

**WHY ARE SOME LEARNERS MORE
SUCCESSFUL THAN OTHERS IN THE
COMPLETION OF AN ABET COURSE?
– a case study at a publishing company**

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ABSTRACT

The provision of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) in South Africa has evolved over time to meet the needs of political agendas of the day. Presently, ABET policy aims to redress the inequalities of education created by the apartheid and Bantu Education systems. To this end, government has established policies and frameworks to encourage learning in both formal and informal environments. ABET learners usually have a very specific sociological and historical autobiography. Their needs and responsibilities are different to those of younger learners. So, with this andragogical consideration in mind, I posed the question: "Why are some learners more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course?"

I conducted a case study at Belmont Publishers¹. My primary research participants were company management, the ABET facilitator and the ABET learners. To gather data from these participants, I used qualitative research tools that included: questionnaires; interviews; focus group interviews; group work activities; and observations. My study focussed on the investigation of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact ABET success at the Belmont site. The views of the various research participants (the manager; the ABET facilitator and the ABET learners) are presented as either factors that contribute to learner failure at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels or factors that contribute to learner success at either an intrinsic or extrinsic level.

From the findings that emerged from the case study of Belmont Publishers, recommendations are made to relevant stakeholders about factors that could potentially enhance ABET learning in South Africa. The study concludes with suggestions of other ABET related issues which could be researched.

KEYWORDS

ABET in South Africa

ABET literacy

Andragogy

ABET learner success

ABET pedagogy

Qualitative research

¹ Name changed for reasons of confidentiality.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my beautiful Grandmother, *Alfreda van Dyk* (born Stanejko), who I miss so much and who always encouraged me to eat more, slow down and to reach for the stars.

Kocham was, Babcia.

Niech Bog będzie z Tobą , aż się spotkamy ponownie.

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Thank you Mom and Dad – I am who you made me and I love you for it.

DISCLAIMER

I, John David Bermant Thurlow, declare that this research report:

Why are some ABET learners more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course? – A case study at a publishing company,

is my own work and that I that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

This research report has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

John David Bermant Thurlow

ACRONYMS USED IN THIS RESEARCH REPORT

ABE:	Adult Basic Education
ABET:	Adult Basic Education and Training
ANC:	African National Congress
CEPD:	Centre for Education Policy Development
COSATU:	Congress of South African Trade Unions
EWLP:	Experimental World Literacy Programme
FET:	Further Education and Training
GET:	General Education and Training
GETC:	General Education and Training Certificate
HRDM:	Human Resources Development Manager
IEB:	Independent Examination Board
MAPPPSETA:	Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging Sector Education Training Authority
NCS:	National Curriculum Statement
NEPI:	National Education Policy Initiative
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organisations
NSF:	National Skills Fund
NQF:	National Qualifications Framework
OBE:	Outcomes-Based Education
RNCS:	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RPL:	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADTU:	South African Democratic Teacher's Union
SANLI:	South African Literacy Initiative
SANGOCO:	South African Non-Governmental Organisation Coalition
SARS:	South African Revenue Services
SAQA:	South African Qualifications Authority
SDA:	Skills Development Act
SETA:	Sector Education Training Authority
SMME:	Small, Medium, Micro Enterprise
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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PREAMBLE

CONTEXT

The legacy of apartheid in South Africa and the Bantu Education Act resulted in a “lost generation” (Mathiane, 1992: 39) of Black people who were not afforded the opportunity of a quality education and in some instances of no education at all. This “lost generation” (*ibid*), although originally used to describe the youth who from 1976 sacrificed their own education in the interests of the struggle also includes the generations of people affected by apartheid and Bantu Education. As a result of processes and policies such as those implemented by the apartheid government, a large part of the adult population has also lost out on educational opportunities. The apartheid regime limited the supply of financial and human resources to the majority of schools based on their racial composition and as a result, “they [the learners] never had the opportunity to gain the information, skills and experience necessary to develop themselves and make the economy grow” (Bhengu, 1999: 1).

These political barriers to equal education were further compounded by the socio-economic positioning of the majority of the population. The apartheid regime was successful in its efforts to stunt the social, political and economic advancements of Black people and as such many had neither the financial resources or political autonomy to liberate themselves through education.

Until the introduction of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), many members of this “lost generation” had still not received a formal education. They had either taken up employment with little or no chance of further advancement or they had been unable to find any employment at all. ABET plays a significant role in:

the provision of lifelong learning, consisting of levels along a continuum of learning aimed at adults and youth with very little or no formal schooling and who have unrecognised knowledge and technical and practical skills, (Department of Education, 1995: 4).

Many of the Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs) have been behind the drive to improve skills-based learning in both the community and the workplace. These SETAs have implemented national ABET programmes that offer

employees in the sector and community members free local or work-based ABET tuition. Many corporate companies and Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) have also initiated ABET training programmes for their employees through various ABET providers. In addition to this the South African Department of Labour launched Phase 1 of its National ABET project in 2006, while Phase 2 (which aims to increase the scope of Phase 1 in relation to learner numbers) will roll out early in 2007. The Department of Labour's National ABET project aims to provide basic education in literacy and numeracy to unemployed adults across all nine provinces, with rural localities being specifically targeted. Further to this, the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), 2005 – 2010 has identified national priority areas, which include:

Promoting productive citizenship for all by aligning skills development with national strategies for growth and development and training of at least 100 000 unemployed people in ABET level programmes of which at least 70% should have achieved at least ABET level 4², (Department of Labour. NSDS. 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2010).

These ABET programmes culminate in a rigorous, monitored assessment procedure that is in line with national policy. Successful completion of such an assessment usually results in the issue of a nationally recognised certificate for the appropriate learning area and level attained. Such certification offers the graduate leverage to transfer acquired skills across industries and geographical areas. By providing this opportunity, leverage for personal and economic growth is provided.

One of the challenges facing ABET in South Africa relates to the success of learners in the ABET classroom, many learners complete an ABET programme without having acquired the necessary core knowledge and skills outlined in the unit standards. The unit standards define the outcomes that the learner should achieve to demonstrate competency in the relevant learning area at the appropriate level. Aitchison (2003: 17) identifies the problem of ABET learner success when he states that after substantial efforts devoted to policy, materials, methodology and implementation, the increased number of ABET learners engaged in adult learning is disproportionate to the number of ABET graduates. It is for this reason, I believe there is a need for an investigation into why some

² ABET Level 4 is equivalent to Grade 9 and is the exit level from NQF1. ABET levels are presented in detail in Table 4. (See section 1.5.3).

ABET learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course.

RATIONALE

Why is it important to explore why some ABET learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course? I am interested in exploring the factors that determine success in the ABET classroom as I have worked extensively in the ABET world both as a project manager and a curriculum and materials developer. I have witnessed ABET learners both succeed and fail in a variety of different contexts. The degree to which some learners are more successful than others within the same learning environment has perplexed me.

ABET learners usually have a very specific sociological and historical autobiography. Their presence in an ABET environment indicates that the system has, at some point in the educational journey, failed them. ABET is a mechanism by which to address the educational shortcomings of the learners who undertake to complete an ABET programme. It is for this reason, that I believe, it is important to understand why some learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course. My experience has shown that since ABET is essentially a 'second chance' at education, learners who fail an ABET course often see it as the end to their personal educational development.

Relevance of study:

The research findings from my study would provide some indication as to why some ABET learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course. Such information would be useful to:

- ABET Funders: They would be in a stronger position to conceptualise projects in which learner success could be impacted on by the choice of relevant learning programmes and appropriate learning pathways.
- ABET Service Providers: They would be in a better position to develop ABET programmes that take cognisance of the factors that determine learner success in ABET courses.

- ABET learning sites: Companies and organisation that have ABET classes running on site would be better informed about the personal and institutional barriers that determine learner success. They would therefore be in a better position to address and remedy these barriers. Further to this, ABET personnel would be able to make more informed decisions with regards to what ABET training material to use in the implementation of their ABET programmes.
- ABET Facilitators: They would also be more considerate of the personal and institutional factors that impact on learner success in the ABET classroom. ABET facilitators would also be more aware of the their roles in determining learner success.
- ABET Learners: They would ultimately benefit from changes and decisions that could improve their rates of success in the ABET classroom.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Drawing on a case study that was conducted at one ABET learning site, the study poses the following questions:

1. Main Question:
Why are some learners more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course?
2. Supporting Research Question:
What factors determine the degree to which some learners are more successful than others?
To answer this question, the following questions need to be explored:
 - 2.1. How conceptually relevant are ABET funding arrangements?
 - 2.2. To what extent does the design of the programme meet learners' needs?
 - 2.3. What institutional barriers do learners experience with regard to learning?
 - 2.4. How is the ABET course presented?
 - 2.5. What personal barriers do learners experience with regard to learning?

In order to investigate the above question, I will explore the following theoretical questions to familiarise myself with the relevant literature in the field:

3. Theoretical Questions:
 - 3.1. What approaches to lifelong learning can be used in the South African ABET environment?
 - 3.2.1. How have literacy campaigns been structured in other developing countries?
 - 3.2.2. To what degree have the literacy campaigns in these countries accommodated historical, social, cultural and political factors that could impact on the pedagogical progress of the learners?
 - 3.2.3. What pedagogical approaches to lifelong learning have these campaigns adopted?
 - 3.3. How has ABET been historically structured in South Africa in relation to socio-economic, cultural and political factors?
 - 3.4. How is ABET currently structured in South Africa in relation to socio-economic, cultural and political factors?
 - 3.5. What constitutes successful completion of an ABET course?

RESEARCH OUTLINE

This research report is presented in four chapters:

Chapter 1 –

What do people do with literacy and what does literacy do to people?

This chapter introduces ABET in the South African context and endeavours to define the concepts of ABET, literacy, lifelong learning and andragogy. Thereafter various approaches to lifelong learning are investigated with considerations as to what approach would be most relevant to the South African context. This leads onto an exploration of literacy campaigns in three developing countries, namely: Cuba, Tanzania and Mozambique. These literacy case studies foreground how ABET is situated internationally and allow for a comparison of ABET legislation, structure and provision in South Africa.

Chapter 2 –

Investigating literacy success

This chapter provides a theoretical overview of case study methodology and as such explains why this methodology was most suitable for my research.

This chapter then introduces and profiles the various research participants that constitute the sample group. These include the principal research participants: company management; the ABET facilitator and the ABET learners at Belmont Publishers. The sample group further extends to include associated stakeholders that include the SETA: MAPPPSETA; and the ABET service provider: Compu Learning³.

This chapter also provides a theoretical overview, rationale and explanation of the research and data collection methodologies that were implemented. These include: questionnaires, interview (semi-structured and unstructured), focus groups, group work activities and observations. Issues of researcher positionality, ethics clearance, solicitation of participants and letters of motivation, consent and anonymity are also addressed. The chapter provides a theoretical overview of the data analysis tools that were employed.

Chapter 3 –

Determining Literacy success

In this chapter I present the insights and findings that emerged as a result of the data collection process. The research data is categorised into various factors that developed through the data and content analysis processes. The views of the various research participants (the manager; the ABET facilitator and the ABET learners) are presented as either factors that contribute to learner failure at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels or factors that contribute to learner success at either an intrinsic or extrinsic level.

Since the main research question asks: “Why some learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course?” - this chapter explores notions of *success* as indicated by the research participants.

³ Name changed for reasons of confidentiality.

The chapter concludes with a synopsis of how the various ABET stakeholders and research participants can draw from the lessons learnt at the case study site.

Chapter 4 –

Recommendations for future literacy success

This chapter makes recommendations in response to the analysed data and presents suggestions on how to improve ABET learner success.

Recommendations are made to both extrinsic and intrinsic stakeholders who can contribute to ABET learning success. At an extrinsic level, these stakeholders include: the SETA; the Service Provider; the ABET learning sites; ABET facilitators and government. At an intrinsic level, recommendations are made to the ABET learners themselves regarding the intrinsic control that they have over their own learning.

This chapter then makes suggestions with regards to future research in the field of ABET and concludes with a discussion of literacy (and illiteracy) as a national concern and responsibility.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT DO PEOPLE DO WITH LITERACY AND WHAT DOES LITERACY DO TO PEOPLE?

1.1 DEFINING ADULT LITERACY AND LEARNING

1.1.1. Introduction

As is the situation in most developing countries, South Africa has low levels of literacy. The low levels of literacy in South Africa are a result of the apartheid era during which many people received very little or no formal education at all. The National Department of Education estimates that 12 million adults in South Africa lack a basic education (Department of Education, 1999: 69) and the census of October 2001 (Statistics South Africa 2003: 50) suggests that 34% of the South African population is functionally illiterate. Table 1 summarises the findings of the 1996 census (Aitchison, 2001) and highlights the historical impact of education in South Africa, identifying race as the single most powerful variable in determining the educational levels of South African citizens (*ibid*):

	No schooling	To Grade 6	Grades 7 – 9	Grades 10 & 11	Grade 12 only	Grade 12 with Diploma/ Certificate	Degree
Black Women	26.6%	27.2%	23.4%	12.9%	7.6%	1.6%	0.4%
Black Men	25.3%	30.0%	22.2%	12.4%	8.0%	1.2%	0.5%
Coloured Woman	13.7%	28.2%	31.5%	14.9%	8.7%	2.1%	0.6%
Coloured Men	14.3%	29.3%	29.0%	15.0%	9.0%	2.0%	0.9%
Asian Women	10.8%	19.0%	23.4%	18.2%	21.9%	3.3%	2.5%
Asian Men	6.9%	16.7%	21.1%	21.0%	24.9%	4.3%	3.7%
White Woman	4.8%	9.3%	11.6%	22.7%	33.8%	8.9%	6.8%
White Men	5.2%	10.3%	10.8%	21.5%	29.3%	10.2%	9.3%

Table 1: Level of education of South African population aged 5+: Census 1996

People who are functionally illiterate usually have basic reading and writing skills but they cannot function sufficiently in employment that requires more advanced

reading and writing skills. ABET has evolved as a response to the problems associated with the low levels of literacy in South Africa.

This chapter begins with an in-depth analysis of approaches to lifelong learning in relation to ABET. Following this, the history of ABET both internationally and nationally will be explored, this will be followed by an overview of the structure of ABET in the South African context.

Before I commence with the aforementioned, I will clarify the key concepts of *ABET*, *literacy*, *lifelong learning* and *andragogy*. These concepts are central to my key research question which explores the factors that determine the degree to which some ABET learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course.

1.1.2. Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)

Elliot (1997: 7) defines ABET as the general conceptual framework towards:

... lifelong learning and development, comprising knowledge, skills and attitudes, required for social, economic and political participation and transformation applicable to a range of contexts.

This definition acknowledges more than just the technical nature of ABET which is essentially concerned with adults who have little or no formal education. The 'ABE' (Adult Basic Education) is concerned with cognitive and theoretical skills associated with mathematical and communicative literacy. The 'T' (Training) extends the preoccupation with cognitive and theoretical skills to include practical applications which may lead adults to become more efficient in their jobs; make adults more employable; and equip adult learners with the necessary skills to become self-employed.

As such, there are essentially three main activities that comprise ABET. The first two are *literacy* and *numeracy* training – these are concerned with basic education - the 'B' and the 'E' in ABET. The third activity relates to life or coping skills which are concerned with technical tasks that are often related to skills necessary in the workplace - the 'T' in ABET.

I will now define the concept of *literacy* due to the fact that ABET is often used interchangeably with this term. Further to this, the case study which is central to this research report is based on the successes of ABET learners who are currently, or have recently been engaged in a literacy learning programme.

1.1.3. Literacy

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (2003: 795) supports the traditional view of literacy as the “the ability to read and write.” Sjöstrom & Sjöstrom (1983: 22) argue that this narrow view of literacy overlooks the practical needs of a literate person as in this view; literacy is seen “as a commodity for consumption.” Carceles (1990: 6) describes a literate person as somebody “who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his [*sic*] everyday life.” As such, it appears that Carceles extends the traditional view of literacy to consider the ‘T’ for training. This understanding begins to imply that functional literacy depends on the environment, the context and the ideological underpinnings of society at any given time.

In working towards an international definition for literacy, an International Symposium for Literacy was held in Persepolis, Iran in 1975. Delegates at this symposium identified the political, cultural and human aspects associated with literacy and signed a declaration at the symposium defining literacy as:

... not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man [*sic*] to his [*sic*] full development. Thus conceived literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man [*sic*] lives... . Literacy work, like education in general is a political act. It is not neutral, for the act of revealing social reality in order to transform it, or of concealing it in order to preserve it, is political (*Declaration of Persepolis* in Bataile 1976: 273 – 274).

This definition of literacy is relevant to the South African context as the previous government used the education system to deprive the vast majority of the population access to literacy so as to prevent them from achieving their full personal and academic potentials. This deprivation extended to imply a denial of liberation above and beyond political freedom. In 2001, literacy researchers from 24 countries met in Cape Town for the International Literacy Conference with the theme *Literacy and Language in Global and Local Settings*. Delegates at this

conference were in agreement that literacy is still considered a basic tool to be taught at the beginning of schooling or adult education (Mothiba, 2005: 11).

The writings of Van der Horst and McDonald (1997: 52 & 53) seem to concur with the definition of literacy as promulgated by the International Symposium for Literacy (1975) and later discussions around literacy at the International Literacy Conference (2001). They are concerned with literacy in relation to language and communication and regard literacy as being intrinsic to human development and central to the process of lifelong learning. It is this view of literacy that will be supported in this research report. This literature review investigates literacy campaigns implemented in other developing countries and the issue of the language of instruction is central to the degree of success of these campaigns. My research will explore the learning area of literacy as central to lifelong learning as facilitated by the process of ABET. Olson, Torrance and Hildyard (1985: 14) suggest that what matters most is not what people do with literacy but what literacy does to people. Adult literacy is important in terms of individual empowerment and growth as proficiency in literacy often provides learners with the necessary tools to acquire additional skills in the process of lifelong learning. I will now explore the concept of lifelong learning.

1.1.4. Lifelong Learning

Education, and indeed, learning should be an ongoing lifelong process. Huber (1995: 125) writes that “life long learning emphasises the need for renewal in learning over time.” Titmus (1989: 15) draws a distinction between the concept of *lifelong learning* which he describes as informal and incidental and *lifelong education* which he recognises as more formal in nature.

Kraak (1994: 32) does not differentiate between the concepts of lifelong learning and lifelong education in the South African context. He does, however, identify the problems associated with formalised adult learning and proposes that to overcome narrowly defined and task-specific vocational courses, the following should be implemented:

- a unified and integrated education and training system with a strong commitment to lifelong learning;

- a competency-based modular curriculum framework; and
- active labour market policies.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) sets out a scaffold to facilitate and acknowledge both lifelong learning and lifelong education in the South African context. Through processes associated with recognition of prior learning (rpl), informal or lifelong learning can be recognised in formal learning environments and as such it can contribute to lifelong education.

Lifelong education encompasses much more than *adult education*. Lifelong education includes all levels, bands, unit standards, learning areas and qualifications of the NQF. In the South African context, the unit standards associated with each level of a learning area determine the knowledge and skills that the learners should achieve by the end of that particular learning programme. Further to this the ideology of social democracy is transcended through all learning programmes placed within the NQF to promote the values and attitudes contained within the Manifesto on Values in Education (Department of Education, 2001a). This research report is concerned with ABET as part of a system of lifelong education and learning in the South African context.

1.1.5. Andragogy⁴

According to Connor (2004: 25) *pedagogy* literally means the art and science of educating children and is often used as a synonym for teaching. More accurately, pedagogy embodies teacher-focused education where teachers assume responsibility for making decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, and when it will be learned. In contrast, *andragogy*, a theory of adult learning, “attempts to explain why adults learn differently to younger learners” (Knowles, 1984: 56), but more importantly it acknowledges that adults’ reasons for learning are often very different to those of younger learners. The traditional meanings associated with the child-learning theory of pedagogy relate it to training in that it encourages convergent thinking and rote learning (Donovan et al. 1999: 122). Progressive educational theorists, like Dewey, (1902) believed formal

⁴ I recognise that Andragogy refers to the teaching of males or men. For the purposes of this research report, Andragogy will be used in reference to the ‘the teaching of Adults.’

schooling was falling short of its potential because of its preoccupation with teacher-focused learning. Dewey stressed the advantages of learning through various learner-centred activities rather than traditional teacher-centred pedagogy. He believed that children learned more from a guided experience than they did from authoritarian instruction. As such, he ascribed to a learner-focused education philosophy suggesting that learning is life - not just a preparation for it.

Unfortunately, adult education has been (and in many cases still is) approached from a teacher-centred perspective. Lindeman (1926) raised concerns about the need to teach adults differently. He writes:

Our academic system has grown in reverse order. Subjects and teachers constitute the starting point, [learners] are secondary. In conventional education the [learner] is required to adjust himself [*sic*] to an established curriculum... . Too much of learning consists of vicarious substitution of someone else's experience and knowledge. Psychology teaches us that we learn what we do... . Experience is the adult learner's living textbook.

Theories of andragogy evolved out of concerns such as those raised by Lindeman. Although andragogy was initially defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn," (Connor, 2004: 27) it has taken on a broader meaning that implies an alternative to pedagogy. As such it refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages (Knowles, 1998).

Andragogy also assumes that "the point at which an individual achieves a self-concept of essential self-direction is the point at which he [*sic*] psychologically becomes [an] adult", (Donovan et al. 1999: 122). This is a very important point in the intellectual, emotional and social development of a person because:

... a very critical thing happens when this occurs: the individual develops a deep psychological need to be perceived by others as being self-directing. Thus, when he [*sic*] finds himself in a situation in which he [*sic*] is not allowed to be self-directing, he [*sic*] experiences a tension between that situation and his [*sic*] self-concept. His [*sic*] reaction is bound to be tainted with resentment and resistance, (Knowles, 1978: 56).

Knowles' repetitive use of the word 'self' in the above quote implies strongly the degree to which adult learners need to be in control of and indeed take control of their learning pathway. Zemke (2001: 6) argues that adults bring a wealth of information and experiences to the learning environment and as such, they generally want to be treated as equals who are free to direct themselves in the

learning process. Zemke (*ibid*) presents the following table to compare the theories of andragogy and pedagogy:

	Andragogy	Pedagogy
<i>Demands of learning</i>	Learner must balance life responsibilities with the demands of learning.	Learner can devote more time to the demands of learning because responsibilities are minimal.
<i>Role of instructor</i>	Teachers guide the learners to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts. Learners are autonomous and self-directed.	Fact-based lecturing is often the mode of knowledge transmission. Learners rely on the instructor to direct the learning.
<i>Life experiences</i>	Learners have a tremendous amount of life experiences. They need to connect the learning to their knowledge base. They must recognize the value of the learning.	Learners are building a knowledge base and must be shown how their life experiences connect with the present learning.
<i>Purpose for learning</i>	Learners are goal oriented and know for what purpose they are learning new information	Learners often see no reason for taking a particular course. They just know they have to learn the information.
<i>Permanence of learning</i>	Learning is self-initiated and tends to last a long time.	Learning is compulsory and tends to disappear shortly after instruction.

Table 2: Comparison of Andragogy and Pedagogy

When Zemke’s comparison of the theories of andragogy and pedagogy are interrogated, it is obvious that the South African conception of OBE supports theories of andragogy. In theories of andragogy, as in OBE, (adult) learners need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it, they need to be responsible for their own decisions and they should be treated as capable of self-direction. According to Knowles (1984: 57) andragogy acknowledges that learners have a variety of life experiences which “represent the richest resource for learning” and that (adult) learners are ready to learn those things they need to know in order to cope effectively with life and work situations. This view of andragogy supports the definition of literacy as promulgated at the International Literacy Conference held in Cape Town in 2001(See section 1.1.3). Further to this, theories of andragogy also recognise that adult learners are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks they confront in their life situations. Rachal (2002: 210 – 227) outlines “seven criteria for [successful] andragogical studies”, these include: voluntary participation; elevated adult status; collaboratively-determined objectives; a

measure for satisfaction; performance-based assessment of achievement; and an appropriate adult learning environment.

Although the theorists reviewed tend to differ in their opinions of andragogy being a theory of learning exclusively for adults, they are all in agreement that andragogy adopts a learner-centred approach to knowledge acquisition. Pratt (1988: 204) criticized Knowles for comparing learning processes in children and in adults and for his use of self-directedness as a definition of adulthood. In his criticism, he identifies three concerns with Knowles's theory by stating that:

... [there is] a confusion between whether he is presenting a theory of teaching or one of learning; a similar confusion over the relationship which he sees between adult and child learning; and a considerable degree of ambiguity as to whether he is dealing with theory or practice.

Cross (1981: 227 – 228) is clearly impressed with such debates around andragogy when he explains that the issue of andragogy has heightened the awareness of the need to answer three major questions:

- (i) Is it useful to distinguish the learning needs of adults from those of children?
- (ii) What are we really seeking: Theories of learning? or Theories of teaching? or Both? and
- (iii) Does andragogy lead to researchable questions that will advance knowledge in adult education?

These questions cannot be fully explored in this research report, but they foreground the need for further discussion around the andragogical debate.

For adult learning programmes to be successful, it is paramount that varying theories of andragogy inform the learning programme from its conceptualisation through to its design and delivery as these theories support a particular approach to teaching and learning that endeavours to understand and accommodate the social, economic, political and personal positioning of the learner.

1.1.6. Success

Success is a very relative term and means different things to different people. The Independent Examination Board (IEB), the only Umalusi accredited private assessment body in South Africa presents the following assessment ratings:

MERIT - (M) 80 – 100% (Levels 1, 2, 3 & 4)	Learners have done extremely well and can proceed to the next level with confidence. A certificate will be awarded.
HIGHER CREDIT - (HC) 70 – 79% (Levels 1, 2 & 3) 60 – 79% NQF1 (ABET Level 4)	Learners have done very well. A certificate will be awarded.
CREDIT (PASS) - (C) 50 – 69% (Levels 1, 2 & 3) 40 – 59% NQF1 (ABET Level 4)	Learners are competent at this level and are ready to start working at the next level. They have passed the examination. A certificate will be awarded.
THRESHOLD - (T) 40 – 49% (Levels 1, 2 & 3) 33.3 – 39% NQF1 (ABET Level 4)	Learners are not yet competent. However, they are close to obtaining a Credit. They need to demonstrate more of the outcomes required at this level. They need some more teaching and practice before they attempt the exam again. No certificate will be awarded.
UNGRADED - (U) 0 - 39% (Levels 1, 2 & 3) 0 - 33% NQF1 (ABET Level 4)	Learners were not ready for this examination. They need to do more work in order to demonstrate the required outcomes. They may have been entered at a level higher than the one they are ready for. They need to go back to the beginning of the level, or even to the previous level to prepare thoroughly before they attempt the exam. No certificate will be awarded.

Table 3: IEB Assessment Ratings

Academic success

These ratings taken from the IEB information booklet (2006) indicate a pass mark to be 50% at ABET Levels 1, 2 and 3 and 40% at ABET Level 4. For the purposes of this research report, success will constitute learners achieving this pass mark. Success at this level will ensure that learners are issued a nationally recognised certificate. This formalised recognition of achievement can open up possibilities in terms of new employment and growth within existing employment positions.

1.1.7. Key Conditions for the Success of ABET learning in South Africa

The Department of Education's White Paper on Education and Training (1995b) suggests what it calls key conditions for the success of lifelong learning in South Africa. These include amongst others, suitable placement testing; the availability of varied learning programmes; and learning pathways that ensure relevance and progression. The key conditions outlined in the White Paper focuses on what I define as extrinsic factors. These factors are generally determined by the environment in which the learning takes place and are usually out of the learner's control. These factors result from such things as stakeholder ideology and the logistical arrangements that impact on the learning environment. In considering

the suggestions made in the Department of Education's White Paper (*ibid*), I suggest that these factors could include the following:

- The language of teaching and learning
- Facilitator competency
- Learning materials
- Support from superiors
- Learning programme implementation
- A democratic learning environment

Further to this, I believe that the success of any lifelong learning programme is also determined by what I define as intrinsic factors. These factors are determined by the learner's personal circumstances, attitude and history. These personal factors may or may not be within the learner's control but are usually informed by the learner's personal biography. These factors could be catalysts that promote success or failure and I suggest that these factors could include the following:

- Personal family circumstances and responsibilities
- Mother-tongue and previous exposure to English
- Socio-economic background and present financial position
- Personal attitude
- Cultural heritage

Where appropriate, these factors – both intrinsic and extrinsic - will be investigated throughout the remainder of this literature review. The Department of Education's, Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes (2005) identifies various barriers to learning and development and presents the following as the most frequent causes of barriers:

- Disability as a barrier
- Language and Communication
- Socio- economic Barriers
- Attitudes
- Inadequate opportunity for programme-to-work linkages (Department of Education, 2005: 11).

These difficulties that hinder the teaching and learning process are relevant to the success of ABET learners. For this reason, I would like to explore each of them in more detail:

Disability as a barrier usually relates to intrinsic or personal challenges. Such barriers include: visual barriers, auditory barriers, oral barriers, cognitive barriers, physical barriers, medical barriers and psychological barriers. (*ibid*)

Barriers caused by *language and communication* can be considered both intrinsic and extrinsic. Learners are often forced to learn in a language in which they are not competent to learn effectively - this is an extrinsic factor but their personal biographies (an intrinsic factor) has resulted in their lack of capacity to fully understand the language of instruction.

Socio-economic barriers are extrinsic factors that, in my opinion, play the most significant role in determining ABET success. The legacy of apartheid and Bantu Education are responsible for the need and development of the ABET industry in South Africa. Socio-economic barriers include: poor reading and print background (learners who have not had pre-school exposure to literacy and print in general), lack of exposure to numeracy concepts, sensory deprivation resulting from a lack of opportunity, poor oral language development, poor self-image, impact of alcoholism and violence, depression and hopelessness, substance abuse and migrant labour (*ibid: 15*).

Negative *attitudes* may be considered both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact on learning success. Discriminatory, prejudiced and unethical attitudes towards ABET learners can impact negatively on the ABET learning environment. The same is true of learners who are not committed or interested in the ABET learning programme.

Inadequate programme-to-work linkages are extrinsic factors that can impact on learner attitudes. ABET learning programmes need to make learning relevant to the learner and this, more than often, requires relevance to the work place. The ABET programme needs to be within the cognitive abilities of the learner and it should culminate in appropriate and accredited certification for the level of skill achieved by the learner. Programme-to-work linkages ensure the portability of knowledge and skills in the facilitation of lifelong learning.

My research aims to identify and understand more fully these intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact on the success of ABET learners. In the section that follows, I will explore the approaches to literacy acquisition, and indeed adult learning, in three developing countries. The case studies of adult literacy in these developing countries make reference to the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact on ABET success.

1.2. APPROACHES TO LIFELONG LEARNING

1.2.1. Introduction

The approach adopted to lifelong learning or literacy pedagogy implies the methods of planning, implementation, assessment and post literacy support associated with a literacy initiative. In developing countries, approaches to literacy are usually determined by government ideology and are usually identified to support political change, human rights issues or to assist with the restructuring of an entire education system (Lind & Johnson 1990: 68).

Life long learning is explored as a central approach to literacy in this research report because ABET learners are perfect examples of lifelong learners – they have, in many instances, practical, technical and academic expertise gained in their autobiographical journeys. Their ABET learning is a means to acquiring additional knowledge and skills as well as to formalise their past and present learning experiences.

Various approaches to ABET learning have been suggested to facilitate lifelong education and learning. These include the following:

- The missionary approach⁵;
- The mass campaign approach⁶;
- The fundamental approach⁷;

⁵ The Missionary approach was originally used by missionaries to use literacy to convert people to Christianity. The aim of such missionaries was to put Christ in the hearts of their learners while at the same time putting knowledge into their heads (Lyster, 1992: 30).

⁶ The mass campaign approach targets entire segments of the population and aims to make people literate within a given period of time. The underlying aims of such a campaign are usually economic, social and political in nature. Mass campaigns generally achieve low levels of literacy (Sibiya, 2005: 127 – 128).

- The radical approach⁸;
- The functional approach and
- The outcomes-based education approach.

Only the latter two will be explored in this research report as I believe that they are relevant to ABET in the South African context and as such, also to my research case study. Lind & Johnston (1990: 68) maintain that approaches to literacy (and lifelong) learning are neither complete nor exclusive – “they overlap in time and space.”

1.2.2. The Functional Approach

In 1964, UNESCO launched a pilot literacy programme in eleven different countries. These countries included: Algeria, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Iran, Madagascar, Mali, Sudan, Syria and Tanzania. This programme was called the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) and it aimed to transform literacy into an effective tool for social and economic development and was implemented through work-oriented programmes.

This programme was concerned with *functional literacy* – a concept which was new at the time of the project’s implementation. Functional literacy should:

... lead not only to elementary knowledge but to training of work, increased productivity, a greater participation in civic life and a better understanding of the surrounding world and should ultimately open the way to basic human culture. (UNESCO/ UNDP, 1976: 10).

The pilot programme received poor evaluation results because the evaluators felt that the programmes were too technical and they ignored social, cultural and logistical factors. These extrinsic factors are central to determining the success or failure of any lifelong learning initiative.

⁷ The fundamental approach to education is concerned with providing the minimum or baseline in terms of knowledge and skills for achieving a satisfactory standard of living (Gray 1956: 17) and also recognises the value of mother-tongue instruction as an effective means to literacy.

⁸ Lyster (1992: 11) suggests that supporters of the radical approach to ABET learning see it as a tool to empower learners completing an ABET programme. In this approach, empowerment is used as both the aim of the learning programme as well as the criteria against which teaching materials and methodologies should be evaluated.

The functional approach to literacy was concerned not only with the technical skills of reading, writing and numeracy but shifted focus to include functional skills and knowledge about the social, political and economic conditions that impact on learners' daily lives. As such, the functional approach to literacy assumes that the individual and national productivities will be improved if literacy levels are raised. This approach fails to recognise the subjectivity of the learners and as such intrinsic and extrinsic factors that determine learning programme success or failure are not considered in the design and implementation process. This therefore implies that the functional approach is based on the human capital theory which views literacy from an economic perspective (Godden, 1991: 11, in Mothiba, 2005: 85). The human capital theory would therefore suggest that illiteracy is responsible for poverty and economic decline. This economic focus of the functional approach is limiting in that it favours economic conditions over the promotion of vocational skills and training.

In the South African context, the functional approach has resulted in ABET programmes focusing on the inclusion of content that improves and teaches work-related skills, therefore bridging the gap between the 'ABE' (Adult Basic Education) and the 'T' (Training).

1.2.3. Outcomes-Based Education Approach

This approach to adult learning supports Freire's (1972) ideas about the learner-educator relationship breaking traditional values. Freire states that oppressive relationships are indicative of oppressive societies and he suggests that the classroom is the ideal platform to redress issues of oppression.

Outcomes-based education (OBE) forms the basis of the curriculum in South Africa and it strives to assist all learners to achieve their full potential. In its efforts to achieve this aim, OBE stipulates outcomes that learners need to achieve at the end of a learning process. The outcomes generally encourage learner-centred and activity-based approaches to education. Freire (1987) also supports this approach to education and suggests that learning should be concerned with problem-solving and relationships. Freire also suggests that the acquisition of

literacy is not a mechanical process in which learners store and regurgitate what they have been told. He states that learners of literacy need to be encouraged to look at their worlds critically in such a way that sense and meaning are established through the process. The underlying ideology of OBE in the South African context, as with Freire's approach to learning, is based on social democracy, community and learner-centeredness and personal growth and development. The South African National Curriculum Statements (NCS) set out critical and developmental outcomes that have been inspired by the Constitution of South Africa and developed in a participatory and democratic process. These outcomes apply to all learning areas, learning programmes and qualifications that are situated within the NQF and are described in the NCS (Department of Education 2001: 1 – 2) as such:

The Critical outcomes envisage learners who are able to:

- identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking;
- work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community;
- organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively;
- collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information;
- communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes;
- use science and technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others: and
- demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

The developmental outcomes envisage learners who are able to:

- reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively;
- participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national, and global communities;
- be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of contexts;
- explore education and career opportunities; and
- develop entrepreneurial opportunities.

OBE provides a method of teaching and learning which clearly defines what learners are expected to achieve. A continuous, planned process of gathering information about the performance of the learner against previously determined and stated learning outcomes, specific outcomes and assessment criteria is therefore central to OBE. These clearly defined criteria and a variety of appropriate assessment strategies will inform the educator of learner's

competency at relevant stages in the learning process against the relevant outcomes and assessment criteria.

1.2.4. Synthesis

The different approaches to adult learning addressed in this section can collectively play a vital role in alleviating the problems associated with adult illiteracy in South Africa. Each approach has its own focus and offers solutions through differing strategies. The functional approach recognises the need for the technical skills of reading and writing which should progress to more functional work related skills while the OBE approach stresses the need to achieve clearly defined outcomes by satisfying assessment criteria that may be theoretical or practical in nature. Obviously some of the approaches are contentious and as such these approaches need to be selected sensitively and appropriately and also need to be relevant in their application. The missionary approach for example uses the Gospels as a means to literacy acquisition while the OBE approach is based on social democracy. The radical approach on the other hand, sees the acquisition of literacy as a political tool to freedom and power. These differences in ideology and function should help inform at which point in the political history of a country each might be used. As previously explained, these approaches to literacy learning are neither complete nor exclusive – “they overlap in time and space” (Lind & Johnston, 1990: 68).

1.3. ABET IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Throughout the world, various governments have conceptualised, designed and implemented literacy campaigns. These campaigns usually have two differing aims – they are either aimed at satisfying the socio-economic ideologies of the government or they are implemented with humanitarian or aid objectives. Freire, in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), draws attention to literacy as a vehicle to liberation. In studying adult literacy in his native Brazil, Freire identifies the role of literacy in enhancing community and building social capital. To this end, acquiring literacy ultimately leads us to act in ways that make for justice and

human flourishing (Smith, 1997). Whichever the aim, the ultimate purpose of a literacy campaign is to alleviate adult illiteracy.

The literacy campaigns explored in this research report are used as a framework to analyse what policies and practices do and do not work in adult literacy. I would like to suggest, possibly prematurely, that the problem in South Africa is that there has been no expansive national literacy drive in post-apartheid South Africa. I believe that the lessons gained from the international ABET platform can and have been used to inform ABET policies and practices in South Africa. Further to this, I believe that practices adopted in these case studies impact on learner success and failure. By carefully observing and considering the learning methodology and approaches to literacy used in these countries we can inform future ABET practice in South Africa from national level, right down to implementation level.

Having previously detailed the differences in the theories of andragogy and pedagogy, I will not consider the semantics and implications of these words in the sections that follow. I will give an overview to the literacy campaigns in the countries identified with consideration of their *histories, politics and pedagogy*⁹.

1.3.1. Literacy in Cuba

The Cuban literacy campaign was launched in 1961 shortly after the revolution of 1959. Before this time, educational development in Cuba was not a governmental priority and only 50% of children of school going age attended school. In poor families, more than half of the adults had no formal education at all. Castro's view of Cuba as one large school supported the national political will for lifelong education. A literacy campaign was launched and motored by the model of revolution and as such it was more than technical or pedagogical in nature – it was a political effort that resulted in mass mobilisation.

The literacy campaign was conducted through the medium of Spanish on a national scale. Intensive instruction was provided to groups of two or three

⁹ *Pedagogy* refers to the approach to lifelong learning adopted and the manner in which the campaign was implemented and sustained.

learners in their own homes over a three-month period. Learners were considered literate when they could read at first grade level (Sibiya, 2005: 150). After an intense literacy campaign, a governmental publication was designed and distributed free of charge with the purpose of encouraging neo-literates to continue reading. Further to this, rural libraries were established as were evening schools and schools in work centres for neo-literate adults to continue their education (Bhola 1984: 103). The Cuban literacy campaign was successful for two major reasons: literacy was not viewed in isolation but rather as a developmental revolutionary process; and the post-literacy planning recognised (and provided) the need for continued adult education.

The Cuban literacy campaign is relevant to my study because of the fact that literacy was taught in mother tongue, it was part of a greater revolutionary process and it aimed to provide post-literacy campaign support – the literacy campaign was seen within the context of lifelong learning.

1.3.2. Literacy in Tanzania

When Tanzania gained independence in 1961, the adult illiteracy rate was 75% (Mpogolo, 1983: 59). Literacy initiatives were implemented to address this high rate of illiteracy; the first national literacy campaign was launched in 1971 and ran until 1981. As in Cuba, the political leadership played a vital role in steering the literacy campaign. The ruling party adopted the *Arusha Declaration* of 1967 and this declaration promoted socialistic values and self-reliance at individual, community and national levels. The first five years of the campaign focused on adult education and stressed the importance of the impact of literate adults on the economy. The second five years of the campaign focused on the implementation of issues relating to socialism and self-reliance and as such encouraged learners to be willing agents of transformation (Bhola, 1984: 141).

Learners attended two-hour literacy classes, three times a week and literacy was taught through the language of Kiswahili and was contextualised for implementation in different economic sectors. The variants of the programme were called *primers* and included, amongst others, the following occupational

groups: cotton farmers, fisherman, banana farmers, cattle raisers, coffee growers and housewives (Bhola, 1984 in Sibiya, 2005: 144). Primer specific teaching guides were distributed to literacy teachers and demonstration materials were included where necessary. To sustain literacy and aid literacy development, the government implemented post-project support programmes. These included things such as: rural newspapers, rural libraries, correspondence education, instructional radio and film education.

The Tanzanian literacy campaign was successful in that it integrated adult education into governmental ideology and planning as well as making the training provided relevant to work and community life. Further to this, government delegated campaign responsibilities to literacy committees and volunteers.

The Tanzanian literacy campaign is relevant to my study for numerous reasons. These include: its initial focus on literacy and then its move towards social democracy; the teaching of literacy through mother-tongue instruction; and the primer specific variants of the literacy programme. These primers can be compared to the South African Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs) as learning focussed on skills specific to a predetermined field or vocation - the 'T' in ABET. (See section 1.1.2 and Table 5 in section 1.5.4).

1.3.3. Literacy in Mozambique

Veleso (2002: 81) states that when Mozambique gained independence in 1975 the illiteracy rate was estimated at around 93%. The ruling Mozambican Liberation front (FRELIMO) made education as well as economic and social recovery its top priorities. Adult education was central to the government's education initiative. The government viewed education as a basic human right and by identifying the success of revolutionary literacy campaigns in countries such as Cuba, it regarded a national literacy initiative as the basis of social change and indeed social revolution.

The language of instruction used during the national literacy campaign was Portuguese. Veloso (2002: 79) cites this as one of the factors that contributed to

the failure of the literacy initiative. Marshall (1990: 289) explains that Mozambique has in excess of twenty mother-tongue languages which are spoken across the country's substantial geographical area. The government decided to use Portuguese as the language of the literacy campaign to promote an ethos of national unity and to eliminate issues of ethnicity in the country (*ibid*). They also believed that literacy in Portuguese would enable citizens to participate and share in economic, social and political affairs. Veloso (2002: 82) argues that Portuguese is not a widely spoken language and as such literacy taught through this medium would not achieve the government's ideological aims. Veloso (*ibid*) states that literacy is not a second language and that when literacy is taught in a learner's mother-tongue it is much easier to attain literacy in a second language. Bhola (1984: 191), however argues that "literacy in a language other than the national language may doom one to a limited and parochial and marginal existence", he further argues that where many local languages exist, strategies with regards to literacy need to be formulated and legislated.

The Mozambican literacy campaign is particularly relevant to my study as it strongly raises the mother-tongue debate with regards to teaching and learning. South Africa is a country in which diverse African languages are spoken but it is also a country in which English (and in some instance Afrikaans) are the languages of business.

1.3.4. Synthesis

In this section, I have provided a review of approaches to literacy used in three developing countries. The literacy campaigns conducted in these countries provide insightful lessons for ABET practice in South Africa. These lessons include the acknowledgement that: political will is necessary for the success of a mass literacy campaign; there is no recipe for the success of a literacy campaign – a unique strategy for the specific context must be adopted; literacy programmes should not run for extended periods of time nor should they be too academic in focus; and finally post-literacy strategies to ensure sustainability need to be put into place to ensure that literacy is developed and maintained.

The lessons learnt from these countries provide both insight into the different approaches to literacy as well as offer a platform against which to assess and compare ABET practices in South Africa. The most significant insight is that the literacy campaigns reviewed in this section centre around mother-tongue instruction: literacy in Cuba was approached through the medium of Spanish; literacy in Tanzania was approached through the medium of Kiswahili; and literacy in Mozambique was approached through the medium of Portuguese. A second insight is in relation to the fact that post-literacy success was aided by ongoing post-literacy initiatives and another insight is that successful adult literacy initiatives need to be relevant to the economy at a point where the learner can access the market place.

While mother-tongue literacy programmes are becoming increasingly available in South Africa, ABET or adult literacy in the South African context tends to be approached through the medium of English (and in some instances, like in the Western and Eastern Cape, through the medium of Afrikaans). The utilisation of non-mother-tongue instruction as a vehicle to literacy raises other issues around the discourse of literacy acquisition. Approaches to education, adult literacy, and indeed ABET, in South Africa have a volatile and oppressive past. I will now profile the history of ABET practice and intervention in South Africa.

1.4. THE HISTORY OF ABET IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

This section focuses on approaches to adult literacy in pre-democratic South Africa to the present.

1.4.1. ABET Before 1990

The Bantu Education Act of 1954 determined that teaching literacy to Black people was illegal, unless it was at an officially registered night school. This law was slightly relaxed in the seventies when the Bureau for Literacy was allowed to do some work in South African gold mines. Unfortunately, night schools of this nature did not always provide materials that were contextually relevant to adult learners. Formal school textbooks and teaching aids were often used and these

materials did not support andragogical practices. Later a non-governmental initiative called *Operation Upgrade* began working with community groups and established agreements with government departments that dealt with the education of Black people (Aitchison, 2000). In addition to these slow, legal initiatives a lot of illegal programmes and operations ran during the apartheid era. Unfortunately, none of these impacted significantly on the national literacy statistics. However, due to the political climate at the time, literacy initiatives were often used as the basis from which to mobilise anti-apartheid movements.

It was not until 1976 and then later with strong anti-apartheid sentiments in the eighties that a movement for literacy was really established. With the prospect of the demise of apartheid, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and universities became instrumental in the reconceptualisation of literacy programmes for adult learners. Independent ABET service providers were being established at the end of the eighties to meet the dire needs of adult illiteracy. These included organisations such as the National Literacy Cooperation and Project Literacy (Aitchison, 2000: 5).

1.4.2. ABET: 1990 – 1994

1990 was International Literacy Year and despite political violence in South Africa, relevant stakeholders seemed to have literacy on their agendas. Even with optimism and commitment from politicians, trade unionists and the learners themselves, the literacy drive could not be fully implemented because of the sheer magnitude of the need. The next few years saw the establishment of additional private ABET service providers who had recognised the need for a better-educated workforce. Companies and employers were also under pressure from unions to educate and develop their employees.

The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) undertaken in 1992 worked closely with trade unions like the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and recognised the need for general education and skills training to be provided to South African workers who had previously been denied a formal education. The NEPI reports did not provide any recommendations or

implementation plans to ABET service providers although they did outline broad 'policy options' (NEPI Report: 1992). The NEPI reports identify, amongst others, the following key resources for the improvement and development of ABE:

- A strong adult education department
- A national qualifications framework
- A national certification system
- A national curriculum
- Rigorous training of ABE educators and facilitators
- A compulsory ABE component in educator training
- Ongoing curriculum development and research

In 1993 the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) was established to facilitate democratic change in South Africa. The following year, the African National Congress (ANC) instructed the CEPD working group for ABE (Adult Basic Education) to prepare an implementation plan for education and training in the new democracy. The prospect of a new democratic government established a climate of optimism in which those whose educational needs had been previously marginalized would be brought to the forefront of the political agenda.

1.4.3. ABET in a Democratic South Africa

Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, South African policy makers have developed ABET policies, procedures and implementation plans as well as established numerous committees, bodies and organisations to oversee the improvement of adult literacy nationally.

The implementation of ABET in a democratic South Africa was marred by bureaucratic processes and policy implementation. The pace of development in the ABET field was slow and ABET did not appear to be a priority for the new government or for the National Department of Education. Most of the recommendations made by the CEPD seemed to be disregarded and it was only in 1996 that a director for ABET Education was appointed by the National Department of Education (Aitchison, 2000: 143).

In 1997, the government announced a four-year implementation plan for ABET in South Africa. By the end of 1997, there was a general feeling that the National Department of Education was making ABET more of a priority but even with

foreign funding, the ABET implementation plan fell into financial crisis. Aitchison, (2000: 148) attributes the collapse of the four-year implementation plan to "... mismanagement and an inability to take firm and decisive action ..."

After the general elections of 1999, Kadar Asmal was elected as the new Minister of Education. He was motivated by the successes of literacy movements in other developing countries, and the degree to which ordinary citizens in those countries supported literacy as key to their political agendas. As such, he called for "a social movement to bring about reading, writing and numeracy to those who do not have it" (Department of Education: 1999). *Tirisano*, a project to alleviate illiteracy in South Africa was launched in January 2000. This project made provision for the establishment of the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) which aimed to reduce adult literacy by the:

... mobilisation of voluntary services in support of nationwide literacy campaigns; development of training programmes for volunteer educators; evaluation and, where necessary, development and procurement of reading and resource material for use in the nationwide literacy campaign; establishment of decentralised literacy units with responsibility for running the campaign at local level; and the recruitment of learners and the servicing of their needs (Mail and Guardian 10 – 16 November 2000).

This initiative, which was seen not only as a literacy drive but also as a means of initiating development, was slow in its implementation due to insufficient resources, poor project coordination and a lack in passion and agenda (Samuel 2000: 17). It does, however, continue today and many adult learners have benefited from it. The benefits of adult literacy include, amongst others:

Improved community participation; improvement enrolment, retention and performance rates at primary and secondary schools which correlate to levels of parent literacy; an increase in the success rates of other initiatives; boost to tourism and the economy; increased workforce productivity and entrepreneurial initiatives; and increased participation in other ABET and skills development programmes (Department of Education, 2001).

With the benefits of adult literacy, and indeed the general advantages associated with education and skills acquisition in mind, the government legislated a skills levy on all operating businesses. The skills levy constitutes 1% of a company's wage or salary payments and is paid via the South African Revenue Services (SARS) to the Sector Education Training Authority (SETA) to which the company is a member. SETAs are responsible for the education and training within the

industry that they represent. For example, the MAPPPSETA - the SETA to which, my case study site, Belmont Publishers belongs is the media, advertising, publishing, printing and packaging sector education training authority. Companies that belong to the MAPPPSETA pay 1% of their wage or salary bill to the MAPPPSETA, in return the MAPPPSETA provides, develops, accredits and quality assures education and training programmes that are specific to the SETA. Further to this, if companies train their employees through accredited service training providers, they can claim back up to 60% of the training costs. This process serves as a mechanism to encourage employers to develop and enhance the skills of employees through ongoing education and training initiatives. Unfortunately, many companies see the skills levy as a 'tax' and as such they pay it through their tax returns and make little or no provision for claiming back the levy through the education and training of their employees. As such, the National Skills Fund (NSF) to which all of the SETAs report has accumulated a substantial skills fund. In its efforts to improve workplace skills and indeed national levels of literacy and numeracy, the government has approved NSF and SETA plans to conceptualise and implement various pilot projects, many of these are ABET focussed.

These ABET projects generally involve a tender process through which ABET service providers would be awarded contracts to oversee the advocacy, implementation, monitoring and arrangements for accredited assessment and certification. Effectively there is no cost to the companies except for the time learners may need to attend ABET classes.

1.4.4. ABET provision in 2006

ABET operates within the General Education and Training band (GET) and as such any training materials used in an official ABET context needs to be approved by Umalusi, the council for quality assurance in general and further education. At this stage in time ABET is generally provided through official channels in the following ways:

- The Department of Education
- Private ABET service providers

- SETA funded programmes (implemented by NGOs and private ABET service providers)
- Private companies and Section 21 companies who have accredited ABET materials
- Non-Governmental Organisations

1.4.5. Synthesis

The field of literacy and indeed ABET have been closely related with political transformation in South Africa. ABET is strongly connected to the democratic successes of this country – the greater the level of literacy, the greater the level of personal autonomy. Freire (1972) emphasises literacy as the key to personal liberation and implies that literacy acquisition is central to gaining social participation. By participating in social activities, neo-literates are set on a course to ultimately take part in democratic decision-making processes.

The degree to which literacy advocacy is successful depends on the degree to which it is supported by the political powers. The South African government has established educational structures that serve to legislate and monitor the delivery of ABET in South Africa. These structures aim to continuously improve literacy acquisition and to overcome the legacy of apartheid. These structures, bodies and organisations will be explored in the section that follows.

1.5. THE STRUCTURE OF ABET IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

1.5.1. Introduction

Under the new dispensation, there has been a shift in the approach to education and training in South Africa from the input or performance approach which emphasised what content was taught to an output approach that focuses on competencies achieved by the learner. This is of particular importance to ABET learners who need to demonstrate improved competency in their education and training.

1.5.2. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

The Government Gazette (1997: 45) states that the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was established in 1995 (SAQA Act 58 of 1995) to provide a structure to implement and develop the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). As such, SAQA approves and oversees the implementation of new curricular policies. Further to this, SAQA formulates and publishes policies and criteria for the registration of Standards Generating Bodies (SGB) which are responsible for establishing education and training standards. SAQA also oversees policy and accreditation related issues relating to National Standards Bodies (NSB) that are responsible for the monitoring and auditing of learning achievements in terms of standards and qualifications. SAQA's vision is to reconstruct and redevelop education and training in South Africa by reflecting and satisfying the objectives contained within the NQF. In so doing, SAQA envisions that it will:

... enhance the quality of education and training to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities (*ibid*).

SAQA also aims to ensure that every learner achieves his or her full learning potential. The NQF provides the framework for SAQA to facilitate personal, social and economic development.

1.5.3. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Table 4 provides a developmental structure for learning in the South African context. Learning bands and ABET levels within the General Education and Training (GET) band are evident in the table.

<i>Higher Education Certificates</i>						
<i>NQF Level</i>	<i>Band</i>	<i>Types of Qualifications and Certificates</i>		<i>Locations of Learning for Units and Qualifications</i>		
8	Higher Education and Training	Doctorates Further Research Degrees		Tertiary/ Research/ Professional institutions		
7		Higher Degrees Professional Qualifications		Tertiary/ Research/ Professional institutions		
6		First Degrees Higher Diplomas		Universities/ Technikons/ Colleges/ Private/ Professional Institutions/ Workplace, etc.		
5		Diplomas Occupational Certificates		Universities/ Technikons/ Colleges/ Private/ Professional Institutions/ Workplace, etc.		
<i>Further Education and Training Certificates</i>						
4	Further Education and Training	School/ College' Trade Certificates Mix of all units from all -		Formal High Schools/ Private/ State Schools	Technical/ Community police/ Nursing/ Private Colleges	Labour Market Schemes/ Industry Training Boards/ Unions/ Workplace, etc.
3		School/ College' Trade Certificates Mix of all units from all -				
2		School/ College' Trade Certificates Mix of all units from all -				
<i>General Education and Training Certificates</i>						
1	General Education and Training	Senior Phase (Grade 7 – 9)	ABET Level 4	Formal Schools – Urban/ rural/ farm/ special/ early childhood development centres	Occupation/ work-based training/ RDP/ Labour market schemes/ Upliftment/ Community Programmes	NGOs/ Churches/ Night Schools/ ABET Programmes/ Private Providers/ SETAs/ Unions/ Workplace/ etc.
		Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 – 6)	ABET Level 3			
		Reception Year and Foundation Phase (Grades R – 3)	ABET Level 2			
		Provision for children from 2 – 6 years	ABET Level 1			
		Provision for children from birth to 3 years				

Table 4: The Structure of the NQF

The NQF aims to provide an integrative platform in which skills and knowledge can be transferred across learning fields and qualifications. Lubisi et. al (1998: 64), in describing the NQF says that it is:

... a new approach to education and training. It provides opportunities for you to learn, regardless of your age, circumstances, and the level of education and training you may have. It allows you to learn on an ongoing basis. This is called lifelong learning. People learn all the time, both from life experiences and from formal learning situations. This new system will provide access to nationally accepted qualifications. Different forms of learning such as full-time, part-time, distance learning, work-based learning, and life experience will be recognised and credits allocated and registered on the NQF The NQF will make it possible for you to achieve national qualifications through both formal and informal learning.

The NQF is essentially a framework to facilitate and acknowledge lifelong learning. As such it integrates education and training in such a way that learning undertaken outside of formal institutions is recognised and awarded credits and qualifications. The aim of the framework is to measure qualifications in education and training against prescribed unit standards which comprise specific outcomes and assessment criteria.

1.5.4. ABET Learning Areas

The NQF identifies eight areas of learning within the General Education and Training (GET) band. These learning areas fall into three different categories as detailed in Table 5.

Learning Area Category	Description
Fundamental Learning Areas	The fundamental learning area category comprises Communication, Literacy and Language as well as Numeracy and Mathematics.
Core Learning Areas	The core learning area category comprises formal learning areas that would be typically found in traditional school. These learning areas include: Human and Social Sciences (HSS), Natural Sciences (NS), Technology. (TECH), Arts and Culture (A&C), Economic Management Sciences (EMS) and Life Orientation (LO). These learning areas form the core of the curriculum. The fundamental and core learning area categories focus more on the 'E' in ABET as they are concerned with education.
Elective Learning Areas	The elective learning area category comprises industry specific unit standards and qualifications. The content and skills covered in this category would develop learners to become more competent to perform the duties associated with their job. As such, this learning area category focuses more on the 'T' in ABET as it is concerned with the more technical aspects of learning.

Table 5: Learning Area Categories

The learners who formed part of this study were engaged in Literacy in English at either ABET Level 3 or Level 4.

1.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored approaches to lifelong learning, international literacy campaigns, the history of ABET in the South African context and the present structures and policies associated with ABET in South Africa.

This exploration has illuminated many issues that are pertinent to this research. Firstly, it is evident that adults want and need to be taught differently to younger people. This is particularly important in South Africa where many adults were either deprived of a formal education or received ABET tuition that did not support andragogical theories. Secondly, this chapter confirmed that there are numerous approaches to lifelong learning. These approaches vary in politics and pedagogy and the choice of approach is usually ideologically informed. The need for ABET in South Africa is both historical and political in nature. For these reasons, it is important that an appropriate combination of approaches be adopted to literacy pedagogy. In the analysis of international literacy campaigns, it became evident that the language of instruction is important in determining the programme and learner success – this is particularly pertinent in South Africa given the diversity of official languages that exist. The importance of post-literacy support also emerged as being central to sustaining acquired literacy.

Finally, this chapter contextualised both the historical and present provision of ABET in South Africa - it is evident that government has developed processes and policies to redress issues of Adult Education.

CHAPTER 2

INVESTIGATING LITERACY SUCCESS

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This Chapter deals with the methodological issues that emerged in my exploration of the question: *Why are some ABET learners more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course?* In this chapter, I present a discussion of qualitative research and the case study methodology that I used in conducting and gathering my research.

I introduce my sample group which comprises management, the ABET facilitator and ABET learners at Belmont Publishers and I describe how I negotiated entry into the research site and how I solicited the research participants. I theorise the research tools that I employed and describe the processes and practises that I employed in relation to each. The research tools employed include questionnaires; interviews; group work activities and observations. Further to this, I consider issues of validity and reliability, the role of the researcher and conclude with a discussion around ethical considerations that include anonymity and confidentiality.

2.2. RESEARCH TECHNIQUES AND DATA COLLECTION

2.2.1. Qualitative Research

I used qualitative research to investigate factors that determine success and failure from both the intrinsic (learner perspectives) and extrinsic (institutional and logistical) factors that impact on ABET literacy. As such, the research techniques used in this research are qualitative in nature. Cantrell (1993: 90) suggests that “the qualitative approach uses small, information rich samples purposefully selected...”, while Preissle (2002: 1) describes qualitative data as:

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

Cantrell (1997: 87) explains that the term qualitative data “is used synonymously for a number of research approaches associated with interpretive and critical science perspectives.” Qualitative research methodology is concerned with how people arrange themselves and their settings and how they make sense of the social structures and cultures that characterise their setting. Understanding these social and cultural structures at the Belmont site were central to my research as they gave insight into the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact on learner success. Qualitative research methodology assumes that realities are socially constructed by individuals and society (Smit, 2001: 56) and is dependent on the establishment of relationships for explaining various causes and outcomes. As such, I identified case study methodology as an appropriate qualitative research methodology because the sample group was small enough for me to develop a relationship in which participants felt secure enough to share and explain the causes and outcomes that existed in their ABET learning environment. These causes and outcomes were usually described by the ABET learners in relation to the degree to which they believed they were successful in their learning environment. Further to this, I was able to observe the relationships that existed within the existing social and cultural structures at Belmont Publishers.

McMillan & Schumacher (1997: 391) describe a qualitative approach to data collection as “naturalistic inquiry.” Fraenkel & Wallen (1996: 444) describe this form of inquiry as “a non-interfering manner in which to study real-world situations as they unfold naturally.” I disagree with Fraenkel & Wallen because although one would assume that this form of inquiry is non-interfering, the very presence of the researcher is interfering – it alters the dynamics of the learning environment and one can never be certain that participants are behaving as they usually would. At my initial visits, I found that the participants were very aware of my presence, so much so, that many did not contribute to classroom discussions. The facilitator assured me that this was not always the case. This phenomenon seemed to ease with each of my visits, and towards the end of the data collection process the participants appeared comfortable with my presence. Despite this drawback of

naturalistic inquiry, an inquiry of this nature offers the researcher the opportunity to observe whatever emerges without predetermined constraints on outcomes (*ibid*).

2.2.2. Case Studies

Within the quantitative research paradigm, I further identified case study methodology as an appropriate research method because it “strives to portray what it is like in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and thick description of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts and feelings, for a situation” (Cohen et al. 2000: 182). By employing qualitative research strategies and using qualitative research tools, I was able to gain a deep understanding into the processes and practices associated with the Belmont ABET programme. In doing this, I was able to identify various factors that impacted on learner ABET success.

Anderson (1998: 152) suggests that case studies are often mistaken for other research types such as historical and evaluation research. He describes a case study as an approach to research investigation that deals with contemporary events in their natural context. Case studies have been increasingly used in educational research and as a research methodology as they provide the researcher with the possibility of understanding in-depth, the nature of the research subjects regardless of the number of participants or sites. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 157) state that case study methodology examines a “bounded system” - a case examined in detail over a specific time and it utilises various sources of data situated within a specific case. The case may be a programme, an event, an activity or a set of individuals bounded in time and place. McMillan & Schumacher (*ibid*) remind us that by increasing numbers of individuals or sites, we reduce the depth of analysis at any given site.

A case study is an intensive investigation of a particular entity (Weiss, 1998: 261). The ‘entity’ that my case study researches is the ABET learning environment at the Belmont site. This entity comprises a group of learners engaged in a Level 3 and Level 4 literacy class. It also comprises the Human Resources Development Manager (HRDM) - who for the remainder of this research report will be referred

to as *company management*, the ABET facilitator and the relationships and dynamics that exist among these research participants. A case study also aims to understand one phenomenon in depth – in this case, my study explored why some learners are more successful than others in their completion of an ABET course. I decided to use a single-case study approach (Yin, 1984: 108) as this method of investigation focuses entirely on the subjects situated within the case and thus, holistically considers the interrelationships among people, institutions, events and beliefs.

McMillan & Schumacher (1997: 395) suggest that case studies work well as methods of investigation where little or previous research on a topic has been done. This exploration within a case can lead to further inquiry and ultimately to the development of a theory related to the issue under study. Thomas (2002: 4) suggests that a case study aims to provide understanding rather than knowledge. At the site where I conducted my research no previous ABET investigations have taken place. This placed me in an advantageous position to gather and analyse relevant information so as to gain understanding as to why some ABET learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course.

2.3. SAMPLE GROUP

McKay (1987: 11) argues that samples do not pretend to be representative and therefore a generalisation in the findings is neither assumed, desirable or considered possible. My case study focused on a sample group that comprised the following research participants: literacy learners placed at Levels 3 and 4 within the GET band; company management and the ABET facilitator at Belmont Publishers. ABET learners have demonstrated competency in the preceding literacy level, either through the process of recognition of prior learning (rpl) or national certification. The learning programme at this site is also supported by associated stakeholders that include the MAPPPSETA¹⁰ and the Service

¹⁰ This SETA is a non-profit making organisation that supports and facilitates education and training in the media, advertising, publishing, printing and packaging sectors. The MAPPPSETA was founded and exists as a result of the Skills Development Act (SDA) and the Skills Development Levies Act. (See section 1.4.3).

Provider¹¹. The organograms in Diagram 1 represent the relationships of the various participants and stakeholders:

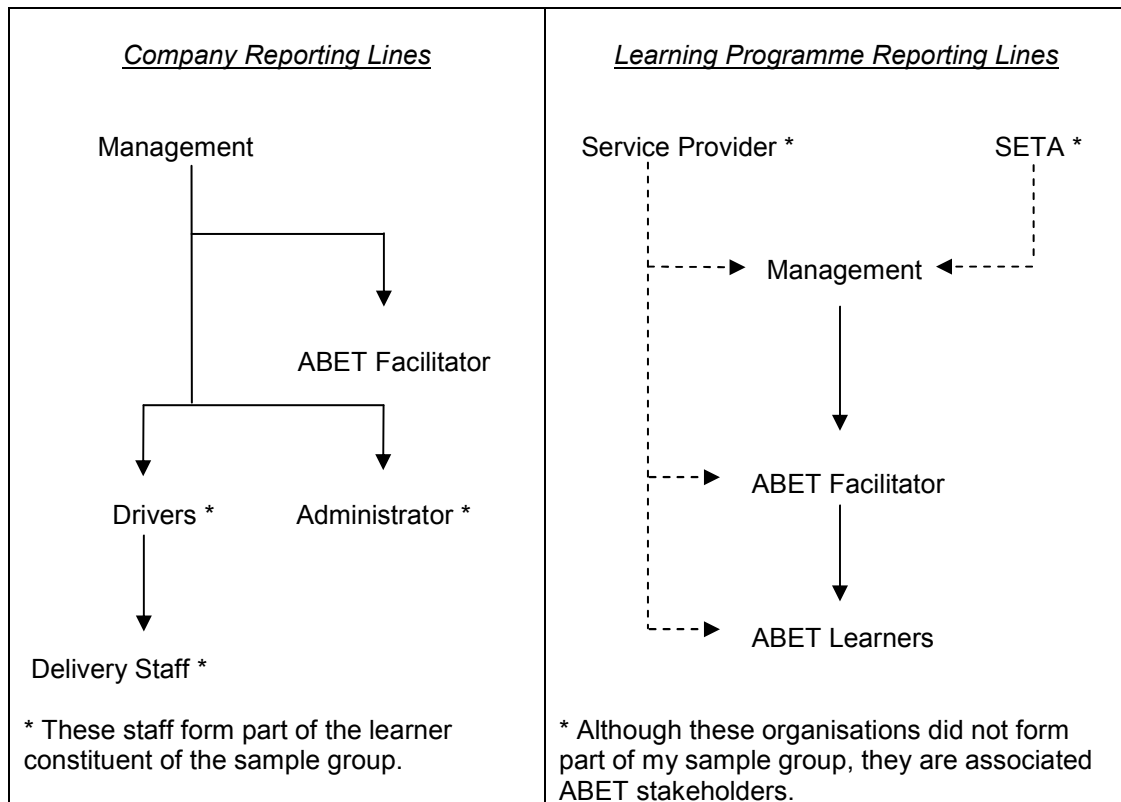


Diagram 1: Organograms demonstrating reporting lines at Belmont publishers

A detailed account of the sample group at Belmont Publishers follows:

ABET Site/ Company

The company that constitutes the ABET site and formed part of this sample group is Belmont Publishers. The Belmont Group is a large publishing house whose principal activity is publishing and printing in electronic and print media. Its publication titles include many well known daily and weekly newspapers as well as many weekly, monthly and quarterly magazines. Other products produced by Belmont include telephone directories, annual reports, diaries and business forms.

¹¹ The ABET service provider that provides ABET learning material to the Belmont Site is Compu Learning (a pseudonym) who are a private ABET service provider that has accreditation with Umalusi. Compu Learning offers learning programmes using two broad approaches, namely: (1) the face-to-face approach which relies predominantly on a facilitator and; (2) the computer assisted approach which uses multi-media programmes in conjunction with workbooks and facilitator training sessions. The Belmont site has adopted a combination of the computer assisted and the more traditional facilitator-reliant approach. Compu Learning provides the facilitator with training that encompasses pedagogical and assessment practices associated with the learning programme and also supply facilitators with training guides, teaching support material as well as learner workbooks and answer books. The Belmont facilitator has attended this compulsory training course which sensitises facilitators to the Compu Learning programme, SAQA, the NQF, theory related to assessment and the actual practices and processes associated with adult learning. The Compu Learning facilitator training programme does not place emphasis on teaching methodology - and more importantly, it does not fully address andragogical practices or approaches to lifelong learning.

Belmont have remained committed to the ABET programme since they implemented it in 2002. Each year they have extended the programme to encompass additional levels as well as to include more learners. At present 25 learners are actively engaged in the ABET programme. The company was very open to hosting my research and both company management and the ABET facilitator consented to giving me open access to ABET classes.

Facilitation takes place on a Monday from 08h30 until 17h30. The Level 3 and 4 learners attend classes in the morning, while the Level 1 and 2 learners attend classes in the afternoon. The Belmont Monday training timetable is as follows:

08h30 – 10h15:	Computer Learning
10h15 – 10h30:	Tea Break
10h30 – 11h30:	Class Work
11h30 – 12h30:	Group Discussion

The computer learning session involved the learners working on the computer at their own pace with the computer teaching them the relevant new concepts. The computer learning session involved both content input and the completion of an activity that was done on the computer. Level 3 learners only used the mouse, while Level 4 learners may have also used the keyboard to complete computer-based activities. After the tea break, learners gathered in the breakaway room for the facilitator to reinforce and teach the skills introduced on the computer. This session usually involved some form of input and a worksheet or activity of sorts. The final session involved the learners meeting in groups (or as one large group) to discuss or debate issues relevant to the topic. Unfortunately, the computers were proving problematic during my research visits and as such, I only got to see the computers being used once. During the other visits, the facilitator doubled up on the class work component of the timetable.

I oversaw questionnaires, conducted interviews and made my observations during the Level 3 and 4 class times on Monday mornings. The visits were always planned in advance with the facilitator and I generally visited the site every second

Monday morning over a three-month period. Table 6, below summarises my visits to the Belmont site:

Visit Number	Date of Visit	Purpose of Visit
Visit 1	24 July 2006	Management sensitisation, consent and interview
Visit 2	6 August 2006	Facilitator sensitisation, consent and interview
Visit 3	20 August 2006	Learner Sensitisation Session
Visit 4	27 August 2007	Signing of Consent and Confidentiality with learners and Learner Questionnaire
Visit 5	10 September 2006	Focus Group Interview with learners and facilitator
Visit 6	25 September 2006	Lesson Observation
Visit 7	8 October 2006	Focus Group Interview with learners
Visit 8	22 October 2006	Lesson Observation
Visit 9	5 November 2006	Group Discussion with learners and facilitator
Visit 10	19 November 2006	Lesson Observation & Discussion with learners and facilitator

Table 6: Summary of Visits to the Belmont Site

* Conducted with all Level 3 and 4 learners present on the day of my visit to the site. Details of the focus group interviews can be found in section 2.4.2. The specific content and approach to the group work activity is explained in detail in section 2.4.3. The group discussion held during visit 9 explored different conceptions of *success*. These conceptions are detailed in section 3.4.

Further to these planned interventions, unstructured discussions took place with the facilitator and learners at various visits on an *ad hoc* basis. The Belmont site provided two staff members who formed part of my sample group, these included the Human Resources Development Manager (HRDM) – company management and the ABET facilitator. The HRDM was an ex-teacher who is a White, English-speaking female in her fifties - she has been with the company for a number of years. The ABET facilitator was a 23-year old, Black university graduate from the University of the Witwatersrand who has a degree in Industrial Psychology. Although she has no formal teacher training or experience, she has been involved, on a voluntary basis, as a facilitator in an ABET programme at a Johannesburg prison. Although her (spoken) mother-tongue is Setswana, she is not proficient in reading and writing it. She was educated at an English-speaking model C high school. She has been working at Belmont for less than one year.

Initially, facilitation at the Belmont site was outsourced to Compu Learning, the service provider, but management has recently appointed an internal facilitator due to the high turnover of external facilitators. The present ABET facilitator is employed by the company on a fulltime basis.

Learners

This study focused on 16 learners, who speak at least six different home languages and who were completing an ABET literacy programme at Level 3 and 4. In ABET terms these courses are called *Communication in English – Level 3 or 4*. As such, it can be assumed that these learners have satisfied the unit standards for ABET communication in English at Level 2 (for those presently engaged in Level 3) and Level 3 (for those presently engaged in Level 4), either by formal accredited summative assessment, rpl or placement/ baseline assessment. The demographics of the learners are presented in Table 7 below.

	Gen-der		Age				Race				Dis-ability		Home Language						ABET level
	Female	Male	20 –29	30 – 39	40 – 49	50+	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Yes	No	Zulu	Xhosa	Tswana	Pedi	Tsonga	Swazi	
Learner 1	✓			✓			✓					✓	✓						3
Learner 2	✓				✓		✓					✓				✓			3
Learner 3		✓	✓				✓					✓	✓						4
Learner 4		✓		✓			✓					✓				✓			4
Learner 5		✓	✓				✓					✓		✓					4
Learner 6		✓	✓				✓					✓					✓		4
Learner 7		✓	✓				✓					✓			✓				4
Learner 8		✓		✓			✓					✓		✓					4
Learner 9		✓	✓				✓					✓		✓					3
Learner 10		✓			✓		✓					✓	✓						3
Learner 11		✓	✓				✓					✓	✓						3
Learner 12		✓		✓			✓					✓	✓						3
Learner 13		✓				✓	✓					✓						✓	3
Learner 14		✓		✓			✓					✓	✓						3
Learner 15		✓	✓				✓					✓	✓						3
Learner 16		✓		✓			✓					✓			✓				4
TOTAL	2	14	7	6	2	1	16	0	0	0	0	16	7	1	2	4	1	1	

Table 7: Demographics of Belmont ABET learners

All of the learners, with the exception of one who has a basic administration function, have similar job descriptions – they are responsible for the distribution of Belmont newspapers and report directly to a driver, who is effectively their senior. These learners are all voluntarily attending the ABET classes to improve their literacy skills with the prospect of personal and professional growth.

2.4. RESEARCH TOOLS

Case studies also use a variety of data gathering techniques and methods that are determined by the researcher. The tools that I used to gather information include: questionnaires; interviews; group work activities and observations— by virtue of the fact that they are qualitative data collection tools that employ qualitative information gathering methods, they provided me with a degree of flexibility in the data gathering process:

2.4.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires as described by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2001: 267) are useful in that they “... move away from seeing the human subjects as simply manipulable, and data as somehow external to individuals and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations.” Through effective questionnaires people exchange views on a topic of mutual interest. Sooklal (2005: 88) stresses the importance of the questions contained within questionnaires bearing relevance to the research and critical questions that underpin the research being undertaken.

Questionnaires can also be advantageous in that the responses are gathered in a standardised way. This is useful to the researcher who has to make sense of and extract information from the questionnaire. Care needs to be taken when formulating a questionnaire that subjectivity is not lost to objectivity. This implies that the researcher developing the questionnaire needs to ensure that both the structure and the way in which questions are formulated in the questionnaire allows for personal and individual responses from the participants. Further care should also be taken to ensure that issues of sensitivity relating to such things as

professionalism, culture, race, religion and gender are considered and addressed accordingly. In South Africa, this is particularly pertinent because of our racially oppressive past – many Black people have first hand experiences of inequality and researchers need to be sensitive to issues such as these so as to maximise their data collection efforts.

Questionnaires may, on the other hand be limiting in that respondents may answer superficially and like many evaluation methods, questionnaires are conducted away from the learning event and as such participants may forget to include important information in their answers.

I developed a questionnaire that aimed to capture information regarding the learner's perceptions of the ABET programme in relation to their success. This questionnaire comprised the following sections: biographical details; personal reflections; you and your employer; you and your ABET learning environment; you and your ABET learning programme; you and your ABET attendance; factors that contribute to your ABET learning success; factors that contribute to your ABET learning failure; and any additional comments or suggestions. (See Appendix 8 for learner questionnaire). Although the draft questionnaire was not officially piloted, it was discussed (and subsequently improved) with various research participants and associated parties. The most productive of these improvements were done with company management and the ABET facilitator, who both gave me insight into the degree to which my questionnaire was appropriate to their specific learning environment.

After all of the edits and changes, I administered the group questionnaire to all of the ABET learners who were completing the ABET programme at Level 3 or Level 4. This questionnaire was constructed in such a way that difficult or more sensitive questions were posed later in the questionnaire so as to maximise inputs should participants choose to discontinue completing the questionnaire at any point. Despite this consideration, all of the learners completed the questionnaires as thoroughly as they could. Although I had carefully planned the questionnaire to streamline the decoding process - when I began working with the data, I realised that information gathered in each section was not as definite as I had planned. It

emerged that there was a lot of overlap in the information collected and although in some instances this could have been avoided, for the most part it was clear that the various aspects of the learning process collectively impacted on the degree to which learners were successful.

This questionnaire was conducted shortly after the management and facilitator interviews and it was devised in such a way that qualitative data could be collected in categories that related directly to the key research questions relating to factors that may impact on learner success. As part of the data collection process, such a questionnaire assisted me with developing an understanding of the individuals who formed part of the case study at the same time ensuring that I did not deviate from the pertinent research issues. The questionnaire also guided me and informed my preparation for and actions in subsequent research activities at the Belmont site.

2.4.2. Interviews

Cohen et. al. (2000: 267) suggest that interviews:

... enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view.

Through the interview process, views on an identified topic are discussed and exchanged. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2001: 267) describe an interview as "... [an] interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, (which) sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasises social situatedness for research data."

In my research, I conducted three types of interviews, namely: semi-structured, unstructured and focus group interviews. These interviews were advantageous to my study in that they afforded me the opportunity to collect large amounts of information over a short space of time. I conducted in-depth interviews with the research participants to gather relevant information. This information was varied as it was collected from a variety of different subjects, and as such triangulation¹²

¹² Triangulation is discussed in section 2.7.

provided me with the opportunity to verify the data collected. I used the following interview strategies:

(i) Semi-Structured Interviews:

According to Leedy (1992), interviews should be considered as professional interactions that require professional planning and conduct. The semi-structured interview allows for questions to be rephrased if the respondent has misunderstood or is unclear of what the question is actually asking. Semi-structured interviews have no choices from which the respondent selects an answer and the questions are phrased in such a way that they allow for individual response, thus enabling the interviewer to pose follow-up questions should clarification or additional detail be necessary. Finally, semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to describe and analyse the situation, process or response (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001: 454). I used semi-structured interviews to engage with the research participants within the sample group that are involved in the ABET programme from a managerial or instructive perspective. As such, I conducted interviews with the company manager who oversees the ABET programme from senior management level at the site as well as with the ABET facilitator. These interviews were not piloted and in hindsight, I realise that this should have been done – possibly with the service provider co-ordinator. Even though the questionnaire attempted to compartmentalise research participant involvement and impact at the various levels, I discovered, while conducting the interviews, that the same information often emerged at different points in the interview. These interviews were recorded on an interview sheet and for the most part, I posed open text questions that required the participants to explain their personal opinions and experiences in relation to their ABET success. On receiving their responses, I always attempted to probe deeper the issues of learner success and failure wherever appropriate. The management and facilitator interviews, for the most part, asked questions in the same categories, these included: funding and SETA arrangements; the service provider; the actual ABET programme; the company and logistical arrangements; views on facilitation; learner attitudes; and personal and general comments. (See Appendix 6 and 7 for the Senior Management and ABET Facilitator interview schedules).

(ii) Unstructured Interviews:

I also, from time to time, conducted unstructured interviews with the research participants that constitute my sample group. At every visit, I conducted informal and unstructured interviews with the ABET facilitator either before or after the learning session. I also engaged informally with learners during their tea break, where the discussion would always centre on the lesson or learning environment. After the initial contact, I only really communicated with management to give feedback from time-to-time. During these interviews and exchanges, I took notes where I deemed necessary (sometimes these would be directly after the interactions). Unstructured interviews have no predetermined questions and are informal and conversational in nature. Direct questions are asked if the researcher identifies gaps in the data collected. As such, unstructured interviews provide the researcher with great latitude in asking broad questions in whatever order seems appropriate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001: 458).

(iii) Focus Group Interviews¹³:

Focus group interviews are different to one-on-one interviews in that they are conducted with the researcher and a group of identified research participants. Morgan (1988: 18) believes that the focus group interview offers the unique advantage of providing the researcher with access to interactions within a group context. It is only recently that focus group interviews have been accepted as an appropriate qualitative research technique within social science research (Morgan 1988: 19). According to Kelly (1999: 388) a focus group interview is a general term given to research conducted with a group of people who share a similar type of experience. It is important to note that, whilst conventional interviews strive to collect data on the subjective experiences of individual participants, focus group interviews focus on accessing inter-subjective experiences shared within a group of participants (*ibid*). This method of data collection is effective in that it allows the researcher to assess problems, concerns and ideas with a purposefully selected group of participants. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2001: 299) identify the following

¹³ I have used the term 'Focus group Interview', rather than 'focus group' or 'focus group discussion', as I believe it is important to acknowledge the pivotal role that the interviewer plays in shaping the discussions and debates that take place between the participants.

advantages of focus group interviews: they create a social environment in which participants are encouraged to share ideas; differing perceptions increase the quality of collected data and; they are time saving as they produce a large amount of data in a short period of time.

I identified focus group interviews as an effective way to elicit the participants' perceptions because I felt that they would create an unthreatening environment for them. In conducting my research, I conducted two focus group interview with the ABET learners. In the first focus group interview, the learners appeared to be apprehensive about my motives (despite the initial sensitisation session¹⁴) and it was obvious that time was needed for them to develop a rapport and trust me - the outsider. In this focus group interview, I centred on debates around the personal and institutional factors that impact on learning success and addressed the following four questions:

1. Why have I been successful in my ABET learning experience?
2. Why have I not been successful in my ABET learning experience?
3. How can I (personally) improve my ABET learning experience?
4. How can ABET learning experience be improved (environmentally/ or through extrinsic factors)?

As focus group interviews are flexible in nature, they provided me with the opportunity to ask questions pertinent to the learners' ABET success in relation to the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that emerged through the data collection process. Since the focus group interview is flexible in nature, this strategy gave me the opportunity to adjust research strategies to enrich my data where necessary - this is something that I did during the second focus group interview. As my adjusted strategy does not fully conform to the criteria and processes associated with the focus group interview, I have decided to discuss this strategy under the heading: 'Group Work Activities.' (See section 2.4.3).

¹⁴ The Sensitisation Session is discussed in section 2.8. (Also see Appendix 4).

2.4.3. Group Work Activities

In this particular focus group interview, the learners, the ABET facilitator and I were discussing various aspects and components to the ABET programme. These included, amongst other things, support from management, ABET facilitation, the actual ABET programme and the learners' own attitude towards their studies. Participants were asked to talk about how and why each aspect or component contributed to either their ABET success or failure. It became apparent that learners did not feel comfortable to speak, and I assumed that that this may have been as a result of the facilitator being present - or perhaps they were not comfortable to speak openly with each other about issues such as these. I placed learners in groups of three and rotated them so that they got the opportunity in which to explore and discuss each one of the intrinsic or extrinsic factors that contributed to their ABET success with different members of their class. I concluded this group work activity with learners completing a table in which they summarised factors that they believed impacted on success and failure. By completing this activity, I was assisted in gaining access to the subjective experiences of the participants (See Kelly, 1999: 62).

According to Tiberius (1990: 23) students learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. He argues that regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it for longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. Although my activity did not aim to teach the learners anything, I believe that Tiberius' argument can be applied from the perspective that when working in groups, learners can construct, formulate and present their knowledge to a greater degree. Kohn (1986: 101) states that learners who work in collaborative groups also appear to be more satisfied with their classes. This, I believe was evident in the context of the focus group interview in which I adjusted my strategy – the learners appeared to be more comfortable and generally made more valuable contributions with regards to their ABET successes and failures.

2.4.4. Observations

Schwandt (1997: 106) states that “observation is a direct firsthand eye-witness account of everyday social action ...” . At the outset of the research data collection process, I negotiated times and parameters with Belmont management for the conducting of interviews, observations and *ad hoc* site visits. Management were very flexible and granted me access to all of the ABET classes. Acquiring permission to gather “live data from live situations” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001: 305) gave me the opportunity to look at what was taking place in *situ*, rather than rely solely on secondary resources.

In conducting my research, I recorded what I saw and heard while observing both structured and unstructured social encounters. These encounters afforded me the opportunity to contemplate and understand classroom and company dynamics as well as the relationships that exist between the various ABET research participants. Most of my observations were in the context of the ABET classroom and included the dynamics that exist between the facilitator and the learners and between the learners themselves. The atmosphere and the style of the facilitator at the Belmont site seemed to contribute significantly to learner success – learners appeared happy in an environment in which an attitude of mutual respect existed. I observed three ABET classes in progress, this gave me the opportunity to engage in “non-participant observation” (Henning et al, 2004: 171). Non-participant observation places the researcher in a position to observe what is happening without commenting or intervening. Such comments or interventions could impact negatively on the natural social relationships that exist within the context being observed. The facilitator taught through the medium of English but did use mother-tongue to reinforce new concepts or to offer assistance where learners were having difficulty. This, it emerged, also contributed to learner success.

Since most of my observations took place in the morning, I was usually on site for the commencement of the ABET class. I observed that many learners arrived late for class and that attendance fluctuated from week to week. The facilitator explained that since learners do not work on a Monday - the day that they attend

class - it is difficult to control their attendance. I observed that this intrinsic factor, along with extrinsic factors such as the computer programme and timetabling hindered learner success in the ABET classroom.

My observations were recorded in field notes and two of the classes that I observed were recorded on audiotape. Taped lessons were later transcribed to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in the learning environment. These notes and recordings also assisted me in developing ideas, questions and critique as I tried to verify my own understanding of the information gathered in the research process. Henning et al. (*ibid*) define these field notes as “soft” notes that include personal thoughts, feelings, impressions and responses to observations and discussions. Merriam (1998: 116) states that observations are effective qualitative data collection tools in that they allow the researcher to record behaviour as it is happening. Such documented data serves as a historical record for both myself and other researchers in the future. Mouton (2001: 107) presents a checklist for facilitating the documentation of key decisions and actions during observation. This list includes, amongst others, the following suggestions:

- Record dates of field visits;
- Describe fieldwork activities conducted;
- Record the names of people who took part in fieldwork activities;
- Track factors that influenced fieldwork adversely; and
- Track and colour code themes that emerge as a result of data collection.

Through observation and through the recording of my observations, I gained a deeper understanding of the context of the programme as well as a deeper understanding of the factors that impact on learner success – factors that may otherwise go unnoticed in more formal interviews or questionnaires.

My observation will focus on the following:

1. *Who?*

This will include research participant relationships with and between each other.

2. *What?*

This will include content related issues relating to curriculum content, literacy levels, relationships and varying notions of success.

3. *How?*

This will include how the various research participants engage with each other, what methods are used in the classroom and how the ABET programme is supported.

4. *Why?*

This question will be answered in order to service my main research question in the context of my case study: Why are some learners more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course? – A case study at a publishing company.

(See Appendix 9 and 10 for field and lesson observation schedules).

2.4.5. Synthesis

Tellis (1997: 96) states that “they [case studies] do not claim to be representative, they emphasise what can be learnt from a specific case.” Tellis does not draw attention to some of the disadvantages of case study methodology, but Yin (1994: 110) highlights the following considerations:

- Descriptive case study provides anecdotal evidence, which lacks robustness as evidence of a programme’s effectiveness.
- The focus is on the individual project, not on the programme’s portfolio of projects.
- Results for single projects and small clusters of projects generally cannot be generalised.
- Important benefits in an economic case study may be difficult or impossible to capture in monetary terms.

In conducting my research, I was mindful of both the advantages and disadvantages of case study methodology in attempting to reach my primary aim – that of understanding the Belmont site in relation to my research question: Why are some learners more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course? In acknowledging the disadvantages of case study methodology, I maintain this approach is an effective means of investigating this question, as the qualitative nature of such a study provided me the opportunity to investigate the factors that determine learner success on a scaled and focussed sample group. Through employing qualitative research techniques, I had the opportunity to engage with the research participants to determine the factors that impact on

learner success from numerous perspectives within the case study. These perspectives include the ABET funding arrangements; the design of the learning programme; the presentation of the ABET course and the personal and institutional barriers that the learners may experience.

2.5. DATA ANALYSIS

In interpretive research such as my study, there is no distinct place at which data collection ends and data analysis begins. The collecting, analysing and interpreting of data happen simultaneously throughout the research process (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999 in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Charman (2000: 47) supports this idea by suggesting that one of the approaches to constructivist grounded theory is the simultaneous, ongoing collection and analysis of data. In my research, this ongoing and simultaneous analysis and interpretation of data would provide insight into my research investigation of the case study site. Kelly (1999) suggests that the primary goal of conducting analysis and interpretation is to discover regular patterns in the data collected.

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

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

- Segmenting the data into units of content called topics (less than 25 -30) and grouping the topics in larger clusters to form categories; or
- Starting with predetermined categories of no more than 4 – 6 and breaking each category into smaller subcategories; or
- Combining the strategies, using some predetermined categories and adding discovered new categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001: 467).

Bogdan & Biklen (1992: 166) in agreement with McMillan & Schumacher's strategy regarding the segmenting of data into units of content called topics and then grouping topics into larger clusters, suggest that for the researcher to develop each coding category, he or she needs to work through all of the data collected to identify regular patterns, topics and themes. They suggest that the researcher should then write down the words and phrases to represent the perceived patterns, topics and themes. Bogdan & Biklen (*ibid*) continue to describe these words and patterns as "coding categories that are a means of sorting descriptive data" so that information that relates to the given topic can be physically separated from other data.

In conducting my qualitative research within an interpretative paradigm, I relied on my field notes, completed questionnaires and the recordings of focus groups and interviews. Terre Blanche & Kelly (1999) suggest that there are essentially two sorts of field notes. Firstly, there are the notes I made to describe as fully as possible what participants did and said. Secondly, I made soft notes that were concerned with my unfolding analysis. Mouton (1996: 111) is of the view that "we analyse data by identifying patterns and themes in the data and drawing conclusions from them." When I was identifying patterns and themes, I encountered both contradictory and complimentary findings. My first step was to transcribe the management and facilitator interviews. Seidman (1991: 281) contends that transcribing "is a crucial step, for there is the potential for massive data loss, distortion and reduction of complexity." To avoid the loss of data, I transcribed the tape myself immediately after each interview. At this stage the interview setting was still fresh in my mind, and the body language and other gestures of the interviewee were also clearly remembered - this ensured that detail was recorded. After transcribing the interviews, I worked through the participants' questionnaires and coded the information as I identified common factors that contributed to learner success and failure in relation to the ABET programme they were attending. This coded information informed the topics of discussion at the focus group interviews.

Data collected at the focus group interviews was also coded and used to develop areas that positively or negatively impacted on learner success. By repeatedly

reading and scanning the collected data, I developed a good understanding of what the respondents were actually saying. This assisted me in identifying commonalities and differences in the participant’s responses and as such to ultimately identify emerging issues that related to learner success.

Cresswell (1994: 153) suggests that data analysis “requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts.” Once these categories were identified and developed, I endeavoured to gain a deeper understanding of the content embedded in them. I created two large tables on two separate sheets of newsprint – one sheet was titled *learner failure* while the other was titled *learner success*. Each table was split into two major columns - the first being *intrinsic factors*, the second *extrinsic factors*. These columns were in turn split into two sub-columns – the first being *factors* and the second being *details and explanation*. As I systematically worked through the raw data, I added factors and explanations to the relevant side of the table. In the explanations column, I described the factor in detail and then provided a reference in brackets e.g. (D12: 2) - as I has numbered all the documents in my raw data (including questionnaires, interviews and observations), a reference such as this would direct me to page 2 of document 12. The process I undertook is demonstrated (as a working example) in Table 8.

LEARNER FAILURE			
INTRINSIC FACTORS		EXTRINSIC FACTORS	
Factors	Details and Explanation	Factors	
1. Attendance	Facilitator – learners arrive late – poor excuses (D2: 3) Learner – family commitments (D17: 3); funeral (D21: 1)	1. Computer Programme	HRDM – learners often struggle with technology (D1: 2) Facilitator – computer often don't work (D2: 1)
2. Language	Facilitator – learners don't have basic conversational English (D25: 2)	2. Timetabling	Learner – difficult to get to class on a Monday (D11: 9)
3. Motivation	Tired after weekend (D12: 4) Need a social life (D6: 4)	3. Language	Learner – need to learn in own language first (D9:6); (D13: 6)

Table 8: **Data Analysis**

Through this process of categorisation, I noticed recurrent themes emerging in relation to the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact on ABET learner success. These are detailed in Chapter 3 and include the following categories: learner

motivation, attendance; language; the learning programme; timetabling; company support; peer teaching and assessment.

2.6. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis has been defined as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Krippendorff, 1980: 91 and Weber, 1990: 33). Holsti (1969: 14) offers a broad definition of content analysis as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages." Content analysis enables researchers to work through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion. It can be a useful technique for discovering and describing the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention (Weber, 1990: 53). It also allows inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection. According to Krippendorff (1980: 100), six questions must be addressed in every content analysis:

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

The most common notion in qualitative research is probably that a content analysis simply means doing a word-frequency count. The assumption is that the words that are mentioned most often are the words that reflect the greatest concerns. While this may be true in some cases, there are several counterpoints to consider when using simple word frequency counts to make inferences about matters of importance (Stemler, 2001: 1). Another thing to consider is that synonyms may be used for stylistic reasons throughout a document and this may lead the researcher to underestimate the importance of a concept (Weber, 1990: 60). The researcher should also note that each word may not represent a category equally well. By interrogating the content, the validity of the inferences that are being made from the data are strengthened.

Stemler (2002: 2) further argues that content analysis extends far beyond simple word counts and suggests that what makes the technique particularly rich and

meaningful is its reliance on coding and categorizing of the data. Weber (1990: 37) describes a category as “a group of words with similar meaning or connotations” and suggests that “categories should be mutually exclusive and exhaustive” (*ibid*).

In analysing my content it was evident that the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that I identified were not mutually exclusive. Some factors that I identified were difficult to classify as either intrinsic or extrinsic because different aspects of them were classifiable as either. An example of this occurred with the coding of the language of instruction – intrinsically, it was a barrier if learners were not proficient or inexperienced in the language of literacy and extrinsically it was also a barrier if learners literacy was not being offered in a language chosen or understood by them. This was further complicated by the coding of data as either a factor that resulted in failure or a factor that resulted in success. An example of this occurred with the computer programme as an aid to literacy learning – in some aspects it encouraged success, while in others it presented a barrier because of computer hardware problems. In cases where codings were not mutually exclusive, they are presented (in Chapter 3) in the section to which they were mostly coded.

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

2.7. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Mouton (1996: 109) defines validity as “... a quality of the elements (data, statements, hypotheses, theories and methods) of knowledge.” Quality in data collected can be achieved through the honesty and integrity of both the participants and the researcher. If any of the parties involved fail to offer or relay the truth, the research findings will be inaccurate. My strongest validity challenge was that of my preconceived ideas and experiences of ABET in practice.

Fortunately, I had the aim of my study to keep me focussed and I soon realised that I was not out to test hypotheses or people, but rather to discover and explore the factors that impacted on learner success in the ABET learning environment. I assessed the validity and reliability of my research results by triangulating data received from my various data sources. Table 7 (see section 2.5) assisted me with validating my data. This triangulation validated the honesty and integrity of comments and actions observed throughout the data collection process by converging or aggregating data to reveal the truth (Schwandt 1997: 163). The use of triangulation in analysing the data and content in this research gave me the opportunity to validate the information received from the various research participants. McMillan & Schumacher (2001: 478) contend that:

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

Maxwell (1992: 191) argues that “... the validity of an account is inherent, not in the procedures used to validate it but in the relationship it has to those things of which it is intended to be an account of.” Maxwell suggests various issues of validity of which, for the purposes of my research, I took cognisance of the following two:

(i) **Descriptive Validity:** Descriptive validity is considered to be the primary aspect of validity as it is “the foundation upon which qualitative research is built” (Wolcott 1990: 27). In other words, for research to be considered descriptively valid, the accuracy of the account’s application needs to be assured. Maxwell (1992: 286) differentiates between primary and secondary descriptive validity. My research is informed by primary validity in that it relates to accounts of what I observed at the Belmont site. Secondary validity, as explained by Maxwell, is data “... that could, in principle be observed, but is inferred from other data – for example, things that happen in the classroom when the researcher is not present” (*ibid*).

(ii) Interpretive Validity: This form of validity is associated with qualitative research and the qualitative researcher's concern with the describing of actual events. As such, interpretive validity is concerned with the degree to which the researcher reads and analyses the accounts that he or she observes. Interpretive validity is central to this research report as I consistently aimed to understand why some ABET learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course. Maxwell (1992: 289) describes interpretative validity as:

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

My research documents, as far as possible, the perceptions, opinions and experiences of the participants in their own words.

2.8. THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

When conducting qualitative data research, the researcher is essentially the main research 'instrument' of the data collection process. Creswell (1994: 145) states that "data is mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires or machines." Creswell (*ibid*) argues that using the human research instrument to data collection can and does have numerous advantages, but caution needs to be taken that the researcher's personal biases and experiences do not influence the final research findings (Wolcott, 1995: 61). It was pertinent for me to constantly monitor and reflect on my subjectivity throughout the data collection, data analysis and content analysis phases of this research report. Yin (1984 in Winegardener: 2001: 2) provides some guidelines to case study researchers:

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

I perceived my role to be that of a marginal or external researcher (Robson, 1993 in Sooklal, 2005: 94) - as discussed in section 2.2.2. and as such, I observed, documented and asked questions without attempting to alter existing practice. In conducting my research, I made every effort to establish a relationship based on trust with participants and to this end, I began with a sensitisation session with all of the research participants prior to the commencement of my research. Separate sessions were held with the three primary research participant groups – these include the management, the ABET facilitator and the ABET learners. (See Appendix 4 for the Sensitisation Session briefing notes). This sensitisation session aimed to inform research participants of who I was; what my research was for; the research process that I planned to follow; and to assure learners of their anonymity throughout the research process. I also used this session to emphasise the need for honesty and openness from all participants (myself included) throughout the entire process. This session also gave learners the option to withdraw from the research if they so wished. Letters of consent were signed by the participants; and guarantees of confidentiality were signed by myself at the end of this process. (See Appendix 5A and 5B). Qualitative investigation methods, by virtue of their application, establish relationships and are important for explaining causes and events within the socially and culturally constructed learning environment. These are what Smit (1999: 82) calls “measured social facts” as they provide strategies for the researcher to understand the social phenomenon of the participants or respondents. To access these socially measured facts, the researcher needs to develop a relationship of mutual trust with the participants - this sensitisation session aimed to lay the foundation for such a relationship.

2.9. ETHICAL GUIDELINES

2.9.1. Consent

Anderson (1998: 16) maintains that all human behaviour is subjected to ethical principles and rules, and that research practice is no exception. Cohen & Manion (1994: 354) and Anderson (1998: 18) state that one of the most important principles for ethical acceptability is that of informed consent. Participants should

be informed about the purpose and the benefit of the research. Cohen & Manion (1994: 354) also allude to the necessity for permission to have access to the organisation where the research is conducted.

Initially consent was obtained from the service provider, Compu Learning, to contact the Belmont group. In my first contact with site management at Belmont, I clearly stated my research intentions and strategies. To this effect, I received a letter of consent to conduct research at the site. (Letters regarding introductions and permissions to conduct research with the sample group can be found in Appendix 1, 2 and 3).

In my first encounter with the learners, I conducted a sensitisation session in which I gave them a very clear explanation of what my research would entail so that they could make a voluntary and informed decision as to whether they would like to participate in the study. Research participants were also guaranteed absolute autonomy - even after voluntary consent, they were free to withdraw from the research process. All research participants who were willing to participate in my research signed a personal consent form. This form consented to me being present in the ABET classroom; observing lessons; observing company relationships and dynamics; taking field notes; facilitating group discussions and audio-taping lessons. Further to this, participants also consented to taking part in interviews; completing questionnaires; engaging in focus group interviews and engaging in ad hoc discussions with the researcher. (See Appendix 5A). This form was signed by company management, the ABET facilitator and the ABET learners who participated in the study.

Ethical clearance to conduct this research was also received from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the University of the Witwatersrand.

2.9.2. Confidentiality

Ethical issues such as confidentiality indicate an awareness and recognition of the rights of the individual in undertaking research (Kumar, 1999: 190). In taking part in my research, learners were assured of confidentiality in their participation and

as such they were guaranteed anonymity in any recorded or published material. To this end, I presented each research participant with a Guarantee of Confidentiality letter as presented in Appendix 5B. This confidentiality extends beyond this final written report and will also assure confidentiality within company reporting lines during any future verbal and written exchanges. During the research process, learners were encouraged to share personal or confidential information that related to the research topic in interviews, focus groups and other contact time - in the comfort that their contributions would be treated with absolute confidentiality.

In this written research report, the confidentiality of all research participants has been ensured by the use of pseudonyms. The names of the companies – including the service provider and the ABET learning site have been substituted so as not to reveal their identity. Wherever possible, vital statistics or information that may imply or reveal their identity have either been omitted or changed. The names of individual research participants have also been replaced with pseudonyms; as have contact numbers, physical addresses, email addresses and any other information that may appear on introductory or consent information.

2.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the research paradigm and methodology used in my research. In carrying out this research, the theoretical base from which I worked provided me with a solid foundation from which to gather data. In conducting my research, I realised the value of qualitative data – more so, once I began to gather information and became immersed in the social and cultural relationships that existed between the various research participants who formed part of my sample group at the Belmont site. To this end, I also became aware of the fact that it is imperative for the researcher to endeavour to fully understand both the demographics of the participants as well as the relationships that exist between the various participants of which the sample group comprises so as to gain richer and more substantial data.

As I became more entrenched in the research, I realised the power that the researcher has over the research process and indeed the ultimate research findings. This alerted me to the need for absolute integrity on the part of both the researcher and the participants in relation to the data and content analysis. In addition to this I also became aware of the need for ethical considerations around consent and confidentiality being strictly adhered to, so as to protect all involved in the research process.

Finally, this data gathering process drew my attention to the need to prove that data is both valid and reliable. I believe that some of my data collection tools did this successfully but some tools and strategies could have been more fully developed to check for cross-validation across data sources.

Chapter 3 analyses the data collected in this chapter so as to identify factors that impact on both learner success and failure in the ABET learning environment at the Belmont site.

CHAPTER 3

DETERMINING LITERACY SUCCESS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with why some ABET learners are more successful than others in the completion of an ABET course and specifically elaborates on the questions investigated in this study in relation to the data gathered at the Belmont site. Where possible I draw on theoretical support from the literature review in Chapter 1 to elucidate arguments and to aid me in my exploration of the research question.

The issues identified by research participants (the manager; the ABET facilitator and the ABET learners) are presented as either factors that contribute to learner failure at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels or factors that contribute to learner success at either an intrinsic or extrinsic level. These factors are presented in the discussion that follows:

3.2. FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO LEARNER FAILURE

The qualitative data collected at the Belmont site, suggested numerous intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact on learner failure in the ABET context. The following factors emerged in the study and are discussed in the paragraphs that follow: motivation; attendance; late arrival; personal responsibilities; language; the SETA; service provider facilitation; lesson content; the learning programme, timetabling and language.

3.2.1. Intrinsic factors contributing to learner failure

Motivation

Learners at the Belmont site are given the opportunity of a free education that requires of them to give of their own time to attend class. Management raised the

issue that many learners come forward for the pre-assessment but never actually commence with the ABET programme. Other learners joined the programme because they were excited about working on the computer and would then drop out because they found it too difficult. The company recently organised the “Day of the Professionals” at which the co-ordinator from the service provider was invited to speak to about 300 employees about the concept of lifelong learning and the need to constantly improve their skills - and in turn their lives. Despite extensive organisation, and at large cost, there were no additional employees who expressed interest in joining the ABET programme. The issue of motivation may be directly linked to promotion prospects within the company. Management did indicate that successful learners were offered promotion but that this may not always be fully perceived or understood by the employees. By failing to motivate themselves, prospective ABET learner (and indeed ABET learners engaged in an ABET programme) are diminishing their chances and opportunities for ABET success. Although this issue of motivation may seem to contradict, the andragogical stance that suggests that adult learners are motivated to control their own learning, it does in fact support it because the learners are making their own decisions in relation to their learning.

Attendance

Management also stated that some learners have no commitment and often do not attend class despite calls and follow-up from the facilitator. Although this phenomenon does not support theories of andragogy in that andragogical thought suggests that adults are self-directed and motivated, it does support andragogy in that it illuminates that adults will ultimately make their own decisions and choices with regards to their learning.

Transport is not used as an excuse relating to attendance as learners receive R10-00 every Monday to assist them with transport costs to and from the ABET training centre which is located at the Belmont site. By not regularly attending their ABET classes, learners are reducing their chances of ABET success as they miss out on key concepts and do not experience the ABET course in its entirety.

Late Arrival

Although this factor is related to attendance, the facilitator noted that it is “almost worse than being absent” because late arrivals disrupt the class and require extra input regarding content and instructions to the detriment of the other learners. Very often, the flow of the lesson is interrupted by late arrivals and a positive lesson dynamic can fall flat by unexpected and unnecessary interruptions. In the data collection process, I also noted that late arrivals were a big problem that impacted negatively on the learning environment. Sometimes learners arrived up to two hours late – this constitutes half of their four hour ABET class. In one of the focus group interviews, some learners indicated that they had to attend to personal responsibilities such as banking and childcare before arriving for class – this is explored more fully in the section on personal responsibilities that follows. Both management and the ABET facilitator suggested that these adult learners need to realise that they, intrinsically, have the power to overcome this factor which can be a stumbling block to their own personal learning success.

Personal Responsibilities

Management also cited personal responsibilities as a factor that contributed to failure in the ABET course. Personal responsibilities impact on learner attendance and include banking, seeing to ill parents or children and arrangements around cultural festivities. Both management and the facilitator indicated that they were not convinced by these “excuses.” This mistrust raises other issues – the company is offering the learners an opportunity to extend themselves and feel frustrated that learners are not seizing this opportunity. Nonyongo (1997: 7) in her study of DUSSPRO¹⁵ (the Distance University Support Programme) suggests “students are likely to remain students, giving to studies what they can and what they will.” This suggestion is true of the Belmont site - although the Belmont site had arranged ABET facilitation for half a day of the two days that the learners do not work, learners still chose to attend to personal responsibilities during class time. “Giving to [their] studies what they can and what they will” (*ibid*) impacts negatively on their ABET learning success.

¹⁵ In her study of DUSSPRO (a Distance University Support Programme), Nonyongo (1997) aimed to understand how well DUSSPRO was supporting students at pure correspondences distance universities. She discovered that reducing geographical transactional distance, does not necessarily reduce transactional distance in the face-to-face classroom.

Language

It was the facilitator who originally raised the issue of language suggesting that she would prefer to teach literacy through mother-tongue and then introduce English at a later stage. She suggested that learners would be in a stronger position if they learnt literacy in mother-tongue first and then only learnt English when they had a solid language base in place. She commented that “learners don’t see the connection in the language of instruction [English] to their own.” She further suggested that if it was her choice, she would teach literacy through the medium of isiZulu as this was “the most widely used and the easiest” of all the languages spoken in the ABET class. Through the questionnaire, these sentiments were confirmed by three quarters of the learners, while the remainder preferred English as the language of literacy. Those who supported English as the language of literacy see it as a means to access promotion. The issue of language is difficult to clearly define as a factor that contributes to either success or failure. In this instance, it has been defined as an intrinsic barrier to success because most of the learners (whose mother-tongue is not English) commented that learning literacy in a mother-tongue would place learners in a stronger position to later transfer language structures into English.

3.2.2. Extrinsic factors contributing to learner failure

SETA

Belmont Publishers pays a skills levy to the equivalent of 1% of the wages and salaries bill to the MAPPPSETA. Although the legislated arrangement is that the MAPPPSETA will reimburse levy paying members, like Belmont, for accredited training it emerged through the management interview, that the MAPPPSETA is not directly involved in the ABET programme because they do not recognise ABET as a priority within the sector. This data was supported by the facilitator who stated that she had had no dealings with the SETA in relation to the ABET programme. Senior management confirmed that the SETA reimbursed the company for up to 60% for non-ABET accredited in-house training and although efforts have been made to claim against ABET training, this had not been successful. The status quo in this regard suggests that although the company has implemented the ABET programme independently of the SETA, they have

adhered to SETA and broader ABET principles. This non-support of ABET specific projects by the SETA clearly impacts negatively on learner success. If the MAPPPSETA committed itself to ABET initiatives, more learners would have access to this type of education and such initiatives would also relieve companies of the financial pressure associated with in-house education and training.

Service Provider Facilitation

In terms of facilitation, management indicated that until recently, they had used the services of a facilitator provided by the service provider. Both company management and the learners indicated that they were not happy with the level of the service provider's facilitators. Management was particularly concerned about the rate at which they were being withdrawn and replaced. This was further compounded by managements' belief that the facilitator was not on site for sufficient time to address the levels at which the learners were operating and that no extension or enrichment activities were provided. It appeared to the company that facilitators were being replaced to satisfy the needs of the service provider without offering the necessary support to the site and the learners associated with the learning site.

Management expressed that they were happy with the relationship that they have with the service provider co-ordinator but questioned his judgement in relation to facilitator competency.

The Belmont site has now appointed their own in-house facilitator as it was felt that the high facilitator turn over and in some instances the level of facilitator incompetency was impacting negatively on learner success in the ABET classroom.

Inappropriate lesson content

Although the facilitator is keen, enthusiastic and committed, management suggested that she needs development and training in the area of teaching content and methodology. In one lesson I observed, the facilitator taught a lesson on collective nouns to the Level 3 learners. The lesson had no formal introduction and learners were presented with a densely typed four page hand-out that offered

numerous collective nouns under the headings of: birds; mammals; invertebrates; insects and arachnids; molluscs; fish; amphibians and reptiles; people and miscellaneous. The opening sentence of the worksheet read: “one of the many oddities of the English language is the multitude of possibilities”. This contextually irrelevant language and content is of no benefit to second language learners who need to learn functional literacy. What resulted in this particular lesson was a discussion around the word “oddities” before learners had to page through magazines to find pictures that matched the collective nouns. Some of these collective nouns were also inappropriate to the English second (and third) language learners as they contained language that even many English first language speakers would probably never use. Some examples included: “ a sord of mallards; a curse of painters; and a psalter of bishops.”

Literacy as a tool for personal and social empowerment is described by Freire (1987: 7) as “... the opportunity to give meaning and expression to their [the learners] own needs and voices as part of a project of self and social empowerment.” With this argument in mind, Freire would suggest that irrelevant subject content would not promote learner success in the acquisition of literacy.

Learning Programme

The learning programmes for each level are based on the SAQA unit standards associated with that particular ABET level. The manager stated that she was not au fait with the SAQA unit standards and as such could not comment on the degree to which the learning programme satisfies the unit standards. The ABET facilitator commented that she believed that the course material satisfied the ABET unit standards for each particular level.

The service provider’s learning programme is also presented through a computer programme and although the technological status of computer-aided instruction was recognised, both the manager and the facilitator had issue with the computer programme as an obstacle to learning. The manager explained that it “lacks the human element and this is why we have introduced face-to-face group work.” She further explained “the programme relied on itself too much when it in actual fact lacked the personal element.” This comment highlights the manager belief that

effective learning needs to be directed by a facilitator who can directly respond to the needs of the learners.

The irony of the issue of computers is that they are often the lure that encourages learners to join an ABET class. The problem with the Belmont site is that the computers are out-dated and they often give operational problems. The facilitator commented that “when the computers don’t work, it breaks the students’ morale.” When the facilitator was asked: “Given the opportunity, what changes would you make to the ABET programme at Belmont?”, she stated that she would “drop the computers because when you use them, you don’t really know if the learners understand” new concepts that are being taught.

Some of the learners suggested that the computer content and material was not always appropriate to adults, with some of them describing the voice over as “babyish”, “irritating” and “not appropriate.” The inappropriateness of the voice over highlights the andragogical debate around how adults want to be taught. Zemke (2001: 6) argues that adults bring a wealth of information and experiences to the learning environment and as such, they generally want to be treated as equals who are free to direct themselves in the learning process. The condescending inflection of the computer voice over does nothing to suggest that adult learners are “equals”; neither does the rigid structure of the computer programme give learners the opportunity to direct their own learning. While the computer programme claims to be interactive, it only requires learners to listen to a voice over and to use the mouse (Levels 1 – 3) to turn the page and complete random activities. The keyboard is introduced at Level 4. Further to this, the programme has been designed to run its course from the start to the completion of each lesson. One learner commented that the programme sometimes gave a positive affirmation (“way to go” or “Bravo!”) for an incorrect answer. The inappropriateness of the affirmation and content thereof, remind us that adult learners want their age and status to be recognised as well as the manner in which they are taught to differ from that of younger learners.

In one focus group interview, a group of learners highlighted the fact that the computer programme did not enforce the completion of every single page in every

single lesson. They suggested that by opening a lesson and then going straight to the last page, you could gain access to the next lesson. When I asked why they would consider progressing to the next lesson without actually completing the lesson in its entirety, one learner commented that “the lessons are too drawn out and the computer doesn’t even check if you understand the work.” The attitude of this learner questions Donovan et al’s. (1999: 122) view of andragogy that assumes that “the point at which an individual achieves a self-concept of essential self-direction is the point at which he [sic] psychologically becomes [an] adult.” This learner’s comment, which was supported by other learners, raises issues about the value of the human face in the teaching and learning environment and highlights the degree to which learners value and need a facilitator who can guide, encourage and monitor them.

While it must be acknowledged that the technology associated with the computer programme is a draw card to attract learners to the ABET classroom, the issues outlined also raise concerns about the degree to which the computer programme can impact negatively on learner success.

Timetabling

The ABET classes take place on a Monday because this is the only day that the learners are available. Learners work from Tuesday through Thursday and a previous attempt to run ABET classes on a Friday was unsuccessful due to poor learner attendance. Learners are grouped according to level and attend a four-hour session either in the morning or the afternoon. This is not ideal – although at a typical ABET site, learners will also attend classes for four hours a week; this is usually spread across two to four sessions over the week. The facilitator suggested that “if learners could attend classes everyday, it would be beneficial [to the learners’ success] to have them for one hour a day” – unfortunately this is not possible considering the learners work schedules at the Belmont site. The issue of timetabling is further complicated by the fact that literacy at Level 4 often requires more than the four hours that usually prove sufficient at the lower levels.

Unfortunately, in the Belmont context, there is no way around the issue of timetabling because the learners are unavailable from Tuesday through Friday.

Due to the nature of the learners' jobs, they are only available to attend classes on a Monday as they are either driving vehicles or delivering newspapers on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Learners are paid on a Thursday and as a result, they do not arrive for classes on a Friday. The facilitation of additional classes on a Friday was previously attempted but this was not successful.

Language

Although the issue of language has been discussed and described as an intrinsic factor with regards to learner failure, it can also be regarded as an extrinsic barrier to learning. It was interesting to note that despite the facilitator's support for mother-tongue instruction in literacy learning she had limited mother-tongue proficiency herself. Although, she could communicate at a very basic level in numerous mother-tongue languages – using this well in the context of the classroom – she was the only Black member of the sample group who did not have some degree of formal literacy in her own mother-tongue. If literacy is to be taught in mother-tongue, its success will be dependant on the facilitator's proficiency in that language. The issue of mother-tongue instruction is further problematic at the Belmont site because there are such a variety of mother-tongue languages spoken amongst the learners and these cannot all be the same as that of the facilitator.

3.3. FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO LEARNER SUCCESS

Factors that impact on learner success can largely be attributed to the following at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels: language; motivation and attitude; service provider support; company support of the learning programme; computer aided learning; ABET facilitation; the learning environment; peer teaching and learning; timetabling and assessment. A discussion of these factors follows:

3.3.1. Intrinsic factors contributing to learner success

Language

By comparing the learners' previous education to their participation in the ABET classes that I observed, it was apparent that learners who have had formal literacy

training in their mother-tongue were able to cope better in class work tasks through the medium of English. On the whole, they also seemed to be the more confident learners who achieved good results in tests and exams. Learners such as these, for the most part, use English on an ongoing basis in the execution of the work related duties and identified the benefits of literacy in English with one learner commenting that “it [English] helped [me] to communicate” and “it helped [me] with my job”. Another learner explained that while distributing newspapers, his ability to communicate in English helped him to “communicate with White people”, while another learner explained that English was a common language and that “you need it [English] to get a job”, he further explained that “your CV must be written in English”. Language as an intrinsic factor that contributes to learner success also brings to the fore, the issue of the learners’ autobiographical journeys as their histories – personal, social, economic and political – will determine their language strengths, abilities and proficiencies.

Motivation and Attitude

My lesson observations highlighted the fact that some learners are highly motivated and enjoy their ABET sessions – arriving on time, maintaining good attendance and participating in classroom discussions. Although attendance on the whole is a problem, there are some learners that have never missed a session. These are generally the learners who contribute to classroom discussions and achieve good results in the examinations. This would imply that there is a direct correlation between motivation to attend lessons, commitment to the programme and success.

The facilitator noted that she received support from the learners and that with the exception of one student; all learners took part in planned activities and completed homework tasks. It was explained to me that when this disruptive learner recently disrupted the class, all of the learners sided with and gave the facilitator support. It seems that this learner goes out of his way to be objectionable - arguing irrelevant points; answering his cell phone and doing as little as possible in independent work time. Learners with a positive attitude seem to be intolerant of disruptive learners and are intrinsically taking care of their own ABET success.

3.3.2. Extrinsic factors contributing to learner success

Service Provider Support

Management reported that they had good channels of communication with the service provider and that the managing director visited the site on an annual basis to discuss client satisfaction. Management indicated that they were just not sure what follow-up action takes place in relation to concerns raised.

Before commencement with her duties as a facilitator at the Belmont site, the facilitator attended Compu Learning training. This training gave her the necessary skills to use the systems administrator component of the computer programme. This component of the programme allows the facilitator to track learner progress and attendance on the computer. The training would have also sensitised her to the Compu Learning curriculum material as well as introduced adult teaching and learning methodology. After this initial contact, the facilitator commented that she felt she would appreciate more interaction and support from the service provider on an ongoing basis, stating that she only had communication with them when she needed assistance with something. While, I have classified service provider support as an extrinsic factor that contributes to learner success, it is important to note that additional support and involvement from the service provider could improve learner success by the provision of extra training, on-site support and periodic monitoring.

Overall Company Support

The Belmont site demonstrated a unique commitment to their ABET programme. This commitment was evident in the passion with which the manager and the facilitator spoke about the ABET programme at the initial interviews held with them. It was further evident in the actual implementation and management of the ABET programme. Learners suggested that they generally had very good relationships with their managers and supervisors and many learners commented on the follow-up and support that they received from their superiors. One learner told of how every Tuesday (the day after the ABET school), her senior manager would ask whether she had attended school and how things had gone. The learner noted that this encouraged her to do well in her ABET lessons. Another

learner commented that he and his supervisor (a driver) “were working well as a unit”; while another stated that “this could take a whole day trying to describe what a good man he [the driver] is.” A few learners, in their anonymous questionnaires, commented that they felt that the presence of one of the drivers in their ABET class was motivating and encouraging with one learner describing his attendance as “empowering to ourselves through his participation in the ABET programme.” The support that exists at the Belmont site is a model worthy of replication at other sites. The support structures are operational right from top management through to ABET facilitation and this is further supported by the presence of superiors who are actually present in the ABET class as peers and learners. (See the organograms in Section 2.3).

The company does not have a formalised ABET vision and mission since this ABET programme is essentially a trial programme. The programme was initiated because a need to eradicate illiteracy and to improve literacy skills where learners demonstrated functional literacy was identified by the manager. This initiative was primarily aimed at Black staff who had been educationally disadvantaged. Should this trial programme be successful, the company will be in a stronger position to improve racial equity with regards to its editorial and sales staff. Staff who excel on the ABET programme are offered places at the company’s cadet training centres where they receive intensive training in either editorial or sales skills. The aim of this Cadet School is to improve equity ratios in the newsroom and to up-skill employees at branches across the country. One learner of the current ABET group has been elected to attend training at one of the company’s cadet training centres. The company attitude at Belmont contributes to ABET learner success in that interested people are providing a positive learning environment which aims to yield optimistic results and bring about change in the learners’ personal lives.

Computer aided learning

The Belmont site has the Compu Learning programme installed on the 11 computers in the training venue. Although the computers can be problematic from time to time in terms of not working and learners experiencing difficulty with them, management expressed that the computers give the programme status. The prospect of interacting with technology is quite exciting and learners will often tell

family members that they are attending computer classes rather than literacy classes. Although the advantages of computer directed learning are recognised by management, it was expressed that there needs to be a synergy between computer directed learning and face-to-face tutorials to reinstate the human element in the learning process.

Despite some of the problems that learners identified with regards to the computer, they also identified many success factors associated with the use of computers. One such success is that of the clear pronunciation of the computer voice artist – learners felt that this was advantageous to their acquisition of well-spoken English. Another learner made mention of the user-friendliness of the computer by saying that “it was easy to look for answers.” This comment implies that the programme is easily navigable and that answers and content are easy to reference. It is evident from this discussion that the computer can indeed be a tool to promote learner success in the ABET classroom, it is however imperative to note that a balance must be found between the computer and a human being as teacher and mentor.

Management Attitude

The management at Belmont were incredibly supportive of the ABET programme and the fact that they have instituted this ABET programme at their own time and expense shows their commitment to the ABET learning programme. The Human Resources Development Manager is particularly committed to the programme and was present at some of the classes that I observed. Although her presence could have been interpreted as ‘keeping an eye’ on the process, her involvement and interaction with the learners during actual lessons demonstrated a very clear commitment to the process. It was also clear, that she was using her time in the ABET classroom to mentor and guide the relatively inexperienced ABET facilitator. This commitment and interest can only contribute to the success of the learners – their facilitator is receiving professional in-service training and management is interacting with the learners on a very personal and interested level. Five of the learners, indicated the interest of the manager as contributing to their ABET success.

Management indicated that the ABET course is “used as a stepping stone for distributors of newspapers to further themselves” with regards to work-based skills as well as for future growth within the company. It was stated that the programme gives the learners the opportunity to improve English levels “if they don’t have model C matrices.” This personal interest in providing learners with the opportunity to develop themselves for personal growth contributes to learner success, as learners feel invested in and motivated to achieve good results. One learner commented that they wanted to do well in the ABET course so that they could join the cadet school and ultimately join the Belmont management team.

ABET Facilitation

The Belmont facilitator is employed directly by the company and at the commencement of my research she had only been in the employ of the company for two months. Management expressed their satisfaction at the expertise of the facilitator who has a model C matric, a university degree and practical experience with working with ABET learners in prison. The facilitator is not trained as a teacher and as such, it was stated that she needed to be developed with regards to actual teaching methodology and lesson preparation. During one of my lesson observations, the manager arrived to monitor the ABET learning programme and she intervened where appropriate to provide methodological input.

In one of the lessons that I observed, the facilitator code-switched between English and the various mother-tongues present in the class when teaching new concepts. Although effective and useful to the various learners, numerous translations were required as there are at least six different home languages spoken in the class.

The facilitator was also well prepared and this impacted positively on the lesson. The Department of Education (1995: 15) suggests that properly prepared lessons will go a long way towards achieving the following aims of the NQF and ABET:

- Individualising learning
- Addressing the locus of learning
- Providing a holistic approach to modular teaching
- Existing learning material need not be discarded. With the necessary adjustments, such material can be incorporated in tutorials
- Tutorials designed for ABET programmes should be adjusted to provide for the needs of adult learners

The well preparedness and organisation of the facilitator enabled her to be at ease and she had a casual and informal relationship with the learners. Within this relationship, there was a large amount of respect for her, with some learners calling her 'Maam' or 'Miss Thembi'¹⁶. This was interesting to observe, as she was a young African female with authority over a Black male dominated class. This arrangement of gender hierarchy has caused problems (and failed) in many other ABET contexts. The facilitator did describe dealing with older people as a difficulty that she encountered in her facilitation. I did not observe any form of disrespect throughout the data collection process and the way in which she interacted with them on a social and personal level firmly supported theories of andragogy. She, whenever appropriate, encouraged learners to talk about their personal experiences and feelings and also supported constructivist theory by attempting to get the learners to guide their own learning and contribute their own information and facts. Further to this, she dedicated a quarter of the class time to discussion. According to Zemke (2001: 6) andragogical practice recognises that learners must balance their personal responsibilities with the demands of learning and that facilitators must guide the learners to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts. Further to this, andragogy recognises that learners are autonomous and self-directed - they have a tremendous amount of life experiences that need to be connected to their learning and to their knowledge base. The general attitude of the facilitator and the way in which she supported theories of andragogy contributed to the overall success of the learners in her class.

Learning Environment

The learning environment is conducive to good learning. There is sufficient light, workstations have ample space and there is a breakaway room for group facilitation. The learning environment is further supported by the good relationship that exists between the learners and the facilitator; the facilitator and the manager; and the manager and the learners. These relationships were observed in the lessons I observed. What was very interesting about the Belmont site was that

¹⁶ Name changed for reasons of confidentiality.

although people like the manager and the ABET facilitator were clearly respected, learners were clearly comfortable enough to approach them.

In my initial meeting with the facilitator, she described her relationship with the learners as being “more their friend than their facilitator.” In my observation of her interaction with the learners, there appeared to be an open and warm relationship in which mutual respect and trust existed. The facilitator demonstrated a passion and willingness to help the learners with one learner describing her as “loyal to us”, while another described her as “a very nice person.” These ‘good person’ values have certainly promoted and established a learning environment based on trust that is conducive to effective teaching and learning. The effective learning environment is further enhanced by the senior manager who the learners described as supportive and approachable, with one learner suggesting that she was “open for appointments to talk about problems.”

Learners are also assisted with stationery and equipment and although they are encouraged to buy learning resources like dictionaries and stationery themselves, the company reimburses them for 50% of their expenditure. Despite, this offer from the company, I observed that very few learners had actually bought their own resources. Further to this, learners pay R80-00 a month to attend ABET classes and this amount is refunded on passing the level in which they are engaged – i.e. successful completion of the course. If learners have full attendance for the duration of a course, they do not need to pay the R80-00 a month for the next level. In acknowledging that R80-00 a month was “cheap”, some of the learners suggested that they struggled to come up with this money because they were the breadwinners in their families.

Notwithstanding these issues, there is an open, transparent and accountable atmosphere that exists at the Belmont site. Learners have access to management and are encouraged (and given the opportunity) to complete an evaluation of the course on a monthly basis. The evaluation is reviewed by management and the facilitator so that issues raised can be dealt with on an ongoing basis. Although some minor frustrations exist at the Belmont site, the learning environment, for the most part, encourages and promotes learner success in the ABET classroom.

Company Decision-Making

The facilitator indicated that she was given latitude in making all of the decisions in terms of training times, class tests, parties, etc. My study did not probe the degree to which these decisions were democratically made with the learners but the overall positive attitude that exists at the learning site would suggest that the way in which decisions are made contributes towards learner success.

Peer Teaching and Learning

The facilitator indicated that the Level 4 learners are given the opportunity to discuss their work with each other in small groups. Three learners in the sample group indicated that they believed that these discussions gave them the opportunity to reflect on what they had learnt with one learner saying “it made things clear in my head.” Group discussions were central to the methodology used by the facilitator at the Belmont site and six learners indicated (in their initial questionnaires) that this strategy was instrumental in building their confidence and general literacy skills, as they were encouraged to both speak and write in the language of literacy.

Timetabling

Although the issue of time has been raised as a factor that impacts negatively on learner progress, some participants raised the time tabling arrangements as contributing towards their ABET success. For this reason, I will briefly explore the issue of time as a factor contributing to learner success. When time was raised, as a factor impacting on failure, there was a focus on insufficient time being available for ABET learning. Some learners suggested that while time was limited, if you used it efficiently you could progress at an acceptable rate without too much interference on your personal and working lives.

Some learners explained that this timetable was adequate in terms of time allocations and that if learners arrived on time and tea breaks were strictly adhered to, there was no reason why the coursework could not be completed in the required timeframes. One learner commented that “if you are willing to do your work and work hard, then four hours a week is fine.” If we consider the issue of time from this perspective, then it becomes apparent that the effective use of time

in the planning and implementation of a learning programme can contribute to learner success by offering learners the opportunity to complete a course and acquire a certification in a stipulated time period. Such an approach would encourage learner focus and attention, ensuring that the learning programme is not drawn out or extended unnecessarily to the detriment of the learners.

Assessment

The Belmont site uses the Independent Examination Board (IEB) as its summative assessment agency. The IEB is an Umalusi-accredited, independent, non-profit organisation which provides relevant and accessible examinations to schools and adult education programmes. The IEB examinations are based on the relevant unit standards, specific outcomes and assessment criteria. As such, the IEB issues examination syllabi that inform what skills, knowledge and competencies will be assessed for the different learning areas at various ABET levels. This should therefore contribute to learner success as examinations are fair and transparent and they assess the skills and competencies that the learners have gained in the ABET course. Table 9 summarises the results of the Level 3 and Level 4 learners in their most recent IEB examination.

IEB Rating	Percentage Range	Number of learners
MERIT - (M)	80 – 100% (Levels 1, 2, 3 & 4)	6
HIGHER CREDIT - (HC)	70 – 79% (Levels 1, 2 & 3) 60 – 79% NQF1 (ABET Level 4)	3
CREDIT (PASS) - (C)	50 – 69% (Levels 1, 2 & 3) 40 – 59% NQF1 (ABET Level 4)	7
THRESHOLD - (T)	40 – 49% (Levels 1, 2 & 3) 33.3 – 39% NQF1 (ABET Level 4)	0
UNGRADED - (U)	0 - 39% (Levels 1, 2 & 3) 0 - 33% NQF1 (ABET Level 4)	0
Total number of learners:		16

Table 9: Learner results at Level 3 and Level 4 in the most recent IEB Examination

Assessment also takes place in the classroom on an ongoing basis. A structure for continuous assessment is built into the Compu Learning material and workbook exercises and indeed entire lessons form part of this ongoing practice. The facilitator at the Belmont site also conducts and records ongoing assessment to ascertain if learners are coping with new skills and content and the pace and sequence at which they are introduced. This strategy also contributes to learner

success as problems with specific learners are identified and remediation is offered where appropriate.

The management and ABET facilitator both indicated unhappiness with the rigour of the IEB¹⁷ project or site-based assessment tasks and suggested that they were contemplating moving away from the summative examination procedures associated with the IEB towards portfolio assessment offered by the UNISA ABET Assessment Agency. It is for this reason that the learners have begun to develop their own learning portfolios of evidence. For adult education to be successful it needs to draw on the life experiences of the learners as well as relate to the lives and basic needs of the learners. As such, learners are encouraged to continuously add to their learning portfolios which contain records of their projects, oral work and personal experiences and achievements. These portfolios are valuable in that they record the learners' progress and personal achievements. It is too premature in this research report to comment on the degree to which they contribute to learner success.

3.4. OFFICIAL AND LEARNERS' NOTIONS OF ABET SUCCESS

As the notion of success is central to this research report, the concept of success was investigated and explored as part of the data collection process. This section presents the various conceptions of success as suggested by the different research participants.

During my initial interview with company management, it was interesting to note that when posed with the question: "Are you satisfied with the success rates of ABET learners?", her response suggested that the results for the recently written examination would be available soon. She continued to comment that although they had had the odd failure, pass rates were generally good. This notion of success would imply that the company views success in relation to the pass marks stated by the IEB. A pass mark with the IEB is 50% at ABET Levels 1, 2 and 3 and 60% at ABET Level 4. In the 2006 examinations at the Belmont site there was a 100% pass rate. The ABET facilitator echoed the sentiments of the

¹⁷ All learners passed their latest IEB exam. Learner demographics can be found in Table 6. (See section 2.3).

manager when she commented that success could be assumed when a learner had passed the IEB examination for the relevant ABET level.

When the learners were asked to define their notions of success, very few eluded to success in the context of the ABET learning environment. Although their contributions suggested what might be attainable through acquiring an education they did not draw a parallel to success in the ABET context. Examples of the learner's contributions regarding success follow. These contributions are direct quotes:

Success is:

- something or a person who has a good life
- being educated but still continuing with your studies
- being able to talk to other people
- like a dream come true on achieving something that you wanted to be
- an achievement in life
- changing and improving the way you live

The learners' view of success and their lack of commentary on success in relation to ABET perplexed me and this led me to question them with regards to their ABET success. I posed the question: "Do you think you are successful in your ABET learning?" and probed them to give reasons for their responses. All of the learners indicated that they were successful and offered the following reasons for their success. These are direct quotes:

I am successful because:

- I can read the newspaper and the comics.
- I can speak better English.
- I know how to read and write.
- I'm gaining more knowledge to pronounce words.
- I can understand when I read articles.
- I gain in knowledge.
- I can simply speak and write everything correctly.
- My English and spelling is improving.

These suggestions with regards to success indicate that the learners view their ABET success in relation to their English proficiency – be it speaking, reading, writing or comprehending. It is interesting to note that all of the learners in the sample group passed their last IEB examination and therefore considering the academic definition of success offered in section 1.1.6. they would be deemed successful. It is also interesting to note that for the most part, their notions of success beyond the ABET context generally appear to be avenues and

opportunities that would be made accessible through successfully acquiring some form of education.

3.5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have presented the data gathered in the process of my research and wherever possible, I have made suggestions as to how and why I believe the data has emerged as such as well as suggested ways in which the information can be meaningfully used and interpreted.

I have endeavoured to use the data to gain an understanding into what contributes towards the success and failure of ABET learners. What emerged from this analysis of the data collected at the Belmont site was the fact that learner success is determined by a range of factors, these factors originate at national level, funding level, provider level, the level of institution and the level of self. Factors at national level incorporate national policy regarding ABET provision and the approaches government may adopt to literacy. Factors at funding level are determined by the SETA's commitment to ABET provision and in some instances to foreign and corporate funding. Factors at provider level are determined by the quality and content of the actual learning and assessment materials, while factors at the level of institution are determined by company and facilitator attitude and expertise towards the ABET programme. These factors incorporate the methodological approaches to lifelong learning that may be adopted at a particular site. Finally, at the level of self, success or failure is determined by the learners' personal attitude and responsibilities. Further to this, the factors that rise out of the various levels may operate at either an intrinsic or extrinsic level.

Reflecting back on the key conditions for the success of ABET learning in South Africa (See section 1.1.7), the Belmont site demonstrated factors – both intrinsic and extrinsic – that are in line with the barriers identified by the Department of Educations', Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes (2005: 11). These include:

- Disability as a barrier
- Language and Communication
- Socio- economic Barriers
- Attitudes
- Inadequate opportunity for programme-to-work linkages
(Department of Education, 2005: 11).

With the exception of disability as a barrier, because there were no disabled learners at the Belmont site, the following barriers (adapted from the Department of Education, 2005: 11) were present and emerged through the data collection process: language and communication – this barrier was usually rooted in the language of instruction as a direct contrast to the learner’s mother-tongue; socio-economic barriers – these barriers generally resulted from personal and financial constraints that the learners experienced; attitudes – these barriers generally include issues of motivation, attendance and participation; and inadequate opportunity for programme-to-work linkages – although opportunities existed for learners to gain access to the cadet school and to gain promotion within the company, the ABET training did not always appear to be geared to that end. For this reason, some learners felt disillusioned about the benefits of attending the ABET school.

It was interesting to note that the majority of factors that emerged as impacting on learner failure are intrinsically based, while most success related factors that emerged in this study are extrinsically based. This suggests an interesting and polarised idea of the degree to which learners can be successful in their completion of an ABET course – intrinsically, they are largely responsible for their failure, while success is largely supported by extrinsic factors that relate to such things as the environment, logistical arrangements and the goodwill of other powerful stakeholders.

Finally, while factors that contribute to learner success and failure occur at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels, ABET learners need to, in the best interest of their educational progression, address the factors that are within their power while proactively seeking ways to overcome others that may be dependent on the extrinsic.

CHAPTER 4

THE FUTURE OF ABET LITERACY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Education, and indeed, learning should be an ongoing lifelong process. Huber (1995: 125) writes that “life long learning emphasises the need for renewal in learning over time.” This chapter offers recommendations to various ABET stakeholders that impact on the ABET learning process at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels. Stakeholders with extrinsic influence include SETAs; service providers; ABET learning sites; ABET facilitators and government, while intrinsic influence of learning success operates at the level of the learner. The recommendations offered in this chapter aim to improve ABET learning programmes - from design, through to implementation and finally to assessment - based on the insights derived from my research investigations at Belmont Publishers.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) sets out a scaffold to facilitate and acknowledge both lifelong learning and lifelong education in the South African context. Lifelong education encompasses much more than *adult education*. Lifelong education includes all levels, bands, unit standards, learning areas and qualifications of the NQF. For lifelong learning, and indeed literacy, to be effectively achieved and attained, support needs to be received from stakeholders at various levels.

The recommendations to various the stakeholders follow:

4.2. EXTRINSIC CONTRIBUTION TO ABET SUCCESS

SETAs

Some of the SETAs, including the MAPPPSETA, tend to employ people with a higher degree of education due to the nature of their business. What seems to go

unnoticed is that behind the technology and expertise that fronts these sectors are people who could benefit from ABET courses. These are people who keep the organisations running at their basic levels and include janitors, cleaners, drivers and people like the newspaper distribution team at the Belmont site who attend ABET classes at Belmont. SETAs need to review their skills programmes and outputs to accommodate learners who previously “never had the opportunity to gain the information, skills and experience necessary to develop themselves and make the economy grow” (Bhengu, 1999: 1).

ABET Service Providers

In developing and providing ABET learning programmes, ABET service providers need to have a thorough understanding of what the purposes and intentions of the ABET learning programmes are. In South Africa, ABET has evolved out of the legacy of apartheid and the programme designers need to be mindful of this. They need to consider issues of approach with regards to pedagogy and methodology with a specific consideration for theories of andragogy. This would ensure that learning materials are not condescending or infantile.

The actual learning material used in a literacy campaign or ABET programme should not be too long or too academic. The material should relate to the learners' everyday life activities and working contexts with the ultimate utility of the learning being evident to the learners. Moshini (1993: 188) reminds us that indifference of adult learners towards their learning results if learners doubt the utility of the literacy classes and if they find their facilitators uninspiring. The motivation of ABET learners can be improved and retained if ABET learning connects with the lives of the learners as directly as possible. Sibiya (2005: 181) suggests that when adult learners see others becoming literate and using their newfound literacy to enrich their lives, they too aspire to acquire literacy. This would suggest that the focus of ABET learning should be placed on improving the quality of people's lives.

Generally, illiterate people in the South African context want to know what it is like to experience democracy – this is a good basis from which to start planning learning materials. This practice would support national curriculum policy in its

endeavours to promote social democracy. The ideology of social democracy is transcended through all learning programmes placed within the NQF to promote the values and attitudes contained within the Manifesto on Values in Education (Department of Education, 2001a) and a learning programme based on these values would support the national educational objectives. The functional approach which is concerned not only with the technical skills of reading, writing and numeracy but also with functional skills and knowledge about the social, political and economic conditions that impact on learners' daily lives is a useful approach to consider in the development and design of ABET learning programmes.

ABET Learning Sites

To formalise an ABET learning programme and to afford it status, companies should develop ABET specific vision and mission statements. Companies should also endeavour to draw attention to ABET success so that the esteem of ABET learners is constantly developed.

In establishing an ABET learning centre, learning sites need to ensure that the necessary ABET resources are provided. If, for example, the learning programme relies on a computer to operate, the specifications of the computers provided need to be compliant with what the programme needs to run. ABET programmes lose support and status when they are seen as second rate. An effective learning environment needs to be well resourced and well managed – ABET learning environments should be no different. ABET site managers should also ensure that the learning environment is clean, with appropriate lighting and furnishings.

Further to this, ABET facilitators and managers need to be mindful of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact on ABET success and failure. To this end, ABET sites need to be mindful of the extrinsic factors such as learning programme selection, timetabling and company support that are within their control and that can offer support and assistance to learners where necessary. In the design and implementation of their ABET programmes, ABET sites should also consider these factors to minimise the prevalence of barriers to learning. Finally, ABET sites should reflect on their practice and learning programme provision on an ongoing basis by soliciting frequent feedback from learners, as is done at the

Belmont site. Such introspection can only improve the delivery of ABET tuition in an attempt to alleviate as many barriers to learning as possible.

ABET Facilitators

Although ABET preparation is seldom done by facilitators who rely on the material of the service provider, lessons need to be planned with due consideration of the context specific to the learners who are being taught. Such contextual considerations include the political, economic and social autobiographies of the learners. Facilitators also need to be well trained and committed to the task of adult education. It is also the task of the facilitator to encourage active participation and to stimulate the learners to extend themselves.

In delivering ABET lessons, ABET facilitators should be aware of the fact that for ABET learners, English is very often their second or third language. Facilitators should take cognisance of Hartley's (1995: 55) language checklist that incorporates, *inter alia*, the following:

- simple vocabulary
- defined technical terminology
- clear precise definitions with examples to which learners can relate
- avoid vague terms
- use short sentences
- use active voice
- structure a paragraph to contain only one main idea
- write to express, not to impress
- write to be clear, not to be clever

Government

This research report explored three international literacy campaigns in detail – these literacy campaigns implemented in Mozambique, Tanzania and Cuba provide useful lessons that could inform a South African government initiated national literacy campaign. While there is no single and successful approach to teaching literacy at a national level, it is important that government design and develop a strategy appropriate to the South African context.

South Africa could benefit from the experiences of such countries as Cuba and Tanzania where literacy and post-literacy were developed as a continuum. In these countries, as with opportunities recently implemented through learnerships

and the General Education and Training Certificate, adults can study for formal school certificates after gaining competency in literacy at a specified level.

South Africa can also learn from Cuba that successful literacy campaigns result from hard work, technical planning and comprehensive organisation. The Cuban campaign also demonstrates that even a lack of resources is not an obstacle in launching a literacy campaign if effective mobilisation is undertaken. “If political will inspired by an ideology exists, additional resources can be generated through the mobilization of people” (Sibiya, 2005: 153). With this in mind, the Government should plan literacy initiatives with the following considerations:

- Literacy learning should not be provided in isolation, it should be linked to other educational, social, economic, political and cultural programmes.
- Wherever possible, literacy initiatives should be linked to community and social development programmes.
- Literacy and post literacy should be conceived as a continuum as was done in Cuba and Tanzania.
- Multi-purpose centres, such as schools, community halls, churches and other community centres should be used to increase the scope and depth of a literacy campaign.

Literacy and post-literacy initiatives create and develop literate environments within our society. These environments must be sustained by government, business, NGOs and independents who can offer human, financial and material support to the betterment of South Africa. Finally, the approach of the South African government needs to be in line with its underlying ideology, its long-term political and economic goals for the country and its conception of how its citizens can articulate their human rights in the sphere of education.

4.3. INTRINSIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO ABET SUCCESS

ABET learners

As a tool to realise a new South Africa, the NCS (RNCS, 2001: 2) envisages a particular kind of learner - this learner is amongst other things, inspired by the values in the South African Constitution, willing to act in the interests of society

and democracy, is confident, independent, multi-skilled and able to participate in society as a critical and active citizen. As a democratic society, these values are to be demonstrated and developed within the formal ABET learning environment and should extend beyond that into life (and work) itself. This supports Bruner (1999: 156) in his description of the curriculum as a “major embodiment of a culture’s way of life, not just a preparation of it.” The NCS also seeks lifelong learners who are “confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as critical and active citizens” (RNCS, 2001: 3). To attain such an ideal, and with due consideration of the intrinsic factors that impact on both success and failure, learners need to acknowledge and act upon the intrinsic factors over which they have control. There are numerous intrinsic factors over which the learners have control, these include: motivation, attendance and commitment. Learners, should therefore remain motivated and committed to the ABET programme without letting such intrinsic factors interfere with their learning success. Where intrinsic factors are out of the learner’s control, the learner needs to enter into open dialogue with stakeholders such as the ABET facilitator, supervisors and company management that are accessible to them. Learners need to take control of extrinsic factors that promote success and use these to their advantage. Where, for example, as is the case at the Belmont site, they are presented with incentives and subsidised stationery, learners should seize such opportunities to facilitate their learning. Where extrinsic factors impact negatively on learner success, learners need to demonstrate initiative by addressing these through consultation with the relevant stakeholders. This may involve meeting with the facilitator or company management to raise issues that impact negatively on learning.

In exercising practices such as those outlined above, learners are supporting the critical and developmental outcomes as stated in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS).

4.4. FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has endeavoured to understand what factors contribute to the success and failure of learners completing an ABET course at Belmont Publishers. There are various other issues pertinent to broadening our understanding of ABET literacy in South Africa. I would recommend the following as possible areas for further research in the South African ABET context:

- How does government policy support ABET implementation at a grassroots and practical level?
- What informs the varying approaches of curriculum development by different ABET service providers?
- How can strategies and models be developed for improving the motivation of learners who enrol for literacy classes?
- What are learners' motivations and expectations from ABET literacy programmes?
- How do different SETAs approach ABET provision in South Africa?
- How do different ABET learning sites implement their ABET learning programmes?
- What constitutes effective ABET facilitator training?

4.5. CONCLUSION

This study has provided a historical trajectory of ABET in the South African context while at the same time clarifying terms and practices appropriate to the ABET environment. This study has also provided an overview of the different approaches to lifelong learning, firstly in the international arena and then in the South African context. Political changes before and after democracy in 1994 have brought a growing awareness to the need for improved ABET provision in South Africa. Although, we are twelve years into the democratic South Africa, there are still many working class Africans, notably Blacks, who are still essentially suffering as victims of the apartheid era. ABET is the beginning of their attainment of political, economic and social freedom. Literacy as a tool for personal and social empowerment is described by Freire (1987: 7) as "... the opportunity to give meaning and expression to their [the learners] own needs and voices as part of a

project of self and social empowerment.” Freire’s writings on literacy empowerment focused on adult peasants in Brazil and as such are relevant to the South African context. Freire’s view of literacy goes beyond the processes of reading, writing and numeracy and moves towards the ability to critically evaluate information as well as to create a critical consciousness in society in which an individual lives. Freire’s rationale for literacy is therefore preoccupied with moving from a state of oppression to a state of liberation – which is essentially the purpose of education (particularly adult education) in post apartheid South Africa.

To truly assist ABET learners overcome the factors that hinder their ABET success, government will need to intervene at a policy and fiscal level. Policy needs to be developed to provide a mass literacy campaign that supports learners financially (in part) as they balance the responsibilities of learning, working and family life. This policy will need to be implemented with corporates and non-governmental organisations through strong and supportive partnerships. Sibiya (2005: 206) suggests that a comprehensive and integrated approach such as the universalisation of primary school education and pre-school programmes will go a long way to combat illiteracy in South Africa. The problem of illiteracy is a national problem in South Africa and it needs to be addressed by every citizen, so that in time to come, the focus of adult learning may shift from basic literacy to courses that are more practical and technical in nature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letter of Introduction

From: Catherine Jones [mailto:Catherine@Compulearning.co.za]
Sent: : 17 July 2006 10:55 AM
To: Mary Smith
Cc: John Thurlow; Louis Neal; Bheki Masonda
Subject: ABET Research at Belmont

Hi Mary

I hope that you are very well.

A colleague of mine, John Thurlow, is completing his Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand and has asked me to recommend an ABET site at which he could do his research in ABET.

I suggested your site as it is one of the best sites we have in the Johannesburg area.

Attached please find his letter requesting for permission to conduct research at your site.

Please could you let me know if management would allow him to conduct research at Belmont.

Thank-you so much.

Kind regards,
Catherine

Catherine Jones
Director
Compu Learning

Tel: 0861 331757 / 0861 mLearning
Fax: +27 (0)11 833 0999
Cell: +27 (0)74 337 9244
Catherine@Compulearning.co.za
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Appendix 2: Letter of Request

PO BOX 3636
Kenmare
1745

15 July 2006

Attention: MARY SMITH

Dear Mrs. SMITH

My name is John Thurlow and I work for Compu Learning on a part time basis. My duties at Compu Learning encompass facilitator training and materials development. I am currently completing my Master's degree in education at the University of the Witwatersrand on a part time basis.

My research report aims to investigate ABET success rates and for this reason, I would like to investigate what constitutes a successful ABET learning environment: Why are some ABET learners more successful than others?

My proposed research will be based on case study methodology and as such, I will only be conducting research at one ABET learning site.

After consultation with Catherine Jones at Compu Learning, I would like to request permission to conduct such research at the Belmont ABET site.

The research would be conducted on site in the latter half of 2006 and would take the form of observations, questionnaires and interviews.

Please give this request due consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

John Thurlow

Appendix 3: Letter of Approval

Belmont Publishers

3rd Floor

Publishing House

2000

Letter of Consent

I, Mary Smith, have consented to the participation of the Belmont site as a research subject in John Thurlow's Master of Education studies. I understand that the data collected and analysed as a result of the research will form part of the main body of the master's research report. I also understand that his studies will be used for educational purposes.

Mary Smith

HR Development Manager

6/8/06

Appendix 4: Sensitisation Session

Briefing Guidelines:

Purpose –

- I am completing my Master degree in education at the University of the Witwatersrand and as such I am conducting an inquiry into why some learners are more successful than others in their completion of an ABET course.
- This study will be conducted in usual ABET learning time.
- I am interested in learning about how people like yourselves cope with learning when you have jobs and families to attend to.
- Find out about factors that contribute to ABET learning success.

Procedures –

- Your participation is totally voluntary.
- You do not need to take part in this research as part of your job.
- This research will require you to offer suggestions as to what factors you believe impact on your ABET learning success.
- This research will also require me to observe and probe into issues around your ABET success.

Participation –

- You can decide not to participate at any point in the study without any consequences.
- You can refuse to answer any question or offer any information at any point in the research process.
- Your refusal to take part will have no effect on your work or employment.

Benefits and Risks –

- Your participation could help with future provision of learning for ABET learners.
- Research findings could improve ABET practice and provision at your company.

Confidentiality –

- Any information that you exchange in this research is confidential and it will not be made available to your employer, driver or ABET facilitator.
- To protect your confidentiality, no identifying information about you will be recorded in the research findings.
- Research records will only be used for the purposes of this study and for the writing up of my MEd research report.
- You are participating in this research on a voluntary basis – remember that you can refuse to answer a particular question at any time or withdraw from the research process at any time.
- If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact:
 - John Thurlow on 082 854 5543
 - Dr. Juliet Perumal, School of Education, University of Witwatersrand on 083 428 6355
 - Dr. Nazir Carrim, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee on 011 717 3059. This committee exists to protect the welfare of research participants.

Compensation –

- There is no compensation for participating in this study

Questions and answers.

Appendix 5: Consent and Confidentiality

Part A: Letter of Consent

(to be signed by all research participants)

I have consented to participate as a research subject in John Thurlow's Master of Education studies. I understand that the data collected and analysed as a result of the research will form part of the main body of his Master's Research Report to be submitted to the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I also understand that his studies will be used for educational purposes. I understand that I will be guaranteed anonymity during the actual research process as well as in the final research report.

By signing this letter of consent, I consent to the following - [Tick (☑) the relevant blocks]:

- The researcher being present in the ABET classroom
- The researcher observing lessons
- The researcher observing company relationships
- The researcher taking field notes
- The researcher facilitating group discussions
- Lessons being audio-taped
- Taking part in interviews
- Completing questionnaires
- Engaging in focus group interviews
- Engaging in ad hoc discussions with the researcher

I expect to be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

.....
Signed

.....
Date

Appendix 5: Consent and Confidentiality (CONTINUED)

Part B: Guarantee of Confidentiality

I, John Thurlow, hereby guarantee anonymity and confidentiality to

..... in his / her participation in my

Master of Education research at the Belmont site.

This confidentiality will be guaranteed both during and after the

research process as well as in the final research report.

.....
Researcher: John Thurlow

.....
Date

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule for Management

Confidentiality

You should understand that anything that you exchange in this interview is confidential and this information will not be made available to your employer, driver or ABET facilitator. To protect your confidentiality, no identifying information about you will be recorded in the research findings. Research records will only be used for the purposes of this study and for the writing up of my MEd research report.

You are participating in this research on a voluntary basis – remember that you can refuse to answer a particular question at any time or withdraw from the research process at any time.

If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact:

- John Thurlow on 082 854 5543.
- Dr. Juliet Perumal, School of Education, University of Witwatersrand on 083 428 6355.
- Dr. Nazir Carrim, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee on 011 717 3059. This committee exists to protect the welfare of research participants.

Position in Company	
---------------------	--

Funder

Do you have an active and good relationship with your SETA?

What support do you receive from your SETA?

Do you claim ABET costs through the skills levy scheme?

Does the SETA or service provider conduct quality assurance on your site? If yes?
When and how?

Service Provider

Do you believe that you receive the necessary support and guidance from the ABET service provider?

How would you describe your relationship with the service provider?

Do you think the ABET materials satisfy the unit standards (skills and content) necessary for learners to achieve competence?

What obstacles, if any, do you think the learning programme may present that impact negatively on the ABET programme?

ABET Programme

What is your opinion of the ABET programme at Belmont?

Is the ABET programme making a difference to work-based skills? If yes, how?

Where does ABET facilitation take place?

What are your opinions of the ABET programme being implemented through the medium of English?

Have you ever considered another language for ABET instruction?

If yes, what language would you use for ABET instruction?

Company

Does Belmont have an ABET vision?

What was Belmont's major objective in implementing the ABET programme?

Do you think the implementation of the ongoing ABET programme has made a difference to learner's skills?

What obstacles do you recognise as institutional or logistical factors that may impact negatively on the ABET programme?

When does ABET facilitation take place?

What difficulties have you noticed with regards to finding a balance between learning and working time?

Is there an ABET budget to provide for ABET resources?

Facilitator

What obstacles, in relation to the facilitator, do you recognise as factors that may impact negatively on the ABET programme?

What are your feelings with regards to the current facilitation of the ABET programme?

How is your ABET facilitator trained and kept up to date on current trends with regards to delivery and assessment?

Personal

What is your perception of learner response and commitment to the ABET programme?

Are you satisfied with the success rates of the ABET learners?

What obstacles do you recognise as factors that may impact negatively on the ABET programme?

How do you think adults should be taught?

Do you think that the ABET programme that you use at this site uses the methodology outlined above? Explain.

Learners

What personal obstacles do you recognise in the learners as factors that may impact negatively on the ABET programme?

Are ABET learners provided with any incentive on completion of a learning programme? If yes? What?

Does your ABET programme extend to members of the community, or is it only offered to employees?

General

Are there any other issues/ problems/ concerns/ suggestions that you would like to raise in relation to ABET successes and failures?

Appendix 7: Interview Schedule for ABET facilitator

Confidentiality

You should understand that anything that you exchange in this interview is confidential and this information will not be made available to your employer, driver or ABET facilitator. To protect your confidentiality, no identifying information about you will be recorded in the research findings. Research records will only be used for the purposes of this study and for the writing up of my MEd research report.

You are participating in this research on a voluntary basis – remember that you can refuse to answer a particular question at any time or withdraw from the research process at any time.

If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact:

- John Thurlow on 082 854 5543.
- Dr. Juliet Perumal, School of Education, University of Witwatersrand on 083 428 6355.
- Dr. Nazir Carrim, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee on 011 717 3059. This committee exists to protect the welfare of research participants.

Position in Company	
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Service Provider

Do you get the necessary support from the service provider? Explain.

ABET programme

How do you place learners at the commencement of an ABET learning programme?

Could you describe how learner progress, commitment and attendance are monitored throughout the learning programme?

How are learners assessed at the end of the ABET learning programme?

What are your opinions of the ABET programme being implemented through the medium of English?

Have you ever considered another language for ABET instruction?

Company

How would you describe your relationship with senior management?

How would you describe your relationship with the drivers?

Do you get the necessary support from the company? Explain.

Are you provided with all the necessary resources to effectively run the ABET programme?

What decision making power do you have in relation to the ABET programme?

How does the company reward learners for ABET commitment and success?

Are you aware of any learner/s having received promotion or additional responsibilities as a result of ABET success?

Personal

For how long have you been facilitating ABET? What other educational experience do you have?

For how long have you been facilitating ABET at Belmont?

What learning areas and levels do you facilitate?

What difficulties do you encounter in your facilitation?

Are learners ever given opportunities to:

1. Evaluate their progress and achievements? How?

2. Share their successes and failures? How?

3. Give personal feedback on the learning programme? How?

How do you reward learners for ABET commitment and success?

How do you think adults should be taught?

Do you think that the ABET programme that you use at this site uses the methodology outlined above? Explain.

Learners

How would you describe your relationship with the learners?

Do you get the necessary support from the learners? Explain.

For how many hours per week to ABET learners attend ABET classes?

Do you think ABET learners have sufficient time to attend ABET classes?

How would you describe learner attendance during ABET sessions?

What are the most common causes of absenteeism?

How do you remediate learners who encounter difficulties?

Other

Given the opportunity, what changes would you make to the ABET programme at Belmont?

Are there any other issues/ problems/ concerns/ suggestions that you would like to raise?

Appendix 8: Learner Questionnaire

Confidentiality

You should understand that anything that you exchange in this questionnaire is confidential and this information will not be made available to your employer, driver or ABET facilitator. To protect your confidentiality, no identifying information about you will be recorded in the research findings. Research records will only be used for the purposes of this study and for the writing up of my MEd research report.

You are participating in this research on a voluntary basis – remember that you can refuse to answer a particular question at any time or withdraw from the research process at any time.

If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact:

- John Thurlow on 082 854 5543.
- Dr. Juliet Perumal, School of Education, University of Witwatersrand on 083 428 6355.
- Dr. Nazir Carrim, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee on 011 717 3059. This committee exists to protect the welfare of research participants.

Last ABET level passed In Literacy	
Last ABET level passed in Numeracy	
What is your age?	
What is your gender? (please tick ✓)	Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/>
Are you disabled? (please tick ✓)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
What is your race? (please tick ✓)	African <input type="checkbox"/> Coloured <input type="checkbox"/> Indian <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/>

Please complete the questionnaire below as openly and honestly as possible.

Personal Reflections

What is the highest standard/ grade that you passed at school?	
Where did you attend school?	
When did you attend school?	
When did you join this ABET programme?	
What learning area and at what level are you involved with the ABET programme?	
Have you previously attended an ABET course? If yes:	<p>a. When?</p> <p>b. Where?</p> <p>c. What level did you achieve?</p>
How did you do in your last ABET exam?	
Why do you think you achieved this result?	
What do you think your strengths are in the ABET classroom?	
What do you think your weaknesses are in the ABET classroom?	

You and your employer

When did you start working for Belmont?	
What is your job description?	
How would you describe your relationship with your middle manager/ supervisor/ line manager?	
Do you feel that this person supports your involvement in the ABET programme?	
How would you describe your relationship with your driver?	
Do you feel you're your driver supports your involvement of the ABET programme?	
How would you describe your relationship with senior management to which your driver reports?	
Do you feel that senior management supports your involvement of the ABET programme?	
Do you receive any incentive for successful completion of the ABET learning programme?	

You and your ABET learning environment

How would you describe your relationship with your ABET facilitator?	
How would you describe the strengths of your ABET facilitator?	
How would you describe the weaknesses of your ABET facilitator?	
How do you think adults should be taught?	
Do you think that your facilitator teaches you in this way?	

You and the ABET learning programme

Do you know the name of the ABET programme that you use?	
Do you think the content of the learning material is too easy, too difficult, or just right? Explain.	
Do you think the content of the learning programme is relevant to your work? Explain.	

Do you think the content of the learning programme is relevant to your life beyond work? Explain.	
---	--

You and your ABET attendance

Have you ever been absent from an ABET session?	
For what reasons have you have missed ABET classes?	
How many hours a week do you attend ABET classes for?	
How much of this time is your company time and how much of this time is your own time?	
Are you happy with the time arrangement?	

General - please give as many suggestions as possible to these questions.

<p>Can you think of any things that have caused you to be successful in the ABET programme?</p>	
<p>Can you think of any things that have caused you to be unsuccessful in the ABET programme?</p>	
<p>Would you like to make any additional comments or suggestions?</p>	

Appendix 9: Field Notes Observation Schedule

Date:		
Context/ Setting:		
Number of Research Participants Present:		
Observations	Analysis	Factor contributing to success or failure. Details
Who?		
What?		
How?		
Why?		

Appendix 10: Lesson Observation Schedule

LESSON OBSERVATION			
DATE			
LEARNING AREA:			
TOPIC:			
ABET Level:			
Number of learners:			
	Observation	Analysis	Implications for success
Lesson Introduction			
Lesson Body			
Lesson Activity			
Lesson Conclusion			

	Observation	Analysis	Implications for success
Group work discussions			
New concepts learnt			
Classroom Management			
Assessment			
General			