# CHAPTER 2
# THE RESEARCH PROCESS:
# AN ISLAND-BASED CASE STUDY

> … the validity [or trustworthiness] of scientific claims is always relative to the paradigm within which they are judged; they are never simply a reflection of some independent domain of reality (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 12).

> … all research is a practical activity requiring the exercise of judgment in context; it is not a matter of simply following methodological rules (*ibid*: 23).

When a researcher applies a specific methodological approach, the research problem emphasises the need to understand a specific problem or issue in a given context. As previously stated, this study aimed to understand the challenges associated with implementing and sustaining an adult and vocational education curriculum on an isolated island. The study identified three aims:

- to examine the current state of curriculum implementation and its associated challenges within the Adult and Vocational Education Service;
- to investigate how this curriculum is satisfying the needs of the island by aiding workforce development to support economic growth on the island; and
- to explore the challenges relating to the sustainability of the Adult and Vocational Education Service in providing a relevant vocational curriculum.

Mason (2002: 13) suggests that an "intellectual puzzle" is presented in the form of the main research question – which in my study was: What are the challenges of implementing and sustaining an Adult and Vocational Education Curriculum on an isolated island?

While I opted for a research approach based on predominantly qualitative data, supporting quantitative data is incorporated where appropriate. I chose to use a

case study as the island context created an ideal platform to conduct a study with very clear and definite boundaries.

The data elicitation techniques that I employed included: document analysis; questionnaires; a range of interview types that included unstructured, semi-structured and focus groups; the use of the local media – both audio and print; and a feedback workshop session.

In this chapter I will elaborate on the qualitative research approach; case study methodology; ethical issues; the research design; the data elicitation techniques; data analysis; and issues relating to trustworthiness (validity and reliability) of qualitative data.

## 2.1.    QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

According to Seidman (2006: 34), the notion of 'approach' refers to the "way in which an academic situation or problem is viewed, thought about and dealt with" according to principles which can be discussed and which are fitting to the case being studied. The approach of the researcher implies a perceptual activity, which is different to the practical steps undertaken to access, analyse and draw conclusions from the data (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2010).

Qualitative inquiry has shaped the way in which researchers look at and attempt to make sense of the world (Emmel, 2010). Lavenda & Schultz (2003: 45) advocate that qualitative research is the only field of research "that can access evidence about the entire human experience on this planet". In undertaking qualitative research, the researcher has the opportunity to "interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning that the stakeholders involved in the process bring to the natural setting" (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997: 742). This was a useful feature in my study because it gave me the opportunity to observe, engage with stakeholders, ask questions and to make sense of the natural setting in my endeavours to understand the challenges associated with implementing and sustaining an appropriate adult and vocational curriculum on Cascara Island.

Cantrell (1993: 90) suggests that "the qualitative approach uses small, information rich samples purposefully selected …", while Preissle (2002: 1) describes qualitative data as:

> … a loosely defined category of research designs or models, all of which elicit verbal, visual, tactile, olfactory and gustatory data in the form of descriptive narratives like field notes, recordings, or other transcriptions from audio and video tapes and other written records and pictures or films.

Cantrell (1997: 87) explains that the term qualitative data "is used synonymously for a number of research approaches associated with interpretive and critical science perspectives". Qualitative research methodology is concerned with how people arrange themselves and their settings and how they make sense of the social structures and cultures that characterise their setting. I aimed to understand these social and cultural structures in the Cascarian context. Qualitative research methodology assumes that "realities are socially constructed by individuals" (Smit, 2001: 56) and society and is dependent on the establishment of relationships for explaining various causes and outcomes. The notion of 'qualitative' implies an accent on the qualities of the entities and on the processes and meanings associated with the entities. These processes and meanings are not examined experimentally nor are they measured in terms of quantity, intensity, amount or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative researchers focus on the socially constructed nature of reality, the relationship between themselves and what is being investigated and the social limits that shape the context of the research *(ibid)*.

Qualitative research gave me the opportunity to gain an understanding of the meaning that stakeholders attach to the provision of adult and vocational education on the island – particularly in relation to how this provision will aid economic activity in the wake of the air access project. Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2000: 91) emphasise the researcher's role as being one of an "active learner". In the context of qualitative research, I was able to immerse myself in the context and reach the outcome as a process rather than a product *(ibid)*.

McMillan & Schumacher (2001: 391) describe a qualitative approach to data collection as "naturalistic inquiry", while Fraenkel *et al.* (2010: 444) describe this form of inquiry as "a non-interfering manner in which to study real-world situations as they unfold naturally." I do not fully support the contentions of Fraenkel *et al.* because although one would assume that this form of inquiry is 'non-interfering', the very presence of the researcher is in itself 'interfering'– it alters the dynamics of the context and one can never be certain that participants are behaving as they usually would; nor can one always be certain that they are imparting all necessary information to you as the researcher. Despite this potential drawback of naturalistic inquiry, an inquiry of this nature offers the researcher the opportunity to observe whatever emerges without predetermined constraints on outcomes (*ibid*).

Although my research for the most part was located in the qualitative approach, I did draw on the quantitative paradigm in respect of descriptive statistics and figures that supported my argument and findings. This involved my questions and investigations into such areas as the number of courses on offer, the number of learners enrolled in specific learning opportunities, pass rates, the gender and ages of course participants and population and unemployment statistics.

## 2.2. CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

At the stage of proposal approval for my studies, one of the five critical readers suggested action research as an appropriate research methodology given my explanation, background and rationale for the study. I explored this research approach and decided against using it as I was keen to make an adjudication on the progress and challenges experienced by the AVES. As already explained in the aims of this study, the AVES Strategy was designed by the AID AVES Consultant. This consultant kept a close eye on the activities of the AVES (although he was based in the metropole) and I knew from previous experience that he was fully invested in the design and structure of the AVES Strategy. Although I was the manager of the Service, my responsibilities were mostly operational. Strategic and policy changes were the domain of the AID AVES Adviser, the Executive Education Officer (EEO) and the Education Committee –

working from an action research stance would have been very limiting and I am not sure how much change I could have realistically affected. I therefore undertook a case study as my research method because it:

> ... strives to portray what it is like in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and thick description of participants' lived experiences of, thoughts and feelings, for a situation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007: 182).

Although not *action research* or *participatory action research*, the intermingling of my work and my research did lend itself to the notion of participatory research. Maguire (1987: 44) defines participatory research as "a method of social investigation of problems … and a means by which researchers and oppressed people can join together to take collective action for social change". The colonial history of Cascara therefore lends itself to participatory research.

When I commenced my study, I had not consciously thought about the impact of colonialism on Cascarians, their education or the island in general. As I delved deeper, I discovered that the island's colonial history and its current relationship with the metropole were not free of tensions. These tensions were revealed to me by research participants and work colleagues (some of whom were also research participants).

Whilst I made every effort to separate my roles of AVES Manager and researcher the nature of the way in which I engaged with some research participants in the course of my work as AVES Manager gave my study a participatory slant. In attempting to understand the questions that I had posed, I drew on the human resource that I had available to me. Much of what I discovered might also have been revealed to me during work meetings and impromptu office discussions. My research writing and continuous reflection on the research process would have been influenced by the indistinct lines between my work and my research. Without even realising it, I was also a participant in my own study.

My actual research process was not entirely participative in nature as I structured and framed the study without the involvement of the relevant stakeholders.

Conversely, my study supported the participative approach in that it generated a lot of participation from stakeholders and the knowledge generated was transformational in nature. This in itself supported andragogical learning principals. Palloff (1996: 47) supports the emancipatory nature of participatory research when she states:

> Participatory research seeks to generate knowledge and then to use that knowledge to empower the participants as they create solutions to the problems they face. Outcomes are focused not only on the creation of that change, but also on individual and group empowerment, and the creation of a heightened sense of self-esteem through ownership of the process and the solution.

As my conceptual framework was based in critical theory, my research approach also supported participatory research because I treated all research participants as equals. Additionally, the knowledge that resulted from the process has the potential to be utilised to support social activity and, to some extent, it should aid in developing a critical consciousness with AVES stakeholders. Park (1993: 18) notes that "the knowledge generated by participants through participatory inquiry is 'experiential knowing'. The result is as much a process of recovery as of discovery". The findings from this shared qualitative case study experience should therefore support emancipation and economic empowerment.

By employing a qualitative case study and using qualitative research instruments, I was able to gain a deep understanding into the processes and practices associated with the AVES on Cascara Island. By conducting my qualitative research in an interpretive paradigm, I was able to interact and record the experiences and opinions of individual stakeholders. The "central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience" *(ibid).* As I lived on the island for three years, I was able to gain insights into the efforts of the AVES to implement and sustain a curriculum that would aid workforce skills development. My case study therefore demonstrated some features of ethnography. Ethnography presupposes that human behaviour and the ways in which people construct and make meaning of their worlds is "highly variable and locally specific" (Ellis, 2004: 33). My study

displayed elements of ethnography in so much that it aimed "to discover what participants actually do; the reasons they give for doing it; and how they feel while doing it" (Chang, 2008: 44). It was, on the other hand, not entirely ethnographic in that it was located in the place of my employment. This meant that in carrying out my research, I always had to keep my roles as that of *researcher* and that of *manager* as clearly separated as possible. In doing this, I had to maintain an awareness of what was at the centre of my case study: the curriculum on offer under the AVES.

Huberman & Miles (2002: 127) present a model of "the case" as a circle with a heart at the centre. The heart represents the focus of the study, while the circle defines the edge of the case – "that which will not be studied" *(ibid)*. For the purposes of my study, the heart represented the Adult and Vocational Education Service and its related curriculum and stakeholders. The entire island defines the circle, or the edge of the case. While the 'circle' is not the focus of the study, it is important for the researcher to make sense of the nature of the 'circle' as well as the dynamics at play within it as these will impact on the 'heart' of the study.

Conducting my case study in an isolated island context is not new to qualitative case study methodology. Baldacchino (2006: 5 - 6) suggests that:

> ... a significant component of the contemporary intoxicating 'lure' or 'fascination' of islands has to do with the fact that islands suggest themselves as *tabulae rasae*: potential laboratories for any conceivable human project, in thought or action. There is something about the insular that beckons specificity, greater malleability, less inhibition, a more genuine 'been there, done that' (even if merely psychological) finality, an opportunity for a more thorough control of intervening variables which then are more likely to guarantee successful outcomes. But the small, remote and insular also suggest peripherality, being on the edge, being out of sight and so out of mind: situations which both expose and foment the weakness of mainstream ideas, orthodoxies and paradigms.

The idea of conducting a case study on an isolated island where there are absolute physical and geographic boundaries would support the views of Creswell (2000). Creswell suggests that it is important for case studies to have clear boundaries and that within the boundaries there should be scope for a

specific instance which can be explored, while at the same time highlighting a general problem. This was true for my study because while my study focussed on the provision of adult learning on the island, it was clear that this provision was determined by many factors outside of the 'heart' (the AVES) but within the 'circle' (the island of Cascara). Some of these factors included local politics, available funding streams and the shipping schedule.  McMillan & Schumacher (2001: 157) state that case study methodology examines a "bounded system" - a case examined in detail over a specific time and it utilises various sources of data situated within a specific case. The case may be a programme, an event, an activity or a set of individuals bounded in time and place. A case study is an "intensive investigation of a particular entity" (Weiss, 1998: 261). The 'entity' that my case study researched is the Adult and Vocational Education Service on Cascara Island – with a focus on its efforts to provide a relevant curriculum that will sustainability serve the economy of the island. Anderson (1998) suggests that case studies are often mistaken for other research types such as historical and evaluation research. He describes a case study as an approach to research investigation that deals with contemporary events in their natural context. Case studies have been increasingly used in educational research and as a research methodology they provide the researcher with the possibility of understanding in-depth, the nature of the research subjects regardless of the number of participants or sites. This entity comprises numerous stakeholders, some who have been selected as research participants in my study. These participants will be introduced in 2.4.1.

An advantage of case study methodology is that the end product is often a thick description of the phenomenon being studied, including many variables and portrays the interactions of the stakeholders over time (Merriam, 1998). To this end, Shaw (1978: 11) proposes that case studies:

- illustrate the complexities of a situation and acknowledge that there are many contributing factors;
- show the influence of personalities on the issue;
- show the influence of the passage of time on the issue, especially deadlines;
- include vivid materials such as quotations and interviews;
- obtain information from many sources;

- spell out the differences of opinion on the issue and suggest how differences have influenced the result; and

- present the information in many different ways.

I opted for single-case study approach (Yin, 2008). Apart from the fact that this method of investigation focuses entirely on the subjects situated within the case and thus, "holistically explores the interrelationships among people, institutions, events and beliefs" *(ibid:* 108*),* the island context itself provided a platform for the single-case study approach. A case study was therefore beneficial as my study's focus was on the AVES Curriculum.

McMillan & Schumacher (2001) advocate that case studies work well as methods of investigation where little or previous research on a topic has been done. This exploration within a case can lead to further inquiry and ultimately to the development of a theory related to the issue under study. Thomas (2002) suggests that a case study aims to provide understanding rather than knowledge. Since the design, adoption and implementation of the Adult and Vocational Education Strategy on Cascara Island in 2005, no research had been conducted into the provision of adult and vocational learning. This placed me in an advantageous position to gather and analyse relevant information so as to gain an understanding into the challenges associated with the implementation and sustainability of the new curriculum on the island. The research also had other benefits as the findings and recommendations could inform the future provisioning of associated learning on the island. See recommendations in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, in Chapter 1, I drew on case studies of adult and vocational learning provision in other island contexts so as make comparisons to the Cascarian context (see 1.4.2). In doing this, I hoped to draw on the successes and challenges faced in these contexts so as to make comparisons and recommendations for the Cascarian context. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, the available literature in respect of this is limited. I, therefore, hope that my research and the subsequent recommendations that emanate from it will be of use to other island contexts in the planning and implementation of adult and vocational learning initiatives.

## 2.3.    ETHICAL ISSUES

Ultimately, the ethical integrity of any study rests with the researcher. In this study, my own value system served as a guide in negotiating ethical issues. Personal value systems are not easily measurable or tangible – they are evidenced through the actions of the researcher. For reasons such as these, I carried out the actions detailed in this section to ensure that I addressed, as best I could, issues of an ethical nature with my research participants. In this section, I outline my approach to issues of: researcher positioning; informed consent; confidentiality; anonymity and the use of pseudonyms.

### 2.3.1.  Researcher Positioning

In any research investigation, the researcher plays a vital role. This is especially true in a qualitative research study such as this, where the researcher is part of the research context. It is the responsibility of the researcher to constantly reflect on the process and to shape and reshape the data gathering process and its subsequent analysis to consider new insights through the emerging data. The researcher is essentially a research instrument along with the additional data elicitation instruments that s/he employs. This not only places researchers in a very central position but also in a very powerful position as they ultimately draw conclusions on the basis of corroborating evidence. Creswell (2008: 145) states that "data is mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires or machines". Wolcott, (1995) argues that using the human research instrument to undertake data collection can and does have numerous advantages, but caution needs to be taken that the researcher's personal biases and experiences do not influence the final research findings.

My positioning within the study and within the Adult and Vocational Education Service provided a platform for a potential conflict of interests. As explained in my autobiographical journey earlier in this thesis, I was appointed by the Cascara Government on a 2-year contract to manage the Adult and Vocational Education Service. This required me to liaise and consult with a wide range of island stakeholders, many of whom are included in the purposive sample. On one hand, as an insider, I was the manager of the AVES, while on the other hand, I had to

distance myself from as the outside researcher. Maykut & Morehouse (2007: 123) highlight the paradoxical perspective of the qualitative researcher:

> ... [one] is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others – to indwell – and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand.

This was a particularly difficult area for me to come to terms with. I had previous insider knowledge of how the AVES operated and it was difficult to disregard this. I realised from the onset that I needed to separate my role from AVES Manager to that of postgraduate researcher, but in practice this was not always easy. I remember finding myself in a work-related meeting and thinking about how what was under discussion was pertinent and relevant to my study. Feeling uneasy about the ethical implications of what could amount to 'reckless research', I discussed the issue with my PhD supervisor. We both agreed that it would be difficult not to gain information within the workplace, especially since my work was based on and around issues pertaining to the adult and vocational education on the island. To this end, we agreed that it would be prudent for me to conclude most of my fieldwork by the end of 2009. Document and data analysis continued into 2010. It was pertinent for me to constantly monitor and reflect on my subjectivity throughout the data collection, data analysis and content analysis phases of this thesis. Yin (2008: 2) provides some guidelines to case study researchers:

- case study researchers should have an inquiring mind and a willingness to ask questions before, during and after data collection and should challenge themselves concerning why something appears to have happened and to be happening;
- they should have the ability to listen, to include observing and sensing in general and assimilate large bodies of data without bias;
- they should be flexible and adaptable to accommodate unpredictable events;
- they should work with understanding on issues studied in order to interpret the data as it is collected; and
- they should be determined to see where the data is contradicting each other and if additional information is required.

With these guidelines in mind, I developed a data collection diary to guide my data collection (See Appendix 3). At each fieldwork session, I reminded the participant(s) that I was there in my capacity as a researcher and not as the manager of the AVES. I perceived my role to be that of a marginal or external researcher (Robson, 1993) and as such, I observed, documented and asked questions without attempting to alter existing practice. In conducting my research, I made every effort to establish a relationship based on trust with participants and it was for this reason that I conducted a sensitisation session with all of the research participants prior to the commencement of my research. I followed this session with stringent confidentiality measures. These will be presented in 2.3.2 and 2.3.3. There are, however, also advantages of being in a position such as that in which I found myself. Bonner & Tolhurst (2002: 9) suggest these are:

- a superior understanding of the group's culture;
- the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members; and
- a previously established, therefore greater relational intimacy with the group.

I was to discover, that holding such a position also presented some challenges; but I handled these as best I could. For example, greater familiarity can lead to the loss of objectivity. This was a particular area of difficulty for me as I had to consciously make an effort not to make assumptions based on my prior knowledge of the AVES and Cascara. In doing this, I had to constantly remind myself that whilst I needed to engage with the data objectively – qualitative data is by its very nature subjective. Pitman (2002: 285) argues that an insider's familiarity can provide an "illusion of sameness" which can bring into question the confidentiality afforded to research participants. It was advantageous to me that I was not an 'insider' in respect of curriculum design and political power.

Qualitative investigation methods, by their application, establish relationships and are important for explaining causes and events within the socially and culturally constructed learning environment. These are what Smit (1999: 82) calls "measured social facts" as they provide strategies for the researcher to understand the social phenomenon of the participants. To access these socially measured facts, the researcher needs to develop a relationship of mutual trust

with the research participants and use data elicitation methods that are appropriate for the context and aims of the research. My position was advantageous in that I had previously lived and worked on the island. My previous stay had afforded me the opportunity to develop a relationship of trust with many Cascarians both socially and within the context of work. The challenge was transposing that trust into the realm of my relationship with the stakeholders as participants in the research process and also separating my role as researcher from that of the manager of the AVES. There was a tricky balance to be found because on one hand, I could have been perceived as an 'insider' as I was employed by the Cascarian Government to work for the AVES; and the on the other hand, I could have been perceived as an outsider because I was essentially a foreigner to the island. I believe I succeeded in achieving the correct balance in this regard.

With the hindsight of having undertaken this process, I would think more carefully about my conflicting roles if I were to embark on a research process similar in structure to this again. My role as a case study researcher was to document what I found, but so often, I wanted to respond and take action in respect of my findings so as to continually improve the AVES Curriculum, the service of the AVES and to address issues and challenges as they emerged. I am now convinced that one cannot easily be the main driver of a change innovation, while at the same time trying to investigate and interrogate it from many different angles. In navigating two roles, such as those I had to contemplate, in my research context, there comes a point at which you are either directly or indirectly adjudicating or reviewing your own ideas, actions and operations. There are, however, also advantages in respect of the positions that I held – both on the island and in my study. Having previously lived and worked on Cascara, I had a good understanding of the context and my time on the island had afforded me the opportunity to develop relationships based on trust with many Cascarians – both socially and in a professional context. The challenge was in keeping the research fieldwork professional, transparent and ethical so that it yielded the right kind of data; I believe that this was something that I achieved.

I also discovered that the way in which research participants see you and your position within the process, as well as the way in which they respond to you will

also impact on the research findings. This is highlighted by my engagement with the AVES Co-ordinators as research participants. On the one hand, I was their direct line manager, while in the context of the research; I was a fieldworker gathering data. I like to think that my amenable nature would not have deterred them from being completely open and honest with me in respect of my data collection but this is something which cannot ever be fully known or measured. The same conflict of roles applied in the example of my interviewing and questioning the Executive Education Officer as a research participant as in the work context he was my direct line manager. Relationships such as these highlight the need for gaining consent from the research participants.

### 2.3.2. Consent

Anderson (1998: 16) maintains that all human behaviour is subjected to "ethical principles and rules", and that research practice is no exception. Cohen *et al.* (2007) and Anderson (1998) state that one of the most important principles for ethical acceptability is that of informed consent. Participants should be informed about the purpose and the benefit of the research. At the time of my registration with the university, I wrote to the Executive Education Officer (EEO) on Cascara Island (see Appendix 4) and to the AID AVES Education Consultant (see Appendix 5) to request permission to conduct my research in the context of the AVES on the island. At the time of writing to the AID AVES Education Consultant, he was on island, acting in the role of EEO on a temporary basis. To this end, he responded to me in his capacity as acting EEO.  In the letters sent to these two stakeholders, I clearly stated my research intentions and strategies. Both the EEO and the AID AVES Education Consultant responded positively and their edited replies (so as to respect anonymity and confidentiality) are included at Appendices 6 and 7 respectively.

Cohen & Manion (1994) also allude to the necessity for permission to have access to the organisation where the research is conducted. I made it a priority to contact my purposive sample group once I had arrived on the island. I informally conveyed my intentions to these stakeholders and once my research process was due to begin; I invited all of the research participants (excluding the AVES client contingent) to attend a sensitisation session. An outline of the

sensitisation session contents can be found in Appendix 8. Schulze (2002: 17) contends that research participants should be given "sufficient information pertaining to the study before the data collection process commences", as this will work to the benefit of the study. The sensitisation was beneficial to my study in that it framed my study for my research participants.

In the sensitisation session I gave research participants a clear explanation of what my research would entail so that they could make a voluntary and informed decision as to whether they would like to participate in the study. The sensitisation session covered the purpose and associated procedures involved with my study; the benefits and risks associated with my study; as well as issues relating to confidentiality. In the sensitisation session I guaranteed research participants autonomy. I explained that even after voluntary consent, they were free to withdraw from the research process at anytime. At the sensitisation session, I issued all participants with a personal consent form (see Appendix 9). This was used to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. The consent form also provided an opportunity for participants to select what data elicitation techniques they were prepared to participate in. We agreed a date by which all participants who were willing to participate in the study needed to return signed forms to me confirming their consent. All participants who attended the sensitisation session returned their signed consent forms to me within a few days of the agreed deadline; no member of the purposive research sample elected to withdraw from participating in the research. This may have indicated that I was managing my two roles successfully.

Ethical clearance to conduct this research was also received from the Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria. Special provision was arranged to have the ethical clearance certificate issued in the name of the pseudonym that I used in this study (See Appendix 10). I now provide an overview of how I addressed the issue of anonymity.

### 2.3.3. Confidentiality

Ethical issues such as confidentiality indicate an "awareness and recognition of the rights" of the individual in undertaking research (Kumar, 2005: 190). Gay

(1996: 85) supports these views by arguing that the researcher has the responsibility of being "vigilant, sensitive and mindful to human dignity". I first introduced the idea of confidentiality to my research participants in the sensitisation session that I conducted. In this session, amongst other things, I explained that any information that they exchanged with me in the research process would be treated confidentially and would not be made available to any other person. I also assured participants that no identifying information about them would be recorded in the research findings and that pseudonyms would be used in the final thesis to protect their identity.

McMillan & Schumacher (2001) emphasise that information both on and from the research participants should be treated as confidential unless otherwise agreed through informed consent. To take this idea one step further, on receipt of the letters of consent from research participants, I issued each of them with a guarantee of confidentiality letter (See Appendix 11). In this letter, I made a guarantee of confidentiality to research participants both during and after the research process and in the final written thesis as well as in any journal articles that may be published, or conference presentations that may result from the research. Confidentiality in data elicitation methods, such as focus group interviews and workshops, that involve more than one person are not as straightforward. At the commencement of activities that involved more than one person, I explained to the participants that the presence of others in the activity impacted on issues pertaining to confidentiality and anonymity. I highlighted that although views in this forum where shared amongst other, research participants would still be guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity in the final written report. I also reinforced that ethically, research participants had a responsibility to protect each other and therefore suggested that the information shared in the sessions remain within the context of the study.

Essentially, the consent and confidentiality agreement that I made with the research participants prior to the commencement of the research process were handled as 'business contracts'. This 'contract' formalised and made the promise that I had made to my research participant. This was the first step to establishing a relationship of trust and confidence. The manner in which I addressed issues

of consent and confidentiality seemed to bear fruit as I found participants to be open and frank right from the commencement of the research process.

### 2.3.4. Anonymity and Pseudonyms

Anonymity is usually considered in the context of confidentiality but as it arose as a complex issue for consideration during my research process, I explore it in more detail. Although I guaranteed my research participants anonymity and had planned to use pseudonyms in the final thesis, I soon realised that the small context in which the study was being conducted brought into question the anonymity that I promised to my research participants. I had already conducted a sensitisation session with all of the research participants, so all of the participants knew who else was taking part in the study. This did not cause too much conflict for me in respect of confidentiality, as all were major stakeholders of the AVES. This did, however, prompt the need for me to offer additional anonymity to the participants in my final thesis.

In the small context of Cascara, the mention of for example, the Executive Education Officer or the Director of the Development Bureau, would pinpoint a specific research participant as only one such position exists on the island. The need for a further emphasis in relation to issues of anonymity was highlighted by the obvious political issues at play between the local government, the AID and the people of the island – mostly in respect of the local government's ownership of the island's assets; the limited growth in the private sector; and the volatile historical relationship of the Cascarians with the government of the metropole. These dynamics highlighted the need for additional measures relating to confidentiality. With this dilemma, I contacted my PhD supervisor and consulted with other academics on whether it would be appropriate to use a pseudonym for the name of the island. This process assisted me in a decision to use a pseudonym for the name of the island so as to provide additional protection for research participants.

In my first contact with participants during the data elicitation process, I informed them of this development to reassure them of anonymity in the research product. In my attempts to ensure anonymity, I also slightly changed and adapted the

names of the participant titles. For example the 'Executive Education Officer' is an alteration to the original title of that participant's post.

This type of 'disguised observation' is not new to qualitative research; it was used by 'James Patrick' (a pseudonym) in his 1973 study titled: *A Glasgow Gang Observed*. In his study Patrick, became immersed in gang culture so as to understand it on a sociological level. He published his study at least 10 years after his fieldwork using a pseudonym so as to protect his identity and the identities of the gang members. My study did not elicit danger as in the case of Patrick's study, but 'danger' as a relative term required me to consider the professional integrity and causal effect that participation in my study may have had on research participants in the small and isolated context of Cascara. More so to protect my research participants, than to protect myself, I too took on a pseudonym in the presentation of this study. My reasons for doing this were confirmed as prudent when I conducted an Internet search using my surname, the word 'island' and the words 'adult' and 'vocational'. This search revealed the identity of the island in 5 of the 10 websites found on the first search page.

Another example of 'disguised observation' was in a 1973 study by Pierre L. van den Berghe, titled *Power and Privilege at an African University*. In his sociological study of the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, van den Berghe is very critical and direct. To aid with confidentiality, he provides both the university and the research participants with pseudonyms, but anyone – as with my study – who knew the context would have been able to penetrate the disguise. He suggested that the use of pseudonyms would protect both the participants and the institution from any embarrassment locally and abroad (van den Berghe, 1973). The use of a pseudonym for the name of the island in my study, also only provides a 'veiled anonymity'- anybody who knows the context will be able to penetrate the disguise. The research site is an isolated island on the verge of air access and this could possibly single it out. The use of a pseudonym does, however, protect the participants in so far as it narrows down the possibility of the research being identified through Internet and library searches. The local independent press on the island is fairly vigilant and articles or web links of island interest often appear in the weekly newspaper. To reduce the chances of the context of the study being revealed, I have also removed all contact

numbers, physical addresses, email addresses and any other information that may appear on introductory, consent documentation or other information.

By using pseudonyms in the body of this thesis, I also had to be mindful of not revealing the identity of the island in the reference list. I consulted with numerous academics, including the Chair of the Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Education at the university, on the dilemma that I faced in respect of this. One option was to extend the use of pseudonyms into the referencing, but I felt a sense of unease about tampering with the references as it implied a serious contravention of scholarship. I therefore decided, following a precedent set by van den Berghe (1973: 269), to intentionally exclude from the reference list the literature sources that might have revealed the context of my study. Van den Berghe (1973: 269) stated:

> To preserve a measure of anonymity, all references to books, journals and articles which mention the real name of the University of Ilosho [the pseudonym used for the university where he conducted his study], as well as works by prominent members of the University have been deliberately omitted from the bibliography. While I regret not being able to mention most of my primary sources, I disguised the name of the University at the request of several colleagues there. The specialist, however, will experience no difficulty in finding the sources.

I share the sentiments of van den Berghe in so much as I too regret not being able to include some of my primary sources; but the need to protect my research participants far outweighed the necessity for including some of my literature sources.

In taking careful attention to protect my research participants, one of my greatest concerns was how I would share my findings with the AVES stakeholders. I believed that I had an interesting story to tell and it would have made the study relatively pointless if the recommendations that arose out of it could not be constructively debated and used by the AVES and its associated stakeholders to the benefit of the island and its people. To this end, I wrote Chapter 4 of this thesis so that it could stand-alone and be separated from the body of the thesis as an individual recommendations document. In this document, I assume full

responsibility for all of the recommendations presented. Before the circulation of the recommendations chapter to all of my research participants and to the wider stakeholders of the AVES all pseudonyms (such as Cascara, Cascara Community High School and Cascara Development Bureau) will be reverted to their original names.

In working through this process, I had hoped to reach an arrangement whereby I could still use the actual names and positions of participants in my thesis but it never became clear to me that this could be easily achieved. I believe that the manner in which I approached my recommendations chapter found a compromise between respecting ethical considerations and the ability to make the research findings available to stakeholders of the AVES.

### 2.3.5  Data Storage

The confidentiality and the protection of my research participants also related to the issue of data storage. The data gathered as part of this process included field notes, my data record book, interview notes, audio taped interviews, transcribed interviews, completed questionnaires, data analysis and discourse analysis notes, electronic files, consent forms, guarantees of confidentiality and the documents (often with notes and comments in/on them) that were reviewed as part of the document analysis. This data will be stored according to the requirements of the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years from the time of the commencement of the study, after which they will be destroyed. During the research process, all data was treated as confidential and was stored in a secure cupboard at my home.

### 2.4.  RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design process is the plan of action to get from 'here' to 'there' (Yin, 2008: 112). 'Here' is indicated by the set of research questions, while the 'there' is specified by the responses that the research yields *(ibid).* In the process of navigating the 'gap' between the 'here' and 'there' a number of decisions and subsequent actions must be taken. These decisions and actions define the design of the research to be undertaken.

In this section I explain how I navigated the 'gap' between what I wanted to know and how I planned to get the information that I needed to answer my research questions. Firstly, I introduce the research participants and explain the rationale for inviting them to participate in the study. Secondly, I furnish details of the timeframes associated with the research design.

## 2.4.1. Research Participants

In any research, it is imperative that the sample selected to participate in the study is "useful and meaningful" (Mason, 2002: 121) because it will determine how effectively the participants will enable the researcher to obtain insightful data. To ensure that I solicited research participants that I believed would aid me in exploring my research questions, I opted purposive sampling.

Purposive sampling or "judgement sampling" (Zikmund, 2002: 368) is the selection of a sample based on the researcher's own judgement regarding who might be the most appropriate research participants. Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 198) suggest that "all sampling is done with purpose in mind".

Table 3 summarises the research participants selected and the specific groups into which I categorised them. Participants were selected because each played a significant role in the context of adult and vocational learning on the island. Some of the participants hailed from the education sector itself, while others came from local government, representatives of the public and private sectors were also included as were stakeholders from the AID who provide funding and strategic support. Organogram 1 shows how the research participants relate to and report to each other as stakeholders of the Adult and Vocational Education Service on Cascara Island.

I now provide an overview as to why each research participant within each stakeholder group was selected:
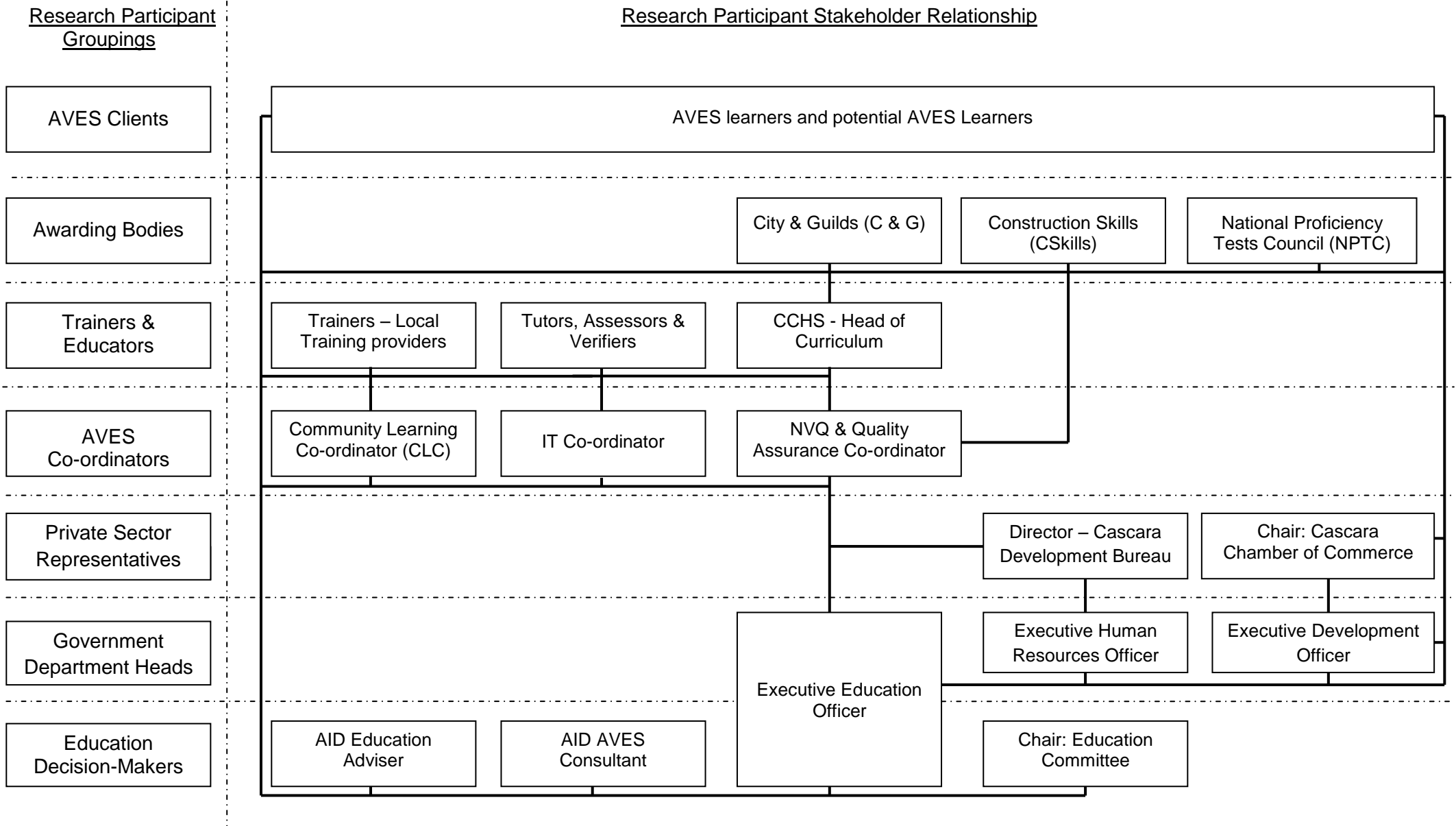
| Participant Group | Position/Designation of Research Participant | Age | Gender | Race | Language | Citizenship | Location/ Where based |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education Decision Makers | Executive Education Officer* (EEO) | 44 | M | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | AID AVES Consultant | 60 | M | W | E | Metropole | Metropole |
| | AID Education Adviser | 57 | M | W | E | Metropole | Metropole |
| | Chairperson – Education Committee | 72 | M | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| Government Heads of Department | Executive Human Resources Officer* (EHRO) | 54 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | Executive Development Officer* (EDO) | 56 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| Private Sector Representatives | Director - Cascara Development Bureau* (CDB) | 55 | F | W | E | Metropole | Metropole |
| | Chairperson – Cascara Chamber of Commerce (CCC) | 59 | M | W | E | Metropole | Metropole |
| AVES Co-ordinators | AVES Community Learning Co-ordinator | 36 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | AVES IT Co-ordinator | 26 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | AVES NVQ and Quality Assurance Co-ordinator | 50 | F | W | E | Metropole | Cascara |
| Trainers & Educators | Cascara Community High School – Head of Curriculum | 39 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | Manager – Mountain House Training* | 43 | F | W | E | Metropole | Cascara |
| | Director – Training Solutions*[20] | 52 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | AVES Tutor 1 | 66 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | AVES Tutor 2 | 27 | F | W | E | South Africa | Cascara |
| | AVES Assessor 1 | 51 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | AVES Assessor 2 | 54 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | AVES Verifier 1 | 47 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| | AVES Verifier 2 | 64 | F | C | E | Cascara | Cascara |
| Awarding Bodies | External Verifier (EV) – City & Guilds (C & G) | 66 | F | W | E | Metropole | Metropole |
| | External Verifier (EV) – Construction Skills (CSkills) | 55 | M | W | E | Metropole | Metropole |
| | External Verifier (EV) – National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) | 59 | M | W | E | Metropole | Metropole |
| AVES Clients | AVES learners and potential learners | See 2.5.2 – Table 5 | | | | | |

**Table 3:** *Research Participants*

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[20] These are all pseudonyms.

[Key: EV = External Verifier; M = male; F = female; C = coloured; W = white; E = English]

Research Participant Groupings

Research Participant Stakeholder Relationship

| Research Participant Groupings | Research Participant Stakeholder Relationship |
|---|---|
| AVES Clients | AVES learners and potential AVES Learners |
| Awarding Bodies | City & Guilds (C & G) · Construction Skills (CSkills) · National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) |
| Trainers & Educators | Trainers – Local Training providers · Tutors, Assessors & Verifiers · CCHS - Head of Curriculum |
| AVES Co-ordinators | Community Learning Co-ordinator (CLC) · IT Co-ordinator · NVQ & Quality Assurance Co-ordinator |
| Private Sector Representatives | Director – Cascara Development Bureau · Chair: Cascara Chamber of Commerce |
| Government Department Heads | Executive Human Resources Officer · Executive Development Officer |
| Education Decision-Makers | AID Education Adviser · AID AVES Consultant · Executive Education Officer · Chair: Education Committee |

**Organogram 1:** *Research Participants*

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**Education Decision Makers**

This education decision maker research cohort comprised four participants: the Executive Education Officer; the Chair Education Committee; the AID Education Adviser; and the AID AVES Consultant.

- The Executive Education Officer (EEO) is one of the 13 government departmental heads. This person has ultimate responsibility for the activities of the Cascara Department of Education. The Adult and Vocational Education Service is one of the six sectors of the Cascara Department of Education. (The EEO was my direct line manager).

- The Chairperson of the Education Committee leads the committee which comprises 4 democratically elected counsellors and the EEO. This committee oversees the activities of the Education Department. The EEO will always liaise with the Chair and the committee on all matters relating to education on the island. This committee is headed by an elected chairperson.

- The AID Education Adviser is based in the metropole but liaises with the education stakeholders on island as well as with the Unit for International Development and Training (UIDT) which implements the Cascara Education Development Programme (EDP) on behalf of the AID.

- The AID AVES Consultant works through the Unit for International Development and Training (UIDT) as part of the Education Support Programme (ESP) to support and develop activities within the Adult and Vocational Education Service. It was the AVES consultant who designed and developed the original AVES Strategy which gave impetus to the current AVES structure and its subsequent curriculum.

**Government Heads of Department**

This research cohort comprised two participants: the Executive Human Resources Officer; and the Executive Development Officer.

- The Executive Human Resources Officer (EHRO) has a vested interest in the activities of the AVES. Until the establishment of the AVES, all public sector training was conducted under the Human Resources (HR) Department. As it is the remit of the AVES to deliver appropriate and relevant training to both the public and private sectors, the AVES works closely with the EHRO in ensuring that relevant and appropriate training is made available to government personnel.

- The Executive Development Officer (EDO) is responsible for all development projects implemented on the island. The majority of these projects are implemented on behalf of the AID – from where all of the AVES funding is derived. The AVES AID Development Aid Project which constitutes a sizeable part of the current AVES curriculum is a development project for which the AVES works closely with the EDO.

**Private Sector Representatives**

This research cohort comprised two participants: the Director of the Cascara Development Bureau; and the Chairperson of the Cascara Chamber of Commerce.

- The Director of the Cascara Development Bureau (CDB) leads this organisation. The CDB previously oversaw a substantial amount of private sector training on the island. After the establishment of the AVES, the CDB and the AVES have established a working partnership under which the CDB makes funding available for private sector business development. These partnership training initiatives are co-ordinated by the AVES. The CDB also assists private sector entrepreneurs and businesses with loans, advice and training opportunities. The AVES works closely with the director of the CDB to ensure that the training needs of the private sector are addressed.

- The Chairperson of Cascara Chamber of Commerce (CCC) leads this organisation which aims to assist island businesses with advice and with

issues relating to business development. The CCC is particularly active in the area of public consultation and provides businesses with a 'voice' when dealing with issues relating to government. As the AVES is a government sector, under the Education Department, the AVES works with the CCC in relation to issues around training and development for the private sector.

**AVES Co-ordinators**

This research participant cohort comprised the three AVES training co-ordinators:

- The AVES Community Learning Co-ordinator; the AVES IT Co-ordinator and the AVES NVQ and Quality Assurance Co-ordinator along with the AVES Manager represent the AVES management team. The co-ordinators are responsible for business planning, budgeting, the provision of training and the day-to-day running of the Service under each of their respective divisions. This management involves the sourcing and co-ordination of learning activities, liaising with training providers and tutors and reporting on training outcomes within their respective areas. (I line managed the AVES Co-ordinators).

**Trainers & Educators**

This research cohort comprised three participant groups: The Deputy Head for Curriculum at Cascara Community High School; two AVES Trainers - the Manager of Mountain House Training (in her capacity as an AVES trainer) and the Director of Training Solutions (in her capacity as an AVES trainer); and the AVES Tutors, Assessors and Verifiers.

- The Head of Curriculum at Cascara Community High School (CCHS) is responsible for the contents of the curriculum at the secondary school. A substantial part of the curriculum is vocational in nature and these aspects of the curriculum are delivered in partnership with the AVES. Vocational learning opportunities at the CCHS include Vocationally Related

Qualifications (VRQs) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Hospitality & Catering; Automotive Vehicle Maintenance; Business & Administration; and Masonry & Construction. The AVES, in particular the AVES NVQ and Quality Assurance Courses Co-ordinator, work closely with the head of curriculum in the implementation of vocational learning opportunities at the secondary school.

- Training representatives from two local training providers: Mountain House Training & Training Solutions. On this small isolated island it is difficult to source suitably qualified training providers. Training providers are usually sourced abroad at great expense but there are two established local providers that offer their training services to the AVES. These two providers work closely with the AVES management team in the provision of appropriate learning for the people of Cascara.

- The AVES tutors, assessors and verifiers are the people who implement and assess the curriculum at a grass roots level on an ongoing basis. The tutors liaise with the co-ordinator of the area under which the learning opportunity in which they are involved falls. Assessors and verifiers work closely with the NVQ and Quality Assurance Co-ordinator in meeting the requirements of the overseas awarding bodies. Two tutors, two assessors and two verifiers were selected to participate in the study.

**Awarding Bodies**

This research cohort comprised the external verifiers from the awarding bodies based in the metropole.

- External Verifiers from the following awarding bodies were included in my purposive sample: City & Guilds (C & G); Construction Skills (CSkills); and the National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC). These awarding bodies are responsible for approving some of the learning opportunities on offer. These include all of the overseas accredited Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The island offers challenges in respect of delivering these awards that are not

usually experienced in mainland contexts. For this reason it was important to include the external verifiers involved with these awards in the research process. Under City & Guilds, the AVES offers NVQs in Health & Social Care; Maternity & Pediatric Care; Customer Service; Business & Administration; Hospitality; Hospitality & Catering; Automotive Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs; Basic Construction; Food Studies; and Wood & Trowel Occupations. Under Construction Skills (CSkills), the AVES offers a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Construction and under the National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC), the AVES offers Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Agricultural Crop Production and Land Based Operations.

**AVES Clients**

The AVES clients are the most central stakeholders to the ongoing provision of learning through the AVES on Cascara Island. The clients represent AVES learners and potential AVES learners, who may be unemployed or work within either the public or private sectors.

Mason (2002: 135) suggests that once the research sample has been confirmed, the researcher needs to "reflect upon the logic through which [he or she] intend to develop and test explanations and the kinds or arguments they wish to make".

### 2.4.2.   Research Timeframes

As I was appointed to the post of AVES Manager on Cascara Island in a two-year contract, I planned to conduct my research over an extended period of time. Most of the fieldwork was conducted during 2009 as per the data collection diary in Appendix 3. The process of document analysis spanned the duration of my PhD research. In the section that follows, I provide a detailed account of the data elicitation instruments that I employed.

## 2.5. DATA ELICITATION TECHNIQUES

Case studies rely on "interviewing, observing and document analysis" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 202). Case studies can also use a variety of additional data gathering techniques and methods that are determined by the researcher. The data elicitation techniques that I used to gather information included: document analysis; questionnaires; unstructured interviews; semi-structured interviews; focus group interviews; the use of the local media – both audio and print; and a feedback workshop session. By virtue of the fact that these techniques are qualitative data collection tools that employ qualitative information gathering methods, they provided me with a degree of flexibility in the data gathering process.

| Research Participants | Data collection method | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Questionnaires | Semi-structured Interviews | Unstructured Interviews | Focus Group Interviews | Local Print Media | Local Audio Media | Feedback Workshop |
| Executive Education Officer | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| AID AVES Consultant | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| AID Education Adviser | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Chair - Education Committee | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Executive Human Resources Officer | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| Executive Development Officer | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| Director - Cascara Development Bureau | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| Chair- Cascara Chamber of Commerce | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| AVES Community Learning Co-ordinator | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| AVES IT Co-ordinator | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| AVES NVQ & Quality Ass. Co-ordinator | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| CCHS - Head of Curriculum | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| Manager – Mountain House Training | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| Director – Training Solutions | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| AVES Tutors, Assessors and Verifiers | | | | ✓ | | | |
| EV – C & G | | ✓ | | | | | |
| EV – CSkills | | ✓ | | | | | |
| EV – NPTC | | ✓ | | | | | |
| AVES Clients | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |

**Table 4:** *Data Elicitation Techniques per research participant*

Table 4 shows which data elicitation and research methods were administered to the different research participants.

### 2.5.1. Document Analysis

In my research, I analysed two sources of documents – firstly there were documents sourced and referenced in preparing the theoretical and methodological aspects of the study. These included all referenced theory and literature documented in the chapter 1 of this thesis; and there was material and literature that related specifically to the AVES. Many of the documents that related specifically to the AVES also informed aspects of the literature review. Zikmund (2002) argues that document analysis is the use of secondary information that is gathered and recorded by somebody else for purposes other than the current needs of the researcher. Keats (1982: 2) contends that "document analysis is a technique in education evaluation which relies heavily upon a variety of written materials for data, insights and judgements about programmes or events". Keats further contends that document analysis is best employed in conjunction with other research techniques but that it can stand-alone as a technique for gathering retrospective data. Furthermore, Keats *(ibid)* suggests that major advantages of using document analysis as a research technique include:

- their stability as a rich and rewarding source that is usually readily available;
- the fact that they are a rich source of information about the context of events under investigation; and
- that they are non-reactive – they do not alter their behaviours because they are the subject of an investigation.

Keats does, however, also warn of the disadvantages of using document analysis as a research elicitation source. These include the possibility of the documents being non-representative samples and that they may reflect subjective rather than objective views, perceptions and information. Finally, Keats warns of the validity of documents and records. Gough (1999: 48) cautions that by producing curriculum policy documents in glossy print form, we "monumentalise them and give them unquestionable status". Glossy printed

documents whether they are curriculum policy, reports, textbooks or other print forms need to be critically analysed to determine their accuracy and motive.

Document analysis is a systematic process "that begins with an hypothesis" (Keats, 1982: 2). The 'hypothesis' referred to by Keats is in the researcher's selection of the documents – in so much that, with limited evidence of how the documents will benefit the study, the researcher identifies documents that s/he supposes will advance the investigation. To this end, potentially relevant documents are identified by the researcher and through the analysis process they need to be verified. This verification may take the form of triangulation, crystallisation (Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; Ellingson, 2008) coding or category construction (Zikmund, 2002) and will lead to judgements and interpretations granted in the context of the actual events under investigation.

In my efforts to formulate an understanding of the historical, current and proposed activities and plans relating to Adult and Vocational Education on the Island, I identified, analysed and critically examined the documents listed in Appendix 12. Some of the documents included: the AVES Strategy (2005); the AVES Operations Manual (2006); archived educational records pertaining to the historical provision of adult and vocational learning on the island (1972 – 2003); the AID Air Access Consultation Document (2009); and the Cascara Sustainable Development Plan (2007). In analysing the content of the documents that I had selected, it became apparent that there was a disparity between what was originally intended in terms of the formulation and design of the AVES and what was actually operational in terms of curriculum delivery. This was no surprise as the nature of curriculum policy and practice is such – there is seldom complete synergy between what was planned and what is delivered. This informed the questions that I posed in some of the research instruments that I subsequently developed. Through the document analysis process, I realised that I was accumulating rich contextual data that would be very valuable to my study. It became evident that the results were "less synthetic and investigator-controlled" (Guba, 1981: 43) than when using other qualitative data techniques. Whilst some documents provide much more information than others, many of the insights gained provided excellent data that aided in answering the research questions.

The documents analysed gave me a deeper understanding into the Cascarian context and also aided me in answering my research questions.

In respect of document analysis, I was in a fortunate position because given my appointment to the Education Senior Management team; I could access many documents that would possibly be unavailable, or hard to access by a different researcher. These included archived education files and I also had electronic access to all of the documents on the Education Department's Server. This raised ethical issues in respect of my conflicting roles and I had to sensitively use the information to which the Executive Education Officer had given me *carte blanche* access. On the other hand, the advantage of this was that I had the opportunity to read widely and to gain a deep understanding into the historical provision of Adult and Vocational Education on the island; as well as of how current processes and policies are implemented as a result of this. My access to all of this information, did lead me to consider whether organisations such as the AVES should insist that researchers such as myself with privileged positions sign an agreement of confidentiality with the organisation in which they conduct their fieldwork.

I know provide details of the research instruments that I developed to support my study.

### 2.5.2. Questionnaires

Cohen *et al.* (2007: 263) define a 'questionnaire' as a "set of questions on a form that is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project". Black (1999) suggests that a questionnaire used for qualitative research is an instrument that aims to quantify and measure how people feel about things, their perceptions, their attitudes and their views and opinions. Cohen *et al.* (2007: 267) contend that questionnaires are useful in that they "… move away from seeing the human subjects as simply manipulable, and data as somehow external to individuals".

I chose to use questionnaires in my study as a means of understanding how the AVES clients – both learners and employers, perceive the service and curriculum

on offer from the AVES. The questionnaire responses gave me insights into how the curriculum was serving the people and the economy of Cascara. The AVES client cohort was the only research participant group that I did not engage with on a face-to-face basis. Although the client questionnaire also aided me in understanding the first aim of my study (1) to examine the current state of curriculum implementation and its associated challenges within the Adult and Vocational Education Service; it mostly elicited data to aid my study in respect of my second and third aims: (2) to investigate how the current curriculum is satisfying the needs of the island by aiding workforce development to support economic growth on the island; and (3) to explore the challenges relating to the sustainability of the Adult and Vocational Education Service in providing a relevant vocational curriculum.

The use of questionnaires can be advantageous in that the data within the responses can be gathered in a standardised way. This is useful to the researcher who has to make sense of and extract information from the questionnaire. In developing the questionnaire the researcher needs to ensure that both the structure and the way in which questions are formulated in the questionnaire allow for personal and individual responses from the participants. Further care should also be taken to ensure that issues of sensitivity relating to such things as professionalism, culture, race, religion and gender are considered and addressed accordingly. When developing my questionnaire, I was mindful of these elements and endeavoured to ensure that the questionnaire was not demeaning or offensive in any way. I also aimed to be as considerate as I could about how I structured my questionnaires so as to respect these potentially sensitive issues. Conscious that I was targeting an audience which would be wide in ability range, I attempted to phrase the questions so that the language would be accessible without being patronising. This seemed to work successfully.

Another advantage of using questionnaires as a data elicitation technique is that respondents are more likely to feel that they can remain anonymous and subsequently, they may feel more comfortable to express controversial opinions – this was particularly useful to my study given the small community on Cascara Island. My questionnaire did not require respondents to supply their names.

Questionnaires on the other hand, can be limiting in that respondents may answer superficially and like many evaluation methods, questionnaires are often conducted away from the learning environment and as such participants may forget to include important information in their responses. As was to be expected, this impacted on the questionnaires returned to me in that all but one contained some questions that had not been answered.

As I opted for what De Vos (2001: 153) refers to as "mailed questionnaires", I needed to be mindful of the fact that I was physically removed from respondents, and that although this approach was relatively inexpensive, it was difficult to manage as I had no control over ensuring the return of completed questionnaires. The fact that the completion and return of the questionnaires was on a voluntary basis made tracking replies impossible. I mailed 112 questionnaires to AVES clients: these included clients who had recently completed an AVES course; clients who were undertaking an AVES course at the time; and clients who had expressed interest in joining an AVES course that commenced the month immediately after the questionnaires were despatched.

I developed a questionnaire that aimed to gather information regarding the perceptions and feelings of AVES clients in relation to curriculum provision on the island; how the curriculum was meeting the economic needs of the island; its people and how they viewed the sustainability of the curriculum under the AVES. The questionnaire also included a final section that covered specific themes and factors explored in my literature review. These included how clients perceived the impact of the following as potential barriers to learning:

- local government (including government personnel)
- the private sector on Cascara
- the AID
- the isolation of the island
- the metropole
- the colonialism

Valuable contributions from the research participants who returned their questionnaires aided me in answering many of the critical research questions that supported the second and third aims of my study.

The questionnaires were sent out to AVES clients with a covering letter that outlined my intentions and reasons for conducting the research. I ensured that the covering letter made it clear to potential respondents that this questionnaire was being requested outside of my remit as AVES manager, and to this end the questionnaires were dispatched and received independently of the AVES. See Appendix 13 for a copy of the covering letter and AVES client questionnaire that were returned anonymously. By the deadline set in the covering letter of the questionnaire, I received 33 out of the 112 questionnaires originally sent out. This was not surprising as although questionnaires provide the potential to collect a large amount of information in a relatively short space of time, this potential is often not realised, as returns from questionnaires are usually low (Milne, 1999: 1). Since some time had lapsed and new courses had been attended by additional candidates, I resent the questionnaire. This time I sent it to organisations within both the public and private sectors with up to 8 questionnaires and envelopes in a larger envelope. Also included was a cover note that asked the training contact at the organisation to ask AVES clients to complete and return the form to me. Packs were sent to the 13 government departments and 7 of the private sector companies. This exercise yielded another 14 responses, bringing the total number of responses to 47.

Table 5 summarises the demographics of respondents who returned questionnaires. While the number of responses were disappointing, the demographics evident in the returns seemed consistent with learner demographics on record at the AVES: Most learners are between the ages of 26 and 40, with the AVES currently catering mostly to employed able-bodied female learners with Cascarian status who work within the public sector. Even with a return rate of 17 percent, I felt encouraged as the completed questionnaires were beneficial to my study.

| Percentage return | Number of questionnaires despatched | Number of questionnaires returned | % Return | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 112 + (8 x 20) = 272 | 47 | 17% | |
| Age | Under 25 yrs[21] | 26 – 40 yrs | 41 – 65 yrs[22] | 66 yrs and over |
| | 10 | 23 | 12 | 2 |
| Gender | Male | Female | | |
| | 14 | 33 | | |
| Disability Status | Disabled | Able-bodied | | |
| | 1 | 46 | | |
| Citizenship Status | Cascara Status | Non-Cascarian | | |
| | 43 | 4 | | |
| Employment Status | Employed | Unemployed | | |
| | 39 | 8 | | |
| Employment Sector | Private Sector | Public Sector | Unemployed | |
| | 10 | 29 | 8 | |

**Table 5:** *Personal Details of Questionnaire Respondents*

I now provide details of the various interview approaches that I employed as part of my data collection process.

### 2.5.3. Interviews

The use of interviews (unstructured, semi-structured and focus group) were the data elicitation techniques most widely used in my study. For the most part, interviews were centred on the following themes, which represent the aims of the study:

- the curriculum and adult learning on Cascara Island;
- the curriculum, the workforce and the economy on Cascara Island; and
- the curriculum, change and sustainability within the AVES in the Cascarian context.

While my research focussed on the themes listed above, I purposely designed each interview schedule slightly differently so as to aid me in obtaining information that specifically related to the areas from which the different

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[21] Cascara legislation defines anybody 25 years of age and under as 'youth'.
[22] This is the retirement age on Cascara.

participant groups were selected. This assisted me in ensuring triangulation and crystallisation of the data across the data collection process. Cohen *et al.* (2007: 267) suggest that interviews "enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view".

Through the interview process, views on an identified topic are discussed and exchanged. According to Cohen *(ibid)* this process facilitates an "interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, [which] sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasises social situatedness for research data".

The three interview strategies used were advantageous to my study in that they afforded me the opportunity to collect large amounts of information over a relatively short period of time. The information collected from the range of different research participants was useful to me in my efforts to understand the challenges associated with implementing and sustaining an adult and vocational education curriculum on an isolated island. I now provide an account of each of the interview strategies that I used.

### 2.5.3.1. Unstructured Interviews

I began the research process by conducting unstructured interviews with the education decision-makers cohort of my purposive sample. In addition to this, I also conducted unstructured interviews with the AVES Co-ordinators. During these interviews, I took notes where I deemed necessary (sometimes these would be during and/or directly after the interactions). Unstructured interviews have no predetermined questions and are informal and conversational in nature. Direct questions are asked if the researcher identifies gaps in the data collected. As such, unstructured interviews provide the researcher with great latitude in asking broad questions in whatever order seems appropriate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The unstructured interviews that I conducted with the education decision-makers gave me the opportunity to understand and make sense of the history, structure, vision and current *status quo* in relation to the provision of adult learning and the AVES on the island. These unstructured

interviews assisted me with the development of the design and content of the semi-structured interview schedules.

The unstructured interviews with the AVES co-ordinators gave me the opportunity to interact on a one-on-one basis with the co-ordinators so as to gain insight into the actual implementation and provision of learning within the context of the Service. I conducted two unstructured interviews with each co-ordinator. The first of these explored the state of curriculum implementation within their respective areas and I probed for successes and challenges in regard to the implementation of the curriculum. In the second unstructured interview, I probed the issue of the island's needs; how the curriculum on offer in their respective areas was aiding work-based skills development; and I explored issues pertaining to the sustainability of the curriculum. Table 6 summarises the unstructured interviews conducted during the data collection process, by research participant group, duration and framework. The data collection diary in Appendix 3 shows when these interviews were conducted.

| Research Participants | Duration | Framework of Interview |
|---|---|---|
| Education Decision Makers: <br> • Executive Education Officer <br> • AID AVES Consultant <br> • AID Education Adviser <br> • Chairperson – Education Committee | 1 hour each | • History of AVES/ provision of adult learning on Cascara <br> • Structure of AVES <br> • Island vision for AVES <br> • Current status quo |
| AVES *Co-ordinators (A):* <br> • Community Learning Co-ordinator <br> • IT Co-ordinator <br> • NVQ and Quality Assurance Co-ordinator | 2 hours each | • Curriculum implementation: success and challenges |
| AVES *Co-ordinators (B):* <br> • Community Learning Co-ordinator <br> • IT Co-ordinator <br> • NVQ and Quality Assurance Co-ordinator | 2 hours each | • The economic needs of the island <br> • The curriculum and work-based skills development <br> • Sustainability of the curriculum |

**Table 6:** *Unstructured Interviews administered*

The unstructured interviews were all face-to-face, with the exception of the telephonic interviews held with the AID AVES Consultant and the AID Education Adviser who were both based in the metropole. These interviews were really useful to my study in that they gave me a forum in which to more fully

understand the current AVES context as well as to familiarise myself with pressing island-wide issues. The face-to-face unstructured interviews all proved constructive and useful to my study. The telephonic interviews were arranged in advance by email and I used a telephone conference facility to conduct these. The use of the conferencing equipment made it easier for me to take notes while I was conducting the interview. I recorded the interviews with a Dictaphone so that I could transcribe them at a later date. The telephonic interviews did not generate as much information as the face-to-face interviews and this might have been as a result of the absence of body language and facial gestures which generally inform, promote and guide conversation. In contrast, an advantage of the telephonic interviews was that the interviewer and interviewee have to directly respond to what the other asks or says – without the luxury of pauses or silences that might exist in face-to-face communication. In my telephonic interviews, I felt that interviewees were more spontaneous in their responses, without the opportunity of too much deliberation. The challenge for me was in maintaining concentration and remaining focussed on the questions that I needed to be asked and the answers that were given.

My telephonic interview with the AID AVES Consultant took 42 minutes to conduct, while my interview with the AID Education Adviser lasted 34 minutes. Apart from the fact that the telephonic interviews with these two participants were slightly shorter due to the 'distance' created by this type of interview – another consideration was that of cost. Telephone calls from Cascara to the metropole are very expensive, and I felt myself being aware of this throughout the interview.

Subsequent to the telephonic interviews here outlined, I met both of the research participants interviewed by telephone in person and found them amenable and open and they proved to be information rich data sources.

The information gained during the unstructured interviews aided me in refining the questions that I then posed during the semi-structured and the focus-group interviews.

### 2.5.3.2. Semi-structured Interviews

According to Leedy & Ormrod (2009), interviews should be considered as professional interactions that require professional planning and conduct. The semi-structured interview allows for questions to be rephrased if the respondent has misunderstood or is unclear of what the question is actually asking. Semi-structured interviews have no choices from which the respondent selects an answer and the questions are phrased in such a way that they allow for individual responses, thus enabling the interviewer to pose follow-up questions should clarification or additional detail be necessary. Finally, semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to describe and analyse the situation, process or response (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

I conducted independent semi-structured interviews with the majority of my research participants. This was the most widely used data elicitation technique in my research. These semi-structured interviews included one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with the participants in the following groups: education decision-makers, government heads of department, private sector representatives, the awarding bodies; and the trainers and educators (excluding the tutors, assessors and verifiers with whom I conducted a focus group interview).

Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to gain a rich data from the interviewee; they provide an opportunity to discover subjective meanings and interpretations; the participant generally finds the experience rewarding; and they allow new understandings to be developed in the research process (Saunders *et al.*, 2000: 110). On the other hand, semi-structured interviews can also be subject to the bias of the researcher, where comments, tone or non-verbal behaviour from the researcher may influence the way that the interviewee responds to the questions. As I was also involved with the AVES in a professional capacity, I needed to extend the notion of researcher bias in the interview context a little further. To this end, I conscientiously made an effort not to allow any preconceptions that arose out of my work experiences to impact or to interfere with the interview process. In addition, when I conducted the majority of the semi-structured interviews, I arranged time off work and conducted the interviews away from the AVES. I dressed casually when conducting these

interviews so as to assist research participants in seeing me as the researcher, as opposed to the AVES Manager. For the most part, this separation of myself as researcher and Manager of the AVES seemed to be successful, although it was evident that the separation was not always easy for my participants. One participant repeatedly made reference to the AVES Staff and made comments such as: 'as their line manager, you should ...'. Repeated gentle reminders about the differences between my roles as manager and researcher with this participant did not really prove successful.

Each semi-structured face-to-face interview took a lot longer than I had expected; and even though I made a concerted attempt to keep the interview sessions focussed, this was not always easy. The relaxed setting of the unstructured interview seemed to encourage all of the research participants to talk widely on the questions and topics posed. While this was useful to my study, it did make the transcription process a rather lengthy one. However, the end result of this process was very worthwhile because the semi-structured interviews were the main data elicitation method that I employed in respect of engaging face-to-face with the research participants. The questionnaires were designed so as to mirror the aims of my study.

Table 7 summarises the semi-structured interviews conducted during the data collection process, by research participant group, interview duration and content or focus of the interview. Although the interview schedules attempted to compartmentalise data; while conducting the interviews I discovered that the same information often emerged at different points in the interview. These interviews were recorded on an interview sheet and were audio taped and later transcribed. For the most part, the questions posed were open in nature and required the participants to explain their personal opinions and experiences in relation to the three areas of the study: curriculum implementation; the economy and work-based skills development; and curriculum sustainability under the AVES.

| Research Participants | Duration | Content/focus of Interview |
|---|---|---|
| *Education Decision-Makers (4):*<br>• Executive Education Officer (EEO)<br>• AID AVES Consultant<br>• AID Education Adviser<br>• Chairperson – Education Committee | 2.5 hours each | • The Strategy<br>• Elements of the Strategy<br>• The curriculum<br>• Economy, needs and work-based skills development<br>• Stakeholder support<br>• Sustainability<br>• Marketing<br>• Other factors<br>(See Appendix 14 for interview schedule) |
| *Government Heads of Departments (2):*<br>• Executive Human Resources Officer (EHRO)<br>• Executive Development Officer (EDO) | 2 hours each | • The Strategy<br>• The curriculum<br>• Economy, needs and work-based skills development<br>• Funding/Sustainability<br>• Centralising of training/Sustainability<br>• Other factors<br>(See Appendix 15 for interview schedule) |
| *Private Sector Representatives (2):*<br>• Director – Cascara Development Bureau<br>• Chairperson – Cascara Chamber of Commerce | 2 hours each | • The curriculum<br>• Economy, needs and work-based skills development<br>• Relationship with the AVES<br>• Sustainability<br>• Other factors<br>(See Appendix 16 for interview schedule) |
| *Trainers and Educators (1):*<br>• Cascara Community High School – Head of Curriculum | 2 hours | • The Strategy<br>• The curriculum<br>• Economy, needs and work-based skills development<br>• Sustainability<br>• Other factors<br>(See Appendix 17 for interview schedule) |
| *Trainers and Educators (2):*<br>• Manager – Mountain House Training<br>• Director – Training Solutions | 2 hours each | • Service provider background and the curriculum<br>• Insularity and isolation<br>• Economy, needs and work-based skills development<br>• Course accreditation<br>• Sustainability<br>• Other factors<br>(See Appendix 18 for interview schedule) |
| *Awarding Bodies (3):*<br>• EV – City and Guilds<br>• EV – Construction Skills<br>• EV – National Proficiency Tests Council | 1 hour each | • The curriculum<br>• Economy, needs and work-based skills development<br>• Sustainability<br>(See Appendix 19 for interview schedule) |

**Table 7: *Semi-Structured Interviews administered***

[Key: EV – External Verifier]

### 2.5.3.3. Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews are different to one-on-one interviews in that they are conducted with the researcher and a group of identified research participants. Morgan (2004) posits that the focus group interview offers the unique advantage of providing the researcher with access to interactions within a group context. It is only recently that focus group interviews have been accepted as an appropriate qualitative research technique within social science research (*ibid*: 19). Kelly (1999) contends that a focus group interview is a general term given to research conducted with a group of people who share a similar type of experience. It is important to note that, whilst conventional interviews strive to collect data on the subjective experiences of individual participants, focus group interviews focus on accessing inter-subjective experiences shared within a group of participants *(ibid)*. This method of data collection is effective in that it allows the researcher to assess problems, concerns and ideas with a purposefully selected group of participants.

Cohen *et al.* (2007: 299) identify the following advantages of focus group interviews: "they create a social environment in which participants are encouraged to share ideas; differing perceptions increase the quality of collected data and; they are time saving as they produce a large amount of data in a short period of time". This was true of the focus group interviews that I conducted – particularly that which was conducted with the three AVES Co-ordinators. The interview was really beneficial and as these three research participants had up-to-date firsthand knowledge of the practical implications of Adult and Vocational Education Curriculum delivery and sustainability on the island, their combined thinking provided information that informed all of my research questions. Whilst they collectively expressed many of the successes of the AVES to date, they were able to talk in-depth about the challenges and barriers that impact on the implementation of the curriculum.

When conducting the focus group interviews, I was mindful of the possible comprise created in respect of confidentiality. The presence of more than one person in a data collection activity makes it difficult for the researcher to guarantee absolute confidentiality. In each of the focus group interviews that I

conducted, I reminded participants that their and the other research participants right to confidentiality could be respected by not discussing research issues outside of the focus group interview. Anonymity to these participants can still be offered in the written research product.

Another disadvantage of focus group interviews is that they require the diaries of numerous participants to be co-ordinated and the raising of irrelevant issues can waste the time of all involved in the interview (De Vos, 2001). In my study, I really struggled to gather the tutors, assessors and verifiers for their focus group interview as many of them work shifts and were not available at the same time during the week. We finally agreed a time on a Sunday morning to conduct the focus group interview. De Vos *(ibid)*, also highlights that when conducting focus group interviews, sensitive issues can compromise confidentiality and this might cause participants not to engage fully in the process. Reflecting on the focus group interviews that I conducted, I believe that all the participants were comfortable, open and actively engaged in the interview discussions. Within the small Cascarian context, the open commitment and engagement of the participants might be attributed to the trust that I built up with participants over time (in my role as the AVES Manager), as well as to the stringent confidentiality measures that I put in place before my fieldwork began.

I conducted two focus group sessions – the first was with AVES Co-ordinators cohort of the research sample and the second was with the Trainers and Educators participant cohort. The focus group with the AVES Co-ordinators lasted 3 hours, while the interview with the Trainers and Educators was completed in just over 2 hours. The focus group interviews were held in an informal setting with all participants (including myself) sitting in a circle. I had a flip chart beside me that I had prepared in advance. Using the main themes of the study – curriculum, economy and sustainability – I presented participants with keywords on the chart that centred on the questions that I posed. I explained to the participants that interview would cover the three areas of the study with a final area that focussed on other broader issues that may have been relevant to the questions that I wanted to answer. The keywords on the flipchart kept the discussion focussed and I revealed one new question/point for discussion at a time. I facilitated the interview in an informal manner and I found

participants to be relaxed. This, I believe, contributed to the interview collecting the kind of information I had hoped to gather.

Although the two focus group interviews addressed the main themes of the study, the questions that I posed to each group varied slightly. By doing this, I was able to learn about the different challenges that each cohort faced in their efforts to contribute to the success of the delivery of the AVES Curriculum. The focus group interviews were audio taped and transcribed at a later date. I also wrote brief notes during the course of the interview.

| Research Participants | Duration | Content/focus of Interview |
|---|---|---|
| AVES *Co-ordinators (1)*:<br>• Community Learning Co-ordinator<br>• IT Co-ordinator<br>• NVQ and Quality Assurance Co-ordinator | 3 hours each | • The curriculum<br>• Economy, needs and work-based skills development<br>• The sustainability of the curriculum<br>• Other factors<br>(See Appendix 20 for interview schedule) |
| *Trainers and Educators (1)*:<br>• 2 x tutors<br>• 2 x assessors<br>• 2 x verifiers | 2 hours each | The curriculum<br>• Economy, needs and work-based skills development<br>• The sustainability of the curriculum<br>• Other factors<br>(See Appendix 21 for the interview schedule) |

**Table 8:** *Focus Group Interviews*

Table 8 summarises the focus group interviews conducted by research participant group, duration and content focus. As focus group interviews are flexible in nature, they provided me, wherever necessary, with the opportunity to ask additional questions pertinent to the curriculum, the needs of the island and to sustainability.

I opted to use focus group interviews as an effective way to elicit the participants' perceptions about the AVES Curriculum, how it was supporting the economy of the island, and how it could be sustained; because I felt that we could together create an unthreatening environment in which data could be elicited.

### 2.5.4. Workshops

Once all of the interviews were complete, I brought my research participants together for a research workshop. The workshop, as with the focus group interviews, also raised concerns in respect of confidentiality. My approach to confidentiality in the forum of the stakeholder workshop was the same as that adopted with the focus group interviews.

The workshop conducted with the research participants (excluding the AVES clients who completed the anonymous questionnaire) gave me the opportunity to provide some early feedback on my initial and rudimentary findings. It also allowed me to verify some of the data already gathered. I opted to do this, as I considered it prudent to bring all stakeholders together so as to ascertain areas in the data collected where there was synergy or incongruence. Apart from supporting the notions of triangulation and crystallisation, I did this to add an additional element of rigour to my research findings. This rigour would be obtained by research participants having the opportunity to engage with, debate, agree or refute my emerging findings and recommendations. This aided me in determining if I was reading the local landscape and the AVES context correctly.

The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the rudimentary summary of my findings and it encouraged debate in relation to the three focus areas of my study.

Workshops requires the researcher to create a "micro-world" that comprises the selected participants (De Vos, 2001: 279). A workshop also provides the opportunity for participants to express ideas and opinions as well as to brainstorm issues that are of common interest. De Vos *(ibid)* further suggests that workshops provide the researcher with an opportunity to observe participants and to make sense of and attach meaning to the world around them. Workshops are advantageous in that the researcher can determine the design and framework of the workshop content. Workshops can also produce a relatively detailed picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny and attitudes or ideas that are not clearly understood or agreed with can be casually questioned and discussed. Workshops can, however be very time consuming; participants

can lose interest; and without a creative approach they rely heavily on the observation of the researcher.

Of the eighteen research participants in my sample who were on island[23], eleven attended the workshop. The following were not present due to other commitments, with the exception of one who was ill: EHRO; Manager - Mountain House Training; Director – Training Solutions; Chairperson – CCC; Director – CDB; one assessor and two verifiers.

During the workshop, I presented my emerging findings in respect of:

- Demography
- Social and economic context
- Education and labour market
- Views of stakeholders
- Perceived strengths and weaknesses of AVES
- Principles of the AVES
- The AVE Service
- Options for improvement

I also presented my emerging recommendations in respect of:

- General recommendations
- Strategy focus – courses and qualifications
- Leading the Service/Strategy
- Delivery of AVE on the island
- Funding

Details of the slides presented in relation to my emerging finding and recommendations can be found in Appendix 22. The workshop provided a good

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[23] Executive Education Officer (EEO); Chair - Education Committee; Executive Human Resources Officer (EHRO); Executive Development Officer (EDO); Director - Cascara Development Bureau (CDB); Chair - Cascara Chamber of Commerce (CCC); AVES Community Learning Co-ordinator; AVES IT Co-ordinator; AVES NVQ & Quality Assurance Co-ordinator; Cascara Community High School (CCHS) - Head of Curriculum; Manager – Mountain House Training; Director – Training Solutions; 2 x AVES Tutors; 2 x AVES Assessors; and 2 x AVES Verifiers

opportunity to discuss my initial findings with research participants and to ascertain whether local stakeholders concurred with some of my findings. Given the short period of time between the data collection and this workshop the points raised and presented for discussion were relatively raw and rudimentary but none-the-less, the approach was worthwhile. Not only did this process encourage me to engage with the data that I had collected early in the process but it is also compelled me to begin my attempts to analyse and make sense of the data so that I could impart early findings and begin to synthesise early recommendations to research participants. This gave me a sense of whether I was beginning to understand the data as well as whether I was being sympathetic to the nuances and complexities of this unique context. Not all of the findings or recommendations accorded with those made later in this thesis but they initiated the process and the workshop stimulated stakeholder input – this is what made the workshop process so worthwhile. See Appendix 23 for the programme of the day on which the workshop was held.

In the context of my case study on this small and isolated island, I also tried to use the local media to gather data from AVES clients about the AVES Curriculum and the service that it provided.

### 2.5.6. Local Media

Within the small and isolated context of Cascara, the local media provided the ideal opportunity to reach the AVES clients on a level that excluded my connection to the AVES. The island has a State funded media service which comprises a radio station and weekly newspaper. In strong opposition to this, is an independent media service which came into operation in 2005. The independent media, as with its State funded counterpart, also operates a radio station and issues a weekly newspaper. The independent media is vigilant, controversial and is fairly vocal in speaking out against the local government and the government of the metropole. This is worth noting as the AVES, like all government sections, is also at the scrutiny of the independent media. As the AVES Manager, I was interviewed by the independent media twice during 2009 and the AVES is frequently discussed in letters and fora in the press. One such critique appeared in the independent press on 19 June 2009 and strongly

criticised the AVES and the funding invested in it. An excerpt from the article read:

> We now have the AVES Scheme which is punching its way through another bag of money and serving absolutely no useful purpose as it is probably a little too sophisticated for the island. The whole monstrous problem was caused many years ago when some advisers and educationalists, without discussion (or listening to advice) closed down the Trade School. This little enterprise had enabled many of its pupils to achieve success on the island and obtain excellent jobs and vast respect for their skills in other countries. We are now looking at another calamity simply because the objectives laid out for the AVES Project were flawed from the start. It will be another running sore which will soon implode, but not before it has cost the proverbial Bushel and a Peck to set up and administer and the scheme is now beset by the high cost of sending adjudicators or assessors to oversee the project; the hidden financial liability is therefore ridiculous and beggars belief - as well as helping beggar our economy! (Wicks[24], 2009: 12).

The sentiment expressed in this column highlights some public opinion and sentiment towards the AVES. At the commencement of the research process, I placed an advert (see Appendix 24) in both of the local newspapers. This advert was research-related, and in it I asked for members of the public to return a form titled: 'Adult and Vocational Education on [Cascara] Island'. The one page insert asked members of the public – the AVES clients, to indicate what learning opportunities they would like to see on offer through the AVES. This part of the form could be returned to me anonymously. The second half of the form asked respondents to indicate if there were any additional learning opportunities that they might be willing and able to offer through the AVES. For obvious reasons this part of the form could not be submitted anonymously. The advert request that completed forms be dropped in one of two boxes placed conveniently at two venues in the town. Two weeks after the stipulated deadline, not one single return was returned. This 'silence' might have indicated negative sentiment to the AVES and its curriculum.

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[24] This is a pseudonym.

Later in the research process, I opted to use the audio media as a means to elicit data. I chose to use the radio station of the independent media as I believed this would elicit honest, direct responses within the context of the free arena of the independent press. I chose not to present the radio phone-in myself as I was concerned that the public who had not undergone my research sensitisation or been subject to my ethical procedures would not separate my role as researcher to that of AVES Manager. The programme was hosted by two expatriate broadcasters who present a mixed show on a Monday evening. I was in the studio at the time of the radio phone-in but did not respond or talk directly to the public who called in. The talk show hosts posed the questions:

- What skills are needed to give the island's economy a boost?
- How is AVES addressing the skills need on the island?
- What are they getting right?
- What could they do better?

During the two hour programme only one call and one e-mail was received at the studio. The caller commented that AVES should not charge fees to the private sector, while the e-mail respondent suggested that more training on the island was needed in the areas of fishing and agriculture. Not even the incentive of a box of chocolates and bottle of wine for the most original ideas regarding the future provision of adult and vocational learning on the island could persuade listeners to call in. This along with the nil return for my press advert earlier in the research process, did not point only at public sentiment regarding the AVES but also at the issue of anonymity in the small and isolated context of Cascara. Hogenstijn & Middelkoop (2003: 10) draw attention to the issues associated with social familiarity by stating that:

> As a result of the social control and familiarity it seems that everyone knows everyone. As a result, subjective inference concerning others becomes the norm and judgments fluctuate in the light of information concerning past and present, private, family, political and social lives, personalities, relationships with the community or with persons in authority, the predominance of a particular clan and the weight of the key person's influence.

In one of my interviews, the respondent equated living on Cascara to 'living in a gold fish bowl'. Cascarians, for the most part, seem to be very reluctant to reveal their identities when questioning authority or stating something controversial. This is evident by the use of pseudonyms in letters that appear in the weekly newspapers. The caller who made contact with the station during the show made his contributions off air, and asked that we did not reveal his identity. A similar request for anonymity also came from the e-mail respondent. The suggestions made by the respondents were relevant and they triggered debate within the studio. The programme took place at a time when the AVES, in partnership with the CDB and the Cascara National Trust (CNT), were running an extended training programme in heritage skills construction. The radio show hosts did an excellent job in handling the topic and used the heritage skills training project as a means to launch the topic as well as to stimulate listener interest in relation to skills development on the island. Due to the poor listener response, the questions posed were not really answered but the discussion (which took place between the two radio hosts) highlighted that the island needs to increase skills in certain areas so as to boost the economy of the island. The discussion highlighted that this would best be done through improving the services that are on offer on the island and increasing the export of locally made products. It was expressed that this might reduce the 'export' of people and ultimately encourage Cascarians to return home.

The radio show may have been a worthwhile contribution to my study as it had the potential to infiltrate every home on the island – and thereby encourage thought and debate on the AVES Curriculum. This, unfortunately, cannot be measured.

Once the data collection process was complete, I gave more attention to the rigorous process of data analysis.

## 2.6.    DATA ANALYSIS

In interpretive research such as my study, there is no distinct place at which data collection ends and data analysis begins. The collecting, analysing and interpreting of data happen simultaneously throughout the research process

(Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999 in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Charmaz (2006) supports this idea by suggesting that one of the approaches to constructivist grounded theory is the simultaneous, ongoing collection and analysis of data. In my research, this ongoing and simultaneous analysis and interpretation of data would provide insight into my research investigation of the AVES on Cascara Island. Kelly (1999) suggests that the primary goal of conducting analysis and interpretation is to discover regular patterns in the data collected.

Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh (2002: 465) contend that "… data analysis is the heart of qualitative research and the process that most distinguishes qualitative from quantitative research". This is the most important function of the researcher: to search, re-search, arrange and rearrange the data in such a way that it can be clearly understood and presented.

I now provide details of the steps I took in respect of: transcription; content analysis; and discourse analysis.

### 2.6.1. Transcription

Although researchers will usually attempt to record the interview transcriptions verbatim, this is an impossible task as even if audio taped, the non-verbal parts of the conversations cannot be fully recorded (ten Have, 2007). Mergenthaler & Stinson (1992: 137) suggest that the goals of transcription are "morphological wholeness (standard word forms and standard punctuation), naturalness, and staying as close to the raw data as possible while still producing readable text".

In my study, I took copious notes and I personally typed as accurately as I could, all of the interviews undertaken. The resultant transcripts were returned to interviewees for their comments, suggestions, additions and changes. It was often difficult to transcribe audio interviews because apart from background noises that often muffled words, the flow of the conversation was not always easy to transpose into the written text. I also discovered that I would for example; pose a question and once the respondent had provided an answer, I would seek confirmation by saying something like: 'are you therefore suggesting that the

construction of an airport will boost economic development?' This would have been better substituted with another question, like: 'having said this, what are your thoughts on the airport and the economy?' This is something that I will need to address in future qualitative research that I undertake.

Becker (1986) contends that transcriptions have "documentary veracity" and may therefore have some official status. Conversely, converting spoken words into print can only be "partially representative and not isomorphic with the original" (Sandelowski, 1994: 312). This was the view that I held of transcripts within the context of my study. The transcripts that I developed were not exact copies of the original interaction, but slightly edited forms of the original data that still provided a useable "morphological wholeness" (Mergenthaler & Stinson, 1992: 137). In transcribing, I found it quite difficult to punctuate the oral text and had to avoid excessive use of hesitations and affirmations (like 'um' and 'ok') as the incorporation of these made the text difficult to follow. Sandelowski (1994: 312) suggests that the ontology of the transcript is therefore both realist and constructed. Once the interview has been converted to a transcript, it is the transcript itself that becomes the focus of the analysis. Even with the precaution of allowing interviewees to check transcripts, it is still inevitable that the transcription may alter our perceptions of reality.

With the interview schedules typed up, and the with all of the client questionnaires returned to me, I commenced with a detailed analysis of the content of the data that I had gathered.

### 2.6.2. Content Analysis: Coding and Categorisation

Content analysis has been defined as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1990). Holsti (1969: 14) offers a broad definition of content analysis as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". Content analysis enables researchers to work through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion; it is a process that aids in discovering and describing the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention (Weber, 1990: 53). It also allows inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection. According to Krippendorff (2004: 100), six questions must be addressed in every content analysis:

1. Which data are analysed?
2. How are they defined?
3. What is the population from which they are drawn?
4. What is the context relative to which the data are analysed?
5. What are the boundaries of the analysis?
6. What is the target of the inferences?

To effectively analyse data, the process of coding is essential. McMillan & Schumacher (2001: 467) refer to coding as classifications, topics or categories and define it as "… the process of dividing into parts by a classification system". As such, they *(ibid)* suggest that the researcher develops a classification system based on one of the following strategies:

- segmenting the data into units of content called topics (less than 25 -30) and grouping the topics in larger clusters to form categories; or
- starting with predetermined categories of no more than 4 – 6 and breaking each category into smaller sub-categories; or
- combining the strategies, using some predetermined categories and adding discovered new categories.

Bogdan & Bilken (1992), in agreement with McMillan's & Schumacher's Strategy regarding the segmenting of data into units of content called topics and then

grouping topics into larger clusters, suggest that for the researcher to develop each coding category, s/he needs to work through all of the data collected to identify regular patterns, topics and themes. They suggest that the researcher should then write down the words and phrases to represent the perceived patterns, topics and themes. Bogdan & Biklen (*ibid:* 166) continue to describe these words and patterns as "coding categories that are a means of sorting descriptive data" so that information that relates to the given topic can be physically separated from other data.

The most common notion in qualitative research is probably that a content analysis simply means doing a word-frequency count. The assumption is that the words that are mentioned most often are the words that reflect the greatest concerns. While this may be true in some cases, there are several counterpoints to consider when using simple word frequency counts to make inferences about matters of importance (Stemler, 2002). Another thing to consider is that synonyms may be used for stylistic reasons throughout a document and this may lead the researcher to underestimate the importance of a concept (Weber, 1990). The researcher should also note that each word may not represent a category equally well. By interrogating the content, the validity of the inferences that are being made from the data are strengthened. Stemler (2002) further argues that content analysis extends far beyond simple word counts and suggests that what makes the technique particularly rich and meaningful is its reliance on coding and categorising of the data. Weber (1990: 37) describes a category as "a group of words with similar meaning or connotations" and suggests that "categories should be mutually exclusive and exhaustive" *(ibid).*

In analysing the content of my study, I used McMillan's & Schumacher's (2001: 467) approach of deciding on predetermined categories, which I then broke up into smaller sub-categories. As I did this, it became evident that the themes that I was identifying were not always mutually exclusive. Some issues that I identified were difficult to classify within a particular area of the study because different aspects of them were classifiable across different research areas. An example of this occurred with the coding of the issue of tutor shortage – this theme impacts across all three of the main research areas: curriculum implementation, the needs of the island and sustainability.

Stemler (2002: 5) suggests that when used properly, content analysis is a "powerful data reduction technique". Its major benefit comes from the fact that it is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. It has, he suggests, the attractive features of being unobtrusive, and being useful in dealing with large volumes of data *(ibid)*.

In conducting my qualitative research within an interpretative paradigm, I relied on my notes and summaries pertaining to the documents that I analysed, my interview notes, typed transcripts of audio recordings, completed questionnaires and the notes taken during the radio phone-in. Terre Blanche & Kelly (1999) suggest that there are essentially two sorts of notes. Firstly, there are the notes made to describe as fully as possible what participants did and said. Secondly, there are soft notes that are concerned with the unfolding analysis. In making 'soft notes' I carried around a data record book in which I continually aimed to synthesise and make sense of the data that I was eliciting from my research participants, the documents that I reviewed and the context in which I found myself immersed. Mouton (1996; 2001) is of the view that "we analyse data by identifying patterns and themes in the data and drawing conclusions from them". When I was identifying patterns and themes, I encountered both contradictory and complementary findings. The challenge for me was in coding and categorising these in such a way that I could maximise my analysis of the data. Although I made a rudimentary attempt at coding and categorising my data for the stakeholder workshop – my data coding and categorisation, began in earnest, after I had transcribed the audio taped interviews. Seidman (2006: 281) contends that transcribing "is a crucial step, for there is the potential for massive data loss, distortion and reduction of complexity". On receipt of the anonymous client questionnaires, I worked through them and coded the information as I identified themes in the responses. Some of these themes included the following:

- training times
- perceptions of clients (good and bad);
- expectations of clients (reasonable and unreasonable);

- training needs:
  - public sector training needs,
  - private sector training needs,
  - individual/personal training needs;
- tutor relationships and tutoring style;
- change (airport):
  - economic,
  - social;
- the role of the Cascarian Government and the AID; and
- sustainability.

Data collected from the focus group interviews was also coded and incorporated into the developing themes. By repeatedly reading and scanning the collected data, I developed a good understanding of what the respondents were actually saying. This assisted me in identifying commonalities and differences in the participants' responses and as such to ultimately identify emerging issues that related to the challenges of implementing and sustaining an adult and vocational education curriculum on Cascara Island. Some of the additional issues that emerged through the focus group interviews included:

- curriculum stakeholders (perceptions and expectations)
- accredited learning (challenges and successes);
- labour market needs (public and private sectors);
- local unaccredited learning (challenges and successes);
- local leadership (support and obstructions);
- isolation and insularity (sustainability);
- colonialism (current and historical impact); and
- sustainability (staffing, the curriculum and the AVES).

Creswell (2008: 153) suggests that data analysis "requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts". Once these categories were identified and developed, I endeavoured to gain a deeper understanding of the content embedded in them. I developed a table in which I tried to prioritise and make connections between the themes that

emerged within each area of the study: curriculum implementation; the needs of the island; and sustainability. What I discovered was that most of the themes identified under the first two areas of my study, (the curriculum and the needs of the island), could also have been classified under the third area – sustainability. It became clear that sustainability was the underpinning theme of my study. A portion of the table that I developed is represented in Table 9.

| AVES Curriculum & Adult Learning | Curriculum | Needs of island | Sustainability |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Curriculum provision* | gaps in provision; modes of provision; quality of provision | airport; local businesses; tourism and construction industries | funding; AVES budget; AID Development Aid Project |
| *Perceptions and experiences* | andragogical experiences; limited | increased quality; accredited courses; more flexible training | need to see relevance of training; shortages of tutors |
| *Public sector training* | more technical courses; high level administration | airport related skills; construction; tourism | funding; human resource shortage |
| *Private sector training* | Charging/fees issue; need for technical co-operation in scarce skills | training in construction, hospitality and customer service | funding; human resource shortage |
| *Training for individuals* | learning for learning's sake; bursaries | happy and content citizens; citizens who can contribute to economy | colonial influences; autonomy of citizens; AVES Charging policy |

**Table 9:** *Excerpt of coding and categorisation table*

During the process of categorisation and coding, it became clear that data that I had gathered did not always align with just one theme – this despite the fact that I had tried to design research instruments so that they aligned closely with the research aims and questions. To aid with this complicated and sometimes messy process, I made multiple photocopies of my field notes, transcripts, and questionnaires and cut and pasted answers and text under the emerging themes on large sheets of flipchart paper. In the text, I highlighted (using different colours as appropriate) relevant words and sections so as to identify any sub-themes that were emerging. This process was useful because it highlighted contradictory and complementary findings and being a visual and tactile person, this worked

well for me as the emerging themes and findings felt very tangible. I acknowledge that such an approach might not work for everybody. In planning to analyse my data, I had considered using a data analysis software package but decided against this as I wanted to practically, and in a hands-on way, engage with my data. So much of my time writing up this research has been at a computer and although I also used the word search facility in Microsoft Word; I enjoyed working through some of my data analysis removed from technology.

The recurrent themes identified during the coding and categorisation process are detailed and expanded on in Chapters 3. They also inform the recommendations in Chapter 4.

### 2.6.3.   Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is an approach to the study of discourse which views "language as a form of social practice" (Fairclough 2010: 20) and focuses on the way in which language forces social domination. Stubbs (1983:1) supports Fairclough's view of discourse analysis in suggesting that it is concerned with language use "beyond the boundaries of a sentence or utterance" and that it is interested in the interrelationships that exist between language and society. Stubbs further suggests that discourse analysis is concerned with the "interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication" *(ibid).*

Discourse analysis does not assume a bias towards the study of either spoken or written language. Within this study, I viewed my task as researcher to make sense of the discourse beneath what Stubbs (*ibid*) calls the "outer-layer". Stubbs further suggests that it will not be surprising to note that there is a point at which discourse analysis becomes an inroad into the understanding of the social processes that underlie the discourse. This, he suggests "becomes theory which is completely detached from an empirical engagement with the analysis of language use" (*ibid*). As I conducted my research in a social environment that was not entirely my own, I needed to use the analysis of discourse to make greater sense of this environment in which I was operating. I needed to consciously remind myself that I was both an outsider and a foreigner – this required me to analyse the discourse meticulously so that I came to understand

the social dynamics of the context in which my study occurred. I also needed to be mindful of the power that my position (as the Adult and Vocational Education Service Manager) may have afforded me and I had to constantly make every effort to minimise the effects of this on the discourse. To this end, I remained aware of the potential power dynamics between the research participants and myself and I also always foregrounded the separation between my role as researcher to that of the AVES Manager. (This was discussed in 2.3.1 and 2.5.3.2). As with the analysis of content, I repeatedly read transcripts and questionnaires to gain a deeper understanding of the discourse. To this end, I also used the 'find' function in the Microsoft Word Programme to assist me in finding trends in the frequency of words. For example, the words 'our' and 'we' were used often in interviews held with research participants who were Cascarian. The frequency of these words indicated a sense of nationness and a strong identity of Cascarians to their people and to their island.

Slembrouck (2003) suggests that discourse analysis is similar to content analysis in that it explores ordinary talk and the social actions performed in them.  My study required me to analyse both discourse and content as these two, have principles and an ethos suited to the analysis of qualitative research. I had to always bear in mind the fact that these analytical discourses are fluid and subject to a variety of contextual variances.

## 2.7.    TRUSTWORTHINESS: VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Mouton (1996: 109) defines validity as "… a quality of the elements of knowledge". The quality in data collected can be achieved through the honesty and integrity of both the participants and the researcher. My strongest validity challenge was that of my preconceived ideas and experiences in relation to the Adult and Vocational Education Service and its operations. This was further compounded by the fact that I was employed as the AVES Manager while I was undertaking the study. Fortunately, I had the aim of my study to keep me focussed and I soon realised that I was not out to test an hypotheses or people, but rather to explore the challenges associated with implementing and sustaining an adult and vocational education curriculum in the isolated context in which I was immersed. I believe that the reliability and validity of my findings were

supported by the fact that I consistently remained conscious about the need to separate my role as researcher and manager. When necessary, I also reminded research participants of this during interviews. By conducting most of my fieldwork during 2009, I limited the difficult challenge that existed between my role as that of AVES Manager to that as postgraduate field researcher. Maxwell (2010: 329) argues that "the validity of an account is inherent, not in the procedures used to validate it but in the relationship it has to those things of which it is intended to be an account of".

Maxwell *(ibid)* suggests various issues of validity of which, for the purposes of my research, I took cognisance of the following two: Descriptive Validity and Interpretative Validity.

## 2.7.1. Descriptive Validity

Descriptive validity is considered to be the primary aspect of validity as it is "the foundation upon which qualitative research is built" (Wolcott, 2009: 27). In other words, for research to be considered descriptively valid, the accuracy of the account's application needs to be assured. Maxwell (2010) differentiates between primary and secondary descriptive validity. My research is informed by primary validity in that it relates to accounts of what I observed within the context of the Adult and Vocational Education Service on Cascara Island. Secondary validity, as explained by Maxwell, is data "… that could, in principle be observed, but is inferred from other data – for example, things that happen in the wider context when the researcher is not present" *(ibid:* 287*).* The information that I gathered in relation to the historical provision of adult and vocational learning on the island, amount to what Maxwell would term secondary descriptive validity. Examples of this would be in information found in documents such as the AVES Strategy, the AVES Operations Manual and reports written by previous AID consultants; as well as in information shared with me by research participants during interviews.

### 2.7.2. Interpretive Validity

This form of validity is associated with qualitative research and the qualitative researcher's interest in the describing of actual events. As such, interpretive validity is concerned with the degree to which the researcher reads and analyses the accounts that s/he observes. Interpretive validity is central to this thesis as I consistently aimed to understand the challenges associated with the implementation and the sustaining of an adult and vocational educational curriculum within the Cascarian context. Maxwell (2010: 289) in describing interpretative validity states that:

> Accounts of meaning must be based on the conceptual framework of the people whose meaning is in question … . Interpretive accounts are grounded in the language of the people studied and rely as much as possible on their own words and concepts.

Maxwell's notion of interpretive validity draws attention to the need to validate the analysis of discourse within the study. This study documents, as far as possible, the perceptions, opinions and experiences of the participants in their own words. Issues relating to the validity and the reliability of the findings were further ensured by my use of triangulation and member checks.

### 2.7.3. Member checks

The technique of member checking involves giving all or some of the research participants an opportunity to check or verify interpretations and findings. Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 314) regard this as the "most critical technique for establishing credibility".

In one interview, my audio recorder would not work so I was unable to record that particular interview. Notes were typed immediately after the interview and I returned the draft to the respondent, asking them to verify the data recorded. This process also provided an opportunity for the respondent to add or remove information in the interview transcript.

At the onset of my studies, I had hoped to provide, at the very least, the Education Decision-Maker cohort of my research participants with the opportunity to review my analysis so as to provide me with the opportunity to address any distortions and misrepresentations. As, I became embedded in the research context and as the power and leadership struggles were illuminated to me, I realised that it would not be prudent to reveal the sources of data to other research participants or to other island stakeholders. It became clear to me that that the confidentiality that I guaranteed to research participants also needed to extend to protecting participants from each other. Within the trust-environment established during the fieldwork, it was evident that participants were happy to be open, frank and honest but that on this small island, I needed to handle the data gathered with reciprocal trust and consideration for confidentiality. Whilst this might have potentially compromised my findings, I felt it more important to protect my participants in the small and amplified context of Cascara. To this end, I wrote the recommendations chapter of this thesis as a standalone document that could be distributed to island stakeholders. In the recommendations, all data sources have been concealed, and I take responsibility for all of the findings and the recommendations made.

### 2.7.4. Triangulation and Crystallisation

The use of triangulation and crystallisation are a critical means to assessing and enhancing the validity of qualitative research. I now explore each of these trustworthiness measures. "Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" (Marshall & Rossman, 2010: 144). Patton (2002) observes that triangulation strengthens a study by combining different research methods.

Firstly, I assessed the validity and reliability of my research results by triangulating data received from my various data sources, namely: interview schedules and records, questionnaires, the documents analysed and the information gained from the stakeholder workshop. This "triangulation validated the honesty and integrity of comments and actions observed throughout the data collection process by converging or aggregating data" (Schwandt 2007: 163). This aided me in ensuring that I was adequately and researching my research

questions. The use of triangulation in analysing the data and content in this research gave me the opportunity to validate the information received from the various research participants. McMillan & Schumacher (2001: 478) contend that:

> Researchers use triangulation which is the cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical schemes. To find irregularities in the data, the researcher compares different sources, situations, and methods to see whether the same pattern keeps recurring. A theme of "institutional collaboration", for example could be cross-checked by comparing data found in artefact collections (minutes, memos, official brochures, letters), informant interviews (project co-directors, teachers, principals), and field observations of project meetings. Researchers sense, however, that even though they only directly observed, heard, or recorded one instance, for some types of analysis, a single incident is meaningful.

Schwandt (2007) supports this notion of drawing on different aspects of the study to triangulate data. In my search for divergence in the data, I compared different sources, situations, and methods to see whether the same pattern kept recurring. In my study, I compared the data that was elicited from my different research participants (shown in Organogram 1) and document sources analysed (See Appendix 12). This assisted me not only in establishing consistency but also in accounting for deviations, misinterpretations and incongruencies between policy and related documents and what was actually being implemented in practice. In addition to this, similar questions were posed to research participants in different research participant groups and this aided me in validating and making sense of responses and data gathered during the research process.

Given that my study contained certain ethnographic aspects, I also explored crystallisation (Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005) as an alternative means of validating the trustworthiness of my data. Ellingson (2008: 2) contends that the development of crystallization as a framework builds upon a rich tradition of diverse practices in ethnography and qualitative representation. Ellingson (*ibid*: 6) argues the importance of "blaspheming the boundaries of art and science" as many researchers such as Charmaz (2006):

… do not wish to abandon conventional forms of analysis as the primary outcomes of qualitative research because these analyses accomplish important goals: They highlight patterns in the data; privilege researchers' sense making by sublimating participants' voices in support of explicating themes or patterns in the data; and generate theoretical and conceptual insights, as well as pragmatic suggestions for improving practices and policy.

Qualitative methods "illuminate both the ordinary within the worlds of fabulous people and events and also the fabulous elements of ordinary, mundane lives" (Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). It is, Richardson further suggests, how we represent the truths we generate that remains an open question. Working within an interpretive research report genre (Miller, 2005), it became clear to me that I needed to contemplate crystallisation as a trustworthiness measure. Working within this genre, I had to constantly remind myself that the realities of my participants were social constructs that were subject to change over time.  Richardson (2000: 934) proposes that:

… the central image for "validity" for postmodern texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach … . Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.

In applying the idea of crystallization to my analysis, I needed to carefully interrogate the various forms of data that I had gleaned during my fieldwork. This required me to combine multiple forms of analysis, so that I could arrange my data into a coherent text that provided a rich account of the phenomenon under investigation. What I discovered in working with these various texts was that this process itself problematises its own construction and that my own vulnerabilities and positionality as the researcher were exposed. Having navigated these issues, my ultimate aim was to provide, in the final research product, "thickly described, complexly rendered interpretations of meanings about [the] phenomenon [and] group" (Ellingson, 2008: 7) that would provided answers to my research questions.

## 2.8.    CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the research paradigm and methodology used in my research. In carrying out this research, the theoretical base from which I worked provided me with a solid foundation from which to gather data. In conducting my research, I realised the value of qualitative data – more so, once I began to gather information and became immersed in the social and cultural relationships that existed between the various research participants who formed part of my sample on the small isolated island of Cascara. I also became aware of the fact that it is imperative for the researcher to endeavour to be fully aware of the culture and history of the research context. I also realised how important it is to develop a continued awareness of the relationships and dynamics that exist between the various research participants of which the sample and the extended context comprise - so as to gain richer and more substantial and meaningful data. As I became more entrenched in the research process, I realised the power that the researcher has over the research process and indeed the ultimate research findings. The data gathering and subsequent analysis thereof reinforced my understanding of the need to ensure that data is both valid and reliable. Through this process, I also realised the need for absolute integrity on the part of both myself and the research participants in relation to the data, content and discourse analysis. Such integrity not only respects the notions of confidentiality and anonymity, but also aids in ensuring the trustworthiness of the final research product . In addition to this, I also became aware of the importance of ethical considerations around consent and confidentiality being strictly adhered to, so as to protect all involved in the research – both before, during and after the research process.

Finally, the methodological process undertaken was rich and meaningful to me. Within the context of this case study, I learnt so much and was overwhelmed by the trust and warmth extended to me by the people of Cascara. If I were to undertake a study similar in scope to this again, I would think very carefully about the approach and method that I adopted given my role within the Service as the AVES Manager.