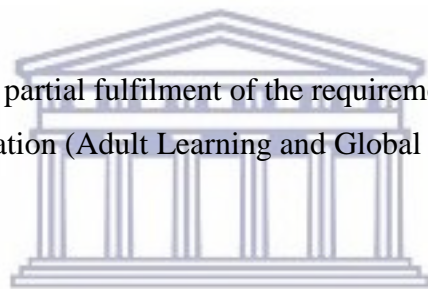


Psychosocial barriers to participation in adult learning and education: Applying a
PsychoSocial Interaction Model

Myrtle Adams-Gardner

Student Number: 3378858

Research Paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
in Education (Adult Learning and Global Change)



UNIVERSITY *of the*
Supervisor: Professor Zelda Groener
WESTERN CAPE

May 2018

Word count: 29 411 (without appendices)

Key Words

Participation

Adult learning and education

Barriers to learning

Psychosocial interaction model

Non-formal learning

Psycho-social factors

Decision making

Learning experience



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Abstract

Adult learners' perception of factors that are internal to their perceived control of their lives can be challenging to overcome when making a decision to participate in learning. There are complex relationships between psychological, and social barriers to participation in adult learning. Psychosocial barriers can deter adults' participation in learning programmes. Understanding the nature of such barriers can enable policymakers, educators and adult learners create strategies to reduce such barriers in order to increase adults' participation in adult learning. This study investigated the research question: What are adult learners' perceptions of psycho-social factors that undermine participation in adult education and learning? The psycho-social interaction model adopted as a conceptual framework allowed the study to contextualise and analyse the effects of socio-economic status on the adult learner's decision and readiness to participate. The model provided the broad segments of the adult learners' pre-adulthood and adulthood learning years and through a thematic analysis attempted to analyse psychosocial factors that emerged as barriers to participatory behaviour in learning. An interview guide was used during a semi-structured interview. The study investigated a group of adult learners attending a non-formal learning programme in Central Johannesburg, South Africa. The selection of participants included 6 males and 4 females between 21 years to 49 years of age. The study findings showed that the adult learners' perceptions of family support as well as the learning environment support are key enabling factors, which assist the adult learner to develop learning capabilities. Negative experiences with prior schooling was also described as a psychosocial barrier to participation. Age was a socio-economic variable that influenced the type of stimuli participants identified as a psycho-social factor which influenced their decision to take up further learning. Adult learners felt confident to successfully complete their current and future studies however perceived their learning press as a motivating factor that impacted their decision to participate. Findings also suggested that experiences of adult learners are unique to their specific context and educational planning can integrate ways to address enhancement of learning experiences for a diverse learner audience in non-formal learning programmes. The study concluded that while adult learners acquire social competencies through accessing non-formal programmes, further learning support is necessary to overcome the social and psychological complexities needed to develop basic academic learning capabilities.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God for keeping me mindful of others I relied on, during trying times on my learning journey and for granting me the strength to get this far. I thank my supervisor, Prof Groener, for her support, guidance and input during the preparation, many reflective writing processes and prompts that helped me shape this research paper. I would like to thank my partner, Jillian Gardner and our daughter Carnia who believed in and encouraged me to remain resilient throughout the process.



Declaration

I Myrtle Adams-Gardner (Student number: 3378858) am a student registered for the degree of Masters in Education in the academic year, 2018.

I hereby declare the following:

I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.

I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above degree is my own unaided work except where I have indicated otherwise.

I followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.

Signature:  Date: 24 May 2018



Glossary of Terms

AET	Adult Education and Training
PAE	Participation in Adult Education
SES	Socio-Economic Status
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



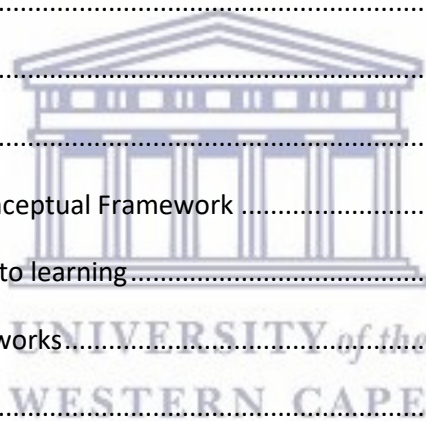
UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE



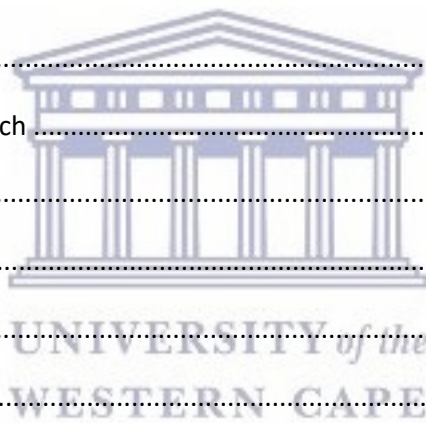
UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Table of Contents

Key Words.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Declaration	v
Glossary of Terms	vi
Section 1: Introduction and Background.....	1
Rationale.....	4
Research problem.....	4
Research aims.....	5
Research questions.....	5
Limitations	5
Anticipated Findings	5
Section 2: Literature Review/Conceptual Framework	7
Adult participation, and barriers to learning.....	7
Emergence of conceptual frameworks.....	9
Psychosocial Interaction Model.....	12
Socio-Economic Status (SES).....	15
Learning Press.....	16
Perceived Value of Adult Education and Readiness to Participate	16
Participation Stimuli	17
Barriers to Participation.....	27
Participation Stimuli	17
Section 3: Research Design and Methodology	28
Research site.....	28
Participant selection	29
Research instrument and methods of research data collection	30
Data-capturing.....	31



Data analysis	31
Research ethics considerations	32
Section 4: Data Analysis.....	34
Section 5: Summary, Findings, Discussion and Recommendations.....	67
Summary.....	68
Findings.....	69
Discussion	69
Recommendations.....	74
Conclusion	74
References	75
Appendix A	
Re: Permission to conduct research	
Appendix B	
Information letter to participant	
Appendix C	
Participant Consent Form	
Appendix D	
Interview guide	



Section 1: Introduction and Background

Introduction

This section provides a brief description and background of the study. The rationale is presented, followed by a statement of the problem. The research aims and research questions are outlined. A discussion of limitations and anticipated findings conclude this section.

Background and context

In South Africa, unemployment, poverty and illiteracy are prevalent among many disadvantaged adult learners. Lack of access to the right information can delay decisions by adult learners to participate in further study or efforts to learn.

Rule (2006) argues that adult educations' contribution to society is too "transform adult learners' sense of themselves, to build their confidence and to equip them to participate actively in their communities and society" (p. 122). The adult learners' perception of a positive learning experience is necessary to develop basic academic skills and social competencies as a lifelong learner. Developing the necessary cognitive and social capabilities equips the adult learner with knowledge, skills and values to mitigate barriers they face when accessing education.

I have been employed as an educator in the private and public education sector over the past 15 years, and have facilitated numerous life skills interventions in both adult basic education and training (ABET) and further education and training (FET) environments. I have observed and engaged with adults from diverse backgrounds regarding the challenges they experienced as learners in previous educational encounters. I am interested in what motivates adult learners to study further and the psychosocial barriers they perceive when considering participation in learning. As my understanding of barriers to learning was limited, I decided to focus this study specifically on psychosocial factors affecting adult learning in adult education. This systematic investigation enables me to contribute to theoretical insights that can guide adult educators in addressing the psychosocial barriers that undermine the success of adult learners.

There have been many efforts to improve South Africa's education system and to improve on policy-making in balancing quality teaching and learning as well as access to education. The relevant South African authorities reported on country performance indicators towards

achieving Education for All (EFA) at the World Education Forum (UNESCO, 2015). In the South African national review report (EFA, 2015) reference is made to the Adult Education and Training Act (Act. 52, of 2000, amended), wherein it is stated that provision is made for:

establishment, governance and funding of public adult learning centres; to provide for the registration of private adult learning centres; to provide for quality assurance and quality promotion in adult education and training; to provide for transitional arrangements; and to provide for related matters (p. 23).

I became interested in what constituted the learning competencies and attributes that develop an adult learner's capacities to learn, while building my own learning capabilities as a student studying for the degree of Master's in Adult Learning and Global Change (MALGC). The perceptions that adult learners provide as reasons for not wanting to access further learning opportunities can be viewed as the negative attitudes formed from their past learning experiences.

This study is particularly directed at learners' perceptions of psychosocial factors in education and learning, and to what extent these factors act as potential barriers for the adult learner. Understanding psychosocial barriers can assist in educational planning efforts to benchmark information about the type of learning support required for the adult learner to access educational opportunities. Access to the right information and services can support the adult learner in developing the necessary employability skills required to compete in society.

The adult learner may not be aware of the available support that can be called upon when a decision is taken to participate in further education. Identifying psychosocial barriers can foster collaboration for a more supportive teaching and learning environment.

Psychosocial barriers to participation are individual factors that are challenging for the adult learner to overcome. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) refer to survey findings administered to non-participants, commenting that "dispositional barriers are perceptions like little to gain by participating, concerns about own ability to succeed, belief that one is too old to go back to study, and bad previous experiences with schooling" (p. 192).

The study findings of Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) reported "negative attitudes and dispositions toward adult education" as a barrier that negatively impacted the decision to further adult learning and participation (p. 192). Rubenson and Desjardins seem to suggest

that non-participation in learning reflects the adult learners' "subjective rationale regarding participation" and is to be understood as a learning disposition being "constructed around the person's life context" (p.192). Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) claim that non-participation in adult learning is indicative of the impact that the adult learners' psychological state of being has on their decision to participate in some form of learning activity. Silva, Cahalan and Lacireno-Paquet (1998) concur with Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) in a review of Conceptual Frameworks and Empirical Studies on Adult Participation Decisions and Barriers in a U.S. Department of Education Working paper (1998), stating that, an adult learner's psychological development and interactions with the social environment, influences how the level of participation is maintained.

The selected research site for my study was a non-formal education programme offered by the Displaced Persons Unit, in Hillbrow, Johannesburg and funded by the City of Johannesburg's Department of Social Development. The Department of Social Development introduced the non-formal offering of life skills initiatives to adults accessing psychosocial services in and around greater Johannesburg to prepare them for community development and integration. These initiatives offer training in catering, gardening and early childhood development. The aim of my study was to identify the psychosocial factors that the adult learners perceive as impacting on their decisions to participate in adult learning. Research evidence presented by Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) suggests that deeper insight into the psychological and sociological factors that influence adult participants learning experiences, could reveal interactions contributing to inequitable participation in adult education.

In the current study, I adopted the Psychosocial Interaction Model developed by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as a conceptual framework to identify and analyse the psychosocial factors adult learners perceived as barriers in their learning. Figure 1 outlines the Psychosocial Interaction Model and its components.

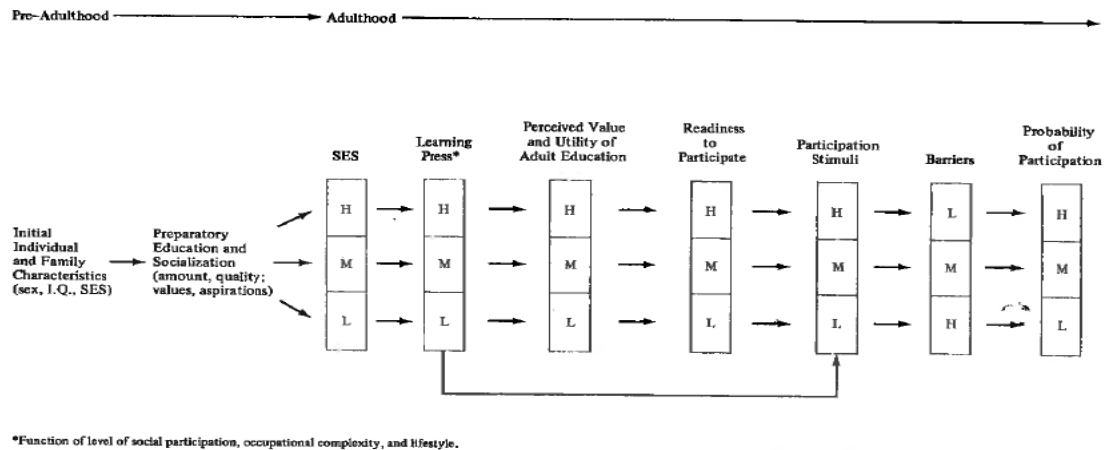


Figure 1: Psychosocial Interaction Model of Participation in Organised Adult Education (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

Rationale

Adult learners who perceive a lack of support while learning can find the learning experience challenging and troublesome owing to their lack of intrinsic motivation to navigate and manage their lives while learning... or even just deciding to study further (Abdullah, 2008).

An adult learner's prior experience in learning that has been perceived as unsatisfactory can trigger negative emotions that the adult learner would need to confront when considering to participate in learning. The purpose of this study is to utilise existing theoretical insights on adult participation to investigate the perceptions an adult learner holds about psychosocial factors and how these serve as a barrier that hinder their decisions to participate in learning. The value of this research can provide evidence on the perceptions that adult learners hold about psychosocial barriers. Understanding what psychosocial factors are challenging can guide education management efforts across education sectors to redefine teaching and learning practices and seek ways to offer learning support to adults who are wanting to develop basic academic and social learning skills. Reinforcing the value of education can raise awareness of its positive effect on adult learners' participation in life-long learning and its benefits to the economy and society

Research problem

Literature reveals that there are complex relationships between psychological and social barriers to participation in adult learning. Psychosocial barriers can deter adults' participation

in learning programmes. Understanding the nature of such barriers can enable policymakers, educators and adult learners create strategies to reduce such barriers in order to increase adults' participation in adult learning.

Research aims

This study aims to identify psychosocial factors among adult learners perceived as impacting their decisions to participate in learning.

Research questions

Main research question

What are adult learners' perceptions of the psychosocial factors that undermine participation in adult education and learning?

Sub-question

What psychosocial factors create barriers to participation in adult education and learning?

Limitations

The following limitations have been identified in this research:

The sample of participants was selected from a cohort attending a non-formal educational programme located in Johannesburg. A limitation of this research is that learners not accessing the programme at the chosen site, but instead attending at other sites, were excluded from the research. As a limited number of participants were used in this study, the degree to which the research design allowed for generalisability was not considered, rather it aimed to investigate a context of learning within a particular sample of a learning population.

Anticipated Findings

The researcher anticipated that through the findings, an understanding of adult learners' psychosocial barriers to learning would begin to emerge and be included in the ongoing discourse on adult learners' barriers to participation in non-formal education. The data is also useful to educational planners wanting to create supportive learning trajectories in non-formal education. The study findings will be shared with the organisation where I conducted this investigation in the hope that any theoretical insights achieved could contribute to the planning of psychosocial services.

In Section 2 of this research paper, relevant academic literature is reviewed, and the conceptual framework adopted for this study is described. In Section 3, I discuss the study research methodology and explain the research site, as well as the participant selection methodology and the research approach utilized to collect data for this study. The study data is analysed in Section 4 and in the conclusion section, I provide a summary of the study discussing the findings and recommendations.



Section 2: Literature Review/Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Given the focus of this research, I review, in this section, relevant academic literature with regard to the selected conceptual framework chosen for the study, the Psychosocial Interaction Model developed by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982).

Adult participation, and barriers to learning

The scholarly literature that focuses on barriers affecting adult participation categorises barriers as situational, dispositional and institutional (Larson & Milana, 2016; Desjardins, Rubenson & Milana 2006; Malhotra, Shapero, Sizoo and Munro, 2007; Abdullah, 2008). The conceptualisation for this research study was intended to identify the perceptions adult learners hold about psychosocial factors presenting barriers to their participation in learning and education. Desjardins et al. (2006) in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Perspectives overview discuss different perspectives on why adults learn, asserting that adult learners not only invest in adult education and training for economic purposes but also do so for accessing social learning benefits related to adult education. The reasons provided for wanting to participate are summarised by Desjardins et al. (2006) as:

While the world of work forms an important part of daily life for many and is a major incentive for continued learning, people in fact engage in multiple contexts over the lifespan, including the home, family, school, community and leisure... The need to acquire and develop various economically and socially relevant competencies, however, strongly depends on individual choices and lifestyles, which are in turn conditioned by various social and cultural practices, not to mention values. (p. 92)

Research studies in adult education have reported a number of barriers to participation in adult education. Desjardins et al. (2006) illuminates that “adults’ readiness to participate in AET is strongly related to the value ascribed to learning, but readiness itself does not imply actual participation” (p. 94). Desjardins et al. (2006) infer that adult learners experience many challenges when accessing education and that this can present to the adult learner obstacles she or he perceives as learning development challenges. Thus for Desjardins et al. (2006)

adult learners need to evaluate the purpose or reason related to their life situation in order to want to learn.

Adult participation in learning is determined by various life changes that happen over the adult's lifespan, and impacts the adult learner's intention for considering adult participation. In the UNESCO overview, Desjardins et al. (2006) highlight "lack of time, balancing time between work and family life and learning, receiving external support" (p. 106) as some of the situational barriers reported in the UNESCO overview. Desjardins et al. (2006) point to the categories of dispositional barriers that require investigation into their role for adult participation. Desjardins et al. (2006) refer to dispositional factors such as "a low readiness to learn, particularly with regard to a lack of cognitive and non-cognitive competencies that are thought to be important for engaging in further learning" (p. 106). It can be inferred from the research findings of Desjardins et al. that a certain type of cognitive capacity is a dispositional barrier. Desjardins et al. (2006) assert that "low self-confidence in one's learning capacities can be a major barrier to participation" (p. 107). In this study, dispositional barriers are referred to as psychosocial. Exploratory investigations into participation rates in adult education by Larson and Milana (2006) and Malhotra et al. (2007) focus on categories of barriers among non-learners, using factor analysis as a research design. The research study by Malhotra et al. (2007) explores studies dating back four decades and cites the research of Johnstone and Rivera who state that "barriers could be classified as situational, which are external to an individual's control, and dispositional, based on personal attitude" (p. 83). Malhotra et al. (2007) also cite Carp, Peterson and Roelfs who "analysed the learning activities of adults already engaged in learning" and highlight barriers that included "cost, not enough time, not wanting to attend school full-time, home responsibilities, job responsibilities, and the amount of time required to finish the program" (p. 83). Studies by Shipp and McKenzie (as cited in Malhotra et al., 2007) assert that when compared to active learners, the psychographic profiles of non-learners:

were oriented less to the future than to the past or present, had shorter time perspectives, emphasized emotional response more than rational, felt little personal freedom, were less willing to take risks, thought more concretely, depended more on family and friends for advice, and were more action-oriented in comparison to learners who were future-orientated. (p. 83)

Emphasis is placed on adults' disposition towards learning and Malhotra et al. (2007) state that "the internal psychological variables of self-concept and attitudes towards learning are important decision points" (p. 83) for the potential adult learner. When conducting research about barriers that deter participation, applying a conceptual framework has been shown to be helpful in analysing the barriers perceived by adults to affect why they decide whether or not to participate.

In the next paragraphs, I review some debates in adult education literature about conceptual models used to understand barriers to participation and explain how I selected the Psychosocial Interaction Model as the conceptual framework for my study.

Emergence of conceptual frameworks

Adult participation theories Abdullah (2008) refer to "self-direction and autonomy" (p. 69) as necessary learning competencies that provide impetus for learning during adulthood. Merriam (as cited in Abdullah, 2008) describes "self-directed behaviour as a major tenet of andragogy" (p. 68) and claims "adults have a deep psychological need to be generally self-directing" (p. 68). The reasons that adult learners should provide for the pursuit of further learning are important for the enabling of the adult learner to develop characteristics that Cross (1981) defines as "Characteristics of Adult Learning (CAL) Theory" (p. 69).

The CAL theory, according to Abdullah (2008), is "based on two variables, personal characteristics and situational characteristics. The personal characteristics include the psychological stages" (p. 69) of the adult's learning which Abdullah (2008) defines as stages of learning outlined "along a continuum, which reflects growth from childhood to adulthood" (p. 70). Abdullah (2008) explains that "situational characteristics, on the other hand, focus on variables that are unique to the adult's participation in self-directed learning activities namely, part-time versus full-time versus compulsory participation" (p. 70).

It is my assertion in my study that psychosocial factors in adult learning is based on an interaction between the two variables, namely the adult learner's personal and situational context.

Adult participation in a learning activity is described by the Chain of Response Model (Cross, 1981). According to Scanlan (as cited in Silva et al., 1998), participation is thus "not an isolated act but is the result of a complex chain of responses based on the evaluation of the

position of the individual in their environment” (p. 36). The researchers imply that participation in learning is to be viewed from a continuum of both the adult learners’ disposition and their external environment. The forces influencing the adult learner’s decision to participate are compounded and educational efforts should consider the type of learning in which adult learners decide to participate when developing learning support mechanisms in teaching and learning.

Cross (1981) in her Chain of Response Model theorises that “responses leading to participation tend to originate within the individual, as opposed to outside forces” (p. 36). This Chain of Response Model outlines two main concepts, i.e. the adult learner’s selfevaluation and the adult learner’s attitude toward education (Cross, 1981). Silva et al. (1998) claim the Chain of Response Model “assumes that the components of participatory behaviour can best be understood and articulated by the individual making the decision” (p. 36).

For the average adult learner in South Africa, formal education is regarded as a recognised way to access further studies. While many efforts have been made in the non-formal education sector to develop basic literacy skills among the disadvantaged, a large percentage of these adults are still left with little opportunity to return to studying as they are challenged by many other life decisions. The choice to take up further studies is most often seen as a way of finding work or at times a decision to return to complete prior qualifications. The adult learner can become overwhelmed by the many areas of life that need to be satisfied and requires personal capabilities to lead meaningful lives amidst the many obstacles in life. Most times education seem to be the answer for many disadvantaged adults. For many South Africans, survival is a mode of living and education is perceived as an external factor, outside the individual’s locus of control, even when offered government support in adult education and training.

Larson and Milana (2006) explain that the premise of Cross’s (1981) Chain of Response Model is that the adult learner must be motivated intrinsically to participate in education and it is “unlikely that a person will participate, no matter how much is done to eliminate barriers external to the individual” (p. 2). Recent evidence in adult education literature presented by Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) suggest that a more in-depth investigation of the psychological and sociological factors can uncover the interaction contributing to current

inequitable participation. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) argue that sociological and psychological factors “include students’ goals and basic skills as they interface with institutional systems such as adult basic education and development education” (p. 28).

South Africa’s development as a democratic state over the past three decades has seen many national efforts in policy making to widen access to education and encourage participation for all. In a published thematic report of South Africa’s educational statistics (2017), an overview of the status of the South African education system is provided. The Statistics SA report (2017) indicated that enrolment rates at post-secondary educational institutions varied by age, with a peak in enrolment levels among young individuals aged 17-19 attending postsecondary educational institutions, while a decline is observed in enrolment levels by 20year-olds and older, with a sharp decline after age 23.

Increasing access to a formal pathway to learning or to develop basic academic skills is necessary for the adult learner who wants to become employable and survive in a volatile economy. A study by Pulley (as cited in Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2010) comments that “adults aged between 18-64 years lack the basic skills in literacy and mathematics to succeed in college or today’s workforce” (p. 28). Pulley shows that between 43% and 80% of adult learners entering community college require one or more remedial courses. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) claim that adults in this group, described as re-entering adult learners, “often have not been adequately taught, they have not developed a readiness to learn, have not had sufficient math or science courses and have lacked educationally supportive role models” (p. 28).

The disadvantaged adult learner in SA must deal with many obstacles while developing both academic and personal capabilities to ensure agility in a fast-paced, changing world. The profile of adult learners in this study is best described by the research of Comings (as cited in Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2010), as “ABE students are intermittent students who move in and out of program services because they have long-term goals, but experience personal and environment barriers that disrupt their learning and require episodes of departure from their studies” (p. 28).

The type of learning required to capacitate an adult learner to deal with adversity can be attributable to an adult learner’s pre-adulthood learning phase in life and, according to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), involves the adult learners’ family influences and

preparatory education as early socialisation for how adults participated in learning later in their adult lives. Character traits developed through learning (socially and personal development) and motivations inherent within an individual will determine how they deal with the challenges they become confronted with in life. Value placed on education and learning and the aspirations the adult learner forms are developed in the early stage of the adult learner's life and influences how the adult will make decisions for further learning. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) infer that an adult learner who portrays a pattern of an in-out educational pathway faces disadvantages that compound over time and become "increasingly difficult for low-income adults to overcome" (p. 28).

Psychosocial Interaction Model

The conceptual framework utilised in my study draws on the Psychosocial Interaction Model developed by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). The Psychosocial Interaction Model expands the Chain of Response Model of Cross (1981) and emphasises a sociological perspective which locates participation in a social context rather than limiting it to only the individual's psychological readiness, as posited in Cross's model. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) emphasise that a "sociological lens contributes to a historical and broader comprehension of adult participation" (p. 28).

The Psychosocial Interaction Model was developed by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) to describe what makes some people involve themselves in adult education and learning, while others choose not to participate. According to Silva et al. (1998) the Psychosocial Interaction Model emphasises socio-economic status factors, for example gender, race/ethnicity and class, as being "strong determinants of adult participatory behaviour" (p. 38). The researchers Silva et al. (1998) and Larson and Milana (2006) agree with Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) that adult learners' socio-economic status (SES) can inform the adult learners' decisions/attitudes on participation in education and learning. Larson and Milana (2006) suggest the adaptation of the Psychosocial Interaction Model as a conceptual framework that can "contextualise whether socio-economic status has a positive effect on participation stimuli, the perceived value and utility of adult education and training and thereby the adult learner's readiness to participate" (p. 4). The Psychosocial Interaction Model provides a framework that is not prescriptive but rather allows factor analysis to unfold through the narratives of the adult learners' lived experience in learning. It locates adult learners within a socio-economic context and attempts to understand participatory behaviour through analysis

of adult learners' perceptions of the value and purpose of education. In this context the Psychosocial Interaction Model, according to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), can be viewed as “the interplay between individual and socio-environmental factors” (p. 142) placing emphasis on socio-economic status (SES) as the main variable influencing participation.

In this study, the Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) will be viewed as a framework that attempts to explain adult learners' participatory behaviour from within their unique socio-cultural contexts. How adult learners deal with the types of barriers they perceive as having a lesser or greater influence on their decision to participate will determine their attitude towards learning.

Figure 1 outlines the phases of the Psychosocial Interaction Model by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as “pre-adult and adulthood” (p. 142) components.

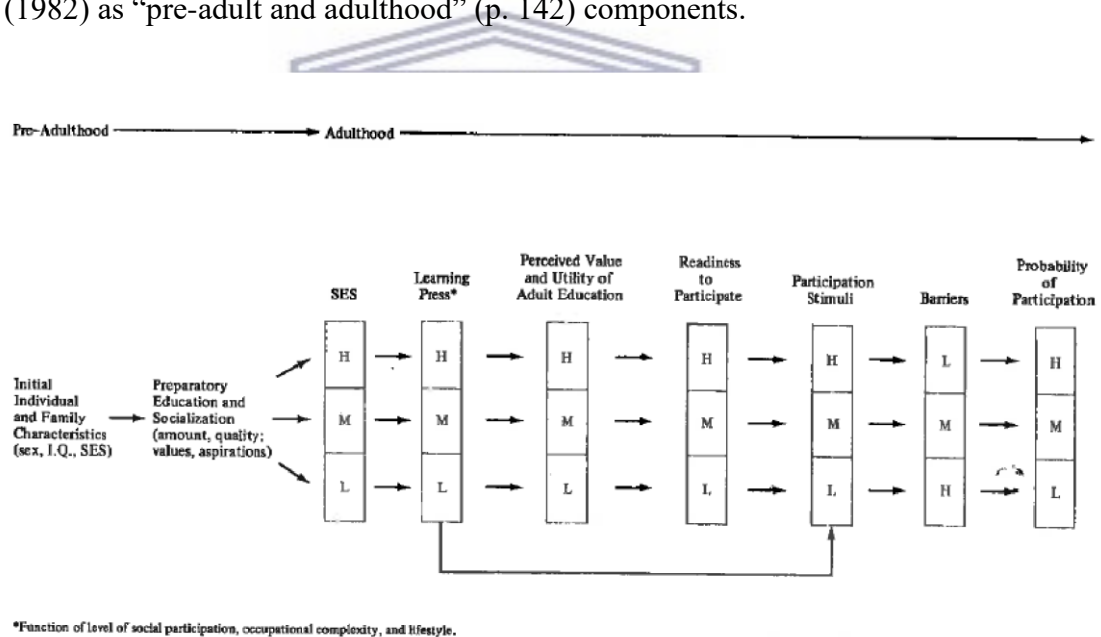


Figure 1: Psychosocial Interaction Model of Participation in Organised Adult Education (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

The pre-adult component is described by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as “initial individual and family characteristics factors (particularly I.Q. and social economic status (SES)) [that] strongly influence subsequent experiences in school” (p. 142). It considers how factors influence the individual's decisions/attitudes towards further education. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) suggest the “amount and quality of preparatory education, and the values

and aspirations an individual acquires in the process of becoming an adult, are major determinants of (SES)” (p. 142). The pre-adult factors, according to the Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) are defined in terms of the individual’s “educational attainment, occupational status and income” (p. 142).

In this study, I aimed to identify psychosocial barriers that adult learners perceived as impacting on their decisions to participate in adult learning. Adult learners’ reasons for learning are driven by both internal and external forces that shape their lives. The application of frameworks that guide teaching and learning mechanisms to structure programmes and support initiatives can assist efforts to redress educational systems. These programmes and initiatives in collaboration with communities, businesses, educational institutions and government partnerships determine the value and benefit to society. Cross (as cited in Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2010) describes the concept of barriers as “emanating from an individual’s situation in life and combined with institutional practices or personal dispositions such as attitudes and self-perceptions” (p. 28) which diminish participation for the adult learner.

According to the Department of Basic Education’s (2014) country progress report, the South African government has developed a national skills development plan to widen access to adult education and thus allow for adults to participate fully in lifelong learning. An understanding of the barriers hindering adult learners’ decisions to participate can support efforts to transform such adult learners’ chances of acquiring an education.

Elements in the adulthood phase outlined in the Psychosocial Interaction Model by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) are:

- (1) SES;
- (2) learning press;
- (3) the perceived value of adult education;
- (4) readiness to participate;
- (5) participation stimuli;
- (6) barriers to participation;
- and (7) probability of participation (pp. 141-145).

Adoption of the Psychosocial Interaction Model as a conceptual framework for this study allowed me to analyse the adult learner’s learning trajectory from childhood to adulthood. Through identification of the personal and social factors emerging in the data, I was able to analyse, deconstruct and synthesise the broad themes of the model as they surfaced during analysis of my study data.

I will now consider each element in detail.

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) the adult learner's socio-economic status (SES) is "portrayed as the first and dominant influence in a sequence of variables affecting the probability that an individual will participate in adult education" (p. 142). In adulthood, according to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), the variables represent a continuum that can "clarify the complex interrelationships" depicted as "three values – high, medium or moderate, and low" (p. 142). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) explain that adult learners towards "the lower end of the SES continuum... are less likely to exhibit a high degree of social participation", usually "hold jobs that are relatively routine and require limited skills", and "tend to lead lifestyles that diverge from the middle-class values and norms associated with self-improvement and self-expression" (p. 142). It is suggested by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) that the adult learner's SES is synonymous with the "social context that influences and shapes the adult learner's world view as it unfolds during the pre-adult years" (p. 143).

Research by Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990) examined the relationship between adult learners' "pre-adult factors and both credit-bearing and non-credit forms of adult education" (p. 77) and found that attempts to address equal access opportunities for adults who want to participate in education have been challenging. Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990) suggest disadvantaged adult learners perceive education's value as being in relation to their own active participation in education. It can therefore be presumed that the amount of formal education an adult learner acquires is perceived as relative to being able to access further adult education opportunities. Boudard and Rubenson (2004) investigated major determinants of participation in adult education and comment that "readiness to learn is formed early in life and further developed through educational and work experiences" (p. 265).

Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990) suggest the Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) is "one of the few that explicitly acknowledges the presence and importance of several pre-adulthood factors that may affect any decision to engage in educational activities" (p. 80). Studies by Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990), Boudard and Rubenson (2004) and Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) highlight opportunities for further

investigation into how early schooling experiences affect adult learners and influence their “readiness to learn”. Adult learners’ readiness to learn can be conceptualised as a learning attribute needed in order to be successful when participating in education.

Learning Press

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) define the learning press “as the extent to which one’s total current environment requires or encourages further learning” (p. 142). The importance of the learning press is emphasised by Silva et al. (1998) in a U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics review who suggest that an adult learner’s learning press fosters certain attitudes and perceptions the adult learner holds about the value and utility of adult education. The “involvement in formal organisations”, according to Silva et al. (1998, p. 26), is theorised by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as being a key element in an individual’s learning press. Silva et al. (1998) assert that in “the relationship between socio-economic status and learning press are elements in differences in general social participation, occupational complexity, and lifestyle” (p. 38). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) elaborate that the different factors of the learning press are influenced by the adult learner’s SES. Silva et al. (1998) report that while the National Household Education Survey (NHES) included questions about reasons for participation which included “credential seeking, employer requirements, fear of layoff, and reflect the extent to which the respondent is experiencing learning press” (p. 41) it did not deal directly with the concept of learning press. Silva et al. (1998) claim that while surveys do not “directly measure the respondents’ subjective evaluation of the utility of education or participatory readiness”, the “measure of employment and earnings information does provide an objective measures of utility” (p. 41). The design of this study permitted inquiry into the realities of participants’ experiences of prior learning and the type of support they perceived as encouraging their learning and further study.

Perceived Value of Adult Education and Readiness to Participate

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) refer to the perception one holds about education as “individual or psychological forces” rather than “social or environmental” (p. 144). According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), an “individual’s perception of the value of adult education quite obviously will affect the individual’s disposition or readiness to participate” (p. 144). The values that a society’s learning culture and its institutions of learning place on education can shape a learner’s attitudes about experiences in the learning

process. The perceived level of support that the learner's environment offers for further learning propels the learner to participate in learning. According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), "when learning press is less pronounced" - as it generally is for persons towards the lower end of the SES continuum - adult education is "less likely to be perceived as potentially valuable or useful" (p. 140).

This study is influenced by the claim of Hatlala (1993) that "environments which encourage continuing education will elicit positive perceptions rather than negative ones which ultimately increases an adult's chances to participate in adult education" (p. 8).

Participation Stimuli

Aslanian and Brickell (as cited in Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982) cited a study claiming that "most adults are stimulated to continue their learning because of external trigger events and that most events occur in the family life and occupation" (p. 144). The Psychosocial Interaction Model highlights the complexities of participation stimuli, which vary "along a continuum of intensity or power" (p. 144). Darkenwald and Merriam (as cited in Larson & Milana, 2006) comment that if "participation stimuli is determined by the socio-economic status of the adult learner, it can also be assumed that the higher socio-economic status, the fewer barriers towards participation in adult education and training" (p. 2).

Barriers to Participation

Barriers to participation of the Psychosocial Interaction Model include according to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), situational, institutional, psychosocial and informational barriers. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) renamed the dispositional barriers of Cross (1981) as psychosocial barriers, stressing the importance of an adult learner's social context.

In a study of adult participation in self-directed learning programmes, Abdullah (2008) indicates that barriers to participation can be compared to that used by Cross (1981). Smith (as cited in Abdullah, 2008) refers to challenges the adult learner faces as perceived barriers to learning, outlining them as follows:

- a. Situational barriers: those arising from one's situation at a given time:

Lack of money, the cost of studying, and the cost of childcare and so on.

Lack of time, for example, job and home responsibilities.

Lack of transport to the study venue.

- b. Institutional barriers: those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage adults from participating in learning activities:

Inconvenient schedules or locations of programmes.

Lack of relevant or appropriate programmes.

The emphasis on full-time study in many institutions.

- c. Dispositional barriers: those related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner:

Feeling “too old” to learn.

Lack of confidence because of “poor” previous educational achievements.

Tired of school, tired of classrooms (Smith, 2002; Cross, 1981).

The barriers highlighted by Abdullah (2008) appear to be common across the literature search I conducted on barriers to adult learning and participation.

Both Cumming (1992) and Fagan (1991) were interested in types of barriers specific to marginalised groups. Cumming (1992) investigated the learning experiences of a group of older women immigrants and identified four kinds of obstacles that tend to hinder participation in formal education. The four obstacles mentioned were:

Institutional barriers, including location, schedules, fees, site atmosphere; situational barriers, including job commitments, home and family responsibilities, lack of money, lack of child care, and transportation problems; psychosocial barriers, such as attitudes, beliefs, values, past experiences as a student, self-esteem, and opinions of others; and pedagogical barriers, such as a program’s lack of responsiveness to the interests, backgrounds, and existing skills of those groups they seek to serve. (p. 2)

Cumming (1992) also commented that psychosocial barriers are affected by negative attitudes displayed by families and leaders in communities towards women who want to study further and which can restrict the female adult learner from seeking further opportunities to learn beyond the primary schooling years.

According to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), barriers experienced by non-participants who actually wanted to participate are reported as being mostly situational and institutional. The researchers explain that institutional barriers are important but to a “lesser degree than situational barriers” and note that among the reasons frequently cited for institutional barriers are financial constraints. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) elaborate that while situational and institutional barriers tend to be consistent, regardless of the research methodology, it is not the same with dispositional barriers. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) describe “dispositional barriers as perceptions like little to gain by participating, concerns about own ability to succeed, belief that one is too old to go back to study, and bad previous experiences with schooling” (p. 192). It is clear from this review of the relevant literature that psychosocial barriers are internal beliefs the adult learner perceives as being challenges to learning, which, however, can be overcome with the proper support.

The current study focuses on learners’ perceptions of psychosocial factors in education and learning and to what extent these factors present potential barriers to the adult learner. Understanding psychosocial factors as (dispositional) barriers can assist educational planning efforts to benchmark information about the type of learning support required by the adult learner to access educational opportunities. Access to the right information and services can support the adult learner in developing the necessary employability skills required to compete in a fast changing world of work.

Psychosocial Barriers to Participation

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) explain that psychosocial obstacles tend to be related either to “education or learning as entities or activities, or to the self or potential learner” (p. 139). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) describe the construct of psycho-social obstacles as follows:

The first category encompasses negative evaluations of the usefulness, appropriateness, and pleasurability of engaging in adult education. Particularly among lower- and working-class persons, adult education may be seen as having little intrinsic value and little usefulness as a means of achieving personal goals. Negative or deprecatory evaluations of oneself as a potential learner are probably less closely tied to socio-economic status, but they are nonetheless prevalent among disadvantaged and working-class adults. (p. 139)

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) agree with Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) that not participating becomes a highly rational act for adult learners who hold negative perceptions; according to them, only when participation is viewed as resulting in better and higher paying employment does it become meaningful for the adult learner. The dispositional barriers described can be defined as psychological in nature and conceptualised as personal and academic skills that the adult learner needs in order to attain educational success. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) emphasise that “adult learning can be seen to promote competencies that help individuals adapt to the demands of the new economy and enable full participation in economic and social life” (p. 188). Finding ways to overcome psychosocial barriers towards participation in adult education can further support national policies to eradicate unequal opportunities for education and learning in post-school studies, according to Malhotra et al. (2007), Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) and Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010).

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) considered a Bounded Agency Model as a theoretical perspective to understand the impact that the types of welfare state regimes have on barriers to participation and explain that the model is premised on the assumption that the “nature of welfare state regimes can affect a person’s capability to participate” (p. 187). The researchers claim that while adult learners are free to make choices that will affect their development and build the necessary learning competencies and behaviours, adult learners are “bounded by structures and contexts and by features of the self that constrain choices” (p. 192). Rubenson (as cited in Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009) comments that several studies comparing participants with non-participants indicate that “negative attitudes and dispositions toward adult education are by far the most deterring factor” (p. 192). The researchers highlight differences emanating from analysis of “objective” (p. 191) barriers like the physical situational context and disabled position of an individual compared to the “subjective” (p. 192) barriers which emphasise the dispositional nature of the individual including the values they hold about education. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) argue that adult learners are motivated to participate when there is an external reward to drive them and that a “lack of interest can reflect a subjective rationality that is constructed around the person’s life context” (192). The research denotes the importance of both internal and external factors that an adult learner needs to overcome and accentuates that understanding the “subjective interpretation of one’s opportunity structure to achieve what matters for them” (p. 192). The researchers

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) describe perceptions like “little to gain by participating, concerns about own ability to succeed, belief that one is too old to go back to study, and bad previous experiences with schooling” (p. 192) as dispositional barriers.

Jamilah (as cited Malhatro et al., 2007) state that 22 years is the typical age of undergraduate college students, according to a United States Department of Education report. Malhatro et al. (2007) comment that while age is a consistent factor for traditional students in most societies, the mix of adult learners over the age of 35 years has increased in the past three decades and refers to the United States Department of Education report, which indicated that “73 percent of undergraduate students today are considered to be non-traditional by virtue of their age and financial status” (p. 81).

According to Malhatro et al. (2007), reason for non-participation varies from situational concerns of “cost of books and tuition, not enough time and job responsibilities” (p. 84) to factors underlying non-participation such as bad schooling experience, low grades, and not confident of ability which also corresponds with the findings of Rubenson and Desjardins’s (2009) description of dispositional barriers. Malhatro et al. (2007) describe adult education as an activity that adults choose to take part in and explain that adult learners with “workplace challenges and family pressures experience participation under a different set of educational conditions than the traditional age student” (p. 81).

The research of Malhatro et al. (2007) and Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) concur with Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) who state that these complexities compound over time and it “becomes increasingly difficult for low-income adults to overcome” (p. 28). According to Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) “adults’ capacity to participate” (p. 28) are compounded by both adult learners’ pre-adult barriers combined with external barriers they face in adult education programmes. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) also investigate factors that present barriers and stress variables such as a “lack of confidence in one’s ability to learn” (p. 140) as a critical reason presented by non-participants. Confidence is depicted as not being a reflection of self-discipline, which is a type of learning attribute. Fears that efforts to learn will result in failure and humiliation are widespread according to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). The “fear of failure syndrome” was postulated by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as a perception and was not to be confused with an obstacle to continuing education. It is stated

that social institutions to a large extent also influence what appear to be psychological barriers.

Sinanovic and Becirovic (2016) describe the drivers of lifelong learning and emphasise its importance when analysing the “life-cycle system of education as a basic prerequisite of growth and development” (p. 112). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) explain that adopting an action-driven approach to educational planning may not always be as straightforward as assuming that the presence of a stimulus to participation will ensure a particular adult learner, at a given time and place, will engage in education.

The research by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) suggests the “individual’s held beliefs, values, attitudes or perceptions can inhibit participation in organised learning activities” (p. 137). Furthermore, the researchers state that institutional structures and societal processes can also be depicted as accounting for an adult learner’s attitudes and perceptions concerning education. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) elaborate that personal psychological characteristics, past experiences with formal schooling, and many other factors play a role in shaping participatory behaviour.

My study investigates adult learners’ perceptions of psychosocial barriers to learning and explores ways to mitigate these barriers in teaching and learning to foster participatory behaviour in learning. Access to education and recognition of the adult learner’s prior knowledge are further enabling learning factors for an adult learner who wants to learn. Researchers Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) and Silva et al. (1998) claim that the impetus for an adult learner to study further varies from one adult learner to another. Silva et al. (1998) suggest adult learners’ motivations would be determined to some extent by their social context and that while the state is responsible for basic support services, it is not fully responsible for adult learners’ decisions about participation.

The psychosocial barriers the adult learner perceives as hindering the decision to participate, are internal and individually centred. While the adult learner has rights of access to basic education, capabilities required to learn are individually and structurally connected. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) suggest the state can foster broad structural conditions relevant to participation and construct targeted policy measures aimed at overcoming both structurally - and individually - based barriers. The researchers seem to suggest that the perceived level of

support that the adult learner's environment encouraged, propelled adult learners in the current study to participate in learning.

Hatlala (1993) refers to adult learners wishing to pursue further study, and, finding the transition difficult, and comments that individuals may be so immobilized from being unemployed and not experiencing social cohesion "that even if they attend re-entry workshops they would not be able to benefit without prior counselling" (p. 2).

According to Silva et al. (1998), the Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) posit that the "relationship between socio-economic status and learning press highlights the lesser or greater perceived value of adult education" (p. 38) which can be used to determine the adult learners' favourable disposition or readiness to participate" (p. 38).

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) argue that the "perceived value or utility of adult education and the barriers to participation that confront disadvantaged adults can be influenced" (p. 141). The perceived value of education and barriers to participation are intertwined. The adult learner who perceives the value of education as being less important will similarly perceive challenges to participation.

Some researchers, such as Hatlala (1993), Scanlan (1984), Mertesdorf (1990) and Mackeracher et al. (2006) agree with Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), who recommend that "social linkage strategies for reaching the hard-to-reach adult are applicable to any population of potential learners, not only the social or educationally disadvantaged" (p. 147).

According to Silva et al. (1998), reaction to participation barriers is influenced by an individual's psychological development and interaction with the social milieu. Ngidi (2014), who adopted the Psychosocial Interaction Model as a conceptual framework, concurs with Silva et al. (1998) who argue that the decision to participate in adult learning is "influenced by barriers which have been classified as internal or individual and external or social environmental in nature" (p. 5).

Psychosocial barriers can be described as influences that are internal to the individual's perceived control, and can thus influence the adult learner's decision to participate. Whether the individual's social context (i.e. support systems, financial capacities) allows for opportunities to learn, the adult learner's perception of him- or herself as a learner, is an equally important factor when making the decision to participate.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), Mertesdorf (1990), Fagan (1991), Desjardins et al. (2006) and Larson and Milana (2006) agree that psychosocial barriers - also referred to as “dispositional, attitudinal and perceptual barriers” - can be understood as adult learners’ ability to assess their prior schooling experiences and their sense of self as adult learners, or potential learners (Fagan, 1991). Fagan (1991) outlines three sets of factors related to learner participation, namely, inherent factors, defined as being “within - individual factors”; “self-evaluation, life/personal factors which are goals of the adult learner”; and “capabilities described as program-related factors” (p. 3). The adult learner who is considered disadvantaged and who perceives little support while learning can find the experience challenging and troublesome as there is a lack of motivation to navigate and manage life while learning or deciding to study further.

According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), Millar and Falk (2000) and Godard and Selwyn (2005), research on psychosocial and informational barriers outline the attitudes of adult learners towards participation as a belief that ‘I’m too old to learn’, which, combined with low self-esteem and fear of failure, ‘prevents many adults from entering a learning activity’. Emotional fears associated with previous school experiences can contribute to nonparticipation in learning. An adult learner’s prior experience in learning that is perceived to be unsatisfactory can create negative emotions that the adult learner would need to confront when considering the possibility of taking up some form of learning in later life. The perceptions adult learners hold about feelings of failure can be changed through the type of messages communicated about the value of education. Reinforcing the value of education also raises awareness of its positive effect on the adult learner’s responsibility as a learner.

The social and psychological factors of the adult learner not only give rise to many different barriers but can also maintain and reinforce them. Research findings from studies by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), Silva et al. (1998) and Larson and Milana (2006) assert that the adult learner who is educated and employed would be more likely to value the purposes of education and see the benefits of further study, whereas disadvantaged adult learners would be faced with very many social and psychological factors making them less likely to participate.

Participants in my study can be described as disadvantaged individuals who have many issues to overcome when learning or wanting to pursue opportunities for further study. Aslanian

and Brickell (as cited in Mertesdorf, 1990) claim that more than 83% of “adult learners identified past, present, or future transitions in their lives as the motivating factor that caused them to start learning” (p. 2). Mertesdorf (1990) suggests that adult learners are inspired to learn because of various “life transitions that can take place in their personal or work life circumstances” (p. 2). Whether seeking support for responsibilities at work, new family roles, or adjusting to new learning experiences, overcoming psychosocial factors can enable the adult learner to develop positive meaning about the value of learning. Gaining an understanding of psychosocial factors, through investigating adult learners’ perceptions, can provide insight into adult learners’ rationales for participating. Psychosocial barriers are related to perceptions adult learners have towards participation in learning, such as low self-esteem, and perceived coping abilities based on age, race, language ability and level of education (Mackeracher et al., 2006; Aiken, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000).

The research site chosen to conduct my study was accessed by adult learners who are seeking access to health services, psychosocial support services and adult basic educational programmes. Through accessing the support services the adult learner could speak to a social worker for advice and seek information from referral services. The psychosocial support services offered the adult learner an opportunity to access other necessary services needed for survival (i.e. healthcare services, non-formal adult education opportunities and employment referrals).

Scanlan (1984) recommends that “interventions created for learning and skills development, adopt strategies that address common factors like the individual, family, home-related problems, cost concerns, self-worth or need of educational opportunities, negative perceptions of education’s value, lack of motivation towards learning and lack of self-confidence” (p. 83). The strategies outlined by Scanlan (1984) presume that adult learning requires teaching/learning and psychosocial support mechanisms to be in place for the learner to be successful. The decision for the adult to participate is impacted by the individual’s socio-economic, psychological and socio-cultural context and having these support mechanisms as referral points can aid the adult learner to access guidance on the desire to participate in learning to develop the necessary academic and social skills.

According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), psychosocial obstacles “tend to be related either to education or learning as entities or activities, or to the self as a learner or potential learner” (p. 139). The authors also comment that adult learners assume different reasons for

the “negative evaluations of the usefulness, appropriateness and pleurability of engaging in adult education” (p. 139). In addition, adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may see adult education as having “little intrinsic value and little usefulness as a means of achieving personal goals” (p. 140).

Courtney (1992) conducted research with adult learners in a bid to understand why adults learn and what their motives or reasons are for participating in adult education. Courtney (1992) commented that there is a perception that when adult learners pursue adult education and training, they are in fact “making up for deficiencies in earlier formal schooling”. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) argue that reasons for participation may not always be for the purpose of the learning activity, i.e. “to learn a subject or skill” (p. 136) and that reasons are not always obvious or rational. The adult learner can be driven by various pressures to participate, e.g. a need to conform to some requirement to obtain a certificate, a need to escape daily routine or to satisfy a need for human relationship-building (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982).

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) and Courtney (1992) agree that adult learners who access AET are more likely to be active and productive participants in society, than someone who is not participating in a learning activity. Mackeracher et al. (2006) explain that studies conducted with marginalised groups generally let the reader assume that irrespective of levels of socio-economic status, all women and men from a specific context experience the same barriers. Larson and Milana (2006) agree that although this appears obvious, it is, however, unlikely, as some barriers may be more important for specific socio-economic groups than others within these contexts. Amid the many external factors acting as barriers for the adult learner to overcome, barriers that are perceived as internal factors can make it more challenging when deciding to participate in further learning.

Mertesdorf (1990) defines three types of barriers stating that institutional barriers are “created by institutional practices and policies, situational barriers are generated by the adult students’ life circumstances and dispositional barriers are created by psychological struggles with attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner” (p. 1).

Literature on the topic of barriers that hindered potential adult learners’ participation reported that institutional or situational barriers are more important than dispositional barriers (Mertesdorf, 1990; U.S. Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

Mertesdorf (1990) critiques this claim, believing that when adult learners portray negative prior schooling experience, “dispositional barriers are probably more powerful barriers than either institutional or situational barriers” (p. 2). Mertesdorf (1990) also cites Cross (1981) in support and comments that the “real importance of dispositional barriers is underestimated since theoretically based inquiry is lacking for studies on barriers to learning” (p. 2). Considering the individual’s psychological and social context will provide holistic insight into what barriers exist for specific socio-economic groups.

Probability of Participation

The Psychosocial Interaction Model by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) indicates there “is a direct relationship between the intensity of one’s learning press and the frequency and intensity of the participation stimuli” (p. 144) experienced by the individual learner. The learning environment and the availability of information accessible to them influence learners’ experience. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) comment that the presence of motivation to participate does not ensure the adult learner at any given time and place will participate in learning as this depends on each unique life situation.

In the current study, I conceptualise a framework that permits analysis of a group of adult learners’ psychosocial factors by considering their perceptions about adult education during their pre-adult and adult stages of learning.

Section 3 will discuss the research design and methodology for the current study.

Section 3: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

In this section, the research question is outlined and the research site utilized to conduct this study is described. The method of selection of participants for the study is explained together with the research instrument and methods used for the collection of research data. The section concludes with a description of this study's data analysis process as well as ethical considerations affecting the research.

Research question

Main research question

What are adult learners' perceptions of psychosocial factors that undermine participation in adult education and learning?

Sub-question

What psychosocial factors create barriers to participation in adult education and learning?

Research site

The selected research site for my study was shelter residence in Hillbrow at which the Department of Social Development offered a non-formal education programme. The Department of Social Development runs local clinics and provides educational workshops and psychosocial support services for vulnerable individuals throughout Johannesburg. Various service providers working in collaboration with the Department of Social Development offer the adult learning programmes.

Participants in this study were adult learners who attended a non-formal learning programme offered by the Department of Social Development. Participants in the non-formal programme comprised of participants who resided at one of the shelter residences in Hillbrow, as well as participants who lived in other areas in Johannesburg and who attended other non-formal programmes offered at the research site. The non-formal learning initiatives included a catering course, a gardening course and early childhood development training. Participants who completed the course received a certificate of attendance. Participants attended the non-formal programme to develop skills that would assist them to enter the labour market and be able to sustain their lives.

In a letter (Appendix A) addressed to the Department of Social Development Unit, I sought permission to conduct research among participants accessing the educational programmes as an exit strategy from the adult learners' current occupations and lifestyles. I was invited to a meeting by the Director of the Unit who informed me that the available educational and psychosocial support services gave participants access to a social worker who links them to educational providers offering non-formal learning, and thus possible employment for the adult learner. Both structural and institutional challenges had to be overcome during the selection and recruitment of participants for the study. Previous adult learners who had participated in and had completed the learning programmes were not easily accessible. In consultation with the shelter centre's director, I was able to work with a social worker who became the contact point for access to participants in this study.

Participant selection

This research study's socio-cultural orientation acknowledges reality to be socially constructed and that participants are experts in their lives, and it was not my intention to re-interpret participants' truth but to document their realities in the most honest way possible.

For this research study, a generic purposive sample was adopted as a form of non-probability sampling. According to Bryman (2012), "generic purposive sampling may be employed in a sequential or in a fixed manner and the criteria for selecting cases or individuals may be formed a priori (for example, sociodemographic criteria)" (p. 422). Bryman refers to generic purposive sampling as a form of sampling employed "in relation to the selection of participants" (p. 422). Hood (as cited in Bryman, 2012) refers to generic purposive sampling as a "generic inductive qualitative model, which is relatively open-ended and emphasizes the generation of concepts and theories but does not entail the iterative style of grounded theory" (p. 422). The type of sampling strategy chosen relates to what Bryman refers to as a purposively conducted "but not necessarily with regard to the generation of theory and theoretical categories" (p. 422). This study did not investigate various categories of barriers but instead sought to single out a case for psychosocial factors that adult learners perceived as challenges when deciding to participate in adult learning. The process of applying the Psychosocial Interaction Model as a guiding framework allowed me to validate the data through participants' feedback and ensure that individual views were clarified and not misunderstood in this research.

Criteria to participate in this research study required that participants were attending a current non-formal programme or had participated in a previous non-formal programme offered by the Department of Social Development. Prospective participants were asked during the information session conducted by the social worker, whether they would be prepared to be contacted by me, who would share more information about the study and whether they would be willing to confirm an appointment to be interviewed. A register, that the social worker circulated during the information session, was made available for them to sign. I was provided with a list of fourteen prospective participants details. I contacted each prospective participant that indicated on the register that they were willing to be contacted. The initial list I received from the social worker comprised eight men and six women. I had planned to have a gender balance in this study, but finding women from the initial information session register was proving difficult. I approached the social worker again to assist with recruiting two women who were attending a different non-formal learning programme. In total 10 participants (6 men and 4 women) were interviewed.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the 10 participants. They were adult learners between the ages of 21 and 49 years old who were participating in a non-formal educational programme being offered between 2016 and 2017. Data collected from the sample were used to investigate the perceptions of this sample learning population.

Research instrument and methods of research data collection

Using an interview guide (see Appendix D) as an instrument, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with participants. I chose this research instrument to permit more openness to different views and ways in which adult learners perceive their social world. The selected research instrument was useful for gathering data on what was not known and the conversation during the interview was effectively a free and open engagement. Bryman (2012) defines an interview guide as:

A rather vague term that is used to refer to a brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered that is often employed in unstructured interviewing or to the somewhat more structured list of issues to be addressed or questions to be asked in a semi-structured interview. (p. 712)

Bryman (2016) states that a semi-structured interview is:

“A term that covers a wide range of types of interview. It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview guide but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference than those typically found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies”. (p. 550)

According to Bryman (2012), qualitative studies are frequently interested not just in what people say but also in the way that they say it. To capture the unintended meanings from the engagements it is necessary for a complete account of the interview to be available.

Securing suitable and convenient appointment times was a necessary consideration. Participants were asked whether telephonic calls could be made to follow up on appointments. Most participants had mobile devices. Those without a smart device were personally approached to book an appointment for an interview once a time slot had been agreed during the information session.

Data-capturing

Participants were asked (Appendix C) during the introductory session if the interview discussion could be recorded. Informed consent was obtained at the start of the interviews and I explained the interview process to participants in order to put them at ease before commencing with the recording. I used an electronic smart device to record interviews after which I transcribed the interviews. Heritage (as cited in Bryman, 2012) suggests an advantage of recording and transcription is that it is “useful to help correct the natural limitations of our memories and allows for a more thorough examination of opening up the data to scrutiny by other researchers to evaluate the analysis” (p. 482).

Data analysis

A framework as a type of research strategy that assists with analysis is defined by Ritchie (as cited in Bryman, 2012), as a “matrix-based method used for synthesizing the data and constructing central themes and sub-themes which are then represented in the matrix and closely resemble the display of variables outlined by the framework” (p. 579). The data analysis process utilized in this research evolved through coding and synthesising the data

collected under each element and also the broad themes located within the Psychosocial Interaction Model. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) describe the type of analysis I adopted for this study as “grouping concepts that are abstract and lacking theory specificity to construct meaning that can explain aspects of complex phenomena in adult learners’ participation in education and learning” (p. 133).

Analysis was carried out using a standard MS-Excel spreadsheet to capture the data collected under a broad theme and ordered according to the questions in the research interview guide. Sub-themes emerging for further analysis were linked to understanding participants’ perceptions of psychosocial factors as analysed across the Psychosocial Interaction Model.

This process allowed me to validate the data through participants’ feedback and to ensure individual views were clarified and not misunderstood in the course of this research. Throughout the research, the context is justified in relation to adult learners’ perceptions of psychosocial barriers to participation. The study does not locate its context in the phenomenon inherent to its research cohort, however, it acknowledges that specific aspects of participants’ culture, socio-economic status and lifestyle may need further clarification. A measure of validity in qualitative research, according to Yardley (2008), is reflexivity and power. Reflexivity, in this instance, is described as the “researcher’s reflections of the research process whereby both researcher and participant effect the construction of meaning and knowledge” (Willig, 2001, p. 240). Qualitative research emphasises that the researcher is not detached and objective, but instead plays an active role in shaping the research process. While reflexivity does not remove bias, it was necessary for me to continually examine my own perceptions and the impact on the data analysis process, particularly in relation to my own construction of disadvantaged groups and learning.

Research ethics considerations

Some of the key ethical considerations in social science research include voluntary participation, informed consent, risk of harm, confidentiality and anonymity (Bryman, 2008; Bryman, 2012). These are all ethical issues that I considered important for this study.

When inviting potential participants and institutions to be part of a research project, a number of authors stress how essential it is to provide them with all necessary information regarding the study (Bryman, 2008). This will ensure they can make informed decisions on participation. Ethical considerations for the current study are as follows: I recognise that

participants will be active role players and should be treated with respect. I recognise and respect the human rights and dignity of each participant. I asked for permission and consent from prospective participants. Their decisions to participate were voluntary.

Voluntary informed consent

A consent form (Appendix C) was given to participants during an individual discussion. Participants were informed of their rights regarding the interviewing process, so that they understood their protection from any form of exploitation.

Confidentiality

Participants' real names and the name of the institution are not associated with any part of the written findings in the research paper. Pseudonyms have been used. All hard copy and voicerecorded data are kept confidential in a safe place. Data will be kept in the strictest confidence and will be stored in a secure location for five years, where after it will be destroyed.

Non-Malevolence

I considered whether there was a need to address the psychological impact of the research process for all participants during the interviews. Participants were advised to speak to the social worker should the need to talk about negative feelings arise during or after the interview and she / he would provide psychosocial support.

The research design chosen for the research methodology highlighted the interplay of the Psychosocial Interaction Model's pre-adulthood and adulthood elements outlined by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) and form themes for analysis to determine what social and psychological factors undermine learning and education.

In this section, the research site and participant selection undertaken in this study were described. I also described the type of research instrument used and the method of data collection. Before ending this section, a definition of the research strategy used during data analysis is presented. Finally, the three research ethical considerations applied in this study were explored.

In Section 4, the data analysis process undertaken in this study is described.

Section 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

This section covers the data analysis and provides the findings of the research paper. A brief synopsis of each participant is presented. Through conceptualisation of the study's framework, the data was coded and synergised according to broad themes. A socio-cultural lens was applied, when sharing participants' narratives and responses.

The aim of the research study was to identify psychosocial factors that a group of adult learners attending a non-formal learning programme perceive as barriers to participation in learning. For the purpose of this study, psychosocial factors were defined as perceptions that adult learners (or an adult learner wanting to study further) hold about their sense of self as a learner. The data, collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants (6 males and 4 females) using an interview guide, was analysed.

The main research question was: "What are adult learners' perceptions of psychosocial factors that undermine participation in adult education and learning?" It came with the following sub-question: "What psychosocial factors create barriers to participation in adult education and learning?"

This study investigated how adult learners in a non-formal learning context perceived psychosocial factors that served as barriers influencing their decisions to participate in further learning.

The data collected was explored and I had to re-read it and engage with it by listening to the audio recordings more than once to enable grouping of the data and aligning it to the research aim. This study did not investigate various categories of barriers but instead sought to single out a case for psychosocial factors that adult learners would have to mitigate when deciding about further learning and accessing educational opportunities available to them. The process of applying the Psychosocial Interaction Model as a guiding framework allowed me to validate the data through participants' feedback and ensure that individual views were clarified and not misunderstood in this research. In the course of the research, the context is justified in relation to the adult learners' perceptions of psychosocial barriers to participation.

The Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) was a useful framework for analysing the recorded data as it permitted framing and it explained the study participants' psychosocial barriers to learning as these emerged from the elements highlighted as adulthood factors affecting participatory behaviour. The Psychosocial Interaction Model can be recommended as a workable framework for educational policy makers and planners to investigate why adult learners learn, how adult learners experience learning in education, and the nature of the interplay of psychological and social factors that affect decisions to participate.

Through understanding psychosocial factors, this study set out to investigate the world within which participants have developed cognitively as learners and how perceptions of psychosocial factors influenced their decisions to participate in learning and further adult education.

Brief synopsis of participants and Pre-Adult Factors

Participants in this study were adult learners who had joined a non-formal learning programme offered by the Department of Social Development in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. Participants in the non-formal programme comprised of participants who lived in a shelter residence in Hillbrow, as well as participants, who lived in the broader Johannesburg area and attended a non-formal programme offered by the Department of Social Development. The Department of Social Development introduced life skills initiatives as a type of non-formal learning to participants accessing psychosocial services. The Department of Social Development recognised the importance of developing life skills as an imperative to prepare individuals for employment and community development. Participants attended the non-formal programme to develop skills that would assist them to enter the labour market and be able to sustain their lives.

Ten participants, six males and four females, participated in this research study. The ages of participants in this study ranged from 21 to 49 years old.

Participants in this study had a diverse mix of languages. Zulu is the home language for three of the participants; one speaks English, two Sotho, one Pedi, one Swahili, one Setswana and one Tsonga. Other languages that they are either able to speak, write and/or understand were English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Tsonga, Xhosa and Southern Sotho. All participants understood English, which was advantageous for me as I am English speaking and it obviated translation

issues. All participants in the study had completed primary schooling, while four participants completed Grade 11 and six completed Grade 12. Of the six that had attained Grade 12, one had an incomplete Bachelor of Commerce Degree, another had completed a Diploma in Early Childhood Development and the other was a qualified high school teacher.

Six participants were single, two were married, one was divorced and one was separated. Six of the participants had between one to three children. Four of the participants did not have children.

A criteria to be a participant in this study was being unemployed, while seven of the participants were unemployed two participants were contractually employed at the time of the interview and one participant was doing voluntary work at the shelter. The nature of the contractual agreement presented the participants with a potential income through generation of sales with a financial service provider, however, the participants were not receiving a fixed income. The seven participants that were unemployed, stated that they had earned between R1, 000 and R5, 000 per month, when they did have employment. Both categories of participants, in terms of employment status, had been employed before and had earned at the level of what would be considered as low-socio-economic status adults. One of the seven participants had never worked before. Towards the end of the data collection process, two participants contacted me to share the news of possible job opportunities at an NGO, which they got through the social worker at the public adult learning centre.

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) portray an adult's SES as a dominant influence in a sequence of variables outlined by the Psychosocial Interaction Model. The broad concepts outlined by the Psychosocial Interaction Model explains the probability for an adult learner to participate in some form of learning activity during adulthood. The participants' SES are depicted below.

Thabo is a 23-year-old black male residing in Johannesburg. His home language is Sotho and he also speaks Xhosa, Zulu and English. He is literate, being able to read and write in all these languages and is proficient in the use of computers. He completed Grade 11 and started Grade 12 at an Adult Basic Education and Training Centre but did not finish due to moving from Limpopo to Gauteng after his mother's death. He is currently unemployed and the last

job he held was in 2012 working as an entrepreneur (fashion designer) and earning up to R5, 000 a month.

Jabu is a 21-year-old black male residing in Johannesburg. This participant's home language is Zulu and he is literate, being able to read and write in both his home language and English. He is able to operate a computer and type basic texts. He completed Grade 11 and indicated that he was unable to complete his schooling due to lack of family support and having no home after his mother had died. He is currently unemployed but had done temporary work in 2016 and earned up to R1, 000 per month.

Sarah is a 38-year-old black female who resides in Johannesburg but her family (husband and one child) lives in the Free State. She grew up in a Sotho community but is of Tsonga descent. She is literate, being able to read and write in English and her home languages. After she had finished Grade 11, she completed a nursing certificate instead of matric (Grade 12). She is computer-literate. She had to leave her family behind to find work in Gauteng but has been unemployed for three years and now does voluntary work at the Displaced Persons Unit in Johannesburg. In her last job she earned up to R2, 000.

Menzo is a black male aged 39 who lives in Johannesburg. He is separated and has three children. He speaks, reads and writes in his home language, Zulu, and also English, and is computer-literate. He was a successful entrepreneur up until 2012 and had generated earnings of up to R5, 000 per month and also received big tenders from working with the Department of Forestry in KwaZulu-Natal at that time. He completed Grade 12 at an Adult Basic Education and Training Centre.

Althea is a 49-year-old coloured woman residing in Johannesburg. She is from Cape Town and has lived in four different shelters between 2011 and now. She is divorced and her two daughters live with her ex-husband in Cape Town. Her home language is both English and Afrikaans. She completed Grade 12 and has an incomplete Bachelor of Commerce degree. She is computer-literate. She is currently employed on a contract basis and earns up to R1, 000 per month.

Thabang is a 22-year-old single black male born in Limpopo but is currently residing in Johannesburg. His home language is Pedi and he is literate, being able to speak, read and write in his home language, as well as English, Zulu and Tswana. He is computer-literate.

Thabang is currently unemployed and his last employment was a casual position in 2016 where he earned an income between R1, 000 to R2, 000. He completed matric.

Joseph is a 37-year-old Southern Sotho-speaking black male. He speaks, reads and writes in his home language and is literate in Zulu, Afrikaans and English. He is computer-literate. He resides in Johannesburg, is single with one dependant and currently unemployed. He was last employed during the period 2006-2009 and earned a salary of between R4, 000 and R5, 000. He completed Grade 11 and would like to go back to school to complete matric.

Mary is a black female aged 36 living in Johannesburg. Her home language is Swahili and she speaks, reads and writes in English. She is originally from Kenya and has lived in South Africa for the past 10 years. She is a single woman with two dependants (boy and girl) currently living with her. She completed Grade 12 and gained a diploma in early childhood development. She is employed as a pre-school educator at present earning a salary between R4, 000 to R5, 000.

Jono is a black male aged 34. He resides in Soweto, Johannesburg. His home language is Sotho and he speaks, reads and writes in English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa. He is computer-literate. Jono passed Grade 12 and is currently employed on a contractual basis earning R1, 000 basic a month.

Tebogo is a black female, aged 45 residing in Johannesburg and is originally from Botswana. Her home language is Setswana and she speaks, reads and writes in English and is computer-literate. She completed Grade 12 and gained a teacher's diploma but is currently unemployed.

According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), adult learners' willingness to participate in some form of adult education is usually defined by possible "predictors such as educational attainment, occupational status and income" (p. 138). In this study, in terms of employment status, all participants have been employed before and earned what would be considered low socio-economic status incomes.

The study data is in tune with the Psychosocial Interaction Model's assertion that high learning press is related to high SES (and low to low).

Learning Press

In this study, some participants' low SES did not influence their motivation to learn; however, it did impact on some participants' decisions to participate in further education and learning. The amount of support they perceived, as being given by family and educators, equally affected their decisions to access further education. Eight of the participants indicated that support from family and educators was a necessary mechanism for encouraging their further learning.

Participants in this study are all categorised as low-income status and showed varied levels of good support systems in place during their former schooling years. The data does, however, highlight that as the perceived support diminished, so too did their decision to access services that could support their learning. In this study, the participants' learning press was investigated to enquire into perceptions of past and current learning experiences and the type of support they received. The data revealed that while adult learners' SES and perceived support in education affected their choices, it, however, did not affect their behaviour in respect of wanting to learn.

Among the emerging concepts further analysed was how family support influenced a learner's decision to participate in learning during adulthood. The adult learners' prior learning also served as a factor inhibiting participation in further adult education. Analysis of this study highlighted the type of learning press and prior formal schooling experiences the participants perceived as being required to develop attributes needed for success in learning.

Perceived family support

In this study, participants answered questions about how they perceived their support systems from past learning experiences and whether they had been able to develop a learning attitude against all the odds they faced in their lives. Some participants perceived the support they received from parent figures like their mothers as being significant during childhood and as an inherent factor promoting confidence and doing well as an adult learner. The type of support the adult learner received during prior schooling can also act as a psychosocial barrier impeding their perception as learner. Perceived support from family was described by three of the participants as a parent having supported them. They indicated the following:

Support was good until my mom died and then there was little support from family.

Support was a problem with family, living with my aunt was hard for me as she

treated me differently from her children. School fees were paid by my aunt but they did not see this through and I had to leave and come to the shelter. I always wanted to learn but not having the family support made me feel less eager to want to learn. The support I received from my mother pushed me to want to do more and want to learn more. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

The support system was my mother. She tried her best to make sure I was in a good school. Problem is she could not fully support me as I sometimes needed money to buy school stuff and pay school fees. She was the only one working and as a single mother it was hard but she tried her best to make sure I have what I needed to learn and go to school. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

Support was good the time my mom was still alive. Everything was okay, everyone was supporting me. This changed when she died. I did not really need the money; everything was paid for us when my mother died but the support I am talking about is they started treating us differently. Family did not treat us the same when my mom was alive. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) explain that an individual's disposition towards learning is shaped and formed through family contexts and socialisation processes and thus the social background tends to influence educational attainment in many ways. As seen from the data collected here, different views about support started to emerge and the measure of how adult learners perceived their childhood learning experience is inherent in how they valued family support and considered it a basis for how they viewed learning as an adult, so influencing their decisions regarding further learning. Boudard and Rubenson (2004) argue that although learning behaviour is "established during childhood, readiness for leaning is further fostered in the educational system" (p. 267). Boudard and Rubenson (2004) highlight that factors which correlate between the development of literacy and family background is also evident in the "distribution of educational attainment and reading and writing habits across different socio-economic groups" (p. 267)

Data obtained in this study harmonise with the findings of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), who argue that different factors of the learning press "are heavily influenced by SES" (p. 142), as is the case with participants' responses to questions about learning press. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) describe the pre-adulthood factors as individual and family

characteristics that are embedded in the adult learner's socio-cultural context that can be seen as inherent values and orientations the adult learner holds about education.

Perceived support required from family

Unlike Thabo, Jabu and Joseph who perceived family support as being a prerequisite to determine participation in further learning, Thabang and Althea received little family support, leading to the perception that support from family should be linked to a type of emotional encouragement that propelled a readiness to want to learn.

I did not actually get any support from my family. I propelled myself and felt like if I drop out of school, what would that mean for me? If I have a dream I go for it. In primary school I stayed with my gran and she taught me a lot of things. I moved around a lot and when I got to high school everything changed for me. I felt like my view was being obscured. My family obscured my view from learning. I felt robbed by my family. Having their support would have helped me focus better and although I had other support my family could have helped me. I had no support from family. (Thabang, Interview, February 9, 2017)

...My mother told me I have the devil in me and this shut me from schooling. I cannot tell you I got the support that I needed but after this incident I was cut off but I recall being in the top three. Actually it did not feel like I was working hard but I did what I needed to do. Support from parents was more the financials but the emotional support was just not there. I never felt like I could just go speak to my parents. At school I could be the good girl I had to be and at school there were teachers I could feel close to but in Standard 4/5, male teachers were different. I was not as comfortable as I was with female teachers. I did not engage as much as I could have. (Althea, Interview, February 9, 2017)

Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990) explain that the Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) is "one of the few that explicitly acknowledges the presence and importance of several pre-adulthood factors that may affect any decision to engage in educational activities" (p. 80). Studies by Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990), Boudard and Rubenson (2004) and Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) highlight opportunities for further investigation into how the adult learners' early schooling experiences affect the adult learner and influence "readiness to learn" as a learning attribute.

For me, support is not about money, it is about emotional support. When I lived with my grandmother after my mother died it was okay but when she died things became difficult. My grandfather took a younger wife and this made it hard to go to him when I need to talk about something at school. I ran away after that. (Joseph, Interview, February 6, 2017)

The data obtained in this study is in line with the findings of Sinanovic and Becirovic (2016) who state that “motivation and variety of learning opportunities are prerequisites for successful lifelong learning” (p. 112).

Perceived support required from educators

Perceived support experienced from teachers during prior schooling was another indicator pointing towards adult learners doing well and providing reasons for their attitudes towards further learning or participation in education.

The historical and social content of a participant’s pre-adulthood context, according to the Psychosocial Interaction Model, is necessary to contextualise how perceived support impacts on the learner’s ability to do well. In this study, types of support structures were perceived differently among participants. While some participants perceived having good support from family as a prerequisite for doing well and feeling good about themselves as learners, others embedded their sense of self in how they experienced support from teachers.

Most participants perceived having a supportive school system as a key factor in helping the adult learner focus and commented as follows about perceived support:

The only support I got was from teachers and during secondary school I had a lot of access to support, which helped me pull through different situations. I could get this from teachers more than from family life. My situation was one where I felt like my family wanted to keep me behind and my definition of support is very much about family. (Thabang, Interview, February 9, 2017)

Do you mean support from teacher or home? Okay, at school, teachers at primary school was very strict. But it was worth it. If I compare the support between primary and high school the teachers were very different. Teachers at primary school encouraged us a lot to study. Support for me was from the teachers and this helped me a lot at school. Teachers wanted to know everything even outside, at

home. The teachers wanted to see you becoming something and their interest about home made it easy for me to want to learn. In high school, it was different. The teachers were not the same as in primary school. ‘You here at school, we teach you and you go home.’ There is no interest like at primary school; they would involve parents. At high school, there is no involvement with parents from teachers. At high school, I did not do anything. Children would be different if teachers at high school were like teachers at primary school. ...Teachers must encourage us at high school so that when we go to tertiary it is easier for us to know that we must be different. Encouragement is important even when children are big because it shows the child that there is an interest. Older children still need encouragement, you know. Teacher support and parents’ support is important to make me focus. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Do you mean support by teachers? My support at the time during childhood was a little bit of support. My parents were not educated. My mother knew nothing about education. Teachers, no they did not supporting, they were supporting but not that much. During our time, I remember when I was at primary; if you do something wrong and you did something the teacher would beat you. The beating was not good for me, it was not supporting me to learn. If you fail to answer the question you would get punished and then you go home your parents also give you hiding and you don’t know where to run. (Menzo, Interview, February 8, 2017)

I thought about going back to school but I don’t feel like going back... So, because of teachers who have destroyed my motivation and willingness to do well at school. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

If a teacher makes sure that learners are different, they want to understand my needs. I think a barrier to learning is thinking that you already know and a second reason is not listening. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

Participants’ perception of teacher support as a factor in doing well at school is explained by Fagan (1991) as: “[A]ny program must operate within a number of constraints, some internal to the learner, some internal to the program, and some external to the learner and the program” (p. 22). According to Fagan (1991), “the area for greatest flexibility in providing for learner participation and responsibility is in the interaction between instructor and

students” (p. 22). Fagan (1991) claims that adult learners’ perception of a barrier would depend on adult learners’ perceptions of the situation. Similarly to Fagan (1991), Silva et al. (1998) comment that the concept of learning press “fosters certain attitudes and perceptions about the value and utility of adult education” (p. 38).

Learning support within the learning environment is to be encouraged for adult learners to develop abilities to reason. In a study by Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990) an individual’s learning press is described as the extent to which one’s environment encourages further learning and is referred to as “the amount and quality of preparatory education and the socialization” (p. 81). The adult learner’s learning, the type of support and types of adult learners are said to be classified within a unique context.

Perceived Value of Education

Fostering attitudes towards education that are grounded in life-long learning principles can result in a more favourable attitude or learning readiness. It is therefore imperative for society and citizens to have the value of adult education grounded in life-long learning, which, in turn, can determine an adult learner’s readiness to participate.

Participants in this study showed varied and conflicting views about the value of education when asked whether they thought their prior schooling had prepared them for further education. Data obtained in this study was in line with the findings of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) that an adult learner’s “perception of the value of adult education quite obviously will affect that individual’s disposition or readiness to participate” (p. 144). Perceived value in education was analysed in this study within the context of whether prior schooling was perceived as having an influence on decision-making about further learning, and whether prior schooling acted as an affirmation of the adult learner’s perceived value of education or not.

Prior Schooling No affirmation of Perceived Value of Education

Althea, Joseph and Jono did not feel or were less sure that their prior schooling prepared them to study further.

No. I was made to feel that I am not good enough... (Althea, Interview, February 9, 2017)

No and yes... (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

The data analysis of perceived value in education does not resonate completely with the Psychosocial Interaction Model's description that "learning press is less pronounced, as it generally is for persons towards the lower end of the SES continuum", describing adult education as "less likely to be perceived as potentially useful or valuable" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p.144). In the current study, the majority of participants had a positive attitude towards the value of education and saw their prior schooling as having made an impact on their ability to study further.

Barriers undermining perceived value of education

The theoretical perspective of this study is in line with the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report that states for "an inclusive social development to be present a universal provision of services requires to be redressed" (UNESCO, 2016). The 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report also suggests that an "inclusive social development requires more than providing services" and comments that "social structures must be changed to ensure that all women and girls, men and boys have a measure of equality between them, and "that one's gender does not adversely affect opportunities in life-long and work-based learning" (UNESCO, 2016, p 91). Gorard and Selwyn (as cited in Mackeracher et al., 2006) argue that because "patterns of participation in formal education are set early in life through variables [such] as age, ethnicity, gender, prior schooling and the literacy culture of the family [it] can be deduced that adult learners who create a positive learner identity early in their learning development will be more likely to participate in further learning" (p. 10).

Informed by their research Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) constructed a bounded agency model as a theoretical perspective to understand the impact that welfare state regimes have on participation in education. In the South African educational context many are reliant on the state as a welfare organ where individuals accessing opportunities are further hindered through the social context in which they are located, and by structures the individual has to mitigate when deciding to participate in education.

Comments from participants about prior schooling experiences in relation to current learning suggested that quality support in educational structures also adds to how education is valued and therefore how institutional structures influence adult learners' perceptions of its utility. The data in this research corresponded with the findings of Malhotra et al. (2007) and Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990) who found that if "perceived provision of services and

learning support is not present for the adult learner the utility and perceived value of education is diminished for the adult learner” (p. 81).

The data from this study confirm that while various levels of support are necessary to motivate an adult learner, so too is a change in educational planning required to address social systems that they perceive as supporting education. The data also highlighted a negative trajectory of the perceived value of education in society. This is evident from the data and resonates with participants’ perceived experiences on the current learning programme.

Being on the learning programme I want to access more information on studying. I want a chance to study further and get information about where I can go and do more than this. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

The OECD (as cited in Mackeracher et al., 2006) reports that while prior learning processes are being recognised by educational institutions, further improved linkages need to be created between educational institutions and public adult learning centres to provide learning opportunities in a responsive educational system. The argument exists for the education system to foster the linkages that have been created across segments of education, namely, between formal and non-formal education. All participants in the current study reported high educational costs or not being able to access the learning programmes they preferred.

Readiness to participate

In this study, questions about readiness to participate were asked in relation to the adult learners’ expectations of a current learning activity in order to analyse their perceptions about further learning. The data highlighted the necessity for an enabling learning environment together with educational information and psychosocial support mechanisms. Most participants grounded their perceived motivation to learn and participate in education as being dependent on what they were currently learning.

Inspired readiness to participate

Mary concurs with Thabo, Jabu and Sarah, that participating in the non-formal learning programme inspired her to study further.

I feel inspired, however not any course. I want to do fashion design. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

I feel inspired. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

I would love to study further do community work. I attended a nursing college. I enjoy learning. I did not complete matric but I did study nursing. My parents supported me a lot, you know my father like to read a lot. He was working in the forestry industry. He was a lecturer. He was doing his diploma when he was 50something. He always said if you want to go to school I will pay for you. At home we are three and I am the eldest with two brothers. I feel inspired by the learning programme. I would like to do something other than nursing, for me now community work is good. I don't want to teach so the early childhood programme is not interesting for me. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

...Yes I feel inspired to go back to studies. I feel I can empower others... (Mary, Interview, March 1, 2017)

While most participants felt positive about the support mechanisms offered in the learning programme, others indicated that the Department of Social Development was not inclusive in supporting their learning/skills development and/or psychosocial needs and they did not feel inspired to participate further in learning.

I have no expectations as I don't see the benefit of the programme. (Jono, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Gorard and Selwyn (as cited in Mackeracher et al., 2006) explain why a positive disposition is necessary to form a positive learner identity for the adult learner, inferring that learner identity may “explain more about non-participation than the various barriers that are routinely described in the literature” (p. 10). Most participants in this study portrayed a readiness to participate in some form of learning. However, there is room for further investigation into why participants do not feel inspired in current learning programmes. Participants' responses show a lack of trust in the support mechanisms already in place, requiring further investigation to find ways to increase participation and make learning environments conducive to learning.

The data are in line with those of Hatlala (1993) who considered ways that educational planners can design interventions to minimise deterrents to re-training or re-educating unemployed adults.

The data analysis in this study relating to readiness to participate concurs with that in the working paper of the U.S. Department of Education (1998), confirming that the “likelihood of participation is further conceived as dependent upon the perceived frequency and intensity of participation stimuli” (p. 38). It also comments that while deterrents for participants are important when it comes to understanding barriers external to participation, it is necessary to consider the individual’s internal disposition about dealing with challenges and its impact on decisions about participating in further learning.

Academic literature dealing with adult education accentuates the many complexities that confront the adult learner when taking a decision to participate in learning. The literature makes recommendations for a more multidisciplinary approach to planning educational efforts that encourage lifelong learning.

Participation Stimuli

Participants in this study were asked what their main reasons for joining the learning programme was and to provide one reason for continuing education.

Most responses were in line with the literature regarding the need to learn being triggered by an internal desire to better their lives, however some felt external factors compounded their decision to study further. In this study, age as a socio-economic variable influenced the type of participation stimuli identified as a psychosocial factor influencing participants’ willingness to study further. Age can be identified as a variable factor that is different for young adult learners (18-25 years) and older adult learners (26-49 years), as the adult learners’ willingness to participate was stimulated by different factors that were age-related. When participants were asked about their reasons for joining the learning programme they responded as follows:

Age 18-25 years:

My main reason is because I want to go further, I want to brighten my future. Me studying is about achieving my dream. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

My plan is to be an entrepreneur and open a fashion school. I want to make my dream come true. I am doing it for me and other people. (Thabang, Interview, February 9, 2017)

I really have seen that I need to complete my Grade 12 and have seen that it is a must to do things. I have struggled a lot because I don't have this Grade 12. This one is deep for me. In reality I have a dream to become a footballer, a soccer player. I have been told that football is a short career and maybe I would need a back-up. Something constant that can help me when I am done with soccer. No, I don't belong to a soccer club here in Joburg. I would like to join an institution where I can. I can say that I am good but not that good enough because soccer is like you need to practice all the time. Football is like a match you have to practice every day. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

Age 26-49 years:

The main reason was that I came to Joburg to look for a job and then I could not find a job and no place to stay. I did stay here before but that was long ago. I came here to want to get a job. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

For survival and to have a place to be safe. (Jono, Interview, March 1, 2017)

I need support and learning to get a job. I need cooperation. (Althea, Interview, February 15, 2017)

To find work in this country. (Tebogo, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Unlike the other participants in this study, Mary believed joining the learning programme is intended to meet a specific learning need.

I attend the workshops with the expectation to find out more about the current trends in teaching in the field of early childhood development. Back in the days we use to write on the floor with a stick; now the kids are using computers. So I learn a lot through technology. This is important to me. (Mary, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Participants in this study are all from disadvantaged backgrounds and are considered to be low-socio-economic status individuals who have participated in some form of formal education in their lives. In addition to distinguishing participants' social learning context to improve educational planning and the availability of social development services, there is

also the challenge of integrating ways to address each individual's unique context to understand experiences and expectations as stimuli for participation.

The reason Tebogo and Menzo gave for joining a learning programme is embedded in the need for social participation. Tebogo states that her reason for joining was...

To meet others and fulfil my dream to help others. (Tebogo, Interview, March 1, 2017)

It depends which programme. On joining I expect to learn more. I want to go on programmes like community programmes. (Menzo, Interview, February 8, 2017)

The stimuli from social participation in learning expressed by Tebogo and Menzo resonate with what Wenger (2008) states about learning as “forms of participation and reification which continually converge and diverge” (p. 89), and also notes that through learning new information, the adult learner is able to negotiate meaning through connections with others.

Irrespective of gender, Tebogo and Menzo felt they would be more motivated through social participation strategies in their learning process and perceived social cohesion amongst learners as being a necessary driver in education. The data collected here supported the research of Fagan (1991) who stated that learners' feelings of isolation impede their learning ability.

Althea and Jabu considered their current learning experience by first evaluating their prior schooling experiences. Participation stimuli for further study are reflected in a held belief, which is reflected in their expectations of the current learning programme.

I was told in the learning programme that I need a plan and when I told the social worker that I am doing something about it and was told that my thinking is bad. I was told if I want to do something I must not worry about what I want to do but rather sell food instead of selling the catering equipment. And on top of this I was told to find a job as a cleaner or child minder and in all of that he tells me when you work around you must think about where you want to go. He has never once asked me for my CV or understand what it is I can do; rather he just assumes that I need to do what he wants so that I can go away. Based on his behaviour I feel that this social worker is not capable of doing, supporting me, that I need. I am disappointed in what we are being taught on this programme, as he does not keep his

appointment with me. I left him one day totally in tears, I left him feeling so down because instead of getting to know me and what I need to learn, he rather sent me to other students who are younger and have no experience. In these learning programmes they don't get you. My experience is that second-place shelters (shelters where people live and still go to work) is much better as they spend time to assess my needs for studying and the support I need to learn. I have always been open to learning. (Althea, Interview, February 9, 2017)

I struggled at school because sometimes teachers will say things like you too old enough, you too dumb, you just useless. I feel like school is not for me; many times teachers talk like harmful things to us and sometimes it can bring us down in terms of our learning and to complete school. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

This perception has been reinforced for Jabu by how he experiences the learning environment and teaching methods used.

Aiken et al. (2000) reported that research “treats adults as a generic class in comparison to the traditional 18-to 21-year-old undergraduate, and the motivators and barriers that have been identified as affecting participation are cast as individualistic and not group specific” (p. 317).

Data obtained in this study are in line with the findings of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), analysing adult learners' willingness to participate, where they state that “readiness must be activated by one or more specific stimuli before participation can be expected to occur”. As seen in the data collected, age as a factor created different stimuli for the adult learners here. The data also revealed that most participants wanted to study further as a result of an internal anticipation of something, or a need related to self-improvement of their lives.

Most participants in this study indicated that a major reason for continuing their education is to build their capabilities and pursue their desire to create a better future. Responses from the data collected on reasons for joining the learning programme supported this view, with such interview responses as:

I want to see myself helping others with whatever I want to study. Even help myself but mostly... you know sometimes, you must forget about yourself and think about others. (Sarah, Interview, February 6, 2017)

To have a chance in life because now I thought this course would help me. But now I see that many courses are worthless. I have burnt many certificates, serious. I have been applying but never get responses. Yes, I regret doing this, even that one from UNISA I burnt it but I think I can get the UNISA one and the ABET college course. You see what happened, the course we doing here is just a way for me to do something cause I don't want to stop learning. When they do presentations they don't know what exactly, what is going on in the field. (Menzo, Interview, February 8, 2017)

I want to complete what I started. I feel useless; I feel like a disappointment, a failure in my life. I feel like I did not make it. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

...To gain more experience and become more empowered. (Mary, Interview, March 1, 2017)

...To achieve my goal in life. (Jono, Interview, March 1, 2017)

UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2016) outlines educations' benefit to society and explains that "lifelong learning approaches focus not only on curricula but also on intergenerational knowledge and values created by the community" (p. 29).

Barriers (psychosocial)

Ngidi (2014) outlines a review of barriers to participation, asserting that in summary, a range of barriers can be categorised into "external and internal barriers", referring to external barriers as "situational, institutional, academic and informational" and internal barriers as "dispositional" (p. 13). Internal barriers are similar to what Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) described as psychosocial barriers, arguing that these are "employed to emphasise the role of social forces" (p. 137).

Variables emerging from this study provided insight into the interchangeable social and psychological influences the adult learner needs to mitigate when deciding to participate in learning. The individual factors emerging in the data revealed attributes inherent to the adult learner's perception of self as a learner feeling motivated to learn.

Confidence as an individual factor

The data indicated that possessing confidence was an individual factor capable of facilitating opportunities for the learner to seek access to learning. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) argue that “there are as many adult learners with objective barriers in terms of dysfunctions, for example having a young child and working hours as those who do not participate in learning” (p. 191). Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) state that emphasis is placed on “dispositional aspects including values and subjective interpretation of one’s opportunity structure to achieve what matters for them” (p. 192).

In this section, the data obtained indicated both positive and negative feelings about being confident of learning success. Most participants reported that they felt confident about successfully completing their current and future studies; however, others perceived their learning press as a demotivating factor that impacted their decision to participate.

Responses given by Thabo, Jabu, Thabang, Mary and Tebogo showed that having confidence as an attribute influenced their decision to want to learn, irrespective of their social contexts. Thabo described himself as learner willing to learn and wanting to take advantage of educational opportunities accessible to him. He commented:

I am about to do what I love. The learning programme is one support for me but I want to be full-time and not be limited. I am always motivated to learn. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

Mary described perceptions of self-confidence as evolving at various points in her life transitions and learning and this was reflected in her response:

The way I thought about education has changed over the years. I can continue with teaching at home but it is not the same. I am inspired to study further. I did bible studies. I had to travel far to go to class (between Johannesburg and Pretoria). I felt confident to complete. Each exam I completed I passed with distinction. I relied on sponsors. The work support made it possible to feel confident. The desire to study is for my professional development. (Mary, Interview, March 1, 2017)

I completed my teacher’s diploma and this makes me feel confident to go further. (Tebogo, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Social factors influencing confidence as individual factors

Bourdieu (as cited in Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009) argues that an individual's socio-economic contexts "can be seen as a system of dispositions that governs how a person acts, thinks and orients him or herself in the social world" (p. 196). Fagan (as cited in Mackeracher et al., 2006) explains that dispositional factors are a reflection of the adult learners' perception of their ability to seek out and successfully complete learning activities.

Menzo, Joseph, Sarah, Tebogo and Jono's perceptions of how confident they were was influenced by desire to learn. They viewed the desire to learn as being dependent on the support they were receiving to lessen social factors that were external to their perceived control. Although most participants felt confident, their perceived level of support prevented them from deciding to participate. The participants' narratives about this were of social factors that they needed to mitigate. The desire to succeed and participate further in adult education is not the only aspiration any longer as their social context influenced their ability to succeed in their efforts to achieve an education. The participants can be said to perceive situational factors as barriers that overrode their confidence about seeking opportunities to learn, irrespective of their social contexts.

Menzo perceived social factors as being reasons for not wanting to participate in further education and commented:

Yes, I feel confident but I think it is too late; I got many things that must be done. Every time I think of education I see my children in front of me. They like a wall. I have to satisfy them now. You see they said one day they said they will send me to university in the Eastern Cape. It was around 2007/2008, and they said they could give me bursary but they were not prepared to pay me because I have wife and children. But now I think if I can go there now I will be too far away. Another reason is that teachers will say you too old; you too dumb. I can but it is too late. My children need me and I don't feel confident. Finding a job will make me feel confident. I resigned from my previous job. I want someone to trust. Support means having someone believe in you. (Menzo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

Tebogo, like Menzo, perceived social factors - like not having a job - as reasons for not succeeding and stated:

Finding a job at a school in SA will help me a lot. I have a lot to offer but everywhere I go I am told there are no vacancies. (Tebogo, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Psychosocial factors are interwoven and challenging to separate, as is evident from participants' responses to the question, "Do you feel confident that you will complete your studies successfully?"

Sarah, Joseph and Jono displayed a willingness and inherent drive to acquire a certain level of adult educational attainment, but saw their social context as external to their perceived control or decision to participate.

Yes, I feel confident, I just need the opportunity, but the problem is money and most of the time the learnership is, you know, age is the problem for me. Yes, there is learnership but you see 35 is the age and it is a problem. You see these things are free but my age, you see, is a problem. I need to find the solution, information. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Yes, I will be confident if there is nothing to disturb me. Having food, a house, transport. I think transport is not really a disturbance because I can walk but the thing that can disturb me is not having a proper diet. Knowing that I come back from school and having a place to study. It is hard to study here. This place is not good for studying; if you come back from work and want to relax, you can't. Now imagine coming from school and having to do assignments, study for a test needs a place to be able to study. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

I am a confident individual. The only thing that is keeping me back in this programme is not having my ID to look for work. My parents robbed me from life by keeping it. (Jono, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Hatlala (1993) notes the deterrents to participation in re-entry adult programmes and comments that "individuals may be so immobilized from being unemployed and not experience social cohesion that even if they attend re-entry workshops they would not be able to benefit without prior counselling" (p. 2). Various theoretical bases and typologies have been put forward as explanations for why adult learners choose to participate; these barriers have been grouped into dispositional, situational and institutional in nature. Data from the

current study indicated that the barriers reported on by the adult learner participants were difficult to separate and overcome.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) explain that psychosocial obstacles tend to be related either to “education or learning as entities or activities, or to the self or potential learner” (p. 139). Psychosocial barriers are related to perceptions learners have towards participation in learning, such as low self-esteem, perceived coping abilities based on age, race, language ability, and levels of education, according to Mackeracher et al. (2006) and Aiken et al. (2000). Aiken et al. (2000) investigated issues affecting participation among a group of black women studying nursing and considered “how to structure educational programs to optimise retention in and completion of these programs” (p. 306). According to Aiken et al. (2000), psychosocial barriers offer new insight into perspectives on barriers to participation. Psychosocial factors such as “self-esteem and past experiences as a student” are factors that can cause “psychological distress resulting from the culture of racism and the experience of being the other” (p. 318). Similar barriers have been noted by Scanlan (as cited in Malholtra, 2007) who also includes “the learners’ questionable worth of themselves, relevance, or quality of educational opportunities, negative educational perceptions, including prior unfavourable experiences, apathy or lack of motivation and lack of self-confidence” (p. 83).

Darkenwald and Merriam (cited in Silva et al., 1998) in a U.S. Department of Education Working Paper Series (1998), explain that the expanded concept of psychosocial barriers, emphasises the “potential learner’s possibly negative attitude toward the utility, appropriateness and pleasurability of engaging in education activities” (p. 46).

Data in the present study indicated that social and individual factors were intertwined with how participants perceived their confidence and the perceived level of support they received from family, prior experience with educators and work. Participants in this study all shared a common affiliation by being part of the learning programme and their reasons for participating were distinct from their social context.

Participants were asked to describe the kind of support that would make them feel more confident when learning. The data obtained in this study revealed that adults require support at the level of family, work and education in order to perceive a trajectory in learning. In order for adult learners to value education’s purpose, they required fundamental support systems and learning environments that allow them to feel safe and supported.

Thabo's attitude portrayed confidence in participation if certain external stimuli, such as institutional support, were offered and he states:

If the learning programme can help me go for upgrading my skills in fashion designing after this programme it would help. I started studying fashion design and I would like to continue with this. I would like the learning centre to allow me an opportunity to follow through with my studies, not just what they want me to learn. If I can get the support with what I want to do will make it more manageable. Having my work and family support me and I will be able to do what I love. Support from work makes it easier for me to follow through. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

In Sarah's narrative about the support needed for her to feel confident and motivated to learn to further her education, she presented time constraints as reasons that made it challenging.

The time I was working I was not going to cope with studies. When I worked at the medical centre I was knocking off late and it could not be possible for me to learn. The difference to cope for me when working and studying is time. I was not working far from home but time is an important support for me. Time is also a support factor that can help me create time to focus. I can make time but sometimes having a family to look after makes it difficult. When I have to look after kids it makes it difficult because I have to support the children and give up my time to help them. Even when I stayed with my family, my child was living with my mother. I had time but I had to look after my sister's child and help her with homework. I knew my child was getting help from my mother and I could not just leave my niece when she was struggling. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Menzo showed confidence as a dispositional trait when describing social factors that were challenging for him to overcome.

Support for me is difficult to explain. What age do you want me to talk about? There was little support for me as a child but the time I grew up it started to change a lot, with the system of education. When I started high school there was big change. When I was in Standard 6, there was a chance to debate and ask teachers if you don't understand anything. High school was good in Grade 8 and I started to

get confidence. Debating was good as I could challenge the teachers and this was good for me and feels better about school. For me it is different, when I was working I was very motivated. I did not have a problem, I had status and I could work and study and be involved in community projects. Being busy helped me to work under pressure. I was working and did a Development Studies course at Unisa but had to drop out because I was under pressure and it was too much for me. Studies were wasting my time. But I did a mistake; if I could do that I would be able to do better know. Stress for me is like making my brain not function. At the time I was busy, I could work and do many courses but I was fresh and my mind was open. You see between 2004 - 2010 was good for me I could live my dream; now I have stress. This stress makes me not cope and made me feel like a hero to zero. (Menzo, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Althea comes across similarly to Thabo in believing that particular types of educational activities must be present in her environment to propel her participation.

...as 49-year-old studying, it's about the connection for me and understanding who I am and acceptance from the other person. Getting to know me, not just telling me but allowing me to be myself. This helps me engage better. Where there is negativity I struggle and realise now that I did not work through what happened with my mother. If you want to engage with me and want me to learn, do it with me in a positive manner. Maybe because of the trauma that I shut off. Before the trauma of losing everything I just needed to survive, the me I was before, I want to be again. I am aware that at this point in my learning I need an environment where I can be comfortable and have awareness that I need positiveness to deal with what I need to work through. (Althea, Interview, February 8, 2017)

For me, managing requires a state of mind and understanding with self that you have to plan ahead and know that it is not just about support from family or work but about getting the balance and commitment to go to the next level. I need to know that these things take time and being willing makes it easier to do what needs to be done when you learning. Doing learning yourself is about being determined and applying your mind. (Mary, Interview, March 1, 2017)

It is important to note that in this study, as participants perceived their level of support was increasing and where it was present for them, so did their confidence in participating in learning grow.

Motivation as an individual factor

The adult learners' confidence and motivation to learn were individual learning attributes that encouraged a decision to participate in learning and further adult education. Participants were asked to recall a time when they had felt motivated and to describe what about that experience made them feel motivated. Participants responded as follows and also shared what they perceived as being support for their motivation to learn:

Yes, I was, I was very motivated. Then I was disappointed when my mom died, you see I knew I was not going to be able to go to school.

I am more motivated, especially when it comes to Arts and Science. I enjoy Arts because it has what I love. God has given me this talent—fashion design—and what motivates me is what I love. In Science what I love the most: that we are taught more about the world we living in. The teachers alert us to what is happening around us: you see for example, they tell us about earthquakes and then we can understand what this is. I am hungry to understand new things. You see I did not like it to drop it, you see. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

Yes. There was a time I felt motivated to want to learn. I had a group of friends who helped me with schoolwork. We would come together and discuss what we have learnt. Yes, there was a time I really felt like I am going for this now, I felt encouraged. The problem is I felt like I want to do it but then it was only at school. At home I had no one around me who could continue with what I learnt at school. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

I attended my brother's graduation. My brother gave me advice and I can do anything I want to. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

I resigned. I want someone to trust. When I started working on my own there was no time for motivation, you have to work hard. I think working for someone was different but when I started on my own, things were changing. You see, maybe after 10 years I can go back to look for a job. The general manager did not believe

in me and I was told I am too independent. People like that, I am not racist but you see people like that made me not want to sit in my office, not have a computer. (Menzo, Interview, February 8, 2017)

I think I was just so motivated out of desperation and clung onto this person and thinking back I realised that we complemented each other. (Althea, Interview, February 9, 2017)

I read a lot, especially motivating stuff. Reading makes me feel motivated, it enhances your vocab and once you start talking to people you don't feel belittled because you can express yourself. Having a relationship with my teachers, I thought about it. (Thabang, Interview, February 9, 2017)

When I was doing my diploma (Data Capturing diploma) because I always knew my mom wanted me to do well at my education. This motivated me and I wanted to do well because I knew she wanted this for me. At the moment I want to do well for myself. Whether or not I like it, I must let go and do this for myself. I am not a child anymore; I am not getting any younger. I must fend for my own future as well. I cannot think like the old me any more, I have to think like an adult. I have to man up. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

I had to come to work here and knock off at 5:30 and by 6pm I must be at the college. I feel so motivated because I knew there was no way I could be late. I have favour at work to leave a bit earlier and I have made it the whole year and made it. What motivated me was that every course I did, I got a distinction. Everything that I did and learnt was what motivates me. It was all taken care for me except for transport. If I did not pass I would have to pay back the money so this was a motivation for me. (Mary, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Malhotra et al. (2007) argue that “an adult learner’s decision to participate depends on the degree of congruence or conflict between the person’s needs and the perceived strength of the social and situational factors in the decision” (p. 81). Malhotra et al. (2007) argue further that an adult learner has to overcome the “mental resistance of conflict between motivation and deterrents” (p. 82). Cultivating a positive identity as an adult learner is cumbersome amidst many challenges the individual is faced with in their daily living.

Social factors influencing motivation as individual factors

Other support that would help me is me making friends with my teachers, having that communication with my teachers. I like to talk to others; I am a people's person. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

If I can have that group of people at home to try to concentrate on studies at home, I will be able to turn for help to understand better. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

Money is a problem for me. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Have someone believe in me. To have support means having someone believe in me. (Menzo, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Working together made us assist each other in studying and working in business. (Althea, Interview, February 9, 2017)

Having a relationship with my teachers, I thought about it. A relationship with the teacher on this programme because I have not spoken to the social worker yet. I feel they could have called us one by one to find out how we feel about this place and finding out by us how they can improve this place. (Thabang, Interview, February 9, 2017)

Getting support from the learning programme. I cannot talk to the social worker. I think he is in the wrong job because he never uplift us, he also makes us feel useless. You know what he said to us? He said that we don't have anywhere to go because you abused all your opportunities. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

The support I received from my colleagues helped me a lot. They knew I had to go to college and when I have assignments some of them would check the assignment and sometimes help me with the typing. This really helps me a lot. I think the sponsor being withdrawn because of lack of funds made it very difficult for me. Not having the support made it difficult but I still have the desire to continue. (Mary, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Participants' levels of motivation are hindered by their unique and different social contexts that are seen to serve as barriers. The findings from this research are in line with those of Hippel and Tippelt (2010) who argue that the adult educator's contribution to increasing

participation in adult education should focus on “group-specific differences in further education like socio-demographic factors and states that some aspects related to motivation and attitudes are closely linked to socio-cultural features of the adult learner’s environment (p. 39). The authors argue that socio-demographic factors affecting perceptions and attitudes towards participation are among the barriers impeding further education for the adult learner.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) found “that although individuals have a degree of agency with regard to their learning behaviours, they are also bounded by structures and contexts and by features of the self that constrain choices” (p. 192).

A possible suggestion for new insights from research is to consider the link between learner experiences and learner support as a good teaching educational strategy to create opportunities in the educational setting for the adult learner to understand the relationship between the knowledge and skills being acquired and the expected learning outcome.

Psychological readiness to learn new information

In an investigation into deterrents to participate, Scanlan and Darkenwald (as cited in Hatlala, 1993) argue that:

disengagement, stemming primarily from individual inertia, apathy and negative attitudes; dissatisfaction with the quality of available educational opportunities; costs to individuals; family constraints such as young children, working spouse and so forth; perceived lack of benefit and doubts about the need for continuing education; and constraints at work such as overload, stress, variable schedules, reveals nothing about the different types of would-be learners who experience these forces. (p. 10)

Hatlala (1993) criticised the extent of research into understanding participants’ psychosocial barriers to re-entry programmes in adult education. Alfred (2003) similarly claims that research “seeks to understand the cultural worlds within which individuals have grown and developed, how individuals interpret who they are in relation to others and how they have learned to process, interpret and encode their world” (p. 245). Alfred (2003) seems to suggest that the construction of knowledge is more than just “skills and strategies that are acquired to deal with everyday life” (p. 246) that can be learned in a learning activity. I stress the

importance that learning is as a result from “participation in a larger learning system, sociopolitical community, or discourse” (p. 246).

The findings from the data obtained during the current research revealed that when participants perceived barriers that were external or internal influences, they either embraced learning or they blamed external factors as reasons for not feeling motivated or not wanting to participate and that this hindered a decision to participate.

Participants in this study were asked to share a school experience that they recalled where they enjoyed learning new information and then to explain what in particular about the learning was satisfactory for them. The data indicated that most participants had a desire to learn. For Thabo, Jabu, Sarah, Menzo, Thabang, Joseph and Mary, the narrative was about learning new information and they associated learning with a desire to know more about the world; learning about technology and learning new information was a type of enjoyment for them. Jono, however, felt learning new information was not necessary and associated learning with education, stating that learning new information should result in better job prospects, while Althea stated that her ability to relate to others stemmed from self-directed learning. She perceived learning and finding new ways of engaging as opportunities for learning outside the formal educational system.

I enjoy learning new information. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

I like to learn new information but I only like information that is useful, but not just any information. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

I enjoy learning new things, to know more about everything that is happening around us, in the world. That is why I am always reading newspapers or anything I can read. Yes, it gives me information and with that information I am able to help others (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Yes, I like learning new things, especially technology. When it comes to computers... you see, when I was at school these things were not there. At the moment just simple things, but I like to discover new things. There are no access to computers at PALC but I can go to the Internet café. (Menzo, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Learning new information is something I enjoy, especially in primary school I enjoyed learning all the time. Main reason I want to study is to get me to complete what I started. (Thabang, Interview, February 9, 2017)

Yes. I feel complete and I feel I can do much better if I can get the support system I need, when I study new information. At some point I wanted to be a doctor because I believe it is possible to achieve. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

I feel ahead in terms of learning something new. The perception changed about learning new information since I grew up – there are things I know now that I did not know then. I am determined to want to know more and so I can say is not hard for me. Learning is good for me. (Mary, Interview, March 1, 27)

There is little use for education so learning new information makes little difference. (Jono, Interview, March 1, 2017)

I am always open to learning. Books I collect give me knowledge I relate to others. Yes, I enjoy learning new information through reading a lot and speaking to others. It helps me figure out things that I think about. Talking to you is motivating. I am just too old to study and not having a qualification it makes it hard to find work. (Althea, Interview, February 9, 2017)

Varying levels of satisfaction emerged in wanting to learn new information, which could be strongly related to prior learning and reasons for re-entry into further education. Tebogo, Jabu, Thabang and Joseph described psychological and social factors they perceived as outside their control and which hindered them from participating.

A barrier of learning is thinking that you already know and the second reason is not listening. (Jabu, Interview, February 6, 2017)

When I got into high school it literally went downhill. There were certain things that I felt degraded by. When I speak to family about schoolwork they would say that I don't understand their situation on something I would ask and because I am a child I should understand their situation. This puts me down and my family never motivated me at all. I think family support would have helped us with communication. Communication is important and when you don't have this

understanding from family it does not help one to learn. (Thabang, Interview, February 9, 2017)

Yes. I feel complete and I feel I can do much better if I can get the support system I need, when I study new information. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

If a teacher makes sure that learners are different, they will want to understand my needs. (Tebogo, Interview, March 1, 2017)

The data aligns with Wenger (2008) who defines learning as “forms of participation and rectification which continually converge and diverge” (p. 89), arguing that through learning new information, the adult learner feels a sense of meaning rather than feeling isolated in learning. In this instance - learning through a socially organised activity - learners blame internal factors as well as external factors as reasons for making them more motivated or confident to participate.

The data further indicated that individual psychological and social factors were different for each adult learner and Aiken et al. (2000) and Alfred (2003) argue “that individuals belong to multiple cultures and collectively bring many cultural values to the learning environment...” (Alfred, 2003, p. 246). Lave and Wenger (as cited by Alfred (2003) explain that “the notion of context in sociocultural theory extends beyond physical location to include individual, cultural, social, institutional, and historical locations” (p. 245).

Participants associated learning new information with finding new ways of engaging with their world, which opened opportunities for learning outside the formal education system.

The data collected revealed that participants’ perceptions of psychosocial barriers had an impact on their decisions to participate in further learning or access pathways to further education.

A learner has many responsibilities that must be balanced against learning needs, such as family and financial support. These responsibilities may be perceived as barriers against participating in learning and further adult education and therefore necessary psychosocial barriers are to be understood in the individual learner’s specific and unique learning context.

Data analysis for this study revealed that there was a link between the participants’ perceptions about learning and taking up of adult education and how prior learning support

was perceived in relation to their current learning. In this context, knowledge of the different participants' types of support can help further education in promoting quality development in teaching and the learning structures necessary to enhance learning abilities. It is evident from the data in this study that individual and socio-environmental factors are difficult to separate; however, contextualising the individual within his or her unique social context is necessary, as grouping all individuals as being merely disadvantaged can perpetuate the notion that all disadvantaged learners share the same learning challenges.

Probability of Participation

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) state that the "probability of participation is lowest for adults at the lower end of the SES ladder and highest for those at the upper end" (p. 141). The findings from the data collected in this study indicated that most participants agreed that a qualification/certification meant accessing opportunities for a better life. Participants responded in the following way when asked whether getting a qualification/certificate meant a better life:

Yes it does. If I am well qualified it is easy for me to get a job and possible for my life to be better. So a qualification will put me in a very good position. (Thabo, Interview, February 6, 2017)

Yes. At the end of the day a qualification makes it possible to get a job. Even if you don't get a job but maybe I can get my own business. I was doing catering with my friend at home; she was running a catering company and more or less I know a lot about it. (Sarah, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Yes, a diploma or degree is better. If you have a tertiary certificate it got more power than one-year certificates. The ones that we did are useless, I think it's just a waste of time. (Menzo, Interview, February 8, 2017)

Definitely, education is key to success and I value education more than anything else. Besides, who are you going to be when you don't have education? If you start learning and telling people how you feel, it would ultimately expand your mind.

You don't think inside the box, you think outside the box. (Thabang, Interview, February 9, 2017)

Yes, because without education you cannot get a good job. (Joseph, Interview, February 15, 2017)

Yes, it means a better life. Employment requires a qualification. The higher the qualification the higher the money, the lower the qualification the lower the money. (Mary, Interview, March 1, 2017)

Probability of participation is the final element and variable of the conceptual framework of the Psychosocial Interaction Model. The data collected showed that adult learners value educational attainment and therefore the probability of participation is increased when learning is located within a formal context of education.

In Section 5, a summary of this study is provided. The findings are discussed with supporting theoretical perspectives from the literature and finally recommendations are presented.



Section 5: Summary, Findings, Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The aim of this research study was to identify psychosocial factors that adult learners perceived, as barriers, when participating in adult learning. The research problem that this study addressed is the following: Literature revealed that there are complex relationships between psychological and social barriers to participation in adult learning. Psychosocial barriers can deter adults' participation in learning programmes. Understanding the nature of such barriers can enable policymakers, educators and adult learners to create strategies to reduce such barriers in order to increase adults' participation in adult learning.

The research study focused on addressing the following research question:

Main question: What are adult learners' perceptions of psychosocial factors that undermine participation in adult education and learning?

Sub-question: What psychosocial factors create barriers to participation in adult education?

In this section, a summary of the data findings is presented and key concepts that emerged in the research study are discussed. The researcher will consider theoretical perspectives in light of the findings and make recommendations accordingly.

Summary

For this research, adult learners' perceptions of learning in adult education were explored. A thematic analysis research design allowed me to conceptualise psychosocial factors perceived by the study cohort and the study was located within the context of the participants' learning press in their environment, the value of adult education as perceived by them, adult learners' readiness to participate, participation stimuli, psychosocial barriers and the probability that the adult learner would participate in some form of learning (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

In this study investigation of adult learners' perceptions of psychosocial factors that undermine participation in learning, I highlighted the interplay of the Psychosocial Interaction Model's pre-adulthood and adulthood elements (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982) and focused on psychosocial barriers (social and psychological) as sub-themes for analysis of factors that undermine learning in adult education.

To gather data, an interview guide was used as a research instrument, facilitating semistructured interviews with 10 participants. The data analysis process evolved through coding and synthesising the data collected under each broad theme, from which further sub-themes emerged.

Anticipated findings confirmed by study

It was anticipated that through the research findings, an understanding of adult learners' psychosocial barriers to learning would begin to emerge and be included in the ongoing discourse on adult learners' barriers to participation in non-formal education. The data is also useful to educational planners who want to create supporting learning trajectories in nonformal education. The study findings will be shared with the research site to address educational efforts in the planning of psychosocial services. I envisage creating collaborative partnerships between various stakeholders in education planning within the South African education system to apply frameworks that guide capability and capacity-building objectives when implementing the SA National Skills Development Strategies (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

Findings

Findings from the data analysis confirmed that the majority of participants attending the nonformal learning programme perceived psychosocial factors as internal barriers to participation while others perceived both internal and external factors as barriers. The data was ordered according to the seven themes of the conceptual framework suggested by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). The adult learners' collective narratives provided rich data from which to construct meaning through a thematic analysis of the research data. Below is an outline summary of the data findings:

1. The data revealed that while adult learners' SES affected their life choices and perceived support in education, it did not affect their desire to learn.
2. Low socio-economic status does influence the decision to participate in further education and learning, however, the levels of perceived support from family and educators were equal factors that affected the adult learners' decisions on accessing further education.
3. Adult learners with low socio-economic status exhibited a need for a degree of social participation, contrary to the findings of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982).

4. Some participants perceived the support they had received from parent figures, such as their mothers, as having been significant during childhood and being an inherent factor in gaining confidence and doing well as an adult learner. The type of support an adult learner received during prior schooling can also act as a psychosocial barrier impeding perception as a learner.
5. While adult learners perceived having good support from family as a prerequisite to doing well in their learning, others embedded their sense of self in how they experienced support from teachers. Perceived support experienced from educators during prior schooling was another indicator for the adult learner doing well and providing reasons for attitudes towards further learning or participation in education.
6. Adult learners' prior schooling experiences in relation to their current learning suggested that quality support in educational structures added to how education is valued and therefore institutional structures influence adult learners' perceptions of education's utility.
7. While most participants felt positive about the support mechanisms offered in the learning programme, others indicated that the social services were not inclusive in supporting their learning/skills development and/or psychosocial needs, and they thus did not feel inspired to participate further in learning.
8. The decision to participate seem to be different for young adult learners (18-25 years) and older adult learners (26-49 years), as the adult learners' willingness to participate was stimulated by different factors that were age-related. While age is not a deciding factor, it does influence how education is valued for participation therein. Adult learners' perceptions of individual factors that made them feel confident about doing well in their learning were influenced by the level of support they felt was needed for success. That the level of support determined their ability to do well was evident from the responses when asked how confident they felt that they would succeed in learning, or how motivated they were to learn from recalling a prior experience in learning where they had felt motivated.
9. Data indicated that adult learners require support at the level of family, work and education in order to determine a learning trajectory.
10. Participants associated learning new information with finding new ways of engaging with their world, opening opportunities for learning outside the formal education system.

Discussion

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) asserted that it was necessary to contextualise how perceived support during adult learners' adulthood learning years impacted their ability to do well. The pre-adulthood factors illustrated in the Psychosocial Interaction Model are described by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as necessary supporting individual and family characteristics, embedded in the adult learners' socio-cultural context as inherent values and orientations in a gendered perspective in which they believe and to which they hold.

Most participants perceived having family support and a supportive school system as a key factor in helping the adult learner focus. Financial costs remain a challenge for the low economic status individual, irrespective of whether the adult learner exhibits a willing disposition and readiness to learn. Perceptions held by some participants about negative experience with prior schooling are described by adult education literature as presenting deterrents to participation that are "internal psychological variables such as self-concept and learning attitude which is a mental resistance of conflict between motivation and deterrents" (Malhotra et al., 2007, p. 83). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) explain that psychosocial obstacles tend to be related either to "education or learning as entities or activities, or to the self or potential learner" (p. 139).

As cited in Mackeracher et al., (2006), "Gorard and Selwyn (2005) suggest that patterns of participation in formal education are set early in life through variables such as age, ethnicity, gender, prior schooling and the literacy culture of the family (OECD)" (p. 11). Thus it can be deduced that adult learners who create a positive learner identity early in their learning development will be more likely to participate in further learning. Data from this study confirm that while a high learning press is necessary to ameliorate low self-esteem, a change in educational planning should also address social systems that support education. The data analysis for readiness to participate in this study is also echoed by Silva et al. (1998) confirming that the "likelihood of participation is to be conceived as dependent upon the perceived frequency and intensity of participation stimuli" (p. 38). While deterrents to participants are important to understand as being barriers external to participation, it is necessary to consider the individual's internal disposition towards dealing with challenges and its impact on decisions about participating in further learning.

In this study, age as a socio-economic variable influenced the type of stimuli participants identified as psychosocial factors influencing willingness to study further. Participants in this

study were all from disadvantaged backgrounds and could be considered low socio-economic status individuals who have participated in some form of formal education in their life. Most participants reported that they felt confident about successfully completing their current and future studies; however others perceived their learning press as a motivating factor that impacted their confidence about participating in further study. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) explore factors that determine barriers and stress variables such as “lack of confidence in one’s ability to learn” as a critical reason described by non-participants (p. 140). Confidence is depicted as not being a true reflection of self-discipline but rather as a type of learning attribute. Fears that efforts to learn will result in failure and humiliation are widespread, according to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). The fear of failure syndrome defined by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as a perception is not to be confused with an obstacle to continuing education. It is stated that social institutions and forces to a large extent also influence what appear to be psychological barriers.

Participants can be said to perceive situational factors as barriers that override their confidence about seeking opportunities to learn, irrespective of their social contexts. Data obtained for this study indicated that these barriers are difficult to separate and overcome. Data in this research study reveal that social and individual factors are intertwined with how participants perceived their confidence and saw levels of support from family, while recalling prior experience with educators and work. Participants in this study all shared a common affiliation by being part of the learning programme and their reasons for participating were distinct to their social context. Participants were asked to describe the kind of support that would make them feel more confident when learning. The data obtained indicated that learners require support at the level of family, work and education in order to perceive a trajectory in learning. The study data indicate that psychological and social factors are different for each adult learner, while Alfred (2003) and Larson and Milana (2006) argue that reasons for participation are different for disadvantaged individuals and that individuals belong to multiple cultures, collectively bringing many cultural values to the learning environment. Malhotra et al. (2007) argue that an adult learner’s decision to participate depends on the “degree of congruence or conflict between the person’s needs and the perceived strength of the social and situational factors in the decision” (p. 81). Malhotra et al. further argue that an adult learner has to overcome the “mental resistance of conflict between motivation and deterrents” (p. 82).

Theoretical perspectives

1. Boudard and Rubenson (2004) argue that “readiness to learn is formed early in life and further developed through educational and work experiences” (p. 265). The researchers explain that “disposition towards learning is shaped and formed through family contexts and socialisation processes” (p. 266) and thus the social background tends to influence educational attainment in myriad ways. The data collected in my study indicated the different views about support that emerged from analyses. The measure of how adult learners perceived their childhood experiences influenced their decisions in regard to further learning as it was inherent in how they valued family support which was considered the basis for how they viewed learning as an adult.
2. Participants who perceived teacher support as being a factor in doing well at school were aligned with what was described by Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) as being “the interaction between structural and individually based barriers to participation” (p. 203).
3. The data in this research corresponded with findings by Malhotra et al. (2007) and Cervero and Kirkpatrick (1990) who asserted that “if perceived provision of services and learning support is not present for the adult learner, the utility and perceived value of education is diminished for the adult learner” (p. 81). The OECD (as cited in Mackeracher et al., 2006) argue that a “responsive lifelong learning system is that it should present the learner with an integrated series of learning opportunities and a collaborative network of information and service providers that work cooperatively rather than competitively” (p. 27).
4. The data findings resonate with the research by Hatlala (1993), who investigated ways in which educational planners could design interventions to minimise deterrents to retraining or re-educating unemployed adults. This study reached similar intended learning outcomes, despite its limitation of being conducted over a short period of time using a small study population.
5. The data is in line with the analysis by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) who state that adult learners’ willingness to participate, must be associated with a readiness to learn that is “activated by one or more specific stimuli before participation can be expected to occur” (p. 144).

6. Mackeracher et al. (2006) note similar reflections by Scanlan (as cited in Malholtra, 2007) and state that “the learners’ questionable worth of themselves, relevance, or quality of educational opportunities, negative educational perceptions, including prior unfavourable experiences, apathy or lack of motivation and lack of self-confidence” (p. 83) are notable barriers to participation.
7. The data agrees with the findings of Wenger (2008) who defined learning as “forms of participation and rectification which continually converge and diverge” (p. 89), arguing that through learning new information, the adult learner feels a sense of meaning, rather than feeling isolated in learning.

Recommendations

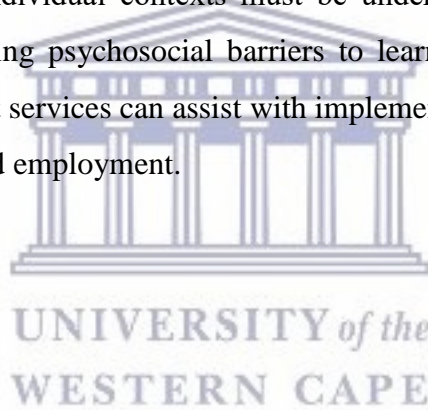
- a. The findings of the study indicate that educational planning can create deep connections for social learning in non-formal learning contexts. In order for adult learners to value education’s purpose and challenge negative perceptions towards learning, they require fundamental support systems and learning environments that will make them feel motivated.
- b. A possible suggestion regarding new research insights is to consider the link between learner experiences and learner support among different educational types that can create opportunities for non-formal programmes that align outcomes to participants learning, which can be shared with participants. Basic and Adult Education institutions can guide interventions to offer psychosocial support as part of educational programmes aimed to enhance re-entry and uptake of further adult education.
- c. Public adult learning centres and educational planning can benefit from completing needs analyses with participating adults that benchmark key indicators when structuring curricula for educational purposes. The needs analysis will assist teaching mechanisms that can support and validate the type of psychosocial interventions required in the planning of interventions.
- d. Non-formal learning activities can create digital spaces where participants can talk freely about their life experiences. Creating safe spaces for adult learners can assist the adult learner to build confidence.

- e. Perceptions to participation in learning are more than just financial cost for the disadvantaged adult learner. To increase student success, access should be linked to the social and psychological variables inherent in the socio-historical context of learners with diverse needs.

Offering learning support services within formal, non-formal or informal learning environments can assist in the fostering a society that values life-long learning and education.

Conclusion

This study confirmed some assumptions and generated additional findings about psychosocial barriers to learning. It provided evidence that adult learners participating in non-formal education perceive both social and psychological factors to be barriers. It also showed that adult learners felt that without the necessary support from family and the schooling environment, they were less motivated to pursue further education. The study demonstrated that adult learners' unique individual contexts must be understood to mitigate factors the adult learners perceive as being psychosocial barriers to learning. The study reveals that strengthening learning support services can assist with implementing the national policy goals of increasing adult literacy and employment.



References

- Abdullah, M. M. (2008). Adult participation in self-directed learning programs. *International Education Studies*, 1(3), 66-72. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1065431.pdf>
- Aiken, L., Cervero, R., & Johnson-Bailey, J. (2000). Black women in nursing education completion programs: Issues affecting participation. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 51(4), 306-321
- Alfred, M. (2003). Socio-cultural contexts and learning: Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women in U.S. postsecondary education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(4), 242-260.
- Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Boudard, E., & Rubenson, K. (2004). Revisiting major determinants of participation in adult education with a direct measure of literacy skills. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 39, 265-281.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. (Int. ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cervero, R. M., & Kirkpatrick, T. E. (1990). The enduring effects of family role and schooling on participation in adult education. *American Journal of Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/444282>
- Courtney, S. (1992). *Why adults learn: towards a theory of participation in adult education*. New York: Routledge.
- Cross, K. P. (1981). *Adults as learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cumming, A. (1992). *Access to Literacy for Language Minority Adults*. Washington, DC.: Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education for Limited-English-Proficient Adults.
- Darkenwald, G., & Merriam, S. (1982). *Adult education: Foundations of practice*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Department of Basic Education. (2015). *Education for all national review*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002316/231680e.pdf>

- Fagan, W. (1991). *Understanding learner participation in adult literacy*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED333108.pdf>
- Ginsberg, M. B., & Wlodkowski, R. J. (2010). Access and participation. In C. Kasworm, A. Rose & J. Ross-Gordon, *Handbook of adult and continuing education*, pp. 25-34. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Hatala, P. (1993). *Minimising deterrents to retraining or re-educating laid-off and unemployed adults: an intervention study*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialnetworkaudit.com/articles/Deterrents%20to%20Retraining.pdf>
- Hippel, A. V., & Tippelt, R. (2010). The role of adult educators towards (potential) participants and their contribution to increasing participation in adult education – insights into existing research. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 1(1-2), 33-51. Retrieved from http://www.pedocs.de/volltexte/2011/4156/pdf/RELA_2010_1_2_vonHippel_Tippelt_The_role_of_adult_educators_D_A.pdf
- Larson, A., & Milana, M. (2006). Barriers towards participation in adult education and training. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Geneva, 13-15 September. Retrieved from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/157725.htm>
- Mackeracher, D., Suart, T., & Porter, J. (2006). *Barriers to participation in adult learning*. University of New Brunswick. Retrieved from www.leeds.ac.uk
- Malhotra, N. K., Shapero, M., Sizoo, S., & Munro, T. (2007). Factor structure of deterrents to adult participation in higher education. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 4(12), 81-90. Retrieved from <https://cluteinstitute.com/ojs/index.php/TLC/article/view/1515/1495>
- Mertendorf, J. (1990). *Learning styles and barriers to learning perceived by adult students on campus*. Retrieved from <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=12206&context=rtd>

- Millar, P., & Falk, I. (2000). *Seniors online: Online literacy and learning by senior citizens in rural centres*. Melbourne: Language Australia.
- Ngidi, N. (2012). *Psychosocial interaction model and barriers to participation in adult learning: A case of community caregiver training in Gauteng*. Retrieved from <http://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/11394/4305>
- Rubenson, K., & Desjardins, R. (2009). The impact of welfare state regimes on barriers to participation in adult education: A bounded agency model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(3), 187-207. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0741713609331548>
- Rule, P. (2006). The time is burning: The right of adults to basic education in South Africa. *Journal of Education*, 39(1), 113-135.
- Scanlan, C. S. (1984). *Deterrents to participation: An adult education dilemma*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
- Silva, T., Cahalan, M., & Lacireno-Paquet, N. (1998). Adult education participation decisions and barriers: *Review of conceptual frameworks and empirical studies*. U.S. Department of Education. Working Paper Series (1998). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/9810.pdf>
- Sinanovic, J., & Becirovic, S. (2016). The determinants of lifelong learning. *European Researcher. Series A*, 103(2), 107-118. Retrieved from http://www.erjournal.ru/journals_n/1456759066.pdf
- Statistics South Africa (2017). *Education Series Volume III. Educational Enrolment and Achievement, 2016*. Retrieved from <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report%2092-01-03/Report%2092-01-032016.pdf>
- Dejardins, R., Rubenson, K., & Milana, M. (2006). Unequal chances to participate in adult learning: International perspectives. Paris: UNESCO.
Retrieved from http://www.forschungsnetzwerk.at/downloadpub/rubenson_148815e.pdf

UNESCO. (2016). *Education for People and Planet: Creating sustainable futures for all*.

Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002457/245752e.pdf>

Wenger, E. (2008) (Ed.) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yardley, L. (2008). Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology. In J. A. Smith (Ed.),

Qualitative Psychology: A practical guide to research methods. London: SAGE.



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Appendix A

The Director

February 2017

The Organisation

Dear Programme Director

Re: Permission to conduct research

Title: Psycho-social barriers to participation in adult learning and education. Applying a Psycho-Social Interaction Model.

I am registered as a Masters student at the University of the Western Cape.

I am writing to request permission to use your organisation as a research site. I would like to interview the current group of participants who are attending the educational programmes offered by the Centre. This research is part of my Masters programme in Adult Education and Global Change.

The aim of my research is to investigate participants' perceptions of psycho-social barriers to learning and these influences on their decisions/attitudes to participate in further adult education.

I will also submit a research paper to the University of the Western Cape, and a short report to your organisation should permission be granted.

As this research project has been registered by the University of the Western Cape I will adhere to the research ethics procedures as outlined in the universities ethics policy.

For further information, you may contact my supervisor

Prof Zelda Groener University

of Western Cape

zgroener@uwc.ac.za

Appendix B

Information letter to participant

Dear Participant

My name is Myrtle Adams-Gardner. I am registered for the Masters Programme in Adult Learning and Global Change (ALGC), University of the Western Cape. UWC requires me to conduct a research study, which will contribute to the completion of the ALGC Masters Programme.

Purposes of the study

This research set out to investigate adult learners' perceptions of psycho-social factors that create barriers to participation in education and learning. Negative perceptions and attitudes about education and learning can be changed by becoming better informed about adult education services, through knowing where to access educational services, counselling and support. Many adults become discouraged before they begin pursuing their learning desires because of their assumptions that their previous learning will be ignored and they will have to start over again if they wish to obtain a credential at a new and higher educational level. The purpose of this research is to investigate how psycho-social barriers (also known as dispositional factors), influence the learners' decisions / attitudes in a positive or negative way to participate in further adult education.

Procedures and conditions

I am requesting, kindly, your participation in this research study. I would like to engage with you about what motivates you to participate in learning and understand your perceptions of psycho-social factors that influence your decisions to participate or not to participate. In an interview I will ask you some questions. I will record the interview using a voice recorder smart application. Your participation is voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you can

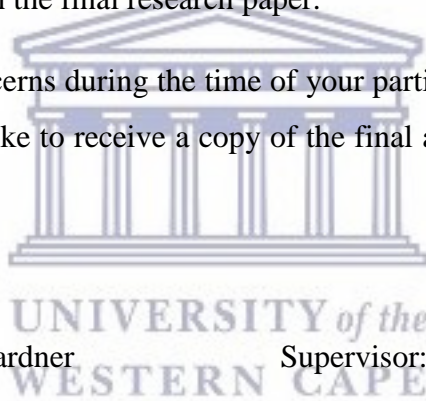
withdraw from the study at any-time without consequences of any kind. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide will be destroyed and omitted from my research paper. The interview will be 30-45 minutes.

The data collected will be stored and not released. It will be stored in a locked cabinet.

Confidentiality

With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded. If you agree to take part in the study, no one other than my supervisor will have access to the interview scripts. The interview schedules and transcripts will be kept confidential will be kept for two years following any publications or five years if no publications emanate from the study. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research paper.

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of the study, please contact



Researcher: Myrtle Adams-Gardner

Supervisor: Professor Zelda Groener

Email: myrtlegracea@hotmail.com

Email: zgroener@uwc.ac.za

Contact Number: 0827873716

Contact Number: 027 21 959 29 11

Statement of Consent: I have read the information letter to participants and the consent form and I understand what is requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. The researcher provided me with a copy of this form through email. I agree to fill out the attached questionnaire personally. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Appendix D

Interview guide

Title: Psycho-social barriers to participation in adult learning and education. Applying a Psycho-Social Interaction Model

Socio Economic Status

1. Name

2. Age:

3. Gender:

Male

Female

4. How would you describe yourself in terms of population group?

Black

Coloured

Indian / Asian

White

Other

5. Home language:

6. Other languages:

7. Can you read / write in this (at least one) language. (If more than one language listed)

8. Are you employed?

9. Yes - If yes, are you employed full-time / part-time job?

10 No - If no, when was the last job you had?

11 Income range

R0 - R1000	R10001 – R2000	R2001 – R3000	R3001 – R4000	R4001 – R5000	More than R5000
------------	-------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	--------------------

12. What is your marital status?

Single

Divorced

Widowed



Married

Living together

13. How many dependants do you have?

14. What was the highest level of education that you completed?

Grad e 0	Grad e 1	Grad e 2	Grad e 3	Grad e 4	Grad e 5	Grad e 6	Grad e 7	Grad e 8	Grad e 9	Grad e 10	Grad e 11	Grad e 12
-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	--------------	--------------	--------------

15. If no, which of the following educational institutions did you attend before?

Pre-school

Primary School

Secondary School

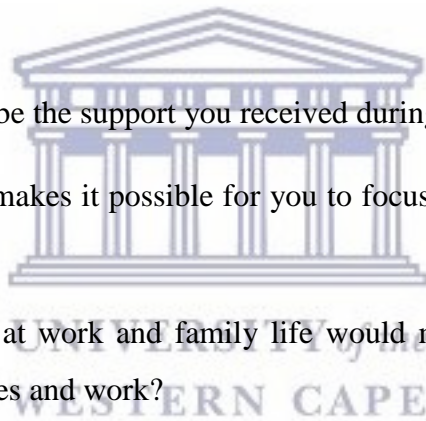
Educational programme offered at a Public Adult Learning Centre

Learning Press

16. How would you describe the support you received during your childhood learning?

17. What kind of support makes it possible for you to focus on what you learning in the programme?

18. What kind of support at work and family life would make it more manageable to cope with further studies and work?



Perceived Value of Education and Readiness to Participate

19. Do you think that your prior schooling prepared you for studying further?

20. Does participating in the learning programme inspire you to study further / go back to school / college?

21. What are your expectations from the programme?

Participation Stimuli

22. What were the main reasons for you to join the learning programme?

23. If you had to pick one main reason for continuing your education, what would it be?

Psycho-social Barriers

24. Do you feel confident that you will complete your studies successfully?
25. If yes, what makes you feel confident?
26. If no, what makes you feel less confident?
27. What kinds of support could make you feel more confident?
28. Do you recall a previous experience where you felt motivated to learn?
29. If yes, what about the experience made you feel motivated to learn?
30. If no, what about the experience made you feel less motivated to learn?
31. What kind of support would have made it possible for you to feel more motivated to pursue learning?
32. What made you join the programme at the PALC?
33. Thinking back to your school experience, would you say that you enjoyed learning new information?
34. If yes, what about learning new information was satisfactory for you?
35. If no, what would have made it possible for you to enjoy learning new information?

Probability of Participation

36. Does getting a qualification / certificate mean a better life for you?
37. If yes, what makes this possible?
38. If no, what make you think so?