

**VIEWS ON ABET 'DROP-OUT'
IN THE AREA OF THULAMHASHE**

by

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ABSTRACT

The research report in this essay is concerned with the drop-out syndrome in ABET classrooms in the rural area of Thulamahashe. The essay contains four sections. In section 1, the contextual framework is described.

In section 2, a literature review is used to trace the views on ABET dropout. This section also provides the contribution of ABET to community building.

In sections 3 and 4 there is a report on how the study explored, by means of in-depth interviews and observations, the views on ABET dropouts in the lives of these adults. The study also recorded how they perceived their situation as 'drop-outs', and what they feel can be done in ABET centres.

Evidence from the study suggests that they are victims of formal education drop-out, and are trapped in the past education system where rural education was given very little attention and support by the government of that time.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late wife Busiwana Phoslinah Mdluli [Majinga], and our four children: Given; Thanks; Bongani and Sibusiso.



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SECTION ONE


ORIENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This section is an orientation section, in which the study is contextualised. The theoretical rationale explaining the motivation for the research, and the physical contextualisation in which the study is conducted, is discussed. The main terminology used in this research will be presented. The aim of the study and the research question will be stated. This will be followed by a discussion on the methodological orientation in which the study is framed.

1.2 CONTEXT AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

1.2.1 Physical context



The study was conducted at an ABET centre at Thulamahashe, Bushbuckridge. This is a centre for Adult Education, for adults who want to further their studies. The classes chosen for the purpose of the study were the grade 10 and 12 classes. The rationale for choosing these two grades was that they were writing external examinations, and this is where the teachers experienced the dropout problem teaching these classes. It was felt that these adults were not capable of meeting these standards, and therefore dropped out before they could write their examinations. The grade 10 class was made up of 15 adult learners, and four teachers. The grade 12 class was made up of 25 adult learners, and six teachers. In both classes female adult learners outnumbered the male adult learners. The main reasons why female adult learners outnumbered male adult learners, is the notion of males as heads of families who have no time for literacy lessons. Female adult learners are fighting daily against poverty and low-social economic living conditions.

Most of the people in rural communities, even today, still have a belief that education is a waste of time. They believe it spoils youth, and tends to make educated people look down on their parents. Most adults in communities view educating their children as a waste of money. This is prevalent among the males, as the heads of families. They see attending literacy lessons as a waste of time and resources.

ABET learning centres in rural areas are therefore dominated by female adult learners. This is based on the perspective of education as a waste of time and resources. To counter-act this state of affairs, male adult learners need to be given recognition for lifelong learning. It is maintained that through ABET, African women can be empowered to challenge domination by their husbands. Women are dominating rural areas because so few male adult learners attend the programmes.

Male adult learners prolong the process of keeping abreast with change. This is despite the fact that life changes. Knowledge is keeping up in a time of changing societies. All the teachers were young males who had the experience of teaching in a formal high school, but did not have the knowledge and training necessary for teaching the adult learners. Teachers reflected a lack of learning and teaching strategies necessary for ABET. Vella (1994:47) propounded that the seven steps for good planning are needed for successful designing of projects like ABET, by trainers. This should hold true within the ABET Centre at Thulamahashe learning centre, for the adult learners and teachers, as "facilitators".

The overemphasis on academic schooling in many parts of the world has led to the inadequate preparation of school leavers for the occupational world. In South Africa for instance, the majority of blacks had inadequate education; and whites had better educational opportunities than blacks. The white paper on education (1995) captures this essence. As a result of the historic inadequacies of school education provision, especially among Africans, the majority of the adult population, both in formal and out of formal employment, had either inadequate schooling, or no schooling at

all. Adult Basic Education and Training has definitely been neglected, both by the media, and the past system of Government.

Recently in South Africa, there has been a dramatic shift in awareness. This has resulted in the rethinking, refocusing and redefinition of program direction and relevance. In this light it was proposed that a survey, on an alternative towards adult education, should be conducted.

ABET has the main focus and perspective of transforming adult education towards job preparation and economic viability in communities. It is a lifelong learning process.

1.3 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

There is an indication of resistance to ABET programmes at the Thulamahashe learning centre, where I conducted a pilot investigation. My findings indicated that the students' attitudes could be attributed partly to their experiences in formal education, as well as to the fact that they had eventually dropped out of mainstream education. The research is thus undertaken as a way of ascertaining the assumption regarding the students' views on their formal education, and on dropping out.

The study is based, anchored and directed in what, according to COSATU's (1993:3, 6/7) new approach to ABET, is regarded as a fundamental part of a totally education and training system. The main objective being that of developing the skills and knowledge needed to run industries, build a democratic society, and enhance job creation.

Students who no longer participate in formal education, and who are seen as dropouts should turn to ABET programmes. These programmes will meet their needs and life-demands, by "conscientising" them into an awareness of the social cultural reality, and "transformation", in their daily rural lives within Thulamahashe and the neighbouring areas. I claim in this

study that ABET programmes in rural areas such as the one at Thulamashashe learning centre, should promote a sense of self-development and self-sustainment. This can be done by empowering ABET community students to improve their life skills, and to attain their aims. Fellow scholars or researchers should at the end of this educational investigation, benefit when doing similar studies in communities, for the social and economic development of such communities.

1.4 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

1.4.1 Formal education

Coombs (1985:22) defines formal education as a "deliberate and systematic transmission of knowledge, skills and attitudes within an explicit, defined and structured format of space, time and material. In addition there are set qualifications for teachers and learners, which are typified in the technology of schooling". The learner in the formal system is involved with learning only, and follows a fixed, generally applicable method of instruction. According to Mocker (1991:5), this means that the learner has hardly taken any responsibility, and that other people take most important decisions for him. Formal education can make a particular contribution to the acquisition of basic work skills. Formal education orientates students or learners to conform, to accept inequality and their places in the status quo, and to follow authority. Freire (1993:52) explicitly highlights the analysis of the character of formal education. ABET is presently of the same character. He also mentions the "banking" approach, and "participating" of students as passive participants in their learning events. ABET centres, especially at the Thulamahashe learning centre, maintain the same educational character, and hence a high rate of drop-outs from formal education ensues. Formal education in the rural areas lacks exposure and intended educational outcomes such as skills to make living and knowledge to "construct" and expose their expertise from accumulated knowledge. The learners develop an attitude of failure in their life styles. Hence they dropout from the mainstream system.

1.4.2 Adult learners

The word "adult" can refer to a stage in the life cycle of an individual. An individual's first a child, then an adolescent, then an adult (Gravett 1997:1). A learner can be any person who is prepared to learn something, irrespective of their age, sex or colour. It is very difficult to give a precise definition of the concept "adult learner", as there is little agreement between writers on when a person becomes an adult, and consequently an adult learner (NEPI: 1992a). Recently a suggestion was made by the United Education Science Culture Organisation (UNESCO), that adult learners are "people who are not regular at school or university system and who are fifteen years and older". So far this is an acceptable definition of an adult learner. Malale (1996:28) states that literature sources indicate that adult learners bring a variety of needs into class or learning centres. While Vella (1994:5) adds that, listening to learners' needs will help shape a programme with immediate usefulness for adults. Adult learners want to learn what they need, and want to be taught what is relevant in day to day life experiences, for instance, filling in forms at a bank.

Adult learners will walk out of learning centres if learning materials and courses do not meet their learning needs. I also claim in this study that ABET programmes in the rural areas of Thulamahashe have to conduct a needs assessment of the adult learners in the centre. There is a need to listen to learners' needs, so that what is delivered to them is useful for lifelong learning, and will benefit their lifestyles in their communities.

Based on the above information, it is evident that adult learners need respect from their facilitators. This is because one needs to learn by choice when one is matured. A dialogue is of paramount importance to adult learners, and must be part of decision making in the curriculum design. Adult learners depend on teamwork, and the facilitator has to consult the learners. Vella (1994:150) maintains that educators have a forceful voice within the learning centres. Mezirow (1990:48) maintains

that “participatory discourse” is necessary to motivate and encourage adult learners. In addition, he says that dialogue declines due to lack of self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy in their courses. Transformation in adult learners’ education is important if rural learners are to benefit.

Habermas, in Ewert (1991:57), propounded education to be of a transformative nature, and useful in eliminating educational activities previously imposed in the curriculum of adult learners. It is in this fate and state of affairs, that ABET centres in rural areas like Thulamahashe have realized that the needs of adult learners’ need to assessed, their dignity must be respected, and they must be actively involved in their learning activities, as a team of learners. Education in these learning centres should be facilitated through deliberative and consultative voices. ABET learning centres should aim to transform the character of education. This will, in return, motivate and encourage adult learners. This is because they will have a purpose in mind. Communities from which they come will be transformed, when their needs are met economically and culturally. If their voices are not heard in the planning, they will also be silent in the learning situation.

1.4.3 Adult education

Knowles (1980:28) describes adult education as an activity, which treats adult learners in ways different from the way they would treat children. In adult education the fostering of self directedness is the chief purpose. In this way, integrity is respected and interests and demands are granted a great deal of validity. For this reason adult education is seen as a democratic, cooperative venture. The learner has to be directed towards making decisions that will enhance their potential. According to Knowles (1980:28), most cases of adult education began as a response to a perceived practical need. Adult education enhances personal growth or maturity, which includes “linkages with life”. This refers to personal growth within a social context (Knowles 1980:29).

In South African education there is now a formal structure that accommodates adult education. According to the NQF levels, adult education is parallel to general education.

The NQF ABET levels are specially designed to facilitate effective learning among adults, for appropriate outcomes at various levels. Such outcomes include skills to do things so as to make a living in their communities, and knowledge which can be to make a success in life. Finally, these programmes aim to develop lifelong learning attitudes for the workplace, and coping strategies for change in society.

1.4.4 Centres of learning

Centres of learning are places where learning takes place, either formally or non-formally. These educational environments include schools, adult education centres, pre-schools, ECD centres, universities, and technikons. Centres of learning should meet conducive requirements for effective learning and teaching. This will mean that learners in these educational environments, can be motivated for lifelong learning.

Each centre of learning needs support from the community it serves. Such support includes community based support in meeting learners' needs through centres of learning based teams. ABET centres in rural areas need support of this kind, which will motivate adult learners to continue learning and to cope with life changes. From these centres of learning good relationship among educators as facilitators, adult learners, and other community members should develop in a climate of educational partnership.

ABET centres in rural areas are generally not viable for learning due to a lack of facilities, and lack of experience on the part of educators. Learners

dropping out from formal education see no need to attend ABET programmes as these programmes offer nothing that attracts them.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

The study was conducted on the assumption that there is a resistance to ABET classes in rural areas.

The research question that guided this study is:

- * What are the views of rural ABET students on their dropping out from formal education?
- * What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of ABET classes in rural areas?

1.6 AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study is to identify the students' views on the prevalent drop-out syndrome, as well as their views on formal education. This is with special reference to rural areas such as the Thulamahashe area in Bushbuckridge. This will empower them to continue with their educational careers. This is community empowerment in that it allows for its people to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to be able to make a living by themselves. This is self-sustainment. It reduces the lack of employment and poverty in a community, and raises the low socio-economic in communities. This will eventually cause them to lead a better life.

Supporting this aim are the following objectives:

- * To write up a brief theoretical framework in which the main concepts of the research topic are contained.
- * To conduct this investigation that captures the sought data optimally.
- * To render findings that are valid and conducive to interpretation, from the literature in the domain of adult Basic Education Training and Community Education.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research design is of a qualitative nature. The reason for choosing this design is that it is descriptive, explanatory and contextual. Le Compte and Presissle (1993:31), maintain that qualitative research is concerned with contextual meaning. Thus such studies are framed by a description of, an explanation of, or a meaning given to the phenomenon, by both the researcher and the participants. A small survey and case study format was chosen, with the unit of study being the grade 10 and 12 classes consisting of 40 adults and 6 teachers. A specific group of students were identified as drop-outs, and were therefore representative of the sample. The case study format would complement the research question and elucidate a wealth of information. This view is supported by Patton, M. (1987:19) who says that "a qualitative case study seeks to describe the unit, being the case, in depth, in details, in context and holistically".

1.8 VERIFICATION OR TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Determining the accuracy of the account, discussing the generalizability of it, and advancing possibilities of replicating a study is important in any research. Qualitative research writers such as Miles and Huberman (1994:278), discuss establishing quality criteria such as "authenticity and

trustworthiness which are analogous in questions of validity and reliability” used in qualitative research.

The data collection methods are an in-depth interview, and direct observation. During interviews a tape recorder was used, and written documents were kept by the researcher on a daily basis. From this an inductive analysis, the main patterns and themes emerged (Miles and Huberman (1994:239). Data analysis involved categorising the data and clustering it.

1.9 PROGRAMME OF STUDY

The study consists of the following sections:

SECTION 1

Introduction to the study, which covers the rationale for the research, aim of the study, methodology, research assumptions and presupposition.

SECTION 2

The section comprises of the theoretical framework.

SECTION 3

The section considers the methodology of the study, including the design and data collection, and the method of analysis, with examples.

SECTION 4

Section four consists of a discussion of the findings and recommendations of the research.

SECTION 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first section, a broad outline on how the research was conceptualised was presented. In this section an effort will be made to focus on the theoretical background and literature review regarding ABET drop-out. The thrust of this section will be that ABET can help to empower the community through non-formal education. The non-formal ABET programmes at the community level are aimed at reducing a high dropout rate from formal education. The main claim of this investigation is that the drop-out continues in ABET programmes, probably because the learners feel alienated. ABET learning programmes at the community level should be geared towards skill development that could motivate the adult learners. This will lead to meeting the needs of individuals and collective members of the community, in promoting economic growth, and in fighting against poverty. People within communities will experience self-development and self-sustainability. The drop-out syndrome needs to be addressed if ABET is to succeed in this way.

2.1.1 Defining ABET

Gravett (1997:11), says that ABET is wrongly equated with literacy education. However, she regards ABET as the provision of empowering, useful, general knowledge education for adults in order to help them acquire literacy, numeracy, skills and information. She further prompted the principle of integration as a cornerstone of national policy development for education in South Africa. ABET was equated with vocational training, adult basic education and formal schooling. Indeed ABET programmes, even in rural areas should accommodate skills development for work place knowledge and an attitude for lifelong learning and should curb

unemployment of community members. If this does not happen ABET is not going to improve people's lives.

2.1.2 Literacy

While literacy is defined as an ability to communicate through reading and writing which can be communicated through speech, Merriam & Cunningham (1989: 66) also argues that literacy goes beyond the ability to read and write. This idea is also referred to as the basic education of adults, rather than technical skills of reading and writing. Literacy needs to be defined in relation to its uses and purpose, rather than its function. Lyster (1992:10) says that literacy courses are educational programmes designed for the empowerment of adult or non-adult learners, for the achievement of a better understanding during their second chance of learning. Malale (1996: 23) maintains that literacy contributes to social transformation at a community level. It provides people with skills to participate actively in a democratic society. Literacy comforts the marginalized youth who deviated from formal education, leading them to non-formal education programmes. ABET programmes should benefit adult learners by teaching them life long learning in acquiring skills, knowledge, and attitudes for self-development.

2.1.3 Non-formal education

From an educational perspective Colletta (1990) says that non-formal education is defined as a systematic communication of skills, knowledge and attitudes provided outside the limits of the formal school. Mocker (1991: 11-23) regards this type of learning as the climax of learner autonomy. The learners themselves take responsibility for choosing what they learn, and also for how to learn. Coombs (1994:176) also defines non-formal education as an organised systematic educational activity carried out outside the framework of the formal system, to provide selected

types of learning to particular subgroups in the population. This includes adults as well as children. Non-formal education is like formal education, but the emphasis is on skills, and not on qualifications.

2.2 MAKING ABET WORK WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

2.2.1 Community

A community is a group of people who have something in common like place of habitation, beliefs, and language, or cultural activities. ABET adult learners are a community of learners sharing the common interest in education. The adult learners at Thulamahashe learning centre are a community of learners sharing a philosophy of life as learners.

Anthropologically, communities accommodate social perspectives like symbols, kinship, boundaries, and spirits. Cohen (1985:9) maintains that a community "is a micro-social and cultural entity". While Cohen (1985:17) believes that a community has boundaries, and people within these boundaries reflect similarities and differences in their interests, symbols and events, he also says that these boundaries can shift according to need.

In ABET learning centres boundaries are clear and similarities exist due to the common needs of learning by adult learners. Differences are also seen in learning centres due to individual differences based on individual interests. Learners in ABET learning centres should extend their learning boundaries to be community productive, and viable for community needs.

Tönnies, in Sergiovani (1994:22), defines community as *gemeinschaft*, as a collective or a group of members with stability and solidarity. These are bound by common interests and common aims within their vicinity. While *gesellschaft* or a society, is broader than *gemeinschaft* where relationships are of limited nature. ABET at *gemeinschaft* level should be

extended to *gesellschaft* broadening the perspectives of adult learners from a narrow focus to a wider perspective - in other words, from the community to the society level.

2.2.2 Community education

According to Townsend (1994:17), community education is a process that concerns everything that affects the well-being of citizens within a given community. Community education focuses on the needs of the individual to become a self-fulfilled, active participant in society, and also emphasises serving the needs of the society. Townsend (194:25) further maintains that community education is the involvement of people in the process of identification, development, implementation, and evaluation of the sort of activities that have been given the label listed above. Since society is always changing, the provision of ABET needs to adjust in response to changing structural needs. According to Dekker and Lemmer (1996:27), change requires from us a systematic adjustment to more and new information, knowledge and world philosophies. Therefore the introduction of community education will help to empower the community, and the individuals within it. This will be done by giving them experience in decision-making, and in participation.

Allen and Martin (1992:3) maintain that community education "demands policies that reflect the interests, concerns and needs of local people". Unlike formal institutionalised education, community education embraces everyone in the community, irrespective of age or ability. It may address a problem of deprivation or be used to enrich those with potential that are in need. It can also promote self-realisation. Through community education, equity in opportunities, social justice and economic growth could be attained.

ABET programs in rural areas like the Thulamahashe ABET learning centre, should use non-formal education to address the problem of

unemployment. Adult learners can acquire skills, knowledge, and even attitudes through community education. This will help them in their self-development, and self-sustainability, and in alleviating poverty from that community. Learning programmes should be broadened and remain flexible, to accommodate the needs of most people in the community. Learners should be part of curriculum construction in community education, so that they feel that they are part of their educational activities. Vella's (1994) advice with regard to curriculum construction should be heeded, namely: who decides what is going to be learned by whom and for what purpose?

2.3 CONTRIBUTION OF ABET TO THE COMMUNITY BUILDING

According to Cohen (1985:1) community is one of those words like "culture", "myth", "ritual", "symbol" banded around in ordinary everyday speech. He defines community as being symbolically constructed as a "system of values, norms and moral codes which provides a sense of identity with a bounded whole". Sergiovanni (1994:47) further maintains that communities are defined by their "centres of values, sentiments, and beliefs". These create, a sense of "We" instead of "I". In many communities the possibilities for education and training programmes are restricted by low levels of literacy and numeracy, and by a general lack of educational grounding. ABET's contribution will help people to run meetings, get things done between meetings, keep accounts, understand how the law works, and how to run a business.

ABET programs are geared towards community development to meet community needs. These programmes break down the sense of "I" as an individual adult learner, to develop the sense of "We" as a group or community of adult learners. Mezirow (1990:48) viewed transformation in education for adult learners by virtue of collaborative learning for social values. An ABET class is a community of adult learners, hence it binds them together to share social values, sentiments and beliefs. This also

indicates a move from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*. This is a sign of community development.

ABET programmes can liberate rural communities by providing them with programmes of action for their self-development. This promotes the social-economic position of the community. The end products of these ABET programs will be community development, self-development and self-sustainability by community people, if all the learners remain in the programs and if drop-out rates decrease. For some reason, however, learners do not complete the courses.

2.4 NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND ABET

Cohen (1985:65), maintained that the knowledge acquired at school level was concerning only those best learners who could finish their studies and were in the minority. These had opportunity to use the acquired knowledge. For this reason non-formal education can be viewed as a means which can contribute to the empowerment of ABET learners. More recently Mezirow (1990) has proposed the concept of 'perspective transformation' as a significant purpose of adult education. Adult education is thus seen as a democratic, co-operative venture. Mezirow (1990) provided a conceptual link between the theory and adult learning. He stresses the need for a "disorienting dilemma", as a trigger that precedes any serious self scrutiny and evaluation of one's situation. This implies presenting alternative ways of thinking and acting. ABET should help learners to locate their personal troubles within the context of wider social forces and structures. This is one way of thinking about drop-out.

ABET learning centres within rural areas like the Thulamahashe learning centre should cater and prepare adult learners for their future learning prospects. Programmes should accommodate the needs and aspirations of learners for economic and cultural viability and should help the learners to take full ownership of the programme.

2.5 THE DROPOUT PROBLEM

2.5.1 View on formal education dropouts

According to researchers, the factors most strongly associated with dropping out are: low academic achievement, socio-economic status and individual perception over their environment. Greenhalgh, P (1994: 72) states that the low self esteem of these individuals who think they can not compete in the world, seems to be the most disturbing factor. This is because it is often likely to lead to anti-social behaviour such as delinquency, truancy and drug abuse or just feeling alienated. During the apartheid period in South Africa, people talked about the "lost generation" which missed the opportunity to get education. The slogan used to be "Liberation now, education later". However, now the lost generation is seen as having dropped out of formal schooling and are left without qualifications or job prospects.

The problem of dropouts from formal education still prevails in present schools because it is inherited from the former South African education system. The system never accommodated community education because of differentiated education departments. Education was geared and based on content for external examination for certification purposes, without the development of skills and relevant knowledge in its learners, and without community ownership.

Paulo Freire (1990), discusses the "banking method" of teaching where learners did not participate fully in their education. Instead they were "passive listeners", who were supposed to listen to the educators with knowledge. Learners were demotivated and saw no need to attend classes because they continued to feel like strangers. Many left as dropouts. This state of affairs is the order of learning activities in ABET learning centres, where adult learners are not part of learning activities but are viewed as listeners. They then see no reason to attend, and consequently leave ABET programmes in favour of their daily activities.

Lack of transformative education, leading to “hegemony and bureaucracy”, according to Ewert (1991:57), also contributed to the dropout problem from formal education. ABET learning centres should avoid this problem of neglecting adult learners and attend to learners’ needs to participate in spirited and open ways. This can help them to construct knowledge of their own accord.

2.5.2 Dropout prevention strategy

Bucci (1992: 68) argues that dropout prevention mechanisms and strategies should be provided for students who are likely to drop out. Such programmes often “combine an array of services in a comprehensive, multiservice approach that encourages students to remain at school”. According to Bucci (1992: 73) one such strategy is an acceleration programme for helping students who have previously dropped out. Bucci & Reitzammer (1992:93) outlined a need for community intervention in such problems ABET drop-out can possibly be prevented by assisting learners to take ownership of their programme in the way.

2.6 INEQUALITIES IN THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION

During the apartheid era, the South African education system was characterised by inequalities in both formal and non-formal education. This was especially true in rural communities. The nature and structure of education in South Africa has not made it possible for equity to be achieved. The problem of ensuring equal education opportunities is further compounded by a lack of consensus, as to what constitutes equal educational opportunities, and how best to achieve this goal in practice. Various contextual factors influence education, such as economic, social and political factors to mention but a few.

2.7 INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMUNITY

Bella (1986: 31) pointed out that, despite the persuasiveness of individualism, many people have sought public and community commitments as a source of peace and commitment in life. Wuthnow (1995: 291) conveyed a similar point in his analysis of how people can make commitments in caring for others, despite cultural difference that seemingly fosters the rugged individualist.

2.8 TOWARDS A CURRICULUM FOR ADULT EDUCATION

The White Paper on Education (1995:47) captures the essence of this: "because of the historical inadequacies of school provision especially among Africans, the majority of adult population both in and out of formal employment, had no schooling". In 1991, the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) conducted a survey on an alternative secondary curriculum for adult education. The findings of the survey influenced the shape and direction of a secondary education curriculum for adults.

Townsend (1994:109), stated that formal institutions are usually not cost effective and that few of the community members benefit from these institutions. Due to this limited resources, most community illiterates are viewed as dropouts and do not have opportunities of continuing with learning activities. Institutions need to open opportunities for adult learners for community development. These communities' institutions are those which Townsend viewed to have the "core". This consisted of the state mandated courses like English, Biology, Science and Maths, while the "plus" will cover the community needs of the people.

ABET learning centres for adult learners in the rural areas should accommodate "core plus" curriculum for adult learners to meet their needs at a community educational level. ABET learning programmes should

include these necessary curricula. Any curriculum change should accommodate the needs of adult learners, and they should be part of curriculum reconstruction. This will open ways and means for self-employment, and will reduce high rate of lack of employment by community residents. Curriculum change should also do a "needs assessment" of that community, and should allow including ABET adult learners, as a community of learners, to voice their views.

2.9 THEORIES OF LEARNING AND STRATEGIES FOR ADULT LEARNERS

There is a motto which states that: "do not give people fish to eat – but teach them to fish". From the literature review as covered by this section my observations and collected experiences are as follow:

In most cases adult learners are matured people with senses of responsibilities in their learning events. Adult learners deserve respect from their educational facilitators, coupled with relationship structures of acceptance and trust, for effective involvement in learning and teaching. Educators of adult learners should employ a consultative voice. This in turn helps them to learn in the form of a "participatory" action of learning and teaching.

Vella (1994:150), says that the teacher as a facilitator should work as partners with the adult learners. Learners had a say in their learning events and, were even allowed to criticise the trainers as facilitators.

Mezirow (1990:48) proposed transformative education for adult learners. Otherwise "adult learners will resist to take part in dialogue because of a negative self-esteem and a fear of retribution even feelings of inadequacy". He further highlighted "participatory discourse" to motivate adult learners. Adult learners are to be part of the curriculum construction and design. Freire P (1986) also supported the idea of a participatory

approach for adult learners, which conscientised his learners as partners in education.

From the above educationists' points of views, ABET learning programs in rural areas like Thulamahashe should give students a deliberative voice, transformative education and participatory involvement in their learning. Adult learners will be liberated. This is community liberation, from poverty and unemployment.



SECTION 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The theoretical framework of the study was set out in Section two. The methodological orientation of the research will now be presented. The focus of this section will be a discussion of the rationale for the qualitative approach to this study, the research design and data collection techniques, as well as a description of how data were analysed, coded, cluttered and consolidated.

This section is concluded with a brief description of the data.

3.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

In this study, I employed qualitative methods I supported the qualitative approach due to its focus on inquiry into the understanding of social human problems, based on "building a complex, holistic picture", formed with words. According to Miles and Huberman (1994:9), in some sense all data are qualitative, they refer to the essence of people, objects and situations.

By approaching the research in a qualitative fashion, it was hoped that different aspects of different findings would evolve. In addition it was hoped that the findings could help program planners to decrease the ABET dropouts rate and thereby be beneficial to the community to which it is directed.

3.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The design refers to the decision about how a research study is to be conducted and can be classified according to the “logical arrangement that bear upon our ability to draw casual inferences from our research findings” (Merriam 1991:18).

For the purpose of this study the design was characterised by its description, contextual and exploratory nature.

The characteristics of the design related to this are as follows:

- * Process rather than outcomes or product.
- * The process in this study was to observe and interview both ABET learners and teachers at Thulamahashe ABET learning centre.
- * Description – gain an understanding through the analysis of words. (Miles & Huberman, 1994:20) which can be organised to contrast, compare and analyse patterns of behaviour. The data of the research were documented in descriptive qualitative language.
- * The researcher is the primary instrument for collecting data and analysis. The researcher observed, recorded and analysed data in this research.
- * Fieldwork – the researcher physically went to the people, in the setting to observe and record behaviour in its natural setting, (Miles & Huberman, 1994:6) and interacted with those being researched. The researcher was present for the study on a daily basis over a period of a month.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection involves “setting the boundaries for the study by purposefully deciding on the setting, the informants, the events, and the process, to be observed and then collecting data, in various forms over a set period of time” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995:78). For the purpose of this study data were collected through observations and interviews, and recorded with the use of a tape recorder and fieldnotes. The different methods of data collection used will be discussed briefly:

3.4.1 Observation

Bailey (1982:239) maintains that the observational method is the primary technique for collecting data on behaviour. Marshall & Rossman (1998:79) further maintain that observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and artefacts in the social setting chosen for the study. Observation is preferred when one wants to study in detail, the behaviours that occur in a particular setting or institution.

For the purpose of this study the researcher will not participate in the programme, but will observe how the lessons are conducted, and will also observe the activities and conversations of ABET students, and the teachers. This will be written down for later analysis.

I conducted observations at the Thulamahashe ABET learning Centre for a period of two weeks in June 1998. During this period learners were attending classes seriously because they were about to write their June tests. Each day I observed a class for a period of one hour.

The first week I observed the grade 10 class. For two days I concentrated mainly on the behaviour of the adult learners. In one instance a teacher was revising a Geography lesson on “geomorphology”. He introduced his matter by asking questions. “That is geomorphology?” For a long period

there was no response from the adult learners. I observed one adult learner who was drinking from a can of Coca-Cola. After a while one male learner raised his hand. The teacher did not ask him to explain what geomorphology is, but said "I am discouraged by your behaviour. It appears to me you never understood the lesson, or you are not reading your work". This type of interaction was typical of the whole lesson.

On the other two days, I observed teaching methods and the attitudes of the teachers towards the adult learners. In an English lesson the teacher was presenting a comprehension test. He read the passage and later interpreted the story in their mother tongue. Afterwards he requested one adult learner to read the passage again. The learner failed to observe the full stop and commas. I also observed the arrival time. The adult learners were arriving late for the lessons. There were many interruptions and little discussion. Neither the teacher nor the adult learners appeared to be interested. The teacher spoke to the learners as if they were teenagers.



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3.4.2 Interview

An interview is defined as a simple conversation between two or more people, specifically to gather information (Berg (1995: 39). An interview is a purposeful conversation, usually between two people, but sometimes involving more, that is directed by one to get information from the other (Bogdan 1992: 96).

Interviews are classified in structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. This study will employ semi-structured interviews. According to Schumacher and McMillan (1993:25), semi-structured interviews do not have choices from which the respondents can select an answer. Rather, the question is phrased to allow for individual response. This format is flexible and allows the information to be more accessible for the readers of this research.

3.4.3 The strategy/plan

I will now discuss the story of my investigation. This will be illustrated with excerpts from raw data.

The sample for this investigation consists of a group of grade 10 and grade 12 adult learners, and teachers. The interviewees were selected purposefully from these groups (n=4). The teachers (n=2) and the drop-outs (n=4) were also selected in this way.

Collecting data by observing phenomena of interest is commonly referred to as participant observation. Along these lines, Kane (1985: 53) distinguishes two types of participant observation, namely direct (which entails observing the actors and their actions as they occur), and indirect (where the researcher interprets the results of actions or events).

For the purpose of this study the researcher will opt for direct, firsthand observation. This will imply doing field research in the Thumalamahashe ABET centre. The researcher will observe what occurs in the classrooms (as explained in previous paragraphs). The learners in their classrooms, as well as their learning programmes will be observed. This will entail observing their social environment, programme activities, their behaviour, how they interact, how they communicate, as well as documents such as attendance registers.

3.4.4 Observation data

I went to the centre at about 14:00 as an onlooker, as well as a participatory observer. In the grade 10 class, I found nine adult learners and their teacher who was busy with an English lesson. This took place after I had sought permission from the administrator. Each learner had a prescribed book in which they were busy with a comprehension test. I was also given an opportunity to have one of these books. The teacher

requested one learner to read from the passage. The learner repeated the first passage several times, reading word for word. Eventually the teacher stopped him and requested another learner to read. This time the learner read fluently. Later the teacher requested the learner to explain in short what she has been reading. The teacher asked the learners if they understood the passage. They all answered "yes".

The teacher asked them questions following the passage. He allowed them time to read silently, and only two raised their hands. The others were looking in their books. Suddenly the bell rang. I had to leave for the next class.

He next thing I was supposed to do was meet the Geography teacher. I found the Geography teacher at 15:30 in the centre as we had arranged. He was not conducting any classes, but he had an appointment with two female learners at the time of my arrival. Both students left on my arrival.

At the centres that I visited, all the teachers were female, except for one male teacher. The female teachers were also in the majority. Although my aim was not to generalise performance levels in my observation. I noticed that females were performing better than their male counterparts, regardless of particular subjects.

Irregular attendance of classes and dropping out seemed to be common problems encountered by all centres. The reason for this was ascribed to funeral arrangements, lack of certification, and a shortage of qualified teachers to teach ABET classes.

Having indicated that the data-collection methods used for the purpose of this study, were participant's observation and interviews, the following section will focus on interview data.

3.4.5 Interview data

Interview data were collected from interviews with three groups of people namely, the teachers, the learners and the dropout learners.

The three groups will be represented in the table (see table 3.1)

PARTICIPANTS	SEX:		TOTAL:
	Female:	Male:	
Teachers	2	-	2
Learners	2	1	4
Dropouts	3	1	4

The following needs to be noted regarding this diagram:

1. Teachers: At all centres the researcher visited, including the two that were selected for actual research, the teachers were female.
2. Learners: Although female learners outnumbered male learners, only the learners who were present on the days of interviews took part. As indicated, the attendance of adult learners was irregular.
3. Dropouts: The number of ABET dropouts in the table does not represent the number of dropouts from all centres, only those dropout who availed themselves for interviews. Some dropouts refused to be interviewed.

The following is an excerpts from interviews that were conducted with one adult learner in a Grade 10 class and one 'drop-out'.

Example 1

- I : What is the importance of education?
- R : To learn to read and to write.
- I : What prompted you to attend ABET classes?
- R : I want to pass matric so that I can get a better job.
- I : Can you give reasons why the majority of learners drop from ABET classes.
- R : Yes
- I : What are the reasons?
- R : Some of the learners are not serious about life, especially we males. We have a tendency of drinking liquor instead of coming to school.
- I : How do you think ABET is going to change your life when you complete?
- R : I will get a better job.
- I : What else besides drinking liquor?
- R : They might be ashamed because females teach them.

Example 2

From the interview of one ABET dropout learner who dropped in grade 8

- I : Why did you dropout from ABET class?
- R : It was so difficult for me to understand what the teacher was teaching.
- I : What was wrong with their teaching?
- R : They were always speaking in English, no time for explaining in Tsonga.
- I : What standard did you pass at school before registering with ABET?
- R : I have passed grade 6.
- I : Why did you skip grade 8?

- R** : I feel I am too old to go to grade 6.
- I** : Do you really want to be educated?
- R** : Yes, off course.
- I** : What do you feel can be done to assist you to get educated?
- R** : I don't know because it is just the same, I see no point of being educated because there are no jobs.

In another interview with a grade 12 learner the learner stated that ABET classes should not concentrate on reading and writing alone, but should provide a more general education. The learners stated that ABET should be linked to vocational training and promotion prospects in the workplace. This can minimise the dropout syndrome in ABET classes, especially in rural areas.

EXCERPT FROM THE INTERVIEW WITH THE TEACHER

- I** : How do you feel about teaching adult learners?
- R** : I feel very well, but there are lots of problems with adult learners.
- I** : What are these problems?
- R** : The majority of the learners want to be in higher grades than their actual grades.
- I** : Can you explain more about this?
- R** : Yes, some of them have passed grade 7 and they skip grade 8 and 9 to grade 10.
- I** : Are they able to understand what you are teaching?
- R** : No, they find the work very difficult and they eventually dislike the subject and may even drop from classes.
- I** : How many learners did you have at the beginning?
- R** : I had 28 learners, but I am left with only 12 learners.
- I** : What do you think can be the main cause of this dropout syndrome?

- R** : this is ascribed to various factors such as instability in families, lack of motivation, alcoholism, pregnancy and single parenting.
- I** : How can you motivate adult learners to reach their goals.
- R** : I can encourage them to attend classes and to go to the classes, which are suitable for them to understand the subject matter.

In the following part of this section I will give an indication of how codes were assigned to raw data.

TEACHER

- F.V.W.** : I feel very well.
- L.P.A.** : Lots of problems with adult learners.
- M.W.H.** : The majority wants to be in higher grades.
- F.W.D.** : They find work very difficult.
- E.D.S.** : They eventually dislike the subject.
- A.V.F.** : This is ascribed to various factors.
- I.I.F.** : Instability in families.
- L.O.M.** : Lack of motivation.
- E.T.C.** : Encourage them to attend classes.
- L.T.G.** : Learners to reach their goals.
- A.L.S.** : Assist learners to study.

ADULT LEARNER IN GRADE 10

- T.C.Q.** : Teachers conduct and their qualifications.
- D.A.L.** : Demotivate adult learners.
- C.C.B.** : Certain culture beliefs.
- E.D.O.** : Encourage dropping out.
- P.A.R.** : Adults are prompted to attend classes in order to be able to read.

- A.L.S.** : To acquire a life skill.
E.P.J. : Education provides job opportunities.
D.A.C. : Men drink than to attend ABET classes.
M.A.A. : Motivation for attending adult classes.

FINAL CATEGORIES FROM OBSERVATIONS

- L.P.R.** : Learner reading from the passage.
R.W.W. : Reading word for word.
L.R.F. : Learner reading fluently.
T.G. : The teacher does the guiding.
C.L. : Culture of silence.
I.A.C. : Irregular attendance of classes.
D.C.C. : Dropout as a common problem in all centres.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Light (1989:319), discussed the importance of data analysis and sums up his argument with, "A good analyst, who has insight for judgement both in selecting a model and scanning responses for different variable, can draw useful inferences from his research. A poor analyst, of course, cannot". For this reason, the reader of the research should go beyond the report results and make a judgement about the particular design. Through continuous analysis a researcher is helped to gather data for gaps, or to test a new hypothesis that may emerge during analysis.

3.6 THE PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS

In this study the process of data analysis will involve categorising, coding, cluttering, coding, and finally consolidating of data as it is. This is set out in Miles and Huberman (1994:50-86).

3.7 CATEGORISING

Hols (1989:95) says categories should reflect the purpose of the research, they should be exhausted and independent. By independent we mean that the value of one category does not determine the value of another category. Category means looking for data that are related to each other and grouping them together to form categories (Ndlovu 1997).

In this study the categories are formed according to the response of the interviews, and are weighted against the observational data.

EXAMPLE OF CATEGORIES ARE GIVEN BELOW

Diagram 3.1 Categorising interview data

UNITS:	CATEGORY:
1. Dropout ABET feels frustrated, because Of distance.	UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG
2. Feel very worried because he would not Reach a goal.	Dropout ABET learner feel worried because of time and distance.
3. Dropout ABET learner worried because The time frame for lessons are not suitable.	

3.8 CODING

Coding in this study is a two parts procedure, involving: (1) choice of a different number for each and ever-possible answer category, and (2) choice of the appropriate column that contains the code number for that variable (Bailey 1987:334). Coding is used in the analysis for communicating messages.

The purpose of coding is to classify evidence and place it into neat categories so that the pattern may be coherently established. According to Miles and Huberman (1994:56), in coding, a descriptive word or phrase is assigned to notes, abbreviated for ease of use. In this investigation codes were used when the researcher searched through all of the responses given, and came up with a small number of categories which encompassed the range of responses provided.

Examples of coding:

Question : How do you feel about dropping out of ABET class?

"I feel frustrated"	Assign code F.
"It didn't matter to me"	Assign code M.
"I feel very worried"	Assign code W.
"Worried that I would not reach my goal"	Assign code W.

3.9 CLUSTERING

This involves forming categories and sorting data into those categories. According to Miles and Huberman (1994:284), clustering is a "tactic that can be applied at many levels and can comprehend a phenomenon by putting together that seem to fall together". In their examples of clustering, Miles and Huberman (194:248) highlight that "clustering" is the general name given to the process of inductively forming categories, and the interactive sorting of things, events, actors, processes; settings, sites into those categories. Clustering relies on aggregation and comparison to sort things which are like or unlike to each other.

Clustering helps to solve problems and to promote innovations. By clustering information obtained at the ABET learning centre one can be in a position to see what is taking place there.

3.10 INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The purpose of data consolidation is to examine the many propositional statements or themes that emerged from the analysis. Some of these are more likely to be more important than others, in understanding the focus of the inquiry. These propositions are the roughly formed outcomes of the study. However, no meaningful connections have been made relating to the research question. For the purpose of this study, the coded data were “clustered” to produce pattern or themes.

The propositional themes were integrated with the theoretical framework presented in Section Two of the study. This integration is an attempt to deduce explanations regarding the findings of the research and to develop theoretically sound suggestions for the prevention of ABET dropout problems.



SECTION 4

INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this concluding section, the discussion will focus on the interpretation of data. Conclusions will be drawn from the discussion. The research findings and their implications will also be described briefly, in the light of the research question.

4.2 INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

When one moves beyond descriptions and tries to make some statements about what various responses mean, and when one tries to suggest relationships among data, then one is conducting an interpretation of data, McKerman (1991:226). In Section One the research question of this study was formulated as follows: What are the views of rural ABET students on their dropping out from formal education?

4.3 DISCUSSION

4.3.1 Relating past to present experiences

The adult learners had difficulties in answering questions asked by the teacher. They failed to recall what they had learned in the past. Greenhall (1994), who emphasised the importance of past and present experiences in learning, supports this. This difficulty of knowledge of the past was also explored by Vygotsky (1978:17) in his theories of the reality of language. According to Vygotsky "any conscious thought of the future is a mental process which needs language as its base, and it is impossible to deal with the future (as with the past) without the aid of inner speech as a

variation of language". The adult learners probably did not really learn, and therefore have little to recall. They also lack English proficiency.

4.3.2 In Thulamahashe adult centre, findings relating to the female learner outnumbering the male learner

The data from literature, observations, and interviews, indicate clearly that female learners are in the majority in adult centres. At some centres there are no male learners at all. The imbalance can be ascribed to various factors. In rural areas, there are limited job opportunities, and therefore, the majority of men folk go to big cities for employment purposes. Women stay at home and have the opportunity to attend classes. Although other men work at local government departments as labourers, they attribute their failure to attend classes to the fact that classes take place during the afternoon, and they come back from work very tired. Those who are not working find it humiliating to attend classes with women and be taught by female teachers. The majority of men who do not attend classes, prefer to drink liquor, rather than attend ABET lessons.

In my opinion, the reason why women are in the majority at ABET centres is that in the past, culture prevented them from attending schools. Since the beginning of the new era in South Africa, women are aware of their rights.

4.3.3 Poor receptive language skills

The research revealed the theme of receptive language difficulties. The observation in grade 12 classes gave a clear picture of the difficulty of receptive language. When these adults are confronted with a task, in which they have to organise speech in response to specific task demands, they failed to answer. Poor language affected them in answering questions and in general classroom communication. They are failing to

make meaning of what they learn. According to Mezirow (1990: 58), adult learners cannot know the "real thing", because they cannot know what they would need if they see things from a more developmental advanced perspective.

4.3.4 Other findings

Students also indicated in their views, the need for ABET teachers to understand them, and devise programs which will motivate them to reach their goals. These adult learners are also not registered in suitable grades, and hence have a problem in relating the past to their present experience, and have poor receptive language. This leads to dropout. These findings are further supported by Hubermans (1994: 35), who believes that the central core of knowledge is the understanding of the subjective meaning of language, and not merely the observation of observable events. A complete needs analysis of the adult learners is essential.

4.3.5 Recommendation with regard to tutor-centred teaching method

Vella (1994: 5) indicates that listening to learners needs' will help to shape a programme with immediate usefulness for adults. Adult learners want to learn what they need in their lives and this needs to be taught Vella (1994: 4) advises that if a particular course does not meet adult learners' needs, they will simply walk out. By implication, if the learners want to be taught how to fill out forms this needs to be taught. If they do comprehension tests on irrelevant content from strange books they are likely to drop out.

Besides assessing the needs learners themselves express, it is also important for the teacher to assess the literacy level of each learner in order to teach at the appropriate levels, using appropriate materials. Adult learners need to be taught in a particular way which invites them to engage. As adult learners change with age, their cognition and

intelligence also changes. This change has implications for teachers on how to structure learning activities for adults. Some adults need to practise repetitive learning whenever they are in class. They believe in rote learning activities, such as chanting and memorising. Some however, prefer meaning-based activities such as discussion. Whatever the methods used, it is important for adult learners to participate actively.

Studies on teaching adult learners indicate that they are interested in the immediate usefulness of new learning (Vella 1994: 16). Adult learners are characterised by the fact that they do not have time to waste on irrelevant topics, and they want to learn things which make an immediate difference. Adult learners often learn better and quicker when doing what they value Vella (1994: 16).

With regard to ABET programs, the principle of relevancy and immediacy implies that programs should offer adult learners that which is useful for problem-solving in their lives. In other words, what they learn should relate to their own lives (Vella, 1994: 18). Adult learners can be made to feel respected and valued if they are treated as equals to their teachers. This can be done by teachers learning their names, not humiliating them or allowing learners to humiliate one another, and by recognising their achievement however small. Vella (1994: 5) further adds that listening to learners will help shape the future of adults. Once more the issue of engaging with the curriculum is important.

Adult learners learn better when they are involved in the classroom, in both need analysis and in programme design (Vella 1994: 18). An adult class, which is passive and ready to absorb everything from the tutor, will not achieve success. Mezirow (1981; 67) argues that adult education must modify oppressive practices and must allow everyone to participate more freely and fully in discussion. Learners should learn to voice their ideas, as well as to help each other where possible. Vygotsky (1978: 174) maintains that it is not only the tutors who can help the developmental

level of the learner reach its peak, but knowledgeable peers can also assist to support.

According to Vella (1994), adults learn by doing. Their views should therefore be considered, and their class should be client or person centred. The "banking" concept, where the teacher is the depositor, will not work with them in the long term (Freire, 1986: 71). "Banking" education inhibits creativity, and it domesticates learners.

Freire's methodology holds that students should be critical co-investigators, in dialogue with the teacher (Freire, 1986: 68). This implies that the teacher does not come to class with solutions and answers to feed the class with. She comes with well planned learning experiences that offer engagement opportunities.

4.3.6 Limitation of the study

Factors, which limited the study, are:

- * The research group was not large enough for broad generalising; only few people were interviewed.
- * The research was limited to the dropout syndrome in the Thulamahashe area only.

4.3.7 Recommendation

Adult education should be linked to vocational training and promotion in work. The South African education system should allow ABET to contribute by providing people with the skills they will need to rebuild their communities.

- * The curriculum for ABET should be relevant to adults and their needs, and to the needs of the society.
- * There is also a need for an ABET system to be put into place by the government.

4.3.8 Conclusion

The final chapter interpreted the findings within a brief theoretical framework, which allowed for the aim of the research to be met by drawing up guidelines for the betterment of ABET.

On the whole, the study was an attempt to investigate the drop-out syndrome in the ABET centre in Thulamahashe. The study involved a brief theoretical framework which highlighted ABET dropout and the field of investigation.

The findings indicated that there is a need for devising programs, which will motivate the adult learners to reach their goals by engaging more actively in a participatory curriculum that is learner-centred.

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