Access, participation and barriers to adult learning at a TVET College in the Western Cape

Natascha Hector

Student number: 4600084

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Supervisor: Professor Zelda Groener

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on an investigation into adult students, experiences related to access, barriers to participation and success at a TVET college in the Western Cape. Through recognition of prior learning (RPL) many adult students have gained access to TVET colleges to obtain a qualification as educare practitioners.

Many educare practitioners have worked in the ECD field for many years without a qualification. RPL provides an opportunity for these practitioners to upskill themselves and more importantly uplift themselves, giving them hope for a better future. The RPL offers adult students hope of advancement amidst challenging circumstances experienced in the past, thereby changing the tide in the latter years of their lives. The goal of this study was to find pertinent reasons to account for why adult students never gave up on their dreams to study further in order to improve their professional prospects and enhance their way of life.

I interviewed 20 students using face-to-face, semi-structured interviews for a qualitative research approach to guide my investigation. Prominent scholars such as Giddens, Archer, Hitlin and Elder, Rubenson and Desjardin and Bandura have been used to conceptualise the framework of the research paper.

The responses reveal that among others, adult students had a deep desire to complete a qualification so that they could be recognised as professionals. Their experiences of situational barriers related to family responsibilities undermined their progress at times. However, having the ability to plan ahead for a better future, a desire to study and a strong sense of self-efficacy enabled them to succeed.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my dad who always encouraged me to read (but I didn't at the time). Now many years down the line, I often think of him and the legacy he left behind.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Lord, who gave me the strength and perseverance throughout this study.

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I am deeply obligated to the research participants who participated voluntarily in my study.

To my friends, colleagues for being my pillars of strength.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research paper is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Adult Learning and Global Change at the Institute for Post-School Studies, University of the Western Cape. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any university. All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Natascha Hector

Signed……..

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ECD	Early Childhood Development
ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practises Sector Education and Training Authority
SAQA	South African Qualification's Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
DSD	Department of Social Development
DHET	Department of Higher Education

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This section comprises the background and context of the paper, including the rationale, the research problem, research aims and research questions. An overview of the research paper is provided at the end of the section.

Background and context

This research paper focuses on adult students' experiences related to access, participation and barriers to participation at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College in the Western Cape. As I have worked with the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) pilot project at a TVET College since its inception in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector, I have chosen to research access, participation and barriers relating to participants who were allowed access to the College through RPL.

The South African government, through its *Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998* (RSA) introduced learnerships as 'a structured learning component' including a 'practical work experience component of a specified nature and duration' (p. 20) leading to a qualification registered on the National Qualification's Framework (NQF). TVET Colleges play a pivotal role in providing learnerships focused on ECD.

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) was established in 2004, partly in response to high levels of youth unemployment. The EPWP would attain this by providing workers with practical training and skill that eventually leads to further job prospects or self-employment. The Western Cape Province allocates, at their discretion for grants for revenue namely EPWP social sector incentive grant; and the EPWP integrated grant. EPWP in the Western Cape funds the learnership and RPL programmes via the level 4 FET National Certificate ECD as social sector incentive.

My study focused on adult students registered for the Level 4 which was offered as a learnership and administered by the Education and Training Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA). The adult students were allowed to access the learnership through RPL. The Level 4 qualification offeredover 18 months is described as:

> an entry-level qualification for those who want to enter the field of Education, Training and Development, specifically within the sub-field of Early Childhood Development (ECD). Many of those who will seek this qualification are already practicing within the field, but without formal recognition. This qualification will enable recipients of this qualification to facilitate the all-round development

of young children in a manner that is sensitive to culture and individual needs (College of Cape Town, 2018, para. 1-2).

Budlender, Mapker and Parenzee (2015) state that learnerships:

- combine theoretical and practical learning with the latter accounting for at least 70% of the time;
- are based on an agreement between the learner, the employer, and the training provider;

- [t]he learner does not pay any training fees; and
- [t]he learner must be paid an allowance or wage while studying (p. 5).
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This learnership targets ECD practitioners who work at ECD sites. The adult students who are recruited into the learnership programme through RPL, have to meet the following criteria: be a South African citizen; work in the ECD field for a minimum of five years; have a minimum of a Grade 9 qualification; and be actively involved at a registered or partly registered ECD site. RPL is therefore a fast track to completing level 4 FET National Certificate ECD as it is completed in less than 18 months. Many RPL students only needed to complete certain modules to complete their Level 4 qualification therefore only the modules that are incomplete, are covered contributing to the shorter completion of the qualification.

Rationale

This research study investigates access, participation and barriers to participation and success achieved by RPL adult students in an adult learning environment. The rationale for this research study is a desire to understand adult students, who have accessed an ECD learnership through RPL. Moreover, the findings of this study could reinforce the institutional support structures that ultimately led these adult students to success.

Research problem

The White Paper for Post School Education and Training (2013) promotes access to post-school education, especially for historically-disadvantaged people. To facilitate such access, the government has instituted recognition of prior learning (RPL) policies. However, while students gained access through RPL, they experienced barriers to participation which impeded success. The research problem is embedded in the relationships between policy intentions and policy outcomes. Furthermore, scrutinizing the association and/or interconnection between what the purposes and objectives of policy in relation to the actual application and execution of blueprint documents. This study investigates adult students' experiences of barriers to participation who gained access through RPL,to a qualification in early childhood education at a technical and vocational education and training (TVET) college.

Research aims

To investigate the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success related to adult students who accessed a learnership programme through RPL at a TVET college in the Western Cape.

To develop new theoretical insights about the relationships between access, participation and barriers related to adult students who accessed a learnership through RPL at TVET college in the Western Cape.

Research question

Main question

What are the relationships between access, participation and barriers among **RPL** students at a TVET college?

Sub-questions

1. What barriers did RPL student experience?
2. What did RPL students do to overcome these constraints/barriers/inhibitors?
3. What differences are RPL students' interventions making in their life course?
4. How will RPL students use success to access new opportunities in their future life course?
5. How did RPL students access the programme?
6. How many RPL students successfully completed the qualification?

Overview of the research paper

In this section, I introduce the background and context, rationale and outline the research question, sub-questions and research aims. I have prepared my research paper as follows:

In Section 2, I provide the overview of literature explicitly related to my study which frames my study theoretically.

In Section 3, I describe the methodology and design of my study detailing the research site, sample description, research method, research instrument, data-analysis methods and ethical statement.

In Section 4, I deliberate and present the data analysis of my study.

In Section 5, I conclude my research paper with a summary, findings and recommendations.

SECTION 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this section I construct my conceptual framework by drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Anthony Giddens, Margaret Archer, Albert Bandura, Hitlin and Elder, and Rubenson and Desjardins. The main components of my conceptual framework are access to post-school education, agency, structure, and barriers to participation.

Specifically, my conceptual framework includes the concepts of agency and properties of agency; agency and resilience; agency and alternate courses of action; agency and future decisions; and agency and structure. A discussion of these aspects is followed by definitions of structure; bounded agency; structure; barriers to participation; structural barriers; institutional barriers, psychosocial barriers, dispositional barriers, situational barriers and, finally, overcoming barriers to participation.

Agents

Archer (2003) believed that agents are influenced by a combination of social structures and cultural norms. It is important to gain an understanding of how agents navigate through the stimuli generated by social structures and cultural norms when deciding on a course of action.

Bandura (2006) stipulates that people are not simply passive actors in their lives, but are imbued with the faculty of independent thought, which allows them to shape their own destiny.This would apply to the adult students observed in this study. Adult students who are acceptedinto the ECD learnership through RPL have the ability and control to demonstrate a host of human attributes like feeling, thinking and reflecting. Many of these adult students, after working as educare practitioners for many years, pursue a qualification. This study is concernedwith how these students act as agents to determine their own destiny. My research attempts tomake a contribution to the empirical understanding of agents and agency as it pertains to the arena of adult learning and the pursuit of qualifications.

Agency

Several scholars have used the theory of agency to research and study education. Following these scholars, I decided to make use of established theories in my conceptual framework in order to frame the agency of the adult students who participated in this study.

In Giddens's (1979) Theories of structure and agency, the central concept is 'Agency'. This notion is discussed widely in the literature, with conceptualisations of the term differing. Here I discuss some explanations of agency and highlight various dimensions and interpretations of the concept. Giddens's (1976) conceptualisation of agency expresses the idea of being able to generate action at will in the material universe, and is linked to a wider understanding of praxis. According to Giddens (1976), implied in this action is the ability for the agent to affect the outcome of the action either positively (by a clear intention) or negatively (by doing nothing at all).

Giddens (1979) contended that agency involves the desirable or undesirable actions of an individual in the social order in which she/he finds herself/himself, as well as the notion that the individual chooses the extent to which she/he impacts the people around herself/himself – either positively or negatively. Giddens (1984) acknowledged that 'Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently' (p. 14). Borne out by the fact that adult students chose to enrol at a TVET college rather than not to act at all. Archer (2003) confirms this by pointing out that humans possess an unrestricted freedom to choose how to behave. Thus participants in this study freely chose to apply for the learnership programme, displaying a positive desire to educate themselves and change their present circumstances and of those in their community.

Scholars who examine agency often take a somewhat narrow view of the concept. Their approaches are somewhat fragmented, which prevents any one of them from attaining a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of agency (Hitlin & Elder, 2006). Different considerations of human agency are highly disputed, with scholars varying in their interpretations. Some lean towards human agency being the ability to assert one's sovereignty, while others emphasise the power of the individual to effect self-change.

Hitlin and Elder (2006) acknowledge agency as the human ability to impact on one's personal life within one's planned community prospects, as indicated by their reference to agency as 'the human capacity to influence one's own life within socially structured opportunities' (p. 57). Hitlin and Elder (2006) point to the wide disparity of ideas on agency, stating that it 'has been thought of alternatively as a capacity, an attribute, evidence of resistance, and as a structurally defined property of persons' (p. 36). The idea that agency includes 'human capacity' suggests that a sense of agency may be inherent in some individuals and not in others; that some are

born with the ability to succeed in the face of adversity. I tend to concur with this idea; based on the discoveries of this study, I think that adult students' characters play a significant part in their acts of agency.

Sewell (1992) argues that humans possess 'only a highly generalized capacity for agency, analogous to their capacity to use language' (p. 20) while Bandura (2006) elaborates by describing what he believes are the 'four core properties of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness' (pp. 164-165). These properties will be discussed below in relation to the adult students.

Agency, intentions and intentionality

Giddens (1984) states that it was long assumed that agency may be defined as 'intention'. The hypothesis was that for one to perform an action, there must be a precursory intent to act with a purpose. Should the action be unintentional, then the action may be seen as reactive behaviour and not as an envisioned act. Giddens (1984) subsequently elaborated that agency did not only refer to intention of behaviour or action, but to the capacity to act (Giddens, 1984). To Giddens, agency refers to the capacity of someone to stop or modify their behaviour during any stage of the process of actions. An individual who is in some way controlled for whatever reason does not possess the ability to affect change in his or her life (Giddens, 1984).

Giddens (1984) defined human agency in terms of intention; however, this intention cannot function without the agent's authority. Adult students act deliberately when reading, engaging in telephone conversations, completing and submitting application forms, all with the purpose of starting the studying process. Giddens (1984) reinforced his idea of agency as the capacity to initiate, stop or change a course of action by observing that people are indeed influenced by their individual intentionality, which results in their being able to devise actions to achieve a desired outcome.

Giddens (1984) further stated 'that agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place,' (p. 9), although elements of this capability are not specified. For this reason, I suggest that adult students possess agency and have the capability to pursue and complete a qualification.

Giddens (1976) stated that the agent ceases to function at any meaningful level when he/she is unable to exercise the capacity of agency. I propose that agency serves as it were, a stimulus

for participation. For example, adult students practise agency when they access or enter the education arena. There is intentionality when people exert agency; it is a thoughtful act on the part of the person.

However, even if adult students apply agency, they may still experience dispositional and structural barriers. When confronted with barriers, adult students may exercise further agency by changing their actions to overcome those barriers. Behaviours in which they exercise that agency could result in academic success. Agency is therefore at times an act of intervention.

Agency and capacity

Bandura (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) alluded to four aspects of agency or capacity for agency, namely social-structural support, 'planfulness', optimism and self-efficacy. Ahearn (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) defines agency as 'the socioculturally mediated capacity to act' (p. 35). I will build on Bandura's (1986) understanding of agency, which closely resembles that of Giddens (1976) as it takes into account intentions; Giddens (1976), however, goes beyond the idea of intention only and includes the notion of agents having the capacity to act.

Agency and self-efficacy

Bandura (2006) observed

> that perceived efficacy plays a key role in human functioning because it affects behavior not only directly, but by its impact on other determinants such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations, affective proclivities, and perception of impediments and opportunities in the social environment (p. 309).

Self-image is a significant factor to consider when attempting to assess the self-efficacy of an individual faced with intense and testing circumstances. If an individual has seldom received affirming feedback during their learning journey, they are unlikely to possess much belief in their own abilities. This could easily cause them to be hesitant about embarking on an educational challenge which will demand much from them at many different levels.

Bandura (1995) saw self-efficacy as a manifestation of an individual's personal fitness with respect to his or her success in achieving goals, which supports Giddens definition, while Mirowsky and Ross (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) link self-efficacy to the view of individual power. Personal fitness can also be described as 'mastery' which, in turn, suggests

how and to what level of success an individual secures jurisdiction over his or her destiny (Pearlin, 1983). Human beings usually possess a natural understanding of the degree to which they have achieved self-actualisation, and those with a sense of strong self-efficacy normally reach this understanding faster.

Baumeister (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) prefers to see self-efficacy more as a measurement of how functional an individual is able to be in a particular environment. Gecas and Schwalbe (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) aver that self-efficacy is more concerned with the individual's ability to generate positive energy and a 'can-do' attitude which, in turn, is governed by the confidence quotient which the individual possesses. Bandura (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) adds another dimension, stating that a well-developed sense of self-efficacy automatically allows human beings to enjoy more intellectual and physical actualisation.

Four aspects of agency highlighted by Bandura (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) '(1) intentionality, (2) forethought, (3) self-reactiveness (self-regulation) and (4) self-reflectiveness' (p. 35). Intentionality is evident when the individual actively decides to implement an action. Linked to this is the necessity for practising forethought in the interests of predicting an outcome, and self-reactiveness which pertains to the readiness of the individual to regulate his behaviour for the purpose of achieving his goals. With regard to self-reflectiveness, Bandura adds that the degree to which we practise self-reflectiveness will determine how much insight we acquire into our ability to measure our personal efficacy.

Agency and planfulness

Mortimer and Shanahan (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) state that planfulness does not only suggest a capability to accomplish one's everyday objectives, but includes the tendency to project the future by realizing long-term future intentions. This would seem to correspond with the actions of some adult students who, after many years of thinking about improving their qualifications, finally submit application forms for the learnership programme.

For Clausen (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) successful planfulness includes not only mindful engagement, but also consistency or dependability, supported by a solid foundation of personal self - esteem or self-confidence. These elements are crucial to underpin the building of a personality strong enough to withstand obstacles and achieve laid down goals. This implies

that it would be necessary for adult students to build these personality traits in order to reach a state of planful competence.

Agency and optimism

Optimism, as described by Carver and Scheier, (2014) is ‘a cognitive construct (expectancies regarding future outcomes) that also relates to motivation: optimistic people exert effort, whereas pessimistic people disengage from effort’ (p. 293). It would be necessary for students to have a significant level of optimism to achieve their goals for further study and to exercise agency consistently.

Hitlin and Kirkpatrick Johnson (2015) support Peterson and Chang’s (2003) contention that human beings vary greatly with regard to the degree of optimism with which they view their own reality. This is because each individual has unique characteristics of both personality and cognitive abilities. These, coupled with an individual's singular position in various social hierarchies, will inevitably influence his or her attitudes and levels of optimism. These influences should be measured when evaluating the importance of elements of agency in human behaviour.

Hitlin and Kirkpatrick Johnson (2015) refer to a person's personal belief system which can create a powerful impression of the world, or worldview. This worldview is also affected by societal circumstances. However, it is the individual’s interpretation of these circumstances that is crucial. If seen in a positive light, circumstances can motivate an individual towards a fruitful goal, but if seen in a negative light, circumstances can produce a very different result. A person's emotional intelligence plays a significant role in whether and how he or she incorporates optimism into his or her overall worldview (Oyserman, Bybee, Terry & Hart-Johnson, 2003). Hitlin and Kirkpatrick Johnson (2015) align an individual's capacity for anticipating success with the extent to which they reflect an optimistic approach to problem solving.

Agency and resilience

Van Breda (2018) states that some

> refer to resilience as something intrinsic to the individual, while others refer to it in a more holistic sense. Some refer to resilience as the competencies or capacities of people, while others refer to it as positive functioning in the face of adversity (p. 2).

Van Breda (2018) relates resilience to a particular character trait in an individual, and states that others see it in more universal terms, emphasising the skills or initiative quotient of human beings in general, and their ability to respond positively to negative conditions. Actors such as adult students also demonstrate 'adaptive resilience' (Hitlin & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2015, p. 1440) when expectations do not work out.

Many adult students, after many years of desiring to complete a qualification, manage to withstand the harsh, extraordinary pressures faced, either in their personal scenarios or the tough economic conditions in their lives, to persist and gain the sought-after qualification. Thus, Hitlin and Elder (2006) perceive the qualities of resilience as reflecting an individual's sense of purpose and determination, enhanced by a balance of physical harmony with unwavering will power and refusal to give up.

Agency and alternate course of action

King (as cited in Archer, 2003) affirmed that, on the human plain, we are possessed of the capacity to mould our own fate, to steer our course toward our destiny, which is not rigid but fluid, as we can influence it. As previously mentioned, many adult students accepted through Recognition of Prior Learning have acquired many years of experience without having formal qualifications in ECD. Many of them realised that their future would be more secure if they obtained professional qualifications in their field. This means that many adult students are determined to complete qualifications against all odds. These qualities of purpose are found within individuals and not in social or other edifices (Archer, 2003). These capabilities can be employed to transform and redirect the path of the individual exercising them (Hitlin & Elder, 2006).

Giddens (1976) states that human beings are automatically able to practise independent agency to the point where they are able to give plausible explanations for a particular course of action and can even create imaginary scenarios to justify them. However, if the individual is confronted with constraints of whatever description, whether socially or culturally engineered, he or she must try to exercise control in order to overcome them. Depending on the severity of the constraints, the outcomes may not always be those primarily desired, but this will ultimately

depend on the strength of an individual's 'creativity and capacity for commitment' (Archer, 2003, p. 7).

Agency and future decisions

As evinced by adult students, a sense of confidence and excitement inspires many adults who embark on a course of study. This observation is supported by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) who define the 'projective element' (p. 971) as an important dimension of agency, and also the means by which an individual may envisage his or her future circumstances, based on his or her expectations and personal emotional make-up. These factors will inevitably affect the future decisions of specific adult students.

Agency and structure

Instead of structure and agency existing as dualistic phenomena, or opposites inhabiting separate spheres, Giddens (2004) preferred to see them as dialectical and intertwined, each constantly evolving out of an interaction with and dependence on the other. This suggest that Giddens (2004) was open to exploring more flexible interpretations and analysis of the forms as opposed to the more rigid and perhaps narrower views inferred by a dualistic approach. Archer (2003) on the other hand indicated that structure influences agency. The interplay between these two concepts is crucial, and affects the lives of adult students. While agency refers to the degree to which one has the ability to succeed and is able to achieve a desired goal by taking appropriate action, it is structure that will inevitably modify the outcome of such action.

Notably, the interplay between structure and agency 'involves a specification of *how* structural and cultural powers impinge upon agents, and secondly of *how* agents use their own personal powers to act "so, rather than otherwise", in such situation' (Archer, 2003, p. 3). Giddens (1984) remarked that human agency is able not only to reproduce social systems, but to transform them by remaking what is already made in a continuous process.

Giddens (1976) referred to "knowledgeable" human agents which he described as those who have an inherent comprehension of the workings of the empirical world and how these workings should be managed according to what is already known. Giddens (1984) mentioned

that ‘structure exists only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability and as instantiated in action’ (p. 377). This is reinforced by actions to create the foundation for human knowledge meaning that structure is embodied in memory. Giddens’s (1984) focus was the dichotomy between agency and structure, and the ever-evolving dynamics produced as a consequence of their convolution. Shilling (1992) on the other hand, states that “ 'structures' are dependent for their continuation on the actions of individual agents located across the spaces which constitute social systems” (p. 79).

Fundamental to Archer’s contention (as cited in Luckett & Luckett, 2009) was that the potential always exists for changing perspectives by means of individuals an collective actions. In contrast, Bernstein’s analysis (as cited in Shilling, 1992) tended to dismiss the importance of human agency, thereby providing a flawed or weak view of agency.

Bernstein discusses the notion of structure and its interrelation with agency against the background of sociology and education, seeing "structuralist" (grounded on limitations, yet frail on agency), as opposed to the interpretive approach. However, Bourdieu (1977) preferred to attribute the power of human 'habitus' as a kind of pre-ordained authority which moulds societal edifices while simultaneously embedding programmed behaviour within their parameters.

Structure

According to Giddens (1984), ‘structure is usually understood by “functionalists” and, indeed, by the vast majority of social analysts – as some kind of “patterning” of social relations or social phenomena’ (p. 16). Giddens (1984) conceives ‘structure as recursively organized sets of rules and resources’ (p. 25) and asserts that structures exist only as ‘memory traces’ (p. 25) so structure is created by the social norms that give rise to certain repetitive actions which, overtime become habitual practice.

In their theoretical perspective, Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) outlined ‘that structural conditions play a substantial role in forming the circumstances faced by individuals and that limit the feasible alternatives to choose from, thereby “bounding” individual agency’ (p. 196). Sewell (1992) claims that ‘structure is the most important, elusive, and under theorized concept in the social sciences’ (p. 1).

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) attracted a great deal of interest in understanding structure as material, social and institutional environments. An example of structure in the framework of post-school education is the state's provision of public transport. Government funding for access to education or further education is another example of structure. Constraining barriers would be, for instance, the provision of limited funding or the provision of funding to only a few adult students. To facilitate success in overcoming barriers, the state needs to implement strategies that enable positive responses in adult students and actively remove obstacles that may present themselves, whether these stem from the structures of societal power or from the personal influence of the individual him- or herself (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

It is inevitable that structure would impact significantly on people's life experience. Sewell (1989) notes that 'structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures' (p. 4). Government legislation and policies could mould practice which encompasses structure. However, people have the power to change their circumstances or direction despite structural constraints.

Shilling (1992) referred to the applications of Giddens's (1984) theories to education in relation to structure as a form of ' "rules" and "resources" which actors draw on, and hence reproduce, in social interaction' (Shilling, 1992, p. 78). Shilling (1992) argues that structure includes providing 'knowledge of social conventions and their contexts of application, and actors with a set of "tools" for accomplishing social interaction' (p. 78). This observation acknowledges individual strength in social knowledge.

In particular, Giddens (as cited in Sewell, 1992) stated that structure should be viewed as both constraining and enabling and not only as constraining. Archer (2003) explained why constraints and enablements are terms which are specific to the social sciences, and refer to causal powers that can be exercised in society. They are not terms usually employed in the natural sciences. The differences between constraints and enablements, on the one hand, and casual powers on the other, may be found in the fact that the latter operates through anticipation while the former occurs when a project is either constrained or enabled during its implementation. Agents can act strategically to try to determine ways around constraints or to define a second-best outcome. Giddens (1984) made structure as an essential part of structuration a central theme. He understood structure not as a sequence of events, but as 'social practices ordered across space and time' (Giddens, 1984, p. 2).

Adult students had the ‘generative power to impede or facilitate projects of different kinds from groups of agents who are differentially placed’ (Archer 2003, p. 7); without this generative power, constraints and enablements remain unexercised. It is crucial to distinguish between the presence of organisational properties and the exercise of their fundamental powers (Archer, 2003). Thus these powers can be expressed variably, depending on the degree or structural capacity and culture.

Structure consists of rules and resources while policy is part of rules (Kipo, 2013) that help to understand structure. According to Kipo (2013), policy as rules both compel and empower aspects of structure. This would mean that policies could potentially be in favour of or against participants in this study. For example, initially in 2015, participants did not receive stipends. These were only given in 2016, which confirms that policies constrain or enable structure as policies permitted an advantage as soon as stipends were received. Therefore, it can be seen that at the outset, policies created certain limitations experienced by adult students when they did not receive stipends.

Kipo’s (2013) cites Giddens’s (1984) definition of power as ‘transformative capacity’ (p. 20). For Kipo (2013), Giddens, 1979, ‘he conceptualizes power relations as “regularized relations of autonomy and dependence” ’ (p. 6). Giddens ‘conception of power does not reflect dualisms of agency and structure; it rather reflects duality of structure in power relations’ (Kipo, 2013, p. 20).

Structuralism as a theory, according Giddens (1984), is ‘the basic domain of study of the social sciences, is ‘neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time’ (p. 2). Human social activities, according to Giddens (1984), are continually recreated through the ‘very means whereby they express themselves as actors’ (p. 2).

Giddens (1984) stated that structure is encompassed in rules as language, since structure embodies the linguistic protocols in which the written as well as the spoken word areprescribed. Giddens (1984) continued to analyse the accepted norms of societal behaviour as necessary for the ongoing stability of social engagement and the maintenance of traditional standards. Sewell (1992) critiqued Giddens’s (1984) concept of structure in some detail, arguing that rules extend beyond structure and that structure is not only restricted to rules but also includes significant Includes significant devices which, when woven into the fabric of collective interchange, allow for a continuous reshaping as well as maintenance of social

outcomes. However, Sewell (1992) supported Giddens's (1984) description of resources, stating that they can assist as a source of power in societal interface.

Sewell, (1992) points out that:

> Resources are of two types, human and non-human. Non-human resources are objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occuring or manufactured, that can be used to enhance or maintain power; human resources are physical strength, dexterity, knowledge, and emotional codtments that can be used to enhance or maintain power, including knowledge of the means of gaining, retaining, controlling, and propagating either human or non-human resources. Both types of resources are media of power, and as such are unevenly distributed (p. 11).

Non-human resources may be comprised of a variety of tangible objects or earthly possessions that may be designed to assert authority or ascendency in any number of different social arenas. Actors in situations requiring action and the conveying of messages also draw upon structural resources (Shilling, 1992). These resources consist of goods as well as services, and have the authority to regulate both these and impact the behaviour of others. People are necessarily influenced by the multiple threads of the many social practices that facilitate individual choice and support independent action for the purpose of taking action and doing something instead of being a spectator as mentioned by Giddens (1984)

Bounded agency, structure and barriers to participation

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) noted that the Bounded Agency 'Model is premised on the assumption that the nature of welfare state regimes can affect a person's capability to participate' (p. 187). This means that bounded agency refers to options and actions that enable involvement, with the choice of whether or not to become involved being dependent on the interaction between structural and individual agency, and based on obstructions to participation (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

This concept of 'bounded agency' contributes to the interpretation of adult education as an intricate phenomenon comprising key agents and their part in enticing or inspiring and/or, in contrast, restricting participation. This should provide a background and understanding of how decisions regarding involvement are made. Also, it explains how 'drop-out' may be avoided with encouraging practices that promote involvement, which have the potential to change the individual's thinking and outlook on education (Keller, 1987). Rubenson and Desjardins's (2009) central argument was that public policy could be made of reduce obstacles to

participation whether or not these obstacles originate from a structural or an independent source.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) argued that different types of barriers could hinder participation. One must consider institutional barriers – for example, high student tuition fees – and dispositional barriers, such as negative attitudes or poor self-assurance. Badat and Sayed (2015) mention that the biggest challenge to evolving societal impartiality in South Africa is making government support obtainable for fairness in schooling.

Cross (1981) identified three main barriers to participation in adult education; situational, institutional and dispositional. '*Situational barriers* are those arising from one's situation in life at a given time' (Cross, 1981, p. 98). '*Institutional barriers* consist of all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities' (Cross, 1981, p. 98). '*Dispositional barriers* are those related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner' (Cross, 1981, p. 98).

Cross (1981) focused on barriers as they manifest in the form of obstacles to learning, while MacKeracher, Suart and Potter (2006), and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), viewed the term 'barriers' in the context of their role with regard to participation. I agree with this concept as I have focused on the term 'barriers to participation' in my study. 'Barriers to learning' focus on learning specifically, whereas my study examines barriers to participation that includes an understanding of the influence of motivation as a springboard for the process of participation. This includes an understanding of factors which encompassed planning, entering and applying to study.

Structural barriers

I concur with MacKeracher et al. (2006) who state that structural barriers are difficult to identify as these barriers are often an inflexible commitment to orthodox practises which are not always helpful to the student.

According to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), major barriers are related to family and prevalent among older adults as opposed to younger students. This could possibly apply to participants in this study, as personal circumstances, family and job dynamics, although each unique, exert a powerful influence on the individual.

Based on the findings of this study, I concur with Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) who found in their study that 'my family commitments take up too much energy' tended to be mentioned more often than barriers related to work to further study. Participants included in this study are adult students which means that they have partners and children for whom they take responsibility. Examples of daily chores include childcare, which could reduce time available for studies.

Institutional barriers

Cross (1981) described some examples of institutional barriers, such as being related to awkward schedules or learning sites, inappropriate fee structures, and unsuitable or irrelevant courses or materials. MacKeracher et al. identified institutional barriers 'as limitations inherent in the methods institutions use to design, deliver and administer learning activities. These methods are frequently biased against or ignorant of the needs of adult learners' (p. 3).

Badat and Sayed (2015) refer to institutional culture as a potential barrier. English as the language of instruction and administration is one example of institutional culture which may well constitute a barrier for many adult learners. English is used as the medium of instruction used at TVET colleges in the Western Cape is English, and could emerge as a barrier, as either Afrikaans or isiXhosa is the mother tongue of many adult students. To accommodate individuals and to ensure effective delivery, SAQA states that as a tool for transformation, RPL should benefit all languages, not only those that are dominant (SAQA, 2013).

Fagan (as cited by MacKeracher et al. 2006) hold the position that a number of barriers are 'learner-inherent factors (goals, capabilities); life factors (conditions and circumstances surrounding the individual such as information, transitions, barriers); and program factors or the nature of the educational programs available to the individual (content, procedures, personnel)' (p. 25) which could be experienced by adult students concurrently. Some students perform in-house work experiences, four days a week, while others have family responsibilities to see to besides their studies.

Lack of financial means may be classified as either an institutional or situational barrier. In the event that there is a lack of finances and the institution does not provide financial assistance, it is regarded as an institutional barrier. Students could have experienced institutional barriers

after schooling, but participants in this programme were subject to fewer such barriers as they were provided with stationery in addition to free tuition.

Psychosocial barriers

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) analysed psychosocial barriers relating to the self as learner or potential learner, who may evaluate the usefulness, appropriateness and plausibility of engaging in adult education in a negative manner. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) observed that a certain negative self-image with regard to being a learner was often prevalent among working class adult students, especially those in a lower socio - economic position. These students often found it extremely difficult to view themselves as having academic potential and lacked the confidence to believe themselves capable of success.

Dispositional barriers

Dispositional barriers refer to an individual's negative perceptions, such as the idea that he or she might have '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' (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 192).

Given the apartheid education system, it is possible that participants in this study encountered negative schooling experiences which manifested as a dispositional barrier in adulthood.

Rubenson and Desjardin (2009) state that the personal disposition of an individual is formed as a result of social experiences, collective memories and ways of thinking that become habitual in the mind of the individual. They refer to these barriers as individual barriers, and divide them into two categories; situational barriers, which include tasks related to work, family or living together in a household related barriers, and dispositional barriers, which are those relating to internal dispositional aspects, or what they term 'consciousness and capacity' (p. 195).

Dispositional influences as mentioned by MacKeracher et al. (2006) "as the 'learners' perceptions of their ability to seek out, register in, attend and successfully complete learning activities" (p. 4). The types of personality traits that would support such constructive activities would be self-confidence and a positive attitude about the benefits of learning. However, negative personality traits would include defiance about themselves which may negatively

impact learning and previous undesirable practises with educational activities that may cause some adult students to lose confidence in themselves.

It is possible that the participants in this study held negative dispositions towards studying, especially as many of them left school before matriculating. Feelings of helplessness, being exposed and at risk of failure could also have been experienced.

MacKeracher et al. (2006) maintained that people 'early in life, create a learner identity for themselves inimical to further study are unlikely to participate in formal educational activities beyond compulsory schooling' (p. 11). This could be one of the many reasons that there is non participation in many adults do not participate in studies once they leave school; so much of the individual identity is shaped during the years of formal schooling.

Situational barriers

Any situation that causes undue pressure on the individual may be described as a situational barrier, which MacKeracher et al. (2006, p. 2) described 'as broad circumstantial conditions that hamper the ability of adult learners to gain access to and pursue learning opportunities'. Rubenson and Desjardin (2009) defined situational barriers as those related to jobs, family or household, as well as those that are institutional and personal, or dispositional.

Situational barriers could be one of the reasons why so many adult students do not register for further studies or, once registered, do not complete the learning programme. MacKeracher et al. (2006) elaborated further on situational barriers, listing some of the obstacle's adult learners face.

> '… multiple and often conflicting roles and responsibilities of most adults in relation to their work, family, and community; the level of support the adult learner receives from significant others in his or her life and the distance the adult learner must travel to reach the learning opportunity (p. 4).

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982, p. 137) state that 'situational barriers relate to an individual's life context at a particular time, that is, the realities of one's social and physical environment'. They mention fee and absence of time as examples.

Desjardins and Milana (2007) mention two situational constraints; job and family related. To overcome such constraints, individual agents may make use of external resources, such as

financial assets, or internal resources, such as those emanating from social support mechanisms, in order to initiate and sustain action.

Overcoming barriers to participation

In their report, Pennacchia, Jones and Aldridge (2018) emphasised that to overcome the barriers to adult participation in formal learning, it is insufficient to focus on one barrier only. Instead, multiple barriers should be addressed simultaneously. Institutions should aim to boost adult students' confidence and all efforts should be made to communicate information about courses and programmes offered, particularly the benefits of learning. This would go some way to alleviating concerns about the various barriers to learning which adult students experience. Information should not be hidden, but visible to prospective students and within students' reach or access. In addition, programmes in communities, for example, should be designed to motivate adults to learn, emphasising the rewards of learning within the workplace and their chosen profession (Pennacchia, Jones & Aldridge, 2018).

Summary

In this section, I constructed a conceptual framework which incorporated the notion of agents, agency and its components, intentionality, capacity, self-efficacy, planfulness, optimism, resilience and structure, as they appear in social and institutional environments. My framework is further enlarged by an analysis of the concepts of bounded agency and a review of the different categories of barriers to participation.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section of my research paper details the design of my research and methodology. It comprises a description of the research site, sample description, research method, research instrument, data-analysis methods and ethical statement.

Research question

Main question

What are the relationships between access, participation and barriers among students at a TVET college?

Sub-questions

1. What barriers did student experience?
2. What did students do to overcome these constraints/barriers/inhibitors?
3. What differences are students' interventions making in their life course?
4. How will students use success to access new opportunities in their future life course?

Research approach

Creswell (2014) outlines qualitative research as an approach:

> for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particular to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (p. 4).

I adopted a qualitative research approach to guide my investigation as Bryman (2016) elaborated that it comprises different traditions and stances that have evolved over time. I examined social research data without converting it into numerical format as in the case of the quantitative approach (Bryman, 2016) with adult students who had chosen the RPL option to gain access to a qualification. The qualitative and quantitative research approaches are not that different and have no hard and fast distinctions according to Bryman (2016). Bryman (2016) avers that 'It is also worth bearing in mind the ways in which quantitative and qualitative research are *similar* rather than different' (p. 317).

Bryman (2016) suggests that we should also be mindful of the fact that there are instances where qualitative and quantitative research can merge into similarity, rather than always

existing as specific opposites. However, he advocates that a qualitative approach is useful to gain an understanding of the influence of social conditions.

I investigated why adult students accessed and participated in the RPL programme, the barriers they experienced and considered the relationship between access, participation and barriers to learning. A qualitative research method provides a magnifying look at social behaviour and a clearer understanding of the social world of adult learners in conjunction with different backgrounds and standpoints that have developed, if any, over time.

Bryman, (2016) argues that it is difficult to duplicate qualitative research as it is dependent on the objectivity of the interviewee. Researchers differ with regard to age, gender, background, morals, standards and values which could affect the fairness of an interview.

Research site

My research site was a TVET college in Cape Town, where an accredited RPL centre in the ECD sector has been established since 2015. This college is one of three TVET colleges in the Western Cape that was identified to provide access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) qualifications through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in 2015. These qualifications were aimed at developing and enhancing critical skills in the ECD sector. Forty adult students registered for the Level 4 qualification. Since 2016, Level 4 adult students received a monthly stipend of one thousand seven hundred rand for the training which is completed over 18 months.

Research participants and selection

Sample description

The sample consisted of 20 adult students who were accepted into a Learnership programme through RPL and who had provided proof of acceptance as well as details of their current status regarding their qualifications, which were at different stages below Level 4.

The RPL adult students were women or men who were South African citizens; employed at an ECD site that was registered or partially registered; had a minimum of a Grade 9 qualification; were between 27-53 years old; had a minimum of five years of experience in the ECD field; and who were actively involved at their particular site in activities with small children that

focused mainly on learning through play. After accessing the details of potential participants from the college database, I selected 19 women and 1 man to conduct my research.

As there is a small percentage of male adult students enrolled in the ECD programme, it was difficult to find male adult students who were available to be interviewed. Ideally, I would have preferred to interview a larger percentage of male adult students.

Sampling strategies

I selected purposive sampling to hand-pick the participants. Babbie (2013) stated that participants to be observed are chosen on the researcher's decision as to who will most likely be valuable or prototypical for the study. Using the criteria mentioned previously, I selected 20 participants for my research study who are in the Learnership programme. Bryman (2016) claims that the:

> goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed. Very often, the researcher will want to sample in order to ensure that there is a good deal of variety in the resulting sample, so that sample members differ from each other in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research question. Because it is a non-probability sampling approach, purposive sampling does not allow the researcher to generalize to a population (p. 418).

For this reason, I would have preferred to interview more male adult students, with a view to make a broad point about access, participation and barriers to learning. However, this was not possible as there are more female than male adult students in the ECD sector. Moreover, I desired and strived for a varied group of racially diverse participants in my study, but adult students from other races were unavailable at the time of the interviews. I was satisfied that there was a comprehensive age variation of adult students represented in my study.

Bryman (2016) sanctioned sequential purposive sampling by virtue of significance and applicability to the research question being fixed at the commencement of the research process. This means that only RPL Learnership adult students were included as subjects for my research question. Bryman (2016) avers that in 'purposive sampling sites, like organizations, and people (or whatever the unit of analysis is) within sites are selected because of their relevance to the research questions' (p. 418); thus, the RPL learnership, adult students were significant and relevant samples for my study.

A small percentage of RPL Learnership, adult students agreed to meet with me but changed their minds or did not contact me to confirm the interview. I continued asking other enthusiastic, adult students who were willing to participate as I had enough RPL adult students to contact.

Research method

Semi-structured interview

Bryman (2016) explains that a semi-structured interview 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 from that 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. 543).

I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews as a research method to gather data from participants at a time that was convenient to all my participants. In contrast to semi-structured interviews, Burgess (1984) commented that unstructured interviews are likened to having to a conversation with a person which can evolve into a series of random and unconnected statements.

During my semi-structured interviews, questions were listed which had to be completed in my interview guide. Bryman (2016) remarks 'that the researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply' (p. 370). I tried to create a level of versatility in the interview process, while equally ascertaining how the interviewee was framed with regard to issues and events concerning the ECD field.

According to Bryman (2016), the interviewer took place at their homes, workplace or at College which was familiar to them, which helps the interviewer to understand what is being said in the interviewees' own terms. As I have been in the ECD field, either teaching or lecturing, besides being the co-ordinator at an educare centre, I am familiar with the terminology, format and structure used in the ECD field and have deference for adults working in the sector. I felt confident that my own professional background in education, and more

especially, early childhood education, provided all the relevance that was needed for my research study.

I started with questions which placed the participants at ease. As far as possible, questions significant to participants were asked early in the interview schedule as advised by Bryman (2016). Thereafter I continued by structuring questions by stating 'I would like to focus on a different topic' to prepare my participants for the next question. Most of my questions were direct questions, which were best left towards the end of the interview. Questions dealing with a person own views and opinions should be asked before questions dealing with one's actions and information about ECD and RPL in this study, as an example as recommended by Bryman (2016). I allowed pauses during the interview to permit time to reflect and strengthen answers.

I was guided by Kvale's (as cited in Bryman, 2016) criteria of a successful interview by being gentle, allowing participants to talk as well as allowing pauses throughout the interviews in order to allow participants to think before they answered questions. Being flexible, remaining informed of the topic and participants' backgrounds and environments were important aspects in my interview. I used clear, simple, short questions as the aim of the interview was to elicit responses. Therefore, being sensitive, and in addition, empathetic throughout the interview was a prerequisite. There were times when I was challenged by what was being said, but I requested clarification, or an explanation of remarks made by the participants.

Bryman (2016) suggested that questions be clustered into segments which allowed for the flow of questioning during the interview. Consequently, questions on information, access and agency to adult learning, for example, were grouped together. This created order especially when the data of all 20 participants needed to be analysed. Some questions overlapped each other in the sense that they were inquiring about the same thing but were simply worded differently. This meant that I repeated questions already answered by participants in earlier questions as affirmed by Bryman (2016). Getting the interviewee to confirm what they had already said was a way for me to ensure that the responses were consistent. There were times participants answered two questions indirectly when only one question was asked. I still asked the other question even though the participants had already answered it (Bryman, 2016).

Roulston (as cited in Bryman, 2016) suggested that an interview may not proceed according to plan. As it was the first time, I interviewed research participants, I maintained focus on questions as well as dealt with sensitive issues when participants became unsettled during the interview. I thanked respondents for their valuable time at the end of the interview.

Research instrument

Interview Guide

I chose an interview guide as a research instrument which Bryman (2016) defines as an assortment of requests intended to be requested by an interviewer to gather data. I used open-ended questions in the interviews. Charmaz (2006) distinguished three types of questions with regard to qualitative interviews, namely initial open-ended, intermediate and ending questions. I used unrestricted questions for respondents to respond in their own way or style and time. This allowed respondents to answer on their own terms instead of those imposed on them when using multiple choice responses as an example (Bryman, 2012). The participants answered questions using their own verbal expressions that allowed unusual responses. This also allowed the participant to provide additional information that related to the topic which is the flexible advantage of open-ended questions. In contrast, unrestricted questions are time consuming and require greater effort from the participants during interviews (Bryman, 2016).

Babbie (2013) points out that with an interview guide, the interviewer has a wide-ranging outline of investigation yet not a necessarily a list of questions that have to be requested in a specific order (Babbie, 2013). I asked questions in the same order not to lose track of questions asked so that I would not make the mistake of skipping a question. As Bryman (2016) advised, I incorporated the basic elements of embracing order when I prepared the interview guide while I ensured a reasonable amount of flow to my questions during the interview.

I kept in mind numerous types of issues which concerned participants, for example, the educational organisations of respondents, encounters and stories which could come to the fore (Bryman, 2016). I listened attentively to the responses of my participants especially after the participants warmed up to me during the interview, providing detailed answers to questions asked.

I included relevant information, which was useful for contextualising people's answers, for example, name, age, gender, position and years of employment at the ECD site of participants (Bryman, 2016). This information provided background to the participants, which was significant for my research. Information collected helped to compile appropriate data for my research.

Data capturing

I recorded all interviews using an audio-recording device and took notes throughout the interview (Bryman, 2016). This ensured that the interview process was not overwhelming for the participants. Informaiton was captured in a computer data file for analysis.

I stored the research data for five years on a reserved laptop, protected with a password. Data was stored on OneDrive which was accessible using a secure password for safeguarding. I will personally delete all computer files related to the research after 5 years.

Data processing

Babbie (2013) alludes that the:

> key process in the analysis of qualitative social research data is *coding*—classifying or categorizing individual pieces of data—coupled with some kind of retrieval system ... Together, these procedures allow you to retrieve materials you may later be interested in (p. 396).

I transcribed all interviews into text in the form of a dialogue.

Bryman (2012) specified that 'coding-[is] the key process in grounded theory, whereby data are broken down into component parts,' (p. 568) for the analysis of qualitative data. Bryman (2012) denotes that 'a coding schedule may also be necessary to keep a record of rules to be followed in the identification of certain kinds of answer in terms of a theme' (p. 248).

Bryman et al. (2014) cites Miles et al. who defines coding as 'selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appears in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials' (p. 336). Bryman et al. (2014) stated that 'coding implies that the coded data will not be presented in the original format but will be interpreted and re-presented by the researcher' (p. 336).

Coding could be seen as a trial and error process especially during the initial stages and is useful to plot or plan the common threads of the ideas that are being discussed (Bryman, 2016). For example, access, participation and barriers to participation in this study then narrowing the

thoughts as we proceed. In my understanding, coding is used to categorise the data into themes. Thereafter the data analysis technique is used to connect the literature with the themes.

According to Bryman et al. (2014), 'coding is not analysis', (p. 337) and should not be compared. Bryman et al. (2014) viewed coding as the initial point for most types of qualitative data analysis. They advocate that coding should be performed immediately, reading the first batch of responses, observations and notes on conversations (Bryman et al. 2014) then repeat the process in preparation for and during coding. Following their advice, I was careful to include noteworthy remarks and observations immediately after every interview so as to make sure that I interpreted its meaning without delay while it was still fresh in my mind.

Ryan and Bernard (as cited in Bryman, 2016) suggested searching for repetitions, similarities, differences, trends, patterns or categories and transitions as well as missing data as themes when coding as far as possible. These themes, once identified, were useful when I coded my data. Careful thought was needed during the coding process which was tedious. Bryman (2016) avers that, for certain scholars, a thread and a code may well be one and the same, while for others, a theme may often consist of a variety of codes.

After coding, I interpreted the data and then carefully situated it in the framework of the real world experience of the participants using the themes I had identified as a guide. Coding could present difficulties as claimed by Coffey and Atkinson (as cited in Bryman, 2016) and could result in division of data so that the description of the course of what is said, could be vanish. I kept in mind that there was a possibility of losing the social context of what was said during coding (Bryman, 2016). I took into consideration that some forms of data were not applicable for coding while I noted that it is broadly accepted that not all the data will be recorded as recurring, connected or consistent during the coding process.

After a long process, I saw that a story had emerged from the data with the research topic, the research purpose and the research enquiries form a background to the story. I composed my story, piecing it together with significant aspects of the data which reflected certain recurring themes.

Data-analysis

I used thematic data analysis to analyse my data. Bryman (2012) stated that 'this means that they examined the data to extract core themes that could be distinguished both between and

within transcripts' (p. 13). Bryman (2016) refers to 'thematic analysis as a strategy which is often influenced by grounded theory and which is often highly dependent on coding as a means of identifying themes in the data' (p. 441).

Braun and Clarke (as cited in Bryman et al., 2014) suggested a 'six-phase process of thematic analysis which includes familiarizing yourself with your data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report' (p. 351) which I used for my thematic analysis. Furthermore, I found themes that were imperative and significant to the participants, maximising the reliability and validity of my research (Bryman, 2016).

Research ethics statement

According to Babbie (2013), 'ethics is typically associated with morality, and both words concern matters of right and wrong' (p. 32). Ethics assists in avoiding mistakes and ethical standards enhance truthfulness and honesty within research. Researchers need to take responsibility for their actions when undertaking interviews.

Bryman (2012) mentioned ethical issues such as 'confidentiality' (p. 136). In view thereof, I conducted my investigation in ways that did not harm the participants in any way and was sensitive to the participants' responses (Babbie, 2013). Diener and Crandall (as cited in Bryman, 2016) elaborated that harm entails a number of factors, namely physical, loss of self-esteem and stress.

I did not place any pressure on the participants that interviews were mandatory. Before the interviews, I explained that involvement in this study was voluntary, and that I was obligated to required consent to proceed with my research. Participants were told that they could withdraw from the research process during the course without providing explanations (Babbie, 2013). My interviews were 'based on [the] full understanding of what is involved' (Babbie, 2013, p. 33) during the interview.

I agreed with Babbie (2013) who asserted that 'assuring anonymity would increase the likelihood and accuracy of responses' (p. 35) and who highlighted that participants should not be characterised during analysis and reporting of data. Bryman (2012) holds the view that 'use of pseudonyms is a common recourse but may not eliminate entirely the possibility of identification' (p. 136). It could be a challenge to conceal the identity of participants, but it

needed to be strived for at all cost. Although I gave the participants pseudonyms, I took care to keep the participants' information concealed, omitting information that would uncover participants' identity.

I managed to maintain confidentiality by not sharing any details about the participant with any other person and keeping all consent forms and electronic recordings in a safe place during the course of the research and thereafter**.** I kept information in my filing cabinet which did not allow unauthorised access.

Consent from institution

It is usual for all institutions to have a policy in place regarding the manner in which consent should be obtained from participants during research. In line with this, Bryman (2016) reminds the researcher that it may also be necessary to:

> fulfil any obligations you entered into, such as supplying a copy of your dissertation, if, for example, your access to an organization was predicated on providing one, and maintaining the confidentiality of information supplied and the anonymity of your informants and other research participants (p. 503).

I prepared a letter to the principal of a TVET College in Cape Town via email for consent to conduct studies on access, participation and barriers to participation of RPL in the ECD sector (See Appendix B). After a few emails and telephone calls, I was granted permission to do my interviews.

I had to, at all times, be aware of University of the Western Cape's (UWC) policy which outlines an ethical approach and advocates that 'commitment to act in the best interests of the University' (UWC, 2014, p. 24) is important for researchers.

Informed consent from participants

In order to conform to the ethical requirements of the University of the Western Cape besides preparing a letter to my research site for consent as mentioned above, I provided a letter of information (See Appendix C) to participants before the commencement of the interview. The Department of Health and Human Services in the UK (as cited in Babbie, 2013), pointed out that the basic elements of:

> informed consent include a statement that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled (p. 36).

With the above in mind, I designed an information letter for the participants which outlined a brief introduction about myself, the reasons for the research and its details. The Department of Health and Human Services (as cited in Babbie, 2013), recommends that participants must 'be provided with A statement that the study involves research, an explanation of the research and the expected duration of the subject's participation, a description of the procedures to be followed' (p. 36). I provided clear details of what the participants would be consenting to, and I also explained that confidentiality, anonymity, right to consent to participate and withdrawal from the research would be guaranteed. This letter was given to the participants in order to conform to the standards of ethical research demanded by the University of the Western Cape at which I am studying. It was important that the participants understood the essence of the research and what would be done with the information that they imparted to the interviewer. I included a clause informing participants that their words would be recorded as I needed their exact words for accuracy of information received. The information letter included a participant consent form that needed to be completed by participants before the commencement of the interview in order to proceed with interviews (See Appendix D).

Summary

In this section, I discuss the research approach and methodology used to conduct this research study. Ethical considerations are also addressed.

SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this section, I present the data arranged according to certain themes, which helped to organise the data and provide structure for its analysis.

The aim of this study was to investigate the reasons why participants accepted through the RPL route accessed and participated in the ECD programme. I asked the question posed by Larson and Milana (as cited in Cross, 1981): Why do some people participate in adult education while others choose not to? I was also interested in the barriers experienced by participants before and during their participation in the ECD programme, along with why all these participants ultimately completed the programme successfully.

I chose an interview guide mostly comprising open-ended questions. Bryman (2016) defines the interview guide as a collection of questions intended to be asked by an interviewer. Open-ended questions are an important tool in qualitative studies, since they do not restrict participants' answers, but allow participants to share unsolicited information with the interviewer.

Most interviews were held at the participants' ECD sites of work, with a few taking place at the TVET College, which was more convenient for some participants.

Twenty interviews were completed within three months. Before each interview, I used a checklist to make sure that I had all the necessary equipment, such as stationery for the interview, voice recorder, interview guide, information letter, participation consent form, and address and contact details of each participant. After each interview, I summarised the interviews using notes to ensure that the data was clear. I then started organising the data to make sense of it.

Coding based on a coding schedule made it easy to analyse data and to find recurrences of data that could be grouped together into coded themes. As I read through the data, I coded units of data according to the designated code for each theme, labelling the data according to the identified themes.

Themes emerged throughout this process, which also involved comparing the data with similar findings in the literature. Once this process was complete – when the themes were as clear and concise as possible – they were analysed, and an interpretive story was formulated as to why these RPL participants had made the life-changing decision to study further, the challenges

they experienced and what influenced their success to complete their studies. I discovered that each participant had a story to tell that bore strong similarities to all the others, yet all contained some unique elements.

It appeared that participants had enrolled in the programme for various reasons, but all seemed to be committed to persevere and attain their goals. Motivations such as the desire to make a difference in their community, to complete studies in ECD and obtain qualifications, to change their personal circumstances, to encourage and support their families, to reap financial benefits and to fulfil work requirements emerged as the predominant motivations.

Factors contributing to the success of participants were positive attributes, leadership qualities and being a good role model, the lure of better job opportunities, personal time management skills, the opportunity to put theory into practice, excitement, growth in confidence, changes in lifestyle, family support and the overcoming of barriers experienced. All the aforementioned elements helped to motivate them, even though several of the adult participants admitted to having very little self-belief at first. Once the data was organised, I wrote up the data analysis which I used to create findings and make recommendations.

Biographical information of participants

Muneera is a 35-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is divorced with four dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for five years as a principal-owner, mentor and teacher. Her home language is English with Grade 12 being her highest grade passed.

Zoleka is a 32-year-old Black woman from the Western Cape. She is married to one dependant. She has been working in the ECD field for five years as a teacher. Her home language is isiXhosa with Grade 11 being her highest grade passed.

Vanessa is a 53-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is married with four dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for 13 years as a principal. Her home language is English with Grade 9 being her highest grade passed.

Marilyn is a 48-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is widowed with one dependant. She has been working in the ECD field for ten years as a teacher. Her home languages are Afrikaans and English with Grade 11 being her highest grade passed.

Desiree is a 47-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is single with one dependant. She has been working in the ECD field for nine years as a principal. Her home languages are English and Afrikaans with Grade 12 being her highest grade passed.

Ruwayda is a 38-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is divorced with four dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for 12 years as a teacher, assistant teacher, volunteer and principal. Her home language is English with Grade 10 being her highest grade passed.

Rebecca is a 32-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is engaged to be married but has no dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for eight years as an assistant teacher. Her home language is Afrikaans with Grade 10 being her highest grade passed.

Sindiswa is a 31-year-old Black woman from the Western Cape. She is single with one dependant. She has been working in the ECD field for three years as a teacher. Her home language is Sotho with Grade 11 being her highest grade passed.

Moira is a 51-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is married with four dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for 20 years as a teacher. Her home language is Afrikaans with Grade 9 being her highest grade passed.

Bronwyn is a 41-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is married with two dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for eight years as a teacher assistant. Her home language is English with Grade 10 being her highest grade passed.

Bulelwa is a 30-year-old Black woman from the Western Cape. She is single with one dependant. She has been working in the ECD field for ten years as a teacher. Her home language is isiXhosa with Grade 11 being her highest grade passed.

Nozipho is a 34-year-old Black woman from the Western Cape. She is married with two dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for seven years as a teacher assistant. Her home language is isiXhosa with Grade 12 being her highest grade passed.

Sumaya is a 42-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is married with no dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for ten years as an assistant, teacher, senior teacher and currently as a volunteer till the end of year. Her home language is English with Grade 10 being her highest grade passed.

Janine is a 46-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is separated with two dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for 20 years as a teacher and principal. Her home languages are Afrikaans and English with Grade 10 being her highest grade passed.

Margaret is a 28-year-old single Coloured woman from the Western Cape with one dependant. She has been working in the ECD field for five years as a teacher assistant. Her home languages are Afrikaans and English with Grade 12 being her highest grade passed.

Noncebo is a 37-year-old Black woman from the Western Cape. She is single with three dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for 18 years as a principal. Her home language is isiXhosa with Grade 12 being her highest grade passed.

Asanda is a 27-year-old Black woman from the Western Cape. She is married with two dependants. She has been working in the ECD field for 11 years as a teacher. Her home language is isiXhosa with Grade 12 being her highest grade passed.

Sabelo is a 26-year-old Black man from the Western Cape. He is single with one dependant. He has been working in the ECD field for two years as an assistant teacher and now a teacher. His home language is isiXhosa with Grade 12 being his highest grade passed.

Kim is a 49-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is single with one dependant. She has been working in the ECD field for eleven years as an assistant teacher. Her home languages are English and Afrikaans with Grade 8 being her highest grade passed.

Rene is a 34-year-old Coloured woman from the Western Cape. She is married with one dependent. She has been working in the ECD field for 15 years as a teacher. Her home language is Afrikaans and Grade 12 is her highest grade passed.

Table Summary of biographical information of participants

Participant	20 participants
Age	Ages of participants ranged between 27 and 53 years of age.
Volunteer/employed	All participants were employed except for four who are volunteers at an ECD site.
Gender	One male and 19 female participants formed part of my interviews.
Highest grade passed	One participant accomplished a Grade 8 pass, two participants finished Grade 9, five participants completed Grade 10, four participants completed Grade 11 in addition to eight participants completing Grade 12.

Marital status	Marital status of participants varied; there were seven single mothers, eight married, two divorced females, one separated, one engaged to be married and one single male.
Language	The home language of participants was isiXhosa (six), English (five) and Afrikaans (three), Sotho (one) with the remainder of participants speaking English and Afrikaans (five) as their home language.
Location	Participants resided in the Cape Flats areas of Silvertown, Bridgetown and Belgravia; the southern suburbs of Grassy Park, Retreat and Capricorn; and the northern suburbs of Ravensmead. Mitchells Plain and Ocean View. Other participants were located in Crossroads, Nyanga, Khayelitsha, Langa and Samora Machel, all townships in the Western Cape.
Participant ECD sites	Participants' ECD sites were in Mitchells Plain, Philippi, Samora Machel, Greenhaven, Athlone, Bellville, Gugulethu, Grassy Park, Ocean View, Crawford, Silvertown, Khayelitsha, Langa, Belgravia, Retreat and Lower Crossroads.

Adult students as agents

Informed by national policies about the recognition of prior learning (RPL), theWestern Cape Department of Education, in partnership with the TVET college used asa site of research in this study, offered experienced 'practitioners without qualifications'access to qualifications through RPL. The participants in this study were adult studentsworking in early childhood development (ECD) as 'practitioners without qualifications' who took up the opportunity to pursue qualifications in this field when they were offered the route of access through RPL. Their responses revealed that they had been considering the pursuit of qualifications for a while, and exhibited similar 'thinking, deliberating, believing and intending' (Archer 2003, p. 2) – the properties and powers of agents as identified by Archer (2003). Participants' comments reveal their positive attitudes to this opportunity.

> Knowing myself, I know I would have succeeded. It was an opportunity for me and I wanted to make the best of it. I was motivated, I believe in myself and I am thinking about the first NCF themes, and I am a competent person (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).

> I was trying, it was difficult for me. The only thing that helped me was to determine myself and find out the purpose of why I am here. Being a male always drives me that I can change this industry (Sabelo, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> The studies, because I am now in the flow, becoming who I always wanted to be (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Participants as agents were transformed into 'social actors', as described by Archer (2003):

> As individuals and groups are acting in situations to defend their vested interests and to realize their projects, they reproduce or transform the structural and cultural conditions that impinge on them, but in this process they are themselves being transformed from involuntarily placed agents into social actors and individual persons (double morphogenesis) (pp. 3-4).

Some of the participants' comments with regard to becoming 'social actors' were:

> Absolutely. I am a go-getter, if you can see it, you can achieve it (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).

> I had a choice in standing up for myself, because my in-laws were very old school. I had a choice of sitting at home or being the person that I am, was a better choice (Ruwayda, Interview, September 14, 2018).

> I pushed myself because everything was important and I was working towards a goal (Vanessa, Interview, August 13, 2018).

> In the beginning it wasn't easy but I am doing it for my daughter and I had to set goals for her future (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

> Prioritizing focus and consistency, I think that plays a big role in making your choices for what you want to study (Sumaya, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> It was very difficult, the father of my child is a chef and all of my aunts are in PE and they are teaching and they were talking that my children are not educated, so I had to do something to upgrade my child's future (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018).

Agency and self-efficacy

Hitlin and Elder (2006) refer to the quality of self-efficacy or 'planfulness' as an essential attribute of the individual in realising his or her agentic role.

> Studies that empirically attempt to assess agency most often refer to social psychological capacities for self-efficacy or planfulness. These individual-level attributes bear upon the individual's ability to act. Individuals possess varying levels of these capacities, and thus possess varying senses of agentic potential. This sense of personal agency exists, of course, to be developed and exercised within socially structured opportunities' (p. 37).

Participants' responses reveal the psycho-social capacities for self-efficacy, such as patience, focus, motivation, will power, leadership skills and a positive attitude, that enabled them to exercise agency:

> Patience for me … I really love what I'm doing. It is a passion (Bronwyn, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> I love what I am doing, and I am also patient and flexible for anything (Nozipho, Interview, September 18, 2018)
>
> Yes, I did. Being focused and, like I said, being where I need to be and also with the help of colleagues (Janine, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> I was motivated and focused to get a job at a primary school because I am young (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).
>
> I have a very strong will power and leadership skills. The confidence I have from my staff and being a mother of four kids (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).
>
> Leadership; when you are a follower you go along but if you understand the importance of leading and qualities that comes with it, the true you is revealed (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).
>
> No, because I have a positive attitude (Moira, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Agency, desire and intentionality

Agency, according to Emirbayer and Mische (1998) is interconnected by means of 'selfhood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom, and creativity' (p. 962). Thus agency carries with it the notion of decision-making spurred by a clear intention and aspiration, and the application of commitment to achieve a desired result.

The data revealed that participants had a desire to complete studies in ECD and to obtain a qualification as they had previously been unable to study for various reasons. The following quotes reveal how the intention to study began with a desire that had earlier been frustrated.

> Due to financial strain from my parents I couldn't finish, however I did Grade 10 (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).
>
> I didn't have a choice because I had to go work, but I always wanted to work with children (Moira, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> No money, it was either a teacher or a social worker (Bronwyn, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> I always wanted to be a doctor, but unfortunately I didn't have money for that. I did apply at UWC, but they didn't accept me because I didn't have Maths, so I had a gap year. And in that year I learned ECD and I loved it (Noncebo, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Participants' responses reinforce Bandura's (2006) assertion that intentionality plays an central part in clarifying the final goals and the decisions ultimately made by individuals. Noncebo, for example, developed a deep sense of intentionality which then spurred her into further acts of agency focused on ECD studies. These responses clearly demonstrate the participants' intentionality; they had a desire to find ways to overcome the constraints which faced them, and they carried this intentionality into their action of pursuing post-school studies when the opportunity presented itself.

Agency, intentionality and commitment

Bandura (2001) describes intentionality as 'a representation of a future course of action to be performed. It is not simply an expectation or prediction of future actions but a proactive commitment to bringing them about' (p. 6). Participants' intentionality had to be translated into a commitment to the goal they had decided to pursue. Most were spurred on by their desire for a Level 4 or Level 5 qualification:

> I don't like to not finish things, so RPL allows me to finish my Level 4 qualification (Nonceba, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Like I said, I had to. It is all about the qualification that goes behind it. That piece of paper gave me an opportunity (Janine, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> For me it was getting more information and learning more on how to develop a child and the certificate. To be more experienced (Asanda, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> My desire to always graduate; it was always something that I wanted to do. Looking forward to Level 5 and my certificate. I was finally doing something that I enjoyed doing. And for my business, it's motivation for my staff (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).

> I wanted to finish my Level 5 (Kim, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> I registered a long time ago and there was a waiting list and then I was chosen to do the RPL (Moira, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> Because of the drive I have for children. I do love children and so that drives me to do this course. I am doing my Level 5 and it is so amazing (Sabelo, Interview, October 13, 2018).

It is common for people to be prompted by several motivating factors at once, particularly adults who decide to pursue studies. This is apparent in the comments above; participants had more than one reason for wanting to study and complete their studies. Responses conveyed a strong sense of agency, the intention to obtain a qualification for work requirements (improving professional opportunities) and commitment to the task. The participants above expressed that they were actively encouraged to study further by mentors, colleagues or managers in their working environment, to the point where many were about to take their Level 5 RPL qualification.

Participants' intentionality was clear. From the responses one can deduce that they were self-motivated to study, choosing to do so independently of the opinions of others; none indicated being pressurised to study. Their own intrinsic desire to better themselves and earn a qualification prompted them to study.

Bandura (2006) reminds us that 'absolute agency' does not exist independently but is always linked to the actions and consequences of other agents. This means that members of a group or community have to have personal goals and interests in common; in addition, intention must be present in the group, so that the group can survive. Thus, the collective members must pool their energies to achieve a common goal, In this study, participants mentioned that their principal, their children and staff influenced their intention to study.

> Yes, because if I don't go study, I can't stay at the preschool. It gives me more information on how to work with children (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).

> Yes, the principal was motivating me (Sabelo, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> Being your own person and it got mostly to do with that piece of paper that I needed to get (Janine, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Yes, I encouraged it for my staff (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).

Agency and intention to change life circumstances

Rather than being complacent, most participants felt that by participating intentionally in a specific task and skill they were committing to an action that would change their lives, thereby exercising agency. Participants had dreams and goals and wanted to complete their qualifications, and therefore grasped the opportunity when it came. This is supported by Bandura's (2006) observation that intentionality means that participants are 'intentionally engaging in activities known to be functionally related to given outcomes' (p. 167).

I propose that intentionality prompts participation. Therefore, participants controlled their behaviour, showing their ability to manage their actions in a positive manner, thus practising intentionality. They intervened in their life circumstances to improve their lives. This is borne out by the fact that three participants voiced the need, giving rise to intention, to change their circumstances as the main reason for studying.

> I made a commitment to myself and the opportunity that was given to me (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).
>
> I wanted to finish and become a primary school teacher (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).
>
> I wanted to change my circumstances, so I had to succeed in my studies (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Therefore, it is evident that the successful implementation of intentionality compelled a change in participants' circumstances.

> It was a requirement for me in the position that I was as principal. I used to help out at schools, and I discovered a passion for it (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).
>
> In the beginning, I didn't have a choice. I was working at a factory and then the owner of the crèche approached me to help him to start with the crèche (Moira, Interview, September 8, 2018).

Both Vanessa and Moira indicated that they began studying because it was a work requirement and not a choice; yet later it became a passion, as they realised the power of a qualification to enhance their futures. Together these two participants pursued their studies without having worked in ECD for a lengthy period, as the others had. They recognised that their qualification would be an advantage in the years to come, and they harnessed their self-control to change

their circumstances. Thus the ability to self-regulate cannot be underestimated, as agency needs a strong foundation of emotional intelligence in order to function effectively and transform an individual's circumstances.

Agency and intention to make a difference in the community

Giddens (1984) defined agency as intention with the ability to act with purpose. Giddens (1984) further informs us, 'That is to say, for an item of behaviour to count as action, whoever perpetrates it must intend to do so, or else the behaviour in question is just a reactive response' (Giddens, 1984, p. 8). Thus we see again the centrality of intention to an act of agency. Agency is always exercised consciously and cannot consist in a 'knee-jerk' reaction stemming from instinct rather than the intellect itself. Some participants revealed their intention to make a difference in an arena beyond that of their own lives:

> I like to learn and because I work in an ECD Centre, I wanted to empower myself so that I can be a better practitioner to the children that are in my care and to the ECD itself (Margaret, Interview, September 18, 2018).

In choosing to study, Margaret did not react to a situation but conducted herself independently, choosing to empower herself by becoming a teacher for the sake of the children she taught. It was not a reaction to a situation but a desire and intention to upskill herself. This idea is reflected in Margaret's response in which she declared that she wanted to make a difference in her community, thereby influencing society for the better.

Agency in the face of situational and dispositional barriers

Having considered the properties of agents and agency, along with its many facets, I now turn to the barriers that affect agency and that confronted the participants during the course of their ECD studies. Many of the barriers they experienced were situational, having their historical roots in their experiences as children.

It was clear that participants' historical barriers were the foundation of their initial reluctance or inability to study. Having faced their situational and dispositional barriers, as well as several institutional barriers, they displayed a remarkably positive attitude, in spite of underlying fears. They were inclined to find positive energy in their ability

to overcome barriers and had cultivated a capacity for dealing with problems and exerting personal agency, as may be deduced from their personal narratives below.

In Zoleka's case, financial constraints were her situational barrier, as there was no money to pay school fees. In Rene's case, poor grades became her dispositional barrier, as she initially felt unable to take on the challenge of studying further. She did not have the grades necessary to study nursing, and experienced an additional situational barrier which became a dispositional one; her high school teacher, whom she loved and respected, died, after which she felt no motivation to study. This may have been why she did not achieve the grades she needed to study further. The situation of the death a loved one led to a lack of motivation, a dispositional barrier to success in studies.

Sindiswa experienced a situational barrier in falling pregnant, which also indicates a dispositional constraint, in that, by her own admission, she lacked the maturity to make wise decisions. Her situation of having a child while young and unmarried had serious consequences, preventing her from pursuing studies.

The following responses show that participants experienced more than one barrier at a time. In most cases, an initial situational barrier causing them to leave school early had a ripple effect throughout their lives to that point, leading to more barriers:

> I wanted to finish Grade 12, but I did not have the money (situational), because of my mother being a single parent (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).
>
> Yes, but due to the financial strain of my parents (situational barrier), I couldn't study further. My desire would have been working with people (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).
>
> The conditions that time was very bad, (situational barrier) there were riots and all those kinds of things and I had to repeat a Grade and that wasn't nice (Sumaya, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> To get up in the morning and they teach you what to do. But when I got to high school it was heavy (situational barrier) for me but I pulled through. For personal reasons I dropped out (Kim, Interview, October 13, 2018).
>
> It was a matter of making bad choices. I fell pregnant (situational barrier) in Grade 11 and then I had to leave school, so I had to go work to take care of my child, but I told myself that I will go back (Bulelwa, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Yes, I always wanted to go study. I wanted to become a surgeon or gynaecologist but when I finished school my family went through a difficult time. My parent's companies were liquidated and there was no money (situational constraints) for me to go study. And when I applied, I was too late (Margaret, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> Yes, I wanted to study nursing but I wanted to work with children especially. I applied at colleges but my grades were not so good (situational barrier) (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018).
>
> Yes, I did not have the money (situational barrier) because my mother was a single parent and I left school at Grade 11 (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).
>
> I'm grown up and my family struggles to raise me (situational barrier) so I told myself I must work hard so one day I can give back to my family (Nozipho, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> I was one of the A learners, but I dropped out at Grade 11, because my mom had a divorce (situational barrier) and she had three children and I was the eldest and I wanted to help out with the others (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).
>
> There was a desire, in 2012 I went to go do Marketing for one year and I passed, at that time I was pregnant and then I didn't go back (dispositional barrier) (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> I always wanted to study, because education is very important. The teacher at the time passed away (dispositional barrier,) so I had to drop out (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).

Although the link between initial situational barriers and later determination to study is not made clear, the fact that these participants initially failed to complete studies may have played a role in their determination and capacity to later overcome their barriers in order to successfully gain an ECD qualification. They did this despite the passing of many years since their initial failure.

Agency and the overcoming of situational barriers

I believe that participants' personal attitudes and choices played a significant part in their acts of agency, a view that is supported by Hitlin and Elder (2006), who claim that 'agency has been thought of alternatively as a capacity, an attribute, evidence of resistance, and as a structurally defined property of persons' (p. 36). This points to the inner nature of the ability to overcome

barriers. The distinct ability to make the decision to succeed and to maintain a strong, positive attitude in the face of many responsibilities is displayed by participants' responses.

MacKeracher et al. (2006) further commented:

> that for most adults, participation in learning activities is a matter of choice that must be fitted into work, family and community responsibilities, and other interests and obligations … The barriers to participation in learning activities that are routinely reported in the literature describe problems that participants and potential participants encounter when trying to gain access to and complete these activities (p. 10).

MacKeracher refers to studies needing to be fitted into work, family and community commitments in the midst of competing pleasures and responsibilities, as can be seen in the responses of participants below. Marilyn displayed agency in overcoming her situational barrier of work demands, and the lack of time she felt to fit in all her responsibilities. Bulelwa managed several responsibilities at the same time in order to complete her studies. The same applies to Sindiswa, who had to make deliberate sacrifices in terms of time with family in order to fulfil her study needs. She was prepared to make choices in order to do what she had set out to do. She managed to gain the cooperation of her family members, so she was successful in overcoming the situational barrier of family responsibilities. This ability to overcome situational barriers is illustrated in the responses below:

> I had to sacrifice a lot of Saturdays and I had to juggle my work and my studies (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

> To juggle everything e.g., family, schoolwork, studying (Bulelwe, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> A lot changes. I am a married woman and I have children. My family is demanding so I had to sit them down and let them know that they have to leave me now to do my studies (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018).

Having exercised agency by acting on the bold decision to study further, participants expressed that they experienced dispositional barriers in their feelings of apprehension and even fear with regard to studying. Emotions they felt included fear, a sense of being overwhelmed, and a fear of the unknown, yet nothing could stop them from completing their qualification.

Barriers to participation are framed by the 'theoretical perspective based on bounded agency' (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 187) whereby the interaction between structural elements and those emanating from the psychological make-up of an individual can cause barriers to

participation. This is apparent in the responses below, which reveal the emotional state of participants at the beginning and throughout their participation in their studies. The structural elements relate to the RPL course, while the dispositional or psychological elements refer to the emotions of the participants.

> I was scared at the beginning with the Level 1, but I was also hungry to learn (Moira, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> The determination didn't make me feel out of place. I was experienced but the work that we had to apply was difficult in the beginning, but I got into the flow (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).
>
> Fear of not finishing what you've started – that pushes you (Sumaya, Interview, September 18, 2018.
>
> Overwhelmed, because I did Level 1 and coming from Level 1 to Level 4 was overwhelming (Bronwyn, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> Scared, excited, nervous, but I wanted to carry on (Noncebo, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> It was hard for me, everybody was looking at me because I was a man. I stayed (Sabelo, Interview, October 13, 2018).
>
> I was on my nerves and very quiet. I was worried about what they were going to expect from me but I finished RPL in the end (Kim, Interview, October 13, 2018).
>
> I felt scared because I felt I didn't know anything, but after attending I found out that I know some of the stuff, so kept going (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018).

The above responses underline the participants' enthusiastic conviction that they were in charge of their decisions, despite fears. They seemed certain that they, alone, could define their destiny, unhindered by internal or external barriers.

According to Bandura (2006), Social Cognitive Theory embraces three distinctive types of agency, namely, individual, proxy and collective. Daily life encompasses a blend of all three, which flow seamlessly into each other. In individual agency, each person directly influences events around him or her; for example, one's personal circumstances within a domestic or work environment. However, there are other forces that also affect individuals while not directly controlling them; namely mediated or proxy agency. With mediated or proxy agency, individuals are able to influence society to varying degrees by focussing on others, for example

family members, who are in a position to achieve the outcomes they themselves aspire to. The responses from Zoleka, Noncebo, Kim and Muneera illustrate this mediated or proxy agency:

> My husband helps me with the assignments and school (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018.

> My grandmother. She will always tell you if you don't study you are not going to be successful in your life, she keeps me motivated (Noncebo, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> My sister-in-law also encouraged me not to give up (Kim, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> I believed up until now because my sister has been my mentor and since this year she's been going through a difficult time and had to stop studying and I couldn't lean on her anymore but I know I can do it (Sumaya, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> At that point in time my husband was at home, so I didn't have to worry about my kids being collected at school and that was my main concern (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).

Hitlin and Elder (2007) refer to agency as 'a model of agency based on the temporal horizons of actors within action situations. Being alive requires action, and for reflexive beings this involves choice, analysis, reflection …' (p. 185). Participants were constantly involved in 'choices, analysis reflection', being determined to submit assignments and attend classes in order to complete the RPL learnership programme. Assignments and class attendance were the fundamental criteria for the theoretical component for the successful completion of the programme. Also, participants were required to be at their ECD site for the remaining four days of the week as the practical, essential hands-on component. The constant choice to attend classes, attend their ECD sites and complete assignments, besides fulfil family commitments, were actioned by participants, all of which were acts of agency, together with the acts of analysis and reflection that they engaged in.

> I had to take from my annual leave to attend the course (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018)

> Family was one of the main reasons, because I needed to support my daughter and because we were studying together, we can make it together (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).

> It is not nice being a single parent and not being educated yourself. I wanted to be a career woman and have a stable job, to be a role model for them. At home they did not believe in ECD but when I graduated, they were like, 'We didn't know you will come this far,' and that made me want to do more (Bulelwa, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> In a way it was difficult. I couldn't go out on a Sunday like going to my sister-in-law because I had to get ready for Monday, but I stuck to studies (Rebecca, Interview, September 8, 2018).

Situational constraints arise from the individual's personal life context, and institutional restrictions arise from the organisation of the educational establishment itself. Scanlan and Darkenwald (as cited in Hatala, 1993) found that situational barriers were contained within the following factors:

> … 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 (p. 10).

The individual situational barriers of the participants included lack of funds for studies after leaving school, challenging family responsibilities, unfavourable personal circumstances and unfavourable living conditions. These are similar to the factors noted by Scanlan and Darkenwald (as cited in Hatala, 1993). Sacrifices had to be made by participants who had to take time from their annual leave, who could not go to church or spend much time with their children, demonstrating the costs to the individual. However, participants did not allow these situational barriers to overpower them.

Agency, planfulness and overcoming situational barriers

Giddens (1984) stated that the concept of agency includes the potential aptitude of any individual to interrupt their actions at will and redirect the course of such actions to an alternate purpose. Participants would not have completed their studies without the capacity to plan around changes, where a different course of action became necessary in order to succeed in the RPL programme. Six participants indicated that they did not have to make any changes in their lives to accommodate their studies, while ten participants indicated that they did have to make changes in their lives. The responses below, although varied, indicate the planfulness employed by individual students, who dealt in varying ways with insufficient time for studies.

> I had to appoint a supervisor, to take over from me when I wasn't at school. And knowing that you have someone to depend on so that I can concentrate on my studies. Also, it was only once a week, which was a good thing (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).
>
> Changing my lifestyle, more like sacrificing my free time (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).
>
> A lot. My daughter is studying law, so both of us wanted to study. I had to sacrifice, because I had to split the money for her studies with her father, so that she could go study (Desiree, September 12, 2018).
>
> I needed to put my family aside and to make time for my studies (Rebecca, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> A lot of changes. I have a baby so I have to put myself together. I must work now. So, I started teaching at the crèche, but I didn't have experience (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> A lot of changes; I am a married woman and I have children. My family is demanding so I had to sit them down and let them know that they have to leave me now to do my studies (Moira, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> I had to quit my job that I had and then I had to volunteer at an ECD Centre to do this (Bronwyn, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> I always make changes, at home and personally, because all the time I want or wish to achieve my goals or something (Nozipho, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> Yes, the deadlines, but I just think about the little ones and doing it for them (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).

These changes included changing lifestyles, sacrificing free time, juggling work and studies, quitting jobs and appointing a supervisor as a substitute once a week. Participants found that they had to deviate considerably from their original plans of action. Participants were asked about the changes they had made in their lives to accommodate their studies. Their responses indicate that the students exercised the quality of planfulness and planned with their many responsibilities in mind, enabling them to make use of time efficiently and to overcome the situational barriers they faced.

Agency, resilience and overcoming demanding family constraints

To overcome their many barriers over the long term, participants had to exercise resilience. Bandura (2000) emphasises 'resilience to adversity' (p. 75) as the major attribute for expanding one's self-efficacy. About 15 of the 19 women were taking care of children and faced

situational barriers, yet their resilience persisted, and their sense of self-efficacy appears to have been amplified. It was clear that the women possessed significant resilience in terms of the demands being made on them; they took care of their family responsibilities while forcefully pushing forward with the task at hand. Nine participants stated that burdensome family responsibilities did not affect their success during their studies. A few participants felt restricted with the additional responsibility of young children in their care. Their responses were:

> I have a challenging family responsibility (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> Family responsibilities play a big role because it does restrain you. If I did not have work and family, the choice to go study would have been much easier (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).

> Not really, in the beginning it was tough taking care of my daughter, but now I'm coping (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

> I had to sacrifice for my daughter, so that she could study further first (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).

> I have a two-year-old son and he is very demanding, and it affects my studies, but I am coping (Bulelwa, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Yes, and no, because sometimes when I do my assignments my child keeps me out of work (Noncedo, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Yes, they disturb me, because they're curious about what I'm doing (Asanda, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> With my son I am always concerned, because I have to see to his needs first before I can sit with my books (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> The divorce and that I am a single parent and the fact that I have four kids. I don't have anybody to depend on to fetch them for extra-murals and I want to be around for that (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).

> Yes, I did. I had problems with my two kids, where they were slow learners and that was also a challenge standing up to the family because I had to take them out of a mainstream school and put them in a special needs school (Ruwayda, Interview, September 14, 2018).

> I did think of it, because sometimes it was difficult with my child and leaving early in the morning and they are shooting in the area (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018.

The above responses reveal cultural and societal practices that result in an unfair advantage for men and place a greater burden on women even though parents should both take responsibility for raising children. From the responses above, this seemed not to be the case with the participants. Participants expressed the capacity to recover quickly from hardships, considering that the status of the participants included seven single moms, eight married, two divorced females, one separated, one engaged to be married and one single male.

Agency and overcoming dispositional barriers

Given that adult students are continually required to make a variety of decisions which will affect their success, it is important to remember that the element of bounded agency will exert an influence on the outcome (Hitlin & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2015). Hitlin and Kirkpatrick Johnson (2015) referred to Bourdieu, whose outlook "is the idea that individuals possess "bounded agency", the circumscribed ability to influence their life courses' (p. 1462).

Bandura 1991b (as cited by Bandura 2006) furthermore indicates, 'The capacity for moral agency is founded on a sense of personal identity, moral standards, and behavioral regulation through self-sanctions' (p. 172). Participants' perceptions of themselves is rooted in their own approval of the decisions they made for themselves during their life, specifically in regard to their studies. Bandura also discusses moral agency; the ability to resist unhealthy and unacceptable behaviour and to make decisions that will benefit and not harm them. Again, participants mastered the ability to overpower their gruelling circumstances with confidence, rising above the demands and sacrifices that needed to be made.

It is clear that situational barriers frequently give rise to dispositional barriers. Cross (1981) described dispositional barriers as 'attitudes and self-perception about oneself as a learner' (p. 98). Ruwayda's compelling account of her personal struggle against the odds indicates personal difficulties in coping with her ex-husband's 'nastiness' which, in turn, had a negativeemotional impact on her and caused a dispositional barrier; hence she dropped out. Marilyn mentioned that it was tough taking care of her daughter, which became a dispositional barrier in that it drained her of confidence. The dispositional barrier had to be faced while dealing withthe situational barrier, which made her feel that she could not cope with all the demands being placed on her. Nevertheless, she overcame both the situational and dispositional barriers and was persisting with her studies.

It is important to note most dispositional barriers consist in emotional states that arise from one kind of situational barrier or another; a divorce, single parenthood, a 'nasty' ex-husband, and so on. These situations at times made the participants feel that everything was too much, and placed a great psychological block on their road to success, as illustrated below:

> My husband was very nasty after the divorce, so I dropped out, I didn't have anything (no work, no school), I only had my Level 1, and they pay little money for a Level 1 qualification, so that's why I went back and filled out the forms to finish my Level 4 (Ruwayda, Interview, September 14, 2018).

> I had to sacrifice for my daughter, so that she could study further first (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).

> I have a two-year-old son and he is very demanding, and it affects my studies, but I am coping (Bulelwe, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Yes, with my son. I had to make time for him and my studies (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> My motivation was the children. There are always things that come up that I need more information about (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> Even the course teaches you how to be confident and to motivate yourself and in the end you need to be confident to stand in front of a lot of children and people (Margaret, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> It made you confident and motivated for the children (Noncebo, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> You are able to be confident for the children (Asanda, Interview, September 2018).

> My grandfather. He was more like a father to me, he worked at the railway. He was not educated but he will always motivate me. When he passed, I studied for him (Asanda, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) acknowledged 'that dispositional barriers can be affected and even caused by structural barriers, such as institutional and situational ones' (p. 196). Dispositional barriers can have a powerful effect on a participant's approach to his or her studies. For example, a lack of confidence in one's academic abilities can result in one giving up or losing motivation to continue. Dispositional barriers are exacerbated by stressful situational barriers. For instance, if one is struggling to complete household tasks and family responsibilities while at the same time meeting deadlines for academic studies, one may be tempted to cave in under the pressure and give up. Furthermore, dispositional constraints speak

of the psychological uncertainties experienced by the individual, which are related to their individual personality profiles and personal characteristics. These aspects are evident in the following responses:

> I didn't think that I was going to do it. Sometimes my head is tired and there are too many demands, but I can't give up. I had to do it (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> During the first few months, the work was too much. And they had to assess you on how you interact with children and the pressure was too much, but I didn't find it until now (Sabelo, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> The fear of being a failure, especially failing my kids and not being educated for them (Bulelwa, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Overwhelmed, because I did Level 1 and coming from Level 1 to Level 4 was overwhelming (Bronwyn, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> It was hard for me, everybody was looking at me because I was a man (Sabelo, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> Yes, I discovered things I didn't know about myself and you are never too old to learn (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).

> Yes, a lot, I told myself I can do it and then I do it (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

> Very much, since 2015 till now we have achieved tremendously, becoming a beacon to other schools (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).

> Yes, it does make a difference (Ruwayda, Interview, September 14, 2018).

> Yes, I did grow although I had to work at it all the time (Kim, Interview, October 13, 2018).

> Yes. I doubted myself at first but my situation is different. At my workplace, we work with children that are abused and neglected and we wanted to teach them the basic understanding. Their delays are emotional and social, and I had to work a lot on that (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018).

Participants overcame dispositional barriers by turning negative experiences into positive ones to motivate them. They showed a powerful determination and will to complete their studies successfully. In the end, all participants completed their course successfully.

When I examined the data, I found that the main barrier for many was a negative attitude towards studying. This is a dispositional barrier, according to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), who refer to a negative experience of learning as causing a dispositional barrier. I agree with Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) as I observed this myself with the participants. There was the natural feeling of anxiety coupled with the fear of the unknown, as seen in Kim who was nervous, and in Rene who was scared. Desiree actually felt intimidated because she was younger than the other participants and thus felt that she did not have the capabilities of the others.

Their negative feeling about studying initially show that they were not all ready to study in the beginning, yet through exercising their independent agency, they developed their capacity to study successfully. Rene revealed that she started the course not knowing what to expect and was unsure of herself, yet became stronger and began to believe in herself as she merged practical experience with the theory she was learning, which increased her self-efficacy.

> I wasn't comfortable at all, because they were all older than me (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).
>
> I was on my nerves and very quiet. I was worried about what they are going to expect from me (Kim, Interview, October 13, 2018).
>
> I felt scared because I felt I didn't know anything, but after attending I found out that I know some of the stuff (Rene, Interview, October 13, 2018).

Hitlin and Kirkpatrick Johnson (2015) state that one needs to have a positive outlook on the outcome of one's life and consciously cultivate resistance to negativity in one's attitude. Epel, Bandura and Zimbardo (as cited in Hitlin & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2015) argued that one should position or project oneself over time, both in the future and in the present, in order to increase the compass of one's self-efficacy. The dispositional barriers described by the participants show that they were lacking in confidence at first. They were fearful of failing and doubted their ability to succeed. Yet they continued to try, and eventually, over time, they built up their self-assurance, which led to an increase in their self-efficacy.

Agency and institutional barriers

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) found that persons' exercise levels of agency in relation to their knowledge and actions, they are also confined by structures placed by organizations and

setting they find themselves. Institutional barriers experienced by the participants included unreliable public transport.

Here, Becker, as cited by Hitlin and Kirkpatrick Johnson (2015), indicates that 'once on these trajectories, a host of identity processes and accordant reflected appraisals may serve to keep people "committed" to certain trajectories. Even there, beliefs about mastery and the future serve to motivate behavior' (p. 1462).

MacKeracher, Suart and Potter (2006) referred to difficulties relating to transport as a barrier to participation. Participants revealed that transport to their educational institution was unreliable as a result of issues ranging from strikes, protests and shooting, and involved excessive expense and time spent travelling. With one exception, who used private transport, the participants used various forms of public transport. Three participants claimed to use three forms of public transport daily to minimise this challenge as far as possible. Participants' travelling times to college varied from ten minutes to two hours.

> Yes, I had to take three taxis to get to college, I stopped using the train a year ago, unreliable, and the bus too expensive (Sumaya, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> The train starts then get stuck, don't mention when there's shooting (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> I didn't go to college, transport was difficult especially when there were strikes and protests (Moira, Interview, September 8, 2018).

Agency, self-efficacy and 'agentic action'

All participants in this study completed their studies successfully, thereby demonstrating their role as independent agents. Bandura (2006) believed that one of the characteristics of human agency includes the concept of freedom of choice.

Bandura (as cited in Bandura 2001) explains that 'self-efficacy occupies a pivotal role in the causal structure of social cognitive theory because efficacy beliefs affect adaptation and change not only in their own right, but through their impact on other determinants' (p. 10). The participants developed strong impressions of their own self-efficacy over time, especially when they observed themselves being able to find solutions to the challenges they faced. A strong element contributing to participants' success was the capacity to believe in themselves, which was the winning formula expressed in five participants' responses.

> I did, I always believe in myself (Bulelwe, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> I never doubted myself, I was always positive in my head (Moira, Interview, September 8, 2018).
>
> I also believed in myself that I will make it (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).
>
> My parents worked in factories and if I see how they used to work I made a choice to myself that I don't want to work in factories or other organisations where there's no benefits (Margaret, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Agentic capability is an important concept in the theory of agency. Bandura (2006) states, 'The cultivation of agentic capabilities adds concrete substance to abstract metaphysical discourses about freedom and determinism' (p. 165). Bandura sees agentic capacity as the ability to make decisions, and accredits people's success in undertakings largely to their level of passion, drive and patience.

Life experiences as an aspect of agentic action

Bandura (2006) points out that agentic capability yields a wide range of selections in the life of the agent.

> People who develop their competencies, self-regulatory skills, and enabling beliefs in their efficacy can generate a wider array of options that expand their freedom of action, and are more successful in realizing desired futures, than those with less developed agentic resources (Bandura, 1986, p. 165).

The more success one experiences over one's life span as the result of ones skills, knowledge, expertise or accomplishments, the more alternatives one has in future decisions. This success need not be in great endeavours but refers also to the small successes of running a family, maintaining a home, etc. In this respect, the participants had many more experiences of success than a student just completing matric, which would have increased their potential to succeed and not drop out of the course.

Numerous attributes contributed significantly to the efficacy of the participants in this study. The ability to withstand adversity emerged strongly from the responses during interviews. Participants remained goal-directed throughout their studies, and believed in their own ability to overcome any difficulty, which reveals their strong sense of personal agency. Not only did participants discover the solutions they needed, but they were also able to implement them by productive and positive actions. The RPL course made a difference to their lives by offering an opportunity to succeed by completing a qualification which had never been offered to them

in the past. It is apparent that their self-efficacy developed during the course of their studies; it was not always there to start with.

> I am more confident in myself and I am very outspoken now. I am not shy like I was before (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

> Knowing myself, I know I would have succeeded. It was an opportunity for me, and I wanted to make the best of it. I was motivated (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).

> A lot of times it is not so much group work, so you have to be motivated to do it by yourself (Janine, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> The passion and the drive and also the patience (Bulelwa, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Even the course teaches you how to be confident and to motivate yourself and in the end you need to be confident to stand in front of a lot of children and people (Margaret, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> It made you confident and motivated for the children (Noncebo, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> You are able to be confident for the children (Asanda, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Their personal agency results in a sense of increased self-efficacy which heightened their self-esteem. Therefore, past adverse learning experiences had not lastingly affected participants' beliefs in their own abilities. Cast and Burke (2002) state that the two parts to self-esteem are:

> … *competence and worth*. The competence dimension (efficacy-based self-esteem) refers to the degree to which people see themselves as capable and efficacious. The worth dimension (worth-based self-esteem) refers to the degree to which individuals feel they are persons of value (p. 1042).

Ruwayda, Margaret and Marilyn accomplished the desire to be valued by not giving up, remaining steadfast, triumphantly reaping the fruits of their labour. This is reflected in their statements below:

> I don't like to fail at things (Ruwayda, Interview, September 14, 2018)

> Yes, because I am a very hard worker and if I start something, I finish it (Margaret, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Yes, definitely, I said to myself I am not going to give up, I am going to persevere until I'm done (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Bandura (2006) states the 'cultivation of agentic capabilities adds concrete substance to abstract metaphysical discourses about freedom and determinism' (p. 165). Bandura (2006) asserts that the more people develop their personal skills and psychological well-being, the more likely they are to make decisions for their lives that lead to fulfilling outcomes.Furthermore, he professes that 'The exercise of freedom involves rights, as well as options andthe means to pursue them' (Bandura, 2006, p. 165).

The ability to change one's mindset

Another positive attribute for success was the ability to change one's mindset. Three participants revealed that they did not believe in themselves at first, and questioned whether it was normal to feel that way. Nonetheless, these participants went ahead anyway, and developed the motivation and determination to remain focused on the end goal. It is intriguing that participants mention that they 'had to do it' whereas in fact they had a choice of whether to continue or discontinue with the course. This would suggest that having the attribute of self-efficacy (or being prepared to develop it) helps separate the 'drop-outs' from the successful participants. This ability to change the mindset is expressed in the following responses:

> I am the kind of person that always doubts myself, so I had to get my head straight so that I can do this (Rebecca, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> I didn't think that I was going to do it. Sometimes my head is tired and there are too many demands, but I can't give up. I had to do it (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> No, I doubted myself at times. It's normal isn't it? (Bronwyn, Interview, September 8, 2018).

The role of reflective ability in continuing to make beneficial decisions

A significant feature of self-efficacy is an aptitude for consistency in correct decision-making. It is worth noting that self-efficacy theory includes an understanding of the differentiation between group and personal efficacy and an awareness of how these may influence the final evaluation of given circumstances or events according to Bandura (1997). As I understand this, not only does one have the ability to make decisions, but one also has the ability to reflect in order to continue to make sound and beneficial choices. Nine participants voiced that they thought of leaving the course but remained determined to succeed. Remaining focused on the finish line (the attainment of the qualification) and the advantages of the RPL course carried

participants through their studies. Participants below mentioned persistence and determination under all circumstances as a valuable personal characteristic that enabled them to complete their studies in the face of barriers. They were asked if they had ever considered leaving half way through.

> No, never, because I can't give up. I wanted to complete the course and it motivated me to implement what I've studied at work (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

> No, I never thought about leaving the course, because I knew the benefit of it (Rebecca, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> I told myself I want to do this, so no-one can stand in front me (Nozipho, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> I wanted to finish and become a primary school teacher (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).

> I made a commitment to myself and the opportunity that was given to me (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).

> I wanted to change my circumstances so I had to succeed in my studies (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

They believed in themselves, and this belief strengthened the participants and their ability to succeed. Diligence and persistence are characteristics that would be beneficial to participants and would provide them with the endurance to make a success of their studies, and in so doing, would prompt agency. It is evident that these students exercised their personal agency and determination:

> Never, I stayed strong (Asanda, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> Not at all, never lost confidence in my ability to succeed (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).

Self-belief

It is vital for human beings to develop confidence in their own identity and their ability to control their own destiny. Bandura (1997) noted that individuals need to trust in their own power. They need to see evidence of their ability to modulate their circumstances. If this is not an integral part of their life experience, they cannot be expected to be motivated to act at all. It is only in the face of powerlessness that human agency is

depleted and self-belief is eroded. Believing in one's own power is central to a healthy and self-actuating approach to the challenges of life (Bandura, 1997). This is affirmed by these three participants:

> No, I believe I will succeed eventually (Nozipho, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> You must persevere through and you must be willing to push yourself no matter what brings you down (Sumaya, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Hitlin and Elder further elaborate that regarding oneself as a competent actor inevitably affects one's level of perseverance when facing the challenges of life. In the same way, one's self-perceptions are molded by the degree of self-efficacy utilized during the process of engaging in facing problems and this, in turn, has a cumulative effect on all social interactions going forward. These sentiments are embodied in the response of a successful participant who asked questions during lectures. One can conclude that only when one builds confidence, thus increasing one's self-perception, is one able to ask questions. Noncebo credited her success to asking questions and the refusal to give up.

> I don't give up easily and I like to ask questions (Noncebo, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Agency as a motivator to persevere

Interestingly, experiences of agency are in themselves a motivation to persevere. It is probable that individuals who perceive themselves as proficient in reflecting a strong sense of personal agency, are going to be able to be more determined to exercise it in solving problems or overcoming obstacles, whether they be structural hindrances or social limitations of any kind (Hitlin and Elder, 2007). Agents act, recognising and identifying that they are developing agency by persisting when faced with adversity. As a consequence of this, it would seem that participants succeed or are at an advantage as a result of difficulties faced. Their tough times gave participants the courage to endure their constraints and achieve the desired result (all participants completed their qualification). This is reflected in their comments below:

> Yes, definitely. I said to myself, I am not going to give up, I am going to persevere until I'm done (Marilyn, Interview, August 24, 2018).

> Yes, I did. I'm a motivated person. I tell myself when I start something, I must finishit (Asanda, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> Not at first. I thought I was not going to make it, but so far everything is competent (Kim, Interview, October 13, 2018).
>
> Early this year, I was so challenged. There was just too much on my plate, but I stayed (Desiree, Interview, September 22, 2018).
>
> Yes, sometimes I did, because sometimes, it gets a bit hectic. Yes, you struggle but you get out of it (Janine, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Mirowsky and Ross (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) claim, 'Self-efficacy is theoretically linked with the idea of "personal control" though Bandura (1986) argues that control and self-efficacy deal with different aspects of the belief that one has the ability to achieve certain goals (p. 41).' Giddens (1976) emphasised that a lack of self-efficacy can lead to the agent's experiencing a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability when he or she loses the capability of being in control of circumstances. However, participants reported the opposite effect and attributed their growth in confidence to their studies. This shows that their sense of self-efficacy increased over time. When asked, 'What contributed to a growth in confidence?' the responses were as follows:

> Definitely the studies, because you have the confidence knowing that it is not just my own thing that I am sucking out of my thumb; it is based on theory and knowledge as well. Forcing to interact and it became natural after a while (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018).
>
> Because I have done it (studies) the first time and I am doing it again and it is better, I grew in confidence (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).
>
> Of course, that's the only way you can do it, when you believe in yourself (Desiree, Interview, September 12, 2018).
>
> I believed, but it was difficult because I was very stressed (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018).
>
> Yes, I did (believe in myself). I had problems with my two kids, where they were slow learners and that was also a challenge standing up to the family because I had to take them out of a mainstream school and put them in a special needs school (Ruwayda, Interview, September 14, 2018).
>
> It [confidence] has grown over time (Rebecca, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> It [studies] boosts your self-esteem, makes you more confident in speaking to other people (Ruwayda, Interview, September 14, 2018).

> I had a low self-esteem but now I believe in myself and I know I can do it and say to myself I am capable, and I have done an awesome job (Bronwyn, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> So much confidence now, I can't wait for my diploma (Sumaya, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Agency and capacity for optimism

Having heard of their many battles with situational and dispositional barriers, I was surprised when half of the participants claimed to be excited about studying. This excitement indicates a positive disposition and suggests that the participants were not just 'surviving' the rigours of studying, but enjoying them. Such a positive attitude would undoubtedly have a positive effect on their capacity to study. Rudd and Evans (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) include optimism in their work on the everyday practices of agency among young people. It is to be understood that youth, irrespective of their socio-economic background, who are transitioning into the work environment feel hopeful about their capacity to triumph. Thus it was surprising that these participants, who were no longer youth, were also filled with excitement at starting their studies. Older participants who had been working in the ECD field for many years without qualifications portrayed their enthusiastic attitude in the following comments:

> It didn't make a difference that I was older to go and study (Ruwayda, Interview, September 14, 2018).

> It is better to study my age [32]. When you are young then you don't know. It feels nice when you're older (Zoleka, Interview, August 14, 2018)

> I was excited. Raring to go and ready for it (Muneera, Interview, August 10, 2018) [She attended first time as an experienced student]. I was excited (Vanessa, Interview, August 15, 2018).

> I was over-excited, I was seeking the information (Sindiswa, Interview, September 8, 2018).

> Excited and also grateful for the opportunity as well (Bulelwa, Interview, September 18, 2018).

> I was also excited (Nozipho, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> Very excited to get my certificate (Sumaya, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> I was very excited, because I was going to learn more and get a certificate at the end of the day (Margaret, Interview, September 18, 2018).
>
> I was excited and curious, because it was my first time (Asanda, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Hitlin and Kirkpatrick Johnson (2015) state

> In sum, optimistic life course expectations in adolescence predict higher young adult levels of (and growth in) hourly pay and biweekly earnings and higher average levels health and well-being, even after taking into consideration adolescent levels of mastery, as in the traditional mastery-as-agency approach (p. 1453).

Hitlin and Kirkpatrick Johnston (2015) point to the role of optimism for predicting a more successful life, in terms of both financial earnings and health and well-being. The positive attitudes of the participants in this study may be taken, therefore, as an indicator that their lives would probably improve in many ways at the completion of their studies – not only because of the practical effects of a qualification, but because of the changes experienced within themselves.

Summary

In this section, I have offered an in-depth investigation into the key concepts associated with adult students as agents. This was done with reference to various predominant theories, including those of Bandura, Giddens and others. Central to the concepts of agents and agency are the notions of self-efficacy and intentionality, which were investigated with reference to both the participants and the literature. This section also examined the various barriers encountered by the students, being situational, dispositional and institutional or structural barriers. In seeking to understand how students coped with these barriers, it was necessary to grasp the elements which affected this process, such as planfulness, resilience, capacity and optimism.

From my interviews with participants, and from my review of the literature related to the above concepts, it became clear that there was a distinct correlation between the personal

circumstances described by the adult students I interviewed and the main tenets of the theory of agency as espoused by Bandura, Gidden and others.

SECTION 5: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this section I present a summary and findings, together with recommendations and the conclusion of my research paper.

Summary

The main aim of this research was, firstly, to investigate the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students, and secondly, to develop new theoretical insights about the relationships between access, participation and barriers among adult students who accessed a learnership through RPL at a TVET college in the Western Cape.

This study focused on the main question 'What are the relationships between access, participation and barriers among students at a TVET college?'

The following sub-questions were also included:

- What barriers did student experience?
- What did students do to overcome these constraints/barriers/inhibitors?
- What differences are students' interventions making in their life course?
- How will students use success to access new opportunities in their future life course?

This study addressed the following research problem:

The White Paper for Post School Education and Training (2013) promotes access to post-school education, especially for historically-disadvantaged people. To facilitate such access, the government has instituted recognition of prior learning (RPL) policies. However, while students gained access through RPL, they experienced barriers to participation which impeded success. The research problem lies in the relationships between policy intentions and policy outcomes. This study investigates adult students' experiences of barriers to participation who gained access through RPL, to a qualification in early childhood education at a technical and vocational education and

training (TVET) college. The conceptual framework encompasses theoretical perspectives of Anthony Giddens, Margaret Archer, Albert Bandura, Hitlin and Elder, and Rubenson and Desjardins. It provided the analytical foundations for investigating students as agents and how they asserted agency to confront individual and structural barriers.

I adopted the qualitative research approach. By means of purposive sampling, I selected 20 adult students at a TVET college to participate in the study. Using an interview guide as an instrument tool, I conducted semi-structured interviews and used a mini audio recorder, as well as notes, to collect the data. Audio files were then transcribed and categorised into themes. It consisted of open-ended questions designed to allow participants to express themselves more fully. Interviews were held at the participants' ECD sites.

I analysed the data using the thematic approach. While interpreting the data, I looked for themes and patterns using coding. The data gave me a clear understanding of the manner in which the adult students, who accessed a learnership in ECD through RPL, approached their learning and made the necessary adjustments to be successful.

Findings

Adult students, agency and access to the learnership in ECD

Adult students' initial access to the learnership in ECD was largely determined by the extent of their personal agency.

This study provides clear evidence that RPL facilitated for adult students, access to the learnership in ECD. This indicates the importance of RPL for adult students' access to a TVET college and other post-school institutions. It also shows that access through RPL can enable adult students to successfully complete post-school studies at a mature age.

A few adult students accessed the learnership as their employers required them to obtain a qualification.

A couple of adult students also accessed the learnership to make a difference in their community.

Planfulness was evident in adult students' actions of making telephone calls, completing and submitting application forms to study after hearing about the learnership.

Although the ages of adult students in this study ranged between 27 and 53 years, they declared that mature age was not a deterrent to seeking access to the learnership and portrayed an enthusiastic attitude towards their studies.

What barriers did student experience?

As discussed earlier, students declared their experiences of barriers in their earlier lives that forced them to drop out of school, and prevented them from pursuing further studies.

Barriers experienced by students can sometimes be interpreted as having both a positive and negative outcome. Although students experienced these barriers in their earlier lives, these seemed to have made them more determined to complete their studies in their adult lives. It could be argued that if they hadn't experienced these historical barriers, they might not have been as resilient and successful in completing the learnership in ECD.

The main situational barrier appeared to be access to funding for many adult students who had not pursued further studies after leaving school as a result of socio-economic reasons. Other situational barriers were unfavourable personal circumstances, challenging family responsibilities and adverse living conditions.

Transport was an institutional barrier to participation, especially when there were problems with buses, trains or taxis. Students were often stranded as many used public transport and this had a negative effect on their attendance of contact sessions.

Dispositional barriers manifested when some students had a negative disposition towards studying as a result of a lack of confidence and fear of failure.

What did students do to overcome these constraints/barriers/inhibitors?

After overcoming initial barriers, the students were conscious of a greater sense of self-worth and developed a sense of self-efficacy to complete their studies successfully.

The learnership in ECD was seen as a second chance or a remarkable opportunity by students.

Students drew on the support and encouragement from family to help them complete the learnership.

Students had to change their lifestyles which included sacrificing free time, juggling work and studies, quitting jobs and appointing a supervisor as a substitute once a week in order to complete the learnership.

As they progressed through the learnership, they were confronted with situational, dispositional and institutional barriers, which were similar to those that they confronted in their earlier lives.

Students fought back strongly, and displayed resilience and optimism to make a success of their second chance.

Connected to this is the understanding of how 'bounded agency' affects the process of decision making and goal setting – both of which actions hinged on the degree of planfulness, intentionality, self-efficacy and capacity exhibited by students.

What differences are students' interventions making in their life course?

There was a robust sense of gratefulness and significance about achieving a qualification realising the difference that it would make in their lives.

The students reported a renewed sense of confidence and a deep sense of accomplishment in uplifting themselves professionally through achieving academic qualifications.

The students feel more empowered to make a difference in their communities.

By turning negative experiences into positive ones, the students showed powerful determination and will power to complete their studies successfully.

How will students use success to access new opportunities in their future life course?

With the positive attitudes and higher self-esteem gained through their success, most students envision new opportunities for themselves in their professional lives as well as in their personal circumstances.

New theoretical insights and perspectives

My research gave me insight into the reasons why some adult students made the decision to study, the barriers they encountered, how they overcome these barriers, as well as an understanding of what factors contributed to their ultimate success.

Due to historical barriers, one would expect adult students to be discouraged from completing their studies, yet this seems to have made them more determined to accomplish this tasks, in spite of their mature age.

The findings show that participation is indeed influenced by the extent to which agency provides the adult student as an agent with the capacity to negotiate barriers.

Findings resonate with Bandura (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) who identified four aspects of agency, namely - social-structural support, planfulness, optimism and self-efficacy. Drawing from Shanahan et al. (2003) Hitlin and Elder (2006) state that planfulness does not only imply an ability to manage one's immediate day to day objectives but includes the propensity for looking ahead to realize long-term future intentions. This corresponds with the actions of some adult students who, after many years of thinking about obtaining a qualification, acted on their deliberations and applied to the learnership programme. Mirowskyand Ross (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) link ones confidence and trust in your own ability to the notion of individual power, as human beings usually possess a natural understanding ofthe degree to which they have achieved self-actualisation, and those with a sense of strong self-efficacy normally reach this understanding faster. The findings validate this notion.

My findings are supported by Cross (1981) who identifies three main barriers to adult participation — namely situational (changing lifestyle, sacrificing free time, juggling work and studies, quitting jobs and appointing a supervisor as a substitute once a week), institutional (unreliable public transport and thoughts of leaving yet not giving up) and dispositional constraints (negative disposition towards studying).

The desire expressed by the adult students who were determined to find ways of making positive changes in their own lives and communities resonate with Hitlin and Elder's (2006) reference to 'Agency represents a human capacity to influence one's own life within socially structured opportunities' (pp. 56-57).

Desjardins and Milana (2007) suggest that family and job constraints would fall into the category of situational barriers. Later Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) also showed a connection between family and job barriers under 'structural barriers' in their Bounded Agency

Model. This demonstrates that some theorists concur. The findings correspond with Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) argument that participants in their study claimed that the obligation of family, consume their energy utilising to much of their time.

Hitlin and Elder (2006) perceive the qualities of resilience as reflecting an individual's sense of purpose and determination. This study provides such evidence as the adult students displayed resilience in overcoming barriers in order to complete their studies successfully.

Recommendations

It is recommended that TVET colleges should continue to facilitate access for adult students through learnerships and RPL.

TVET colleges should examine the possibilities of adding more support mechanisms for adult students during their studies. The learnership programme should, therefore, anticipate and assist with solutions to adult students' barriers as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Transport between the TVET colleges and home must be improved to minimise it as a barrier.

TVET college staff should be made aware that mature adult students' needs and outlook are different to those who have just completed school, and the need to be sensitive to the anxieties, especially the fear of failing, of adult students starting to study at a later stage in life.

TVET college management should create awareness amongst academic staff and course designers with regard to including mechanisms for further supporting adult students in their efforts and instituting practises that will highlight barriers and ensure greater levels of success than are currently being experienced**.**

As many adult students reported being tied down by family responsibilities which hindered their progress, the programmes of educational institutions should be amended to cater for the issue of family commitments. Alternatives like online podcast classes should be provided for adult students who are unable to attend class due to family commitments.

Conclusion

In this research paper, I reported on my investigation of the research question about the relationships between access, participation and barriers of students at a TVET College.

This study shows that when adult students are provided with alternative forms of access such as RPL, and conducive structural and individual conditions are created, they will overcome barriers to participation, and successfully complete their studies.

It is clear that access through RPL to learnerships in Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a successful government strategy to address the historical inequalities related to access to post-school education, and early childhood education.

As this study includes only a small number of participants, generalisations cannot be made. However, more studies of this nature could provide further evidence that could be used to influence government's future decisions about the importance of providing access for adult students to post-school education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview guide

Information

1. Name and surname: _____

2. Gender: _____

3. Age: _____

4. Marital Status: Married Single Divorced

5. Race: Black White Coloured Other

6. Home language/mother tongue: English Afrikaans Isixhosa Other

7. Means of transport: Own Bus Train Taxi Lift club

Access

8. Highest grade passed at school:_____(qualification)

9. Did you enjoy your schooling experience?

10. If yes or no, provide details of your answer.

Agency

11. Was language of instruction an area of concern when you considered enrolling for this course? (Structure)

Agency and planfulness

12. Why did you choose the RPL(/learnership) option? (Structure)

Agents

13. What prompted you to enrol for this course in 2015?

14. Was there a desire to study after your schooling career and why were you unable to pursue those studies?

Agency and intentionality

15. What changes did you have to make in your life to accommodate your studies, explain?

16. What choices did you have to make in your life to start your studies?

Agency and self-efficacy

17. When you started this course in 2015, did you believe that you will succeed, explain your answer?

18. Have your confidence grown?

19. If so, what has contributed to you growing in confidence?

Agency and resilience

20. Did you ever think about leaving the course and why?

21. While you were in this course, did you ever lose your confidence in your ability to succeed?

22. What characteristics do you have which in your opinion made you succeed?

23. What made you overcome your ability to succeed while studying?

24. If you think about your experiences of RPL, provide details about what you consider the most important benefits?

Structure

25. Do you think that there is a difference between your competence and a person who completed the qualification without following the RPL(/learnership) route?

Dispositional barriers

26. Tell me how you felt when you attended this course for the first time as an experienced student?

27. Has your qualifications completed in 2016 been recognized for salary increase?

28. Has the language of teaching and learning at the College affected your success, if yes, how has it affected you?

29. How long does it take you to travel to the RPL venue weekly? (Structure)

Structural barriers

30. Are you in a working environment that encourages further studying while working, explain? (Situational barriers)

31. Provide details of how family responsibilities affect your success during your studies?

32. Are there any personal circumstances preventing you from achieving your full potential during your studies?

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535
South Africa
Tel: +27 (0) 21 959 2649 / 3888
Fax: +27 (0) 21 959 2647
Email: vnomlomo@uwc.ac.za
Website: www.uwc.ac.za

Letter of Permission to Conduct Research

Appendix B

KIND REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY AT THE
TVET College

I hereby request your permission to conduct a research study at the TVET College
I am registered as a student at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the M.Ed. (Adult Learning and Global Change). As part of the Masters programme, I am required to conduct a small research study.

I was employed as a lecturer at the TVET College from January 2012 to January 2018. During this time, I was involved in the pilot Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) project in Early Childhood Development (ECD) which was established in 2015 until my resignation.

I would like to focus my research on access, participation and barriers to access as it has emerged as a critical issue in TVET over the past 2-3 years. The students who have worked in the ECD field for many years, without little or any qualifications, have gained access to the National Diploma in Early Childhood Development through RPL. I would like to request permission to investigate the barriers that they experienced, and how they overcame these during the course of their studies.

As I was employed at the College, it is ideal as a research site because I am familiar with the institution and understand the students who were accepted through the RPL. For this reason, I would like to request permission to investigate access, participation and barriers relating to students who were accepted into the National Diploma through RPL.

If you grant permission, I would like to interview 20 students who are completing the programme in 2018 using an interview guide. All participants will receive a letter of consent informing them of the purpose of the study. They will be requested to sign the letter of consent before the start of the interview.

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

Should you wish to contact my supervisor or myself, our contact details as listed below:

Student:	Natascha Hector
Telephone number:	+27 (0)82 769 37
Email:	nhector9@gmail.com
Course:	M. Ed. (Adult Learning and Global Change)
University:	University of the Western Cape
Supervisor:	Professor Zelda Groener
Email:	zgroener@uwc.ac.za
Telephone number:	+27 (0) 21 959 2801

I hope this request meets your approval.

Kind regards

Natascha Hector

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535
South Africa
Tel: +27 (0) 21 959 2649 / 3888
Fax: +27 (0) 21 959 2647
Email: vnomlomo@uwc.ac.za
Website: www.uwc.ac.za

Information Letter to Participants

Appendix C

Dear ..... (Name to be inserted later)

My name is Natascha Hector. I am registered as a student at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and am enrolled in the M. Ed. (Adult Learning and Global Change). As a course requirement, the university requires me to conduct a research study.

Student protests at universities and some TVET Colleges over the past few years raised concerns about access to studying in the post-school sector. The aim of my research study is to find out from students, like yourself, about the barriers that you experience and how you confronted these.

As you were successful in your application to the National Diploma in Early Childhood Development through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. If you agree, I would like to arrange an interview with you at a convenient time. The interview is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage.

I will provide you with an interview consent form and request that you sign the interview consent form before I conduct the interview. I request permission to record the interview using an audio recorder device.

All information will be treated with confidentiality.

If you wish to contact my academic supervisor or myself, our contact details are as follows:

Student:	Natascha Hector
Telephone number:	+27 (0)82 769 37
Email:	nhector9@gmail.com
Course:	M. Ed. (Adult Learning and Global Change)
University:	University of the Western Cape
Supervisor:	Professor Zelda Groener
Email:	zgroener@uwc.ac.za
Telephone number:	+27 (0) 21 959 2801

Kind regards

Natascha Hector

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535
South Africa
Tel: +27 (0) 21 959 2649 / 3888
Fax: +27 (0) 21 959 2647
Email: vnomlomo@uwc.ac.za
Website: www.uwc.ac.za

Participant Consent Form Appendix D

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

By signing this consent form, you agree that:

- You have read and understood the information letter and consent form provided.
- You freely consent to be interviewed by the researcher.
- You consent for the interview to be audio recorded.
- You understand that your words may be quoted and used in publication, reports and in webpages but your name will not be used.
- You understand that you can withdraw from the interview process at any time and no question will be asked about the reasons why you no longer want to participate.

Please sign this form and return it to me.

Name of Participant: .....

Participant Signature: .....

Place of interview: .....

Date of interview: .....

Student Signature: .....