

AN IMPACT STUDY OF THE COMPETENCY AND PLACEMENT (CAP) TEST
INTERVENTION AT FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (FET) COLLEGES

by

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ABSTRACT

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The research undertaken involves a quasi-experimental approach in determining the impact of the Competency and Placement (CAP) test in the Further Education and Training (FET) colleges. The evaluation became necessary because poor learner performance within the National Certification Vocational (NCV) programme has persisted amid the implementation of a country-wide roll-out of the CAP test; and a recapitalisation injection of R1.9m.

Learner performance data relating to the NCV programme and CAP was obtained in order to undertake an accurate analysis of the poor performance within the FET college sector. In addition to the above, qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with CAP participating colleges in the country.

Recommendations included the restructuring of the NCV programme; the introduction of an alternative learner placement methodology that was in line with international best practices; and improving quality assurance aspects pertaining to the capacity at colleges to deliver the NCV programme effectively.

Key terms:

Learner placement; learner performance; competency; further education and training; vocational; training; education; curriculum; college; impact study; institutional capacity; NCV programme; quality education; learner support.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the content of this research is authentic and builds on objective and investigative analysis of the data obtained from the relevant sources. Arguments and positions established within this document are based on the analyses informed by this research. All sources consulted have been listed in the reference list at the end of this report.

Signed.....

Date:.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement is hereby expressed to the authors and contributors of the rich bodies of knowledge within both the education and human resources sectors, which formed the basis upon which positions and arguments were established within this research report. Furthermore, appreciation is also expressed to the learner support managers at the colleges, country-wide who contributed to these findings. It is therefore with heartfelt gratitude and humility that I present this scientific study as an objective account of the performance problems experienced within the NCV programme at FET Colleges. I also wish to convey my appreciation to my supervisors for their support and guidance in assisting me to complete this report. And finally, thanks to Almighty God in Jesus Christ our creator for navigating me through a lifelong journey of learning.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Technical Colleges, up until 1998 when the Further Education and Training (FET) Act (98 of 1998) was enacted, were the catalysts for artisanship within the country. This was largely achieved through the apprenticeship system (Manpower Training Act, 56 of 1981) where the delivery of education and training as individual elements of human resource development were shared responsibilities between the then Department of Manpower (now known as Department of Labour - DoL) and the Department of Education (now known as Department of Higher Education and Training - DHET) in their joint pursuit of producing artisans for the country. These colleges had a certain mandate under the Technical Colleges Act (Act No. 104 of 1981), which directed colleges to facilitate the theoretical, and where applicable, structured practical training within the apprenticeship training. Apprentices received further practical competence through experiential learning within the workplace. Training boards provided for additional practical interventions that took place on sites that enjoyed accreditation with the relevant training boards at the time. The training staff at colleges was experienced professionals recruited from the various economic industry sectors. Therefore the nature of the education that took place was robust with definite relevance to industry best practices.

Given that the system of education offered at colleges was based on a syllabus, it did not conform to the outcomes based education (OBE) conventions applicable to each occupation. Learning merit was retained during the delivery of the NATED courses, due to the hands-on nature of the occupational field and the fact that industry professionals facilitated the learning. Additional value was accrued through the rich experiential wealth resident with the aforementioned professionals. Although the programme was formal, the traditional teaching methods provided lecturers with sufficient room for

flexibility to supplement the content where necessary. Suffice to say, had the apprenticeship programmes continued, the NATED subjects (N-Courses) would have required upgrading in order to keep pace with the technological developments within the respective industries.

1.2 THE FET COLLEGES DISPENSATION

The Technical Colleges were declared Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges during 2003 (Provincial Gazette 5829, 2002). Subsequent to that, during 2007, the National Certificate (Vocational), also known as the NCV, was introduced as the new funded mandate for FET colleges nationally (DoE, 2006:9; National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:9). On the other hand, the Department of Labour (DoL) had introduced the Learnership system which was touted as a high quality occupational programme set to replace the apprenticeship system (Mc Kop, 2003). The shared responsibility between the two ministries in producing artisans for the country was clearly threatened since each ministry had implemented its own artisanship programme and the former programmes, (NATED courses) at colleges were being phased out (DoE, 2006:9). The rationale for introducing the NCV programme was in direct response to the shortage of occupational skills within the country, of which artisanship was central. The then Department of Education (DoE) launched a series of interventions including the huge Recapitalisation funding regime to capacitate college infrastructure and personnel in order to ensure effective delivery of the NCV programme (DoE, 2006:5). The DoE would for the first time spearhead a skills development mandate previously located under the DoL. The aim was to address the skills shortages within the country as depicted within the government strategies, Accelerated and shared growth strategy of South Africa (DoE, 2006:5). To this end, the two government departments were involved in separate strategies towards satisfying the deep deficit of skills shortages and unemployment within the country. This resulted in incoherent duplication. However, the lack of synergy between these departments became a major constraint to skills and economic development. Training that took place under the Department of Education

(DoE) lacked the much needed experiential and employer based training components. The Minister of Labour soon thereafter retracted his plan to recall the apprenticeship system and announced that it would remain an option for artisanship (Mdladlana, 2005). While the DoE proceeded to address skills development through the NCV programme, DoL rolled out skills development through the learnership system. The termination of the NATED courses hindered the delivery of apprenticeships. It became clear to stakeholders that the benefits of the former synergy were lost. The loss of synergy became evident on the ground where colleges and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) developed an antagonistic relationship, with colleges representing DoE and SETAs representing DoL.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE NCV PROGRAMME

The NCV programme comprises fourteen categories which focus on priority economic sectors within the SA economy. Each programme consists of seven subjects comprising three compulsory subjects: Language (first additional), Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy and Life Skills along with four vocational subjects (NCV Subject Guideline, 2007:6). Furthermore, the NCV programme has three levels commencing at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 2 for the first year, followed by levels 3 and 4 respectively. The entrance requirement for learners to enter the programme is a completed Grade 9. Each level is taught over a period of one year therefore the entire course concludes with a Matric equivalent qualification at NQF level 4 (NCV Subject Guideline, 2007:3). The programme is taught in accordance with the outcomes based methodology and comprises a rigorous assessment regime (Papier, 2009:5). Although the NCV programme targets the priority skills shortages of the country, the delivery of the course was largely theoretical. The outcomes of the learning content were not geared occupationally.

The DoE has injected R1.9 billion into the FET Colleges over a period of three years which commenced from 2006. This infrastructure and capacity revamp was incurred in

preparation for the NCV programme which was launched at the beginning of 2007 (UMALUSI Report, 2008:x; National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:11; DoE, 2006:5).

Given the programme's ambitious aims, much was expected. The alarming poor performance of learners and colleges sent shock waves throughout the various news media. The gross underperformance beckoned an enquiry into the reasons that caused the poor performance. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) took up the responsibility of recruiting the FET Institute headed up by Dr Joy Papier to undertake a research intervention that would produce findings and recommendations to address the poor performance attributed to the NCV programme. The FET institute consisted of a group of education specialists whom have been involved within the FET Colleges sector for a number of years. Papier and her staff were instrumental in building the capacity of colleges educators in order to satisfy the requirements of the SAQA principles and guidelines during the early months of 2000. The FET institute occupied a portion of the premises of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) where it carried out various forms of research and development activities in the interest of FET Colleges.

1.3.1 CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED DURING IMPLEMENTATION OF NCV

The NCV programme was launched in 2007 where learners who passed Grade 9 at school level were given unhindered access to the course (National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:11). The DoE issued huge enrolment targets for each college to achieve (Papier, 2009:31). Learners were given access indiscriminately so that national targets could be realised and the associated funding secured (DoE, 2006:5; Papier, 2009:42). The course commenced with a country-wide shortage of text books and many educators were not adequately prepared for the new content and methodology. For many of them OBE was unfamiliar terrain and facilitated learning to fifteen year olds was equally new (Papier, 2009:29). Schools saw the NCV programme as an opportunity to divert their ill disciplined learners to colleges. Parents from low income households also took the opportunity because of the elaborate bursary scheme offered

to learners on the programme (DoE, 2006:5; National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:8). The year proved challenging for college educators, managers and for the learners. Within the Western Cape, focus group sessions involving subject matter experts revealed that numerous structural issues existed regarding the NCV curriculum. Some of these issues referred to the content being pitched too high for learners exiting Grade 9 (Papier, 2009:38). Secondly, the level descriptors and range statements of the subjects were vague (Papier, 2009:39). These were meant to guide educators in terms of the scope and depth of the content. The NCV curriculum forums which involved subject experts claimed that learning content was not pitched appropriately to the course level. Newspaper articles pertaining to the weaknesses of the course arose from all corners of the country and evoked a national rethink regarding the programme (Businessday, 2010). More recently at a summit on skills development, the Minister of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) questioned the relevance of the NCV programme, stating that the programme presented an obstacle to learners and to the country (Nzimande, 2010a). The FET Round Table and Summit (2010:1) emphasised that the NVC programme distracted colleges from its broader mandate of skills development and occupational training. Furthermore concluded that the programme was de-linked from the world of skills development and occupational training therefore posed a cul-de-sac for learners hoping to progress into higher education.

During 2007 the NCV course commenced with a requisite pass percentage of 70% for vocational subjects; however before the sitting for the final exam it became clear to the DoE that the majority of learners would not attain this high pass requirement. Therefore the percentage for these subjects was lowered to 50%. It also became evident that DoE had experienced logistical challenges in managing the exams. Umalusi (2009: 38) reported that there was a lack of clarity on policies regarding the NCV delivery. This exacerbated the situation causing an outcry from parents through various media channels. Due to the glaring systems failure, learners were promoted and allowed to carry a maximum of three subjects to NCV level 3. This resulted in students carrying

too many subjects (FET Round Table and Summit, 2010:3). The problem snowballed during the following year with learners unable to cope with the insurmountable burden.

1.4 RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE FET INSTITUTE

In 2009 the FET Institute conducted research into the reasons for the poor learner performance within the NCV programme. The report found that the placement process for learners to the programme was not adequate, often resulting in ill prepared learners being admitted to the programme; hence the poor performance. Furthermore, a large percentage of the learners was not properly matched with the respective programme requirements, which was the reason for the damning statistics (Papier, 2009:39). The research study by the FET Institute was conducted only amongst colleges within the Western Cape. However Umalusi, government's quality assurer for FET Colleges and Schools, also conducted its own country-wide research. This research placed learners at the centre of the reason for the poor performance and remedial intervention was recommended for learners (Umalusi, 2009:39; Papier, 2009:44).

1.5 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPETENCY AND PLACEMENT TEST

According to Tiljaard (2009), Research Manager for CAP, a pilot study of the Competency and Placement (CAP) test was conducted involving six colleges within three provinces, namely, Gauteng; Kwazulu Natal and Mpumalanga. These provinces were arbitrarily chosen by the DoE. The study was implemented by the DoE in order to test the CAP instrument before launching it nation-wide. Later during the same year the CAP was awarded a contract by DoE to implement its learner placement test within all FET colleges in the country. CAP provided licences, materials and training to colleges in preparation for a country-wide implementation in November 2008. The implementation contract was stipulated for the period November 2008 to October 2009, with only a fifty-four percent subscription for the participation of the CAP test during this

period. A list of participating colleges was issued by CAP (see Annexure 1). Numerous placement systems such as the PACE Institute are being utilised by various colleges; therefore a large proportion of colleges opted not to use CAP. Given the country's developmental status, many colleges were ill-equipped and therefore had a lack of resources and expertise to successfully implement placement tests. The list of subscribed colleges who used the CAP test renewed their licenses after October 2009. Under the advice of the CAP research department (Tiljaard, 2009), the author identified these colleges as the full target population that represented all learners in NCV level 2 and who were placed through the use of the CAP test.

The CAP test at present focuses on the fourteen learning fields of the NCV programme and is a competency and career placement test. The test assists colleges to identify prospective NCV level 2 learners and to assess whether they would be able to cope with English (first additional language) and Mathematical literacy at NQF level 2, by testing their NQF level 1 competencies in the aforementioned subject. The test comprises pre-knowledge of the aforementioned subjects at Grade 9 level (NQF level 1). The instrument is not punitive in excluding learners from enrollment but is rather, developmental and therefore advises on additional academic support and placement relevant to each application. The test uses simplified visual techniques to streamline the entire process allowing learners to easily understand the requisite tasks (CAP, 2009).

The instrument therefore reports on the areas of learner support required by the applicants (Tiljaard, 2009). This developmental rationale is in line with the Education Minister's call for greater access for both youth and adults within communities in a sustainable manner (Nzimande, 2010b). During an interview with the CAP software development manager (Dodd, 2010), it was revealed that learners were suspicious about the testing, regarding it as a mechanism for exclusion. Learners therefore resorted to guessing within the multiple choice format of the questionnaire. This symptom was also apparent during the interviews with the learner support managers at colleges throughout the country. During an enrolment audit conducted by the DHET in

February 2011(Enrolment Support Document, 2011:5), Majuba FET College students stated that they did not understand the questions contained within the CAP test and that lecturers were not available to assist during the test. Dodd (2010) also indicated that CAP was a purely South African system dedicated to testing learner readiness for NCV level 2. CAP tested the learners' English first additional language and Mathematical literacy competencies.

Given the contention within the country regarding aptitude testing, the CAP test is a competency test that informs the institution of any learning gaps that might exist within the learner placement process. Therefore the purpose is that the implementation of the test adds value by underpinning the learning objective of the college and learner respectively. The results of the CAP test would require the college to implement remedial support in order to fast track the competency gaps identified by the test. This could take on either of two forms, namely: additional teaching classes or e-learning via the numerous e-learning software packages prevalent within the FET colleges sector (e.g. CAMI and PLATO). It needs to be stated that e-learning at colleges are experiencing their own challenges within the sector; therefore the reliance on this form of technology as a means of support for learner development has not proven to be ideal (Hearne, 2009). The notion of reducing the tremendous learning gaps resident with learners through high-tech, low-touch intervention is questionable. It is therefore appropriate to assert that the educational bridging informed by CAP has proven futile, the details of which are discussed in Chapter 5.

Given the South African context, colleges have resorted to legacy recruitment practices which largely involved oral questioning in conjunction with supporting documentation. According to the Centre for Access, Assessment and Research (CAAR, 2007:6) there is currently no standardised school-leaving examination for learners in Grade 9, therefore academic standards vary dramatically. Each school exercises its own discretion with regard to the level of difficulty at which its Grade 9 examinations are set. This notion begins to elucidate the gravity of the problems experienced by colleges when placing

NCV learners according to the open access prescripts of government (National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:11).

Adopting an international approach to pre-course competency testing in South Africa would be counterproductive in terms of the socioeconomic status of previously disadvantaged learners of the country. Our thirty-eight percent youth unemployment statistics, coupled with the skills needs of 30 million people, militates against the notion of a stricter placement approach that denies poverty-stricken learners. Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges facing the youth, it is crucial that a placement model of mutual benefit be sought to ensure sustainable progression through the college education system leading to meaningful employment. CAP attempts to provide a relevant service within the aforementioned parameters.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

Mouton (2005:56) states that research design focuses on the kind of study being planned and the kind of results aimed at. In addition to this, it includes the problem statements and type of evidence required to address the research question. The type of research embarked on in this study was an empirical study involving a quasi-experimental design. Mouton (2005:160) recommends that Evaluation research be used for outcomes studies where the aim is to answer whether an intervention was successful. Trochim (2006:1) supports this notion by stating that “evaluation is the systematic assessment of the worth or merit of some object”. Therefore the research design adopted for the incumbent study was a quasi-experimental outcomes study which aimed at evaluating the CAP test which was implemented in 27 of the FET colleges within the country. According to Mouton (2005:160), evaluation research involving quasi experimental outcomes methods has as its strength, the ability to assess causal outcomes and impact.

1.6.1 HYPOTHESIS

The poor learner performance within the NCV programme at FET colleges was not limited to the indiscriminate placement practices that took place during the period 2007 to 2008. The lack of capacity within the broader education system might also have contributed to the aforementioned poor performance.

1.6.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Given the gross lack of resources leading to serious problems experienced within our South African schooling system, the notion of persistent poor performance amid the huge capital injection by DoE is alarming. The DoE's Recapitalisation Programme has injected R1.9b into the FET college sector during 2006 and 2008 (DoE Annual report, 2007:9; National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:10). Research conducted by the FET Institute and Umalusi revealed that the placement processes of learners were ineffective; therefore it led to learners failing (Papier, 2009:44; Umalusi, 2009:xi).

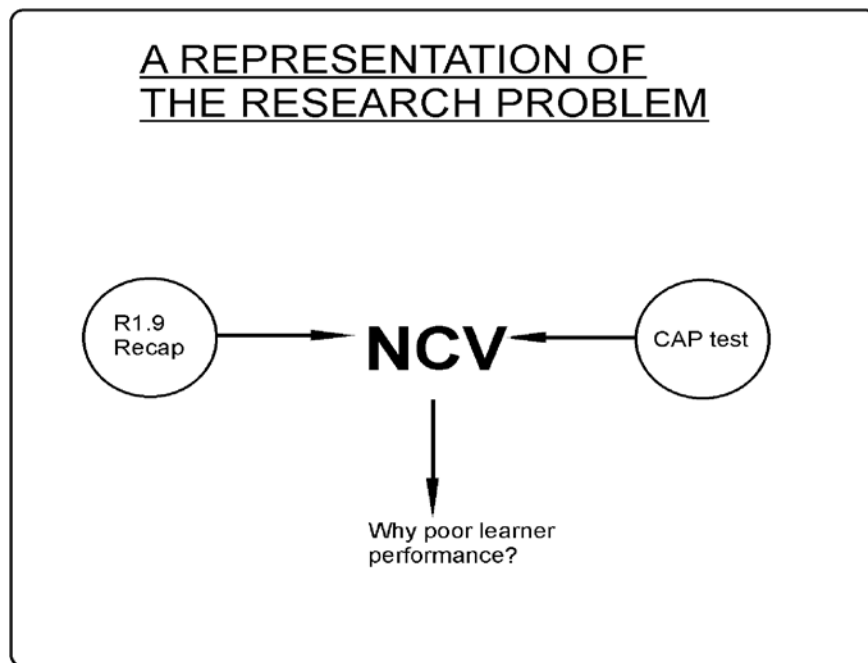


Figure: 1 Representation of the research problem

1.6.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question was therefore, “why have learners in the NCV programme performed so poorly amid a huge recapitalisation injection into FET colleges, and the implementation of a dedicated NCV learner placement intervention, namely CAP?”

1.6.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

An initial objective of the study was to obtain evidence of the apparent poor performance of learners within the NCV programme. Thereafter a research method was developed in order to facilitate the effective collection and analyses of data. The aim of the study was to ascertain whether the CAP intervention was implemented effectively so as to improve the current learner performance. Subsequent to this, was whether culpability for poor performance was appropriately apportioned to learners as was implied within the research conducted by the FET Institute (Papier, 2009:44).

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Mouton (2005:56), research methods are the unbiased deployment of research tools and procedures necessary to achieve the desired research results in a given study. The research methods applied therefore comprised a census of the total population of 50 FET colleges within the country. 27 of these colleges were exposed to the CAP intervention and were therefore categorised as the experimental group within the study. A complete census of these colleges was included in the study. The 27 learner support managers at these colleges were interviewed telephonically using a semi-structured methodology. The remaining 23 colleges were in turn categorised as the control group. These colleges used a variety of generic screening and placement processes to place learners. Given that the research was based on an intervention that had taken place during 2009, randomisation was not possible. Each college was

located in their respective groups; hence the description “*ex post facto*” was adopted, implying that quasi-experimental research (Mouton, 2005:106) was conducted after the intervention had already taken place.

1.7.1 DATA COLLECTION

The study comprised the collection of raw data from three separate pools in order to facilitate rigorous data analyses that would produce the evidence needed to address the research question. In order to establish evidence of the apparent poor performance of learners within the NCV programme, quantitative data was collected from the DoE. This data pool contained the performance levels of NCV learners within FET colleges throughout the country. The second pool of data involved the retrieval of qualitative data from learner support managers at the 27 CAP participating colleges. 27 interviews were therefore carried out through the medium of semi-structured telephonic interviews.

A third pool of qualitative data was retrieved through interviewing two curriculum experts responsible for English (first additional language) and Mathematical literacy. In addition to this, two CAP managers were interviewed in order to verify information contained within the various CAP documents. The purpose of the semi structured interviews was to engage in conversation with the interviewees in order to gain insight into the experiences that took place at the various stages of the intervention. The information obtained from interviewees testified to the issues experienced at the coal face of the NCV programme delivery as well as in the execution of CAP. These referred mainly to the levels of competency within the colleges and the processes used in administering the CAP test. The combination of these elements was regarded as pertinent to the study since it was directly linked to learner performance and placement. A blended method of transcribing was facilitated through coded and textual data recording. The semi-structured interviewing schedule was designed in order to facilitate the aforementioned approach.

1.7.2 DATA ANALYSIS

The raw quantitative data was reformatted into MS Excel in order to facilitate manipulation and eventual generation of Bar Charts that would constitute the analysis of that data leg. Qualitative data emanating from the semi-structured interviews with learner support managers were fed into a separate MS Excel spreadsheet and translated into a combined rural and urban Bar Chart denoting the descriptive themes of the investigation. These themes were predetermined and identified during the process of planning the semi-structured interviews. The predetermined themes are as follows:

- Learner performance
- Effectiveness of CAP
- Curriculum design
- College capacity
- Rural / urban issues

The coded data was recorded on a six point semantic differential scale with the two opposite extremes denoting Poor and Good respectively. This data was used as a basis for developing the Bar Chart which formed the basis for the qualitative data analyses.

1.8 THE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF DATA

Due to the fact that this study is of an “*ex post facto*” nature, the issue of reactivity by the subjects is avoided since the intervention had taken place naturally. Welman and Kruger (2002:80) warn about the danger of affecting participants in one or other aspect of the research setup. This research therefore has strong construct validity. Given that the subjects were born into the respective groups, avoids any form of sensitivity. During the implementation of CAP at FET colleges, the facilitators of the test were not aware of any research being undertaken.

The fact that the study has taken cognisance of the urban and rural dynamic in isolating these performance levels ensured that the population validity was authentic. According to Welman and Kruger (2002:118), population validity is the degree to which findings may be generalised across the total population. The notion of authenticity is further strengthened by that fact that a census of the target population had been included in the research. This refers to the 27 CAP participating colleges from which the qualitative and quantitative data had been obtained.

In terms of ensuring reliability, Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2006:146) posit that comparable measurements should be obtained for the same object under scrutiny. This point strengthens the blended code and textual structure of the semi-structured interview schedule. Furthermore, Sapsford and Jupp (2006:122) assert that semi-structured interviews reduce the risk of generating unreliable data because highly structured interviews attract unacceptable levels of reactivity. The essence of *ex post facto* research refers to studies that investigate cause and effect relationships of variables in order to determine validity of causal factors (Reference.com, 2010).

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is postulated by Glesne (2006:169) that the trustworthiness of data is affected by the upfront statement of the limitations in the research. Although the research covers a national perspective on the phenomenon, only curriculum experts from the Western Cape have been interviewed. Besides cost implications, the reason for this decision was based on the fact that none of the other provinces had a provincial curriculum directorate for NCV programmes. Colleges in these provinces carry out curriculum development programmes independently.

As stated previously, the aim of this research was to evaluate the impact of the CAP test. However, recommendations found in Chapter 5 were limited to the five identified themes listed in the research methodology section. Even though the CAP test

comprised three elements namely numeracy, literacy and placement, this research only focuses on the two former aspects of CAP. The reason for this decision is based on the fact that nonparticipating colleges (control group) whose placements were not included would be less compatible with the experimental group where placements have been included. Therefore comparisons would not have been valid.

1.10 CONCLUSION

FET colleges have a crucial role to play within the economy of the country. The masses of unemployed youth are looking to colleges to equip them for the world of work. It has therefore become necessary to embark on a research intervention that cuts to the heart of the problems experienced by learners within the NCV programme. As is the case in many industries today, research is often funded by role-players who have vested interests in a particular outcome; therefore the findings and recommendations that are yielded are often biased. This report contains results based on quantitative and qualitative data that are both relevant and authentic.

The research methodology and structure of this report tackles relevant issues pertaining to key elements intrinsic to the apparent underperformance of FET college learners within the NCV programme. Given that data from a census of the total target population had been analysed, the research findings and recommendations are both succinct and cognisant of the political and socioeconomic dynamics of the FET college sector within the South African context. This research has carefully navigated through the organisational changes that have occurred within the transformational period of the country. Through multifaceted data retrieval and meticulous analyses of the sector, nuisance variables that threatened the authenticity of the study were avoided. This refers mainly to the socioeconomic dynamics and developmental status of the country.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: LEARNER PLACEMENT AT FET COLLEGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Given that learner placement is under scrutiny, it is important at this stage to determine that there are a number of key role-players involved within this construct. This means that in order to arrive at reliable findings the research has taken cognisance of these role-players and the impact they have on the stated problem. On the other hand, the problem is centrally located and linked to the learner, the college and the NCV programme. This means that in our analyses of the problem, variables attached to the three elements in the diagram were viewed as contributing factors of varying degrees. However, in viewing the problem from a human resource development (HRD) perspective, broader factors became relevant to the aforementioned problem:

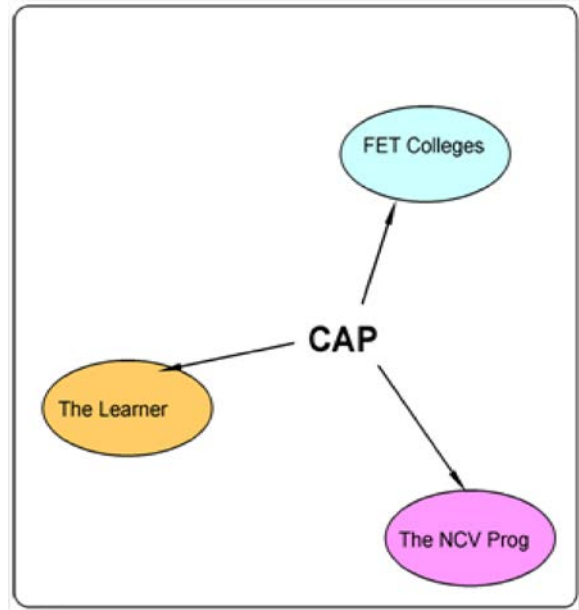


Figure: 2 Elements linked to the problem

- The curriculum
- The school (that the learner last attended)
- Parents
- Educators
- Admissions officer
- The process of testing
- The environment (the organisational culture at the colleges and the SA context).

In avoiding an anecdotal approach to this research, these factors were considered as possible causal variables. Therefore the design of the research has taken cognisance of these issues in an integrated manner so as to narrow the focus of the study in order to remain relevant to the aim. Interestingly, at the heart of the research conducted by the FET Institute during 2009, the question of whether the learner was at fault was raised (Papier, 2009:44). The first recommendation within Umalusi's report (2009:39) recommends remedial and diagnostic testing which also implies that the problem lies at the feet of the learner. Given that learner placement within FET colleges was conducted according to aggressive DoE targets and against open ended SAQA principles of educational access for needy learners, it is understandable that support for learners be considered. However, the question of whether the problem of poor performance was appropriately placed with learners is a question of contention.

The report tabled by the FET Institute stipulated that its research focus did not consider systemic issues that may have contributed to the problem (Papier, 2009:40). On the other hand, Umalusi's report focused particularly on the systemic issues, at national, provincial and college level. It is therefore within these parameters that the incumbent research was appropriated in order to build on what had been established already. The data obtained through the DoE and the interviewing process has in conjunction with the findings of Umalusi and the FET Institute, informed the findings and recommendations made towards the evaluation of CAP and the poor performance linked to NCV programme.

2.2 CAP OBJECTIVES

The CAP test is a placement instrument that was developed within South Africa and focuses specifically on the NCV programme delivery. The instrument tests competencies in Mathematical literacy and English first additional language skills at Grade 9 level. It also provides information on the fourteen NCV programmes which assist learners in choosing the occupational fields they deem they are best suited for.

This is facilitated through a Career Interest Questionnaire developed by CAP (Tiljaard, 2009). The results of the competency tests aim to high-light possible areas that required cognitive support if a learner were accepted onto the NVC programme. The test is based on unit standards aligned with NQF level 1 (Grade 9) as outlined by the General Education and Training Certificate (CAP, 2009). Furthermore, the test is not punitive but rather developmental, promoting access and learning through an inclusive approach (Tiljaard, 2009). CAP was marketed as being an intervention that ensures quality results and assists learners with their career choices (CAP, 2009). Colleges may elect to administer the intervention either manually or via a computer based application which carries additional reporting benefits due to the database functionality integrated into the application. The provision of the manual option is particularly important to the South African context since many colleges do not have sufficient resources to accommodate the computer based option.

Once the learner has completed the registration and selection process within the colleges, the CAP test is administered. The results are captured and an analysis done, which feeds into three streams namely:

- to the colleges statistics (data)
- to the technical department (competence and placement)
- to the learner (option of remedial or exit)

Counselling is provided to learners who chose to exit the placement process. During the interviewing process with learner support managers, feedback was given about these steps. Having said this, the CAP process was straightforward, regarded therefore as a positive indication by colleges.

2.3 THE RATIONALE OF THE NVC

The NCV programme comprises three academic levels namely, NQF level 2, NQF level 3 and NQF level 4. Since first-time entry to the course may only occur at NQF level 2,

the CAP test is administered only for this level. As is the case within the schooling system, learners who pass NQF level 1 are automatically accepted to the next level within the programme. Therefore it is important to note that the CAP test only tests competencies in Mathematical literacy and English (first additional language) at NQF level 1. It is for this reason that the report has only evaluated performance within the aforementioned subjects. Also important to note is that these subjects are those that learners have engaged with during their secondary schooling. Except for Life Skills, the remaining subjects within the NCV programme are purely vocational and therefore, new to learners. Testing these would prove unreliable in terms of the construct validity since CAP cannot test, nor support the vocational subjects.

In an interview with Vollenhoven (2010), deputy chief education specialist of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), he revealed that the NCV programmes were too theoretical with minimal practical activities. Examiners on the other hand assessed learner according to practical competencies which proved problematic because the learners rarely had opportunities to attain practical competence. Vollenhoven therefore asserted that the NCV programmes should conform to the true sense of an OBE philosophy. In addition to this, the programmes comprised a complex assessment regime which includes a combination of theory and practical assessments totaling seven, per subject per year. Each learner took seven subjects, therefore it involved forty-nine assessments for each year. The course was meant to promote real employability to learners who complete the NCV level 4 (Matric level) therefore it was incumbent on the educators to be experts in their respective fields. Furthermore, OBE in essence required of an educator to be competent in the outcomes that were being facilitated. The DoE required educators to base their facilitation on practical methodology so that learners result in being competent and more importantly, employable. Infrastructure and human resource capacity challenges (nationally and locally) made it difficult for successful learning to take place within this programme. National examiners were recruited from within the pool of FET College educators therefore the capacity challenges were being perpetuated.

To this end, the peripheral challenges are alarming since they are indicative of significant institutional and organisational failure which was bound to affect learner performance at colleges. It is important to note that FET college educators were confronted for the first time with OBE in 2007 with the launch of the NCV programmes, therefore one could reasonably conclude that the foundation of the methodology was in all probability, not established. It is therefore clear that in at least some cases the expectations of learners and parents were compromised by the lack of capacity within the college sector to deliver the NCV programme as required. It is therefore crucial that the findings within this report serve as a scientific basis for addressing the performance within the NCV programme.

2.4 THE FET INSTITUTE REPORT FINDINGS

At the time of the current research there were only two other studies conducted on the NCV programme, therefore scientific information about the programme was limited. The research conducted by the FET Institute concluded that marketing and placement were misguided since the envisaged identity of the FET colleges was out of sync with the actual expectations and needs of the learner (Papier, 2009:44). Furthermore, the institute posited that since the cognitive demand of the NCV programme was too high for the poorly prepared learners, collective effort should be brought to bear in “*getting the right learner into the right programme*” (Papier, 2009:44). The report compiled by the FET Institute comprised a theme that implied that the course content was not comprehended by most learners and that this was due to a variety of reasons of which learner ill-preparedness was central (Papier, 2009:41). Papier (2009:31) makes reference to the DoE’s obsession with “chasing numbers” where learners were recruited hastily, resulting in incorrect placements.

In its attempt to communicate a bottom-up approach, the FET Institutes dedicated a large portion of space to the direct comments from learners such as, the colleges being too much like a school; the programme being too difficult ... and should be more fun; did

not want to be taught English and Life Skills etc. (Papier, 2009:24). Learners were however also requesting more practical exposure, shorter lectures and better learning materials. They also claimed that lecturers were weak and classes were boring. However, learners have also indicated that they needed support (Papier, 2009:29). This might be indicative of inappropriate support and placement facilities. One would imagine that given the objectives of CAP, these issues should not have enjoyed the prevalence reflected within the FET Institute's report. Therefore it is of concern, that amid the many responses, the FET Institute's report focused mainly on the fitness of the learners in relation to the programme. On the other hand, input from marketing staff indicated that the image of the FET colleges needed to be elevated through a national campaign since it did not hold much promise for parents and students, especially those wanting to progress to Higher Education (HE). (Papier, 2009:23).

2.5 UMALUSI REPORT FINDINGS

It was interesting to note that although the Umalusi and FET Institute's investigations were conducted separately and centred around different aspects of the NCV programme, there were pertinent areas of intersection which is a clear indication of the prominence of these aspects. For example, both reports recommend remedial intervention for learners and noted the serious lack of lecturer capacity (Umalusi, 2009:39; Papier, 2009:42). Although systemic matters were not part of the FET Institute's report, Umalusi reported extensively on the matter. It is within the current research that the issue of, "the right college" becomes an unavoidable question. This point questions the relevance of CAP since it focuses on the learner while there is no attention given to the capability of the colleges. Since support for the colleges was not provided, the question of whether learners were in fact able to perform well while educators themselves lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate the NCV programme, arose. The Umalusi report very aptly recommended that further research into the NCV programme was necessary in order to establish an FET college programme that would promote skills development within the country.

2.6 NCV ASSESSMENT

The systemic inefficiencies within the assessment infrastructure should be treated as an extenuating variable that militates against the morale of both, lecturers and learners. The Umalusi report (2009:40) states, that there was no system in place for setting common tasks for the Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS). The report further purports that lecturers were not sure about the relationship between the various assessment instruments namely, the Integrated Summative Assessment (ISAT) and the ICASS (Umalusi, 2009:40). This is quite alarming because these assessments are directly associated with the performance of learners. It is incumbent on an assessor to be fully acquainted with the assessment mechanisms of the institution since it is the assessor who judges the performance of the learner and encodes the performance accordingly. Umalusi (2009:40) on the other hand recommends the review of these assessment instruments.

2.7 CAPACITY OF NCV LECTURERS

The Umalusi report alluded to the scarcity of skilled professionals within the various sectors as being a challenge for the colleges since the pool of possible applicants for placement was extremely small – employers compete for these industry experts as well (Umalusi, 2009:39). This has resulted in a serious educator capacity deficit. This lack of capacity has affected the effectiveness of the mediation and delivery of the curriculum and thus compromised the objective of successful learning. A recommendation of formal training in didactics, pedagogics and content depth was muted in the report (Umalusi, 2009:39). Although these elements are of particular relevance and importance, the report has also alluded to adjacent issues (e.g. monitoring; funding; logistics and strategic issues) which might distract the current construct under scrutiny. It is for this reason that aspects have not been detailed beyond this point of the report. Figure 3 depicts the NCV programme being underpinned by the CAP test, which in turn is supported by the research findings of the UMALUSI and The FET Institute. The

Learners are at the pinnacle of the diagram which implies a learner-centred approach. The grey base represents the education system (national and provincial) which communicates the expected stability and soundness of the education system in order for everything else to work properly. This diagram attempts to portray the learner's performance as a result of all the other subsystems. The diagram also depicts the position of CAP as being fired up by the findings of the two research reports. Note that the diagram pushes upwards, indicative of being in pursuit of learner success.

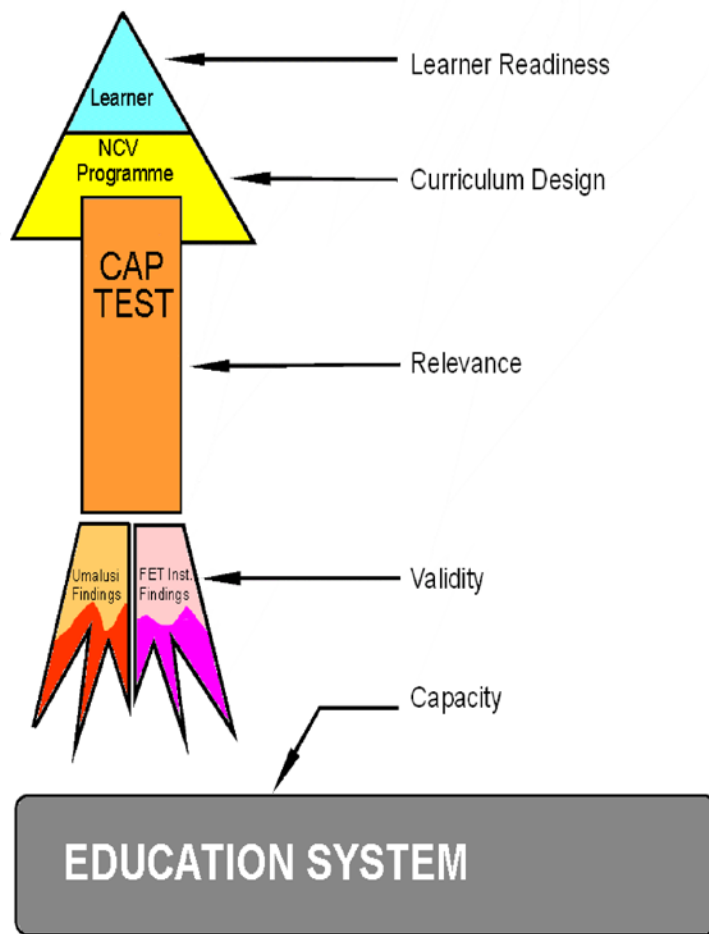


Figure: 3 *Illustration of the Phenomenon*

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.8.1 MARKETING OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Given the findings by Papier (2009:44) of colleges engaging misguided marketing, Lewison and Hawes (2007:16) posit that marketing should be strategic and should take cognisance of the difference among potential students and therefore should develop a target marketing approach. Strategic marketing, according to the authors is often rejected by colleges due to requisite chance activities implicit in this approach. The

approach engaged by FET colleges is described by Lewison and Hawes (2007:16), as 'mass-marketing' which completely ignores the market differences and should therefore only be done if there was a single offering (programme) which could accommodate the entire market. This is not the case with NCV, therefore the implications for the CAP test are critical since it (CAP) is touted as being designed specifically for NCV (Tiljaard, 2009; CAP, 2009). However, as stated previously, the test does not deal adequately with the vocational subjects since it engages placement on a largely superficial level. Literacy and numeracy are the focal points of the test. This point raises the question of appropriateness given that the NCV programme is a vocational course. The importance of ensuring that learners were correctly matched with the appropriate vocational programme could not be over-emphasised. Therefore it is fundamental that greater intervention be brought about in order to ensure proper learner placement. According to Lewison and Hawes (2007:17) greater student satisfaction is achieved when the unique needs of the various targeted market segments are met.

It is no secret that due to South Africa's alarming backlog of skills acquisition and employment of the youth, there has been an unprecedented injection of funding into the college infrastructure in preparation for the impending implementation of the NCV programmes (National Plan for FET College, 2009:7). This has prepared the soil for huge indiscriminant placement campaigning of youth into the programme which goes against the advice of Lewison and Hawes (2007:16).

2.8.2 HRD PERSPECTIVE

2.8.2.1 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

One of the main areas of contention that learners had was the disturbing contrast in the business focus of colleges verses the often humble approach prevalent at a school (Papier, 2009:39). Mahoney (2006:40) makes the observation that places colleges in the frenetic business arena: "paper has been replaced with computers, counseling has been

replaced with marketing, and the emphasis on fit has been replaced by a preoccupation with prestige”.

He further claims that institutions act in their own self-interest often represented by overbearing admissions professionals (Mahoney, 2006:40). Having said this, Lewison and Hawes (2007:18) refer in their text to the notion of “multiple touch points” with prospective learners. This notion is implicit in a learner-centered approach to learner placement, and opposes a preoccupation with bottom-line. Although the report compiled by the FET Institute (Papier, 2009:44) speaks of the lack in capacity of placement officers, no mention was made of the prevalent business drive and culture of the colleges. This particular point does not negate the importance of frugal management which promotes the sustainability of the colleges, but highlights the fact that the preoccupation with numbers often bleeds into the realm of learning. This oversight could have a catastrophic impact on the recruitment and support processes affecting learners.

Mahoney (2006:18) further states that in order to attract and retain learners, the colleges need to develop a value proposition and that the only way colleges will know what to propagate is if and when they (the colleges) understand their respective market. This point reinforces the notion of being business minded yet customer focused where the colleges ensured an optimal experience for its customers, both learners and parents. The culture within an organisation should be designed and constructed intentionally and should further be reinforced by managers who role-model the values associated with the culture, on a consistent basis (Meyer & Botha, 2004:156).

2.8.2.2 LEARNER PLACEMENT

Given the sentiments expressed by college managers toward autonomy (Umalusi, 2009:34) and business, there is much to be learnt about meeting customer needs which precedes the apparent obsession with the institution’s bottom-line. Therefore if one

considers the duration of the CAP placement system along with other such systems, it becomes evident that the time dedicated to understanding the learners' individual needs appears brief. Given the age group (Grade 10 / 15 years old) of learners attracted to the programme, it is paramount that a comprehensive understanding of the specific learner needs be elicited. Therefore it is safe to conclude that the briefness of the CAP intervention could be a contributing factor to the poor performance data registered against the NCV programme. The need for a comprehensive placement approach is promoted by McKay (2006:311), who posits that performance alone was not adequate in the selection of course entry, but that intangible issues like motivation, energy, self-satisfaction and staying power were all key factors in determining potential success. He added that, based on a range of studies over a 30 year period, performance alone was found to be inconsistent (McKay, 2006:312).

During an educational study tour to Nuremberg, the researcher participated in an information session hosted at the "N-ergy" power station in June 2009. The production manager of the power station explained that during their placement of learners more emphasis was placed on passion, attitude and interest than on academic prestige. The company boasted very high learner retention and through-put track record which they claimed was instrumental in their level of organisational success. This input resonates strongly with that of McKay (2006:312) and therefore needs to be considered in our evaluation and analysis of the significance of CAP.

2.8.3 RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

In a report compiled by Washburn and Petroschuis (2004:35-40), a particular institution hosted a six week programme involving tour guides who were specifically geared to interact with prospective learners in a learner-centred fashion. The selection of these tour guides was done by a group of senior officials from the institution. The project included multifaceted and interactive activities with the objective of getting the learner to experience the true value attached to the prospective institution they intended studying

at. Various levels of personnel collaborated within the programme and this was quoted as being instrumental in the subsequent success reported. Learners were required to develop a marketing plan for the college. Therefore the report indicates that important information was solicited about them (written, oral and analytical skills; teamness; critical thinking and other skills). Recommendations within the project were the following:

- Thorough selection and recruitment of tour guides.
- Creation of a positive and consistent image for the tour guides programme.
- Revision of the programme and tour to make it more relationship oriented.
- The study concluded that the programme strengthened the sense of community which was important in a progressive college environment.

There is a stark contrast between the CAP methodology and that of the project alluded to by Washburn and Petroschius (2004:36). At this stage it is safe to say that relationships form the core of what institutions need to build with their clients (the learner). Therefore meaningful touch-points within the recruitment process need to be ensured. Barker and Hart (1998) purport that marketing was about the seller's efforts to establish satisfying relationships with customers. In addition, the aforementioned authors cautioned that marketing is not something sellers do to their customers, but something they do for their customers (Barker & Hart, 1998:61). It thus becomes clear that an important ingredient to building relationships is the duration of time spent together by the parties. This places short-impact placement strategies in a precarious light since the principle of knowing one's customer is key to meeting their needs. It is on this level that concern is raised about the structure of CAP as a compromising factor. Woodhouse (2006:32) contends that faculty needs to establish a personal rapport with learners outside the classroom so that successful enrolment trends emerge. These enhanced relationships could also form the platform for developing effective placement and marketing strategies which were learner-centred. The security of employment of academic personnel at colleges should be linked to the placement of learners to each college faculty. This will ensure that the survival of colleges' educational faculties is based on true value being captured from within the college.

2.8.4 THE COLLEGE SYSTEM

The report issued by the FET Institute asked the question (Papier, 2009:7) “wrong learner or wrong programme?” A critical oversight in the above report was that it did not focus on the apparent lack of capacity of the colleges. The focus was mainly on the learner and the programme. Learners choose careers, programmes and colleges; therefore the possibility exists that a learner might be at an ill-equipped college, or group of colleges. It is in this line of thinking that one begins to understand that a learner gets placed at a colleges first and then onto the programme. It is therefore important that the placement strategy at colleges be viewed more broadly than is currently the case. Broader participation and resourcing should be made available to the process. Washburn and Petroshuis (2004:36) contend that the experience of the colleges visited by learners and parents forms an important determining factor in their choice of college. An HRD perspective on placement really centres around the actual value of the college as an organisation with its multi-faceted activities and structures. These facets of value result in the given college’s brand. In a nutshell, authentic branding is what learners ultimately look for since branding is a form of mental shorthand that assists customers (learners in this case) in determining quality provision (Barker & Hart, 1999:51). It is safe therefore to hypothesise that learners may have underperformed due to the poor support structures and resources available to them at colleges. Having considered these points, one clearly realises the level of robustness required within a learner placement system.

2.8.5 QUALITY MANAGEMENT

In essence the problem at hand is one that falls within the ambit of quality assurance and management. This refers to the quality of learning on one hand, and to the quality of training on the other. The latter pertains to the organisational service rendered by the college to its clients. It is clear that quality of learning is dependent on the quality of training therefore the first priority would be for a college to ensure that its services were

of a high standard especially since learners as clients were paying for this service. In addition to this, the integrity of the NCV curriculum is not in the control of the provinces and the colleges because it (the NCV curriculum) is a national competency (National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:6). As mentioned previously in the literature review, the NCV programme was set in place to respond to the targets set within the AsgiSA strategy (DoE, 2006:5). This strategy was headed up by the office of the deputy president of the country.

Given the scope and purpose of this research, it is appropriate to focus specifically on the quality of training within the FET college programme delivery system. As such, the findings within this research would be able to assist colleges to improve the quality of their service to learners – especially within the NCV programme.

2.8.5.1 CURRENT STRIDES MADE BY COLLEGES

The FET colleges within the Western Cape have recently made significant strides in installing an ISO 9001: 2000 quality management system (QMS) in their respective institutions. This has taken place to a lesser extent within the other provinces. It is important to state that the installation of a commercial QMS is a good starting point for a college that is serious about improving its quality of service. However, it is not where the process ends. Quality systems based on bottom-line centred organisations are not appropriate for an education and training environment (Franceschini & Terzago, 1998:761). The “product” of a training institution is that of learning and people development, therefore caution should be taken in adopting a commercial oriented QMS in an attempt to promote effectiveness at a training institution. Houston (2007:72) concurs with this by asserting that industry-born definitions of quality had limited application within the educational setting.

Training and learning is dynamic, therefore questions concerning the inappropriateness of a mainstream QMS within the learning environment have been raised. According to Idialu (2007:3), training should be optimised so that learning could be successful. Quality systems should not impede learning by virtue of its presence within the learning environment. These systems should take cognisance of the dynamics involved in learning and therefore be used to promote learning in a deliberate and effective manner.

2.8.5.2 INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO QUALITY

The use of innovative quality tools as an approach to overcoming the challenge of quality within an educational setting was asserted by Gonzales, Quesada, Gourdin and Hartely (2006:37). This provides an avenue for utilising existing systems and methods within a variety of quality concepts. The opportunity to create unique mechanisms in order to arrive at a suitable quality assurance framework (QAF) therefore becomes appropriate. There is however also a need for a more intimate quality assurance mechanism that is integral to the process of teaching and learning. Francheschini and Terzago (1998:754) allude to the voice of the customer (VoC) as being the principle input in the design process of a QMS. This implies that quality is determined by the customer (the learner). VoC is an important consideration for this study since it directs the focus to the learner. Manning (2003:26) speaks of a “value proposition” which in terms of a college, means that the institution should state upfront (via posters and or newsletters) what its value adding features are. This would assist learners and parents in deciding which institution to choose and places the responsibility on colleges to produce quality.

2.9 CONCLUSION

The literature review has informed questions concerning the findings of the research conducted by Papier (under the auspices of the FET Institute) during 2009 where the

report implicates the learners as being the cause for the poor performance within the NCV programme designed by DoE. The aforementioned report therefore recommends stringent learner placement processes to be installed so as to ensure successful indulgence of the programmes by the learners. Although the systemic issues were alluded to only as extenuating factors, learner incapacity was at the heart of the findings within the report (Papier, 2009:44). The Umalusi report (2009:38-41) on the other hand had a broader perspective on the problem therefore alluded to broad systemic issues that existed both locally and nationally. The report, however also recommended remedial interventions for learners (Umalusi, 2009:39).

Given that DoE has provided the services of a placement intervention (CAP Test) to colleges country-wide during 2009, an evaluation of the impact of this intervention will be conducted in order to ascertain its significance regarding learner performance within the NCV programme. Furthermore, in enacting an HRD perspective on the problem the evaluation has also informed the hypothesis of locating the cause of poor performance in colleges rather than with the learners as clients.

Since the CAP intervention was specifically designed to support the NCV programmes (Tiljaard, 2009), one would expect the NCV programmes to be sufficiently scrutinised by CAP before its implementation. CAP as educational experts should not have provided their services in supporting a programme that was poorly structured or flawed. This research has therefore critically evaluated the impact of CAP as was implemented during 2009.

Quality is at the heart of the phenomenon under scrutiny. It is for this reason that the research problem and the hypothesis have taken cognisance of the fact that South Africa as a developing nation, has a very young education system. FET Colleges therefore form part of this system. In addition to this, the country has not fully established its performance and quality mechanisms within the various governmental departments. It is therefore crucial that evaluative research be executed in order to escalate the momentum of development within the country.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The essence of demonstrating a scientific approach in determining the impact of the CAP test within the FET colleges during 2009 has been reported on by using an appropriate research design and methodology. These research components have taken cognisance of the particular dynamics relating to the characteristics of the research problem and its associated phenomena. FET colleges are tasked with training unemployed youth in priority scarce skills categories in order to generate socioeconomic advancement within the country (HRDS-SA, 2008:15). This research project has therefore generated plausible findings and recommendations that will inform skills development and the eradication of unemployment within the country. The purpose of CAP is to promote successful learning at FET Colleges especially within the NCV programme by harnessing a progressive and developmental approach.

Given the quasi experimental characteristics of this research, careful consideration has been given to the analysis of data pertaining to both participating as well as non-participating colleges within the country. The main source of data has been obtained from the DoE for learner performance, both prior and post CAP implementation. Pre CAP data refers to the learner performance data obtained from colleges before the implementation of CAP during 2007 and 2008, while post CAP data refers to the learner performance data obtained after the implementation of CAP during 2009. Interviews with 27 learner support officers at participating colleges have yielded textual data and information which have added to the qualitative dimension of the study. In addition to this, four semi structured interviews were conducted with two CAP officials and two curriculum experts within the WCED. The current impact study will form the basis for further research into establishing improvements in the manner in which tuition and training are supported within the FET College sector in South Africa.

3.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

South Africa as a developing country has ascribed the reason for poor service delivery within its various government ministries, to the lack of resources (HRDS-SA, 2009:39). During 2005, the National Education Department commenced the Recapitalisation of FET Colleges Initiative (DoE, 2007:9; DoE, 2006:5; National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:7) which involved a capital injection of R1.9 billion into the FET Colleges sector. The expansion of infrastructure and capacity was initiated primarily for colleges to effectively deliver the NCV programme. However, once implementation of the NCV programme took place in 2007 the results were appalling, and government suffered immense criticism from the media and prevailing political forums (Businessday, 2010). This research was therefore undertaken to investigate why poor performance in the NCV programme continued amid the installation of the “Career and Placement Test” (CAP) intervention. This question is further exacerbated by the notion of a R1.9 billion capital injection made by DHET specifically for the elaborate resourcing of colleges in preparation for the implementation of the NCV programme. Important to note was that the CAP intervention was initiated in response to research conducted by Umalusi who is the FET colleges’ quality assurer. The fundamental question of this research is: why have learners in the NCV programme performed so poorly amid a huge recapitalisation injection into the colleges, and the implementation of a dedicated NCV learner placement intervention, namely CAP?

3.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The first phase of study was to obtain evidence of the apparent poor performance of learners within the NCV programme. The evidence provided the researcher with a broader understanding of the problem for further planning regarding the applicable research method. The official aim of the study was to ascertain whether the CAP intervention was implemented effectively. Inherent in this aim was the analyses of all the data in order to determine whether the culpability of poor performance was

appropriately apportioned to learners as was implied by the Umalusi report (2009:39) and the FET Institute (Papier, 2009:44).

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Given the presumptuous circumstances regarding the implementation of CAP within the FET College sector, the deployment of an *ex post facto*, quasi-experimental research methodology was selected. This methodology was underpinned by a combined qualitative and quantitative data analysis. This retrospective inquiry into the phenomenon has involved moderated data collection of past and current learner performance, but has also involved qualitative data obtained from current sources which include 27 learner support managers; two education specialists; and two CAP managers. The aforementioned data have generated useful trends and qualitative insight into the respective subjects under scrutiny. According to Glesne (2006:36), multiple kinds of data increase confidence in a given study. Albeit that an experiment was *ex post facto*, Kovacs Burn (2005) argues that the strength of a quasi-experimental approach is that the external validity is increased due the naturalistic manner in which the intervention was implemented. This means that test sensitivity and reactivity are completely eliminated given the naturalistic implementation of the intervention (Welman, et al, 2006:107). The quasi-experimental approach simply means that randomisation was not possible due to the obvious constraints located within the evaluative study. The rationale of the quasi-experimental research that was conducted in this study is that the learner performance data of both groups were measured before the independent variable (CAP) was introduced. Furthermore, after the intervention had taken place, the groups were measured again in order to ascertain whether behavioural changes had occurred. This principle of experimentation is therefore evident which demonstrates the conformance to a quasi-experimental research methodology which also mimics true experimental research involving control and experimental groups.

The learner performance data has borne witness to the existence of the problem, and the qualitative data emanating from interviews has contributed to a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative aspect of the study has ensured that a one sided view of the reality was avoided. Dyson and Brown (2006:10) refer to a “selective perspective” of the phenomenon where researchers amplify certain aspects of the reality that fits their preference. It is important to note that since this research was located within the education sector, the danger of clouding the investigation with issues associated with the curriculum, rather than that of performance of an intervention, existed. Meyer and Botha (2004:128) refer to the task of human resources specialists as that of performance interventionists. Hence the study sought to determine the performance of the CAP intervention.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Historical quantitative data contained within the DoE database was used to measure the learner performance levels of the final exams over a three year period. This pool of data included colleges who implemented CAP as well as those who did not. The data contained evidence pertaining to the lack of performance improvements that learners had attained during the period of CAP implementation (Dyson & Brown 2006:9). In addition to this, qualitative data were retrieved through semi-structured interviews with key individuals including 27 learner support personnel; two curriculum specialists and two CAP managers. The qualitative and quantitative data have been factored into the data analysis process described below. Given that the research was based on a country-wide analysis of the problem, the learner support personnel at colleges were interviewed via scheduled telephone conversations. On the other hand, the curriculum experts and CAP managers were interviewed using a face to face approach.

The telephonic interviews have focused on opinions about the CAP test since Sapsford and Jupp (2006:118) promote the notion of asking interviewees for their opinion on a subject relevant to their fields of expertise. To further comply with the views expressed

by Sapsford and Jupp (2006:122), these interviews have avoided issues of reactivity by conducting them in a naturalist manner (semi-structured) so as to maintain the normative requirements of conversation where turn-taking was afforded by both parties (Garfinkel 1967 as quoted by Sapsford and Jupp, 2006:113). Preparation for the interviews (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006:162) was summarised to include the following points of discussion:

- Interviewees' expert opinion on the CAP test
- Whether the administration of CAP was in compliance with the agencies requirements
- Expert opinion on whether CAP has improved the learning experience
- As a result of CAP, have development opportunities been granted to academically needy learners
- Expert opinion on whether CAP required any improvements
- Interviewees' expert opinion on reasons for the poor performance within the NCV programme

An analysis of the various forms of data has been executed where rural and urban trends were captured in order to establish a unique case orientation of the phenomenon. Matrixes and tables on the other hand have been utilised to display clinical data in a manner that promoted a holistic understanding of the phenomenon so that the conclusions and findings drawn from the research were both valid and reliable.

3.5.1 OUTCOMES EVALUATION RESEARCH

According to Mouton (2005:160), the outcomes evaluative model is an effective empirical approach in assessing the impact of an intervention through asking evaluative questions. This form of research could either be true experimental or a quasi-experimental design. Therefore the research included a systematic approach in assessing the merit of the CAP intervention during 2009 by initially analysing the learner performance results at the end of the academic year. Trochim (2006) explains that

evaluation research is a systematic assessment of the worth or merit of an intervention which involves the collection and sifting of data, thereafter making judgements about the validity of the information. He states further that evaluation research should influence decision making or policy formulation. This point was particularly interesting since FET colleges fell within the ambit of the national government which meant that colleges were subject to national policy. The NCV programme was the result of a policy decision in addressing the ravages in the country namely, skills shortages, unemployment and poverty. Garbers (1996:246) postulates that legislators are sensitive to the feasibility of initiatives and therefore influence could be bolstered by insight into cause and effect underlying certain phenomena. He makes mention of the fact that problems can be identified by members of the public or by organisations. Therefore the initiative of this research was backed by the identification of a problem within the skills development strategy of the public service and more so, the DoE, which informed the implementation of CAP.

3.5.2 THE RATIONALE OF AN *EX POST FACTO* APPROACH

Ex post facto refers to the retrospective nature of the research. The term also applies to the outcomes evaluation research method employed within this study. Therefore, given the peculiar circumstances attached to the phenomenon, a retrospective investigation was considered as the most appropriate approach that would accommodate the dynamics peculiar to the study. According to a home science website (Reference.com, 2010), *Ex post facto* research refers to studies that investigate cause and effect relationships of variables in order to determine validity of the causal factors. The method according to the author would involve statistics and alternative ways within its analysis of a past event.

Given the apparent lack of performance within the CAP intervention, the researcher undertook the task of investigating the impact of the intervention, albeit that it was implemented two years ago. It is for this reason that the given approach has been

adopted in order to yield findings that were valid and that could be generalised throughout the country.

3.5.3 QUASI EXPERIMENTAL VERSUS NON EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

Quasi-experimental research refers to a scientific investigation where a limited level of experimentation has been engaged by the researcher. This form of research is usually adopted where there are constraints linked to the phenomena under investigation. These constraints usually involve sensitive and ethical issues which force a less clinical approach to the investigation at hand (Welman & Kruger, 2002:87). It is therefore clear that given the limited level of experimentation involved in quasi experimental research, it is an authentic approach in determining cause and effect in a peculiar investigation.

Non-experimental research on the other hand refers to the absence of experimentation; therefore has less scientific integrity attached to it. Welman and Kruger (2002:83) state, that non-experimental research involves neither randomization nor a planned intervention. They also claim that in order to ensure the authenticity of this type of research, the researcher needs to be thoroughly familiar with the nature of the variables under investigation.

3.5.4 DATA COLLECTION

The moderated, learner performance data was collected from the DHET's management information systems department. This data was dissected and arranged in a comprehensible manner which was incorporated into an Excel spreadsheet so as to support the perspective and approach of this investigation. The quantitative data was historical due to the fact that it was yielded from the intervention under scrutiny which included trends dating back to 2007. This data bore testimony to the poor performance of learners within the NCV programme during 2007 to 2009. According to Glesne

(2006:147), after data has been collected, it needs to be analysed and arranged so that descriptions and explanations are developed into theories. In the incumbent research the data was synthesised and categorised in order to highlight patterns and interpretations within the period under scrutiny. On the qualitative side of the research, data was collected from key role-players involved in the management and administration of CAP and the NCV programme. This data was in the form of textual information gathered through semi-structured interviews with the aforementioned groups of individuals. A qualitative understanding of the effectiveness of CAP was yielded through this component of the research.

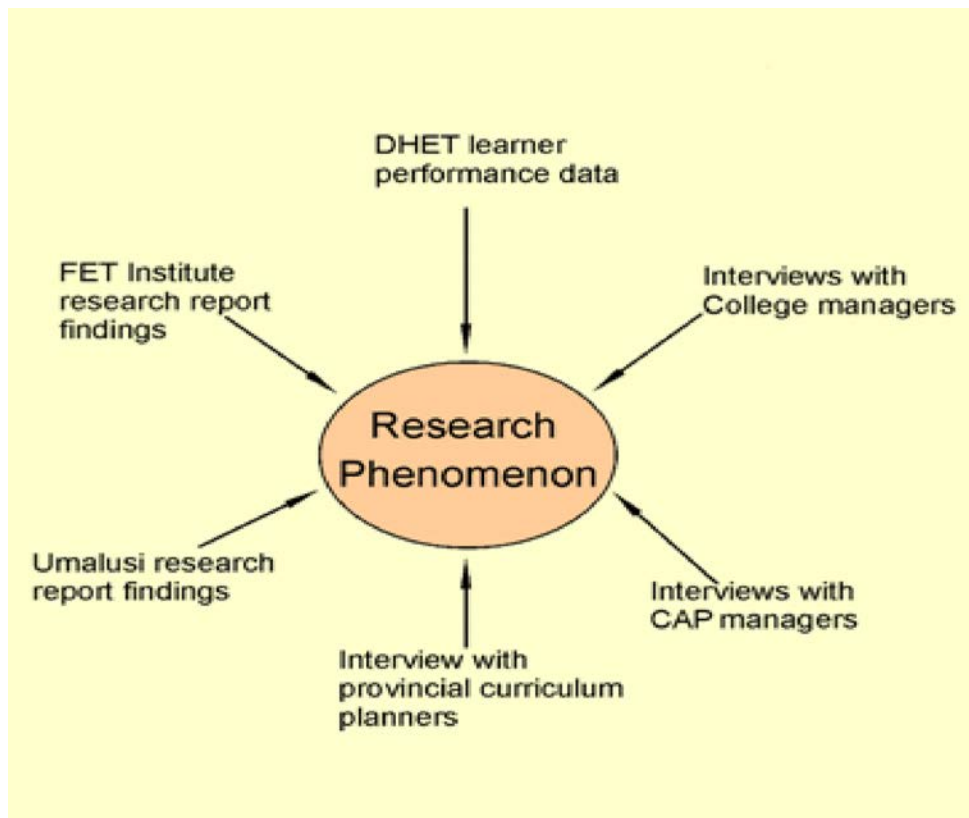


Figure: 4 Sources of data

Extensive use of graphical and tabular representations was obtained in order to generate different perspectives of the problem. Glesne (2006:156) postulates that graphics allows the researcher to display vast amounts of data in a single image or

graph. These images allowed one to observe patterns and trends otherwise difficult to comprehend. Sapsford and Jupp (2006:97) indicate that there was no single best way of collecting data since each case warranted its own method of data design. The data collection therefore took a full census of the problem as it pertained to the country as a whole. Complete census of the college population was achieved.

3.5.5 SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

According to Glesne (2006:147), analysing conversations helps the researcher to get insight into experiences so that meaningful interpretations could be made. Glesne (2006:36) also supports the idea of hosting multiple categories of interviews and stated that the more sources tapped for understanding, the richer the data and the more believable the findings. Techniques should be informed by selecting data that would promote understanding of the phenomenon and shed different perspectives on the issue.

Interviews should stimulate responses from interviewees that generate opinions, perceptions and attitudes in order to illuminate the phenomenon of inquiry (Glesne, 2006:79). Qualitative studies produce data in the form of people's words or the researcher's descriptions. Sapsford and Jupp (2006:77) set the stage for the research interviews by explaining that the researcher should observe behaviour associated with the overall topic and the research question being investigated. These will be determined by the researcher's theoretical and substantive interest. Sapsford and Jupp (2006:97) demonstrate their support for semi-structured interviews by stating that unstructured interviews have a structure since it was impossible to commence an interview with absolutely nothing. Furthermore, stating that an interview conducted in an unstructured style still comprises a degree of control of the interviewing process by the interviewer. In addition to this Sapsford and Jupp (2006:122) postulate that highly structured methods of investigation and data collection entail unacceptable levels of

reactivity no matter how well it is done. Recording interviews in detail also contributes to artificiality therefore researchers seek to rather collect data in a naturalistic manner.

Within this study, authenticity was achieved during the interviewing process by relaxing the inherent rigidity that came with highly controlled interventions. The structure of the interview schedule comprised four general themes for discussion which were introduced in the most appropriate order given the trend of each interview. The recording of data made provision for a blended approach so that the interviewer was easily able to code and jot down textual responses without interfering with the progress and flow of the interview. The fact that these interviews were telephonic strengthened its authenticity because the interviewees were not able to witness the recording process. In this manner the interviews were natural and avoided issues related to reactivity.

3.5.6 FOCUS OF THE INTERVIEWS

During the process of reviewing literature within this study, it became evident within the limited scope of the research that there were four critical focal areas on which to base the interviews namely:

- Learner performance in NCV.
- Effectiveness of CAP
- Curriculum design
- College Capacity

3.5.6.1 LEARNER PERFORMANCE

The literature review determined that within previous research undertaken within the field, remedial intervention was recommended (Umalusi, 2009:39). In addition to this the FET Institute posited that there were inadequate placement processes which were due to the learner targets set by the National Education Department (Papier, 2009:44).

Learners were therefore ill-prepared for the NCV programme which resulted in the poor performance statistics presented within this report.

The notion of poor learner performance lies at the heart of this study because the hypothesis and the research question centre around learner performance within the NCV programme. The interviewing process therefore needed to determine what the perceptions and actual reasons for poor learner performance was.

3.5.6.2 EFFECTIVENESS OF CAP

Given the young age of learners who were placed in the NCV programme, it was clear that the level of support required within the placement intervention should have been comprehensive. The experiences learned from the international best practices within this study (Washburn & Petroshuis, 2004:36; Woodhouse, 2006:32), indicate that placement was a comprehensive activity that required high-touch. CAP was therefore viewed as being inadequate given the briefness and limited engagement of the intervention. The FET Institute (Papier, 2009:44) claimed that learners were poorly matched with the NCV programme requirements and that the placement process was misguided.

It is reasonably clear that a learner placement intervention for learners as young as fifteen years needs to be learner-centred and relevant. The literature has implied that in the case of CAP, this was not so, therefore the second focus area of the interviewing process addressed the effectiveness of CAP.

3.5.6.3 CURRICULUM DESIGN

The central theme of the FET institute's report was stated as, "getting the right learner into the right programme" (Papier, 2009:44). A counter-response to this statement is,

“getting the right college for the right learner”. Implied in the latter statement is the question of whether the colleges and the education system were in good standing in terms of international standards. Papier (2009:41) also claimed that the cognitive demand of the NCV programme was too high for the poorly prepared learner. Learners on the other hand complained that the NCV programme was “too much like school” (Papier, 2009:22). Umalusi (2009:40) stated that there was no system in place for setting common tasks for the ICASS. Also lecturers were not sure of the relationship between the ICASS and the ISAT (Umalusi, 2009:40). These were the two forms of assessments resident within the NCV programme.

In order to isolate the various factors within the phenomenon, it was important to ask specific questions relating to the curriculum design so that accurate analyses and conclusions could be drawn. During the Skills Summit, Nzimande (2010) probed the audience about re-engineering the NCV curriculum. Contributions about the curriculum during the interviewing process solicited interesting feedback (*See Annexure 2*).

3.5.6.4 COLLEGE CAPACITY

The experience received at colleges by learners and parents is an important determining factor as to the choice of college by the learner (Wahsburn & Petrohuis, 2004:36). Since declining college capacity might have been the cause for poor learner performance within the NCV programme, it was crucial that the capacity of FET colleges was scrutinised during the interviews. Umalusi (2009:37), during its research, alluded to the broad systemic weaknesses that existed within colleges. Barker and Hart (1999:51), assert that clients are in search of quality services and products. It is therefore safe to say that learner performance would be compromised by an ill-equipped college. This focus area within the interviews was pertinent to the success of the study.

3.5.7 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

According to Wikipedia (2010:1), the definition of data analysis is as follows:

“data analysis is the process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming and modeling data with the goal of highlighting useful information, suggesting conclusions and supporting decision making. Data analysis has multiple facets and approaches encompassing diverse techniques under a variety of names, in different businesses, science and social science domains.”

This definition therefore elucidates that data analysis forms a crucial ingredient in the task of scientific research, especially that which aims to yield valid and reliable findings. The data analysis process was built on a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Therefore the aforementioned inspection and modelling has guided the manner in which the data had been arranged and presented so that the phenomenon was understood both educationally as well as systemically. Sapsford and Jupp (2006:22) promote the idea of comparisons as a central logical device for establishing the validity of a line of argument. Furthermore, they state that comparisons inform questions that prompt interests as to why groups differ from each other.

Raw quantitative data obtained from the DoE was manually reformatted from MS Word format to that of MS Excel in order to allow for manipulation and filtering. This involved separating Mathematical literacy performance data from that of English (first additional language). In addition CAP participating colleges were also separated from those who participated in the intervention. The manipulation of the data allowed for the creation of Pie Charts and Histograms. Presenting the quantitative data into its various forms promoted an enhanced understanding of the problem. This process informed the thematisation process of structuring the interviewing schedule in order to systematically retrieve qualitative data from the interviewees. The semi-structured interviewing schedule was designed with a semantic differential scale as well as a facility for textual input on the same schedule. This provision allowed the interviewer to capture coded data as well as textual information. De Vos (as quoted by Radloff, 2008:32) postulates that a combined approach of data collection informs the meaningful study of a given topic under investigation. In essence, the CAP impact study involved semi-structured

interviews that were not 'in-depth' (Welman et al., 2006:211) since the quantitative data formed the basis of the study. The qualitative data obtained through the aforementioned interviews added secondary meaning to the irrevocable reality of poor learner performance as established by the quantitative data retrieved from DoE. It is in this light that the method of thematisation and coding was determined during the planning phase of the semi-structured interviews. Five broad themes were thus created within which the data was considered and analysed. The interviewing schedule (see Annexure 2) was setup in terms of the following themes:

- Learner performance
- Effectiveness of CAP
- Curriculum design
- College capacity
- Rural / urban issues

3.6 THEME RELEVANCE

Apart from the indication of culpability inherent in Figure 4.11, the semi-structured interviews have also yielded information pertaining to the level of interest of the four predetermined themes contained in the interview schedule. While conducting the telephonic interviews, a determination of the interviews' subliminal interest levels in the four themes was obtained. These were useful in gauging the relevance of the interview schedule as well as the broader integrity of the study. A matrix comprising a frequency and coding facility formed the instrument through which this information was obtained. (See Annexure: 4)

3.7 OBJECTIVITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

In keeping with Glesne (2006:36), multiple data collection methods promote trustworthiness and confidence. This report has avoided the influence of bias and

amplification of certain viewpoints caused through selective perception. This was achieved by ensuring that all input was considered equally and the analyses thereof were based on objective merit (Dyson & Brown, 2006:10). Given the combined approach of quantitative and qualitative research under the auspices of an *ex post facto*, evaluation methodology, sufficient confidence was conveyed regarding the elimination of reactivity usually caused by highly controlled elements and biases. Stinchcombe (2005:13) asserts that in casting the net wide, one is able to find distinctions among phenomena. The gathering and utilisation of data should not be too focused so that it misses the relevant phenomena, which are often only understood through a variety of data sources and types.

This impact study was not funded by any external party and therefore it was impartial in its aims and in its approach. Critical analyses, coupled with broad participation of qualitative input, have been the basis upon which points were analysed. Furthermore cognisance has been taken of the Umalusi report as well as that of the FET Institute. Within these reports there has been vertical input from learners to that of national education role players. The research has therefore scrutinised the essence of all the relevant sources in order to ensure authenticity of the findings. Glesne (2006) postulates, that the trustworthiness of data is affected by the upfront statement of the limitations in the research.

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The semi-structured interviews with learner support managers involved a census of all participating FET colleges nationally. However, regarding the curriculum experts, interviews were restricted to Western Cape. Given the obvious cost implications, the decision to interview the curriculum experts within the Western Cape was based on the fact that none of the other provinces had a provincial curriculum directorate for NCV programmes. Colleges in these provinces provided their own curriculum development support activities.

As stated previously, the aim of this research was to evaluate the impact of CAP; however, the recommendations were limited only to the five identified themes listed under the research methodology. Even though the CAP test comprised three elements namely numeracy, literacy and placement, this research only focuses on two aspects of CAP for example, English first additional language and Mathematical literacy. The reason for this decision is based on the fact that nonparticipating colleges (the controlled group) would be less compatible with the experimental group had placements been included, therefore rendering comparisons invalid.

3.9 CONCLUSION

It was important for this report to demonstrate a scientific approach in its evaluation of the impact of CAP as it pertained to the NCV programmes within the FET Colleges. A major emphasis of the approach was to ensure that generalisation and applicability were possible across the country so that educational decisions by government were beneficial to all the colleges and more so, to the learners. In spite of the limitations of the study being conducted from within the Western Cape, data involving all 50 FET colleges within the country have been analysed and have formed part of the findings yielded herein.

The trustworthiness of the research is underpinned by the multiple sources of data collected and analysed. This aspect of the research satisfied the concepts of triangulation and authenticity of the data collection and analysis processes that were conducted. Given that policy makers seek feasibility in their decision making, it is crucial that the findings yielded within the report generate confidence amongst key stakeholders and role-players within government (Garbers, 1996:246).

The value of the use of a quasi-experimental research approach has afforded the inherent processes within this research to avoid the peculiarities associated with the

phenomenon and its circumstantial issues. The research design and methodology has accommodated an approach that promoted accuracy through the inclusion of an *ex post facto* methodology which eradicates reactivity obstacles and embraces a naturalistic approach (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006:122). The combination of qualitative and quantitative components allow for a balance within the approach that would satisfy schools of thought located within the various camps of academia.

However, in further defense of the above design, the fact that the total targeted population was integrated within the research makes for satisfying confidence and trustworthiness. Furthermore, the limitations of the study are those that are governed by budgetary and time constraints; however, meaningful participation of respondents across the country ensured that a comprehensive perspective was gathered through the research. The presentation of a variety of graphical representation has ensured that relevant and sometimes hidden perspectives were brought to the fore (Glesne, 2006:136).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is dedicated to the systematic analysis of both historical learner performance data retrieved from the national DHET, as well as qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with learner support management staff as well as with curriculum experts located within the WCED. The first objective within this analysis was to present the landscape of FET colleges both participating and non-participating within the country. Secondly, the presentation of evidence that testifies to the learner performance within the NCV level 2 programme delivered at FET Colleges. This data comprises learners who had undergone CAP assessment as well as those who have not participated due to voluntary non-subscription of certain colleges. The final data group comprises the presentation of crucial qualitative data extrapolated from the semi-structured interviews conducted with key personnel at colleges as well as within the WCED. These data sets have been used to determine correlations that exist between them so as to highlight significant issues pertaining to the phenomenon under scrutiny.

It is safe to say that the study comprised an exhaustive census of the country's total target population of public FET colleges. Accordingly reliable generalisations were extrapolated from the analysis of the data. Given the rural and urban geographic setup within the country, cognisance of the socioeconomic dynamics has also been factored into the data analysis so as to ensure reliability and validity of the findings. It is important to understand the phenomenon within the developmental status of the country so as to accurately apportion cause and effect to the relevant elements within the study.

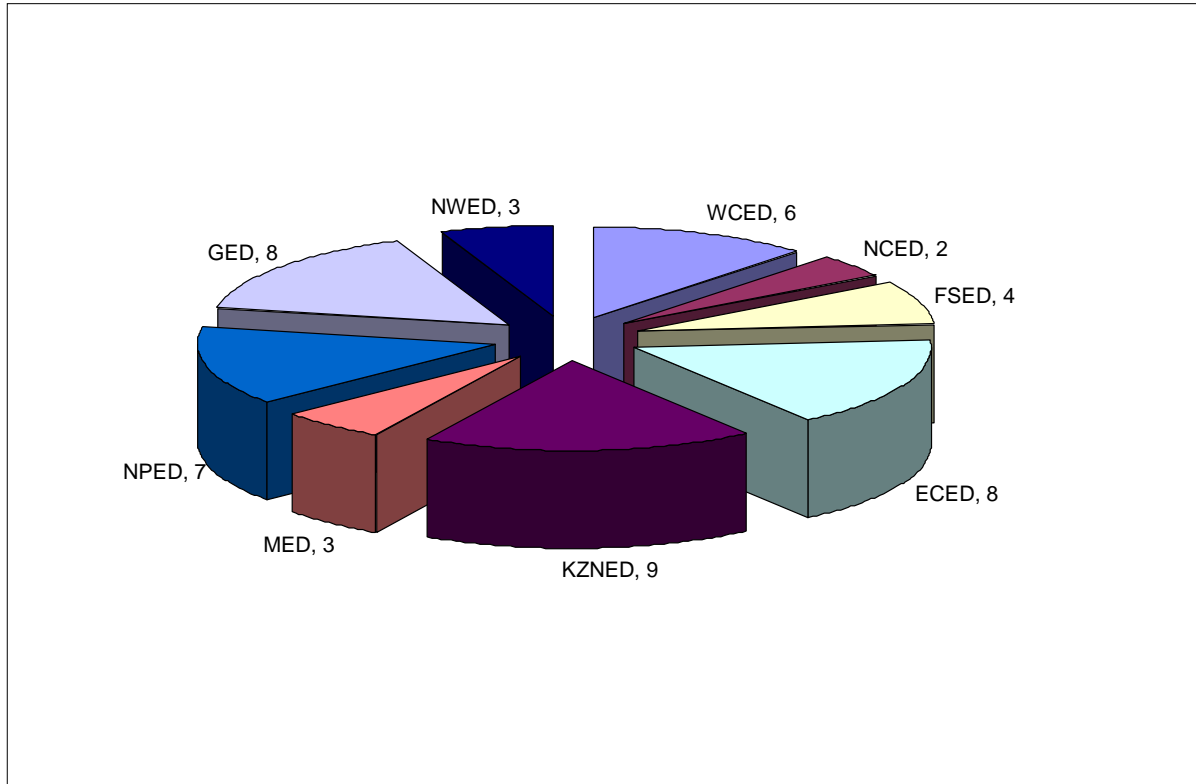


Figure 4.1 *FET colleges landscape*

Legend

- GED = Gauteng Education Department.
- ECED = Eastern Cape Education Department.
- KZNED = Kwazulu Natal Education Department.
- MED = Mpumalanga Education Department.
- NCED = Northern Cape Education Department.
- NPED = Northern Province Education Department.
- FSED = Free State Education Department.
- NWED = North West Education Department.
- WCED = Western Cape Education Department.

There are currently fifty FET Colleges within South Africa comprising close to 300 campuses. The graph depicts colleges within the full spectrum of the socioeconomic

dispensations in the country. These include rural and urban regions associated with the respective colleges participating in CAP. The regional break down has been at the heart of the diverse array of responses received, which pertained to significant issues within the phenomenon involving CAP. Within the analysis of the various data sources obtained careful consideration has been given to the location of both colleges and learners within their respective regions. The location of learners and colleges were seen to be crucial in understanding the manner in which NCV performance has been experienced by the former and latter parties.

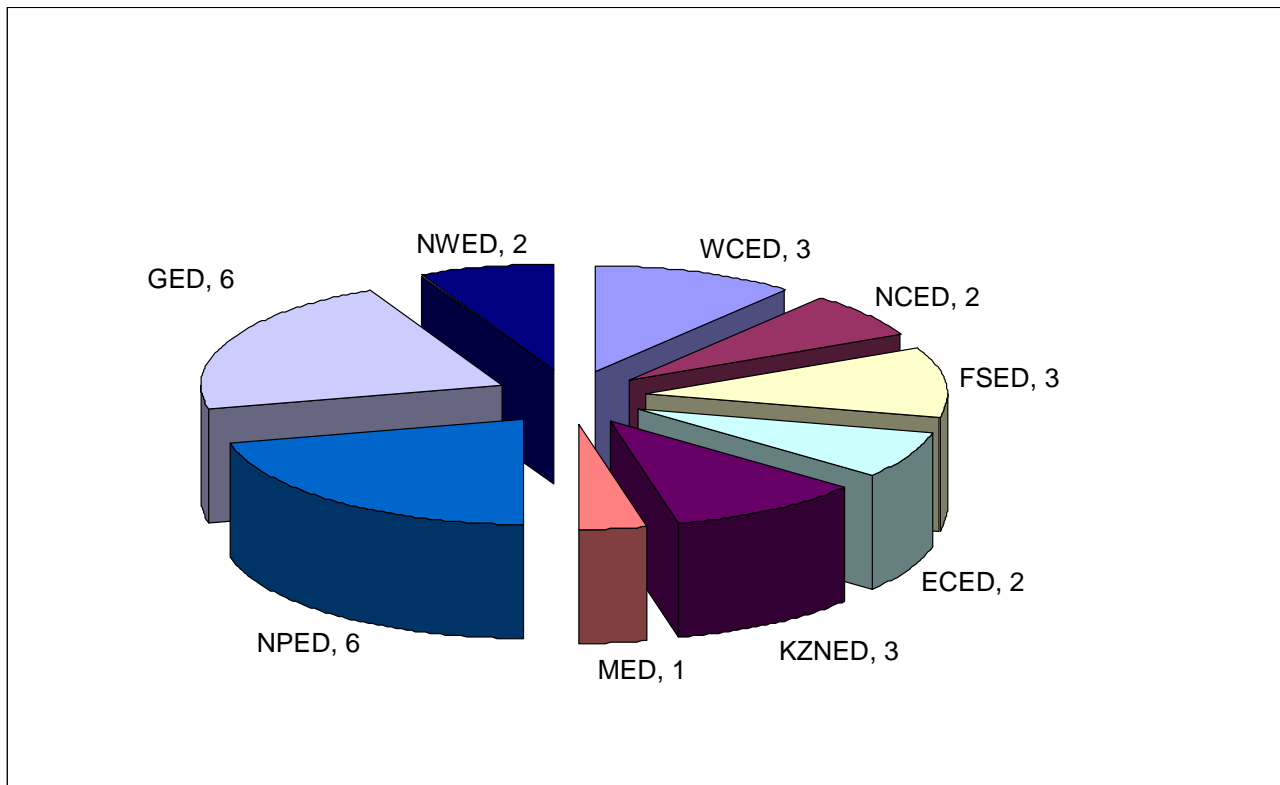


FIGURE 4.2 *Participating FET colleges per province*

In comparing Fig 4.1 and Fig 4.2, it is clear that there was mixed support for the CAP test where participation ranged from 100% down to as little as 25% per province .

Within the analysis of the data received, reasons for the mixed levels of participation were cited as being due to various influences namely:

- Financial constraints.
- Implementation capacity.
- The existence of competing systems (e.g. PACE and other generic methods)
- Resource constraints.
- Lack of information about the intervention.

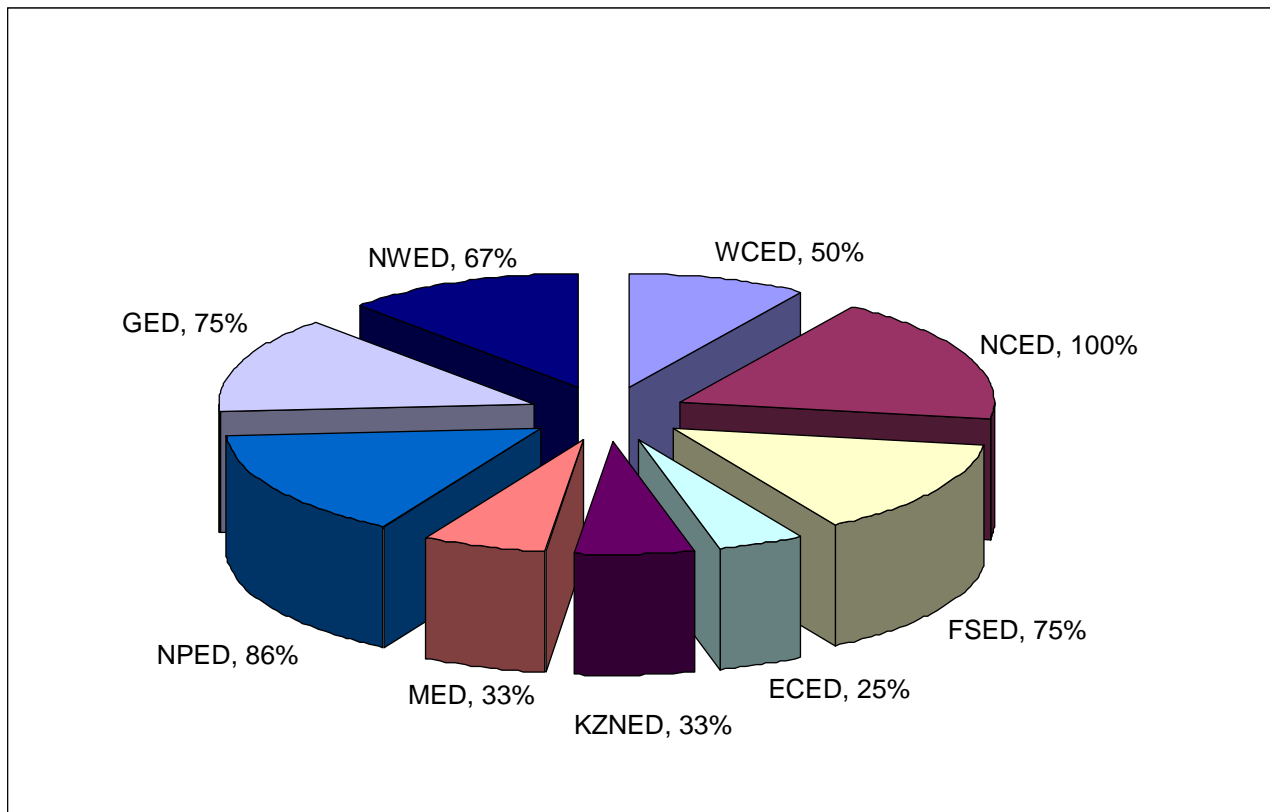


FIGURE 4.3 *Percentage of participating FET colleges per province.*

Within the landscape of 50 colleges, 27 participated within the CAP test intervention. Although the participation within the various provinces does not follow a uniform pattern, consistencies within the obtained data exist. These consistencies involve key socioeconomic imperatives within the country; however, it does not undermine the

investigation concerning the impact of CAP within the country's FET colleges. Having said this, the research does take cognisance of the urban and rural participation of colleges in CAP. These are discussed in the subsequent graphs listed below.

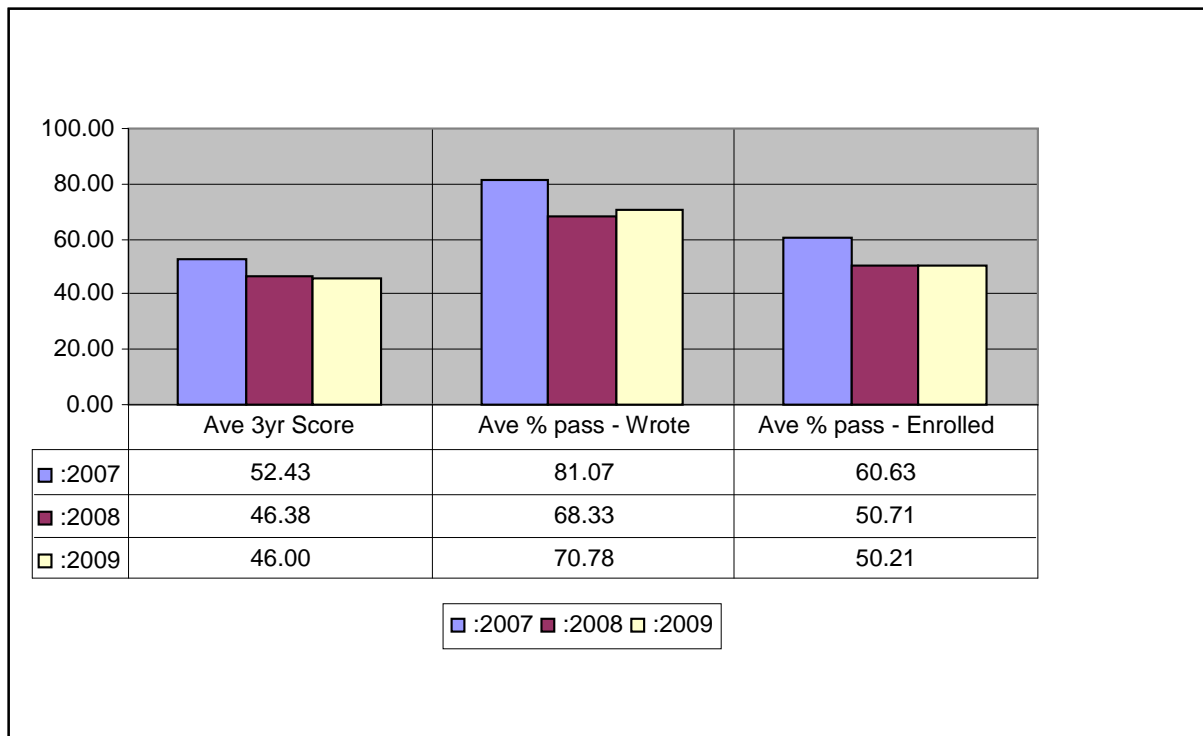


FIGURE 4.4 *Combined trend for English 2007 - 2009*

This set of bar graphs measures learner performance for the following three categories:

- Column One: The average score for registered learners in all colleges who wrote the English (first additional language) exam.
- Column Two: The average pass rate for all colleges with learners who wrote the English (first additional language) exam.
- Column Three: The average pass rate for all colleges including learners who did not write the English (first additional language) exam.

From this graph we can see that indiscriminate learner performance data depicts that there was a decline in performance for the year, 2009 when CAP was implemented as

compared with 2008. The data is fairly consistent throughout all three columns. Important to note is that this graph includes CAP participating as well and non-participating colleges. Equally important, is the fact that the year 2007 experienced better performance than the subsequent years. When comparing column three to column two, the difference between the corresponding columns indicates the percentage of learners who did not write the exams; therefore it is safe to deduce that they have dropped out. For the year 2009, the dropout percentage was higher than that of 2008 and equal to that of 2007. Note, the above graph includes participating as well as non-participating colleges pertaining to English.

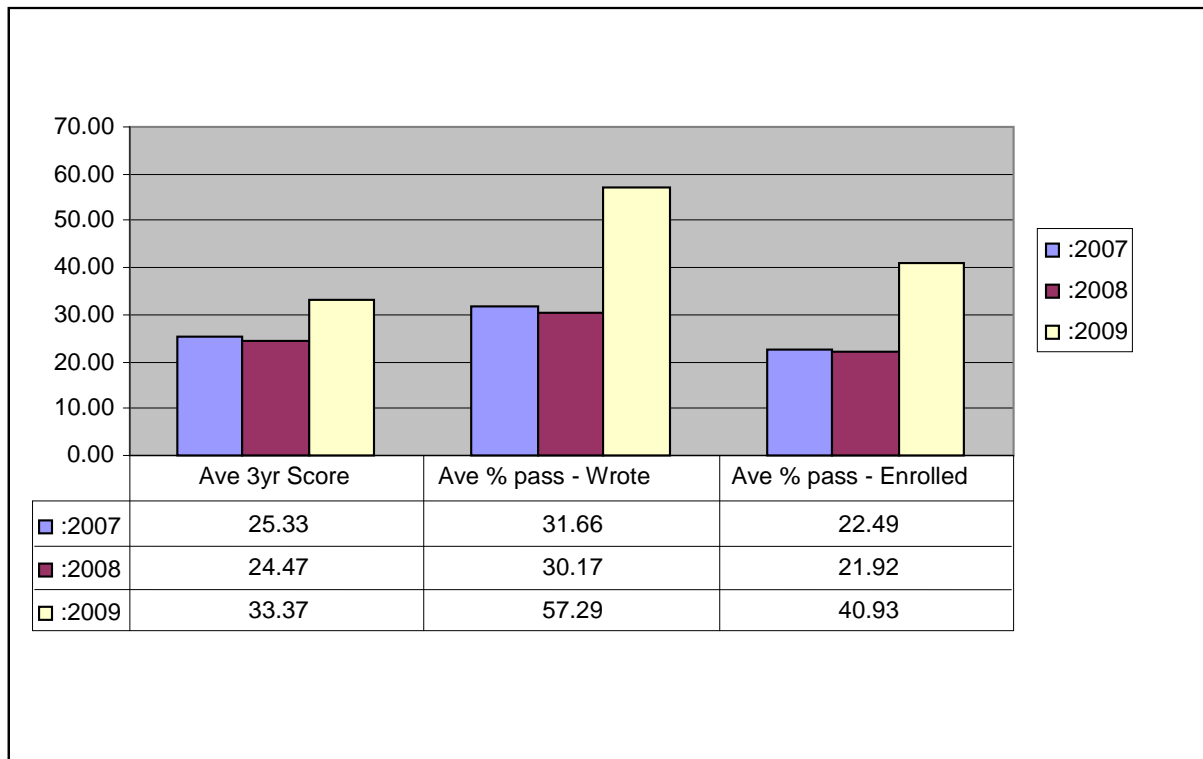


FIGURE 4.5 Combined trend for Maths Lit 2007 - 2009

This set of bar graphs measure learner performance for the following three categories:

- Column One: The average score for registered learners in all colleges who wrote the Mathematical literacy exam.

- Column Two: The average pass rate for all colleges with learners who wrote the Mathematical literacy exam.
- Column Three: The average pass rate for all colleges including learners who did not write the Mathematical literacy exam.

From the above graph we can see that indiscriminate learner performance data depicts that there was a strong incline in performance for the year, 2009. It is however important to note that this graph reflects both groups of colleges: CAP participating colleges as well as non-participating colleges. This fact needs to be borne in mind throughout the analysis. The data in this set of graphs is consistent throughout all three columns for Mathematical literacy. The collective data suggests that CAP has caused positive improvements within the colleges as a whole pertaining to Mathematical literacy; however it needs to be noted that this is a combined view – experimental as well as control groups.

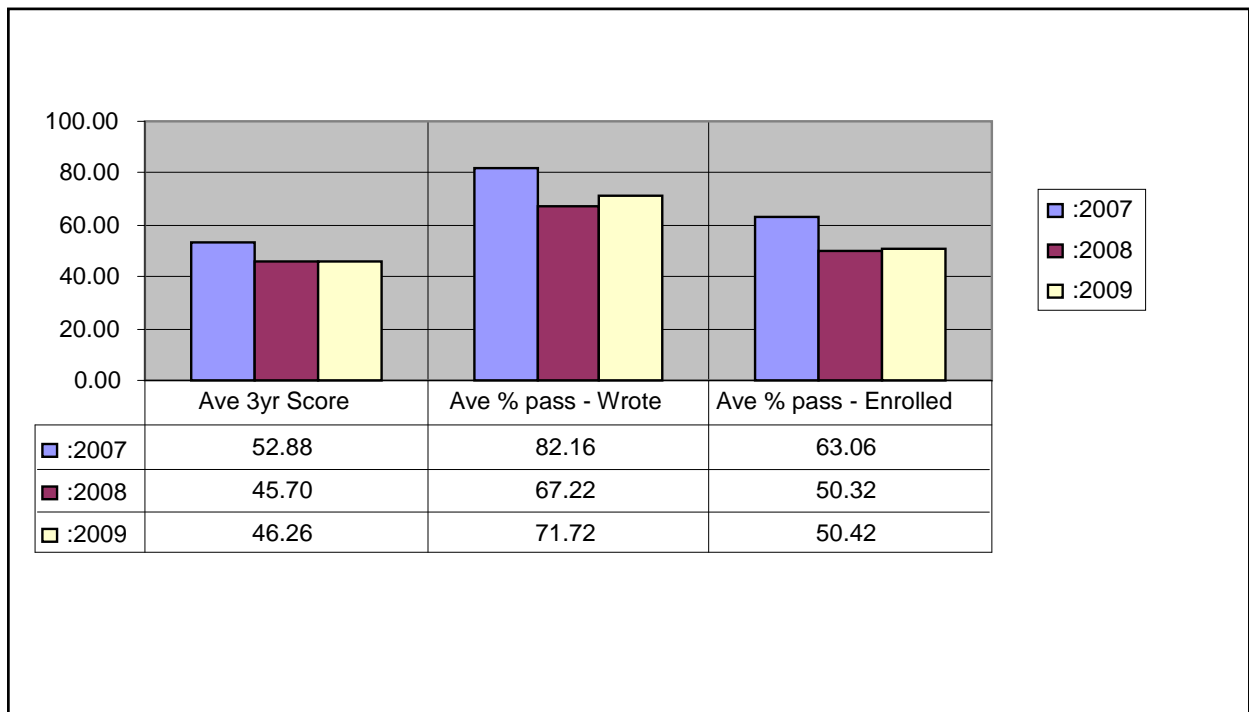


FIGURE 4.6 *Experimental group trend for English 2007 - 2009*

This set of bar graphs measures learner performance for the following three categories:

- Column One: The average score for registered learners in CAP participation colleges who wrote the English (first additional language) exam
- Column Two: The average pass rate for CAP participating colleges with learners who wrote the English (first additional language) exam
- Column Three: The average pass rate for CAP participation colleges including learners who did not write the English (first additional language) exam

From this graph we can see that CAP learner performance data for English (first additional language) depicts that there was a general decline in performance since 2007. Learner performance as depicted in column one has not shown any improvement, therefore it is safe to conclude that within this subject CAP has not demonstrated effectiveness except within column two which reflects learners who wrote the exam, more learners passed in 2009 than in 2008. Important to note is that column two disregards learners who dropped out of the programme; therefore in essence it only reflects stronger learners within the programme who were granted access to the final exam.

The discrepancy reflected in column two and three suggests that CAP participating colleges have not recovered from the high dropout rate that existed in the two years prior to CAP implementation. Although a miniscule improvement is depicted in columns two and three, the difference between the two represents unsuccessful learners. These would be as a result of either dropping out of the programme or failing the exam. This therefore demonstrates that in the case of English (first additional language), the “unsuccessful” learner rate did not improve during the CAP implementation in 2009. The data therefore does not depict any significance regarding improvements yielded through the CAP intervention. Important to note, is that the year 2007 experienced better performance than the subsequent years throughout all three categories of columns.

This trend implies CAP has not had an improved effect on the learners within the English subject. It is therefore fair to say that in considering the two subjects under scrutiny, English would be the more critical of the two. Since 2007 the statistics show that there has been a steady decline in learner performance in this subject. The efficacy of CAP particularly within this subject would be of immense interest given its alarming decline. In other words there has been no interference in the negative trend within the subject.

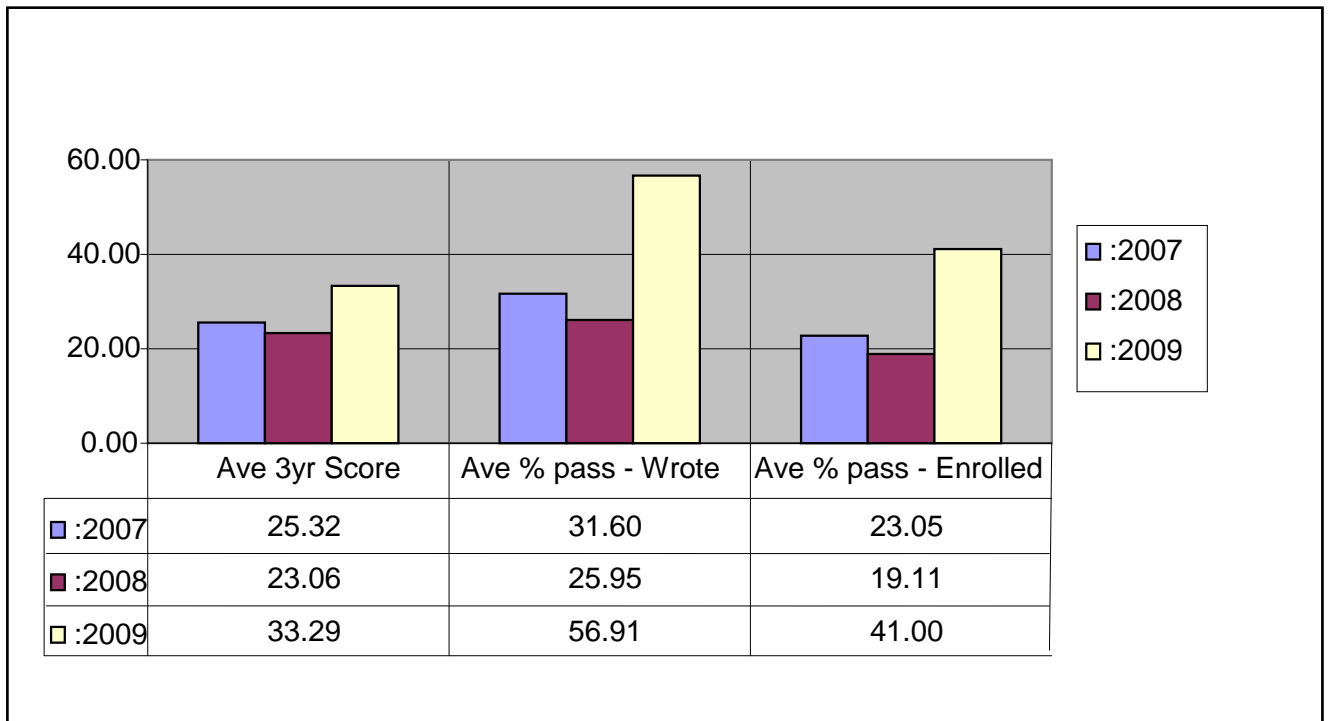


FIGURE 4.7 *Experimental group trend for Maths lit. 2007 - 2009*

This set of bar graphs measures learner performance for the following three categories:

- Column One: The average score for registered learners in CAP participation colleges who wrote the Mathematical literacy exam.
- Column Two: The average pass rate for CAP participating colleges with learners who wrote the Mathematical literacy exam.

- Column Three: The average pass rate for CAP participation colleges including learners who did not write the Mathematical literacy exam.

From the above graph we can see that the CAP learner performance data depicts that there was an overwhelming escalation in performance during the CAP year, 2009. The data suggests that there was a threatening decline in performance from 2007 to 2008 yet during 2009 a significant improvement was achieved. This suggests that CAP was effective within the Mathematical literacy component of the NCV programme. On the other hand, it is also important to note that the perceived dropout rate during 2009 was greater than the subsequent years. So even though, amongst those who wrote, relatively high performance was achieved yet learner retention was poorer than subsequent years. This somewhat frustrates the apparent success suggested within the data.

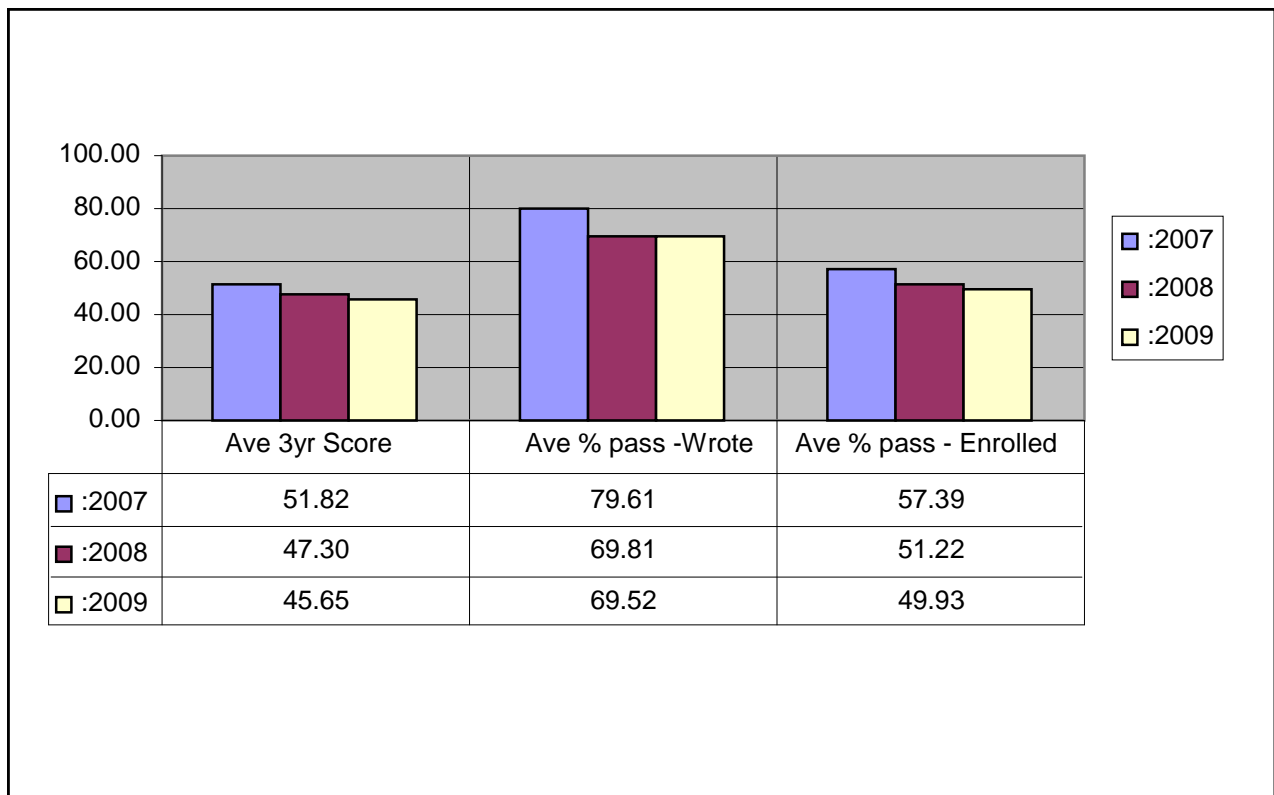


FIGURE 4.8 Control group trend for English 2007 - 2009

This set of bar graphs measures learner performance for the following three categories:

- Column One: The average score for registered learners in non-participating colleges who wrote the English (first additional language) exam.
- Column Two: The average pass rate for Non-participating colleges with learners who wrote the English (first additional language) exam.
- Column Three: The average pass rate for Non-participation colleges including learners who did not write the English (first additional language) exam.

From the depiction of the above graph we can see that amongst the non-participating colleges, the performance in English (first additional language) has declined significantly since 2007. Yet in both sets of data (i.e. control and experimental) the trend in performance in English (first additional language) has not been satisfactory since both groups have not managed to match or better the performance scores of 2007. Having said this, the graph depicts that CAP colleges have demonstrated miniscule improvements as compared with its counterpart colleges.

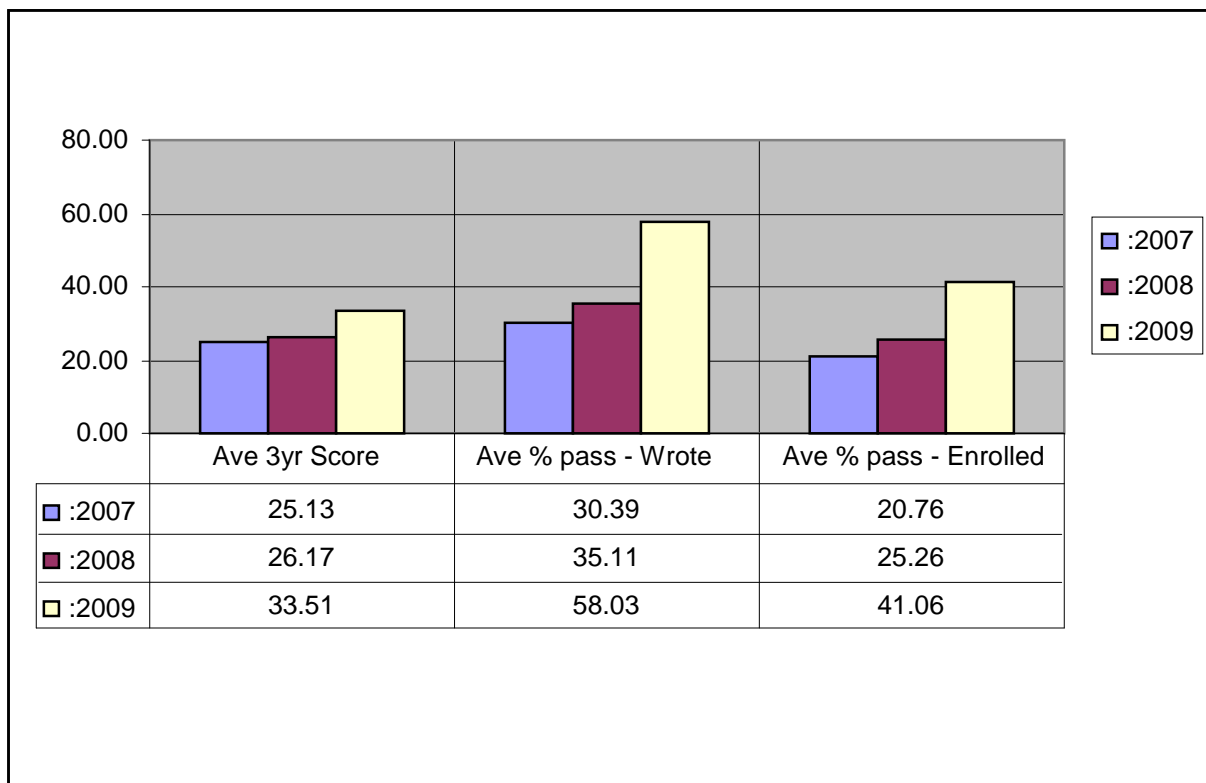


FIGURE 4.9 Control group trend for Maths lit 2007 - 2009

This set of bar graphs measures learner performance for the following three categories:

- Column One: The average score for registered learners in non-participating colleges who wrote the Mathematical literacy exam.
- Column Two: The average pass rate for non-participating colleges with learners who wrote the Mathematical literacy exam.
- Column Three: The average pass rate for non-participation colleges including learners who did not write the Mathematical literacy exam.

From this graph we can conclude that amongst the non-participating colleges, the performance in mathematical literacy has been ironic since exponential improvements have been registered as was also the case with the experimental group. In both sets of data there is congruence in the trend in improved learner performance. Even though the control group did not benefit from the CAP intervention, colleges within this group have out-performed colleges in the experimental group within the first and third data columns. Subliminal data within the graph shows that the control group demonstrated a significant performance trend during 2008 within all three categories of data. This suggests that the control group might be stronger than the experimental group. However, this also means that given that the performance of the experimental group outperformed the control group during 2009 that CAP might have contributed to the miniscule improvements in Mathematical literacy.

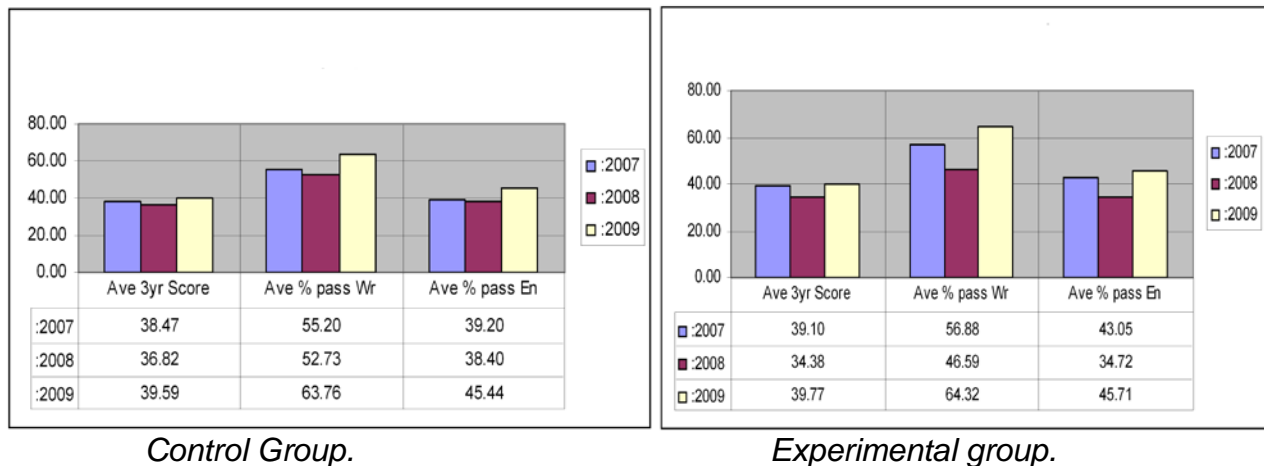


FIGURE 4.10 Control and Experimental comparison for English and Maths lit 2007 - 2009.

This set of bar graphs compares the learner performance data for English (first additional language) and Mathematical literacy of the control group with that of the experimental group. In both graphs the data contained across three categories are expressed in the following columns:

- Column One: The average score for learners in wrote the English (first additional language) and Mathematical literacy exams
- Column Two: The average pass rate for colleges with learners who wrote the English (first additional language) and Mathematical literacy exams
- Column Three: The average pass rate for colleges including learners who did not write the English (first additional language) and Mathematical literacy exams

The comparison of performance data during 2009 is insignificant because the scores are very close albeit that the experimental group has a miniscule edge on that of the control group. Both sets of data (i.e. control and experimental groups) present an improvement over the subsequent years. In addition to this, both sets of data also disrupt the negative trend that had emerged since 2007. It once again becomes apparent that CAP has not necessarily enhanced the performance of learners within the NCV level 2 programme. Likewise within the dropout rate, comparisons within the two groups prove similar. At this stage it is important to note that the notion of ineffectiveness of the CAP intervention is premature since further analyses of the phenomenon has highlighted additional causes for the problem of poor learner performance.

Within the following set of data, the researcher has elicited qualitative input from the participating colleges. The learner support managers at these colleges were interviewed using a semi-structured manner where the aim was to ascertain their understanding of issues relating to the following themes:

- Their views on the state of learner performance.
- The effectiveness of CAP.
- The appropriateness of the curriculum.

- The effectiveness of the colleges and broader education system.

During the interviews, data was obtained in two formats, namely that of a six point semantic scale coded with numerals ranging from 1 to 6. In conjunction with this, the template made provision for narrative observations and input. The narrative data reinforced that of the coded data so as to facilitate an accurate analysis of the phenomenon and more importantly to bolster a qualitative perspective into the phenomenon (See Annexure 3).

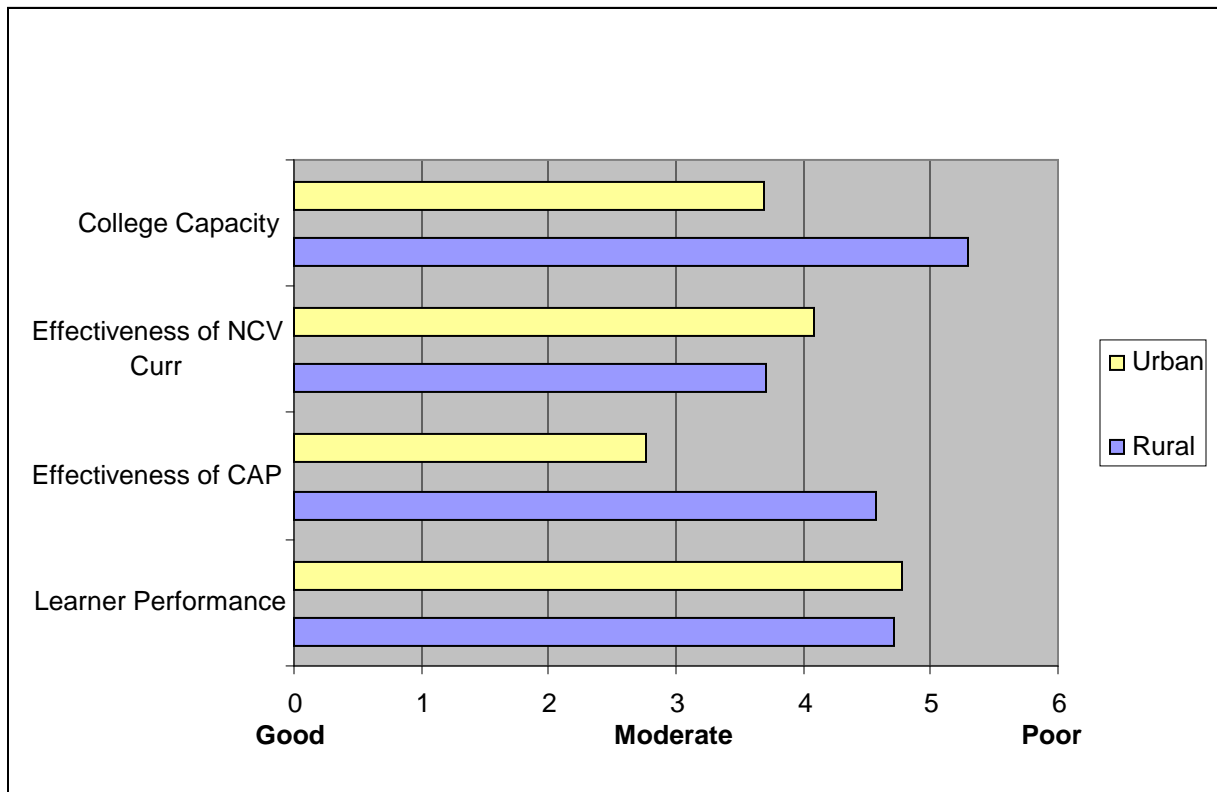


FIGURE 4.11 *Urban and rural perspective on interview themes*

The above graph depicts responses from key individuals within CAP participating college learner support units pertaining to four critical themes that might have been responsible either fully or in part for causing the apparent poor learner performance

within the NCV level 2 programme. The graph separates rural and urban response data in order to promote a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. During the semi-structured interviewing process, the four topics were dealt with individually so as to promote a meaningful understanding of the perceived issues. Suffice to say that amongst all colleges there was compelling consensus about the state of poor learner performance within the NCV programme. The views on poor learner performance are well documented by Umalusi (2009:39) and the FET Institute (2009:44). Given the input gathered from the interviews with the learner support managers, poor performance is of common knowledge to the colleges sector; therefore reporting on the details of poor learner performance is secondary to this study. It has however formed the basis upon which the investigation has been built.

4.2 COLLEGE CAPACITY

As gleaned from the graph in Figure 4.11, the tendency of the responses regarding the capacity at colleges as a contributing factor towards poor learner performance extended deep into the negative quarters of the graph, with rural colleges presenting a dire need for improvements in resources linked to the colleges' ability to effectively deliver the NCV programme. Although urban colleges registered a moderate need within the institutions' capacity, this was also alarming since only two colleges amongst the 27 being interviewed indicated that their institutions were adequately resourced. Amongst those who indicated that their infrastructure and equipment were in place, these also indicated that they were finding it difficult to attract and retain competent staff. In some cases institutions resorted to employing ex-students to teach NCV classes. One of the colleges reported that within the results yielded from an exit questionnaire learners have reported that educators were incompetent. (*See Annexure 5 for a complete list of responses linked to college capacity.*)

4.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NCV CURRICULUM

Figure 4.11 depicts both rural and urban colleges holding similar views about the appropriateness of the NCV curriculum. These were indicative of a mal-aligned curriculum with vague level descriptors and learning outcomes. This was the cause of many educators being uncertain about the width and depth of the learning content. The interviews also reflected data that indicated that most of the technical subjects like engineering and electronics were pitched too high for the learners to master. Educators reportedly were often not sufficiently equipped to teach these subjects which exacerbated the issue of recruiting competent staff for the subject. Since the implementation of the NCV programme many educators left the teaching fraternity. *(See annexure 2 for a complete list of responses linked to the NCV curriculum.)*

4.4 EFFECTIVENESS OF CAP

The graph in Figure 4.11 clearly depicts the ability that urban colleges had in being able to utilise the CAP test. Given that the test provided a paper based option as well as a computer based option urban colleges reported being better positioned to accommodate the computer-based option which meant that the labour intensive activities associated with CAP was reduced whereas rural colleges were grappling with laborious CAP processes which often proved counter-productive. Having said this, the graph also shows that very few colleges were completely satisfied with CAP. Many reported that the test was time consuming and also too difficult for learners. In addition to this the multiple-choice structure of the test caused learners to guess for the answers in an attempt at attaining higher marks. This notion was corroborated in an interview with Dodd (2010), the software development manager of CAP. He stated that an additional option was added to the multiple-choice structure so that learners would not easily guess the correct answer. A significant number of interviewees reported that the career placement mechanism within the test was not effective. Learners were allowed to deviate from the career advice generated by the test. Many respondents lost faith in

the accuracy of the analysis of CAP. This was due to the fact that the CAP test was a totally inclusive instrument which did not exclude any learner but only highlighted learning gaps. To this end colleges were saddled with all who applied for the NCV programme. It was the responsibility of colleges to provide the support required by the learners. This had proven to be an insurmountable task, too demanding for most colleges to achieve. See Annexure 6 for a complete list of responses linked to the effectiveness of CAP.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In the analysis of the data presented within this chapter it is important to note that the CAP test intervention embraces two subjects within the NCV programme, namely Mathematical literacy and English first additional language. Therefore it is crucial to assess the data pertaining to these individual subjects in order to fully appreciate the impact of the intervention. In order to objectively assess the effectiveness of the intervention five categories of data were assessed namely:

- Comparative performance scores from quasi-experimental and control groups pertaining only to English (first additional language).
- Comparative performance scores from quasi-experimental and control groups pertaining only to Mathematical literacy.
- Comparative performance scores from quasi-experimental and control groups pertaining to both subjects as a collective.
- Comparative analysis in dropout rates pertaining to both subjects as a collective.
- An analysis of the qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted in accordance with four predetermined research themes.

Analyses of the descriptive data suggest that both the control and experimental groups showed a decline in English performance and an increase in Mathematical performance. There appears to be no difference between the experimental and control

group. This places a question on the effectiveness of CAP in its ability to advance learner performance in terms of presented data.

This means that those colleges that have not participated in the intervention have performed equally poorly as was articulated by the respondents within the interviewing process. In two accounts, i.e. the performance levels in each data column, and the dropout proportions extrapolated from columns two and three, minimal improvements have been registered within the study. A critical analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviewing process was conducted in order to generate meaning to the aforementioned data.

In Figure 4.11, it appears that all learner support managers responded negatively to the questions about CAP effectiveness. This negative trend has generally prevailed within all the themes central to the interviews and was ultimately indicative of the poor learner performance within the NCV programme. According to respondents within selected urban colleges, the CAP intervention was satisfactory in its capability to assess the learners' competencies. These few colleges were generally well resourced therefore had the capacity to effectively implement the CAP intervention. Responses within the interviewing process show that the majority of rural colleges have expressed dissatisfaction with the CAP in its ability to improve learner placement and performance. They have also apportioned accountability towards the other elements within the phenomenon namely the curriculum, and colleges' capacity to deliver both the curriculum and CAP. They were unanimous about the issue of learners being weak and not ready for the challenging NCV curriculum.

Albeit that the quantitative performance data testifies to the poor learner performance within the NCV programme, the apportionment of culpability could reasonably reside with any of the elements attached to the qualitative data analysis. Therefore it would be superficial to support a view that holds poor learner performance as a result of an ineffective learner placement system which in this case is CAP. The success of CAP is determined firstly by its ability to identify learning gaps within the learners' competency

levels, and secondly the colleges' ability to provide the prescribed learner support required for the individual cases identified by CAP. It is therefore crucial to note that if a college did not possess the requisite capacity to provide learner support for the identified gaps, the CAP intervention would naturally lose its efficacy due to the lack of capacity for follow-through by the college. The lack of follow-through represents short-sightedness on the part of CAP, and a serious short-coming in the design of the intervention. Pertinent to this analysis is that a performance-based recruitment intervention which comprises a mandatory acceptance policy places an insurmountable burden on the support unit of a college. Stated differently, the relationship between the recruitment agency and the colleges is futile given the accountability for learner support. It is in this light that the opportunity for considering an alternative to a performance-based recruitment system becomes more attractive and more so, necessary.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this research study the aim has been to firstly determine whether the impact of the CAP test implemented within FET colleges during 2009 had been effective in improving the poor performance of learners within the NCV programme. In the evaluation of the CAP test intervention, a crucial secondary question was asked: “is the problem of poor learner performance only a learner issue, or is it an indication of a broader educational system failure?” The latter refers to the quality of the NCV curriculum and the capacity that colleges should have in order to deliver the NCV programmes and the CAP test.

The approach in determining answers to these two elements of the research was addressed by obtaining the national learner performance data associated with the NCV programme in order to provide evidence of the poor performance and to understand how this poor performance played out within the college sector. Since the CAP intervention was essentially a placement test for learners entering the NCV programme at NQF level 2, only learner performance data pertaining to this level was analysed. Qualitative data pertaining to the second element being that of the broader educational systemic issues was obtained through semi-structured telephonic interviews with learner support managers at CAP participating colleges. These colleges made up 54 percent of the total FET colleges within the country. In order to obtain insight into the NCV programme and the affected subjects, interviews were undertaken with two curriculum experts within the WCED. The CAP test comprises three streams of testing, namely English first additional language, Mathematical literacy and a career advice component. Since data pertaining to the latter was not available for the non-CAP participating colleges, the analyses focused only on the Mathematical literacy and the English first additional language for the two college groups within the study.

5.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Given the political dynamics at play during the conceptualisation phase of the NCV programme during the initial years of 2000, managers within the DoE at the time were placed under pressure to deliver on the skills development objectives of JIPSA and AsgiSA (DoE, 2006:5). This refers in part to the fact that the NCV programme, although touted as being a practically orientated course did not enjoy the crucial backing from the SETAs which resided under the DoL. This meant that important curriculum and industry issues pertaining to the programme were seriously compromised. A critical example of this was the absence of an experiential learning component within the programme. This brings to the fore the first limitation of this study. Given the limited scope of this dissertation, the study does not dwell on the aforementioned political forces and related short-comings but has as its main focus the impact of CAP as an intervention targeted at addressing the poor learner performance within the NCV programme.

The second limitation refers to the omission of the careers advice element of the CAP intervention. As stated previously the careers advice element of CAP was largely routine and comprised a careers interest questionnaire of which the results were not binding on learners. In addition to this, the control group within the quasi-experiment would not have been able to participate in this aspect of the study because placement data did not exist for the group. The research therefore only utilised the numeracy and literacy subjects within the CAP test because they were common to both study groups. Qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with learner support managers at colleges contained elements of dissatisfaction with the fact that learners showed disregard for the non-binding career advice yielded by CAP.

Although the research was located within the faculty of Human Resources Development, enquiry into the elements of systems performance at the colleges has been limited so as to focus only on the impact of CAP. The scope of this research therefore does not scrutinise and verify issues relating to the capacity at college institutions even though a significant number of responses that emanated from the

interviews made reference to these issues as being central to the poor learner performance. One of the key intentions of this quasi-experimental research was to lay the foundation into further enquiry pertaining to quality improvements within the FET colleges and its programmes.

5.3 FINDINGS FROM THE LEARNER PERFORMANCE DATA

In the comparative analysis of the charts generated from the learner performance data obtained from the National Education Department, it is clearly suggested that the CAP test intervention did not improve the manner in which the NCV programme was engaged by learners during 2009. In the case of Mathematical literacy, there was a dramatic improvement in learner performance across both groups of colleges (i.e. the control groups as well as the quasi-experimental group) over the same period. However, within the English first additional language, the performance of both groups declined over the specific period. In some cases the control group outperformed the experimental group therefore it was concluded that the impact of the CAP test did not improve the manner in which learners performed within the NCV programme. Since the aim of this research was not to analyse the CAP test per se, but merely to evaluate its impact on learner performance, the research was therefore decisive in its findings.

In an interview with the WCED curriculum specialist for the two focus subjects, questions were posed regarding the existence of an apparent discrepancy within the manner in which the performance data depict a dramatic upward performance trend for Mathematical literacy, and an equally dramatic downward performance trend for English first additional language. In her response the interviewee explained, that since the NCV programme was new and the education department did not issue question paper exemplars, educators were uncertain about how well to prepare learners for the subject. The interviewee added that since Mathematical literacy was the compulsory lower level numeracy subject, it was designed to avoid learners from being disadvantaged given their disinterest in numeracy, especially those who were not in the engineering and

financial streams of the programme. Therefore once educators observed the 2007 question papers they were better informed as to how best to prepare the level 2 learners for the exams. By 2009, this played out in a manner where a steady incline in learner performance was experienced since 2007.

The interviewee ascribed the decline in learner performance in English first additional language to the result of ill equipped learners caused by the ineffective outcome based system utilised at schools – FET level school learners were generally weak readers. She added that many rural learners were English second language speakers who were often not familiar with the written form of the language. Further to this the range statements for the subject she reported were too vague, therefore it was difficult for educators to focus their lessons (Daniels, 2010).

Although the response tendered about rural learners was not detected within the learner performance data obtained from the National Education Department, there was a great deal of merit attached to the input acquired within the aforementioned interview since many learner support managers country-wide corroborated these points. Suffice to say that given the dynamics affecting the two focus subjects, the existence of the CAP test intervention was not accepted as a positive influencing factor. CAP has therefore not altered the poor performance trend being depicted within the control group of colleges; the research findings may not depart from the glaring fact that there was very little significance attached to the learner performance data within the quasi- experimental group of colleges.

5.4 FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA OBTAINED THROUGH INTERVIEWING

The qualitative data obtained focused on four areas, the first of which was simply to confirm whether the learner support managers were concerned about the poor learner performance within the programmes. Therefore in essence the remaining three

elements of the qualitative data obtained through the interviewing process have shed light on the following key areas:

- The capacity of the college in delivering the NCV programme.
- The effectiveness of the NCV curriculum.
- The effectiveness of CAP.

5.4.1 CAPACITY OF COLLEGES

A summary of the responses obtained in this aspect of the data collection depicted that urban colleges were doing better in terms of their capacity to deliver the NCV programme and the administration of the CAP test. Having said this, the perceptions of poor learner performance across colleges were similar; all the regions of the country were appalled at the status quo of learner performance within the NCV programme. Colleges reported that they were challenged by the difficulty experienced in attracting and retaining competent staff. The fact that some of the recruits were not qualified educators was seen by colleges as being problematic. This led to issues associated with poor classroom management which was interpreted as educators not knowing how to deal with young learners. The colleges also reported that there was very little time to address the learning gaps identified by CAP.

5.4.2 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NCV CURRICULUM

The NCV curriculum was reportedly poorly constructed, often proving too difficult for both learners and educators. Interviewees accused the National Education Department of being shortsighted in its planning of the curriculum; therefore the programme was in urgent need of a revamp. During an information consultation session, Prof. Graham Hall under the auspices of the DHET, met with the WCED regarding the poor performance in NCV. He asserted that the NCV exams were inadequately funded and added that quality programmes could not result if there was not enough funds to support

them (Hall, 2010). In addition to this he added that there was evidence of poor translations, grammatical mistakes and inadequate skills brought to bear. The Minister in his opening address at the FET Summit hosted in Pretoria during August 2010 corroborated the notion of an incoherent NCV curriculum, alluding that serious rework on the curriculum was needed (Nzimande, 2010a).

5.4.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF CAP

During the interviews with the learner support managers, it was revealed that the CAP test was too difficult for Grade 9 learners resulting in them guessing the correct answers. One respondent mentioned that fifteen percent of learners who passed the CAP test were not ready for the NCV programme. This was due to learners guessing the correct answers. In an interview with CAP about this issue the software development manager indicated that the company has added an extra option in the multiple choice structure of the test (Dodd, 2010). This he said would reduce the problem of guessing the correct answer. Given the serious skills shortage within the country, the issue of access to development was an imperative; accordingly government has adopted a strategy of access for all youth (National Plan for FET Colleges, 2009:36; DoE, 2006:4). Elaborate bursary schemes via numerous agencies underpin the target chasing strategy of access. The problem of congestion was intensified by the DoE's programme funding regime which made it financial attractive for colleges to recruit learners indiscriminately. These strategies undermine the educational efforts at institutional level where middle managers were finding it difficult to maintain performance while being pressured by the education department to produce high learner placement targets (Papier, 2009:31). In addition to this, the developmental status of the country rendered the efforts of colleges futile in addressing the shortcomings of learning deficiencies at institutions. Huge skills and systems deficiencies translate into colleges not being able to effectively facilitate change in order to bring about the necessary improvements. The flaws in the CAP system exacerbate the problem.

5.4.4 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

In concluding the information obtained through the analyses of the two pools of data, it was reasonably clear to determine that poor learner performance within the NCV programme was in part linked to the inefficiencies of the country's education system. It was important to note that learners migrating from general education to FET college education were in fact within the same National Qualification Framework (NQF) structure; therefore they should not have experienced problems of incompatibility between the two learning environments. An important principle of the NQF was that of mobility and portability of qualification and credits between institutions (National Qualifications Bill, 2008:13). It is therefore improper to apportion liability for the poor performance within the NCV programme to learners as was asserted by the FET institute (Papier, 2009:44). Learners were unfairly treated by being placed in a programme that was problematic which in turn compromised their future career prospects. Many had dropped out as a result of the stated inefficiencies.

The apparent issue of learner ill-preparedness and the fundamental rationale of a learner placement test were therefore refuted when considering that had the qualification been constructed more appropriately, that there might not have been a poor learner performance alarm. This might have resulted in a better structure and strategy for a learner placement instrument. CAP has therefore become culpable in the issue of underperformance of learners within the NCV. It is fair to conclude that CAP did not effect successful learning. It is disheartening to think of how different the lives of learners might have been had the SETAs and the DoL been equal participants within the implementation of the NCV programme. In surveying the realistic possibilities that might have been, it is safe to assert that the National Education Department should shoulder a large portion of culpability for the negative manner in which the NCV programme has affected the lives of youth in the country.

To this end it is clear that the gravity of the systemic needs within the country's educational system is huge. Among the various nodal points under scrutiny within the

current research, college infrastructure appears to have maintained credibility in terms of its readiness to accommodate the NCV programme. This point should not mislead role-players within the sector because infrastructure is an inanimate aspect of the system that came about by mere capital injection. It is important to note that education and training is inherently a vibrant and dynamic activity requiring people (i.e. educators and managers) to demonstrate competence through the application of knowledge and expertise. This point therefore renders infrastructure as being of secondary importance. The absence of competent execution within college education undermines all other efforts of government, especially that of funding.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature review and in keeping with the central theme of this research the emphasis of the recommendations are focused predominantly on placement of learners for FET college education and marketing of programmes. Of secondary importance are recommendations with regard to the structure of the NCV programme and the establishment of alternative occupational programmes. As stated previously, the scope of this research limits the indulgence of systemic solutions; however organisational performance based guidelines in terms of a QAF have been tendered in support of a broader solution.

5.5.1 LEARNER PLACEMENT

In the colleges' attempts at producing high quality FET graduates who were work ready, it would be crucial for the placement intervention to be fit for purpose and remain cognisant of all associated imperatives. This means that the design of the intervention should take into consideration the key issues facing the major role-player within the skills arena. These include (but are not limited to), the youth, industry, the college and the community. It was quite clear that the touch points of CAP were minimal especially

since no vocational competencies were tested during the intervention, and learners were allowed to take ill-informed decisions with regard to the choice of study fields notwithstanding the fact that CAP did offer advice along these lines. In citing Washburn and Petroshuis (2004:35), a recruitment intervention that carries benefits for all the key role-players is one that begins to safeguard against a catastrophe of the sort currently experienced by the FET college sector. The placement intervention referred to by the aforementioned authors, yielded reliable and also pertinent information about the learners' abilities and interests. The brief duration of the CAP intervention testified to the level of importance the colleges placed on placement. By its very nature the intervention stated in Washburn and Petroshuis (2004:36) produced a pool of learners who were serious about their careers. In addition to this the institution benefited through alerting learners to the dedication it had towards learning. The structured manner in which the interventions were coordinated demonstrated the type of quality expectations inherent in the programmes offered at the institution. McKay (2006:311) alludes to the shift in paradigm by asserting that performance should not be the focal point of placement interventions. Performance was therefore not dependent on the learners' ability only to think, but on numerous other competencies like attitude, teamness and endurance (to name just a few).

The recommendation is therefore that colleges avoid using onerous placement practices that leave the development burden of so called incompetent learners with the college. A consultative process therefore is needed which takes cognisance of best practices in order to develop a robust placement intervention that will work for all the parties concerned. Socioeconomic contextualisation is crucial for success.

5.5.2 MARKETING OF PROGRAMMES

Findings by Papier (2009:44) assert that colleges' placement and marketing activities were misguided. The recommendation is therefore that colleges ensure that their marketing was strategic and that it took cognisance of the differences among potential

learners (Lewison & Hawes, 2007:16). According to Barker and Hart (1998:62) and Woodhouse (2006:32) the development of satisfying relationships with learners should be inherent in educational marketing. Since FET colleges offer a variety of learning programmes, the findings within this report conclude that a differentiated approach should be used in order to ensure that learners have the best possible chance of choosing the most appropriate learning programme for their respective careers. Along with Lewison and Hawes (2007:17), the findings also conclude that student satisfaction and marketing success is achieved when targeting the unique needs of learners within the various industry segments.

The recommendation in this regard is therefore that colleges consolidate their respective programme offerings in order to contain the associated costs incurred with salaries and equipment. By so doing colleges would be able to ensure quality within the learning programmes they offer. With a robust bouquet of quality programmes in place, colleges should develop a strategic approach to marketing toward the various sub-sectors within the various industries and within communities. In this way colleges will get closer to the learner satisfaction and marketing success spoken of by Lewison and Hawes (2007:17). A focused bouquet of programmes will allow colleges to reduce their diverse range of expertise; thereby offering them better quality control. This benefit will also assist with the marketing strategy in that it will be more specific. This will allow college resources to stretch further than is currently the case.

5.5.3 NCV CURRICULUM

5.5.3.1 REMOVAL OF PRACTICAL COMPETENCE

Given that the NCV programme was largely theoretical and did not enjoy the support from industry and the SETAs, it is recommended that the notion of practical competence within the NCV programme be removed. This will obviate the huge strain from within the programme. In the interview, Vollenhoven (2010) highlighted the fact that the

expectations of practical competence within theoretically structured programmes were futile and proved challenging to educators.

5.5.3.2 SIMPLIFYING THE ASSESSEMENT SYSTEM

Related to the issue of practical competence was a complex set of assessments within the NCV programme. Each learner was required to complete a total of 49 assessments throughout each year. These assessments include separate theoretical and practical activities. Inherent in these assessments were the administrative elements within the portfolio for each subject. Although the portfolios represented value, the rigorous assessment and moderation activities attached to them should be remodelled. It is therefore recommended that national exams should form the bases of national departments' quality assurance systems and that less emphasis be placed on administratively burdensome external moderation of learner portfolios of evidence at colleges. This would take the burden off educators so that valuable time is not wasted on administration but rather expended on the much needed facilitation of learning. The 49 assessments should be revisited with a view to reducing them while elevating learner performance

5.5.3.3 REALIGNMENT OF NCV SUBJECTS

In response to the qualitative data obtained through the interviewing process, it was revealed that there were instances of serious misalignment within various subjects. It is therefore recommended that the education department gather the key role-players which include, but is not limited to, colleges, industry, professional bodies and higher education (HE), in order to develop a syllabus that was compatible with the needs of industry and HE. This does not necessarily imply that text books would become obsolete but rather that they became a resource within the broader resources available within colleges and libraries.

5.5.3.4 NATED INTERFACE WITH NCV

In order to appreciate the existence of the NATED courses formally used for apprentices, one needs to understand that these courses were completed over a period of three months and therefore learners within industry were able to complete a course without having to lose too much time off from the workplace. In many cases learners would fund their own studies by taking unpaid leave from work in order to complete the relevant NATED course. The NCV programme does not accommodate this. The NCV programme has a duration of twelve months for each level coupled with a burdensome curriculum. It is therefore not advisable at this stage to lock the value of the NATED courses into the NCV programme because learners within industry would be marginalised by this.

In order to avoid a silo approach within the colleges' bouquet of programmes, it is recommended that during the realignment process of the NCV programmes, and the supposed reevaluation of the NATED courses, the curriculum development department within the National Education Department drew similar parties together as mentioned above in order to ensure that there was value being added for NCV learners who decide to enter fields which required the completion of NATED courses. Duplication should be avoided for NCV learners who embarked on a NATED course. Secondly, the recognition of the NCV credits should carry benefits for the learner either in terms of exemptions or in financial terms. The removal of practical competence would allow a great deal of flexibility in order to accommodate the interfacing recommendation. This feature should ensure that NCV learners were easily able to migrate into occupationally directed programmes offered at colleges and elsewhere.

5.5.4 FURTHER RESEARCH: A QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWOK

It is recommended that further research be undertaken in order to develop a QAF that would ensure the delivery of high quality training at FET colleges throughout the

country. The QAF should take cognisance of the best practices of the German dual system given its similarities to our apprenticeship system in South Africa. Equally important is that the proposed QAF adopts relevant value adding principles from internationally recognised QMS currently in use in education and in business. It is within this recommendation that the systemic issues related to institutional capacity to deliver would be addressed.

Important to note is that this recommendation should not necessarily refer to a mainstream QMS for business purposes but more so, one that was brought closer to the classroom so as to ensure high quality at customer interface. A QAF that binds the educator along with the institution, to a set of quality objectives that were customer driven, would ensure consistent satisfaction of major role-players namely, the learner, the college, industry and the economy.

5.6 CONCLUSION

In the analysis of the learner performance data belonging to both groups of colleges, it was found that the implementation of CAP within the quasi-experimental group did not present significant improvements to the performance levels of learners. Furthermore, the CAP test was not able to alter the negative trends identified within the relevant subjects. Learners who were exposed to the CAP intervention performed equally poorly as compared to those who were not exposed to the intervention.

The report therefore concludes that there had been an inappropriate focus on learners as being the cause for the underperformance within the NCV programme at FET colleges. It was also established that culpability for the underperformance should largely rest with the broader educational system which includes the DoE and the FET colleges, since these institutions have been instrumental in subjecting Grade 9 learners to a programme that was poorly constructed and delivered. Given that systemic failure was at the heart of the performance problem at colleges, the introduction of an

enrolment test (CAP) was found to be misguided. Furthermore, the CAP test was also found to be limited in its capability to enhance learner placement since the intervention was performance based and did not contain the essential critical cross-field features expected in the placement of teenagers.

Recommendations towards the improvement of the NCV Programme structure and the introduction of a strategic approach to placement, which begins with effective marketing, are crucial. In order to confront the systemic impediments within the sector the need for further research is recommended. The proposed research should be targeted at developing an effective QAF that would ensure high quality training within FET colleges.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AsgiSA	Accelerated and shared growth of South Africa
CAP	Competency and Placement Test
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoL	Department of Labour
ECED	Eastern Cape Education Department
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance
FET	Further Education and Training
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRD-SA	Human Resource Development Strategy of South Africa
GED	Gauteng Education Department
GENFETQA	General Further Education and Training Quality Assurance
IQAS	Integrated Quality Assurance System
ISO	International Standard
IT	Information Technology
KZNED	Kwazulu-Natal Education Department
MS	Microsoft
MED	Mpumalanga Education Department
NATED	National Education
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NCED	Northern Cape Education Department
NPED	Northern Province Education Department
NWED	North West Education Department
PSED	Polokwane South Education Department
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework

QCTO	Quality Council Trades and Occupations
QMS	Quality Management System
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
VoC	Voice of the customer
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

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University of Missouri.

ANNEXURE: 1

PARTICIPATING COLLEGES INVOLVED IN THE CAP TEST DURING 2009					
FET	Contact	CELL	PHONE	EMAIL	PROVINCE
Boland FET College	Mrs Amanda De Villiers	083 234 5782	021 886 7111	amandadv@bolandcollege.com	Western Cape
Capricorn FET College	Ms Norah Mobayi	082 831 9352	015 297 8367	nmobayi@yahoo.com	Limpopo
Central Johannesburg FET College	Mrs Kate Kuhn	082 628 3047	011 484 1388	katekuhn@iafrica.com	Gauteng
Ehlanzeni FET College	Mr Otto Mazibuko	079 529 4891	013 752 7105	onmazibuko@ehlanzenifet.co.za	Mpumalanga
Ekurhuleni East FET College	Ms Refiloe Masemola	073 284 1788	011 730 6600	refiloem@eec.edu.za	Gauteng
Ekurhuleni West FET College	Mrs Constance Ramasala	072 353 9381	011 323 1611	constancer@ewc.edu.za	Gauteng
False Bay FET College	Mrs Jacqui Layman	083 272 0457	021 788 1668	jacqueline.layman@falsebay.org	Western Cape
Flavius Mareka FET College	Mrs Beatrix Terblanche	082 562 7368	016 976 0829 /0815	beatrix@flaviusmareka.net	Free State
Goldfields FET College	Ms Chechile Mapalesa	072 468 7841	057 391 0500	florrychecchile@goldfields-colleg	Free State
King Sabata Dalindgebo FET	Mr Sunil Joseph	083 457 0791	047 5051008	sunilrsa@hotmail.com	Eastern Cape
Letaba FET College	Mrs Susan Larsen / Mr Johan Venter 082 887 0995	083 233 0339	015 307 5440	larsensvr@letabafet.co.za	Limpopo
Lovedale Public FET College	Mrs Juanita Verster	082 571 3504	043 642 1331 /6	verster@lovedale.org.za	Eastern Cape
Majuba FET College	Mr Julius Cindi	084 488 1114 / 083 419 9939	034 326 4888	cindij@majuba.edu.za	Kwa-Zulu Natal
Mnambithi FET College	Ms Khangisile Khumalo	082 211 2069	036 637 4782 /90	rkhumalo@mfet.co.za	Kwa-Zulu Natal
Mopani South East FET College	Mr Stanley Motubatse	082 663 2052	015 781 5604	smotubatse@yahoo.com	Limpopo
Northern Cape Rural FET College	Mr Johan Hendricks	071-897-3006	054 332 4711	wsdelie@upt.co.za	Northern Cape
Northern Cape Urban FET College	Mrs Delmaine Christians	084 503 9574	053 839 2009	dchrist@ncufetcollege.edu.za	Northern Cape
Orbit FET College	Mr Craig Brandt	082 868 8681	014 5328461/2	cbrandt@orbitcollege.co.za	North West
Sekhu-khune FET College	Mrs Marna Gey Von Pittius	082 323 0252	013 269 0278	marna@sekfetcol.co.za	Limpopo
South West FET College	Mr Ginga Lekhotla	072 213 6419	011 984 1260	ginya@swgc.co.za	Gauteng
Taletso FET College	Mr Wandile Mogau	837,127,720	018 384 2346/50	wmogau@webmail.co.za	North West
Tshwane North FET College	Ms Sheila Mashiane	082 780 1445	012 401 1602	sheilam@tnc4fet.co.za	Gauteng
Tshwane South FET College	Ms Nkeki Letsheone	084 392 9568	012 380 5059	nkeki@tsc.edu.za	Gauteng
Umfoloji FET College	Ms Natasha Bothma	082 332 1729	035 7974313	natasha@zululandchamber.co.za	Kwa-Zulu Natal
Waterberg FET College	Mr John Mashala	073 196 4156	015 483 0201	learnersupport@waterbergcollege	Limpopo
West Coast FET College	Mrs Colleen Knecht	073 872 7788	022 482 1143	cknecht@westcoastcollege.co.za	Western Cape
Western College FET	Ms Wilma van Jaarsveld	083 525 2685	011 6924082	wilma@westcol.co.za	Gauteng

ANNEXURE: 2

Complete list of responses linked to the effectiveness of NCV curriculum.

The curriculum was pitched too high for Grade 9 learners

Learners often selected the incorrect stream within the NCV programme

The course was too difficult for the learners

The curriculum design contained misplaced level descriptors

The course was pitched badly

There was a need for a revamp of the curriculum

NCV comprised a misplaced curriculum

More work was needed on the NCV curriculum

The design of the curriculum was done too hastily

ANNEXURE: 3

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – LEARNER SUPPORT STAFF FET COLLEGES.

Date of Interview:..... Time of Interview:.....
 Name of Interviewee:..... Name of College:.....
 Role of Interviewee:.....

Subject: A semi structured interview to determine relevant information regarding the impact of the CAP test for NCV level 2 learners during 2009.

Introduction to Interviewee:

The purpose of the interview is to determine what the impact of the CAP test at the college was during 2009.

Also: to grant opportunity to the interviewee to articulate any relevant information about reasons and or factors influencing the performance of learners in the NCV programme (level 2).

- Determination 1.** Confirm the college's involvement in CAP during 2009:.....
 Confirm the college name and its campuses:.....
 Establish the Rural / Urban status of the college;.....

Determination 2. Level of satisfaction regarding:

Lnr Performance in NCV					
Good		Moderate		Poor	
1	2	3	4	5	6

Effectiveness in CAP					
Good		Moderate		Poor	
1	2	3	4	5	6

Determination 3. Interviewee's view on:

Curriculum Design					
Good		Moderate		Poor	
1	2	3	4	5	6

College Capacity					
Good		Moderate		Poor	
1	2	3	4	5	6

ANNEXURE: 4

RESEARCH THEME INTEREST TABLE								
	IMPORTANCE OF THEMES IN TERMS OF REPOSSES (R/U Ave)							
IDENTIFIED THEMES	CODE	FREQ	NOT 0	SOME 1 - 5	AVE 6 - 10	GOOD 11 – 15	VERY 16 - 20	EXTREME 21 – 27
Learner Performance	LP	27						X
Effectiveness of CAP	EC	10			X			
Curriculum Design	CD	19					X	
College Capacity	CC	25						X

ANNEXURE: 5

Complete list of responses linked to the effectiveness of the colleges' capacity.

Colleges reported a shortage of equipment

Attracting qualified staff was a challenge

There was not enough time and staff to follow up on the gaps identified by CAP

Lectures were not up to standard

Lecturers lacked educational experience

Retaining good staff was proving difficult

Lecturers were challenged by the curriculum

Salaries for lecturers were too low

The utilisation of students as lecturers was problematic

Poor performing lecturers were hard to retrench

Students reported lecturers as being incompetent

Lecturers did not know how to deal with young learners

Complete list of responses linked to the effectiveness of CAP.

Mathematical questions within the test were set too high

Questions were generally too difficult

Guessing the correct answer often meant that incompetent learner went through the system undetected

Career placement mechanism was superficial

There was a need for academic support material

There was a need for a bridging course for learners who were too weak

The intervention was time consuming

The developmental approach and the implied inclusivity was problematic since many learners were too weak for the programme

The CAP analysis was not accurate

The numbers drive for high learner numbers undermined the CAP test

The CAP test served as a deterrent to learners so that they would only apply if they were confident in their ability to pass the CAP test

There was a discrepancy between the computer format and the paper format of the test