

## CHAPTER ONE

### ORIENTATION

#### 1.1 Background to the study

The South Africa's first democratically elected government inherited many problems bequeathed by the divisive, unequal and fragmented education system that for the past half century had failed to educate the majority of the citizens of South Africa (Mudau, 2004:1). Furthermore, the structural legacy of apartheid divisions, a rigidity-defined and politically driven content-based curriculum prescribed by whites for blacks, left the majority of the adult population both in and out of formal employment without adequate schooling (Dean, 2005:1). Adult Basic Education and Training was one of the neglected aspects of educational development.

Dean (2005:1) reveals that in 1993 some six million South Africans were illiterate, and around two million unemployed adults had inadequate basic schooling. This was also emphasised by the Department of Education (DoE, 1997:2) which stated that the policies designed by the apartheid government to limit black people's access to education left some 9.4 million adults with less than nine years of schooling. The DoE (1997:2) stressed that there were over 23 million adults between the ages of 16 and 65 and over three million of whom had not had access to schooling. Furthermore, nearly 10 million had not completed Grade 9, and over 10 million had not completed Grade 12. This meant that they were and is unable to take advantage of further training or skilled employment prospects. The DoE (1995:31) indicated that the consequences of illiteracy amongst adults are still reflected through the economy in the form of low productivity, poor quality of life of low-income households and communities, and in political and social instability. According to the DoE (1995:31), these statistics revealed that education was not in line with the constitution of the democratically elected government, which emphasised that basic education is a right guaranteed to all persons. In addition, the statistics also revealed the need for national development, which requires an ever-increasing level of education and skills throughout society (DoE, 1995:31).

Following the 1994 general election, the democratically elected government mandated to

plan the development of the education and training system for the benefit of the country as a whole and all its people, including the adult population (DoE, 1995:31). The most important task that faced the democratically elected government was to build a just and equitable education system, to provide good quality education and training to both young and old learners throughout the country. This task was regarded as a fundamental priority of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (DoE, 1995:31). Developing the human resources of the country is both a goal of the RDP and a requirement for achieving other RDP goals. An appropriate adult basic education and training system was regarded as a phenomenon that would enhance the effective participation of people in the process of a democratic society, economic activity and community life. Furthermore, the system would enable the building of a nation free of race, gender and every other form of discrimination.

A professional directorate for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) was established in the new Department of Education, in order to provide a national focal point for the ministry's commitment to the field, to develop norms and standards and to liaise with the RDP Office, the Department of Labour, and Provincial Departments of Education (DoE, 1995:31). In the meantime, the Ministry of Education established a national ABET Task Team, including provincial representatives, to proceed with the extensive preparatory work, which had already been undertaken by the community of ABET stakeholders and practitioners, and to plan the RDP Presidential Lead Programme in this field. In conjunction with counterpart teams in the provinces, the Department of Education would work with the Task Team to help translate proposals into implementable policy (DoE, 1995:31).

The Ministry of Education introduced ABET as a force for social participation and economic development, providing an essential component of all RDP programmes. The establishment of these ABET programmes was expected to make more cost effective use of available educational facilities, with the government not being required to make major investments in new buildings. In addition, the programmes could exploit opportunities for distance education where appropriate (DoE, 1997:2).

To avoid becoming educational dead-ends for separate groups or individual learners, ABET programmes were designed around a common core of fundamental concepts, knowledge and

skills on which further learning, knowledge and skill formation could be built. The expected outcomes, or learners' achievements, were therefore formulated in progressive steps, which were appropriate to the learners' circumstances and experiences. This was to encourage a large measure of self-learning, and to enable learners to be assessed and credited with nationally recognised attainment standards, which would be fully incorporated into the National Qualification Framework. Dirkx and Prenger (1997:30) emphasise that the introduction of ABET was to be a solution to economic, political, social and education problems. An ABET programme was expected to bring about change in adult learners, with goals ranging from changing behaviour to increasing knowledge, skills and attitudes (Dirkx & Prenger, 1997:30).

In order to fulfil the above expectations, a national ABET programme had to build partnerships with all constituencies with vital interest in the ABET enterprise, including organised labour and business, women's and youth organisations, civics, churches, specialist NGOs, learner associations, all levels of government, media and other stakeholders. The partnerships were expected to undertake planning, arrange public advocacy, sponsor research and development and mobilise financial resources for the programme (DoE, 1995:31).

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Although ABET centres were established and welcomed by all the citizens in the previously disadvantaged communities, the researcher, being an adult male educator and facilitator of ABET, was concerned that, eight years after the introduction of ABET programmes in the Thohoyandou District, the majority of older people are still not able to read and write. In addition, many adults in South Africa do not understand the role of ABET programmes. This is indicated by the fact that most of the adults are dropping out (Dirkx & Prenger, 1997:30). Lack of understanding of the role of ABET is also reflected in the economy in the form of low productivity, poor quality of life of low-income households and communities, and in political and social instability within the communities. In light of the concerns raised above, it was therefore deemed important to investigate the role of ABET in the Thohoyandou District of Education. In investigating the role of ABET in the Thohoyandou District, the study was guided by the following research question:

How do adult learners experience ABET in the Thohoyandou area?

There are sub-questions which guided the study before interviews were conducted.

- Why do low productivity prevail in rural communities?
- Why do poor quality of life of low-income households protrudes in the deep rural areas.
- What causes political and social instability in the rural areas?

### 1.3 Aim and objective of the study

The main aim of this study was to explore and explain the experiences of adult learners of ABET in the Thohoyandou area.

### 1.4 Definition of key concepts

A definition of terms forms the cornerstone of every research. This gave me the opportunity to clarify the conceptual understanding of key terms employed in the study. To this end, the following terms were clarified: adult basic education and training and adult education.

#### 1.4.1 Adult Basic Education & Training

Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) means the provision of instruction in basic skills, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and other skills required to function in society, to persons over 16 years who are not engaged in formal schooling or higher education who have an education level of less than Grade 9. Adult Basic Education may include any subject normally offered in the basic curricula of an accredited elementary or secondary school in the state (Aitcheson, 2003). Adult Basic Education is seen as the general conceptual foundation for progress toward lifelong learning and development, consisting of knowledge, skills and attitude required for social, economic and political participation and transformation applicable to a range of contexts (Aitcheson, 2003).

#### 1.4.2 Adult Education

Adult Education is the process whereby persons who have not attended formal schooling undertake sequential and organised activities with the conscious intention of bringing about

changes in knowledge, understanding or skills, and attitudes, or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems (Coles, 1997:6). Adult education is for adults who are not enrolled in secondary school; who lack the educational foundation expected of a high school graduate; whose inability to speak, read, and write the English language, and solve problems constitutes a substantial impairment of their ability to obtain, retain and function on the job, in their family and society, commensurate with their real ability, to achieve their goals, and develop their knowledge and potential, and thus are in need of programmes to help eliminate such inability and raise their level of education and self-sufficiency (Belzer, 2004).

### 1.5 Research design and methodology

Below there appears a brief description of the research design of this study. A complete research design of the study is found in Chapter Three.

#### 1.5.1 Research approach

The research followed a qualitative approach. Data were collected by words (qualitative) in order to obtain a sound understanding of the participants in this study. This approach was used for better interpretation of the data collected, as the participants are illiterate.

#### 1.5.2 Research design

A case study as research design was employed. This is a form of qualitative descriptive research, which is used to consider a small group of participants. Creswell (1998:36) explains a case study as being characterised by a “description of context” and also as being “bounded by time and place”.

#### 1.5.3 Data collection

For the purpose of data collection, this study used literature reviews and empirical methods. As suggested by Khosa (2002:13), literature on the role of ABET was reviewed in order to

build an acceptable body of knowledge. A researcher should use both primary and secondary sources to gather information (Strauss and Myburgh, 2002:31).

In addition to the literature review, data collecting instruments were also designed to enable the researcher to obtain data that were compared and summed up and subjected to analysis. The following methods were used: structured interview, focus groups and non-participant observations.

#### 1.5.3.1 Structured interview

The structured interview assisted me in gaining more information regarding the topic being researched (McKernan, 1996:129). In this study I conducted a structured interview in order to gain more information and knowledge regarding the experiences of adult learners in the Thohoyandou ABET centres.

#### 1.5.3.2 Focus group interview

A focus group interview is described as a semi-structured group session, moderated by a group leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of collecting information on a designated topic (Schulze, 2002:68). In this type of interview, the participants are stimulated by each other during discussion, with the researcher facilitating the interaction and ensuring that one person does not dominate the discussion. This implies that the discussion should be facilitated, for group interaction. In this study, a focus group was used to explore and explain the experiences of adult learners of ABET in the Thohoyandou area.

#### 1.5.3.3 Non-participant observation

According to Merriam (1988:87), this method of data collection is a very important technique used by qualitative researchers. It involves the evaluation and observation of the planning and activity process in a variety of real life contexts. In this study, I visited two adult learning

centres to observe the facilitators while they were teaching, taking note of the classroom activities and the engagement of adult learners.

#### 1.5.4 Data analysis

Data were analysed in order to seek, explore and interpret complex, relatively unstructured data in a holistic and integrated way. “Open coding” as described Creswell (1994:155) was used to analyse the data.

#### 1.6 Planning of the study

The division of this study adheres to the following structure.

Chapter One contains an overview and rationale of the study. This includes an introduction to this inquiry and a discussion on the background to the study. The statement of the problem, the aim and objective, the research methodology and the research design are also addressed in this chapter.

Chapter Two consists of the relevant literature on the role of ABET programmes in the Thohoyandou area.

Chapter Three presents the research design and methodology of this study. This includes data collection and data analysis procedures.

Chapter Four data are discussed in terms of data themes.

Chapter Five sets out a summary of the study followed by conclusions and recommendations for future study forthcoming from the recommendations. The limitations of the study are also explained.

#### 1.7 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented a framework for this study. It was emphasised that the Government of National Unity had inherited many problems bequeathed by the divisive,

unequal and fragmented education system that left the majority of adult population, especially blacks, both in and out of formal employment, uneducated. This is also reflected in the economy in the form of low productivity, poor quality of life of low-income households and communities, and in political and social instability. In order to avoid becoming educational dead-ends for separate groups or individual learners, ABET programmes for South Africans should be uniform, rather than addressing a particular separate group. Conditions were also improved in ABET institutions which existed before the 1994 general elections. This was done in order to develop creative citizens capable of critical thinking. The Ministry of Education introduced Adult Basic Education and Training as a force for social participation and economic development, providing an essential component of all Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Many adults in South Africa do not understand the role of the ABET programmes and they need motivational strategies in ABET education.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

Reports suggest that at least six million South Africans are illiterate, and around two million unemployed adults have inadequate basic schooling (Republic of South Africa, 1995:29). This means that they are unable to take advantage of further training or skilled employment prospects. The consequences of illiteracy amongst adults are still reflected in the economy in

the form of low productivity, poor quality of life of low-income households and communities, and in political and social instability. According to the Republic of South Africa (2000:31), there were over 23 million adults between the ages of 16 and 65, over three million of whom had not had access to schooling. Furthermore, nearly 10 million had not completed Grade 9, while over 10 million had not completed Grade 12.

Many workplace environments require more sophisticated basic literacy skills, particularly in reading and mathematics, than those generally possessed by the majority of the presently available workforce. In order to survive in today's world, adults must be able to change. Technology has proliferated into every facet of life, the home, recreation and workplace (Granott, 1998:15). New technologies have transformed communication systems and work procedures. Workers often have to use new technology, adapt processes to their work's needs and develop new products. None of those changes can be successfully carried out without the introduction of adult learning. There was a need to introduce a system that would enhance the ability of the South African citizens to compete successfully, both at home and abroad.

The introduction of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) is a solution to the problem of illiteracy (Vella, 1994:1). A similar situation occurred in America when it attempted to enhance the ability of American businesses to compete successfully both at home and abroad. Adult Education is expected to bring about change in adult learners, with goals ranging from changing behaviour to increasing knowledge, skills and attitudes. One of the focuses of ABET is educational technology which is viewed as an indispensable tool in the daily lives of people as it is used in homes, offices, shops, banks and hospitals.

## 2.2 Integrating ABET lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is a continuous process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to realize their full potential. In making ABET the first stage in a process of lifelong learning for adults, the following objectives need to be realized (Torres, 2004:17):

- to develop an interface between the ABET levels on the National Qualification Framework and the General Education and Training band so as to provide a learning path into Further Education and Training; and

- to make provision for the ongoing application of skills and knowledge acquired by those learners who do not chose or do not have access to continuing education pathways.

These objectives should be viewed as a broad development vision, in which ABET acquires real meaning in the context of lifelong learning

### 2.2.1 Planning for lifelong learning

The Department of Education (2004) views the General Education and Training Certificate(GETC) as the benchmark for a sustainable level of literacy. This explains the Department's commitment to moving away from conventional approaches to literacy and its proposal that literacy and numeracy form an integral part of all 12 organising fields proposed by South African Qualification Framework which will contribute to the GETC (Torres, 2004:17).

The Department will seek to influence NGOs and industry providers to co-ordinate their programmes in partnership with other stakeholders so as to maximise the impact on the levels of literacy within the workplace and in communities. In order to achieve all this, the Department will need to make policy intervention in the following areas:

- the promotion of collaborative mechanisms for small, micro and medium enterprise;
- qualifications and unit standards for registration on the NQF; and
- the evaluation and expansion of programmes in the context of human resource development, including paid education and training leave.

### 2.2. 2 Training and orientation

All ABET practitioners at all levels of the system should be equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required to implement ABET programmes. The Department regards teacher education, including the professional education of trainers and educators as one of the central pillars of a national human resource strategy and the growth of professional expertise and self-confidence as the key to teacher development (Torres, 2004:17).

### 2.2.3 Facilitators in ABET centres

The ministry will explore the link between the right-sizing of the teaching corps to the development, planning and implementation of national ABET programmes. The redeployment of school teachers to ABET will preserve the investment in the human resources of the country.

### 2.2.4 Participants in ABET

In the 1920s and 1930s, it was widely assumed that adult basic education was primarily intended to help both man and women make up for lost opportunities in youth. It followed that programmes should be centred on those segments of the population that had had little schooling. ABET programmes are intended for both men and women. Studies have, however, shown that the majority of the participants are women (Torres, 2004:17). The notable evidence of women's participation in both developed and developing countries could be due to the fact that a large degree of illiteracy is found among women, which motivates them to acquire some basic education and training. Studies have also shown that apart from low literacy levels, there are several other factors that motivate and encourage women to participate more in ABET programmes as opposed to men. The following are some of these factors (Torres, 2004:17):

- women's participation campaign which is aimed at reaching all women with a message of improving their status in society;
- their high rate of unemployment in the formal sector;
- the women's traditionally disadvantaged position of subordination; and
- the rural-urban migration of men, which leaves uneducated, unskilled women with increased responsibilities of taking care of the household.

## 2.3 Age of the participants

ABET programmes are intended for adults in the prime productive age range of 15-60 years. It has been observed that this age group could benefit in one way or another from the ABET programmes for the reasons listed below.

- It is productive but lacks the skills and knowledge for employment in either the formal or informal sector.
- It has the responsibility for household provision and effective participation in socio-economic development but lacks the capacity to fulfil this responsibility.
- It could have been deprived of or missed out on formal education (Kiggundu, 1998:35).

#### 2.4 ABET focus

ABET programmes focus on adults who are functionally illiterate and who have a bare minimum of formal schooling (Kiggundu, 1998:38). This is because these particular adults are underprivileged and disadvantaged in job seeking in the formal sector as a result of their low level of literacy level and their lack of knowledge and skills relevant for effective competition. They may be unable to provide the support for their own children's learning as they may be unable to respond to the critical medical and environmental challenges which pose direct threats to their existence. Programmes and course of academic instruction of ABET include reading, mathematics and language, with each academic course having Literacy Completion points designated by letters corresponding to grade level equivalencies.

#### 2.5 ABET activities

Historically, ABET programmes were basically skills-driven, but evaluation studies revealed that since most ABET programmes were based in rural areas, the incorporation of other activities would be a more appropriate approach to meet the need of the beneficiaries (Kiggundu, 1998:38). That is why ABET programmes now promote several activities. These include the provision of literacy skills, skills development and income generating activities and conscientisation and awareness raising. They also specialise in specific activities depending on such factors as socio-economic situation, political environment and religious affiliation according to the needs of the community (Kiggundu, 1998:38).

## 2.6 The role of ABET

ABET increases reading comprehension. Participation in adult literacy programmes may lead to an increase in achieving reading comprehension. Results from both experimental and non-experimental research that evaluates ABET programmes' overall effectiveness in increasing reading comprehension achievement reported positive trends. One evaluation of thirty two programmes in ten cities found overall gains in reading comprehension achievement (Horne, 1995 :95).

## 2.7 Problems experienced in Adult Basic Education

The most common problem facing ABET centres is attrition (dropout) which may occur in different forms (Dirkx & Jha, 1994: 270). Generally speaking, the rate of attrition in ABET programmes is unacceptably high. This is also confirmed by Dirkx and Prenger, who indicate that keeping adult learners sufficiently motivated and interested in completing their goals for programmes in which they are enrolled is a widespread problem. Attrition rates as high as 60-70% occur. The raw numbers may be alarming, but they do not tell the whole story. Several studies show that non-completers sometimes leave when they feel their goals have been realised. The phenomenon of dropping out is typical of adults who must place their student role on the back burner for a while, which means that counting these learners as dropouts would be misleading.

Classifying all leavers as a homogeneous group is also misleading. Several studies confirm that non-completion has complex causes and that non-completers are better understood as subgroups. Completers of ABET were those who attended more than 21 hours, non-completers came for two weeks, leavers attended less than 12 hours and non-attenders were enrolled but never came. Leavers and non completers had different reasons for withdrawing (Dirkx & Jha, 1994: 270).

Causes of attrition in Adult Basic Education could include the gap between adult learners' expectations and the reality, the philosophical assumptions of educators about adult learning and how this impacts on adult learning, a monologic approach in ABET classes and undermining of adult education principles. All these factors can lead to learners'

demotivation, boredom, irrelevance of course material and ignorance of the multiple role involvement of ABET learners.

### 2.7.1 Gap between learners' expectations and reality

One cause of early withdrawal is a gap between learner expectations and reality. Adult learners may become frustrated early by lack of progress, or they are not given enough information before enrolment to know when to expect change and what they must do to achieve it (Dirkx & Jha, 1994: 270). Non-completers are motivated enough to enrol in educational programmes and many clearly value education, but their negative past experiences of school may be too strong, especially when they walk into classrooms or deal with instructors who remind them too clearly of those past experiences. This is especially true of learners who experienced culturally insensitive teachers or racism, or who had been labelled failures or whose family and community circumstances demonstrate that education does not necessarily improve mobility.



### 2.7.2 Philosophical assumptions about adult learning

Jarvis (1998:97) indicates that all forms of classroom practice are influenced by a philosophical assumption that the teacher concerned may hold about learning. The way in which the teacher operates in the classroom depends on his/her philosophical approach to adult education. A teacher may thus emphasise a teacher-centred, subject-centred, learner-centred or a learning-centred approach to the teaching-learning process, based on his/her philosophical assumptions.

A teacher-centred approach emphasises the importance of the teacher and tends to be autocratic, with the teacher being a unilateral authority. Much emphasis is placed on the teacher. A subject approach emphasises the centrality of content. The content is always right

and absolute; therefore learners have to imbibe it without question (Dirkx & Jha, 1994: 270). The learning-centred approach is one that focuses on ensuring that effective learning takes place.

Based on the fact that teachers have different teaching philosophies, they behave differently in the teaching-learning situation. Adult learners are frighteningly perceptive and articulate about those aspects of teacher behaviour that they find unacceptable. Their criticisms range from their inability to cope with the content, pitching it at an inappropriate level and the use of difficult language, to poor communication skills, lack of enthusiasm and unwillingness to relate to people (Jarvis, 1998:96). Based on these findings, much of the teaching and other processes at the ABET centre under study appear to be monologic in approach, factors which I believe are influential in the high dropout rate.

### 2.7.3 The monologic teaching approach

The monologic view of teaching is based on the belief that knowledge is something that is possessed by the teacher, who then transfers it to the learners. Adult learners are viewed as passive participants. The learners are taught simply listen to the teacher and act as though they know nothing. Learners are treated as objects in the teaching and learning process which is just a passive receiver of knowledge (Dirkx & Jha, 1994: 273). This seems to be the chief reasons why adult learners in ABET centres dropout.

### 2.7.4 Rote learning

Unfortunately, the monologic approach to teaching results in rote learning which, in turn, has a negative impact on the retention of adult learners in ABET (Shor, 1992:15). Rote learning is a process whereby learners passively imbibe information given by teachers without processing it into knowledge. This kind of learning is also referred to as “transmissionalism” (Jarvis, 1998:97).

One of the major negative implications of rote learning for adult education is the demotivation of learners. I argue that adults have the intrinsic motivation to learn, but rote learning kills such motivation (Jarvis, 1998:97). This identifies that rote learning as the main

culprit that causes demotivation in learners. This has an adverse effect on ABET learners who may already have a problem with motivation. Demotivation is cited as one of the major factors leading to learner dropout from most learning centres.

The other problem with rote learning is boredom. According to Dirkx and Jha (1994:274), rote learning results in adult learners being bored which subsequently translates into learner dropout. Not only does rote learning bore learners, it also encourages and rewards conformity (Shor, 1992:20). Conformity frustrates those who are creative and when their creative spirit is stifled, these learners resort to dropping out of the system as a way of communicating their protest. By virtue of being adults, adult learners bring with them experience and knowledge and hate it when they are denied an opportunity to share what they know. They do not like being treated as objects that cannot think for themselves. They usually tend to avoid such a situation and may dropout of the learning programme (Wedepohl, 1988:36).

Adult learners see themselves as independent, and want others to respect them as independent adults who are capable of deciding for and managing their own lives. This tells us that adults will not learn well if they are told what to do, and they need to feel respected and valued as people. Teachers should show respect for learners and treat them as equals, know their names, not laugh at them if they make mistakes, let them say what they do not like about the teaching and listen seriously to what they say (Mudau, 2004: 6).

Adults have had many years of life experience. This experience is a valuable resource which they bring to class. Teachers can build their teaching around this experience (Wedepohl, 1988:36) as it helps the adult learners to feel that their life-experience is valued, and thus they feel valued as persons. Lessons will have real meaning for them and teachers should help them learn by using direct experiences rather than using one sided communication.

Adult learners want learning to be of immediate use in their life. This means that what adult learners learn must be useful in solving problems in their lives. This might mean that what they learn must relate to their own lives, and so when we teach, our starting point should be the concerns and problems of learners and their community (Wedepohl, 1988:37).

Adult education had been established in the developed countries largely by non-governmental agencies and it was principally to them that the task fell in the developing countries. This tended to encourage rote-learning. It was not until 1950s when adult education was beginning to be recognized as a discrete and serious branch of education in Europe and North America that some note was being taken of the contribution which it could make to the development of the third world countries. This was the period when fundamental education programmes became the vogue in developing countries, soon to be superseded by the more dynamic concept of community development with both of which literacy was associated (Wedepohl, 1988:37).

The primary aim of adult education is to help each individual man, woman and youth make the best of life. No system of adult education can do all that is needed, not every want can be met and priorities will have to be established. This education must encourage the development in each citizen of three things; an enquiring mind; an ability to learn from what others do and reject or adapt it to his/her own needs; and a basic confidence in his/her own position as a free and equal member of the society who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not for what he obtains (Wedepohl, 1988:37).

#### 2.7.5 Violation of adult education principles

The fact that in monologic teaching the teacher is a unilateral authority who designs the curriculum without any consultation with the learners concerned, is a violation of one of the basic principles of adult education - that of relevance (Vella, 1994:9). According to the principle of relevance, one of the most important criteria for developing a positive attitude among learners towards their learning programmes is ensuring that the learning material is relevant to their needs. This improves their attitude towards the programme and thus is important as attitudes help people make meaning of their world and give them cues as to what behaviour will be most helpful in dealing with their world.

In an ABET programme, the importance of relevance cannot be emphasised enough. Adult learners are strongly motivated to join learning programmes because they wish to acquire skills and knowledge that they can use in immediate and practical ways (Rogers, 1989:49). It is important that the educator must be able to connect the world with the lesson. This will

make teaching more acceptable. The faster and more effective the learning, the lower will be the chances of learners dropping out of the programme (Vella, 1994:9).

Violation of the principle of relevance leads to a major drawback to the success of ABET programmes because it often results in the design of course that are irrelevant to the learners for whom they are intended. The problem is that if the learners are being offered learning that they consider irrelevant, they may become sulky and difficult and, no matter how crucial that content may be to the teacher, learners quickly determine they do not need to know it, and they accordingly leave the learning programme (Vella, 1994:9).

The fact that the irrelevancy of learning activities results in learners dropping out is also supported by Wedepohl (1988:37). He claims that up to a quarter of the factors that account for the high dropout from adult learning programmes can be attributed to the irrelevance of the course and the course material. Wedepohl (1988:37) further indicates that when educators and administrators of adult learning programmes stick rigidly to their plans or learning programmes, regardless of the relevance of such programmes to the recipients, the learners will resent them and dropout of such programmes.

It is important that the relevance of educational programmes designed for ABET learners be ensured because these learners have multiple role involvement. They have many responsibilities and face pressure from competing demands for their time, attention and efforts, such as family and employment demands (Horne, 1995:96). These learners often come to the learning centre voluntarily and with strong motivation to overcome a particular literacy problem, but sometimes with limited time and energy due to family or work commitments. These demands compete with the provision of education for part of the time and involvement that an individual may possess. The more compelling the commitments are the more an educational event has to display its worth or significance and relevance to the learner, if interest and involvement are to be sustained throughout the life-span of the course or programme.

#### 2.7.6 Respect

The monologic teaching ignores the importance of the principle of respect. According to Vella (1994:8), respect is one of the positive attributes that support learning in adults. Hence

the importance of respect in ABET programmes can never be overemphasised. Gravett and Henning (1998:63) emphasise that educators who strive to establish a co-operative learning climate should show respect for learners. Respect in an educational setting means that the integrity of each person is valued in ways that welcome the worth and expression of one's true self, without fear of threat or blame. In such an atmosphere, people know they are respected because they feel safe, capable and accepted.

Respect can be shown in different ways, for example, where learners are involved in the planning of their learning activities. Vella (1994:9) sees arousal as another example of showing respect for the multiple role involvement of adult learners. As they have multiple roles, they come to class needing a good jolt to the system before they can start learning. Most of them are preoccupied, often still thinking about other responsibilities. For this reason an intensely involving initial ten minutes of warm-up exercise gets everyone in the mood and shakes off the cares of the day. According to Vella (1994:9), the violation of the principle of respect results in learners not learning what they must learn, because disrespect undermines their humanity. This may lead learners to drop from the learning programme.

#### 2.7.7 Engagement

As a consequence of the view of the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge in the monologic approach to teaching, the principle of engagement is violated. According to this principle, for any meaningful learning to occur, learners have to be actively engaged in their own learning (Vella, 1994:14). This need for active involvement of learners includes all adult learners in the ABET centre. Engagement includes involvement, participation, engrossment and transcendence (Vella, 1994:13). Critical to engagement are the voices of learners and teacher in dialogue with one another, all the more so because engagement of learners is not only an indication of their learning, it is how they learn.

The principle of engagement is based on the understanding that knowledge is a dynamic process perceptually constructed and reconstructed and that such construction is a result of the individual learner's interaction with his/her environment. Therefore, learning is an active process whereby the learner is continuously engaged in activities aimed at making sense of his/her experience, transforming such experience into knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, emotions, beliefs and sense (Gravett & Henning, 1998:62).

Adult learners are responsible for constructing and creating new knowledge based on their existing experience and therefore cannot learn effectively by being passive. Shor (1992:22) emphasises this point when he says that to know a thing is to act upon it, thereby, implying that there can never be effective learning without action. ABET classes are characterised by teacher-talk, with the learners very seldom having an opportunity to express their views, leading one to believe that no effective learning takes place. Adult learners learn best when they do not have to rely on memory, but can learn through activity at their own pace with material that seems relevant to their daily lives, and when they use their own experience as a basis for learning. He also indicates that finding right answers at the first attempt seems important to adult learners but generous practice reinforces new skills and maximises the learning. It is a violation of engagement that results in the above-mentioned rote learning with all its adverse consequences for adult learning as already discussed, chief of which is frustration that is followed by an ultimate dropout from the learning centre. It is therefore important that all the programmes should encourage active the participation of learners because this empowers learners and motivates them to further their learning.

#### 2.7.8 Accountability



Yet another principle undermined by monologic teaching is that of accountability. Gravett and Henning (1998:62) identify the principle of accountability as one that emphasises that learners are accountable for their own learning. Each learner learns what he/she is able and ready to learn. The adult educator is accountable for effective teaching of the learners so as to allow them to satisfy their learning needs. It is significant that learners be allowed to participate in the planning and design of their learning programmes so that they can decide what and how they want to learn. Accountability can be demonstrated in a learning group by individual members. Individual accountability is the key to ensuring that all group members are strengthened by learning cooperatively and that they have a good chance to effectively transfer what they have learned to situations in which they may be without group support. This is especially relevant in the case of ABET learners who rarely have any support groups outside the classroom situation.

#### 2.7.9 Time

The question of time is also one of those that suffer due to the monologic approach to teaching prevalent in most ABET programmes. This respect emphasises that adult learners should be given time to learn that the pace of the teacher in an adult learning session is an indication of the awareness of the teacher about this aspect. Each teacher has his/her own personality and natural place. However, it invites teachers to adapt their natural, personal style to the needs of learners (Vella:1994:12). Scores of different experiments have shown that, if adults are asked to learn something new under time pressure, the older they are, the more they are likely to become confused and make mistakes. This shows that the aspect of time is important in the learning situation.

#### 2.7.10 Reinforcement

This principle emphasises the need for every learning design to have a great deal of intentional reinforcement tasks for the learners. This is most important in ABET learners because they need not only to have time for mastering new knowledge, skills and attitudes but also to have this mastery reinforced at every possible opportunity (Vella, 1994:15).

#### 2.7.11 Experience

This principle conveys the need for adult educators to recognise that adult learners bring with them valuable experience to the learning environment (Belzer, 2004:43). This experience has to form the basis of all their learning, if learning is to be effective. As adults, they have experience of the world and probably also some experience of the subject they have enrolled to learn. According to Sutherland (1997:82), adults have much to offer to the educational process from their life experience. Their personal experience can serve as a rich resource for learning, for the individual adult learner as well as for fellow learners. Effective learning can take place if there is a connection between the material studied and their experience from the past, or if experience from the past can be made directly applicable to new situations.

The principle of experience is violated because of the monologic teaching used in the learning situation. In such a situation, learners cannot use their experience due to their passivity. This has a negative effect on the learner as, according to Dirkx and Jha (1994:13), the adult learners feel that they are being rejected as human beings, when they are expected to be passive recipients of knowledge.

According to Hutton (1992:93), adults are always in possession of experience. They carry around a great deal of mental and emotional baggage which they accumulate during their lives. We can see that experience as a skill, is what provides adults with the means of mobilising and directing their mental energy in order to deal with the challenges and events that they encounter in their lives and work. The problem with the programme planners is that they do not let the experience of the adult learners be optimised. In confronting new learning situations, they inevitably bring the inner history of the adult learner to bear on the matter and the planners try to make the problem fit into their framework. Confronted by something new and strange, planners think that they can see it for what it is, but actually cannot.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The literature review was aimed at determining the role of ABET in the community. It was revealed that there are some six million South Africans who are illiterate, and around two million unemployed adults who have inadequate basic schooling. In order to address illiteracy, there is a need to introduce ABET. The role of ABET would be to eradicate illiteracy and unemployment among the members of the community. ABET will develop an interface between the ABET levels on the National Qualification Framework and the General Education and Training band so as to provide a learning path into Further Education and Training and make provision for the ongoing application of skills and knowledge acquired by those learners who do not chose, or do not have access to, continuing education pathways. Due to attrition problems, learners are unable to achieve these objectives. The literature on retention of adult learners strongly suggests that those who are educationally disadvantaged are more likely to lack self-confidence and self-esteem, have negative attitudes toward education and need mastery of basic skills such literacy before attaining job skills that could improve their economic circumstances. My inquiry takes the literature forward by encouraging ABET centres to make adult learners goals reachable by helping them have

realistic goals, comprehensive orientation, offer support services, such as peer counselling and mentoring, increase the visibility of the programme through community service projects, offer programmes in accessible neighbourhood locations with flexible scheduling to fit adult life styles and arrange transportation and child care and adult learners' other requirements.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Research methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe how I investigated the role of ABET programmes in the rural South African context. The chapter starts with a brief discussion of the research design, followed by the research methodology, selection of the site, sampling, instrument design, data collection and analysis procedures, methodological norms and research ethics (Melville & Goddard, 1996).

#### 3.2 Research design and methodology

The study covering the role of ABET programmes in rural South African context followed a qualitative approach.

##### 3.2.1 Qualitative approach

According to Creswell (1994:154), the research approach refers to the plan according to which relevant data are collected. The study on the role of ABET in rural South African context followed a qualitative research design. I used a qualitative research approach for the reasons set out below.

Firstly, the data were obtained in a natural setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:405). I personally visited the targeted individuals in their ABET centres to collect data. This means that the phenomenon being investigated was studied where it naturally occurs, not in researcher-controlled environments under researcher-controlled conditions. as is the case in a quantitative study. I interacted with the selected individuals in their natural settings.

Secondly, I regarded qualitative methods as important because most of the descriptions and interpretations in this study were portrayed by means of words instead of numbers, although numerical data were used occasionally to elaborate the findings identified in the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993: 373).

Thirdly, I used qualitative methods because they are a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and experience events and the world in which they live. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997:500), a number of different approaches exist within the wider framework of qualitative research, but most of these have the same aims, namely, to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures. This differs from a quantitative approach which involves numerous respondents with the aim of explaining or confirming the cause of relationships, and hence generalising results to the whole population (Schulze, 2002:11). Accordingly, I used qualitative approaches to explore the behaviour, perspectives and experiences of the participants regarding the role of ABET in the rural South African context. This was in line with a contention by Holloway (1997:1) who points out that the basis of the qualitative research lies in the interpretive approach to social reality.

Lastly, I have chosen to work qualitatively because I could investigate a small distinct group such as the adults. This means that data analysis focused on the one phenomenon which I wanted to understand in depth, regardless of the number of sites, participants or documents for the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:148).

### 3.3 Research design

A case study was used as a research design to conduct this study. Creswell (1998: 20) describes a case study as a method in which the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon which is bound by time and activity. A case study is a form of qualitative descriptive research, which is used to investigate a small group of participants. This means that the end product of a case study is a rich “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. Thick description means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated (Merriam, 1998:29). This is in line with Creswell’s (1998:37) contention that a case study is characterised by a description of context that is bounded by time and place.

Furthermore, a case study is regarded as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or a social unit within a limited time scale (Merriam, 1998:21). The implication of this was that in this study, I was not necessarily looking for findings that

would be generalised to wider populations, although the findings could be usefully applied to similar contexts. In this study, I was interested in understanding the role of ABET in a rural South African context specifically in the Thohoyandou area.

### 3.4 Research methodology

In the following section I describe the data collection, data analysis, sampling and site selection, together with the trustworthiness of the inquiry.

#### 3.4.1 Data collection

According to White (2002:82), qualitative researchers assume that reality is not easily divided into discrete, measurable variables. Qualitative researchers are often described as being the research instruments, because the bulk of their data collection depends on their personal involvement (interviews, observation) in the setting.

Holloway (1997:45) also indicates that data collection in qualitative research involves the gathering of information for a research project through a variety of data sources such as interviews and observation schedule. Qualitative researchers sometimes reject the term collection of data. Instead they use the term 'generating' data. This term is considered more appropriate in qualitative approaches, because researchers do not merely collect and describe data in a natural and detached manner, but are involved in a more creative way (Holloway, 1997:45). In this study, structured interviews, focus groups and non-participant observations were used. These enabled me to gather valuable data on the role of ABET programmes.

##### 3.4.1.1 Structured interviews

I used structured interviews to gather data regarding individual experiences on the role of ABET in the rural South African context. Before collecting data, I organised the content and

procedure in advance (White 2005:145). This means that I determined the sequence and wording of the questions by means of a schedule. This also means that I was left with little freedom to make modifications. This form of interview is characterised as being a closed situation.

#### 3.4.1.2 Focus groups

Focus groups involve organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views on and experiences of, a topic. This type of interviewing is particularly suitable for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic. According to White (2005: 147), the focus group interview is seen to be limited to those situations where the assembled group is small enough to permit genuine discussion amongst all its members, because some people need company to be motivated to talk and some topics are better discussed by a small group of people who know each other. I introduced the topic and then guided the discussion by means of questions. I recorded verbal and non-verbal communication from the participants. This is in line with the fact that focus groups are characterised by bringing together several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher (Morgan & Spanish, 1984:253).

The number of participants depended on the objectives of the research which means that the size of focus groups may consist of between five and twelve people (White, 2005:147). Smaller group of between four and six people is preferable when the participants have a great deal to share about the topic or have had intense or lengthy experiences with the topic under discussion (White, 2005:147). According to Morgan (1988:42), some studies require that several (3-4) groups are convened. Morgan (1988:42) further indicates that one important determinant of the number of groups is the number of different subgroups required. If there are several distinct population segments, one may want or need to run separate groups in each. In this study, I administered one focus group with the adult learners in each centre. Each focus group consisted of five people.

It is suggested that a focus group interview should include not more than 12 questions. Often it only consists of five to six questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:157). In this study I limited the number of questions to three. White (2005:146) indicates that group members

should introduce themselves and tell a little about themselves. In this study I started by introducing myself to the group members. The introduction of the group discussion included a welcome, an overview of the topic and the ground rules. I then asked the group members to introduce themselves in order to help them to 'break the ice'.

White (2005:147) emphasises that participants should be informed before the interviews in the informed consent form about the use of tape recorders. The recorder should be set up prior to the interview and should be visible to participants. The researcher must encourage the participants to speak one at a time to avoid garbling the tape. It is very help during the analysis if participants identify themselves each time before they speak (White, 2005:148). In this study participants were informed about the value of the study and about the instrument that was used. During the interview I attempted to take notes and even to capture exact phrases and statements made by participants. Field notes were used when analysing data after each session.

#### 3.4.1.3 Non-participant observation

According to Payne (1992:67), non-participant observation is one of the most important data collection techniques in a natural context. Observational research enables researchers to experience the phenomenon and record the events as they unfold. In this study, direct non-participant observation was employed in order to observe how adult learners were engaged in ABET programmes in their centres. Non-participant observations were conducted in one classroom in each centre. During the observations, I was interested in recording the time duration (how long are the adult learners are engaged in activities), the type of activities, the language that was used, the physical location (setting of the school, people personal space) and the behavioural patterns within a given time framework.

#### 3. 4.2 Data analysis

Interviews were recorded followed by verbatim transcriptions. In qualitative data analysis, the researcher aims to gain new understandings of the situations and processes being investigated (Creswell, 1994:153). Qualitative research requires logical reasoning and it makes considerable use of inductive reasoning, organising the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories (White, 2002:82). In this study, data

are analysed for content, using open coding to attach labels to segments of text and selective coding to cluster recurring codes into data themes (Morgan & Spanish, 1984:253). Open coding refers to labels that are attached to segments of text, while selective coding refers to categories, consisting of a number of related codes that are constructed into data themes. The procedure began with naming and categorising text through a close examination of the data. McMillan and Schumacher (1997:500-3) confirm that qualitative data analysis takes the form of written language. In this study, reports of the results are presented in a descriptive or narrative form supported by direct quotations from the raw data (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:420). This means that in this study, verbatim accounts of conversations, transcripts and direct quotations are highly valued as data, as they reveal the understanding of the participants. Participants were, for example, interviewed orally and the researcher translated their responds into written language.

#### 3.4.3 Selection of the site

The data for this study were collected at the ABET centres in the Thohoyandou District of Limpopo Province. Thohoyandou is situated in the Thulamela Local Municipality of the Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province. The area is characterised by a high rate of unemployment where most of the villages do not have access to electricity, clean water, schools and roads. The centres are operating in schools, which were characterised by a lack of well-established school facilities such as electricity, water, classrooms, chalkboards, tables and chairs. Most of the centres have approximately 50 learners who come from different areas where some of them are forced to travel long distances. Adult learners usually come to the centres twice per week (Mondays and Tuesdays). The educators also come from different areas, but most are the permanent employees of the Department of Education, which means that they go to the centres after school hours.

#### 3.4.4 Purposive sampling

Sampling is defined as the strategy used to select a sample of participants chosen from the whole population (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:378). In my case, this implies that I have searched for information-rich key participants, places or events to study. The sample was chosen on the basis of being the most knowledgeable and informative regarding the

phenomenon under investigation. This means that, for the purpose of this study, participants were purposively selected, which enabled me to draw on only information rich participants who had relevant information and experience concerning the role of ABET in a rural South African context. This helped me to collect rich data and useful information (Holloway, 1997:142). I decided to use convenience sampling because the selection of the participants was based on the availability of location, sites and participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:56). For this study, two ABET centres in the Thohoyandou area were purposively selected. In each centre, one facilitator, the centre managers and five adult learners were selected to form the core of this study. This means that the sample consisted of ten adult learners, two facilitators and two centre managers. The participants were sampled until I reached data saturation. This means that participants were interviewed until the time when data given were related to the previous data already given by the participants, i.e. data were repeated and nothing new was revealed.

#### 3.4.5 Trustworthiness and transferability

According to Maxwell (1996:68), the qualitative research revolves around issues of trustworthiness as opposed to objectivity. It is significant that qualitative methods ensure the quality of the research findings and thus qualitative researchers refer to the trustworthiness of the research, (Schulze, 2002:79). The following paragraphs describe the strategies that were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

##### 3.4.5.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is about convincing the audience, i.e. the reader that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to or worth taking into account of (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). Lincoln and Guba (1985:290), suggest that there are four strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and transferability in this inquiry.

###### (a) Credibility

According to Schulze (2002:79), credibility determines that the research was conducted in such a way that the phenomenon was accurately described. It is the most important component in establishing the trustworthiness of the findings and inferences from the qualitative research. I used the strategies listed below to establish the trustworthiness of this study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998:75).

Minimise the distance: participants assisted me in gathering information and minimising the distance between the participants and myself. I achieved this by personally visiting the participants in their centres to collect data.

Member Checks: I verified the accuracy of the data using member checks. As it was only the facilitators and the centre managers who were educated, I gave them the data of the study and asked them to confirm whether preliminary conclusions were accurate or not.

#### 3.4.5.2. Transferability of the findings

According to (Schulze, 2002:79), transferability is used to determine whether the results of a study can be applicable to another context, as opposed to quantitative research where the researcher is looking for results that can be generalised to a wider population. The findings of this study were not generalised to a larger population. However, the findings of this study could be usefully applied to similar environments.

### 3.5 Ethical measures

Ethical measures are principles which should guide the researcher (Schulze, 2002:17). In this study, I adhered to the research ethics discussed below.

#### 3.5.1 Permission to conduct research

I sought approval for conducting the research before any data were collected (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:195). In this study, I received an ethical clearance letter from the Academic Ethics Committee, from the Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg. I

also sought permission from the Department of Education in the Limpopo Province before collecting data in the targeted ABET Centres. These letters can be accessed in the Addenda of this report.

### 3.5.2 Informed consent

Participants were given adequate information pertaining to the study before data collection (Schulze, 2002:17). In this study, I gave the participants ample information about the aims of the research, the procedures that would be followed, possible advantages and disadvantages for the participants, and how the results would be used. This enabled the participants to make an informed decision on whether they wanted to participate in the study. No form of deception was used to ensure the participation of the participants (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, Poggenpoel, Schurink & Schurink, 1998: 27).

### 3.5.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

A researcher has to be responsible at all times, vigilant, mindful and sensitive to human dignity (Gay, 1996:85). This is supported by McMillan and Schumacher (1997:195) who stress that information about participants should be regarded as confidential unless otherwise agreed on through informed consent. In this study, the confidentiality of the participant was not at any time compromised, as their names were not used in the collection of data. No private or secret information was divulged, as the rights to confidentiality of the participants were respected (Huysamen, 1994:134). For this reason, the use of concealed media such as video cameras, one-way mirrors or microphones without the permission (preferably written) of the participants was not condoned in this study. I was the only person, together with my supervisor, who had access to names and data to ensure the confidentiality of the participants by presenting research findings anonymously and using a system to link names to data.

### 3.5.4 Dissemination of the research findings

As a mark of my gratitude for their sharing, participants were informed an account of given findings of the study (Schulze, 2002:19). Unnecessary detail was not supplied and the

principle of confidentiality was not violated. In this study, each school will be given a final copy of the research.

### 3.6 Summary

In this chapter, I presented the methodology for the empirical investigation. A case study design which was followed involved the use of three qualitative instruments, namely, structured individual interviews, focus groups and non-participant observations. I administered two focus group interviews with the adult learners from the targeted institutions, followed by two structured interviews with the centre managers and two structured interviews with the facilitators and non-participant observations were done in the selected centres. The participants of this study were purposively selected to draw on information-rich participants. I have not generalised the findings to wider population. However, findings may usefully be applied to similar contexts. In the next chapter, I present the analysis of the data.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Data analysis and interpretation

#### 4.1 Introduction of data discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the role of ABET in the rural context of South Africa. The secondary aim was to explore the experiences of adult learners in the ABET centres. The purpose of this chapter is to present the empirical data obtained from structured interviews, focus groups and non-participant observation.

I conducted ten structured interviews with the adult learners, two facilitators and two centre managers in the ABET centres around the Thohoyandou area. I asked the participants pre-formulated questions. I also allowed the participants to expand their responses. I recorded and transcribed all the interviews. I presented data from non-participant observations as part of the field notes. Each of the 14 interviews conducted lasted between 35 and 45 minutes. All the interviews were audio recorded. I transcribed the interviews and checked them against the taped discussions and the written responses. I analysed the transcriptions.

I experienced problems when I was interviewing the adult learners because there was a time when they did not want to talk and I had to go back to the previous question in order to establish the foundation for the next question.

#### 4.2 Description of the site and participants

The description of the site and participant can be codified into six categories through the analysis. These categories include enrolment of the adult learners, participants, classroom setting, time spent in ABET centre, the facilities in the centre and adult learners' experience in years.

In determining the enrolment rate of the learners, I discovered that the enrolment rate was high in both centres. Although this was the case, most of the adult learners were females. In Centre A, there were 36 females in the class compared to 14 males, while in Centre B there were 33 females in class as opposed to 13 males. This could imply that females were more interested in learning. It is due to the fact that they were neglected and disadvantaged in terms of education.

Table 4.1. Participants ranged between 28 and 70 years of age as indicated in the table below:

Participant	Age	Grades passed
1	28	1 & 8 passed grade 7
2	30	2 & 6 passed grade 4
3	40	3 & 7 passed grade 5

4	60	4 & 10 never went to school
5	50	5 passed grade 3
6	50	9 passed grade 6
7	60	
8	30	
9	30	
10	70	

This table indicates that most of the adult learners did not advance beyond Grade 8. The results were as follows: participants 1 and 8 passed Grade 7, participants 2 and 6 passed Grade 4, participants 3 and 7 passed Grade 5, participants 4 and 10 never went to school, and participant 5 passed Grade 3, whereas participant 9 passed Grade 6. This means that the participants had low educational qualifications. It is important to note that, amongst the adults in the ABET centre, there were adults who had not attended any formal education. Of these who had attended formal school education, the standard ranged from Grade 3 to Grade 7. This means that the centres were characterised by illiterate people who needed to be educated.

I discovered that the adult learners, the facilitators and the centre managers used Tshivenda as the common language in both centres. During the lessons, the facilitators also used Tshivenda to communicate with the adult learners. The facilitators indicated that they used Tshivenda in order to enable adult learners to grasp the aspects taught in the centre to ensure that they could understand and apply their knowledge in their real life situation.

In terms of the classroom setting, I discovered that both centres were operated in the public schools. In Centre A I discovered that there were five computers, one radio, charts, chalks, electricity, tables, exercise books and 50 learners in the classroom. Each adult learner was sitting in his/her chair. They were sitting in groups of ten. This meant that the classroom was overcrowded. There was a chalkboard in every classroom in both centres. In Centre A, there were 45 adult learners without a computer or radio. In Centre B there were sewing machines, charts, tables, chalks and exercise books. In Centre B, there were 20 sewing machines and 15 machines for zigzag. Both centres had electricity. This meant that they were able to operate

modern technology.

I was also interested in knowing the amount of time spent in ABET centre. All participants indicated that they went to the ABET centre twice per week. This means that the number of the days spent in ABET centre were very few. Adult learners attended for two consecutive days and they spent almost five days at home. All the centre managers confirmed the number of days spent in the ABET centre. They indicated that the number of days is determined by the government. The centre manager A confirmed, *“The government indicated that we should work for two days per week and if we work more than that we will not get paid for the extra days.”* The centre manager B said, *“If we work more than two days it will be our risk because the government has made it clear that we should work two days. For extra days we will not get paid. Within these two days we should only work for four hours. We work for two hours per day.”*

Furthermore, adult learners were asked about the number of hours spent in the ABET centre. Almost all participants indicated that they spent only two hours per day. The number of the hours seems to be limited for the facilitators to present everything they have and to monitor the work of each adult learner. The centre managers also confirmed that the number of hours spent in the ABET centre are determined by the government.

With regard to the facilities that were in the classroom, it is interesting to note that the facilitators were using different facilities to achieve the aims of ABET programme. The comments by the participants are as follows: participant A said, *“We are using computers, radio, books, papers, pens and pencils, chalkboard, chalks and we also have small garden project.”* Participant B said, *“We use chalkboard, pens, pencils, books posters and we have juice and sewing project”*. It is important to note that Centre A unlike Centre B, has well developed facilities, and it is evident from the comments that the centres use different facilities to achieve the aims of ABET programme (eradicate unemployment and illiteracy in the community).

The centre managers also confirmed the facilities used in the centres. The centre manager A stated *“The centre has five computers, radio, books, papers, pens, pencils, chalks and chalkboard. The computers and radio were donated to them by the business people around*

*the village. Books, papers, pencils, chalks and pens are from the government whereas chalkboard and chalks are for the school in which they are operating. For gardening we purchase seeds and some of the equipments such as spades, fork and shovel are from the adult learners.”* The centre manger B said *“The centre has books, papers, pens, pencils, chalks and chalkboard. With the exception of the chalkboard which is for the school that we are using, other facilities are from the government. We also raise money to buy the materials for making juice and traditional clothes.”*

The comment by the centre managers reveals that people are committed to achieving the aims of ABET programme. These comments also reveal that they are aware of the role of an ABET programme in their community. This is evidenced by the fact that they are getting donations from other people and that they also raise money to buy some of the necessary equipment such as garden materials and materials to make juice and sew clothes.

With regard to the experiences, the data indicate that the centre managers have more than five years’ experience than the facilitators. The centre manager A has eight years experience while the centre manager B has six years experience. This means that all the centre managers are able to understand the role of ABET within the community. This experience also means that they are able to understand the problems experienced in ABET centres.

Furthermore, the data indicate that the facilitators have more than three years experience in teaching in the ABET programme. This was evidenced by their comments. The comments of the participant A was that, *“I have four years experience in teaching in the ABET centre”*. Participant B mentioned, *“I have six years teaching experience.”* This implies that all the facilitators are in a better position to understand the role of ABET in the context of SA, as it is obvious that a number of the adult learners have passed through their hands.

I also learnt that adult learners have varying numbers of years at ABET centre. Their experiences are illustrated by means of Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Experience in years

Participants	No. of years in ABET centre
1, 4 and 10	2

2, 3 and 6	3
8 and 9	4
7	5
5	6

It is evident from the above table that all participants had more than two years experience in ABET centres. Their responses were as follows: participants 1, 4 and 10 had two years experience; participants 2, 3 and 6 had three years experience in the ABET centre; participants 8 and 9 had four years experience in the ABET centre; participant 7 had five years experience in the ABET centre; while participant 5 had six years experience in the ABET centre. This suggests that adults are willing to become educated and that they valued ABET programmes.

#### 4.3 Data description

I organised the discussions of the data using four themes: reasons for and purpose of ABET enrolment, experiences of adult learners, dropout rates and ABET sustainability.

##### 4. 3.1 Theme 1: Reasons and purpose of ABET enrolment

The participants have different views regarding the factors that influence their enrolment in ABET centres. An overwhelming number of the participants cited the desire to learn as a significant reason that influenced them to enrol in ABET centre. They indicated that they wanted to end illiteracy in their communities. Their responses were as follows: participant 1 mentioned, *“I want to be able to read so that I will be able to read meters of electricity and water and be able to operate a bank machine.”* Participant 2 said, *“I find the place that is helping me to be able to read; write and to develop myself”*. Participant 4 stated, *“I enrol in ABET centre because I was not able to read and write so I think ABET will enable me to be able to read and write.”* Participant 6 said, *“I want to read and write.”* Participant 7 claimed, *“I want to be able to make phone calls, read and write.”* Participant 10 just said, *“I want to learn to read and write.”* It is clear that to most adults enrolment in ABET programme will help them to decrease the rate of illiteracy.

The participants further indicated that they enrol in ABET because they want to eradicate poverty by starting their own projects. The responses of the participants were as follows: Participant 3: *“I want to learn how to start garden projects.”* Participant 5 indicated, *“I enrol in ABET centre because I want to learn to sew the traditional clothes so that I will be able to stand on my own.”* Participant 8 mentioned, *“I want to learn to make juice.”* Participant 9 said, *“It was long since I was interested in making juice but unfortunately without the place to go to learn it but with ABET I think it will help me to learn it.”* This role is crucial amongst the adults, as they may be able to start their own projects that will enable them to maintain their families.

It is also interesting to note that all the facilitators share the same views as the adult learners regarding the aims of enrolling in ABET programme. They made the following comments: participant A claimed, *“The aim of ABET programme is to eradicate illiteracy and to create employment.”* This response was also emphasised by participant B: *“The aim of ABET programme is to empower people through projects and to help people to be able to read and write.”* All these comments indicate that the facilitators are well aware of the aims of ABET programme. This implies that they will commit themselves towards the achievement of these aims.

Furthermore, the centre managers also shared the same understanding as the adult learners and facilitators. They confirmed that the aim of ABET is to eradicate unemployment through projects and also to bring down the illiteracy rate. The centre manager A confirmed by stating, *“The aims of ABET are to eradicate poverty and illiteracy in South Africa.”* The centre manager B also emphasised, *“The prominent aim of ABET is to create jobs and to eradicate illiteracy.”* These comments reveal that the centre managers, adult learners and facilitators all share a common opinion on the subject. They are aware of the role of ABET within the South African community. The comments also indicate that the centre managers will work hard to achieve these aims.

Concerning the achievement of the aims of ABET, the centre manager indicated that adult learners were achieving the aims of ABET. It was also evident from the comment of the centre manager A that adult learners are achieving the aims of ABET programme. The

comment was as follows: *“Adult learners are achieving the aims of ABET programme because they are able to read and write and to sell the vegetable they grow in their garden to the nearby communities”* The centre manager B also confirmed that adult learners were now empowered to eradicate poverty and illiteracy in the Thohoyandou area. They could sell the traditional clothes and to read and write. The comment by the centre manager B was: *“Adults are achieving the aims of ABET because they are selling the traditional clothes and juice and they are also able to read and write.”* These comments reveal that the aims of ABET programme are achieved. And now that ABET is playing a significant role within the context of South Africa.

The facilitators also confirmed that adult learners were able to achieve the aims of ABET programme. Facilitator A indicated: *“Adult learners are able to read, write, type and to grow vegetables that are sold to the local people around the garden.”* Facilitator B confirmed, *“All adult learners are achieving the aims and objectives of ABET because they are able to read, write, sew and to make juice that is sold in the schools around the village”*. These comment reveal that the aims of ABET are achieved in these centres.

From the adult learners’ point of view, I discovered that all adult learners confirmed that they are able to achieve the aims of ABET programme. I divided the participants’ responses into two groups. The first group indicated that they were now in a position to eradicate illiteracy. Participant 1 said, *“I am able to help my child in homework and teach him to read.”* Participant 2 mentioned, *“I am able to read and write”*. Participant 4 indicated, *“I am now able to read and write and teach my children.”* Participant 6 states that, *“I am able to read and write.”* Participant 7 claimed, *“I am able to make phone calls, read and write.”* Participant 10 said, *“I am able to read and write short sentences.”* This suggests that ABET is able to achieve its aim of eradicating poverty in South Africa. It was clear that by 2010 a large number of adults should be able to read and write.

The second group mentioned confirmed that they were now able to create employment. Participant 3 said, *“I am able to sew the traditional clothes such as minwenda and malungu (cloaks and beads).”* Participant 5 said, *“I am able to sew the traditional clothes and sell them to the tourists.”* Participant 8 mentioned, *“I am able to make juice and sell them at school.”* Participant 9 states that, *“I am able to make juice for my family.”* This suggests that ABET is helping South Africans with skills that will enable them to eradicate poverty.

#### 4.3.2 Theme 2: Experience of adult learners

The experience of the participants is measured in terms of the engagement in ABET activities and the changes brought about by enrolment in the ABET programme.

##### 4.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Engagement of participants

I assessed the engagement of the participants in terms of the activities that were completed during my classroom visit. I observed both centres. All participants were engaged in their activities. In Centre A, I saw that each day adult learners were involved in two different activities. Adult learners in Centre A were spending the first one hour using their computers. They were in a group of ten at each computer. It is important to note that adult learners were showing an understanding of MS Word programme. They were able to type and even the elderly people were able to use the mouse effectively. This lesson took one hour. It was evident that, although adult learners were given assistance by the facilitator, they were able to demonstrate their understanding of the MS programme.

Adult learners spent their second hour in the garden which is a kilometre away from the centre. They grow vegetables for their project. Literacy is dealt with on the second day of class. As a means of irrigation they were using a spray that was connected to a water tank. The tank draws water from the nearby river. I discovered that those vegetables were sold to the nearby villages. This might indicate that these adults are also involved in eradicating poverty through their garden project.

In Centre B all adult learners were busy with sewing. Female adult learners were sewing traditional clothes, while males were busy sewing trousers. I discovered that, apart from sewing, they make juice and they also have literacy classes on different days. The sewing lesson lasted for almost two hours. Adult learners also sought assistance from the facilitator. I discovered that all adult learners were taking part in their activities. It is evident that adult learners were well involved in the activities that eradicated poverty.

##### 4.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Changes brought by enrolment in ABET programme

In this section, I was interested in knowing whether their enrolment in ABET programme had brought some changes in their life. This was elicited from focus groups which revealed that there was a change from what they were prior the programme. In Centre A, the adult learners indicated that, *“in the start of the programme it was difficult for us to write a complete sentence without mistakes. In reading it was hard to read a single sentence. The situation became worse when the centre was given a computer. It was difficult even to press the key. The computer meant a new world for us. It was difficult to attempt to do even the most basic action, such as switching on the computer due to lack of previous computer experience.”*

In Centre B adult learners indicated, *“At the start of the ABET programme, we had little or no understanding of how to write operate ATM, answer cellphone calls, read bank statement, the meters of water and electricity.”* These comments reveal that adults have learned a lot from the centre. They also learnt to operate computer which even today is difficult for some postgraduate students to do. This shows that apart from being taught how to read and write they are also exposed to the new world of technology.

I discovered that the level of engagement in ABET programme has progressed shortly after the start of the programme. This is emphasised by the following response from centre A: *“We have learnt to read without mistakes, write a sentence without mistakes and to operate a computer.”* From centre B, the following response also emphasised the fact that there was an improvement in the level of engagement in the activities: *“I have learnt how to read, write, operate ATM, answer phone calls, read meters (water and electricity) and am able to read some of the English words written in the television.”* These comments reveal that, apart from learning basic skills such as writing and reading, they are also being introduced to technology.

#### 4.3.3 Theme 3: Dropout

In this section, I was interested in knowing why adult learners are dropping out from the ABET programme. It was significant to note that all participants have different views regarding the causes of dropout in ABET programme. Participant 1 said, *“Adults do not want to go to the centre after they have learnt that they are able to read and write.”* The comment

by participant 1 revealed that these adults felt that they had attained their goals. This suggests that the participant had a specific reason for attending ABET classes. They left the centre whenever they felt their goals had been met, or if they felt the programme was not satisfying their goals.

Participant 8 said, *“Adults dropout because there is no one to look after the children when they are in the centre.”* This comment suggests that adults dropout because of family problems. This seems to be a general problem because adult learners were not expected to go to the centre with their children. They were expected to leave their children at home, or else find someone to care for the children. It was very expensive to pay for someone to look after the children.

Participant 6 claimed, *“Adults dropout because they get employment far from their homes.”* The comment by participant 6 suggests that it is absolutely impossible for the adult learner to be part of the centre if he/she obtained employment far from the centre. Participant 3 said, *“Some of the adult dropout because their husbands are complaining that they arrived from the centre late.”* It is important to note that participant 5 made similar a comment: *“Some of the husbands do not allow their wives to go to the centre for two consecutive days.”* Their comments suggest that this problem seems to be a concern for most people who leave ABET. It seems as if this concern may be attributed to jealousy amongst men who do not want their wives to learn.

Participants 2 and 7 made similar comments. Participant 2 said, *“Most adults leave the centre because of shortage of facilitators. If they realise that for two consecutive days the facilitator do not look at their work they decide to leave the centre.”* Participant 7 said, *“Most adults do not go to the centre because they feel that they are not well monitored by facilitators.”* This means that most adults leave the centre for institutional reasons. The government is not employing many ABET facilitators. It is important to note that the few facilitators who were there could not manage to supervise the work of all adult learners.

Participants 9 and 10 made similar comments. Participant 9 said, *“Most adult’s dropout from the centre because of shortage of books.”* Participant 10 said, *“Adults are expected to buy*

*books and as a result they dropout.*” All these comments suggest that administrative problems also play a vital role in influencing the adults to leave the centre.

The facilitators confirmed the responses given by adult learners. Although they confirmed the responses given by the adult learners, facilitators mentioned different reasons. Facilitator A indicates that adult learners leave the centre because of family problems. The comment of the participant A was: *“Most adult learners especially these who are between 30 and 50 years old leave ABET programme because there is no one to look after the children at home and the husbands are complaining that they return late from the centre.”* Participant B indicated that most adult learners leave the centre because of employment. The following comments were made: *“Most adult learners leave the centre because they arrive at home late and some leave the centre because they got employment far away from the village and from the centre.”* These comments indicate that adult learners leave the centre for different reasons.

The centre managers came up with different views from these given by the facilitators and the adult learners respectively regarding the reasons that influence adult learners in leaving the centre. The comments by centre manger A suggest that adult learners are leaving the programme because of laziness: *“I think it is laziness because they will pretend as if they have attained the goals while they are not. They do not want to learn.”* The comment by centre manager B suggests that adult learners are leaving because of family problems: *“Adult learners leave because they do not have anyone to look after the children while they are in the centre.”* These comments reveal that family problems are playing a significant role in causing dropout in ABET programmes. In addition to the family problem, it is evident that adult learners also leave the centre because they are lazy.

#### 4.3.4 Theme 4: ABET sustainability

In this section, I was interested in knowing the factors that could lead to the sustainability of ABET centres. The participants presented different mechanisms to sustain the enrolment rate. All the mechanisms can be grouped under administrative factors. The comments by participants 2, 3, 4, 8 and 9 are related. Participant 3 indicated, *“The department should build*

*ABET schools to sustain the enrolment rate.*” Participant 4 mentioned, *“The department should build more schools for ABET because sometimes they find that schools are locked and they are forced to go back.”* Participant 8 said, *“No building. We attend at late hours so department should build more schools”.* Participant 9 stated, *“They attend their classes late because their children leave the school at half past three.”* Participant 7 stressed, *“We need our schools because most of the time we find that the principal has locked the school.”* Although this factor may cost government more money, it seems as if it would help to sustain the enrolment rate. It is important to note that if adult learners come to school and find that the school is locked, then on the following day they will not come again.

The comments by participants 1 and 7 are related. They emphasised that the department should employ more facilitators. Their comments were as follows: participant 1 mentioned, *“Facilitators are unable to supervise all learners, no facilities. We wait for other adult learners to complete their activities.”* Participant 7 indicated, *“ABET centres are experiencing a shortage of facilitators to cover all the adult learners so the department should employ more facilitators.”* Participant 8 said, *“We need our schools because most of the time we find that the principal has locked the school.”* Participant 5 said, *“Sometimes there are no facilitators. They decide to leave rather than to come to wait for the whole day. The Department should employ more facilitators.”* It is important to note that if there were more facilitators each adult learner would have his/her work monitored everyday.

The comments by participants 6 and 10 are related. They emphasised that facilitators must be paid enough. Participant 5 said, *“Facilitators are complaining that they are not paid in time. The Department should pay educators enough money.”* Participants 10 indicated, *“Facilitators are not paid enough money. They decided to leave.”* This factor implies that if educators were highly paid they would be motivated to work harder. This would encourage adult learners to realise the importance of ABET and they would come to centre every day.

The facilitators made similar comments regarding the sustainability of the enrolment rate in ABET centres. According to facilitator A, there should be shift of days when the classes should be held. The following comment was made: *“Classes should be held on Saturdays where adults would be taught for four hours per day. They will leave their children with their brothers and sisters.”* Participant B said, *“ABET classes should be held on Saturdays when*

*these who are working far from their homes will be available.*” These comments showed that the facilitators were willing to teach adults learners even on Saturdays. It would be beneficial for those who have family problems. Those working far from their home and able to be available on Saturday, they would also benefit.

The centre managers also indicated that the enrolment rate should be maintained in the centres. They presented with different mechanism to sustain the enrolment rate. The comment of the centre manger A: *“Adults should be work shopped about the importance of ABET in South Africa.”* The comment by the centre manager B was: *“Most of the lessons in ABET should be based on practical things where they will be required to do some of the things. The lesson should be conducted in Saturdays for four hours.”* These comments reveal that what is needed to sustain the enrolment rate is to motivate those who are attending. If they are motivated they will see the importance of ABET programme in their life.

The participants further indicated that ABET programmes should continue to exist and be conducted even in the deep rural areas. The following response from centre A emphasised that the ABET programme should continue: *“Life is difficult if you are not able to read and write. People will lie to you telling you that what is written in the computer cannot be changed and they will also know your affairs because you will ask them to read your letters. ABET should continue to exist in order to eradicate illiteracy in deep rural areas. As for us we want to be the nurses, educators and managers of big companies and municipalities so with ABET we hope we would be able to achieve our aims.”* From centre B the following response also agreed that ABET should continue: *“ABET should continue to bring light to us. We were in the dark for the past decades. We are welcoming ABET programmes. We thought that these programmes would be extended to the deep rural areas where the majority of the people are still in the dark.”* These comments reveal that adult learners want ABET programmes to continue. It is important to note that adult learners are admitting that they are learning a lot from the programmes.

#### 4.4 What does this all mean?

It was evident from the data of this study that adult learners range between 28-60 in age in centre A, while in centre B the ages range between 30 - 70. The data seem to support the fact

that in learning, age does not matter. One still needs to gain some of the skills that can be used in future. This is also emphasised by their experience in participating in ABET centre, which ranges from two to six years. This may mean that these adult learners are ready to learn and to gain skills. It was revealed in the data that some of the adult learners had previously never found themselves in the classroom. This may mean that they do not have previous educational experience. It is important to note that for these who have previous educational experiences, their highest level ranges from Grade 1 to Grade 7. This may mean that they do not have relevant educational experience that could help them to find employment or to create their own employment. This implies that most of the participants are illiterate and there is indeed a need for ABET programmes in the area. It may even be true that at that stage most of the adults may have forgotten to read and write. The fact that the experience of the centre manager ranges from six years to eight years may help adult learners to enhance their experience.

The data revealed that adults are compelled to go to the classroom twice per week where they spend four hours per week. This could mean that adult learners are spending too few hours in the centre. The fact that they go to the centre for two consecutive days could mean that they are forgetting the lessons of the previous week. This may also force the facilitator to repeat the whole of the previous lesson in order to introduce the current lesson and this takes too much time.

An interesting aspect that needs to be noted about the data is the fact that most adult learners enrolled in ABET programmes is in order to eradicate unemployment and illiteracy. This indicates that adult learners have their own goal. This is in line with the DoE (1995:31) which states that the aim of ABET programme is to end illiteracy and eradicate poverty. This was evident because all adult learners indicated that they were able to read, write, operate a bank machine (ATM) and operate their cellphones and able to start a project for instance, gardening, sewing or juice making. This was also supported by their facilitators who indicated that there has been great achievement in both centres. The achievements can be explained in terms of the adult learner's ability to read write and start their own projects. Adult learners have gardening, sewing and juice making projects. All these signify that they are able to eradicate poverty through those projects.

Adult learners from Centre A also stated that at the start programme it was difficult for them to write a complete sentence without mistakes. In reading it was hard to read a single sentence. The situation became worse when the centre was given a computer. It was difficult even to press the keys. The computer meant a new world for them. It was difficult to attempt to do even the most basic action, such as switching on the computer due to lack of previous computer experience. It was further confessed that, in Centre B, adult learners indicated that at the start of the ABET programme, they had little or no understanding of how to write, operate an ATM, answer cellphone calls, read bank statement, and water and electricity meters. These comments reveal that adults have learned a lot from the centre. They have even learnt to operate a computer which today is difficult for some postgraduate students to operate. This shows that apart from being taught how to read and write they are also exposed to the technological world.

The data also indicate that the level of engagement in ABET programme seems to have progressed shortly after the start of the programme. Adult learners have confessed that they have learnt to read and, write a sentence without mistakes and to operate a computer. At Centre B it was emphasised that there was an improvement in the level of engagement in the activities. Adult learners revealed that they have learnt how to read, write, operate the ATM, answer phone calls, read meters (water and electricity) and are able to read some of the English words written on the television. This suggests to me that the ABET programme has moved adult learners into the technological environment.

It is important to note that although adult learners are willing to learn, there are certain things that compelled them to leave the centre. Some of the adults have dropped out from the centre because they felt that they have already gained the skills that would empower them. This has happened after they realised that they were able to read and write. They believe that they have attained their goal and that the programme is no longer satisfying their needs. This was also emphasised by Sandra (1995:1), who indicated that non-completers sometimes drop out because they feel their goals have been realized. These adult learners have focused reasons for participating and will leave whenever they feel that their goals have been met. This reason is totally rejected by the centre manger A, who indicated that adult learners are influenced by pretending as if they have attained the goals while they are not.

However, family problems also influence dropout rates in the centre. These problems are caused by the inability to find someone to look after the children and the husbands' dissatisfaction about the number of days spent in the centre. This was also supported by facilitator A who indicated that most adult learners, especially these who are between 30 and 50 years old, dropout from the programme because there will be no one to look after the children at home and the husbands are complaining that they return late from the centre. The centre manager also shared the same view. It was indicated by the facilitator that adult learners dropout from the centre because of family problems as they will have no one to look after the children while they are in the centre. This was also noted in the study by Sandra (1995:1) who indicated that family problem such as lack of child care also influenced adult learners to leave the centre.

Obtaining employment far from their homes and arriving at home late from work also persuaded adult learners to leave the centre. Adult learners are also supported by facilitator B who indicated that most adults dropout from the programme because they arrive home late, and some leave the centre because they have found employment far away from the village and from the centre. This is also supported by Sandra (1995:1) who indicated that working far from homes influenced them to dropout from the centre. Adults feel that they can not afford to buy books. They expect the government to provide them with all facilities that will help them to reach their goals. Other adults claim that they dropout from the centre because there is a shortage of facilitators. They feel that there are not enough the facilitators to monitor their work. They fail to monitor the whole class and this delays the learners and they feel that it is better for them to dropout.

From the focus group interviews, it was discovered that all adult learners emphasised that adult programme should continue to exist and be conducted in deep rural areas. They indicated that life is difficult if you are not able to read and write. ABET should continue to exist in order to eradicate illiteracy in remote rural areas. ABET programmes should continue to bring light to them. They indicated that they had been in the dark for the past decades. They thought that these programmes would be extended to the deep rural areas where the majority of the people are still in the dark. These comments reveal that adult learners want ABET programmes to continue. It is important to note that adult learners are confessing that they are learning a great deal from the programmes.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Based on the data of the study, all participants have more than two years experience in ABET. All participants have indicated that the aim of ABET programme is to eradicate illiteracy and poverty in South Africa. The results also show that it is important to note that adult learners dropout from their programmes because of lack of someone to look after their children, returning home late, getting work far from home. Although there are those problems, all participants indicated that there is an achievement in ABET centre as far as the performance of the adult learners is concerned. Adult learners are able to read, write, start their projects such as sewing, gardening and the juice making. This means that ABET programmes are empowering people in South Africa.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Data discussion and final comments

#### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the summary, and to discuss the limitations and implications of this study for policy and practice.

#### 5.2 Description of the site and the participants

Although the older people need to use learning to keep fit and active and to feed their knowledge and skills back into the community, it is true that the role of gender in the learning process is very influential. The data reveal that there is a decline in terms of the enrolment figure of the male adults in ABET centres. The decline is acute particularly towards the retirement age. This decline can be associated with loss of confidence amongst some older male people in their ability to keep up with younger learners. This could mean that they regard learning for other people only. Spurling and Smith (1999:22) emphasise this by indicating that the decline in the enrolment rate, especially amongst the males, is an indication that males believe that there is not enough working lifetime left over for them.

#### 5.3 Theme 1: Reasons and purpose of ABET enrolment

From this finding it is interesting to note that adult learners are motivated to attend ABET because they want to learn to read, write and eradicate poverty through the initiation of different projects. Examples, of projects given in the study are juice making, gardening and sewing projects. This indicates that there is no other mechanism that persuaded them to register. They registered voluntarily. This is supported by Seaman (2002:1) who indicates

that one of the realities of adult education is that adults do not have to attend if they are not interested, because they are not required to attend by law.

The fact that adult learners are able to achieve their aims may well support the idea that they have registered through their own will. They are struggling to achieve their target, ending illiteracy and eradicating poverty. They also confirm that ABET is important because it is helping them. A study by Spurling and Smith (1999:29) also confirms that ABET is important in the life of adults. According to Spurling and Smith (1999:29), adults regard learning as fairly important, personally and for their families, as they will be able to help their children in their homework and to motivate them to study hard.

#### 5.4 Theme 2: Experience of adult learners

This finding explains that adults were revealing that during the start of the programme it was difficult for them to write a complete sentence without mistakes. Reading was hard, even a single sentence. The situation became worse when the centre was given a computer. It was difficult even to press the keys. The computer meant a new world for them. It was difficult to attempt to do even the most basic action, such as switching on the computer due to lack of previous computer experience. The study conducted by Horne (1995:4) emphasised those findings by indicating that adult beginning learners, like any beginning learner, have difficulty in applying new knowledge in order to figure out new or unfamiliar things, although they are generally better at recognizing familiar words than children who are learning to read (Horne, 1995:40).

It is my belief that ABET has helped adult learners adapt to the new world of technology because they are now able to write, operate the ATM, answer cell phone calls, read bank statements and also water and electricity meters. Most of these things that adult learners are able to operate are still difficult for some of the postgraduate students in most universities in South Africa (Hilton & Robinson, 1996). So, adults should feel proud of their ABET programme as these have enabled them to survive in the technological world. This was in line with one of the findings of Smith and Pourchot, (1998:1) who indicate that technology has proliferated into every facet of life, for example the home, recreation and workplace. This has improved communication systems and work procedures. In the technological advanced

era, computer-based automation has created the need for profound reskilling. Adults are compelled to adapt to the changing needs and societal values of the adult learners in order to survive in today's world (Smith & Pourchot 1998:1). Older adults can increase their life satisfaction and maximise their contribution to society through participation in a myriad of knowledge-seeking and information-providing situations. A sociocultural view on adult learning will not only enhance older adult-learning, but will also utilise the experience and wisdom of older adults as learning activity experts and mentors (Longworth 2003:11).

This reveals that both technology and the ability to read and write work together, since technology alone cannot solve the problem of human development. This is in line with Longworth's (2003:11) statement which indicates that, after years of rapid development, people will realise that technology alone cannot solve problems of human development. Adults should move towards a learning society without which vast numbers of people, can become alienated from fast-changing technological society. In supporting this statement, Longworth (2003:11) indicates that technology alone cannot create informed citizens with 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills such as learning how to learn, how to make critical judgements, how to tell the difference between good, bad and indifferent, how to communicate intelligently, to be flexible, adaptable and tolerant to other creeds and cultures and to make a contribution to their city and to the well-being of others. Adult learners confirm that they are able to operate cellphones and ATM machines because they are able to read and write. This finding may mean that ability to read and write is important in today's world. This is supported by Longworth (2003: 11) who argues that advanced technology such as sound-bites exists in many advanced countries anxious to spare their audiences the in-depth analysis which would cut into the entertainment schedules but, without the ability to read, technology will not serve its purpose.

The findings of this study reveal that adults are able to show mastery of basic skills, such as reading and writing letters and basic numeracy skills which include addition and subtraction. They are able to decode or encode brief texts within a structured task or to carry out elementary calculations such as addition and subtraction. These are the basic literacy skills in the sense of being simple and fundamental. This finding was also revealed by Hull (1997:7) who indicates that adult learners who are able to show the mastery of the basic skills have attained important skills without which one can probably not succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hull

(1997:8) also goes further to emphasise that solid performance in all areas of life depends both upon foundation skills such as reading, writing, maths, speaking, reasoning, problem-solving, and upon competencies such as being able to allocate resources, work in teams, interpret and communicate information, understand social, organisational and technological systems and apply technology to specific tasks. I believe that through ABET, all adult learners are able to show mastery skills and are able to work in teams.

### 5.5 Theme 3: Dropout

The theme confirms that there are various reasons that influenced adults to leave the centre. The most common causes of dropout is family related problems. Adult learners have indicated that they leave the centre because they do not have anyone to look after the child. Some are employed far from their homes. Some indicate that their husbands do not allow them to come home late. These reasons are in line with Sandra's (1995:1) findings, which reveal that family problem such as lack of child care, and job demands influenced adult learners to withdrawal from the centre.

It was further revealed that adult learners leave the centre because they think they have attained their goals. This, according to Sandra (1995:1), revealed that adult learners have pragmatic, focused reasons for participating and will leave whenever they feel their goals have been met, or if they feel the programme will not satisfy their goals. This emphasised that one of the causes of early withdrawal is a gap between learner expectations and reality. Sandra (1995:1) emphasised that adult learners may become frustrated early by lack of progress or they are not given enough information before enrolment to know when to expect change and what they must do to achieve it. The finding is in line with Seaman's (2002:1) finding which reveals that adult learners attend only if they want to. If their interest in the programme declines, they dropout. I believe that adult learners leave the centre at their own will.

### 5.6 Theme 4: ABET sustainability

It was revealed in the study that adult learners emphasised that to sustain adult learners the government should build schools for ABET, because sometimes they find that the school is

locked and not accessible. They are forced to go back or to wait for someone to collect the key from the principal. Looking at this finding one might be tempted to say that this is not possible because one of the reasons for accommodating adult learners in formal schools is lack of funds. So, if adults are motivated and told the importance of ABET programme, the centre must be sustained. This is in disagreement with Seaman's (2002:1) finding which indicates that to sustain a successful ABET programme local ABET staff members must learn why adult learners enrol and what they can do to keep them interested in the programme.

### 5.7 Limitations of this enquiry

Just like any study that involves human beings, this study has its own constraints and thus has limitations discussed below.

The participants in this study were the adult learners, facilitators and the centre managers of two ABET centre in the Thohoyandou area. A possibility will always exist that a different picture might have been obtained about the role of ABET programme if more centres, adult learners and facilitators had been involved in the study. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalised.

The study only involved two centres and possibly different findings might have been obtained if more districts had been involved. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalised.

### 5.8 Possibilities for policy and practice

In order to improve the role of ABET programmes in the rural South African context, I have listed various suggestions below.

The study revealed that there were shortages of facilities such as books, computers and sewing machines. I therefore recommend that the Department of Education should provide these facilities to all the centres.

The study revealed that participants dropout from ABET programmes as soon as they realised that they were able to read and write. I recommend that adult learners should be told about the value of life long learning ABET programmes.

The study revealed that adult learners dropout from the centre because there is no one to look after the children when they are in the centre. I recommend that ABET classes should be conducted on weekends, when most of the people who look after the children would be available.

The study revealed that participants dropout from ABET centre when they get employment far from their homes. It is important for these participants to attend other ABET centres where they are working.

#### 5.9 Possibilities for future policy and practice

This study has answered of the research question, “How do adult learners experience ABET in Thohoyandou area?” It has therefore opened up the following avenues for future policy and practice which are discussed below.

This study was confined to ABET centres in the Thohoyandou area in the Vhembe District Municipality of the Limpopo Province. Therefore, a further suggestion would be that a similar study be conducted in other districts in order to see if it would yield similar findings regarding the role of ABET in the rural context of South Africa.

This study focused on the investigation of the role of ABET programmes in the rural context of South Africa, therefore, a suggestion would be that a future study, which would investigate the role of the facilitators in motivating adult learners in ABET programmes be conducted. Such a study would make a significant contribution directly towards the improvement of ABET programmes because it would involve people who are responsible for facilitating the lessons.

The findings of this study revealed that the Department of Education should be involved in the provision of teaching and learning materials. It is important to investigate the role of the Department of Education in ABET programmes.

#### 5.10 Final remark

If ABET programmes are upheld and implemented realistically, there is no denying the fact that these programmes will play a significant role in eradicating illiteracy and poverty amongst the vast number of South Africans. As evidenced in this study, many more adults would be able to succeed and cope with technological development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than would previously have been possible.



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