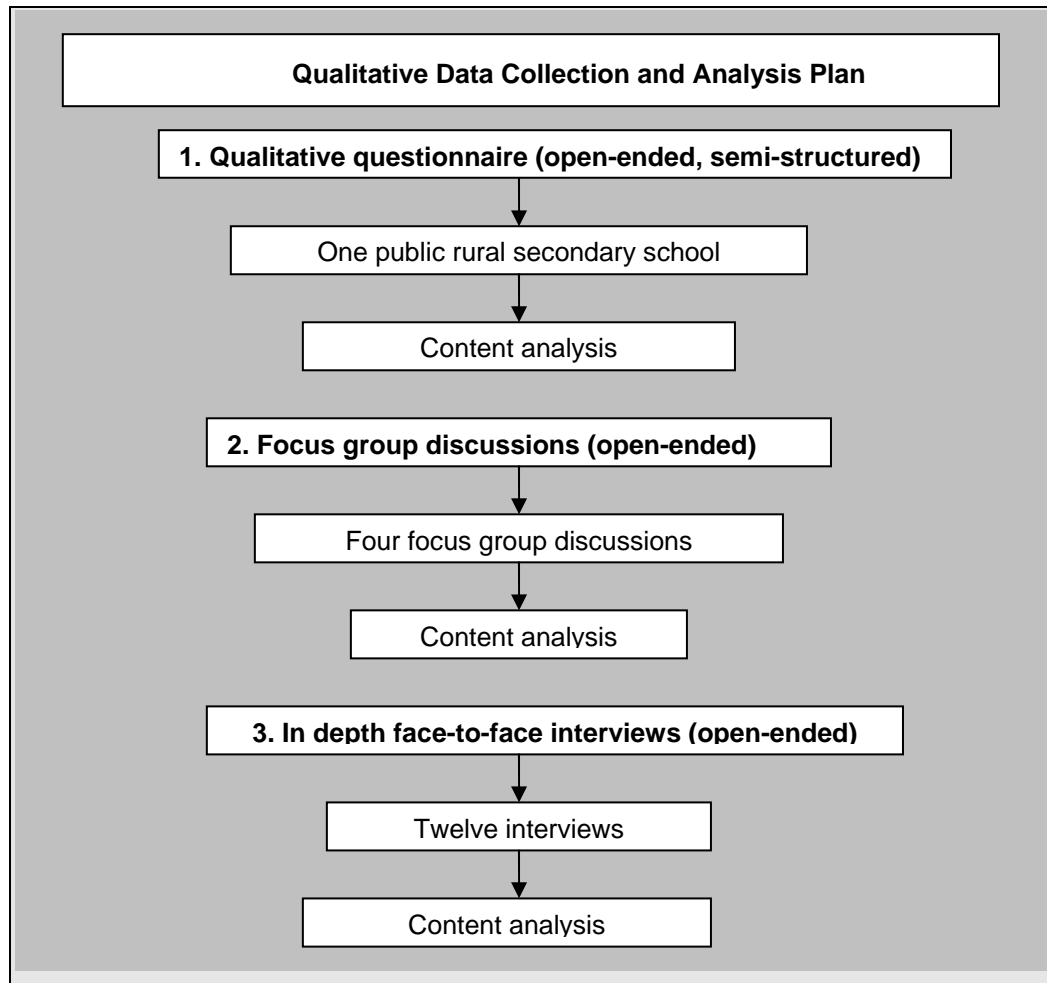


Figure 4.1 Qualitative data collection and analysis plan

4.6.1.2 Focus group discussions.

According to Kruger (1988:18), a focus group is a carefully planned discussion, designed to obtain perceptions of a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. During the second stage, I held four focus group discussions according to grade levels. As the emphasis of this study was to explore (an attempt to develop an initial understanding of the social phenomenon) and understand (Blaikie 2000:72-73) learners' understanding of their right to education, focus group discussions seemed appropriate for my study. This method is flexible and provides a platform for learners to share their views and build on one another's views.

During stage two I conducted focus group discussions for several reasons: firstly, to gather information (Frey & Fontana 1993:22; Cohen *et al.* 2000:287-8), secondly, to generate assumptions (Bellenger *et al.* 1979:21-2; Caruso 1979:60; Wells 1979:2; Morgan 1988:11; Frey & Fontana 1993:33; Gibbs 1996:2) and thirdly, to complement and confirm the findings obtained through my other methods (face-to-face interviews) (Cohen *et al.* 2000:187-8; Morgan 1988:10, 24). The main aim of holding focus group discussions was to gain broader views about learners' knowledge and understanding of their right to education and to interrogate my first premise that learners have limited understanding of their right to education.



I chose to hold focus group discussions because of their many advantages and uses (Oats 2000:188; Gibbs 2004:1-7). Focus group discussions allowed me to obtain data in the participants' own words and I quote their words verbatim in the presentation of the results (see chapters 5 and 6). I had the opportunity to interact directly with the respondents, because they 'think and reason out loud'. I noticed the change in attitudes and expressions when we were dealing with conflict-laden vignettes and I gained insight into the learners' shared understanding of their right to education. I probed them to talk more and to stimulate new ideas.

To ensure that spontaneous data emerged (Wells 1979:3) from interaction within the group, I drew up a focus group schedule, which was used as a prompt or a guide, from which all questions followed. Given that the main value of the focus group discussions resided in the interaction within the group based on the topic under discussion (Morgan 1988:17; Morgan & Krueger 1993:3,18; Morgan 1997:12), questions used were open-ended (unstructured) (Cohen *et al.* 2000:289). Such questions allowed me to stimulate divergent thinking, obtain different responses, facilitate discussion and ensure that a mere dialogue between the respondents and the researcher was avoided (Cohen *et al.* 2000:288).

The focus group discussions were particularly useful in answering questions in section B of the schedule, in which my emphasis was to determine 'why' learners think or perceive their rights the way they do (Oats 2000:187; Gibbs 2004:3; Morgan 1988:25) and then to determine the levels of human rights understanding at which learners operate.

Of the 48 learners who completed the questionnaire, 24 participated in the four focus group discussions that were held. Each focus group discussion consisted of six learners from a particular grade, firstly grade nine learners, then grade tens, grade elevens and eventually grade twelve learners (six learners per grade). The learners were reluctant to engage actively in the focus group discussions at first, especially when dealing with conflict-laden vignettes, in which they were supposed to give their opinion in relation to their rights against the wishes of the school authorities. In this regard Bailey (1994:192) states that because privacy is lacking in focus group discussions, respondents may be fearful of answering sensitive questions. Given the fact that learners come from a culture that emphasises unconditional respect and obedience for elders, and are taught by educators who were part of the authoritarian school system in the past, their reactions are perhaps not very surprising (see § 3.4.5 & 3.4.6). Although some learners were reluctant to actively engage in the discussion at first, by means of the establishment of trust and encouragement, they were eventually able to participate freely.

My role as a moderator was to steer the discussion (Bellenger *et al.* 1979:16). I promoted debate by asking divergent questions such as 'why', challenging the participants' views and their differences, or by simply repeating the respondents' exact words (Bellenger *et al.* 1979:18).



These debates resulted in data that contained conflicting views and different levels of human rights reasoning (see § 6.2). The contradictory views helped in providing answers to the third premise (see § 1.4).

The first two focus group discussions were conducted in one day, with the grade nines and grade tens. During the discussions, the main points were noted relating to the focus group protocol, and recordings were made. After each focus group discussion, I played back the tape recorder and verified my summary with the respondents. One focus group discussion with grade tens had to be repeated, as the voices were not audible because of flat batteries. I did not use the same group of grade ten learners the second time, as that would have compromised the validity of the data. Focus group discussions yielded an enormous amount of data as they consisted of open-ended questions. On completion I was confronted with what Patton (2002:433) calls an overwhelmingly 'massive amount of data'. I transcribed two focus group discussions at the same time and allocated a number to each one. Only the number of a focus group has been used in reporting the results, for confidentiality purposes.

According to Oats (2000:193), each focus group has its own group dynamics and it is sometimes difficult to predict how and why its members will react. Some learners were cold, passive and silent with one or two members dominating the group during the discussion. I tried to engage them all by asking questions directed from various angles. The discussions were held in a laboratory which was a neutral environment. Each focus group lasted between 45 minutes to one hour.

I read the vignettes aloud to the respondents who were required to listen to and concentrate on the story, and then to answer the relevant questions. The questions in section B of the schedule required the respondents to judge the action of the main story characters (a learner and an educator or a principal of the school). They were expected to say what their decisions and judgments would be, had they been in the same position as the learner depicted in the story and in connection with their right to education. They were also required to give reasons for their decisions. The main reason for this method was to determine the level of human rights reasoning learners engage in when balancing the rights they think they must have (covered under section A of the shedule) with the rights of the school authority. I started with questions in section A and then proceeded to section B.

The rationale behind basing the discussion on the order of the sections in the data collection instrument was:

- Section A oriented the respondents with respect to the concept of their right to education, with which they were required to be familiar throughout the second part of the focus group and the in depth face-to-face interviews;



- Section B introduced the respondents to dealing with scenarios which required them to give their judgements of the situations.

The rationale furthermore realised the following advantages:

- It orients the reader towards the learners' knowledge and understanding of their right to education in general.
- It shifts the focus to specific trends with respect to the learners' understanding of their right to education;
- It establishes how learners of different grades handle or balance their right to education with other rights involved in education within the context of the school.

Even though the data collection began by asking questions in section A, followed by questions in section B, I did not always adhere strictly to the order of questions in each section. It became obvious, after the first focus group discussion, that learners had difficulty in answering the first question in section A. Therefore the order of questions was changed in the following focus group discussions, by beginning with easier questions in order to help respondents feel at ease. However, questions that belonged to each section were kept together.

Although focus group discussions are time-consuming in terms of transcribing and coding the data, they are inexpensive, yield more data and have a stimulating effect, since during the discussion, learners may react and build on the points made by other group members (Bellenger *et al.* 1979:13; Morgan & Krueger 1993:18; Oats 2000:188,194). An explanation of the third stage of data collection follows in the next sub-section.

4.6.1.3 In-depth face-to-face interviews

The third data collection stage was face-to-face, in-depth interviews with twelve learners. These interviews were intended to consolidate and verify the information gathered during the focus group discussions. Before the start of each interview I introduced myself to the respondents, explained the purpose of the study and ensured them of the confidentiality of their responses. The participation in the whole data collection process was completely voluntary. Interviewing ceased when relatively similar responses were given and less and less new information materialised. This was an indication that the data had become saturated.

In-depth, non-directive and semi-structured interviews were used, as the aim of this study was to discover the extent to which learners know and understand their right to education. This type of interview seemed relevant as face-to-face interviews are able to focus on experiences,



opinions, values and feelings (Cohen *et al.* 2001:442). Such textual data, rich in meaning, is difficult to capture in 'short and structured' interviews (Mouton 2001:107). The main purpose of using in-depth interviews was to seek to describe and understand the meanings and central themes in the learners' learned world and to make sense of their interpretations (McMillan & Schumacher 2001:443). Patton (2002:340-341) emphasises the importance of interviews in this way:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviour that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of the observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of the interview then is to allow us to enter into another person's perspective.

The central question to this study was 'how do learners understand human rights, especially their right to education?' To be able to answer this question, scenarios were designed in which learners had to judge the actions of a learner and an educator depicted in each vignette, and to give the reasons for their decisions. The vignettes were conflict laden, that is, the learners' right to education was in conflict with those in authority. I began with the assumption that the perspectives of others are meaningful and can be made explicit. Learners were also asked to mention rights which they perceived to be covered under their right to education and why they perceived it in that way. Such questions cannot be fully examined by using structured interviews or questionnaires. The open-ended semi-structured interviews enabled me to probe learners' perceptions of their rights and the reasons why they perceive their rights in a particular way.

Conversational questioning is flexible, spontaneous and more responsive to individual differences. The main reason that probing questions were utilised was to find out what was 'in and on someone else's mind' (Patton 2002:241). Face-to-face interviews also allowed any misunderstanding about questions to be clarified. The time and place of interviews were arranged with the principal and all interviews were recorded on tape. Tape recording was important since one cannot remember everything the respondents have said. Furthermore, I could listen to actual responses during the transcription of data, which is the first step in data analysis. Notes were also made during interviews. Although taking notes during an interview is problematic in that one loses contact with the interviewee and it can disturb the flow of information, it is, however, useful during analysis as a comparison with the tape-recorded responses can be made. I used interview protocols such as the one developed by Creswell (1998) cited in Gay and Airasian (2000:215) for each of the interviews, which I adapted for use in learners' understanding of their right to education. During the interviews, I wrote down key points in the interview protocol (see Addendum S). A variety of probes were utilised to expand the participants' responses to the questions provided in the interview protocol.



4.7 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Many authors have written about purposive sampling (Cohen *et al*, 2001:103; McMillan & Schumacher 2001:175). Denzin and Lincoln (1998b:xiv) and Miles and Huberman (1994:27) note that qualitative researchers often employ purposive and not random sampling models. The logic and power of purposive sampling is the opportunity to select information-rich cases (Morse 1998:74; Merriam 2001:60). The purpose of any investigation is paramount when considering the selection of an appropriate case and sample. The intention of this study was not to determine learners' understanding of their right to education in the Republic of South Africa as a whole, but to explore the phenomenon within the bounded context of a particular school (Yin 1993:33), based on personal judgment and knowledge of the context (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:166). A qualitative case study is characterised by a small sample size, which is not a true representation of the population and a single generalisation in the statistical sense is not the goal of qualitative research. A large sample does not always guarantee true representation of the population, but is only an approximation (Cohen *et al*, 2000:99-103). For this reason a small sample was chosen from a rural public secondary school in the Soutpansberg East circuit, Vhembe district in Limpopo Province. The Limpopo Province is one of the poorest provinces in the Republic of South Africa and consists of diverse cultural groups. It is necessary for educators and school managers to understand diverse beliefs about human rights from the perspectives of learners and also to raise their awareness and consciousness of human rights.

My sample consisted of 48 learners in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 from the same cultural group (Tshivenda speaking learners) of low socio-economic status. As human rights are abstract principles, I chose senior learners in the 'adolescent' age group (15-18 years old). Cognitive or developmental theory indicates that learners belonging to this age group are capable of abstract reasoning (Keating 1990:64) and their reasoning is associated with understanding human rights in an adult-like manner (Covell & Howe 1996:253). One may call adolescence the 'age of understanding'. As age increases, knowledge in the social domain also increases and becomes richer, more specific, sophisticated and differential (Melton & Limber 1992:175; Peterson-Badali & Abramovitch 1992:156; 1993:538; Ruck *et al*. 1998a:104). Goss (1996:119) argues that during focus group discussions, participants are likely to express themselves more freely than a heterogeneous group in which power relations may have an influence. The socio-economic status of the learners' families (Helwig 1997:493) and culture (Covell & Howe 1995:191 & 1996:253; Cherney & Perry 1996:243) play a role in the development of learners' understanding of human rights and the right to education (see § 3.4).

The choice of a single cultural group on the same socio-economic level was because learners' perceptions of human rights may be complex and could not be dealt with independently of the context. This strategy could be useful in guiding efforts to educate learners about their rights. The respondents were selected according to the criteria obtained from the analysis of data



collected during stage 1. Table 4.1 indicates the demographic information of the learners and this concurs with Merriam's (2001:61) view that the sample should satisfy the attributes essential for case studies.

Table 4.1 Demographic profile of participating learners

Grade	Gender		Average age	Socio-economic background	Environmental background	Cultural group
	Male	Female				
9	6	6	15	Low SES	Rural	Muvenda
10	6	6	16	Low SES	Rural	Muvenda
11	6	6	17	Low SES	Rural	Muvenda
12	6	6	18	Low SES	Rural	Muvenda
Total	24	24				

Figure 4.2 depicts the number of learners who participated in each stage of the data collection, beginning with a sample of 48 learners who completed questionnaires. Twenty four learners from this group then participated in the focus group discussions. In order to crystallise the results obtained from stage two (focus group discussions) the sample was narrowed further to include only twelve participants in stage three. The sample was reduced in order to control the variables that might influence the results and to meet the requirements of the sample. There are many over-aged learners in the specific grades in rural area; therefore the sample was reduced from 48 to 24 for the focus group discussions. The interviewing stopped after 12 face-to-face interviews when it became clear that virtually the same responses were being given and less and little if any new information was emerging. This was an indication that the data had become saturated.

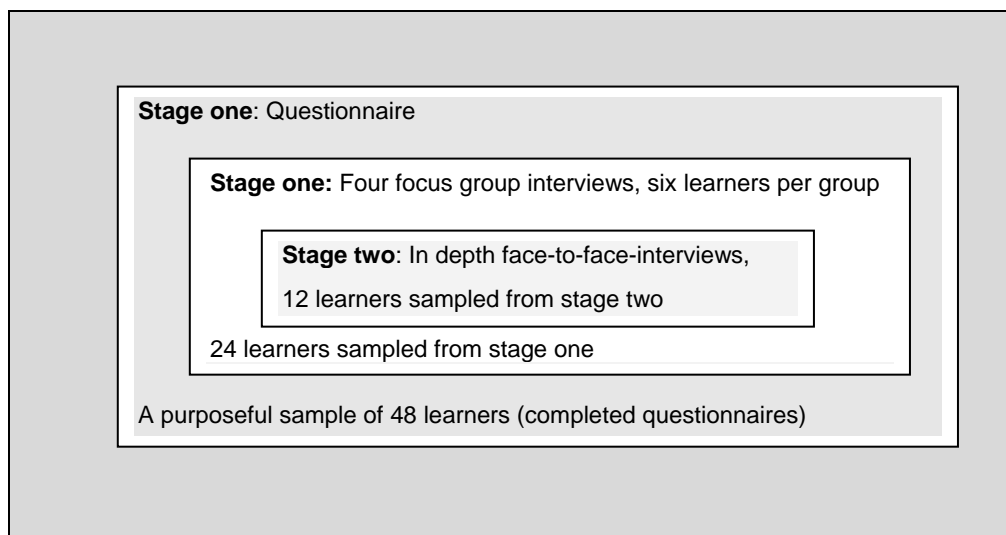


Figure 4.2 The process of narrowing the sample size per data-collecting stage

In the next section I discuss the procedures which were followed in order to obtain the necessary approval from different authorities.



4.8 APPROVAL FOR THE RESEARCH

An official research application letter (Addendum E) was submitted to the Vhembe district office in the Limpopo Province and permission to conduct the research study was granted (Addendum F). An application letter to conduct research was also sent to the Soutpansberg circuit manager (Addendum G) and approval was again granted (Addendum H). As the prospective learners were all minors in grades 9-12 in a public school, permission was requested from the school governing body (Addendum I) which was also granted (Addendum J). An application letter was submitted to the school principal (Addendum K) who also granted permission for data to be collected from his school (Addendum L). Application letters were then sent to the parents of learners who were involved in the study, explaining the aim of the research (Addendum M) and requesting them to sign consent forms (Addendum N). The parents were also required to indicate the stage at which their child could participate, as data collection comprised three stages.

4.9 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Two data collection instruments were used, namely questionnaires and a schedule for the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The following paragraphs briefly explain the composition of each instrument.

4.9.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was constructed, consisting of nine items and this was reviewed for validity by one of my colleagues who is also an educator. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions aimed at collecting the demographic information of the respondents (Addendum O). The information obtained by means of the questionnaire was summarised and is presented in Table 4.1.

4.9.2 Focus group discussion schedule

The following schedule was drawn up and used for both the focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews. The schedule contained two sections. Section A consisted of the following five open-ended questions:

- (a) Explain what it means to have a right to education?
- (b) Which human rights do you think are covered under your right to education at school?
- (c) Why do you attend school?
- (d) Can anyone take away your right to education? And why ?



(e) Who has the right to education?

Section A was presented first and contained questions regarding learners’ knowledge and perceptions of their rights, especially their right to education (Addendum P). Section B comprised 11 conflict-laden vignettes. The vignettes addressed aspects of the right to education and other rights that are directly relevant to the learners’ right to education. The following aspects were addressed in the first draft of conflict-laden vignettes (Addendum Q):

- Vignette One: Free and compulsory education
- Vignette Two: School attendance
- Vignette Three: School discipline
- Vignette Four: Non-discrimination in education
- Vignette Five: Admission to school.
- Vignette Six: Language choice (medium of instruction)
- Vignette Seven: Privacy rights (search and seizure)
- Vignette Eight: Religious rights (attending religious education classes)
- Vignette Nine: Safe school environment
- Vignette Ten: Administrative justice (expulsion from school)
- Vignette Eleven: Freedom of choice (choice of school subject).

After careful review and consideration of the vignettes, some were omitted (namely vignettes four, five and nine), while others were amalgamated. Vignettes one to three and ten were fused into one which then became vignette number two. Vignettes eight and eleven were fused into one and this then became vignette number one. In the end five vignettes were used (Addendum R). Since the right to education is a most complex human right, its whole spectrum could not be covered in the scope of this study, hence the reduction of some of the scenarios. Issues such as learners’ rights to be educated in the language of their choice and the parents’ rights to establish private schools, which are provided for in the general right to education, were not covered.

Table 4.2 Content of vignettes used in section B

Vignette no	Description of the right to education issues and other relevant rights
1	Freedom to choose subjects and participate in religious education classes
2	The right to education, school discipline and access to Resources
3	The right to education, and access to own personal school file
4	The right to education, freedom of expression and school rules
5	The right to education, confidentiality and the right to privacy



4.9.3 The in-depth interview schedule

One schedule was used to collect data during the focus group discussions and the in-depth face-to-face interviews, the composition of which was presented in the preceeding sub-section (see § 4.9.2). An focus group and interview protocol was also constructed containing key questions, and with a margin for any comments noted during the interview session (see Addendum S).

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999:65) the purpose of ethical research planning is to protect the respondents' rights and welfare, as well as those of the researcher, and to ensure the credibility of the research report. An ethical clearance certificate was obtained from the University of Pretoria (see Annexure A). The participants in the study were learners under the age of 18 years; therefore necessary ethical guidelines were followed to ensure that this study did not deceive them. Since the respondents were minors, a letter was sent to all parents requesting permission to allow their children to be involved in this research study and they were required to sign a consent form (Addendum N) (see § 4.8). The research purpose and processes were explained to the learners and anonymity and confidentiality for both the school and respondents was guaranteed. Numbers instead of names have been used to report the results of this study. The respondents were informed that they would be able to verify the findings and have access to the final report. Participation in all stages of this research study was voluntary.

4.11 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

The initial shortcoming of this study is with regard to subjectivity, as an issue of validity. The core of this limitation lies not in the extent to which my observations or interpretations of data are a true description of, or match to, a particular reality, but in the trustworthiness of the responses. Since the purpose of this study was to explore and determine how learners understand human rights, particularly their right to education, validity is determined by the trustworthiness of their responses. 'Trustworthy' is defined as what learners believe to be true in their own eyes and what they have experienced. This truth is supported by their responses. For example, during the focus group discussions, when asked whether or not their right to education is revocable, the responses show that to some of the learners their right to education is something more distant than poverty experiences, for example:

- *Sometimes parents could be held responsible if their children drop out of school or do not attend school ...regularly, you see. They don't give you school fees You ask them to give you, they say quit, go to work (F3/4).*
- *All of us have the right to education but not all of us can get it. You see. Poverty can take away everything from you. Even your self-respect (F4/6).*



From these responses one can infer that learners view poverty as a possible impediment to their right to education. This is an example of what constitutes the truth and validity of the responses in this context, although it is a subjective and experiential observation by some of the learners (Kincheloe & McLaren 1998:288).

The second methodological limitation is what positivist researchers call generalisability or external validity (transferability). Qualitative data does not lend itself to statistical analysis as the purpose is not to produce standardised results that any other researcher in the same field could replicate. The purpose is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of the context from which the results were obtained. The focus of my study was on the understanding of learners in one rural, public, secondary school, involving learners from one cultural group with a low socio-economic background and belonging to one age-group (15 to 18 years old). This implies that my particular findings are not representative of learners of different ages, cultural groups and socio-economic backgrounds in other South African schools. The patterns that evolved from the data are therefore not representative of all learners and I cannot claim to have identified all patterns in learners' understanding of human rights. In this regard Stake (2000b:22) notes that particularisation of the findings is the lone dictate of merit.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that I am a black Tshivenda-speaking female (from a South African ethnic minority group) influenced by history, culture and religion. I found it hard not to interpret some of the learners' revelations as reflected from my own experiences of violation of human rights as a result of apartheid and oppression in the name of culture. According to Blaikie (2000:252) it is difficult to report the results of a study purely from the point of view of the respondents. In this regard Gay and Airasian (2000:223) note that a researcher brings in something of himself to a setting and ultimately his individual background and preference might surface in the outcomes of the research. Most scientists today acknowledge that a scientist's personal outlook on life and image of the world will influence his scientific work (Botha 1996:333). Whilst attempting to be objective throughout, I believe that everyone creates their own truth and therefore I cannot claim that my personal experiences did not influence my research. Although I experienced problems with learners not wanting to respond freely to some of the questions, especially when dealing with conflict-laden vignettes and confronting school authorities, this was overcome by making neutral probes or confirming what I had heard and motivating them to speak freely.

One limitation of this study is the sample size which was small. Care was taken to select a sample which was as homogeneous as possible so that variables that might influence the results were limited (see § 4.7). It cannot be claimed that the same results would be achieved with a more heterogeneous or broader sample. Even if another unbiased researcher were to undertake a study within the same parameters, identical interpretations and findings would be unlikely (Gay & Airasian, 2000:223).



4.12 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative enquiry tends to produce large quantities of data. Questionnaires were used to collect data on the demographic background of the respondents, together with four focus group discussions and twelve in-depth interviews. Processing this quantity of information required careful data management.

In this section, I explain the theoretical grounding which informed the data analysis stance that was taken, together with the steps followed in data analysis. My theoretical grounding was based on the works of authors such as Tesch (1990:95-96); Miles and Huberman (1994:56-57); and Kvale (1996:187). Data analysis is a significant step in the research process. Bernard (2000:177) refers to data analysis as:

a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process.... Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about the relationship between the data.

While Smit (2001a:85) notes that data analysis literally means to break data into bits and pieces, Kvale (1996:178) states that 'to analyse' means to separate something into parts or elements. Data analysis aims at describing data, as well as describing objects to which the data refers. Authors such as Vithal and Jansen (1997:22-24) note that the purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the accumulated information. Tesch (1990:95-96) and Smit (2001a:85) provide guiding principles for data analysis, which I adopted in this study, for example: Data analysis is not the last phase in the research process. The data analysis process starts immediately the first piece of data is gathered – it is done concurrently and is integrated with the data collection process. Data analysis ends only after new data no longer generates new insights. Miles and Huberman (1994:50) comment that early data analysis helps the researcher to cycle back and forth between thinking about existing data and generating the strategy for collecting new, often better, data. Early data analysis allows the researcher to reflect continuously on impressions and relationships while the data is being collected.

Having highlighted the guiding principles that are important in qualitative research analysis, a discussion of content analysis follows, which was the method used for data analysis. Content analysis involves reading, judging and making inferences. When drawing conclusions from unstructured content, inferences are made, including interpretations, and giving meaning to the content (Creswell, 1998:142-148) as seen from the respondent's viewpoint.

Firstly the data was analysed manually using open coding (Neuman 1997:422; Blaikie 2000:239 and De Vos 2002:346). Although a step-by-step data analysis procedure was followed as described by Tesch (1990:95) and McMillan and Schumacher (2000:462), a flexible data



analysis mode was used, which provided the opportunity to utilise dovetail codes and cluster them differently. I adopted an inductive analysis approach, which involves coding and categorising the information; consequently the analysis was grounded in the data and was not abstraction or speculation (Schwandt 1997:70).

The data was collected in the learners' home language, that is Tshivenda, and the responses were tape recorded. Verbatim transcriptions were made of the tapes which were then translated from Tshivenda into English. I went through each transcript with an open mind, firstly to gain a global impression of the content, and secondly (Henning *et al.* 2004:104), to explore what emerged from the text. The inductive data analysis technique employed in this research study supports the notion that categories and patterns emerge from within the data, and are not imposed before data collection (Janesick 1998:47, Gay & Airasian 1992:169).

For research premises one and two the codes were not determined before analysing the data. I searched for the codes from within the data. Initially I coded every detail of the data, separating different codes by different shades of colour in order to aid visibility (Miles & Huberman 1994:56-57). After reading each transcript, I cut and pasted the codes that belonged together in separate files and at the end of the first coding was confronted with what Patton (2002:433) calls an overwhelmingly 'massive amount of data'.

A second attempt was then made at data coding (axial coding) (Blaikie 2000:239). This time I did not code everything, but sorted the data into important patterns and framed the information that emerged into manageable data elements. Eventually I worked with **182** codes for the first and second research premises, ensuring that I did not write a code without reference to its source and page number. Consequently I was able to synthesise the 182 codes into **16 categories** which were classified into **three families**. Two patterns then evolved from the data. To reach this stage, I engaged in the constant comparative method (Tesch 1990:96; Hart 1998:131; Merriam 2001:179), going through the data over and over again to identify, revise, modify and amend new categories and families until manageable patterns emerged. The process of coding and categorising data was not linear, but a cyclical process. The codes were counted according to my research premises and files opened and named for research premises one and two (see Addendum T) and research premise three (see Addendum U). I organised the responses in tabular form depicting the responses to each vignette in which learners either asserted or not asserted their right to education (see Addendum V). An independent coder helped with the coding. I did my own manual coding and we then compared the codes.

The results of stages two and three are reported as one complete whole or hermeneutic unit¹. When reporting the findings of this research study, I used a narrative storyline approach,

¹ Unit of transcribed data

starting from coded data through categories to emerged patterns (Schwandt 1997:98; Cohen *et al.* 2001:190). Figure 4.3 represents the process of clustering of codes until patterns emerged.

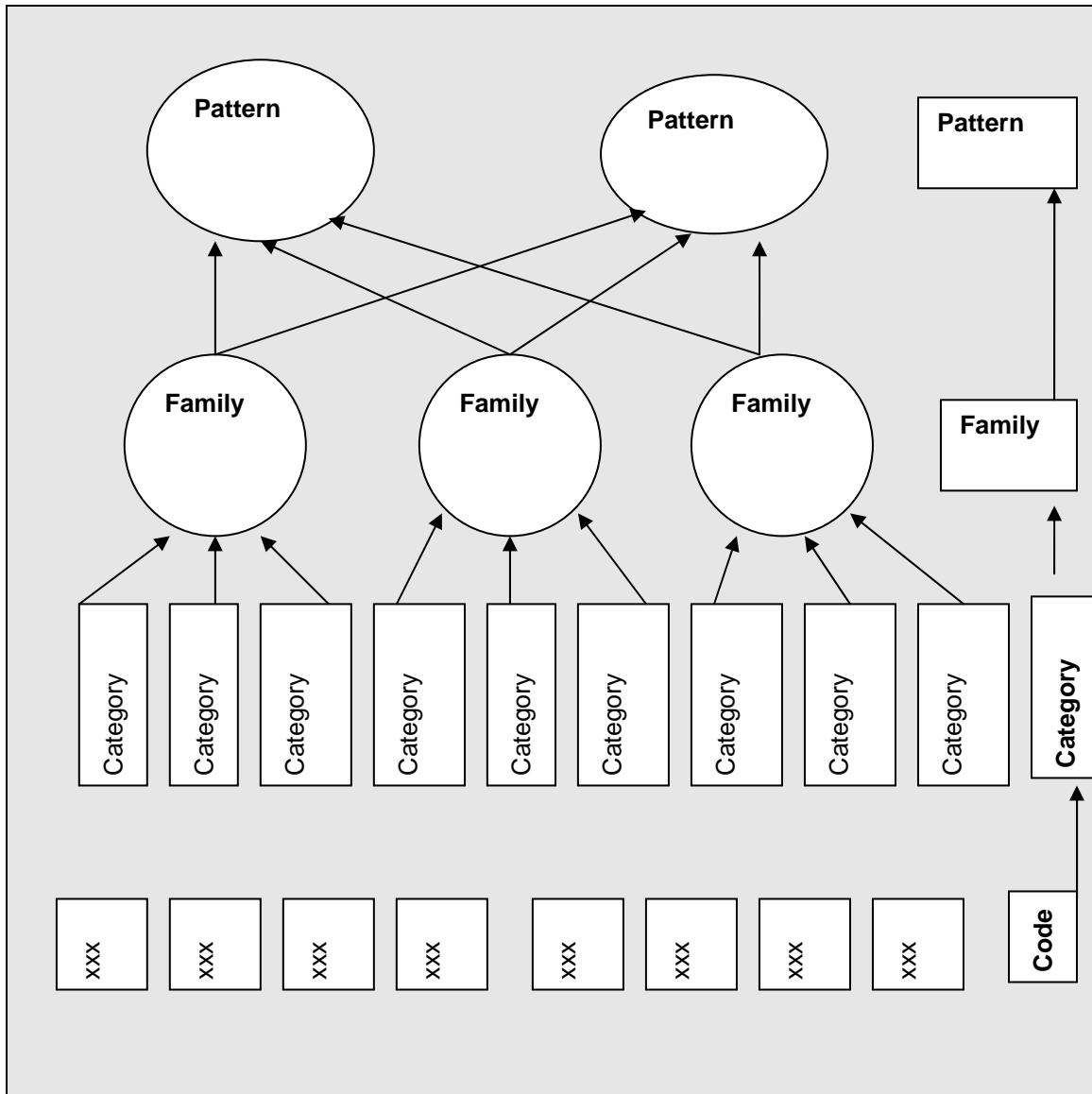


Figure 4.3 Diagram of the process of data coding, categorising and clustering until the patterns emerge.

In order to analyse the levels of human rights understanding and reasoning at which learners operate (research premise 3) I classified learners' responses according to the stages and levels of moral-ethical development prevalent in Kohlberg's theory of moral development as it applies directly to human rights reasoning (see addendum V). Detailed explanations of the stages and levels of moral-ethical reasoning can be found in chapter three (see § 3.5.2). Tables 3.4 & 6.3 indicate the stages and levels of moral-ethical development and the mode of reasoning that is involved during each stage and level. Figure 4.3 depicts the process of data coding, categorising and clustering until the patterns emerged.



4.13 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

As the intention was to determine how learners understand human rights, especially their right to education, I commenced the study by making an in-depth study of scholarly research already conducted on the topic, articles on international human rights instruments and national legislation, and decided court cases. My choice of the qualitative approach was motivated by the assumption that there are multiple realities of the truth, which are socially constructed by individuals. This approach assisted in determining and giving insight into how learners perceive human rights, particularly their right to education. The qualitative method was best suited for a study of this nature since it assumes there are different methods of making sense of reality. Since this research study sought to understand learners' understanding of their right to education, an interpretive research approach seemed relevant.

The theoretical, methodological base that underpins this study as explained above, is the interpretive paradigm (see § 4.3). This approach is subjective, in that it presupposes that individuals socially construct their own reality based on their own lived experiences and individual interpretations and understandings. The research question that underpins my study is how learners understand human rights, in particular their right to education. The focus of my study is not to obtain universal or global generalisations, as is the case in the quantitative approach, but subjective truths as understood by the respondents in a given context and to describe the phenomenon from the learners' perspective.

My working premises were that some learners:

- (1) have limited knowledge of their right to education
- (2) do not know how to exercise their right to education
- (3) Learners employ various levels of human rights understanding when dealing with dilemmas where the exercise of their right to education is in conflict with the rights and duties of the school authorities.

I purposefully sampled one case (a school) and described its boundaries: Learners in grades 9-12, within the range of 15 to 18 years of age, from the same cultural group, of low socio-economic status and attending a rural, public, secondary school were selected. Their understanding of their rights was explored within the parameters of the school (see Table 4.2). Data collection was done in three consecutive stages in order to answer research premises one, two and three. In stage one I collected data with regard to the demographic characteristics of the learners, by means of a questionnaire. In stages two and three I conducted focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews using the same schedule for each method.



The reason for choosing this context and exploring one topic was to explore learners' understanding of a single phenomenon (Yin 1993:33), to limit the aspects that could influence their understanding of their right to education and to bind the topic in the context within which the data was interpreted (Merriam 2001:27; Blanche & Kelly 1999:126). The respondents' construction of reality may be understood more clearly if it is interpreted within the selected context.

This study may be viewed as an exploratory case study, as it may open the way for further studies and generate new researchable hypotheses. Merriam (2002:38) calls this an interpretive case study design, which examines initial assumptions on which other studies could be based.

Table 4.3 provides a summary of the research question, working premises, assumptions, instruments and data analysis for this research study.

Table 4.3: Summary of premises, assumptions, methods and analysis used in this research study

Research question:			
How do learners understand human rights, especially their right to education?			
Premises	Assumptions	Methods	Analysis
(1) Some learners have limited knowledge about their right to education.	Some learners (1a) Know that their right to education involves responsibility. (1b) Know that through the realisation of their right to education an array of opportunities can be opened. (1c) Mix their right to education with other human rights. (1d) Do not know who are the beneficiaries of the right to education.	Focus group discussions Face-to-face interviews	Content analysis
(2) Some learners do not know how to exercise their right to education.	Some learners (2a) Perceive their right to education as absolute. (2b) Do not know how to limit their right to education.	Focus group discussions Face-to-face interviews	Content analysis
(3) Learners employ different levels of human rights understanding when interpreting dilemmas where the exercise of their rights is in conflict with the duties of the school authorities.	(3a) Learners employ various levels of human rights understanding when dealing with dilemmas where the exercise of their right to education is in conflict with the duties of the school authorities	Focus group discussions Face-to-face interviews	Content analysis



4.14 POINTERS

This section provides guidelines to be followed when reading this research thesis.

4.14.1 Notation

A total number of four focus group discussions was held, and numbered according to grades, with grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 being numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. References to the responses made by the participants are indicated as follows, for example: F3/8 or I3/7. The 'F' indicates the focus group discussion while the 'I' indicates the in-depth interviews. The first number indicates the number of the focus group or in-depth interview and the second number indicates the page in the transcript where the response may be read. The above example is thus a response from focus group 3 (grade 11 learners) obtainable on page 8 of the focus group transcript. The second example above indicates in-depth interview 3 (also with grade 11 learners) which can be read on page 7 of the interview transcript.

4.14.2 Referencing

The discussion that follows concerns citation and referencing used in the body text and at the end of this thesis. I have organised my citation and referencing according to the Harvard method of citing part of the sources (Mouton 2001:228-237). This citation style has been used because of its simplicity. I have written the full name of the human rights instrument in the first citation and the abbreviated name in the subsequent citations. This rule has been followed with references made from sections of the acts and the Constitution. When the work has three or more authors I have written the surnames of all the authors in the first citation and in the subsequent citation only the surname of the first author followed by "*et al.*" with the year and page following in brackets.

4.14.3 The concept to 'absolutise'

Although I decided to exclude a glossary and instead to explain concepts in the text where relevant, I find it necessary to explain the concept of 'absolutising' as it features as a golden thread throughout this thesis.

Some human rights are referred to as non-derogable, whereas others are said to be derogable (the Constitution section 37(5)). Where there is a tendency not to limit rights, one can say that the rights are non-limited, not limitable or cannot be limited. Rights would therefore be unrestricted. Synonyms for this phenomenon are that rights are unquestionable, non-negotiable, unequivocal, undeniable and incontestable. As a result, one could say that such rights have



been raised to the state of being absolute or tend towards the absolute. I have opted to use the verb 'absolutise' as done by Van Vollenhoven (2005:155).

4.15 CONCLUSION

The question that underpins this enquiry is "How do learners understand their right to education?"

The first two research premises are :

- (1) Some learners have limited knowledge of their right to education.
- (2) Some learners do not know how to exercise their right to education.

Learners' right to education is explored within the context of the school. I believe that persons attach subjective meaning to reality, depending on how they perceive it and their lived experiences which also applies to learners.

In this chapter, I described the research philosophy, research design, methodology, research instruments, data collection strategies and data analysis procedures. In the next chapter (chapter 5), I present the findings from the data that I used to answer my first two research premises. In chapter 6 I present the findings from the data used to answer my third research premise.