Internal quality assurance of a distance teacher education programme: The case of Lesotho

by

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DEDICATION

I know my mother and father are watching. The two who made me who I am today, I love you both more than you can imagine. I miss you now. I know my debt to you is beyond measure.

At stake is not only the quality of teacher education programmes but the quality of education that course completers will create for their own students (Dean Nielsen, 1997).

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And to my aunt 'Majabulani who was always there when I needed most, your support is invaluable.

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the qualitative study of distance learning at Lesotho College of Education. In 2002 the college was tasked by the Government of Lesotho with the provision of distance education to unqualified and under-qualified teachers. It is the experiences, feelings and observations of the professional learners as they progress through the distance teacher education programme. It looks at the internal quality assurance process within the college. Student support is enhanced by short contact sessions on a weekend at centre level where tutors provide assistance once a month. All professional learners meet at the college at the end of each semester for a week long contact session followed by the examinations. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit experiences, feelings and observations about the programme. The results indicate that whilst there are challenges, there are lots of positives within the programme.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

COSC   Cambridge Overseas School Certificate

DoE   Department of Education

DTEP   Distance Teacher Education Programme

ECOL   Examinations Council of Lesotho

EFA   Education for All

ESDP   Education Sector Development Plan

ESSP   Education Sector Strategic Plan

FPE   Free Primary Education

GoL   Government of Lesotho

LCE   Lesotho College of Education

MoE   Ministry of Education

MoET   Ministry of Education and Training

NADEOSA   National Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa

NCDC   National Curriculum Development Centre

NTTC   National Teacher Training College

PRSP   Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

PSLE   Primary School Leaving Examinations

TPP   Teacher Preparation Programme

UNESCO   United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF   United Nations Children Fund

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CHAPTER ONE
OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A landlocked country completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa and Lesotho is located in the most southerly part of the continent. It is 33,000 square kilometres in area and has a population of approximately 1.9 million people, with an annual growth of 0.1% (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2007). The majority of the population are of school going age, with about 75% living and dependent on the rural areas for their livelihood. Education plays an important role in economic and social development, and in particular Lesotho values basic education and equal educational opportunity. These values are behind an aim to empower all recipients of education with skills and knowledge necessary to address challenges at a personal and national level. Many governments in developing countries are increasingly addressing challenges of equity and access to education, whilst distance education[1] has been used for cost-effective teacher education, through professional development of a large number of teachers within short periods of time. African countries that have provided successful and large-scale distance teacher education include Botswana, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Uganda (Siwibele & Mungoo, 2009). In some instances, distance learning has not lived up to its promise, and a fundamental question is whether it guarantees the quality of teacher education.

Western models of formal school education in Lesotho were introduced in 1833 by the first Christian Protestant missionaries, followed by Roman Catholic missionaries in 1862, followed by Anglican missionaries. To the present day most schools have been owned by these churches, but although school education has grown it has done so at an uneven rate. The schooling system is structured in a 7-5-4(3) hierarchy, that is, seven years of primary, five years of secondary ordinary level (O level), and four years of university. Some colleges, including the Lesotho College of Education (LCE), offer three-year diplomas. There are examinations at the end of each level for selection to the next level, making it a highly selective system.

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[1]In this project the terms 'distance learning' and 'distance education' are used interchangeably.

The Lesotho primary school system is a seven-year programme organised in different levels from Standards One to Seven. Learners have to successfully complete a standard before being promoted to the next one, and complete Standard Seven through sitting an external examination, namely the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE).Successful candidates are awarded the Primary School Leaving Certificate, allowing them entry to secondary level education (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2003; Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), 2004).

The school system has grown continually but the need for qualified and better professionally developed teachers remains a challenge. The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2000 required more and better professionally developed teachers. According to the MOET (2006), the primary school system has a total of 10,552 teachers, however 4,021 (38%) of these are unqualified and/or untrained. The problem is exacerbated by the location of most of these in remote parts of the country and in multi-standard classes.

Another challenge is the attrition of teachers (Phamotse, 2003), lost through retirement, death, long illnesses and promotion to administrative positions. These factors, and the increased enrolments due to FPE, necessitated a review by the Government of Lesotho (GoL) of the mechanism to increase qualified and well developed teachers. The higher education institutions (HEIs) had not kept pace with the increase in numbers of students graduating from secondary education, with the LCE the only one remaining, and tasked with producing all the qualified teachers in the country. It was also mandated to introduce a distance teacher education programme for practicing unqualified and under-qualified teachers, and intended to use printed material in the form of study guides, study material and assignments for professionals as learners so that they could study and carry-out assignments on their own and/or while at work, with minimal face-to-face contact sessions.

Lesotho is a member of an array of global bodies, including the United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth and Non Aligned Movement, to name just a few that have called for Education for All (EFA). It is also a signatory to the Jomtien talks (Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), 2005-2015) and the Dakar ratification of basic education for all. The GoL enacted a policy to open access to primary education for all Basotho, declaring FPE in 2000 and phasing it in annually, standard by standard (grades), beginning with Standard One in 2000 (ESSP, 2005-2015), so that learners in all seven standards were covered by 2006. There was a decline in primary education enrolments between 1990 and 2000, from a Net Enrolment

Ratio of 76 percent to 52 percent in 1999 (Phamotse, 2003). It was envisaged that FPE would improve net enrolments in the schools, the key policy initiative of which was to do away with tuition fees so that all Basotho children could have access to primary education (ESSP, 2005-2015). The number of learners increased as expected from a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 90.6 percent to 101.6 percent between 1999 and 2002 (MoE, 2002a; Phamotse, 2003). The enrolment had a direct impact on the teachers, with the average learner-teacher ratio rising from 44:1 in 1999 to 47:1 in 2002 (MoE, 2002a). Other challenges faced by Lesotho and other developing countries towards achievement of EFA goals were late entry into school, repetition and dropping out (Hutmacher, Cochrane & Bottani, 2001). This placed a heavy burden on teachers, with the worst affected being the unqualified.

Lesotho education policy states that "the basic attitude is that every child should have the opportunity to complete primary education and that non-formal education should be available to all who have not received formal education" (MOET, 2005). In the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2005-2015, the GoL recognises that:

> without sufficient, qualified and well motivated teachers, most of the quality targets in this Strategic Plan would be difficult to achieve. The teacher shortage and subsequent high teacher turnover can only create an even higher need for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to re-skill teachers on innovative pedagogic approaches, emerging challenges in curricular, social issues, new technologies and management practices. The Government acknowledged the need for improved coordination and planning of CPD programmes informed by regular needs analyses (p. 96).

1.2   AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was intended to establish whether quality assurance processes in the provision of a distance teacher education programme exist and are adhered to. This could be achieved through:

- establishing the quality assurance processes set for a Distance Teacher Education Programme (DTEP)
- establishing how quality assurance processes are implemented
- proposing where these processes could be improved if need be.

Furthermore, the findings may act as a guide to facilitators[2]on planning their future development. It aimed at informing policymakers, the LCE and researchers about learning communities' perceptions of the internal quality control measures and effectiveness of the DTEP offered in the country. The findings will be available to policymakers of the MOET and the LCE, intended to help them understand professionals as learners and facilitators' perceptions of the programme and inform their decision-making about programme efficiency. They will indicate the extent to which internal control measures are adequate and the DTEP can be transformed. Policymakers may therefore apply the information gathered to evaluate the programme and decide on future implementations and improvements.

Gay and Airasian (2003:7-8) have argued that evaluation is more about making "decisions about the quality, effectiveness, merit or value of educational programmes, products, or practices", an idea closely linked to that of Creswell (2005), who writes that policymakers may weigh options to maintain or abandon the existing programmes because they would be informed about the current debates and stances taken by others. My intention as a researcher was to provide clear summarised results based on evidence to assist policymakers to make informed decisions. This research was about informing them on further requirements to improve internal quality in the DTEP, while not neglecting the contact programme.

CPD was provided for by inspectors during school holidays, but I was interested to discover whether the LCE provided a quality professional development programme, as required by the Lesotho Strategic Plan, 2005-2015 and its stipulation that access to education should not compromise quality. Teacher education is shifting from the traditional approach by which teachers knew and lectured everything to learners and learners were passive recipients, to one in which learners are expected to participate actively and teachers serve as facilitators (Aguti, 2004). This can be achieved by promoting active learning to professionals as learners in their professional development programme, thus translating it into their practice when they conduct their own classes.

In summary, the study's intended significance is in informing:
- policymakers on distance teacher education in Lesotho
- the LCE as programme provider and other HEIs in Lesotho and elsewhere
- researchers who might be interested in distance education in Lesotho but find it under-researched.

1.3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

High student enrolment figures for primary schooling in the wake of FPE put great pressure on staffing. Unqualified and under-qualified teachers were employed in large numbers, adding to those already in the schools, and as more learners joined the primary schooling system so the deficit in qualified teachers widened. One solution was professional development of teachers, but spaces in the LCE did not increase, so distance education was introduced as an alternative to meet the growing demand.

The LCE has to provide all the qualified primary school teachers the country needs. Approximately 200 primary school teachers graduate annually (Phamotse, 2003) and 3,000 graduated in its first 25 years of existence (Ntoi & Lefoka, in Phamotse 2003). According to Phamotse (2003:18), teacher preparatory programmes (TPPs) are "barely sufficient to cope with primary teacher attrition, let alone make up for the more than 25 percent deficit of qualified teachers in established positions, and keep up with the demand due to FPE". The DTEP was introduced to accelerate the production of qualified teachers for primary education, using a mix of residential sessions, meetings with tutors (facilitators) in locations nearer to their homes and work places, and text material. The output of qualified teachers was expected to be 500 teachers by 2005, and at least 250 annually thereafter (World Bank, 2003). However, this output is not sufficient to meet the learner-teacher ratio of 40:1 as noted by Lewin (2002), implying that under-qualified and unqualified teachers will be continually employed to fill the gaps in primary schools.

Distance education has received much attention and grown as an alternative form of providing education over the last 30 years. In most countries it has been implemented mainly in teacher education, especially in developing countries, in a quest to improve education in schools and address shortages of qualified teachers. In sub-Saharan Africa, the goal of Education For All (EFA) set by international bodies has opened doors for those learners who could not afford to pay school fees (Sikwibile & Mungoo, 2009). This increased school enrolments but the number of teachers could not cope, and were challenged further by a lack of qualified teachers in primary schools (Phamotse, 2003). The distance education programmes were also useful for professional development of under-qualified teachers.

While distance education is used widely for teacher education, some observers such as Aguti (2004) have raised concerns over its quality. High dropout rates have been observed, the

likely causes being tuition fees as some professionals as learners struggle financially despite earning a salary. Lack of support by institutions also contributes to dropout rates, more so when the professional learner is isolated in remote rural areas without peers to discuss educational matters.

China has also included a distance programme for in-service school teachers in a quest to upgrade their knowledge, attain qualifications and to improve overall approaches to teaching. The educational authorities have realised the need for a distance teacher education programme, the intention being to improve pedagogical material, methodologies and technologies (Xiangyang & Shu-Chiu, 2007). The same can be said about the DTEP in Lesotho, where professionals as learners are upgrading their knowledge and after successful completion of their programme will attain certificates and receive better remuneration.

According to Bates (1995) there are four main reasons for employing distance education in teaching:
- It helps in widening access to formal and non-formal learning opportunities
- It is cost-effective
- Its flexibility is excellent in helping re-orientate teachers in times of educational change
- It can help expand the output of qualified teachers.

These four reasons are relevant in the case of Lesotho in that supply of teachers is the main target of the DTEP. Whilst there is an ongoing full-time teacher education programme, the output does not meet the national target due to shortage of facilities at the college necessary to meet the increased intake of contact students. It is envisaged that the DTEP will help accelerate the number of qualified teachers, with anticipated costs relatively low compared to the full-time course. Professionals as learners are studying from their homes and only pay for study materials. For the full-time professionals at college the incurred costs include the purchase of books and stationery, board and lodging and in some instances daily transport to and from college.

Distance education is flexible in that it can easily be adapted if there are educational changes or new innovations. It can immediately be incorporated into the programme and be trialled and tested, as opposed to waiting until the beginning of an academic year or the full cycle to include new changes and innovations in a traditional contact programme. It is important to

revisit the programme from time to time to ensure that quality is adhered to. Whilst this study is not evaluative in nature it has to be mentioned that to find out what is really happening internally, it needs to be evaluated to some extent.

Scriven (1967) defines evaluation as judging the worth or merit of something, while Worthen Sanders and Fitzpatrick (1997:5) describe it as "identification, clarification, and application of defensible criteria to determine … value (worth or merit), quality, utility, effectiveness, or significance in relation to those criteria". Talmage (1982) asserts that evaluation has three purposes, namely to render judgement on the worth of a programme, to assist decision-makers responsible for policy, and to serve a political function. For this research, the focus is on the worth of the programme to enable judgement by the policymakers, and the information collected should help them decide on how effective the programme is, whether to continue with it as it is or improve it, and how to keep up with quality assurance processes.

For each programme there is a need for information about its effectiveness. Policymakers in the case of Lesotho education need information about the relative effectiveness of the DTEP, which includes its relative costs and benefits, planning whether it has been implemented as expected and what adjustments are required to make the programme effective and of high quality. Internal quality control measures led me to conduct this study. Patton (2001) indicates that evaluation is intended to determine programme effectiveness and to improve it. He distinguishes, two types, namely:

- *Formative assessment*, which seeks to inform on whether a programme should continue or be improved, and

- *Summative assessment*, which gives an overall judgement about effectiveness and quality of a programme. This research intends to do both, namely to determine the effectiveness and quality of the DTEP and to pursue its improvement, albeit to a small extent as this is not an evaluative study.

It is however important that quality is not compromised. Sherry (2003:440) argues that distance education is the product of demand rather than 'sound pedagogy' and little emphasis was placed on quality until this century. She concedes that increases in enrolments in distance education are a product of budgetary constraints, and lead to "international concern about notable challenge to basic academic values posed by distance learning ... and about possible jeopardy to core institutional values as accreditation standards are modified…" This concern is shared by Welch and Glennie (2006), they indicate that quality of distance education differs

from one institution to another and between countries. In Lesotho, this is the first distance education programme and it can take lessons from South African cases as an immediate neighbour, as well as from elsewhere in the world. This study has emerged from research intended to inform the process.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Against the above background, the research question is posed as follows:

What strategies are implemented to ensure internal quality assurance of the DTEP offered by the LCE?

Sub-questions linked to this are:

▪ What are the key strategies of implementing internal quality assurance?

▪ How are strategies for internal quality assurance implemented?

▪ What are the roles of college in implementing quality assurance strategies within DTEP (professional learners, tutors and facilitators)?

1.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the context of the distance education programme the following concepts, derived from the literature study, form the core of this research, discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

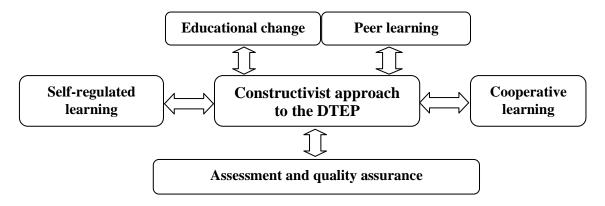**Figure1.1:   Conceptual framework**

The figure above shows constructivism as the central concept to this conceptual framework in DTEP. Meaning making in constructivism is influenced by peer learning. Professionals as learners share their experiences together. This enables them to acquire new knowledge and adapt it into new situations. They further learn and study at their own pace and regulate how

they want to acquire knowledge. Cooperatively they share, discuss and make meaning together. New knowledge is cooperatively generated. Assessment seeks to establish what the professionals as learners have acquired in their professional learning. This is indicated by responses and applying their acquired knowledge in new scenarios given. This will further indicate the pedagogic quality that has gone into learning. To effect change, facilitators (coordinators and tutors) and professionals as learners need to change the way they have been teaching towards improvement. New innovations can be incorporated in to programmes like the DTEP. Cooperative learning, social interaction and social negotiation help to construct new knowledge.

1.6   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to Creswell (2002), a research design refers to the procedures for collecting and analysing data and reporting research, whilst for Mouton (2001) it is a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing the research problem. In this study explorative research was used because quality assurance in distance education is a relatively new topic in the educational field, especially in Lesotho. The research design and complementary methods adopted are determined by research questions, practical considerations and the location in which the research is undertaken (Edwards & Talbot, 1999).

The study is located primarily in the qualitative paradigm, in keeping with the nature of the research undertaken. McMillan and Schumacher (1997:21) believe that this is commonly conducted using research-based knowledge and applied to practice. It aims at understanding people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live, based on the premise that human behaviour, interaction and organisation cannot be accurately measured (Creswell, 2005:406). Unlike quantitative research, therefore, it accepts that both those being studied and the researchers themselves are meaning-makers, with constructivism as an underpinning theory. At the same time it serves as epistemology for this study, seeking more information about the unit of analysis for use in finding solutions to a problem (Mouton, 2001). Epistemology is the means of acquiring knowledge by using our senses to develop concepts. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:19) state that epistemology specifies the "relationship of the researcher to that being researched." In terms of epistemology the qualitative researcher is subjectively involved with the participants due to the interaction with them. Knowledge is gained through observation and interpretation. Constructivism paradigm believes that knowledge is socially constructed and Denzin and Lincoln (2000) further mention that when

social constructivism paradigm is used, the knowledge, experiences and opinions of participants can be used to construct knowledge.

The research methodology refers to a coherent group of methods which scaffold each other to deliver data and findings that reflect the research questions and which are appropriate for the research purpose (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Leedy (2000) maintains that it informs the reader of how the researcher intends to proceed and how data is going to be handled. Research methods, are described as the ways, techniques and tools for generating thoughtful, accurate and ethical data (Rallis & Rossman, 2003), and strategies for manipulating it. For instance, data can be gathered as text but the manipulation is statistical.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1997), qualitative research is any kind of research that produces findings which are neither arrived at by statistical procedures or by quantification. Similarly, Leedy (2000) asserts that it involves the study of cases and minimal numerical data, whilst relying heavily on verbal data based on the subjective meaning attributed to it by participants. According to Creswell, Ebersöhn, Eloff, Ferreira, Ivankova, Jansen et al. (2007), the goal of qualitative research is to explore and understand phenomena in the natural context, a world comprising people with differing assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs and values that encompass the ontological stance of the study. Ding and Foo (2002:375) define ontology 'as a formal explicit specification of a shared conceptualization'. It is concerned with the deconstruction of the 'self' as a humanist conception (Merriam & Associates, 2002). For Creswell (2005:39) –

> "… the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants, describes and analyses these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner."

This study is about people and by people who are attending the programme and those who are running it, so ontology provides a shared and common understanding of the lived experiences of participants. In this study ontology is specific to LCE and therefore local realities are constructed. These are based on the experiences and may differ from individual to individual. This study does not take a traditional approach to quality assurance, but has as focus the quality assurance that starts with the individual from the intrapersonal point of view.

Qualitative research is mostly interactive, and needs a long time to enable observations, interviews and recording of the processes that occurred naturally during the process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). According to Krathwohl (1993), it provides a description of a case, a group, a situation or an event, which implies that it is either exploratory or fully interpretive in nature. For the purpose of this study I understand qualitative research to be an interactive approach that requires extensive time, such as for interviewing and recording the processes. Qualitative research provides detailed background about reasons while participants give answers and allow for the observation of their non-verbal behaviour (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). I used qualitative research methods to elicit people's beliefs, thoughts and perceptions.

1.6.1   SAMPLING

Sampling is the selection of a part of the population that would be studied. Purposive sampling was used in this study, from professionals as learners enrolled on the DETP, the tutors who facilitated their learning, and inspectors, who were constantly in schools monitoring the professionals as learners in their classrooms. Thirteen professionals as learners were involved, from a population of about 150 enrolled for the DTEP. Three facilitators and three tutors from a population of nine and 12 respectifully informed me on how professionals as learners had progressed pedagogically in their teaching strategies, on changes in professionals as learners' attitudes since enrolling for the DTEP and, on the day-to-day running of the programme. They were able to provide information on whether internal quality processes had been followed through as they shared their experiences before and during the programme. They expressed opinions on whether the programme was aligned to any quality assurance procedures and to what extent. Four of the inspectors sampled had already been inspectors when the DTEP started and were able to provide rich information on previous CPD, before being replaced by the LCE in 2002. However, only one former inspector who was then a tutor participated.

1.6.2   DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured individual interviews as a qualitative data gathering method were conducted with professionals as learners, facilitators and inspectors. Lukhwareni (1995) describes an interview as an oral exchange of information between an interviewer and an individual or a group of individuals. Interviews in most cases are face-to-face and are used to direct the

attention of participants to the questions and motivate them to answer and explain the meanings of questions if the need arises (McBurney, 1994). This provided me with an opportunity to probe and expand the participants' responses for depth of information (Opie, 2004). The interviews allowed the flexibility of posing additional questions and rephrasing as and when necessary. Interview questions were framed around the research questions and literature review. Body language, facial expressions, silences, frequency of pauses when replying to questions were recorded to find out if they synchronised with what was being said, thus also giving valuable information to add to the field notes. Comprehensive field notes of the researcher's observations and reflections during the research process will be documented. Mouton (2001) recommends precise record keeping of fieldwork as a form of control. All information regarding the dates and venues of interviews the length thereof, the information of participants, as well as any influencing factors on the fieldwork, form part of the historical process for later reference if needed. This will be part of the data presentation in chapter four.

1.6.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

To address the critical questions, I allowed participants to express themselves and to give as much information as possible as I probed after the responses. The participants were expected to tell their stories (narrate) on their experiences about the DTEP, thus helping to establish whether quality procedures had been followed. Merriam and Associates (2002) recognise narrative research as a strand of qualitative research that focuses on 'self' for data collection and data analysis. It has three main characteristics:

▪ Individuals' lives are the sources of primary data
▪ Narratives of the 'self' are the place for generating social critique and advocacy by the researcher
▪ It is concerned with the deconstruction of the 'self' as a humanist conception.

On the one hand Overcash (2003:179) describes narrative research as "collecting and analysing the accounts people tell to describe experiences and offer interpretation". Whilst the author comes from a medical field it shows that narrative research provides an option to explore beyond questionnaires and enables the researcher to engage with the participants to extract the information required. Overcash adds that it is not about telling events only but the narrator being part of the events. Participants are part of the programme in different ways and capacities and will be allowed to relate their experiences about the DTEP. Face-to-face interviews enabled me to explore beyond the initial responses given by participants for more

data. The narrative research approach is holistic and acknowledges the cognitive, affective and motivational dimensions of making meaning and can be aligned with the whole brain approach to thinking and conducting research as proposed by Du Toit (2009). It takes into account genetic and environmental influences. Relationship is increased with time and enables participants to answer questions in such a way that in-depth data can be gathered.

1.6.4   DATA ANALYSIS

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), qualitative data analysis is an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns amongst them. Similar codes were assigned to the transcripts which resemble each other from the whole transcription. I identified similarities in phrases, common variables, patterns, themes and the distinct differences were noted. *Atlas.ti* was used to analyse the transcribed data and themes created prior to analysis based on the questions used for interviews. However, as more patterns emerged during transcription and analysis, more themes were created to give a full picture on the DTEP.

1.6.5   METHODOLOGICAL NORMS

The following methodological norms were adhered to:

- **Trustworthiness:** According to Mertler (2006), trustworthiness is the measure of accuracy and believability of data. The author further notes that to ensure trustworthiness in any qualitative study three aspects have to be taken care of, namely member checking, triangulation, and prolonged engagement and persistent observation.

- **Member checking**: Glesne (1999) suggests that the transcribed interviews should be returned to participants for verification and correction of details. This ensures that the opinions and ideas of the participants are presented accurately.

- **Triangulation**: This is a process of relating multiple sources of data in order to establish their trustworthiness and verify the consistency of details, while trying to account for biases (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne, in Mertler, 2006). In this study I conducted individual interviews, took field notes and reviewed the relevant literature.

- **Field notes**: The researcher records and makes comments on the thoughts about the setting, the participants and the activities. Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (2002) indicate that field notes have two components. Firstly, the descriptive part which describes

the setting, the people and their reactions and interpersonal relationships, and account of events and secondly as the reflections made and the observer's personal feelings about events.

1.6.6 LIMITATIONS

The major concern of this research is the problem of analysing talk and text, as there might be inconsistency between actual and virtual words. Some expressions were localised and may not be applicable to all situations. Patton (2002:116) states that it is difficult "to separate interpreted purpose of text, the constructed text and interpreted 'truth' of a text, and the persona of the author in text creation..."

Narrative research has the effect of the feeling of invading private space, whilst probing might be problematic in that some questions might touch sensitive issues. Smythe and Murray (2000) indicate that stories might have an emotional impact, and in being re-interpreted and filtered through a 'social-scientific' category might lead to scrutiny and judgement by the researcher. However, for the purpose of this research, focus was channelled towards quality assurance and experiences of the learning community in relation to the DTEP.

As a primary school inspector in Lesotho, my interviews may have led colleagues to believe that I was investigating them as individuals, and they were slightly uneasy at the beginning. However, I built a rapport with them prior to actual interviews. The purpose of the exercise was explained clearly. Finally, some of the inspectors have left their positions to pursue work elsewhere and some have been promoted, making it difficult to access them for interviews.

1.6.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When a research project is designed, the needs of the researcher should be met without compromising those of the participants. At the same time, the researcher should not give up or privilege the needs of the participants and stakeholders (Busher in Kitshoff, 2006). All the necessary protocol of the MOET was followed to attain permission in writing. The participants were informed of their rights to participate or not, or to withdraw at any stage before, during or at the end of the study. I honoured the dates and sites for research and ensured that if they did not want to continue participating they could pull out at any stage. Full respect was bestowed on the participants and their rights were not compromised.

In research, confidentiality cannot be compromised; therefore the participants were assured of this on everything that would have been discussed. I handled the data and observations I made as confidential and their identities remain anonymous. All information and data are honestly reported. I ensured that any identifying information was removed from the data. The interviews were conducted privately at the convenience of the participants. Data gathered was coded and handled with strict care while linking it to 'unique' identifying themes.

1.7   KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts are clarified here, as they are understood and used in this study.

❖   **Continuing professional development**

Continuing professional development is described as an intention towards growth of teachers by gaining increased pedagogical knowledge, sharing of experiences and constructively incorporating these in their own classrooms. It is done over a period of time. It may be achieved through workshops, conferences, seminars, reading professional publications and discussions (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

❖   **Distance teacher education**

Distance teacher education offers professionals as learners who are based in their classrooms, the opportunity to learn, with the tutors and professionals as learners separated by time and space. This mode of learning may make use of printed material, media, and computer communication, with minimal real-time contact between the facilitators and professionals as learners.

❖   **Quality teacher development programme**

The EFA (2005) describes a quality teacher development programme as one that meets the set objectives of an institution, develops and empowers the teachers and addresses their needs. The emphasis is on whether it fits its purposes in the ways that reflect the needs of the teacher development programme. This goes together with the mission statements of most HEIs, including LCE.

❖   **Teacher quality**

The meaningfulness of those engaged in the facilitation of learning and the learning process related to individuals developing competence, confidence and being able to empower professionals as learners during and at the end of the learning process. It is about effectiveness

in achieving institutional goals. For teachers it starts with the individual from an intrapersonal point of view. Therefore, this is the beginning of internal quality assurance.

❖ **Quality assurance**

Burke (2000) describes quality assurance as planned systematic activities that are implemented within the framework of a quality system to provide confidence that a programme will satisfy the relevant quality standards. For Harman (2008:1) it involves systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by HEIs and their systems in order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements.

❖ **Internal quality assurance**

Internal quality assurance includes periodic self-analysis of the institution's performance, which should reveal the strong and weak sides of the performed activities, foresee the ways to overcome challenges, discuss how best practice is implemented, and compare achievements with similar institutions around the world. An internal quality assurance system should involve all the stakeholders at a college, namely administrators, coordinators, government, professionals as learners, tutors and social partners.

1.8   ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

There are six chapters that are interrelated to provide an overall report of the study undertaken.

Chapter One presents the background, with rationale, research problem, research objectives and research questions, as well as a brief outline of the research design, methodology and methods used. Weaknesses of the study are listed and key concepts clarified in accord with how they are to be understood in the dissertation.

Chapter Two constructs a conceptual framework from the literature review, showing how distance education is viewed by the researcher and a brief history and key characteristics of distance education as discussed in the relevant literature is included.

Chapter Three provides a more detailed outline of the methodology and the methods used to undertake the study, including the instruments used, sampling and data collection methods.

Chapter Four is an empirical study reporting data gathering and analysis, employing categorisation and coding procedures to relate the findings to the theoretical framework and prepare for the conclusion.

Chapter Five draws conclusions from the findings, and makes recommendations for interested stakeholders. Limitations, reflections and summary of the study are presented.

This structure is visually represented in the following figure:

Figure 1.2:   Summary of the study

Chapter one is the introduction to the study. I present the problem statement. This is the why of my study. The conceptual framework is a set of concepts and relationships within which the problem is situated and that offers the underpinning scholarship in terms of possible solutions to problem solving. It influences how the research is conducted (design and methodology). Depending on the conceptual framework and research design, appropriate data is collected, presented and analysed. Analysis of data informs the researcher to make conclusions and recommendations in relation to the research question. Constructively the researcher reflects on the findings and present new knowledge from the study undertaken.

1.9   SUMMARY

In this chapter I presented the introduction and gave the background of the study. I introduced the research topic, a problem statement, aims and objectives of the research project. The research method which is used in this study was stated and also the key concepts were described.

In the next chapter I present and discuss the key concepts of this study. The conceptual framework is presented followed by the relevant literature.

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CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature on the understanding of lived experiences of a community of learners and the emerging dominant concepts from literature are interlinked to help the researcher to generate meaning. A literature review grounds the validity of data collected once it has been interpreted and presented with descriptive empirical findings (Merriam, 1998). In this section a review of literature examines previous studies on the subject of distance education programmes, informed by the research questions posed in Chapter One. According to Garbers (1996), a literature review is a systematic and circumspect attempt to search for and trace all the published and unpublished information about a specific subject in whatever forms it exists, and collect useful resources. The subject should be relevant to Lesotho, Southern Africa and international. Gaps will be filled by this study. For Gay and Airasian (2003) it is intended to identify, locate and analyse documents with information related to the research problem. According to Babbie (1992) a literature review answers the following questions:

- What research has been done previously on the topic?
- What have other researchers found and written about it?
- What are the theories addressing it?
- What are the consistent findings or do past studies disagree?

Edwards (in Xiangyang & Shu-Chiu, 2007:9) notes that in contemporary distance education discourse there is an "increased use of open and distance learning as an overarching concept." According to Bates (1995), there are four reasons for the use of distance learning in teacher education:

- It helps widen access to formal and non-formal learning opportunities
- It is cost-effective
- It offers excellent flexibility in helping re-orientate teachers in times of educational change
- It can help expand the supply of qualified teachers.

This implies that the manuals for professionals as learners should make provision for 'self-instructional' activities that will offer them the opportunity to self-reflect as they proceed with the learning process. This would include making use of the manuals and other sources linked to their daily experience in class, thus enabling them to be fully engaged with the text. This is similar to practices in South Africa in that the course material is structured thematically and task-based printed textbooks are tailor-made for the courses. However, this may vary from one HEI to another, depending on the nature of the course.

2.2 CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Villegas-Reimer (2003) describes continuing professional development as promoting growth and development of a teacher over a long period of time. It is attained by gaining more knowledge and sharing experiences. It may be through reading professional publications, conferences, seminars, workshops and it may be a combination of any of these. The teacher continually constructs his own meaning over a long time by relating existing knowledge to new experiences, of which studying relevant literature and engaging in academic discourse form an integral part.

According to Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoo (2001) policymakers are putting an effort to improve quality of teaching and learning in the classrooms. However, teachers may not be prepared to implement new practices such as new assessment approaches. Teachers generally support new initiatives; it is therefore teacher professional development that should be the focus of new reforms in education. As stated earlier CPD should be sustained over time to provide content mastery, improve pedagogical strategies and to enable professional learner to try out new approaches in their classrooms.

In later studies Guskey (2002) established that policymakers have realised that CPD is at the core of improving education. Irrespective of the differences in content and format most professional development programmes have the same purpose, namely that of changing "professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end" (Griffin, 1993:2 in Guskey, 2002). For Fullan (1991, 1993) teachers engage in professional development programmes because they want to increase their competence and to enhance students' achievement of learning outcomes. Teachers believe that their knowledge base and skills will expand when they enrol in these programmes. Guskey (2002:3) observes that professional development activities are designed to "initiate change in teachers' attitudes,

beliefs, and perceptions". When the above have been changed it is envisaged that it will translate into positive change in their classrooms.

It should be noted that change is a gradual process. For teachers to move from their 'old' practices and to change their attitudes requires time and effort. It is made more challenging because it is additional to already existing workload. As thus professionals as learners need to be given feedback on a regular basis by facilitators. They need to see the effects of their effort. CPD requires rigorous follow up, support and challenges from those offering the programme.

2.2.1 RATIONALE FOR DISTANCE TEACHER EDUCATION

Distance education is understood in several ways, with Sampong (2009:1), for example, arguing that it is used as a complementary mode of delivery, intended to overcome "the challenges of access, equity, cost-effectiveness, and quality for higher education." It is used for in-service education of active but unqualified teachers and for professional upgrading of already qualified ones. In this study it is understood to refer to planned and regular educational provision where there is a distance between the college and the professional learner, designed to promote competence. Common features are:

▪ absence of a teacher or separation of teachers and learners
▪ use of media in teaching and learning
▪ correspondence
▪ independent learning
▪ possibility of face-to-face meetings with facilitators
▪ use of communication channels to facilitate interviews and support learners (e.g., telephone, email and teleconferencing)

Competence is associated by Passos (2009:38-39) with "highly professional performance", to which she gives two distinct meanings, namely "as a cognitive structure that facilitates specified behaviours [and] … a broad range of higher order skills and behaviours that represent the ability to deal with complex unpredictable situations." High professional performance is an indicator of quality in education.

Some of the factors that contribute towards the quality of facilitating learning are that teachers are experts in their field of specialisation, have adequate pedagogical knowledge including

aspects such as facilitating teaching and learning, curriculum, teaching experience and certification status. This reflects well in the distance education programmes as professionals as learners are expected to learn how to become specialists. At the end of the programme they may be awarded certificates which in turn will improve their remuneration. This is enhanced by the experience that they had before and during the tenure of the programme, therefore it is important that they develop as professionals in a holistic way, reflecting the multidimensional and holistic nature of their practice.

Ashby (2010) indicates that many teachers follow a traditional route of preparation followed by ongoing professional development, but there are alternatives. Many prospective teachers receive their undergraduate degrees through teacher professional development programmes administered by HEIs through distance education. These generally include field-based experience, courses in a specific field of specialisation, and strategies for facilitating learning, among others. Under the traditional approach, prospective teachers must complete all their certification requirements before beginning to teach, but they may gain certification through alternative routes designed for prospective teachers who have been out of the teaching system for some time. Generally, after completion, teachers in practice participate in ongoing professional development.

Those who have not undergone any teacher education tend to use traditional means of teaching that are teacher-centred, continuing with the way they were taught when they were learners. This inhibits learner-centred approaches based on the discovery and construction of knowledge advocated by constructivism, in which school learners would be more engaged in their own learning. In this case quality is compromised.

According to Passos (2009:45), when selecting the outcomes of teacher development programmes, the principles of "policy goals and aims, characteristics and needs of prospective teachers, the roles expected of teachers and the findings ... from research and evaluation studies" should be taken into consideration. The curriculum of a teacher education programme is based on four components, namely subject matter studies, foundations of education studies, professional studies, and supervised practical work. However, professionals as learners need support emotionally, spiritually and life skills so that they can help their learners. These components together with psychosocial support develop the teacher holistically.

Teacher preparatory and education programmes should be of high quality to fulfil the mandate set by MOET of improving teaching practices. Perraton, Creed and Robinson (2002) and Ntho-Ntho (2009) indicate that teacher preparation comprises a balance between four elements, namely improving general educational background, increasing knowledge and understanding of the subject area, enhancing pedagogical knowledge and practice, and the understanding of children and their learning. This applies to both experienced and inexperienced teachers. Therefore, any teacher educator programme determines the 'proportion and mix' of these elements. Distance education programmes probably provide much of the continuous professional learning opportunities for teachers, but their effectiveness depends on whether they instil "a sense of moral purpose, a knowledge base in support of effective classroom instruction and school-wide change, and the practical skills to put this knowledge into practice" (Nielsen, 1997:286). Therefore, the quality of distance education programmes should be judged in terms of their ability to affect the kind of knowledge, skills and dispositions. High pass rates or 'expert approved' curricula are not in themselves sufficient evidence of quality.

Practical skills acquisition in distance education has been considered important, because professionals as learners are still teaching in their classrooms. Sampong (2009) points out that, teacher preparation at a distance has a potential advantage over residence education because it is possible to integrate theory and practice when practising teachers are in the workplace while improving their skills and construct new meaning. It is relatively easy to apply the concepts to the actual classroom situation.

Tait (2000; 2003) suggests that professionals as learners support services perform cognitive, affective and systematic functions, and that cognitive student support develops learning through course material and resources for professionals as learners. Effective student support provides an environment that helps professionals as learners, creates commitment to learning and enhances their self-esteem, and the systematic function further establishes administrative procedures and information management systems characterised by efficiency, transparency and learner-friendliness. Kamau (2007:6) states that:

> "Without an effective learner support services system that provides on-site face-to-face tutorials, timely feedback on student performance and access to library services, student achievement will inevitably be undermined and dropout rates and procrastination will increase, while the advantages of distance education including cost effectiveness, will be whittled away."

2.2.2   CHALLENGES TO DISTANCE EDUCATION

Challenges that face distance education include relevance and quality of curriculum and learning material. Nielsen (1997) argues that course content is designed in conventional face-to-face classrooms by lecturers who do not have experience of distance education and are detached from the real situation on the ground. Most teachers enrolling for distance education are from rural and remote areas and may not possess the knowledge and skills required by facilitators. The curriculum is usually at a level that leads to further studies but does not address their immediate classroom needs.

Akhter (2008) argues that the level of knowledge acquisition, practice and environment of distance students are incomparable to that of full-time ones. In some instances prospective teachers do not meet minimum requirements for entry into HEIs. Teaching was an alternative that could provide them with a chance to enrol for the distance education. Also, teacher shortages are greater in the remote rural schools, and so the environment for studying is not conducive (Sampong, 2009). There are no libraries, resource centres or electricity, while in some cases access by vehicle is a challenge. These factors contribute to delays in delivery of study material, and therefore compromise quality.

Ashby (2010) points out that teacher preparedness to facilitate learning process to learners and pedagogical knowledge is an important classroom factor influencing learning and ultimately preparing learners at school level for their future as responsible citizens and workers in their economy, more so in this era of knowledge-based economies. However, efforts to improve the quality of teachers' teaching practices face several challenges, in particular in terms of what makes teachers effective. Research demonstrates that some teachers affect their learners' academic growth more than others, however research has not conclusively listed the specific indicators of teacher pedagogical knowledge and relevant application, such as the characteristics, classroom practices, and qualifications that are most likely to improve learners' learning. In Finland, for example, primary school teachers should have a master's degree, whereas it is acceptable to hold only primary teaching certificates in poor countries.

It is difficult to state with a strong degree of certainty or consistency those aspects of teacher quality that matter most for learning, though the high attrition rates and shortage of teachers, especially in areas of great poverty, remain amongst the greatest challenges (as stated in Chapter One). For example, teachers may take early retirement due to poor health, take up

other employment because teaching is not given the recognition that it deserves, or take up senior positions at ministry level. Furthermore, many learners, especially those in poor and rural areas have teachers with limited professional development in terms of their field of specialisation and pedagogy as a whole. Whilst some may be graduate teachers there are concerns that not all teacher education programmes adequately prepare teachers to facilitate learning to high standards, and that once teachers are in the classroom, professional development opportunities to help remedy this situation is sporadic and uncoordinated.

The major challenge has been the quality of distance learning, with concerns raised on the following issues:

- Limited use of technology and more dependence on traditional methods of instruction (facilitating learning in this context)
- Lack of awareness of quality parameters of delivery systems among staff (construction and acquisition of knowledge)
- Inefficiency of administrative systems
- Lack of standard criteria to measure the quality of services (Hope & Guiton, 2006).

Instruction and delivery of content as used by Hope and Guiton (2006) is not applicable in this new paradigm of constructivism. The paradigm emphasises that the teacher facilitates learning and that learners make up their own meaning of the world around them. We currently refer to facilitation of learning because the professionals as learners have to construct their own meaning of the world around them.

One major challenge raised by several authors is that distance learning is associated with high attrition rates, for relatively complex reasons that include a poor learning environment and lack of time caused by demands of work, home and school. Siwibele and Mungoo (2009) classify challenges to distance learning as:

- Personal variables, such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, previous academic experience and motivation
- Institutional variables, such as institutional administration and student support
- Circumstantial variables, such as the nature and quality of interaction between students and institution, course design, and facilitation of learning.

Ukpo (2006) indicates that in the Nigerian context failure rates are attributed to learning material being delivered late, professionals as learners being engaged in other economic activities to supplement their family incomes, and poor support services by the college.

In addition to these challenges it must be noted that distance learning can be facilitated at home and work sites that are convenient to professionals as learners. It allows the enrolment of more teachers and is professionals as learners' centred, thus affording professionals as learners more control of the pace and style of learning.

2.2.3   SUCCESS OF THE DTEP

The success of the distance education programmes depends largely on professional cooperative learning as a professional learner-centred approach. Professionals as learners meet their facilitators once in a while on stipulated times and usually for brief periods, so most of the time professionals as learners are on their own. These factors compel them to develop social skills, critical thinking skills and cooperation, as envisaged by the five characteristics of cooperative learning put forth by Grisham and Molinelli (1995) that are contextualised for this study as professional cooperative learning:

Firstly, the facilitator prepares the tasks that professionals as learners will do together. This brings them together to interact face-to- face, talk, discuss, ask questions and explain some sections to each other when need arises. Secondly, individual accountability is a must and each must participate equally in the group to complete tasks. The facilitator stresses this to group members. Thirdly, groups must be heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, geographical areas, etc. Individuals must ensure that they gain academically as well as socially from working in groups. The fourth factor is that facilitators may facilitate social skills to group members or may choose to use planned group activities to assist students how to work in groups. Finally, monitoring and processing of social skills build the foundation of professional cooperative learning in the class towards improving self-esteem.

In the classroom setting the teacher usually plans the groupings according to the different learning styles. However, in the distance education, professionals as learners group themselves according to how close they are to each other and may not be aware of their different learning styles. One of the students usually initiates the groupings of which the size will be determined according to the group. Groupings usually begin informally and last for a

few minutes up to a period determined by the group, especially in the beginning of programme. They focus on the knowledge and skills required in the modules and learn to process information acquired. They constructively integrate this information with the existing knowledge to create new knowledge, therefore facilitators should encourage them to form study groups.

Professional cooperative learning depends largely on the student support. For Dresselhaus (2005:131), cooperation amongst professionals as learners result in higher achievement and greater productivity; more caring, supportive and committed relationships; and greater psychological health, social competence and self-esteem. Important in encouraging this are contact sessions, which studies from the University of South Africa (Mays, 2005) indicate are felt by professionals as learners in distance education programmes as vital to the successful completion of their studies. Contact sessions ensure that professionals as learners meet facilitators and discuss several issues including pedagogy and those that are administrative. They are intended to form peer support and study groups, though these rarely continue outside the contact session due to finding common meeting venues and times. Another challenge is reliability of transport, especially in the rural remote areas.

Contact sessions provide a platform for new ideas, clarification of common misconceptions by professionals as learners and highlight topics to be learned, learning how to learn and constructively incorporate new learning into their own knowledge. Professionals as learners need to attend contact sessions having read so that they can meaningfully engage in discussions and debates in the classroom, and share ideas and experiences. For Reed (2005), independent reading of material should be encouraged amongst professionals as learners so that they can develop their academic literacy and scholarship of facilitating learning. The general tendency is for professionals as learners to attend contact sessions and assume the facilitator will speak while they take notes and ask questions to which the facilitator responds, and then they leave. Rather, these learners have to reflect on what they have read in the learning material, the challenges they met and how they dealt with them. They work with other learners and pose questions to stimulate discussions (Reed, 2005 & Mays, 2005 in Welch & Glennie, 2005).

The time allocated for contact sessions is limited, so it should be spent addressing issues that hindered learners' progress in their learning. They can only share experiences and construct their own meaning if they can scaffold it on their reading and share with colleagues through

debate and discussion. The facilitator monitors to ensure that time is spent as effectively and efficiently as possible, by creating conducive atmosphere during the sessions.

Reed (2005) further advocates that, during contact sessions, facilitators should model the practices that have to be inculcated into the professionals as learners' teaching. They should clearly state learning outcomes, rationale and content, allow time for questions, facilitate discussions, and assess their learning opportunities, these being fundamentals throughout the current and future teaching career of professionals as learners. Such a modelling approach enables development of learners' cognitive and meta-cognitive awareness, and strategies used by presenters during their learning opportunities should be based on educational and learning theories underpinning teaching as a profession.

2.2.4   QUALITY IN DISTANCE LEARNING

There is no single description or definition for quality in relation to teacher education and professional development. Vroeijenstijn (2001) suggests that the following three questions be answered when addressing quality:

- Are we doing the right things?
- Are we doing the right things the right way?
- Do we achieve what we are claiming to achieve?

Nielsen (1997:286) explains quality in terms of "... graduates' ability to 'teach well', that is, to create the conditions under which students, all students, can learn for understanding." I further believe that quality implies that all students should meaningfully apply what they have learned into new situations and meet the stated learning outcomes. Constructively, they should develop new strategies that will enhance their ability to facilitate learning in a globalising world.

Even if all children enter schooling by 2015, as envisaged by global bodies, the fundamental concept will remain the quality of education they receive. Associated with professional development of teachers, this is central to the success of EFA, and characterises top performing countries such as Finland, Korea, Canada and Cuba (Yates, 2007). Teachers in these countries enjoy high social status, with Finland position atop the PISA results attributed to success of its in-service teacher education (Malady, 2006). The quality of teachers and their continuing education and professional development is thus central to the achievement of quality professional learning, at least until a student has achieved the means to sustain a

degree of independent professional learning. It should therefore be a prerequisite of every government to invest in teachers' education.

In distance education, facilitators should have clearly stated learning outcomes to be achieved at the end of the programme, with appropriate methodologies and strategies in place. Furthermore, quality education can be achieved with proper facilities, well-developed teaching and learning material, well-resourced classrooms and qualified personnel. Professionals as learners are in their schools most of the time and are constructing their own meaning based on pedagogical knowledge and through experiences with the world around them. They constantly generate new knowledge through contextualising pedagogical experience, and bring new ideas from their classrooms, schools and community as pre-knowledge to a distance programme. It is important for them to adapt to self-directed professional learning in a distance learning environment (Wang, Odell & Schwille, 2008), the expectation being that they are becoming more independent. For their part, the facilitators have to develop, encourage and support them during this transition from being unqualified towards being qualified. Facilitators have to pay attention to the learning strategies, such as group work, peer learning and discussions, that professional learners use, and assist them in developing others through professional learning. This should include learning support sessions in which they can be assisted through discussions, homework, feedback, and the designing of group discussion activities.

Xiangyang and Shu-Chiu (2007) indicate that distance in-service teacher professional development programmes have received more attention than before in China. Here the target was to have 70% of all teachers who did not have a four-year college education acquire degrees through distance education, the aim of their programme being to upgrade teacher qualifications, and develop their pedagogical and linguistic competencies, methods and strategies for facilitating learning. This led to new pedagogical material, methods of facilitating professional learning and learning technologies, knowledge, values and skills, thus helping increase the number of qualified and certificated teachers. Professional learners had to meet the following criteria in order to complete the programme: improvement of language skills, enhanced motivation and skills for lifelong learning. They should also learn about new learning material, methods of facilitating learning, and course designs and should be able to carry out action research in their classrooms. Intellectual capacity improvement and better classroom performance lead to more professional learners enrolling for distance programmes (Ukpo, 2006). The upgrading of existing teaching qualifications can thus be achieved through

distance teacher education as teachers do not have to return to college and spend years out of their classroom with little or no income.

Studies from Nigeria show that distance learning serves two purposes, namely that there are many under-qualified in-service teachers who are already in established posts, and, secondly, there are no qualified teachers who can replace them should they leave for full-time professional development. Professional learners are mostly adult and female in Nigeria (Ukpo, 2006), as is the case in Lesotho, where there are many under-qualified teachers in established posts and no qualified ones to replace them if they were to leave for full-time contact education. Also, there are more female teachers in established posts, and more qualified than their male counterparts. In total 51.3% of female teachers, compared to only 9.1% of male teachers are qualified, and in the DTEP there are more female teachers enrolled than their male counterparts (MOET, 2005).

According to Daly, Pachler, Pickering and Bezemer (2007), distance learning promotes individual independence towards learning and working, and face-to-face contact with peers validates ideas that have been developed. Collaborative professional learning is facilitated into professional learners through discussion, debate, asking critical questions and reaching consensus. As Daly et al. (2007:456) put it, overtime, peers become "large investments for validation, challenge and learning rather than an expectation that these will come from the tutor or an external authority."

Dignath and Buttner (2008) indicate that the concept of professional self-regulated learning is based on historical results from educational research conducted in the past by scholars such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Bandura. However, it has only gained momentum in recent times. They further argue that the beginning of constructivist learning theories, the idea that students should take responsibility for their own professional learning and play an active role in the learning process replaced instructional theories, which assigned a reactive rather than a proactive role to the professional learners. It is due to this paradigm shift from instructional theories to learning processes that theories about professional self-regulated learning have evolved. Research into professional self-regulated learning changed from a cognitive strategy orientation in the 1970s to experimental investigations of various conditions in the 1980s, focusing increasingly on metacognitive aspects of professional learning. Definitions on professional self-regulated learning commonly view self-regulating students "as metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviourally active participants in their own

professional learning process [who] self-generate thoughts, feelings, and actions to attain their learning goals" (Zimmerman, 2008). In this context one can distinguish three areas of psychological functioning in which professional self-regulated learning can appear:

- cognition, which concerns mental applications towards learning, performing tasks which indicate how information is presented and transformed in the brain
- metacognitive strategies, which are used to control and regulate cognition;
- motivation and affect, which concern themselves with all motivational beliefs about oneself related to a task, such as self-efficacy beliefs, interest, or affective reactions to oneself and the task.

According to Wang et al. (2008), students' participation in distance learning is due to their desire and interest in learning. They consistently wish to increase their knowledge base so that they may improve the way they facilitate learning this being a form of continuing professional development. Fullan (1991) states that staff development should go hand in hand with the implementation of new approaches and reforms to address specific concerns in the classroom. The more frequently the professional learners meet the more professional they become.

2.2.5 QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN DISTANCE TEACHER EDUCATION

In distance education, assessment of learning should be integrated to promote coherence and retain flexibility and multiple sites of learning. Barnett (1992) and Nielsen (1997) describe three approaches to quality assessment in a distance teacher programme. The first is *objectivist*, with quantitative standards set against which the programme outcomes and conditioning factors are measured. This is based on attaining a certain grade in order for one to pass and has an impact on throughput, that is, how many go through the programme over the allocated time. However, this approach does not measure qualitatively the aspects of the 'learning-teaching core', which is that graduates understand facilitating learning content, perform practical skills and show professional dispositions. The second approach is *relativist*, with assessment tending to compare the learning outcomes of distance education with those of the face-to-face conventional (campus-based) programme. It is more inclusive than the objectivist approach in that it inculcates achievement tests, classroom observation schedules and surveys determining attitude, values, and/or satisfaction levels, administered to the distance education professional learners and their comparison groups. The third approach is *developmental*, described by Barnett (1992:52) as "that of internal members of an institution ... reviewing what they are doing themselves". It is intended to identify challenges within the

professional development programme and formulate solutions to them. It involves critical reflections and dialogue amongst and between students and course developers and facilitators of the course material.

2.2.6   QUALITY ASSURANCE

Hendrikz (2005) strongly states that a quality support system is not negotiable. New staff structures, new functions and processes have to be put into place to ensure proper functioning of the programme. There is a need to ensure timely sending of learning material, packaging of assignments, opening of envelopes for returning assignments, posting of material including use of short messaging system (SMS) because largely professional learners have cell phones. This work has to be done within a given period and with quality that has been entered to by management and staff. Deadlines have to be met.

For quality assurance purposes, the key features are that the management of a programme:
- monitor contact sessions and examinations
- address issues arising from learners and facilitator feedback speedily
- learning material be externalised more rigorously and critically.

Quality assurance should be looked at in three important aspects. Firstly, the curriculum and its assessment, secondly how coursework and assignments are handled; and finally, the association with learners (Clarke, Butler, Schmidt-Hansen & Somerville, 2004). They further propose that a distance education programme should be based on the existing fulltime programme as a standard for curriculum and its assessment. This implies that learners should have common examinations and assessment for both modes of teaching and learning. This would enhance quality in the distance education programmes.

Where there is an existing traditional face-to-face programme the benefits would include trial testing and suitability of learning material at the level of the programme, immediate feedback from learners to enable revision and subjecting the course to already established system which further ensures quality. Assessment procedures for distance education should not be modified but should follow similar procedures as the fulltime courses. It will enable the institution to compare both groups. In the case of the DTEP, there is a fulltime equivalent programme which would fit well within the proposals by Clarke et al. (2004) above.

In concluding this section, the expectations and factors that enable quality in teacher education may be represented as follows:

Enabling inputs

Professional learners' characteristics

Aptitude
Perseverance
Study skills
Prior knowledge
Challenges to learning

Teaching and learning
Learning time
Methods of facilitative learning
Assessment, feedback,
Class size

Teaching and learning materials

Physical infrastructure and facilities

Human resources, teachers, principals, inspectors, supervisors, administrators

School governance

Outcomes

Improved teaching skills

Creative and emotional skills

Values

Social benefits

Context

Economic and labour market conditions in the community
Socio-cultural and religious factors
Aid strategies

Qualified personnel and support infrastructure
GOL budget available for education
Competitiveness of the Teaching profession in the global world
National goals and vision

Philosophical standpoint of teachers
Peer support and assessment
Parental/spousal support
Time available for school work

National standards
Public expectations
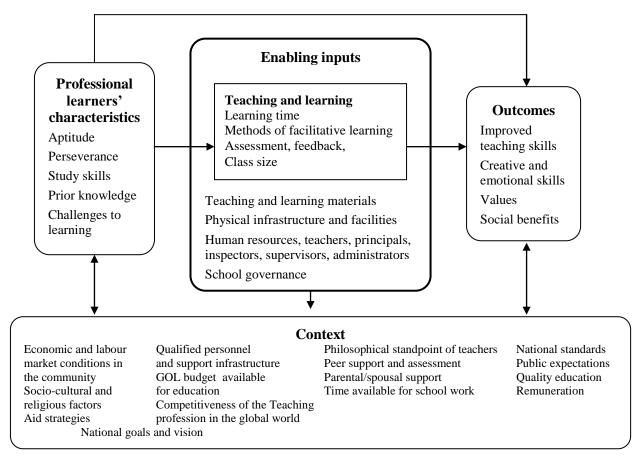Quality education
Remuneration

Figure 2.1:   Framework for teacher education quality (Adapted from EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2000:360)

This framework shows those attributes that the professional learner brings when he first enrols in the distance education programme. These include aptitude, study skills, prior knowledge, challenges to learning and perseverance. These may be driven by economic challenges, labour conditions in the country, global factors, UN charters and agreements. Socio-cultural factors have a direct influence on the prior knowledge that the professional learners have.

To achieve the desired programme outcomes, the institution puts into place the mechanisms that contribute to the attainment of the stipulated outcomes. These include having human resources in place, assessment, providing feedback, physical infrastructure and facilities. There has to be an adequate number of facilitators. This would be in line with national goals. The governments must provide budget and other resources to enable the programmes to achieve the given mandate. Teachers' views are to be incorporated into the programme and teachers should support each other for the duration of their professional learning and beyond.

At the end of the programme it is envisaged that the professional learners will demonstrate improved teaching and facilitative skills, developed creative and emotional skill and social benefits. These are mapped according to the national expectations, national standards, labour market and demand. And at the end teachers earn their remuneration.

In the light of the above framework for teacher education quality, quality assurance should be seen as a management and assessment procedure with a view to monitoring performance against programme outcomes, ensuring achievement of quality outputs and ensuring achievement of quality improvement. This implies that there is no absolute quality but always a need for constant improvement.

In summary, literature suggests that there are a number of quality assurance strategies that can be put into place in distance education programmes. These include the following: planning, quality assurance procedures, internal quality mechanisms, quality oriented curriculum, learner support, institutional support, student and academic services, continuous quality enhancement, evaluation and assessment, credibility, bench-marking, continuous internal review and qualifications of the staff at an institution. These strategies are developed individually looking at the needs of the potential candidates and the institution. These strategies will be enhanced through the conceptual framework below that is derived from the literature.

2.3   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the context of a distance education programme, a number of theories and concepts are interlinked, for example, cooperative learning, peer learning, facilitating learning, adult learning theories, critical cross-field outcomes (CCFOs), instructional design, human resource management, induction programme, mentoring, roles for educators, and whole brain learning. Those focused on in this study specifically, are constructivism, internal quality, educational change, self-regulated learning, cooperative learning, assessment and quality assurance. However, the other theories will also resurface. These concepts are dealt with looking at their relationship and enhancement of quality assurance strategies mentioned in the last paragraph.
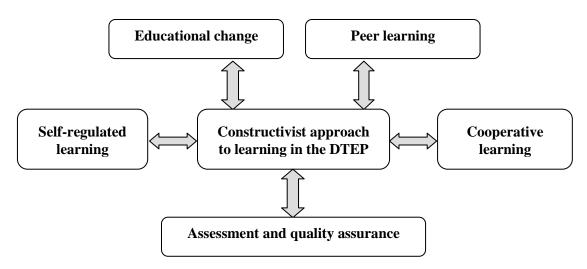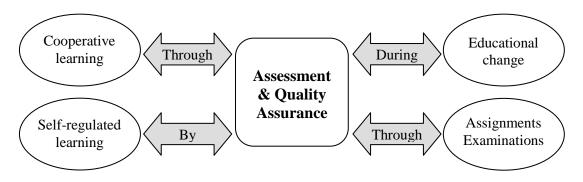
Figure 2.2:   Conceptual framework

To effect change, teachers and facilitators have to change the way they facilitate learning. Teachers' change is directed to improving their teaching practices. Facilitators as agents of change should act as role models for teachers by changing their professional development interventions. It is with programmes such as the DTEP that a teacher is developed holistically with new innovations that can be incorporated into the programme. Cooperative professional learning promotes social interaction, as is to be found in communities of practice, and social negotiation to contribute to meaning making. Setting goals, conducting self-checks and self-assessment, for example, contribute to achieving desired professional development results. Through constant and regular organisation, planning and monitoring one's own academic progress the professional learner self-regulates his own professional learning. Assessment is part of teaching and learning and so is self-assessment of one's practice an integral part of the teacher's professional development (learning). Quality assessment indicates to what extent the professional as learner has acquired knowledge, skill and dispositions necessary to effect change in practice. Quality assurance is intended to create and maintain conditions for attainment of desired results.

Figure 2.3:   Constructivist approach to the DTEP

Constructivism is the dominant paradigm in this study as seen in the previous paragraph. The main concepts of interest in this study can be broken down to indicate what they entail and how related attributes can be achieved. Educational change may be brought about by internal challenges, external influences or personal interests.

Self-regulated and cooperative professional learning maybe achieved through discussions, critical questioning, responding to questions, giving analogies and explanations. Peer learning play an important role in enhancing professional cooperative learning. To ensure that professionals as learners have acquired the necessary competencies quality assurance is done through assignments, tests and examinations and are validated by external examiners.

2.4   CONSTRUCTIVISM

Constructivism has become a prevalent paradigm in teacher education programmes in recent years, largely because of its ability to promote student learning (Gordon, 2009). The main tenets of constructivism are that learning is an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge and that instruction is a process of facilitating the construction of knowledge rather than communicating it. Constructivism has emerged as a model for explaining how knowledge is created and constructed by human beings during their social and cultural interactions. It is acquired through constructive processes and not just information acquisition or accumulation. Professional learners interpret new information acquired previously; they activate prior knowledge and relate it to new knowledge. This is enhanced through discussions with peers, questioning, books, television, games, visiting new places responding to questions, analogies, explaining and practical experiences (Loyens, Rikers & Schmidt, 2007; Orland-Barack, 2005).

Constructivism is an approach to meaning-making that assumes people know and understand ways to construct new meaning. It assumes that human sense-making is a process that systematises experience so as to make it understandable (Mohapi, 2007). As a paradigm, more emphasis is placed on the development of a professional learner and understanding more general social processes and relationships. This is achieved in two ways, namely by means of a direct approach and a discovery approach. The former relies on "verbal instruction, modelling and rehearsal in teaching of ... problem solving skills, including impulse control and anger management" (Mohapi, 2007:26) while the latter relies more on discussion, role-play, cooperative learning and the Socratic Method which is a distinct question and answer strategy to elicit understanding and share knowledge whilst constructing knowledge by others. It is in this latter that the facilitators co-construct social understanding, facilitate learning and guide professional learners' discussions.

Orland-Barack (2005:295) further advocates co-construction of meaning, described as the "reassuring sign of constructivism". Professional learners are constructing their own meaning during professional learning to show that they already have some prior knowledge and experience. Their interaction and collaboration brings 'new' knowledge to everyone involved, hence construction and reconstruction of meaning. Orland-Barack argues that learners, professional learners in the case of this study, engage "in active, systematic, informed and communal meaning-making of various experiences". Wattsjonson (2005:180) adds that construction needs critical thinking. Professional learners must push beyond the "self cognitive comfort zone". She indicates that constructivist learning entails:

- Complex, realistic and relevant environments that incorporate authentic activity
- Social negotiation
- Multiple perspectives and multiple modes of learning
- Ownership in learning
- Self-awareness in knowledge construction.

Professional learners should not be mere recipients of knowledge but should rather be engaged in actively and constantly constructing meaning from their experiences. They acquire new knowledge through discovery, transforming information and revising the rules when no longer applicable. Professional learners are therefore active processors of knowledge and acquisition: "Learning is not a stimulus-response phenomenon but requires self-regulation and development of conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction"(Loyens et al., 2007:180), changing education in order not to simply be about transmission of knowledge to

learners but active construction of knowledge in their own minds. Learners discover and transform knowledge, check new understandings against old ones. They revise their understanding if changes have to be made to accommodate added knowledge based on new information and experience, even doing away with knowledge that no longer applies. This constructivist view of learning considers the learner as an active agent in the process of knowledge acquisition.

The reason for focusing on constructivism is that it offers criteria for quality assurance of a programme. The same applies to other theories and educational aspects or pedagogical constructs that are being discussed in this study, i.e., they contribute to a holistic perspective to quality assurance of a programme. However, I acknowledge that collectively they only form a fraction of the possibilities, especially as the context of the programme is multi-dimensional and complex. One such an example is the reference to self-regulated learning as is indicated above (Loyens et al., 2007) that cannot be separated from any means of learning. This would include constructivist learning which forms part of the realisation of authentic learning described by Slabbert, De Kock and Hattingh (2009:70.) as "concerned with learning quality, and learning quality is determined by the quality of the individual's identity and integrity." Authentic learning is about participation and construction of knowledge within the environment which professional learners come from. Learning in constructivism shares the same principles with authentic learning. As constructivism and self-regulated learning are interlinked, all other theories are. Deriving the concepts that are applicable to this study stems from the array of theories that underpin this study.

2.5   EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Educational change is described as a complex process that happens within an organisational ecology (Vandeyar, 2008) that is difficult to achieve. For change to take place, teachers, and specifically professional learners and facilitators in the context of this study, need to change the way they have been teaching towards improvement. Teacher education has usually been top-down, filtered from the authorities without proper consultation with the teachers who are the implementers of change. Teacher education should ensure that professional learners are involved in their own education, more so in distance learning. The DTEP is intended to assist professional learners and facilitators to realise their full potential as both are to bring about change in their own practices. Facilitators should be role models to professional learners in

contact sessions. The innovative ideas that the facilitators advocate professional learners should use, should also be applied to the teacher education programme.

According to Vandeyar (2008), since the 1990s, there has been advancement in educational change in some countries while others have not accepted the need for it. Political meddling and economic imperatives influence public education negatively, forgetting that education is a right and social service to be provided by governments (Lees, 2007). As interests of teachers have to be respected and acknowledged, and the welfare of learners and parents taken care of, interests of professional learners and facilitators should be taken care of. Policymakers are caught between politics and fulfilment of demands of stakeholders in education, but have to realise that education is not about squandering resources but is a process of investment. The same applies to teacher education.

Education should identify and develop potential citizens, with teachers' professional development programmes being channelled towards eliciting the talents that can be further used by professional learners in their classrooms to promote effective learning. De Kock and Slabbert (2008:106) indicate that the aim of education, especially teacher education in the context of this study, is to maximise and fully utilise "human potential through facilitating lifelong learning towards a safe, sustainable and prosperous universe for all." In doing so, professional learners maybe able to improve their teaching, implement what they would have acquired during their own learning and construct meaning based on acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experience.

Goodson (2001:450) describes different segments in educational processes as "the internal, the external and the personal". In the same way that he argues that internal change agents have to work from within the school settings for initiating and promoting change, internal change agents, such as professional learners and facilitators, should work from within, in the context of this study. Analogue to his ideas external change is seen as a 'top-down' approach from authorities, which may include new curricula, new examination models, or new guidelines for teacher professional development programmes. He further observes that for change to occur it should include personal change, notably personal beliefs, missions and plans that a teacher, or professional learner in the case of this study, brings to the process. It is therefore important to integrate internal, external and personal change for educational change (including teacher education change) to succeed, summed up by Vandeyar (2008) as follows: "educational change is most successful when conducted by teachers [professional learners,

facilitators] as part of their personal and professional projects and where teachers [professional learners, facilitators] take ownership of the reform" (p.115).

2.6   COOPERATIVE LEARNING

The benefits of cooperative learning were promoted by John Dewey in *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916), in which he proposes that the classroom be the reflection of the larger society in which real life learning takes place. However, cooperative learning gained importance and the recognition it deserved in the 1990s, due to the benefits of research. Constructivism emphasises the importance of cooperative learning, achieved through social interactions with peers which contributes towards knowledge construction, interaction and social negotiation. Ideas about how content is to be learnt and how it is shared should be realised because professional learners are more or less at the same level of knowledge understanding and can facilitate each other's professional learning. Constructivists are in agreement that social negotiation and interaction are important factors in knowledge construction (Loyens et al., 2007).

Grisham and Molinelli (1995) and Van der Horst and McDonald (1997) describe cooperative learning as students working in a small group such that each participates in a collective assigned task without direct supervision by the facilitator. This is relevant in distance education because professional learners may work with peers at their place of residence, on assignments and day-to-day challenges of pedagogy. For Abrami, Chambers, Poulsen, De Simone, D'Apollonia & Howden (1995), cooperative learning is a strategy for facilitating learning in which students work together in groups specifically designed to promote close interaction. This is coupled with individual accountability so that students are responsible for learning and contributing to the group task. In cooperative learning, group formation is very important as it enhances interaction between students with different learning styles. The 'whole brain theory' of Herrmann (1996) encompasses many of the styles discussed in Coffield, Moseley, Hall and Ecclestone (2004), and when students are grouped together according to a mix of learning styles they can benefit from contributing from their own learning style perspective. In the case of professional learners they will group themselves according to their geographical location (sites), which is likely to bring together mixed abilities and different learning styles. This enables them to listen to varying opinions and incorporate them into their own, even changing and discarding their own opinions. Professional learners form cooperative base groups, intended to provide assistance and

encouragement throughout the professional learners' learning period of four years. This helps in preparation for assignments, tutorials and examinations, and the groups develop support structures amongst the social groupings.

Du Toit (2009:57) states in the context of cooperative learning that students "are in favour of interpreting their everyday life … by means of discussions with friends and peer learners [students]". The importance of cooperative learning in higher education is that social interactions with fellow professional learners, facilitators, and others contribute to the construction of meaning. Their discussions can scaffold the extent of work and nature of tasks that need further engagement. Knowledge is created not received, and socially constructed through scholarly discourse not mere talk. Professional learners have the challenge of making sense of the world around them, being open-minded and challenging, and engaging with issues of interest during discussions. Furthermore, cooperative learning provides opportunities for learner discussions that can be used as an assessment of prior knowledge and provide them with both the direction and extent of study to be undertaken to acquire a deep understanding of the subject, related constructs and practice.

There has to be compatibility and there are contradictions to be dealt with in constructivism. Different perspectives must be understood whilst challenging the thinking behind individual arguments. Cronje (2006) indicates that construction of meaning leads to individuals' understanding and is highly effective and transferable to peers. For Carson (2005), constructivism is intended to assist learners to learn individually or as a social grouping to transform information. Professional learners discuss with friends and peers certain interpretations of everyday and professional life. In this way, cooperative learning enables them to take an active part in their own learning. Professional learners need to develop learning and social skills in order to work cooperatively with their peers.

The DTEP is expected to create space for sharing and reflecting on experiences by professional learners in the form of conversations with a vision to challenge and support each other. Reflecting on theory and practice helps professional learners to be critical of their discussions so that they can establish connections and gaps in their existing professional knowledge. Groups may organise sessions in which they execute tasks, do assignments, take part in tutorials and explore the challenges that face them, such as developing as subject specialists and the scholarship of teaching.

Killen (2000:100) and Kitshoff (2006) indicate that professional learners experience the following elements as a guarantee that cooperative learning has taken place:

- Positive interdependence – whereby professional learners realise that they need each other to complete tasks

- Face-to-face promotional interaction – in this case professional learners facilitate each other's learning through sharing and encouragement

- Individual accountability – each member is responsible for the learning of the group

- Appropriate interpersonal skills – professional learners develop and use social skills such as communication, trust, and resolving conflicts to ensure successful interaction with other members of the group

- Reflective learners – finally, the cooperative group should reflect on their success and the effectiveness of the group.

2.7   SELF-REGULATED LEARNING

Self-regulation is characterised by setting one's own goals, self-checking, self-assessment and self-reinforcement, which have a direct bearing on learning. McNiff (2012) is of the opinion that professionals as learners should apply what they acquired into practice. It can be achieved if professional learners share their understanding and facilitating in terms of generating new knowledge. It is connected to professional cooperative learning as professionals as learners develop the self-regulating competencies. Loyens et al. (2007) write that professional learners should have motivation to achieve desired results if they properly regulate themselves. Constructively, they should organise, plan and monitor their academic progress using the knowledge and experience base (new constructed meaning) they already possess. They have to be researchers through information gathering and sharing with peers, which enables them to be in control of what and how they are learning. According to Du Toit (2009), learners vary in the way they learn and are unaware of what is important to learn and how to learn it. Professional learners develop critical and creative skills which improve their problem-solving skills. They need to use their meta-cognitive skills to set academic learning goals because they should be self-regulated professional learners. The ability to regulate their own learning is viewed as the key to successful learning in college and beyond (Boekaerts, 1999). They further develop social skills by befriending each other, and all of these influence learning in a positive way. Self-regulating one's study action only is insufficient, but rather there is a need to look at one's beliefs, values, intensions, and cognition, and regulate these so they have a

positive influence on achievement. Self-regulation enables professional learners to organise, plan and monitor their learning and take responsibility for their own learning.

Learning theories, such as constructivism, cooperative learning, and self-regulated learning and learning styles refer to the professional learning of professional learners. In the context of this study one could refer to cooperative professional learning, self-regulated professional learning, and others. With self-regulated learning, for example, its inclusion as part of the teacher education programme is two-dimensional. Students first need to learn how these constructs and related principles can be applied to their own practices as strategies for facilitating learning. Secondly in terms of their own professional learning and development, the steps of planning, implementing, monitoring and assessment relate to taking responsibility for executing the entire process of self-regulated professional development.

2.8   ASSESSMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Assessment is part of a teaching and learning process and learners are motivated by being assessed. It informs the teachers of points that need immediate attention and aspects that require improvement in their own teaching and on the curriculum as a whole. However, in this study I am looking at a different view of assessment. In this case the people involved are taking responsibility and ownership of quality assurance at practice level by themselves. It is also about the quality in the offering of any programme and related aspects as Slabbert et al. (2009) encourage professionals to ensure that the highest quality of learning is ensured. This implies that everything we as professionals (teachers and facilitators) do should be done in such a way that proof of quality assurance at practice level is evident. Formative and summative assessment methods are used to ensure that learning is assessed in a holistic fashion, thus encouraging self-assessment, peer assessment and facilitators' assessment. However, for assessment to be meaningful it should be conducted by academic staff members who have a good understanding of it and an appropriate level of competence. In the DTEP, the experience of professional learners enables them to carryout self-and peer assessment because they learn how it should be implemented and how to construct their own meaning about it. However, college personnel should monitor and moderate both formative and summative assessment to ensure reliability and fairness (NADEOSA, 2005). In order to promote reliability and fairness it should be extended to internal and external moderation for quality assurance purposes.

Quality assessment and assurance systems are firstly indicative of the extent to which learners have acquired knowledge, skills and dispositions considered necessary for effective and quality facilitating of learning. Secondly, quality assurance systems are intended to create and maintain conditions by which learners attain desired learning outcomes. It is important to look at assessment policies, programmes and activities to ascertain that they are functioning well towards achieving their goals. Facilitators should design quality learning opportunities that, inter alia, promote constructivist learning. Assessing professional development portfolios and available records should be based on the principles of appropriate learning theories such as constructivism. Constructivism is about confronting professional learners with real-life problems which are similar to the ones they face daily in their studies and practice, irrespective of their complexity. This motivates them to develop professional competence regarding their subject and high quality of facilitating learning. Assessment tasks should be authentic, holistic and learner-centred, as learning involves activities in a specific learning context within a subject or field of specialisation.

Before the DTEP was implemented the following were addressed and put into place to ensure that quality education is provided:

- policy and planning programme development
- professional learners enrolment criteria
- course material, professional learner support
- management and administration
- quality assurance.

Welch and Glennie (2005:7) state that quality in education may be explained in terms of meaningfulness to those engaged in the facilitating of learning and the learning process per se, related to individuals developing competence and confidence, and being empowered during and at the end of the learning process. The success of distance education is "well designed courses, learner support, efficient administrative processes and appropriate organizational structures and evaluation procedures". Segers and Dochy (1996:118) describe quality as "fit for a purpose" and as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals: "a high quality institution is one that clearly states its mission (or purpose) and is efficient and effective in meeting the goals that it set itself". However, the HIEs should look for continuous quality improvement as new innovations emerge. High quality learning material are key to the successful quality of a distance education programme, because professional learners rely more on the study material than the facilitator in that there is limited time for face-to-face interaction.

In most HEIs, learners are provided with study guides, notes and readers, with assignments included in the course's guidelines and support provided by facilitators. Examinations are written at the end of term, session or year. Quality assurance encompasses all aspects of the programme, including college management for resource procurement, learning community and policymakers. In the context of this study the focus is on tutors, professional learners, and inspectors. Worthen et al. (1997) and Mytsyk (2008) regard the key indicators for programme evaluation and quality assurance as planning, curriculum, attainment, learning and teaching, support for professional learners, ethos, resources and management, evaluation and assessment, and leadership. Some of the pertinent questions to be answered are:

▪ Are levels of achievement stated for professional learners?

▪ Have professional learners based their construction of meaning on prior learning?

▪ Have the facilitators considered individual needs and approaches for the professional learners?

Internal and external moderation of tests, assignments and examinations are carried out for quality assurance purposes, and it is mandatory to have external examiners for examinations to ensure quality and standards set by the institution. In the case of the DTEP, the National University of Lesotho (NUL) monitors all aspects of external examination. The use of external examiners is prominent in many commonwealth countries, for instance, Indonesia, Lesotho, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, having been influenced by the United Kingdom's Open University (Nielsen, 1997).

The intention of quality assurance is seen by Segers and Dochy (1996:119) as being to develop "processes so rigorous that imperfections are heavily reduced and ideally eradicated". However, as education is a human process errors cannot be eliminated, so quality assurance refers to the intention and activities planned to assure quality. Inculcated into this are internal quality assurance systems of which, according to Yates (2007), the main objectives are to:

▪ assist in enhancing high quality of services and 'perfect' standards

▪ provide stakeholders, including students and employers, with reliable and comprehensive information about the programme quality, achievements and improved management

▪ identify areas where quality is insufficient and what measures should be undertaken to improve quality.

Quality assurance processes aim at providing guarantees of the "carrying out of atomised processes by which particular products are 'claimed' to be produced" (Reid, 2005:4). It

implies therefore that, for HEIs, quality assurance is viewed as a way of ensuring they can demonstrate that appropriate measures are in place to satisfy their stakeholders. This is in terms of the education they provide, and it being of a standard that is satisfactory or comparable standard to that of other institutions. This emphasises control by and accountability to educational institutions, both of which must be measured and promoted.

2.8.1   PEER LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

This is characterised by two or more individuals taking responsibility for their own learning. McNiff (2012) and Yeadon-Lee (2013) refer to action learning as the process followed when professionals work together and take action to address a combined set of challenges. This, most often than not, works in a social setting context. This type of professional learning is based on support, trust and a sense of feeling safe. This learning strategy is sometimes referred to as experience-based learning. Cooperative learning and collaborative teaching are supported by three theoretical perspectives (Dresselhaus, 2005). Firstly, the cognitive approach deals with information processing, indicating that maximum learning takes place when individuals make it meaningful by making their own connections and applying it to new contexts. In small groups, members engage and help each other to make meaning, in line with the constructivist nature of distance education in this project. Secondly, motivational theory is more concerned with how the facilitator initiates learning whilst at the same time handing over responsibility of learning to learners. That is, the facilitator ensures that professional learners are eager to learn and take responsibility for their own learning. The facilitator tries to maintain high levels of internal and external motivation amongst the professional learners. Thirdly, when the environment is conducive for dialogue, cooperative and interactive, it is probable that high quality learning will take place. Everyone takes responsibility for his or her own learning, as opposed to the traditional ways. Therefore, professional learners should be truthful to themselves and to others.

When learning has taken place, peers may assess each other as another way of nurturing teaching and learning. Peer assessment can be described as an arrangement in which students enrolled in the same programme may assess each other, according to the amount, level, projects and quality of work given out. It may take the form of oral presentations, written outputs, group work and other professional skills (Topping, 1998). Peers may allocate grades or marks to each other, but in most instances senior students assess their junior counterparts. This gives practical experience at school which will be useful when professional learners

assess their learners. Feedback from peers may be more informative, especially if it is mutually agreed and accepted. Criteria for assessment have to be discussed and clarified to all participants, thus enabling professional learners to locate themselves in relation to the performance of others. Peer assessment is likely to build teamwork skills and promote active learning, and further develop communication and negotiation skills. Professional learners would learn to give and accept constructive criticism. Richardson (2005) further states that learner input is required to inform administrators for promotion purposes of facilitators, mostly through feedback questionnaires by which the professional learners rate the facilitators. According to Slabbert et al. (2009:71), "the question of education is not 'how well do you know' but how well can you learn."

2.9   SUMMARY

In this chapter a review of literature of previous studies on the subject of distance education programmes was done. The purpose of literature was to identify, locate and analyse documents with information related to the research problem. A broad overview of the successes, challenges and teacher quality in distance education programmes was discussed. Infused into each are quality assurance strategies. This was followed by the relevant theories and strategies applicable for the purpose of this study. These strategies include cooperative learning, self-regulated learning and peer assessment. These are derived from literature and therefore inculcate quality assurance strategies in line with the study.

In the next chapter I narrate the methodology used in collecting and analysing data.

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CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the variables used in the project to maximise the depth of information acquired. It discusses the research design followed in undertaking qualitative research to explore what quality assurance practices are employed at LCE for the DTEP. Firstly, it deals with qualitative narrative research as an approach chosen for this project, then discusses the procedure used (sampling),the data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, and technical considerations. The focus of this study is on the quality processes in place at LCE. The participants' responses to the interview questions were analysed and the information obtained highlighted the quality assurance practices in place. This would enable me to make suggestions and recommendations for further improvement on the part of the college.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as a way of emphasising processes and meanings that are not fully examined or measured. It is used to investigate the quality of relationships, activities and situations and narration whilst Czarniawaska (2004:38) describes it as:

> … the way people engage in a dynamic process of incremental refinement of their stories. The stories are recounted … compared to an unfolding storyline to keep the organization concerned from repeating historically bad choices and inviting a repetition of the past.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Holiday (2002) write that qualitative research allows participants to express themselves freely and the researcher to gather as much information as possible about the topic. Participants were expected to narrate aspects of quality assurance practices in place in their programme.

Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews, in a carefully planned schedule of initial questions followed by probing questions as required. This is mostly used in the

education environment because it gives respondents an opportunity to respond freely but in a contained manner. Endless talking can be stopped by the researcher (Wragg, 2002). I made use of planned questions for professional learners, tutors and coordinators, then analysed the data to make meaning out of it in relation to the research questions. Attention was paid to building rapport with participants and communicating freely. Qualitative research employs an inductive research strategy that focuses on process, meaning and understanding, because human behaviour is bound to the context in which it occurs (Merriam, 1998; Razavier et al., 2002). Qualitative researchers believe that to develop an understanding of human experience one has to take into account the interplay of both the researchers' and participants' values and beliefs (Rizavich et al., 2002), therefore I needed to interact freely with them to develop a deeper understanding of their experiences on quality assurance processes.

The study was conducted in the Lesotho College of Education (LCE) in December 2010, during the two-week residential session. During school holidays the campus is used for the preparation of and conducting examinations for the DTEP. Facilitators are members of the LCE staff, while markers are mostly high school teachers in their respective specialisations. I visited the LCE to conduct and record interviews electronically, and took some notes of behaviour I observed demonstrated by participants. The research problem requires narratives and therefore qualitative research was appropriate. Merriam (1998) indicates that qualitative research differs from quantitative research by qualitative description and induction of events. In this case participants narrated the processes in place for quality assurance and how they were implemented. I was thus able to analyse and establish the extent to which quality assurance processes were being adhered to.

3.2.1   NARRATIVE QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Narrative enquiry begins with experience as expressed in lived and told stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In investigating the experiences of a community of professional learners towards quality assurance practices it was therefore necessary to adopt qualitative narrative research. I gained insight into what quality assurance practices were in place and how they were being implemented. This is discussed in detail in chapter Four. I recorded all the interviews using a voice recorder after obtaining the consent of the participants. For the purpose of transcriptions, I played all the conversations and repeated them for ensuring accuracy of the written version. The use of a voice recorder enabled me to listen to the responses repeatedly to capture the meanings and implications. Clandinin and Connelly

(2000) and write that narrative inquiry is a valid method of understanding experience, whilst Creswell (2005) list its characteristics as:

- Experiences of an individual− social and personal
- Chronology of experiences − past, present and future experiences
- Live stories− first person, oral accounts of actions obtained through field texts
- Restoring −from the field texts
- Coding the field texts for themes or categories
- Incorporating the context or place into the story or themes. (Mohapi, 2007: 18)

3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997:164), a population is "a group of elements or cases whether individuals, objects or events that conform to specific criteria and which we intend to generalize the results of the research; also referred to as target group." The target group for this study were the professional learners enrolled on the DTEP, and the facilitators and inspectors. Patton (1990:244) indicates that:

> There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will be credible, and what can be done with available time and resources.

For this study the choice of participants was based on their importance as stakeholders in the DTEP.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:100) stipulate four considerations of a sample, namely its size, representativeness and parameters, accessibility and the strategy to be used. Other factors taken into consideration include time available, the purpose of the study, and the costs and nature of the population. The sample should be as representative as possible of the population. For Mathekga (2004), purposive sampling can be used without excluding participants who can provide rich information but rather to achieve diversity of information and ensure the aims of the study are achieved. In the study, purposeful sampling was used to identify 13 professional learners, three coordinators and three tutors. One senior manager showed willingness to participate and was included.

According to Creswell (2006), researchers select individuals and sites that are informative of the central phenomenon. In choosing the individuals, the researcher has to identify participants who are information rich, as were the professional learners, coordinators and tutors involved with the DTEP.

McMillan and Schumacher (1997), De Vos (1998) and Mathekga (2004) concur that the researcher's knowledge of the population is useful in using purposeful sampling as he or she is able to use judgment to select the most suitable 'information rich' participants. For the purpose of this study the coordinators assisted me in selecting a sample of professional learners. For the coordinators and tutors I used convenient sampling, with the coordinators present when I visited the college giving their telephone numbers and agreeing to the interview dates.

3.4   RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The research procedure included purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews as qualitative data collection techniques. For Ary et al. (1996), determining the degree of accuracy one wishes to achieve is important when estimating the sample size. As an inspector, my interest was on positive practice change by professional learners and I was concerned about continuous improvement being offered to unqualified teachers and under qualified teachers through the implementation of quality assurance of the programme. Thirteen professional learners were considered sufficient for the purposes of this study, and they should have completed the second year of the four-year programme. They had been in the programme for a reasonable length of time and therefore were able to provide sufficiently rich data. The three coordinators and senior manager who were interviewed were able to provide data on policy issues on quality assurance. Furthermore, they were directly involved with the actual professional development programme.

The three tutors included in the sample were chosen on the basis of their proximity to schools, being located at sites near them and employed to visit professional learners in their classrooms to provide support and to observe them in action. Their experiences were valuable in this study as they observed professional development in practice, as well as being responsible for marking assignment scripts and being in a position to identify challenges faced by professional learners.

Professional learners who were willing to participate were requested to meet the researcher in the classroom prepared for by one of the tutors. I explained the purpose and the procedure for the research, including the right to pull out at any stage of the project without any consequences. About 20 professional learners initially showed interest; however, purposefully I sampled 13 and ensured a fair representation of males and females. These professional learners were allocated pseudonyms to protect their identities. Their biographical profiles are presented in the tables below.

Coordinators and tutors were conveniently sampled. The coordinators who were present during my first visit to the college were invited and a briefing discussion held with coordinators willing to take part. One senior administrator was included because I believed that he was in a position to know about the programme more than anybody else.

Table 3.1: Participants' biographical profile

Professional learner	Teaching experience (years)	Number of years enrolled in DTEP	Qualification	Gender
S1	5	3	COSC	Male
S2	5	3	COSC	Female
S3	6	4	COSC	Male
S4	10	4	COSC	Female
S5	9	3	COSC	Female
S6	5	3	COSC	Male
S7	11	3	COSC	Female
S8	15	4	PTC	Male
S9	5	3	COSC	Female
S10	5	4	COSC	Female
S11	6	3	COSC	Male
S12	5	3	COSC	Male
S13	5	3	COSC	Female

Coordinators	No of years working with LCE	Number of years working with DTEP	Qualification	Gender
C1	5	5	MEd.	Male
C2	8	8	MEd.	Female
C3	18	10	MA. +MEd.	Female

Tutors	Experience as a tutor	Number of years working with DTEP	Qualification	Gender
T1	5	5	BEd. Honours	Male
T2	1	1	MEd.	Female
T3	16	10	MEd.	Female

Senior Administrator	Number of years working with LCE	Number of years as a Senior Administrator	Qualification	Gender
SA	12	4	PhD.	Male

The selected coordinators and tutors had a varying number of years teaching experience in the DTEP but all were in a position to provide rich information towards achieving the objectives of my study. Cohen et al. (2007) describe purposeful sampling as handpicking the sample because they possess particular characteristics being sought. They meet specific needs.

On the other hand, convenience sampling as explained by Cohen et al. (2007) involves choosing the nearest participants until the required number is achieved. Even though the coordinators and inspectors were sampled by convenience, it did not compromise the quality of the results. There were seven coordinators in the DTEP assigned to seven different areas in the country, therefore three out of seven was considered representative. There were 13 tutors in DTEP assigned to different sites in the country. In each area there were two or three sites, depending on the number of schools and their proximity to professional learners and terrain.

3.5   DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The following data collection techniques were employed: semi-structured interviews and field notes. Semi-structured interviews were used to keep both the interviewer and interviewee within the scope of this study at the same time eliciting information from the participants. The field notes assisted in recording those aspects that were not said but played a part during interviews. These techniques assisted in making conclusions for the study.

3.5.1   SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

As an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of interest, interviewing moves away from manipulating people as human subjects towards generating a mutual knowledge through conversations. Knowledge is constructed between participants:

It enables participants to voice their interpretations of the world in which they live, and how to express how they regard situations from their own point of view… the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable (Cohen et al., 2007:49).

In this research project I used semi-structured interviews, giving professional learners, coordinators and tutors their own interview schedules, though some questions cut across the three schedules. Mohapi (2007) argues that semi-structured interviews allow participants to have their voices heard, and in this study the participants explained their understanding of quality assurance; what processes were in place in the programme and how they were implemented (frequency). I had built up a good working relationship with the participants, which made my work easier and enabled them to express themselves freely.

During the interviews I ensured that the participants understood what was expected of them and I reminded them of their rights, avoiding long explanations. Semi-structured questions were predetermined and all professional learners received the same questions. The sequence of questioning was the same throughout the process, with interviews conducted on a one-to-one basis. Keeping the interview questions simple and straight forward helped us to keep focused. During the interviews I probed to clear up ambiguities, extract a more precise meaning and find out hidden or deep meaning from the responses.

I recorded all the interviews on an electronic voice recorder, with the permission of the participants, thus enabling me to listen repeatedly at a later date and to transcribe the data. I listened to each interview and wrote down every sentence verbatim. Silverman (2008) acknowledges the importance of the modern electronic voice recorder in allowing the interviews to be played back in the original form as often as the researcher requires. I was able to access the responses at anytime, thus helping me concentrate on the task of questioning with full confidence that everything was being recorded.

3.5.2   FIELD NOTES

Gay and Airasian (1992:223) state that "field notes describe what the observer heard, experienced and thought about during observation." I had a notepad at all times during interactions to record all that was not said but expressed. During the interviews and

discussions I took notes, because there are some cues that are not said during the interviews but rather are expressed though body language, such as abrupt pauses, shrugging of shoulders, nodding, facial expression, and tone of the voice. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000:93) writes: "field notes, in an important sense, also say much about what is not said and noticed." The collected data was documented and edited.

3.6   PROCEDURE FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Patton (1990) describes data analysis as the process of categorising, synthesising and seeking for patterns in the collected data. Each interview was transcribed (spoken words converted into written words verbatim) by playing it repeatedly until every word was included and ready for categorising. Data was coded and grouped into different sub-headings and themes began to emerge. In the process of member checking, transcriptions from the LCE staff were read by them to ensure they had been correctly transcribed. There were no significant changes, and only a few minor typographical and grammatical errors corrected by the facilitators. Generally there were no queries with the transcripts, though I could not return them to professional learners because they were from different sites around the country. However, I played and replayed the recordings and requested one of my colleagues to go through the transcripts whilst listening. There were no significant errors.

Some codes were merged into one as the analysis and patterns began to emerge. I paid attention to every word during the interviews. Whole sentences were captured and screened carefully and patiently. Data was analysed immediately after transcriptions with repeated statements grouped into one category, and patterns began to emerge. The purpose of the data analysis was to make meaning of what was said and to develop understanding of participants' responses. Each interview was transcribed and categorised with data then coded and grouped into different sub-headings.

The transcribed data was analysed inductively. Themes, categories and patterns emerged from the data as opposed to being in place before it was collected. This is advocated by De Vos (1998), who explains that data is 'tapering' downwards like a funnel, open at the beginning and more direct towards the end. Analysing qualitative data depends largely on the creativity of the researcher, who has to be intellectually astute when working around it to make meaning.

Atlas.ti.6, a computer based programme that can be used to analyse qualitative data, was used to analyse data and to identify patterns. Having transcribed the interviews I converted them into rich text format from *Microsoft Word* format because *Atlas.ti.6*operates in rich text format only. I imported the transcripts into the hermeneutic unit (HU) which became the main data source for analysis to determine quality assurance practices in LCE. The HU consisted of eleven primary documents (interviews) labelled according to codes assigned to them, as shown in the participants' profiles above. These corresponded to the number of interviews conducted. During analysis, comments were added to the HU to add information as patterns began to emerge.*Atlas.ti*6.0 uses a unique numbering system to identify quotations from primary documents in the HU. This numbering system includes primary document number, number of quotations in a primary document and line number where the quotation is found. Typically, "4: 33 (55: 87)" means that the quotation originates from primary document number four, quotation number 33 in that primary document and is in paragraph 55, line 87 of the primary document.

Whilst data analysis was carried out inductively, it was important to categorise similar patterns and themes as they emerged. Each category was assigned a unique code to capture its essence, with the aim of reconstructing all collected data. Merriam (1998:183) states that "categories should reflect the purpose of the research. In effect, categories are your answers to your research questions." The following categories were identified:

- entry requirements for the DTEP
- teaching experience by professional learners
- qualifications of coordinators and tutors
- length of service of coordinators and tutors
- availability of resources
- evaluation and assessment procedures: policies and procedures that support and relate to teaching and learning process and how LCE evaluates and assesses the professional learners.
- teaching and learning process: number and nature of contact sessions (includes activities related to pedagogy)
- teaching and learning material
- professional learner support –services offered by LCE, which include admissions, other staff and activities by the institution that help to ensure an environment conducive to maintaining and developing quality DE.

This enabled me to make general statements about internal quality assurance practices at LCE and is fully described in Chapter Four.

3.7   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I applied and received permission from the MOET to conduct the research and approval to conduct this study from the ethics committee of the University of Pretoria. When I visited the college the programme manager acknowledged receipt of the communiqué from the registrar of LCE informing him about conducting the research. He was very willing to assist.

As an inspector, it was easy for me to communicate with the officials of the LCE to arrange suitable dates for interviews. These were conducted at LCE during the contact session in the offices of the DTEP. My management skills and knowledge of most coordinators and I was not meeting them for the first time at the college. I knew some from previous encounters as an organising secretary for the Mathematics and Science Association, some from university years, and one with whom I had worked as inspectors. Others I had interacted with around 2001, in preparation to launch the DTEP. This familiarity made it easier to conduct the research. Furthermore, I had conducted more than 60 interviews with learners, educators, heads of departments and principals in some Gauteng schools whilst still a resident student at the university of Pretoria.

Prior to the interviews I explained the rights of the participants and humbly requested them to cooperate. I requested their consent before we could sit for interviews and explained that there would be no incentives or compensation. The most important consideration is confidentiality in research and I made a promise that whatever we discussed would be confidential. I used pseudonyms to identify interview transcripts and the privacy of the participants was not invaded. I emphasised that participation was voluntary and that participants could opt out without suffering any consequences. I further explained that they could decide not to respond to certain questions.

3.8   TRUSTWORTHINESS

Wellington (2000) and Marshall and Rossman (2010) describe trustworthiness as an alternative to reliability and validity, preferred to validity and reliability because it has four components: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Trustworthiness

was achieved when a saturation point was reached. Quality assurance practices were elicited from the interviews, and participants repeated important points, themes and patterns as they recurred. Credibility is related to truthfulness of data presented, from people who are involved with the programme at different levels. Their responses point in the same direction as quality assurance practices in the programme, and so help render the research credible.

I collected the data personally and spent about forty minutes on average with each participant during the interviews. Time spent engaged in an interview improves credibility of results. The responses of each participant were checked against responses of others. As indicated above, I carried out member checking by returning the transcripts to the coordinators and tutors because they were easy to contact. They verified what was on paper against what had been said during the interviews.

During the planning of semi-structured interviews, which formed part of the ethical clearance application, my supervisor went through the questions. We further discussed the appropriate sample size. This also further increased the credibility of the result.

3.9   CRYSTALLISATION

Crystallisation is described as the continual and persistent questioning of the data in an attempt to expose the analysis to optimum experiences. As it grows and proceeds, value is added to meaning, expanding our understanding of the phenomenon under discussion and scrutinising verbal and non-verbal gestures to elicit the participants' meaning. Through the electronic recorder verbal gestures were elicited. Field notes provided non-verbal gestures and emotional expressions. Through personal experience and managerial skills I was able to draw conclusions regarding the implementation of internal quality assurance processes. Crystallisation can be described as scrutinising verbal and non-verbal gestures to elicit the participants' meaning.

3.10   SUMMARY

In this chapter I have discussed the research methods used, presenting research procedures, sampling processes used and data collection techniques. I have further indicated how I collected data by first meeting my participants to explain the study and then setting a timetable for interviews. The processes of purposeful and convenience sampling of

participants were described, and methods to ensure trustworthiness and crystallisation outlined.

In the next chapter I present the empirical data as it emerged from the interviews and how data was interpreted.

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CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present data as it emerged from the interviews. *Atlas.ti* was used for data analysis and frequency tables emerged. These are discussed in this chapter. *Atlas.ti* is able to generate quantitative data from qualitative analysis. Numerical frequency patterns were generated during analysis and are available as Addendum 1. The major findings are presented as follows: gap between practical work and theory; organisational issues; learning materials development and distribution, facilities; assessment and feedback; student support, teachers' personal development and fulfilment; stability and development of LCE staff; access to programme; and examinations issues. There is a general discussion on the findings at the end of the chapter.

This is a collective participation of professionals as learners during the contact session followed by examinations at the LCE. To them content matter is emphasised. The question to answer is: are the participants contributing to their own professional learning through facilitators' feedback? Is it related to what they teach in their classrooms? The cases are self-reported by professionals as learners, facilitators and a senior manager in their own words, in the locations selected by them and at the times set by them. I am of the opinion that they provided the data that is rich to make findings and hence a conclusion about internal quality assurance processes in the DTEP.

Data generated is quantitative in nature even though it has been derived from qualitative means of data collection. The data generated is mostly statistical. It can be viewed from the addenda one and two: quotes and the frequency of quotes. The selected quotations in this section highlight the most frequent that emerged from the interviews.

4.2 CODING

Coding is the procedure which attaches meaning to the transcriptions from qualitative research. In this research the transcriptions are coded as follows:

Table 4.1:   Coding

Code	Represents		Code	Represents
C1I	Coordinator 1 interview		FG 1	Focus group 1
C2I	Coordinator 1 interview		FG 2	Focus group 2
SMI	Senior manager interview		P	Independent professional learner
ST1I	Tutor 1 interview		St 1	Professional learner 1
ST2I	Tutor 2 interview		St 2	Professional learner 2
ST3I	Tutor 3 interview		St 3	Professional learner 3
ST4I	Tutor 4 interview		St 4	Professional learner 4
PD	Primary document		St 5	Professional learner 5
RES.	Respondent		St 6	Professional learner 6

For members of Focus Group1 I decided to use pseudonyms tabled as such in this data presentation.

4.3   ADMISSION AND ACCESS TO PROGRAMME

Admission to the programme takes into consideration teaching experience, grades obtained at COSC level, and whether applicants hold a PTC. Every professional learner who meets the requirements is admitted, that is COSC 3rd class pass or PTC, with a maximum of 50 per district due to limited space. As a MOET initiative supported by government partners, it is readily accessible to teachers wishing to obtain diplomas.

4.4   PROPER ORGANISATION

Literature suggests that for quality assurance purposes the management has to monitor contact sessions, examinations and address issues raised by learners. There is a general consensus that much has to be done on an organisational level to improve the programme. There is a need to address a lack and shortage of tutors in some subjects, with some coming late to class during contact sessions or not arriving at all. This can be found in this extract (24: 75; 345:348-352):

Table 4.2:   Organisation

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para	Line(s)
Palesa	We didn't have tutors for art this year; we didn't have the tutor since from the first workshop until the last workshop.	24	75	345	348-350
Palesa	We did the assignment on our own and we don't know if we are correct or not.	24	75	345	351
Leboli	What I have seen is there is, in this college there is a problem of arts lecturers that's why in some sites there are no arts teachers.	24	75	345	352
Palesa	It also has to hire more and more teachers. There is lack of tutors. So, college should employ more teachers.	24	100	417	417
Focus group	Both. Mmm	24	100	417	419 & 421
Palesa	You might find that, you spend an hour sitting in the classrooms without a tutor, then he will come and make so many excuses and say that there are no teachers and time has gone.	24	100	417	424-426
P	Sometimes when we go, we went there we found that teachers that help us are absent.	23	37	154	154
P	Apart from that, if in our workshops at our sites the teachers who help us can attend the workshops and help us I think that can help us a lot.	23	37	154	154
SM	…, it's those problematic areas such as arts, music, health and physical education; those are areas that you will find those people.	40	31	14	16

There is a general agreement between the professionals as learners, facilitators and senior management of the college that there are still some problematic areas especially in the field of music and art. Professionals as learners are not receiving full value in these learning areas. In some instances facilitators do not attend scheduled sessions.

4.5   GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Practical skills acquisition is an integral part in distance education. This enables integration of theory and practice when practising teachers are in the workplace improving their skills and constructing new meaning. Quality education can be achieved with proper facilities, well

developed learning material, well resourced classrooms and specialised venues (science laboratories, computer centres, etc).

Professional learners' interviews indicated a gap between theoretical knowledge provided by facilitators and practical knowledge expected by professional learners. The following quotes from the professional learners illustrate this about computer science (24:10; 55:55-60):

Table 4.3:   Theory and practice

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
St 3	We do have some problems. We were introduced to computer during orientation but we did not given the chance to do computer, so, there are some challenges that we meet on the way like if we want to go to internet sometimes we do know nothing about the computer.	30	10	55	55–60
St 4	In our assignments there are questions related to computer whereas we are ignorant about it as a tool of teaching.	30	58	55	305–309
St 3	I was thinking that when I came here that by the fourth year, I would have done some sort experiments in this labs but I have not been in the lab. Those are some of the expectations going to the lab and testing something some sort of things.	30	58	55	305–309
St 2	I think they should also improve teaching; they should apply practicals more than theory.	30	79	55	358

Computer education is a great challenge in that professionals as learners indicate that they have not been afforded chance to use computers. However, questions arise that require at least some competence in using a computer.

4.6   LEARNING MATERIAL

The most challenging and frustrating aspect in the programme was learning material. Both, professional learners and facilitators agreed that learning material often reach professional learners late (24:18; 84: 84), (24:18; 86:92) and (24:44; 221:221):

Table 4.4:   Learning material

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
Leboli	Those modules they sometimes came late.	24	18	84	84
Palesa	Sometimes after writing the exams.	24	18	84	84
Focus group	Mmm, yes. Mmm, yes. Yes, it happens.	24	18	86	92
Sir	I was going to say the same thing.	24	18	86	92
Mantšo	Sometimes yes, sometimes no course?	24	44	221	221
Mantšo	We are sometimes given questions, based on something is not in the module so we have to go and research. And that's where we have problems.	24	44	221	221
Focus group	Yes.	24	44	221	221
P	I think the modules that we use have to be changed they have to be updated because some of the things they are far behind now.	23	34	146	148

4.7   INTERACTION

Distance learning promotes individual independence while learning and working, through discussions, debate and asking critical questions. Dresselhaus (2005) indicates that cooperation amongst professionals as learners results in higher achievement and greater productivity, more caring and social competence amongst others. Contact sessions for distance learners are vital to the successful completion of their studies. They need facilitators to discuss several issues, peer support and clarification of misconceptions.

Interaction between tutors and students and between coordinators and students is an important factor in quality education. Both students and facilitators indicated that there was minimum interaction. Generally, full-time support leads to successful implementation of the programme. Resources are not adequate and adjustments have to be done when the programme is running, such as transport costs and payment of the tutors. Coordinator 1 stated (42:16; 75:75):

Table 4.5:   Interaction

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
C1	As is supposed to be actually.	42	16	75	75
C1	Yes, this is what we talk, all about it all the times but we don't do it, that's truth we talk about it but we don't do it, like now we will be told that after all on campus we are told to go out there but how do we get there to the sites, how do we get there you only sit at the house where you live, you can move to a school that ten to twelve km up in the mountains far away from where you stay, so it's not easy. So it's like you are not there or you are between our work and college that's how it sees at a moment.	42	16	75	75

4.8   LACK OF FACILITIES

Lack of libraries in other parts of the country is also a major issue. It is very difficult for professional learners to study and research under these circumstances. Libraries can be found in the capital city but it very challenging in the districts, as teachers said (24:18, 24:19; 86:92), (24:20; 93:94) and (24: 21; 96:99):

Table 4.6:   Facilities

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
Leboli	Those modules they sometimes came late.	24	18	86	92
Kananelo	… and they are shallow. Information is not enough.	24	19	86	92
Kananelo	Some of the questions are so challenging in the sense that we are forced to go out and make researches of which we don't get enough information.	24	19	86	92
Kananelo	Content itself.	24	19	96	96
Palesa	Even though we are complaining about limited in the modules but we are allowed to go to the library. We are given a chance that, of going to the library if you don't find enough information, we are allowed to go to the library.	24	21	96	99
Potso	It's just that we are far from the college	24	21	26	99

4.9 REVIEW OF MATERIAL

I observed that the teaching and learning material, including modules, had been developed in 2000/ 2001 and not reviewed, however, I was made to believe that the modules were under review and nearing completion during the data collection period (December 2010) for use in 2011 academic year (26:25; 78:81):

Table 4.7: **Review of material**

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
T 1	Modules… they haven't been reviewed. We started reviewing them, we are in the process of reviewing them now.	26	25	78	81
T 1	From the year two thousand and four if I am not mistaken but the students started in two thousand and two prior to their using them.	26	25	78	81
T 1	We started last year (2009)… as for assignments; they keep on changing every year, yes, because the first modules had assignments in them, so that we should make assignments booklets every year.	26	25	78	81
C2	I think we started in February this year two thousand and ten ever since was it two thousand. Yah when we started writing the modules. If I remember well two thousand and one? Yah two thousand - two thousand and one - somewhere there. So, two thousand and ten was the very first time that they were reviewed like sit down and look at the modules but throughout the times you would find that there was something that you didn't quite like in the module, so, you went ahead and changed or reviewed and then, the students also used to come and say we see a certain criteria issue that we want to look and see if it's correct. So, it has been ongoing at the classes but officially it started this year February when though it's not done yet, not finished, it's work in progress.	38	51	71	71
P	I think the modules that we use have to be changed they have to be updated because some of the things they are far behind now.	23	34	146	148

Facilitators were in agreement that the learning material need to be updated and the process had started. It was also the feeling of the professionals as learners that they are outdated.

4.10 ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Assessment is an integral part of learning. In order to be valid it should be coherent, flexible and executed at multiple sites. It should fulfil an objectiveaim that requires the allocation of grades to learners for the purpose of promotion into the next class and/ or certification Learners are motivated when assessed. It informs the facilitator of aspects that need immediate attention and require improvement in their own process of facilitating professional learning. Formative and summative assessments are used to assure that learning is assessed in a holistic fashion. It includes self-assessment, peer assessment and facilitator's assessment. There is a need to ensure timely sending of learning material, assignments and prompt feedback.

Assessment is 'adequate' and dates for submissions are set well in advance. Feedback is also supposed to be provided on set dates but, as one professional learner indicated that this impacts on preparations for the next assignment and / or examinations. There seemed to be good intentions and acceptable standards for assessment but the challenge was that the set targets were not being met. Professional learners reported that (24: 43; 205:218):

Table 4.8: Assessment and feedback

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
Sir	With the assignments, we are given chance to ask those questions. The tutor comes and (long pause) becomes and tries to help us tackle the questions from them we share discussions from the rest it is your responsibility to add more on that.	24	43	205	218
Leboli	Three assignments	24	43	205	218
Mary	At our sites. It depends sir, we arrange with the tutors when we are going to submit. It depends whether the assignment may be more different of needs more information, so they give us time to find information and agree when we submit our assignments.	24	43	205	218
Post	In sometimes, let me say, usually we are used to submit the assignments during the next workshop. For instance let me say we attend the first workshop; we will receive the assignment booklet and do our assignment. The next month or the next or maybe after 3 weeks let's say it is our next workshop, when you come for the next workshop you come with your assignment.	24	43	205	218

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para	Line(s)
Focus group	First assignment. Workshop.	24	43	205	218
Post	Yes, sir.	24	43	205	218
Leboli	We normally know that the first year or the second year or the third year or the fourth year that, you see, we are given the assignments if we are having what? Maybe five months pass and then we receive the assignment booklets we are left with one month. So, we do our assignment within one month sometimes. Very late sir, in one month. We are taught then we are writing the assignments and the next workshop which is next week we are submitting the assignment then we are given the second assignment.	24	43	205	218
Pontšo	I just want to add on that, what sir was saying concerning the submission of assignments. Sometimes you may find that we are not given enough chance to write assignments, you may find that we are given only three weeks to tackle the assignments of which I consider it as two much work and that with a short time.	24	43	205	218

Quality assessment systems indicate the extent to which learners have acquired and generated new knowledge, skills and dispositions considered necessary for effective learning.

4.11   STAFF RECRUITMENT

With the exception of one tutor, all the members of the staff interviewed had at least a master's degree. This was a 'good' sign because the LCE recruits highly qualified staff for the diploma programme. Most had lengthy experience with the college, with one having 18years and another 16, working at the college (26:1; 10:10-13):

Table 4.9:   Staff recruitment (From within)

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para	Line(s)
T 1	In this college or ST ***** [1]. (Whistles) Since 1992.	26	1	10	10-13
T 2	(pause) Hmm, since nineteen ninety four.	25	1	3	4

Other members of the staff had been school teachers before, and were holders of degrees and/or higher qualifications.

Table 4.9.1:   Staff recruitment (Higher degrees)

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
C1	When I started as a coordinator, I had only what we normally call junior degree or what you call um at the moment. I am holding a master's degree in A******[2] that's as far as I can so.	42	3	4	4

There are staff members from other African countries whom professional learners referred to M*** (using a highly offensive term) (24:74; 354:354):

Table 4.9.2:   Staff recruitment (Foreign nationals)

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
Palesa	Some of them are m********[3] and they're busy with their businesses (laughter).	24	74	354	354

4.12   ORIENTATION AND STABILITY

The experience of the staff (tutors and coordinators) shows that there is stability. They range in experience from 18 years to one year of service to the college. Even the tutor with one year experience at college had been a school inspector for six years following eight years as a teacher. This enhances continuity within the programme. Changes that have to be made were received, and implemented by the same staff.

The role of facilitators needs to be clarified, i.e., whether they are to facilitate learning in order to ensure quality learning and higher order thinking, or explain/teach the content of modules –promoting lower level thinking. Their role in terms of observations should also be clarified I could sense an element of uncertainty between the professional learners and facilitators, with the former expecting to be taught but the latter indicating that they were there to direct when professional learners had challenges.

Neither group were given adequate induction (even when provided) to carry out their duties. Tutor 2 said:

Table 4.10: **Stability of staff**

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
T 2	No, not really, not really. No, I didn't get a specialised training.	35	3-4	11-12	11&16
T 2	Basically I did teaching at, I have, I got secondary teacher's certificate that I obtained in the in the college here so then when I went to varsity am I did my first degree in HMS then honours in S S. So I really didn't have a proper training to become a tutor it's just that I have an experience in teaching.	35	5	16	17
C1	That is supposed to be done at the beginning of every academic year and that is the plan and the problems being problems of maybe finances or whatever that comes out of the college itself or the programme that of which I do not know. Sometimes I am told that, that cannot happen there are no funds. So if someone says no workshop no funds then we just stop there because you do not funds to fund that yourself (laughs vigorously) it's supposed to be at the beginning and that where we really talk about all these this things. It did happen once as far as I know aah it was maybe, I think it was last year when that took place and it never happened again because of maybe financial problems that might be there in the programme.	42	37	108	108

[1 & 3] would identify the participant(s)

[2] A bad name for foreign nationals from other African countries

4.13 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

An administrator emphasised that LCE was insistent on recruiting qualified staff and developing the existing staff to attain higher degrees He stated that: (40:31; 14:14-18):

Table 4.11: **Staff development**

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
SM	First of all, academic staff (pause) …, I am writing, putting down all, this is what I was writing yesterday (shows me report paper) all events, constrains, challenges in two thousand and ten. One of the things that we … is continuing professional development of our staff. Making sure that they are up to scratch, in terms of their professional preparedness to deliver quality and that is done through short-term internal training, it is done through short term external	40	31	14	14 – 18

	training, it is done through long term training. Long term will include people who are going for master's degree, going for PhDs. Currently we have about … six we should be having not less than seven people who are doing PhDs in various fields, science covering biology specifically, and science education, various others and there are those also doing their master's degrees. <u>These are lecturers, so that's a long term training but for short term training we have a lot of internal training especially in the use of ICT for training (emphasis) purposes…</u> to train staff short term internally and externally we have had quite a number of them going to various place on short courses, two at different times went to Malaysia, UNESCOM sponsored workshops and another one has recently returned from Japan these are teaching staff and another one on Early Childhood Education has recently returned from Singapore so, we are capacitating to use that word, staff so that even as we talk quality they live quality, they know what quality is and they are up to scratch in terms of meeting the demands of the century or twenty first century learning as it is called.				
SM	We have different levels of academic staffing, we have at a lower and what are called teaching assistants, that's just a beginning level, … from there we have an assistant lecturer, … has a bachelor's degree, yes, and most of the people we recruit if they have a Bachelor's degree will start there,… we have a lecturer, … who has a master's degree when he/she joins us will start there or who has a post graduate qualification it may not be a master's but post graduate qualification below master's for example, yes, honours, postgraduate … but we may also have someone that's a lecturer two. Lecturer one is master degrees in the first place but it's master's degrees with the people with considerable amount of experience and production. Production of reports, some papers, presentations in various for a that's lecturer one and a very higher lecturer and then …. Senior lecturer will normally be someone with a PhD or a master's degree holder of highest possible productivity (in research journals). Then professors depending on (inaudible)…. Mainly, it's those problematic areas such as arts, music, health and physical education; those are areas that you will find those people. It is not so long ago in Lesotho that we began to have degrees in those fields, and I'm pleased that the first cohort of people who went for training in those levels were recommended by me when I was then a manager , suffering and having to call Mister.	40	31	14	18

TT, MT because they are athletes to help in physical education and so on. So, a lot of them are here that I recommended the Ministry of Education and Training agreed that I take them from their teaching posts in schools for training, and we intended to absorb them in the college and they are here now. They are about six of those. Yes.

The senior manager was enthusiastic about the staff continually developing themselves either internally or in pursuing higher degrees elsewhere in the world.

4.14   PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND FULFILMENT

Professionals as learners have a feeling that they are facilitating learning "well" in their classrooms after enrolling in the DTEP. This is validated by Nielsen's (1997) and Vroeijenstijn's (2001) explanation of quality which is argued by means of the following questions: Are we doing the right things? Are we doing the right things the right way? Do we achieve what we are claiming to achieve? Are the professional learners making their students learn for understanding? It is about their desire for learning and interest. The improved remuneration has motivated even more teachers to enrol into the DTEP. The welfare of the teachers is taken care of by the state because education is both a right and a social service.

Professional learners felt that the programme had helped them to do things differently. One professional learner indicated that on the first day at school the principal had allocated him a classroom, gave him the syllabus, scheme and record book and told him to go and teach. The teacher had neither the proper teaching experience nor qualification. In his words (24:86; 383: 383-398):

Table 4.12:   Personal development and fulfilment

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para	Line(s)
Mary	(laughter) you know what, when you came to the school for the first day, the principal just tells you, here is your class you have to go in class three and you don't know what you are going to do there. You just, you have some problems (sir, you are really struggling) but as and when you teach let's say the syllabus say you have to teach about present tense, past tense and future tense, you teach present tense and past and the same time and you didn't know that you have to take the first one present tense and make	24	86	383	383

	sure that the kids do understand and then you go to the past tense but as I have been here at the college have understood that I have to do things step by step.			
Post	And we didn't even know how, the syllabus how to use it. At the end of the day principal needs the lesson plan, schemes so we have learned much since we have been here.	24	86	383	384
Palesa	And disciplinary matters, we have developed in the classroom only. I am able to discipline children since I enrolled in the programme.	24	86	383	386
Mantšo	I want to add on that, this is the major part that this programme played to us. I know exactly that, I was punishing pupils by whipping each and every time but now I have learned how to punish without the stick.	24	86	383	388-390
Chorus	(laughter) not allowed.	24	86	383	391
Kananelo	I have learned teacher (inaudible). Teacher professional ethics.	24	86	383	392 & 394
Leboli	Ethics, in the classroom situation first we, I don't know how to maybe tackle the mathematics problems so, I give the children the work and maybe I say open on page thirty and do number one (laughter in agreement) A, B, C. so that I rest there waiting for when they are witting then I make but now I know that as a teacher when we teach(emphasis) Maths we must do what? We must work the problems first and then after that I give the chance to the children to go on and I work as a facilitator and not telling them (emphasis). I am working as a facilitator to do their work. And this participant mentioned (23:34; 146-148).	24	86	383	396-398
P	When I was, before I was enrolled, I was just teaching like anybody who does not know anything about teaching and even my explanations about the topics sometimes it was very hard for me to explain but now, most of the things have changed because I know the methods how to teach a certain subject.	23	56	23	43

There was a sense of believe and fulfilment shown by the professional learners towards fulfilling their goals of attaining certification, better classroom practices and better remuneration.

4.15   STUDENT SUPPORT

As stated by Hendrikz (2005), quality support is not an option and it is not negotiable. New staff structures are needed that have clearly defined roles and processes for proper functioning

of the programme. Effective support services perform cognitive, affective and systematic functions. It further provides an environment that helps professional learners, creates commitment to learning, enhances self-esteem establishes administrative procedure and information management systems that are efficient, transparent and learner friendly.

Student support is not at the level that it is supposed to be, as verified by the coordinator (42:34; 105:105) and (42:40; 112:112):

Table 4.13:   Student support

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
C1	… we don't do... you know we don't give justice, we do not do justice to the work itself, just like distance at a remote control, you know? We just talk about but it is not what actually what should be happening so those problems and many other things of which some I might not have the knowledge off because they have to do with the management of which I am not always exposed with everything or I am not always within or in all the meetings to know everything that; about why this is happening and why is the other thing happening so that far as I know ah I can go with that but rectifying that is that the situation is there all the times, to monitor what is going on and having the part timers understanding what their job is not just giving them classes and telling them to go class with students, they do not do what is supposed to be done. Some of them is probably because they do not know because you find that some time you had before have gone now, we have got new group all together. We haven't orientate them so they do not know their job you know for instance if they do not understand the gist of what is there in the distance education or the itself that they are hired for.	42	34	105	105
C1	Professional learners you will find that they are people who really need our help, they need our assistance, in fact they really appreciate our presence out there very much you can't believe how happy they are whenever they see a car coming that is from the college to their schools this is when they know all their problems at least are going to be solved if all the problems, … and they really want us to be there but as I said we are not always there because of this problem or that other one for them when they are there you will find that they or most of them really try. It's only a few as we know sometimes we have people who do not want to do their job out of their own reasons whatsoever their own mischief you may call that and most of them you find that they really do their work on time and they submit their assignments,	42	40	112	112

they make sure that they know when is the next workshop, where is it going to be held, what they need to have, when they do not have books they will make sure that you know that on time and when they do not have anything they inform the site tutor or the regional coordinator.

4.16   EXAMINATIONS ISSUES

The college management has to monitor examinations as a quality assurance measure. This should be done with a view to ensure that high quality assessment of learning is achieved through several means of assessing. On the positive side the examinations are externalised and they are critically and rigorously scrutinised which is in line with quality assurance principles. Internal and external moderation of examinations is intended to reduce significantly the imperfections towards eradicating them (Segers & Dochy, 1996).

Professional learners indicated that time for preparation of examinations was inadequate, with delays in receiving study material, assignments and feedback. There were instances when no tutor was available in some subjects (24:103; 427:427)

Table 4.14:   Examinations

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
Post	… sometimes in the classroom we may find that classrooms are small and we are crowded and we do not get anything at the end of the day we go for examinations and another thing is even the time that we spend here is very limited, we work very hard at the end of the day you find that we are even tired and sick because if ton find that we spend only five days let me say that, five days for the revision another five days, the next week we start writing and no interval between really we have for much problems.	24	103	427	427

4.17   CHOICE OF SUBJECTS

Choice of subjects amongst professional learners leads to their specialisation as they further their studies. The DTEP brings together teachers to discuss and enables teachers to choose the subjects they "prefer" as this professional learners state: (30: 46; 245:250-259):

Table 4.15:   Choice of subjects

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
St 1	Yes, we are grouped according to our categories. We have two categories, category B, category A, we are not doing almost the same subjects.	30	46	245	250
St 3	Category A subjects which are they sirs?	30	46	245	252
St 2	Home economics, agric, physical education the rest of them we are doing together. Category B we are doing Music, Art and Craft, Religious Education.	30	46	245	254
Focus group	We are doing them together	30	46	245	257
St 4	But even though, category B we are specializing in arts, whole category A we are specializing with science and mathematics.	30	46	245	259

4.18   DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS

Peers provide social support to each other. When learning has taken place, peers are able to assess each other to nurture their facilitating and learning skills. It comes in different forms such as oral presentations, projects and other professional skills. It helps professional learners to accept a constructivist approach to learning. Professional learners had developed social skills during their interactions (24:78; 364:367-370):

Table 4.16:   Development of social skills

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para	Line(s)
Potso	We have learnt so many techniques of how to deal with the challenges that we are meeting with and apart from that I can say that the modules we use are very helpful.	24	78	364	367
Palesa	We have also developed socially we are able to communicate with one	24	78	364	369
Leboli	And also, it has changed the attitude of some of the teachers they know what we are expected to do when we are in schools.	24	78	364	370

4.19   ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation during examination periods was a challenge, as professional learners stated (24:69; 339: 339-343):

Table 4.17:   Accommodation

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
Mantšo	… I think it is about the accommodation we get here, for the first year, second year it was better in the third year our residences are limited and we are many but the answer that we get, they said they have to get many students, all need to be educated. So, sometimes we didn't get where to sleep unit we went to some common rooms there and it was not satisfactory.	24	69	339	339
Palesa	We slept in the hall.	24	69	339	341
Focus group	Yes and it was winter. It was winter for that matter, wow!	24	69	339	343

4.20   DECENTRALISATION

The work is highly centralised, even though there are signs of decentralization through establishment of sites and site tutors and coordinators. Organisational work is done at the college, as this coordinator described (42:13; 68:68):

Table 4.18:   Decentralisation

Res.	Response	PD	Quote	Para.	Line(s)
C1	Yah, per semester, during the workshops, we got three workshops, that when I really meet with them, because other than that it's when, only it's when you will be out there of which at the moment, we have a problem of being there all the time, it's either we have too much work as a coordinator down here to coordinate with the Director, the college a management and also the site itself and monitor and things like making sure that there are books, modules that they use and many other things that they need at site but u find that most of the time you need a vehicle, you need some kind of mobility to be there so you can't go to schools and meet them and know about their problems because it's actually that we have transport problems at the moment it's not available all the time.	42	13	68	68

4.21   SUMMARY

Educational change is a complex process that occurs within college's ecology (Vandeyar, 2008). Teachers and facilitators have to change the way they facilitate from a constructivist point of view. Professional learners should have their voices heard. Authorities should engage academic discourse with professionals in order to realise that managing and enhancing the quality of professional development programmes specifically and education in general cannot be a top down approach. Teachers, derived from their experience in practice, should inform instructional management, thus promoting a scholarly bottom-up approach to quality assurance.

The tables above indicate a lot of agreements between the interviewees in almost all aspects of the programme from delay in distribution of learning material, facilitators' absence in some cases to self-fulfilment. DTEP seems to be having internal controls to assure quality. The facilitators and senior management are aware of the challenges faced and are working on them to improve the quality of the programme. There are internal moderations to ensure internal quality assurance.

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CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, REFLECTIONS AND SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the following are discussed as the basis for conclusions: findings from empirical study; addressing the research questions; and defining quality education and quality assurance. Examination of the LCE's quality assurance process is followed by recommendations, conclusions on the DTEP, limitations to this study and issues for further research.

5.2 FINDINGS FROM EMPIRICAL DATA

Findings from the empirical data were either positive or showed a need for improvement.

5.2.1 POSITIVE FINDINGS

Most of the facilitators held at least a master's degree, and were designing and developing modules for diploma students. The staff were guided and assisted in developing teaching and learning material, with an increasing number pursuing higher degrees elsewhere. The professional learners were pursuing diplomas whilst their facilitators had master's and doctoral degrees, with the exception of one who had an honours degree. This level of qualification added value to the internal quality processes, and augurs well for the quality assurance process. It is the intention of the LCE management to educate its staff further, either through short-term courses or long-term programmes, including PhDs. It was established that qualifications is a quality assurance pillar in literature.

The policy on recruitment of permanent staff at the college is such that a postgraduate degree is a minimum requirement for employment. LCE generally retains staff for long periods, which indicates stability. Some of the facilitators have been working there for 16 to 18 years and are continually being encouraged to attain PhDs, from afar afield as Europe and Australia. They attend internal workshops organised by colleagues, international organisations and institutions around the world, and are expected to present in these forums.

Facilitators were given initial professional development on module writing and are responsible for writing the modules and assignments and setting examination papers. External moderators examine the modules after completion, and external examiners from universities in South Africa and the National University of Lesotho ensure the questions are of acceptable standards. This augurs well for quality assurance.

There are set minimum standards for application for the DTEP and subsequent admission by potential applicants, who should have a minimum COSC with five passes of which two should be with credit. Other categories of potential applicants are holders of a PTC. These applicants should be teaching and have a minimum of two years teaching experience. The programme runs for four years in the case of COSC holders and three years in the case of PTC holders. PTC holders go into the second year when they enrol.

Distance education is founded around the notion that professional learners and facilitators are separated by time and space, and they rely on print material because the infrastructure restricts other modes of delivery in Lesotho. Tutors deliver material to professional learners on sites to ensure their speedy arrival with the recipients, enabling professional learners to attempt and carryout assignments timeously.

Attending contact sessions for professional learners is of great help to them as they are able to ask questions, share with colleagues and facilitators on their experiences, discuss with peers and seek help. Facilitators avail themselves at the scheduled times for contact sessions and provide feedback to professional learners in need of assistance. They appreciate their presence in their schools and during contact sessions because they believe that their problems will be solved.

DTEP professional learners are exposed to the following elements during their four-year tenure whilst enrolled with the DTEP: improving their general background; increasing knowledge and understanding and construction of new knowledge; enhancing pedagogy and the understanding of learners and their learning; and developing practical skills and competencies. The DTEP mixes all these elements to develop a complete teacher. This is very useful because these professional learners need to develop their own learners holistically.

Once professional learners have enrolled for the DTEP they do things differently in their schools, and should develop and grow professionally. They are able to handle different

situations and issues, such as planning of learning opportunities, scheming and recording of workdone, discipline and extracurricular activities. Professional ethics and codes of good practice are instilled as essential to their career. In the event of challenges they communicate with colleagues within the school or from nearby schools to seek assistance so that they can become quality teachers. Professional learners learn many techniques to deal with everyday challenges, developed socially and communicate better with learners and colleagues. Their attitude towards teaching has changed for the better as they learn what they are supposed to do or not do at work.

Objectivist and relativist approaches are applicable to the DTEP, in that professional learners sit for examinations and have to meet a minimum standard if they are to be promoted to the next class or awarded certificates. This has a direct bearing on how many graduate in a stipulated time. Distance education professional learners are compared to face-to-face students who sit for examinations and the two groups go for teaching practice in which classroom observation schedules are used. In both instances, external examiners are involved for quality assurance purposes. This augurs well for quality assurance in that the two groups are compared and where there are significant differences they can be addressed.

In the DTEP, professional learners have to complete assignments, write examinations and be observed in their classrooms. The nature of the programme is such that they proceed at their own pace, even though they have to meet deadlines for submissions of assignments. This enables professional learners to work on a specific learning area until they make meaning through professional self-regulated learning. They set their own goals, self-check, and self-reinforce which enables them to construct new knowledge towards achieving their own learning. Examinations are conducted after intensive one-week preparation (interrogating with the content area in an attempt to bring all the professional learners from all over the country at par),but this means the content and skills attained then are not long-lasting and may not translate into effective teaching.

Assessment is carried out as stipulated in the professional learners' manuals, with the necessary information on submission dates for assignments stated. Assignments are intended to enhance professional self-regulated learning, professional peer-assessment and professional cooperative learning. Professional learners are supposed to work on assignments and make meaning out of them. Then, they have to link the meaning they have generated with their own experiences and create new knowledge. As they work through the assignments they may

assess each other and this and they can cooperatively develop coherent new knowledge from their experiences and prior knowledge. However this was not always the case because professional learners indicated that at times they had to rush over assignments because they arrived late to them and time was limited in some cases to attempt to assignments professionally. Both professional learners and facilitators agreed to this challenge. As for the number of assessment tasks, they remain as stipulated the only challenge is the delay for assignments to reach the intended recipients. This further creates a problem in that feedback does not reach them on time, thus negatively impacting on the preparation of examinations, with some receiving no feedback on some courses. There are two assignments for each module, which have to be completed for a combined minimum mark of 50% if they are to sit for examinations. They also have to attain a minimum of 50% in the examinations in order to pass and proceed to the next level or be granted a certificate.

Professional learners generally find group work activities enjoyable and effective, feeling that they learn more from each other during group work activities. They are not afraid to make mistakes because they understand that their colleagues are there to help them. Peer support and assessment are central to success. This is key role in constructivism. It is achieved through social interactions with peers which contribute meaningfully towards knowledge construction and meaning making, interaction and social negotiation. Learners need each other to complete the tasks, to share and to encourage. Each is responsible to the group development and use of social skills to ensure successful interaction and reflective members as stated by Killen (2000) above.

Examinations are held in the same central place at the same time for all the professional learners and in the same academic year, making the conditions similar for everyone and reducing the logistical mishaps likely if they were to be held at different venues throughout the country. The number of assignments is adequate, based on the findings from distance programmes in such renowned institutions as the Universities of Pretoria (UP), the Witwatersrand (Wits) and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). They all give two assignments per module followed by an examination, though the weighting of assignments and examinations varies from one institution to another. In the UP distance education programme professional learners receive constant feedback on assignments (at least two assignments per module per semester). They attend tutorial sessions, short and weeklong contact sessions and study group sessions. In DTEP as stated earlier, professional learners attend weekend sessions once every month and at the end of a semester they attend an examinations preparatory session for a week.

The success of the DTEP depends also on professional self-regulated learning as a learner-centred approach. Professional learners meet their tutors and coordinators three times in a semester and only for two days. There are three monthly workshops at the sites. For most of the time professional learners are on their own. These factors compel professional learners to develop social skills, constant knowledge construction and cooperation, as envisaged by Grisham and Molinelli (1995). Professional learners properly regulate themselves. They organise, plan, and monitor their academic progress with the experience and knowledge that they already posses. They do this by sharing with peers and everyone is responsible for own learning.

5.2.2   NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT

There is a need for improvement in a number of areas. Teaching and learning material were not pre-tested before they could be distributed to professional learners. Although the developers were given a course on how to design and compile teaching and learning material I strongly believe that it ought to have been pre-tested before full development and distribution to the recipients. Also, course material is not revised as frequently as it should be and is often neglected. The material used in the DTEP was developed in 2000 and has been in use since 2001. It was only in 2010 that it began to be reviewed, for use in 2011. Professional learners had pointed out errors in the texts [they did not have ready examples at the time of interviews] but they remained for years.

Teaching and learning material do not reach their recipients on time, leading to frustration and despair. Printed material is their only source of information but apart from the capital city there are no public libraries in which to locate books, journals and sources other than their own. The existing libraries are found in a few secondary schools but these close early because as there is no electricity in most parts of the country. However these do not have adequate and applicable literature and resources in terms of pedagogy books, journals, access to Internet. This does not augur well for construction of knowledge.

Quality provision for distance education is about providing appropriate teaching practice experiences. Facilitators have to observe, mentor, attend contact sessions, collect and mark assignments, and set examinations. For their part, professional learners have to submit assignments, attend contact sessions and sit examinations. The classroom observations and mentoring are however limited because facilitators are under-resourced in terms of transport

needed to visit professional learners in their classrooms. One of quality assurance pillars is learner support. This may be provided through specialist observations as indicated elsewhere in this study. Facilitators are expected to visit professional learners in their classrooms to offer support. However, professional learners may work with peers for classroom observations in the time of need. Peers are helpful in providing immediate positive critique to colleagues. Support in schools is provided but more can be done to ensure that tutors make more school visits for observations.

There is a general lack of student support in the DTEP. There are supposed to be three contact sessions in a semester (one per month) but in some instances facilitators do not turn up. Site tutors and coordinators are supposed to visit students in their schools and assist them individually. They have to specialist observations in their classrooms, and the specialist observer must assist accordingly upon observations but this is not happening as required. The remoteness of some schools and lack of transport is cited as a hindrance. Students are promised these visits during the orientation period but practically they do not materialise.

Whilst professional learners agreed that the DTEP contributed to their academic and professional development, they had a strong feeling that the face-to-face programme was being given preferential treatment by having access to science and home economics laboratories and a computer centre. They concurred that it was ineffective to learn such subjects in a theoretical manner and would thus impact on their own facilitating. This is means that there are still some elements of old paradigm where the facilitator dictates to learners what to do and what they are supposed to observe as opposed to learners taking part in their own learning. Professional learners must be given a chance to manipulate equipment, work with chemicals, etc. This will enable them to develop manipulative skills which will enable them to construct new knowledge. The syllabus dictates practical work, in art, science and computers, so inadequate resources weakens confidence when they have to facilitate learning without having had practice.

There was general consensus amongst facilitators, the senior manager and professional learners that there was a shortage of facilitators in some courses. This is a demonstration of triangulation whereby multiple sources of data give information on a certain aspect of the research. This renders the research trustworthy and credible. Professional learners do not experience the demands in some courses and therefore are found wanting. Then they cannot create any knowledge if they do not have any experience in these courses. In some cases the

professional learners went for an entire semester without a tutor, writing assignments as expected but not receiving feedback. They thus sat examinations ill prepared.

Another serious drawback was facilitators arriving late for class during contact sessions and when they did only staying for a short time or did not arrive at all. This issue needs serious attention because it affects professional learners' performance who needs support. It also does not serve as a good role modelling of professionalism.

The programme is highly centralised at the college, with coordinators tasked with supervising site tutors and part time tutors in their areas. However, they were reported to be usually at the college on administrative business. They ensure that there are books, teaching and learning material at the college, but this leads to minimal interaction between them and the students. There are many sites operating throughout the country but it is not possible for senior staff from LCE to visit them all for quality assurance purposes. More effort from coordinators and more resources are needed.

Professional learners have developed greater independence as individuals since enrolling for the DTEP, however they still need their peers to share experiences, challenges and course material. This augurs well with professional self-regulated learning. They are able to organise their work, plan, and monitor their own academic progress with the knowledge and experiences that they have gathered during their learning in DTEP. Problems arise when there is inadequate space for all at the college when they attend the final contact session to prepare and sit for their examinations. Accommodation at the college needs to be increased to accommodate everybody for the duration of the examinations.

There is a lack of intensive tutor professional education to make them better administrators, facilitators and assessors. There is no follow up with an orientation programme in the beginning of each academic year, when they could be reminded of their roles and the latest developments in terms of teacher education in general and distance education in particular. There are no discussions after contact sessions on the successes or challenges that need addressing. This is part of quality assurance that the facilitators and the college administration should take care of. There is a need for learners' feedback as part of quality assurance. This is a form of internal quality assurance which is gathered from bottom and disseminated upwards.

5.3 FINDINGS IN RELATION TO LITERATURE

Even if all children enter school by 2015, as envisaged by global bodies, the fundamental concept is quality education. Together with professional development of teachers this is central to the success of EFA. Top-performing countries offering quality education to their students (e.g., Finland, Korea, Canada, and Cuba) are renowned for placing a high value on teacher education and their continuous professional development. Teachers in these countries enjoy a high status (Yates, 2007), with their quality and that of their continuing education central to the achievement of quality learning, at least until a student has achieved the means to sustain a degree of independent learning. It is therefore necessary for every government to encourage teachers to invest scarce time in studying. Lesotho has followed by making it possible for teachers to study while they are working hence promoting the sense of independent learning. And since 2009 the GoL has placed high value on qualified teachers by implementing a new improved salary structure. This structure has increased desire for teachers to pursue higher certificates.

Studies indicate the importance of the reflection of professional learners in their learning process, with the challenges and frustrations they experience important in improving the educational value of the college programmes (Aydin, 2008). Professional learners indicated that they have improved tremendously in their approach to their classroom conduct, curriculum and general pedagogy since enrolling in DTEP. Looking back at how they had been doing their work they feel they have improved. Learners are able to reflect on their learning when they discuss with their peers. Students have a right to be involved in the decision-making in their teaching and learning, so it has become increasingly effective and important to get their perspectives as the foundation for effective learning and for future improvement of programmes. Professional learners indicated that they are not involved at all in the decision making of their own learning. Professional learners have described their frustrations during their studies. They are not involved in any decision making by the college. They have a strong feeling that they can contribute towards improving the programme. It is valuable to consider the affective responses of learners involved in the programmes, as well as their psychological readiness and willingness to focus their learning. There is no preliminary assessment to find out the readiness of prospective professional learners in DTEP. However, the improved remuneration and 2014 cut-off for unqualified teachers motivate and "forces" them to enrol in DTEP. That is, if they meet the requirements. This would help future curriculum developers and presenters to better understand what their students feel about the

programme and therefore increase their sensitivity when dealing with students. The selection process for entry into the DTEP does not take cognisance of the psychological readiness of the professional learners. The conditions for admission are set and no other means are used to check the readiness and willingness to learning.

The establishment of internal quality assurance systems in the institutions of higher learning is encouraged and there has to be national quality assurance bodies that embrace all the forms of teaching and learning, including distance education. Developments in distance education will affect traditional face-to-face education, and as it demonstrates its effectiveness it therefore works towards convergence with traditional approaches to teaching and learning. Welch and Glennie (2005:8) state that continuous quality improvement "… could best be achieved through stimulating internal quality assurance processes in which institutions would evaluate themselves and set their own quality improvement agenda". This means the LCE must set minimum standards to drive internal quality processes.

NADEOSA (2005:69) emphasises that for any distance education programme, the starting point is the quality of the learning materials. "... materials should be clearly written, interactive and encourage reflection. Furthermore, materials have to be revised periodically to accommodate feedback from stakeholders and advances in new knowledge and research". In the case of DTEP the module writers were given an induction course on material writing. But it emerged from the interviews that the time allocated was inadequate the materials were not near "perfect". Revision on material was conducted in 2010 for implementation in 2011.

In the case of South Africa, the necessary competencies to be developed in teachers' development are placed under three headings. General competencies are related to *knowledge*, which is described as subject content, national, regional, and school curriculum policies, curriculum theory, the role of parents in the education process, the organised teaching process amongst others. In this aspect the professional learners expressed confidence that they have constructed knowledge. They are able to handle subject content and general curricula well. *Skills* competencies include communication, methodology, classroom management and assessment, whilst *values* relate to the school and attitudes related to professionalism (DoE, 1996). In the DTEP, the necessary competencies are those in DoE even though they are not clearly articulated and spelled out as such. Professional learners indicated that their competencies in relation to the general pedagogy have improved since enrolling in the programme.

From the findings of Tait (2000; 2003), it seems that affective professional learners support is lacking in this programme. Most students felt they needed more contact with facilitators and that no blocks were allocated to one-on-one contact with the facilitators, indicating poor planning in the programme. This is worsened by the inadequacy of information and communications technology facilities in Lesotho. Email, telephone and cell phone contact with facilitators is problematic in some parts of the country, unavailable in others.

Thorpe (2003) suggests that students need supportive instructional systems and course material. He describes instructional systems support as including publishing when courses are available, how to apply and how to make payments, before, during and after the course of study. Course materials support includes answering professional learners' questions on how to make sense of content, how to complete assignments, and how to contact other students or services. The DTEP needs to be strengthened in both areas of learner support. The area on personal contact with facilitators is limited to formal monthly sessions, with no provision for one-on-one sessions between professional learner and facilitator.

Distance Education programme increases the opportunity for interaction between peers, during the interviews it was easier to collect data in a focused group than on a one-on-one scenario. Professional learners rely on each other for support. Distance education between programmes increases the chance of being better rated than its face-to-face counterpart. This is so because those in distance education are applying the newly constructed knowledge in their classroom on daily basis as opposed to face-to-face learners who practice during teaching practice term. I maintain that distance education becomes more effective when there is a 'live' instructor present through face-to-face contact.

5.4   ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The following critical questions have been answered in this research:
- What are the key strategies of implementing internal quality assurance?
- How are strategies for internal quality assurance implemented?
- What are the roles of college in implementing quality assurance strategies within DTEP (professional learners, tutors and facilitators)?

5.5 QUALITY EDUCATION

Quality education meets the set objectives of an institution, develops and empowers the trainees and addresses their needs. The emphasis is on whether the programme fits its purposes in ways that reflect the needs of the trainees, the stakeholders and the nation in a globalising set-up. This goes together with the mission statement of most educational institutions, including that of LCE. Professional learners indicated that they feel confident since they have enrolled in the programme. They claim they are doing things differently but positively in their own classrooms which goes with Nielsen (1997) expression of quality graduates ability to "teach well", [that is] create the conditions under which learners can learn for understanding. Learners are able to apply new knowledge meaningfully in new situations.

5.6 QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance can be described as planned systematic activities that are implemented within the framework of a quality system to provide confidence that the programme will satisfy the relevant quality standards. On the one hand, Harman (2008:1) defines quality assurance as a systematic management and assessment procedure adopted by higher education institutions and systems in order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements. And for Hendrikz (2005) it is about monitoring of contact sessions and examinations, monitoring issues arising from learners and facilitator and giving feedback speedily and also, externalising of learning material more rigorously and critically. In this study, the college showed signs of recruiting highly qualified personnel in the programme, adequate number of assignments tasks and a holistic approach to teacher professional development. To some extent contact sessions are monitored and learning material is externalised. Quality assurance in HEIs like LCE is viewed as a way to ensure that appropriate means are in place to satisfy the stakeholders' demands.

5.7 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE DISTANCE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Internal quality assurance includes periodical self-analysis of the institution's performance. This should reveal the strong and weak sides of its activities, foresee ways to overcome the challenges, discuss how best practices are implemented, and compare achievements with similar institutions around the world. An internal quality assurance system should thus involve all stakeholders at college, namely, administrators, coordinators, government,

professional learners, tutors and social partners. In the case of the DTEP, the following are considered to ensure internal quality: (a) admission requirements, (b) recruitment of qualified staff, (c) number of assignments per module, (d) examinations processes (e.g., internal moderation, external examiners), (e) site-based meetings and contact sessions, (f) school visits by facilitators, (g) continuous staff development and (h) teaching and learning material. Lacking for now is self-analysis, comparisons with other institutions elsewhere and evaluation of the programme. However these were outside the scope of this study and therefore I cannot conclusively say they are not happening. Programme evaluation has not taken place though. From the data gathered, it is evident that the college is striving towards quality assurance as exemplified by the list labelled (a) to (g) above.

5.8   RECOMMENDATIONS

Distance learning is a solitary endeavour and the policymakers need to improve on provision of adequate professional learners' support services in order to reduce the transactional distance between the students, the facilitators and the college. In the context of Lesotho, which is a relatively poor country, the DTEP has to seek to reach optimum levels of learner support in the context of limited availability of information and communication technology.

In Lesotho, distance learning remains the only viable option for receiving dispersed groups of professionals as learners in remote areas. Given the largely rural nature of the country, it is particularly cost-effective and convenient for those professionals as learners who cannot leave their work in order to study on campus. Teachers are breadwinners in their own right and cannot afford to lose their posts, while distance learning does not require them to vacate the classrooms as they are learning as they work (Siwibele & Mungoo, 2009).

Without independence and self-direction, distance learners cannot successfully achieve their goal of learning, whilst the providers need to develop a deliberate policy towards developing these attributes in their clients. The DTEP needs to include more learner-centred strategies into their teaching methodology. Independent, self-directed, lifelong learning does not take place automatically or in isolation. Therefore, distance learners need to be empowered to own their learning and to assume more responsibility for their success.

Countries which have a shortage of professionally and adequately qualified teachers should strongly consider distance education. It has been proven very effective with good planning

and implementation. Literature indicates that it has worked effectively around the world in developed and developing countries such as Brazil, Britain, China, India, Kenya, Tanzania, and the South Pacific, to name a few. Distance education is suitable for beginning teachers and for continuing professional development. Its main advantage is that it keeps teachers in their post while receiving further professional development, so their remuneration to finance their studies is not affected. Distance education has brought education to the remotest areas, and to students who could not meet their educational needs in conventional institutions.

There has to be extensive preparation for effective quality distance education if it is to meet the demands of the present-day students and wider population (the 'consumers'). The effectiveness of this project can be measured from the interview transcripts. In the light of these findings the following measures are suggested towards improving the DTEP.

- Short residential sessions and adequate study time, because professional learners juggled family, job commitments and studies. More face-to-face interaction with colleagues and facilitators on sites should be available, especially during formal school holidays.

- Adequate resources should be made available to the programme for it to meet its objectives. Teaching and learning materials should reach recipients on time; and tutors and coordinators should be assisted to reach the professional learners timeously and frequently, as intended.

- Part-time facilitators should be given adequate orientation and induction so that they can perform their duties with knowledge of what is expected of them. Facilitators indicated that they, as college staff, were inadequately inducted in how to carry our tasks in distance education. Interaction between professional learners and facilitators should be frequent, through short contact sessions in addition to the monthly ones.

- Whilst the teaching and learning materials are developed by college facilitators, there is a need to ensure that standards are developed and monitored internally. The findings indicated the same members of staff prepare assignments and examinations.

- The LCE should employ more facilitators to visit students in schools, mark timeously and provide feedback. Major improvements are required to speed up the marking and give feedback. For quality assurance purposes, assignments must be secure and feedback should be as detailed as possible. If feedback is timely it is useful. More staff are needed to manage assignments, keep records, conduct registration and dispatch materials. Facilitators and students agreed that there was a general delay in teaching and learning materials and assignments reaching professional learners and

being returned to college for marking. Specialised personnel would therefore lead to an improved service. This is a quality issue because there are clearly defined procedures to receive, record, process marking and return scripts to students within the minimum possible time.

▪ The MOET and the LCE should provide opportunities and resources for practical subjects such as Art, Music, Computers and Science for teachers to gain practical experience.

▪ Modules and courses materials should be revised periodically to keep up with national and global trends and developments.

▪ The examinations office should be strengthened to maintain the highest integrity of examinations standards.

▪ It could be helpful for members of the LCE staff in the Department of Distance Teacher Education to take study tours into those universities in South Africa that are renowned for offering distance education on a large scale, such as UNISA and UP. This would help them to learn how they could improve on areas such as learner support and management of assignments.

▪ LCE has to develop a clear cycle of study materials production, distribution, feedback and reproduction.

▪ Professional learners must be accorded maximum support. They may form study groups in which they share and discuss the modules and individual challenges. The LCE should contact students regularly to remind them of contact sessions, handing over assignments and examinations dates and venues with the aim of making timeous intervention for students facing challenges with one or more aspects of their learning. Short messaging system and emails may be used because they can be accessed through cell phones.

▪ And finally, the tasks and objectives concerning quality must be clearly identified, defined and measurable at the college. The college management must define and develop the quality assurance policy so that the college may be held accountable to values of quality.

5.9 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT QUALITY IN THE DISTANCE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The indicators are that DTEP as the teacher preparation programme at a distance can be effective if most of quality assurance pillars are observed. Distance education is feasible over

a broad geographic area, and enables students to obtain the necessary education without disrupting their life or work. To this end the DTEP has opened college education to practicing teachers throughout the country, in areas that are inaccessible by vehicle or telecommunications, and where the population still relies on the mail (Post Office) for information. What is required is to improve the infrastructure as indicated in the responses of professional learners on the challenges that they face such as delay in delivery of study material and shortage of tutors in some subject areas. Improved distance education can provide an effective and efficient solution to the shortage of qualified teachers in the developing countries.

Broadly, if distance education is to be effective it requires sufficient investment in planning, resources and time. The major areas of administration, course production, learner support, classroom supervision, evaluation and its end product of student achievement require adequate investment in resources and planning. It should not be implemented without looking at all requirements in personnel, staffing, infrastructure and logistics. This will ensure that professional learners do not have some of the challenges that they raised in chapter 4.

The DTEP offered by the LCE offers great potential for upgrading certificates and under-qualified professional learners to diploma level. The number of primary school teachers who have enrolled since 2002 surpasses 3,000, representing a huge percentage of the workforce and thus having an impact on basic education in Lesotho. If their education were to be compromised it would lead to poor quality primary education. Whilst professional learners expressed appreciation of the opportunity and knowledge acquired through the programme, they had concerns about the challenges they faced, including lack of student support and late delivery of materials. These concerns have a bearing on quality of graduates form LCE. These are genuine concerns and need to be addressed at college and governmental levels.

For the MOET to achieve its goals of improving teacher quality and ensuring that all efforts are reinforcing simultaneously, the Chief Education Officer responsible for tertiary education should establish and implement a strategy for coordination of stakeholders and the programme. This would facilitate information and resource sharing, as well as strengthening links among teacher quality improvement efforts of the LCE and NUL.

5.10 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

There were a number of challenges faced before and during the research process, notably:

- Knowledge generated from this research cannot be generalised to other institutions that offer distance education due to the nature of qualitative research. The number of participants is relatively low and they may have responded in a way that would please me as a researcher. I may also have made interpretations that fit with my intended findings and conclusions.

- Lack of cooperation on the part of LCE personnel in accessing some information. I obtained some data from the MOET planning unit but it was outdated. Some from UNESCO and UN publications was also not up to date.

- Distance education in Lesotho is relatively new compared to other countries and literature is therefore limited.

- The researcher could be biased. I could have interfered with data of focus groups through probing questions. Also, the participants may have already formed opinions on the quality strategies of DTEP.

- I developed interview questions and as a researcher may have been subjective. I also conducted interviews, transcribed, coded and analysed data, which might have led to bias. The data collected was large and the process of analysing it was tedious. "The researcher … may be seen as a bricoleur, a Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:4). And due to the voluminous amount of data, I may have omitted some useful information.

- Some participants knew me and felt intimidated because I was an inspector and they felt that they had to participate. Therefore, they might have not disclosed everything.

- Non-probability sampling was used, which could have led to bias and subjectivity in the study. I would have liked to interview first-year and second-year professional learners but during the data collection period they were not on campus as the LCE was in the process of changing from a July to June academic year to a January to December academic year cycle. At the time of the interviews (2010) there were no second-year students in the programme, and the first-years would only be arriving in 2011.

- I would have liked to have interviewed some senior officials both in the MOET and LCE as policymakers and providers respectfully, however they were difficult to access due to bureaucracy, and they did not keep appointments.

5.11   FUTURE RESEARCH

This study had a limited scope, but it raised several issues that require further investigation:

- Roles of facilitators are not clearly defined from the interviews.
- Further research could be conducted on the curricular of the programme, as a case study to look deeper, using multiple sources of data.
- Further research could be conducted with professional learners in years one, two and three of their studies. They may provide more insight into the programme. It was transitional year during data collection. There were no first years as stated in the previous paragraph.
- Performance of professional learners in relation to their tutors, sites and in comparison with their pre-service colleagues needs to be investigated.
- It could be useful to carry out a longitudinal study, to interview professional learners and observe them in their practices after two years.

5.12   EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME

Programmes that are successful have been evaluated before (Sanders, 2000). The DTEP needs to be evaluated for without it there is no feedback from the clients or stakeholders. These are the people whose satisfaction with the programme has to be guaranteed. Evaluation will assist the LCE with those areas that need serious attention, other than the ones raised in this study. This study had a limited scope and therefore only a few decisions can be based on it. The purpose of evaluation of the DTEP should be holistic and given enough thought and resources, for it are going to have a major impact moving forward with the programme.

Lesotho has responded to political and economic pressure to increase its education capacity. The Distance Teacher Education Programme (DTEP) should be linked with the wider economic development of the country. The successful programme is one that consistently integrates efforts of students, college facilitators, support staff and administrators (Akhter, 2008). This will assist towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for which educational institutions have to produce effective graduates by continuously improving the quality of their educational programmes. However, the ability to build more classrooms to increase enrolments has outstripped the capacity to produce qualified teachers. The challenge is compounded by the large number of current teachers who are either professionally uneducated or academically unqualified.

Investing in human capital is the best way to improve the quality of education. Steyn (1999) and Passos (2009) confirm that investing in human capital is key to effective improvement of the quality of schools. Programmes other than teacher education and other resources (books, furniture, and infrastructure) do not bring about effective improvement, but well-developed teachers in these classrooms bring the desired change. It is for this reason that governments must invest resources in the teacher education programmes. This would be a long-term strategy to ensure that teachers acquire adequate professional knowledge, techniques and confidence to develop their own teaching strategies in adaptation of their own classroom situations. This would improve quality of education in any country.

Providing all children with qualified teachers is central to MDGs, and this goal is reflected in Lesotho's ESSP (2005-2015). To help accomplish it, government should allocate large financial resources and provide other assistance for teacher quality activities through personal development of education programmes. Departments of education should engage in internal coordination, to establish broad collaboration among relevant units that include curriculum unit, inspectorate, and HEIs that offer teacher programmes. This would encourage sharing of expertise and resources.

For government to achieve success and reach the national goals of improving students' achievement through teacher education, it has to manage all its programmes and provide funding, assistance, evaluation and research initiatives. Also, it should encourage HEIs to make improvements in assessing teacher effectiveness and in turn distribute qualified and effective teachers equitably, creating an opportunity for the departments to leverage new resources with existing structures in a way that improves teacher quality and effectiveness. This must be infused within those national education planning bodies that respond to teacher development and shortages in the country.

Whilst there may still be challenges, the DTEP seems effective in terms of increasing in teacher knowledge, which is by constructing skills and attitudes. Teachers are able to create knowledge and make new meaning in the process of their studies. Quality has become a 'mantra' in higher education over the past twenty years, and distance education is no exception. Whilst it has become an option and obsession in poor countries, quality should not be compromised. Institutions that offer distance teacher education must not lose sight of the need to establish and maintain high standards of quality. Quality assessment systems need to

be in place to demonstrate distance education legitimacy and quality assurance systems must ensure accountability and continuous improvements.

Professional learners enrolled in distance education need institutional support for their learning. They should be duly supported to complete their education with competent skills that they will use in their classrooms and to further their studies. Success of distance education programmes includes interaction between professional learners, facilitators and administration staff and between the students and their environment. This can be improved through frequent short contact sessions and study groups, because it has been established that peer learning is very helpful.

The gap between the challenge in objectives and actual programmes is not so wide that cannot be bridged, but constant review of performance of facilitators, professional learners and materials is needed. It would be more meaningful if professional learners were able to provide feedback to the course writers about the readers and manuals.

5.13   REFLECTIONS

An individual is made up of different entities, however I do not believe in emphasizing the differences between individuals. Life would become a series of conflicts. Ontology is about the understanding of the nature of social phenomenon that was being investigated. Reality amongst individuals is created as a result of cognition and created by one's own mind. As a result, the information gathered from the participants is their reality as seen through their consciousness and their cognition. Education should bring integration of different entities. It is when individuals share their experiences that life can be lived forward. Every individual is unique and a product of nature and nurture, therefore people are bound to have different backgrounds, views and opinions. As individuals we are bound together by common goals. We share together our knowledge, experiences, opinions and challenges. Constructively, we make meaning of the environment around us from our shared experiences. The construction of knowledge has taken into account the different groups that are stakeholders in the research to define what was worthwhile to them, what is acceptable in their own setting, and what the meaning was. This was the epistemological stand in this study. This directly links with construction of new knowledge and meaning making. As a researcher I was subjectively involved with the participants due to our interactions. We gained knowledge through observation, interpretation and construction from the world around us. Education and

environment have taught us to seek personal gain but individually we cannot achieve this. That is why we need to work together. However, there is much more to be derived from stressing the necessity of lifelong learning for all than merely its economic imperatives. In order to succeed in life, in the globalised world, in history, teachers need not just academic skill but personality, independence of mind, and sense of autonomy.

Interaction with teachers has helped to create ideas, understanding and meaning in a mutual attempt to connect previous understandings to new knowledge. *Doing* provides more opportunities for learning than *telling*, because teachers may work in their communities and schools to create more knowledge. What they are going to do in their classrooms is to assist their student to generate information and not to tell what they have been told. More learning takes place outside the classroom than in it. People form communities accumulate collective learning and this translates into social practices. Teachers learn more if they participate in the communities because knowledge is accumulated collectively without even formalising it.

Education needs efficiency, and as a result our common and shared challenge to efficiency necessitates teachers working together and formulating strategies towards improving efficiency. Education is helping the teacher to mature and be able to make just decisions, not inherit ones that have been passed on from generation to generation. Education helps teachers to observe and understand their self-projected values and impositions. However, a teacher cannot achieve this alone, but rather it involves other stakeholders in the system, and all must share and communicate the acquired knowledge.

The organisation for distance education is the responsibility of the colleges, which are administered by professionals who might not know what is happening on the ground. The departments of education that are directly working with the schools are the ones that know their needs. Teachers' voices need to be heard in the professional programmes that affect them. They work in an environment that they understand well. They are authorities on their particular developmental needs and their schools. They know what works and what does not. They understand the parents and communities better than the college curriculum developers and staff who decide what is best for their development. If students perceive positively about their teaching, the quality of the institution is also perceived to be good. Their positive relationship is critical for raising educational quality.

Constructivism is shown by teachers because it is informed by their own classroom teaching. It intertwines educational theory and practice. Theory informs the practice and the practice influences the theory. Education is constantly being reformed. Teachers are willing to confront change. They adopt new challenges and practices in their classrooms because they are always striving for excellence. When there are no facilitators teachers feel that they owe it to themselves and their students. They feel that they have not been successfully taught. Situations of discontent push them to work even harder.

It is generally easy for individuals to work cooperatively to accomplish shared learning. This includes group work, collaborative learning and cooperative learning; everyone is expected to work independently from the facilitator without direct supervision. When teachers work together it becomes easier for them to assess one another meaningfully and constructively. It is more assuring when criticism is shared within a group rather than from someone coming from outside, such as a facilitator. A facilitator is seen more as an authoritarian figure.

Formation of groups is influenced by many factors, such as gender, race, ability, and proximity to each other. In the case of the DTEP it was influenced by the physical geography of the country. Professional learners in the same geographical area are compelled to work together because there is no alternative. Fortunately, Lesotho is a homogenous country with one race and almost the same culture amongst the citizens. Race and therefore culture do not play a part in the working relations within the country. Factors that affect groups' formation will differ from country to country and from one geographic location to another. However, there will always be groups, especially with college students.

Cooperative learning focuses on the development of social skills and not only on academic skills development. Members of the team learn to accept, respect, tolerance and value contributions from others. This improves self-esteem, and develops positive attitudes and values. They then support and nurture one another. Cooperative learning brings together many ideas, and new knowledge and meanings are created. Constructively, they are able to apply and create new meanings in new situations and environments.

Students need a space for sharing experiences with colleagues. This helps them to continue assisting each other. They are able to reflect on their practices and then infuse one another's practices into their own, and relate theory and practice. Experiences may differ depending on the geographic location, culture and race. This form of learner-centred learning is transferred

to the teachers' own teaching and thence to the community. Once teachers enrol in a distance education programme they become agents of change.

Cooperative learning builds leadership skills; in the beginning of the programme there is no one tasked with organising the groups, so someone should take the initiative to ensure that study groups are built. During the course of the programme individuals take responsibilities to ensure that all the tasks are carried out. They assign each other work to be done and later shared amongst the members. Each member is responsible for carrying out the assigned tasks without supervision, but as a duty.

Members of the groups realise that there are other ways of explaining and describing events, situations and concepts. Whilst individuals may see issues differently, there are different ways of doing the same task. Relationship between individuals and between individuals and the society are cultivated. This enhances good peer assessment and feedback. At this level, professional learners learn with and from each other. Students are more reliable working more with each other than competing with each other.

Professional learners need to develop their subject knowledge whilst they are teaching. Textbooks and peers are their common sources of information. It is therefore frustrating if there are no supplementary materials to support their prescribed textbooks. Peers are valued because of their interactive support. Peer support is useful both formally and in informal discussions. Teachers feel that their peers are an underused support system. The nature of the programmes, geographic areas, cultures, and race restrict this useful support base. Peers are used more for subject content knowledge support than the tutors, who are used more for administrative purposes. Establishing beneficial relationships is an important element of professional development.

Learning is continuous and open-ended. Every new situation and challenge requires meaning attached to it and new ideas to address the situation. It is not about school or college books which are shelved afterwards, rather it is about being consistently stimulated to think further and keep on reading, absorbing and assimilating what others say and have said. It is about being addicted to knowledge seeking. Teachers gain new knowledge from their peers and from their books, libraries and any other sources of information. This information is processed and retained if necessary, or ignored if meaningless. Constructively, teachers gain confidence

and develop to their full potential and therefore become responsible citizens when they are studying.

Self-independence was created amongst the professional learners due to the environment in which they find themselves. It further leads to high level of self-sufficiency to help their students in schools and in the community. They are able to devise their own procedures for their assessment, improvise equipment and materials in an educational setting. Constructively, teachers adapt their teaching styles and methods to suit their classrooms. They value their students and respect them as the members of the classroom and facilitate participation of learning. Knowledge is constructed by the student in the community of practices.

Distance education graduates still fall within the 'normal' range of intelligence and are capable of learning as much as the day-to-day face-to-face counterparts in the same institution. Their main challenge is that they are separated by time and space from the college, except for contact sessions. However, for the purposes of knowledge acquisition, assimilation and applying it to new situations in their own teaching, they are no different.

Teachers who study through distance are at an advantage because they are able to practice what they learn immediately in their own teaching. They are able to make a decision on what is working and what is not working. They may further share with peers and later adapt from their peers. They are in a position to conduct trials in their classrooms if there are new innovations in the curriculum. However, teachers are faced with a social uncertainty. This is because they are constantly being evaluated by their students, parents and colleagues. Assessment and evaluation create a lot of anxiety at all times.

The greatest challenge that remains is the lack of accountability. When programmes are running for a long period without further consultations with the stakeholders or other professionals, doubts begin to emerge on the suitability and relevance of such programmes. There has to be rigorous discussion from time to time about the existing programmes to ensure that they are keeping pace with the latest developments and innovations. Distance education needs strong and active learning to develop more social responsibilities and personal interaction.

5.14 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This dissertation comprises five chapters, divided as follows:

CHAPTER ONE gives an orientation of the study. It includes introduction, the rationale, the problem statement, research aims and objectives. These are followed by the importance and relevance of the study, summary of how data was collected and analysed including ethical considerations. Lastly the limitations were discussed.

CHAPTER TWO described the key concepts that are most appropriate for this study, namely constructivism, educational change, cooperative learning, self-regulated learning, peer assessment and, quality assessment and quality assurance. The key concepts were followed by a literature review based on these sub-headings: why distance education; the challenges faced by distance education; success of the DTEP; student support; quality in distance education; and quality assurance.

CHAPTER THREE focused on the research design and methodology. It encompassed qualitative research, population and sampling, research procedure, data collection, that is, semi-structured interviews and field notes. Data analysis using *Atlas.ti* was described (hermeneutic documents, codes and frequencies of codes used, etc came out, see addenda 1 and 2); issues of ethics and trustworthiness were also discussed followed by crystallisation (supporting evidence from different participants in some aspects of the interview schedules).

CHAPTER FOUR comprises data presentation and analysis, with coding and findings as they emerged from data. It focused on theory and practice, organisational issues, learning materials, challenges due to lack of facilities, assessment and feedback procedures, student support, personal fulfilment and development by professional learners, staff recruitment and development, and examinations issues.

CHAPTER FIVE looked at the findings from the empirical study. These were compared to literature. The research question was addressed. Quality education, quality assessment and quality assurance were explained, recommendations made and quality in the context of the DTEP looked into. Finally, the limitations of this study were outlined and the summary of the study.

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