

**PROBLEMS OF ADULT LEARNERS IN ADULT BASIC
EDUCATION: A PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

by

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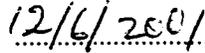
DECLARATION

I, Samson Qedusizi Nicholas Mkhwanazi, do hereby declare that this dissertation has been composed by me, that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree or diploma, that the work of which it is a record has been done by me, and that all quotations and sources of information have been acknowledged.


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SUMMARY

This study investigated the physical, affective, cognitive and volitional problems of the learner in adult basic education (ABE) with reference to the learner's relationship towards the tutor, the learning content, the self, and family and friends.

The research design provided for a literature study of ABE in South Africa, as well as the personhood and relationships of the ABE learner. This was done to arrive at a research hypothesis concerning the relative impact of various categories of problems on the ABE learner.

The empirical summary had both quantitative and qualitative components. It was found that ABE learners are influenced by the following factors, listed in order of impact: affective problems; cognitive problems; problems related to the learning content, physical problems and problems related to family and friends. Positive findings were that volitional problems and problems related to tutors were relatively less significant.

In its recommendations the study emphasises the crucial role of, and need for professionally trained adult basic educators who can deal effectively with the personal and contextual problems of ABE learners. Moreover, the typical perseverance of ABE learners demands the establishment of excellent and responsive infrastructure for ABE provision, *inter alia* in provincial education departments.

(ii)

KEY WORDS

**ADULT BASIC EDUCATION; ADULT EDUCATION; ADULT EDUCATOR;
ADULT LEARNER; ADULT LEARNING; ILLITERACY; LITERACY.**

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Nokwethemba Ntombikayise, for her moral support during my study. I would also like to thank my daughters Sinqobile, Sihlanziwe, Fanele and my son Mmangaliso for their comfort and support during the time of the hardship.

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Finally, my humble gratitude is due to Almighty God for the strength and courage He gave so abundantly during the course of this study.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa is one of the countries in the world with the highest rate of illiteracy. Of a total of 30 million people who are 15 years of age, about 9 million (30%) are illiterate. (National Investigation into Community Education (NICE) 1994:1; Spies 1995:35; Witthaus 1992:4).

Research commissioned by the Joint Education Trust (JET) found that the number of illiterate adults in South Africa is at least half the commonly quoted figure of 15 million (*Sowetan Education*, August 2, 1996). Another significant finding of the research undertaken for JET by the centre for Adult Education at the University of Natal, is that there are currently over 330 000 adult learners attending classes (*Sowetan Education*, August 2, 1996). According to Spies (1995:35), less than one percent of adult illiterates are currently engaged in adult basic education (ABE). This figure is all the more disturbing in view of the fact that already in 1988, the Manpower Commission found that 66 percent of the workforce are in desperate need of ABE (Spies 1995:35).

The level of illiteracy varies from region to region. Regional illiteracy and innumeracy vary from less than 20 percent in the Western Cape to over 40 percent in the North West Province (NICE 1994:1). In KwaZulu-Natal 70 percent of the Black population do not have basic literacy. A large fraction of this 70 percent of the population are from rural areas (Khanyile 1993:2; Wedepohl 1988:16). According to NICE (1994:52), by March 1991, it was reported that in KwaZulu-Natal, 78 percent of Africans, 55 percent of the so called Coloureds, 23 percent of Indians and two percent of White adults were illiterate.

In economic terms these statistics explain the basis of the current dysfunctional proportions in the country's human resource structure. The following map shows the nine provinces of the Republic of South Africa. Table 1.1 shows the population in millions and percentage of illiteracy and

innumeracy in each province. The statistics show the conditions in terms of the population older than 15 years without a minimum formal education level of Grade 6. These are 1990 census figures (see Figure 1 and Table 1, NICE Report 1994:26).

FIG 1.1: MAP OF DEVELOPMENT REGIONS - PER 1990 CENSUS FIGURES

South Africa: Development regions

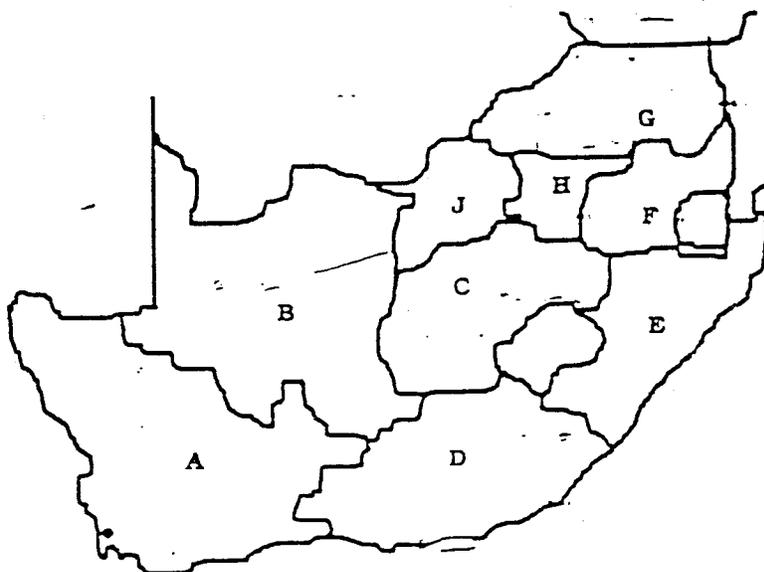


TABLE 1.1 : LITERACY LEVELS

Region	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	Total
Population [10 ⁶]	3,5	0,7	2,4	1,9	8,0	2,0	4,1	7,2	1,0	30,8
% Illiteracy	18,7	41,0	29,8	34,5	31,6	34,8	38,8	21,2	32,5	29,2

It is fortunate that today, parents from disadvantaged communities have realised the importance of being literate. Parents have also realised that sending their children to school is not enough, but

that they themselves have to participate in ABE (Spies 1995:35). A great diversity of needs have been mentioned by adult learners as reasons for participation in ABE programmes (Malicky & Norman 1996:5). Malicky and Norman (1996:5), in their study, found that 83 percent of respondents cited job related reasons for participation in literacy programmes. However, Beder and Valentine (1990:87) found that psychological and social reasons were the greatest reasons for participation in ABE. Apparently the reasons for participation revolve around the situation in which an adult learner finds himself/herself.

Most adult learners seek those learning opportunities that are highly practical, highly applicable, very meaningful and related to personal and professional growth and development (Lind 1988:38; Hiemstra 1991:57). The lack of education has made it difficult for illiterate adults to live independent lives. They are unable to do simple everyday transactions, like filling in a bank deposit slip, completing an application form, reading a newspaper and so forth (Merriam & Simpson 1995:20).

The new education authorities took the first step in the development of a national system for ABE towards the end of 1994. The National Department of Education had allocated an additional amount of R50 million which could be used to transform ABE provision to be in line with the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the new education and training policies of the government (Favish & Omar 1995:3). In 1994 the Minister of National Education presented a major speech in parliament and listed Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) second to the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) as one of the major substantive concerns (Spies 1995:34). In addition to being a presidentially lead project in the RDP, ABE now has its own Directorate within the National Education Ministry.

On 7 September 1995 the previous Minister of Education, Professor S. Bengu, held a special press conference to announce the first steps which the government had taken to develop a national system for ABET. Prof Bengu chose this day as it was International Literacy Day (Favish & Omar 1995:1). The government has since supported the campaign against illiteracy. The first week of

March, 4-8 March 1996, was declared the Adult Learner Week for the first time in South Africa (*Zululand Observer*, 21-26 February 1996:2). During that week ABE tutors and learners from different organisations took to the streets to protest against the high illiteracy rate in the country. They were demanding more support from the government, private companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (*Zululand Observer*, 21-26 February 1996:3). Radio and television programmes were used to disseminate information to the South African public.

The Department of National Education started a process to develop interim guidelines for the National Qualifications Framework. This framework would also apply to ABET programmes offered by different providers such as the state Adult Education Centres, companies, NGOs, communities, technical colleges and universities (Favish & Omar 1995:3). Although there are attempts to disseminate information concerning literacy, there are problems which need to be solved. The establishment of the ABE programmes need financial support. Since there has been a substantial increase in learner numbers after the establishment of the democratic government, ABE financial demands are likely to increase the cost of education in the country (NICE 1994:2). Campaigns against illiteracy imply more government spending on education. According to the SABC, this country is spending 20 percent of the total budget on education (SABC: 20 June, 1996). Furthermore, the government does not have a mechanism to be used in disseminating ABE information, especially in the rural areas. People are not aware of the existence of literacy programmes in remote rural areas (Spies 1995:34).

Family situations and commitments prevent adult learners from taking part in ABE programmes. Women's household and family duties keep these adult learners so busy that they have no free time to attend ABE classes. Furthermore, many of the Amakhosi (chiefs) and Indunas (headman) do not accept the idea of ABE. They think that the women will get new ideas and abandon the traditional women's role (Kemp & Van den Berg 1995:13). Social commitments such as social clubs, sports and religious services may also interfere with the attendance of ABE programmes (Kemp & Van den Berg 1995:14).

It is clear that illiteracy and ABE concern a variety of matters not fully discussed above. For the purpose of this dissertation the researcher's understanding and analysis of the problem will be discussed in the following section.

1.2 PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The following section reveals the understanding of the problem as perceived by the researcher. The problem is articulated under different subheadings.

1.2.1 Awareness of the problem

1.2.1.1 Situation in the past

The perception of formal teaching and education of the modern black society differs from that of the older generation. During the first half of the 20th century, education was not a priority for many black families (Hutton 1992:2). Hooliganism among the youth was perceived as a product of bad education. Furthermore, most of the educated young men and women migrated to the big cities, leaving their parents behind in the rural areas. They never returned to their roots. Owing to this type of behaviour, parents developed negative attitudes towards education. They viewed education as a process that deprived them of their children (Hutton 1992:3).

Young formally educated women were associated with low morals. Education was regarded as related to teenage pregnancies. Educating a daughter was further seen as a loss because she could get married immediately after the completion of her studies, without paying back the money she had spent on education (Hutton 1992:4). According to the African culture, the predominant duty of a boy is to look after cattle while a girl helps her mother. In view of these demands, parents did not see a need to send their children to school. Even those who managed to attend school started very late in their lives (Hutton 1992:6).

Formal education was perceived as a belief or ideology that could introduce new ideas, detrimental to the culture and beliefs of the community. Furthermore, it was viewed as indoctrination by whites so that they could continue ruling the country (Hutton 1992:6).

On these grounds, formal teaching and education appeared to have a stigma in the black community (Kemp & Van den Berg 1995:4). The situation was better in the urban areas where people could see the benefits of education such as being able to read and write and get a good job.

The lifestyle of the past also did not make it essential for youths to go to school. Parents saw no need to send their children to school. In rural areas people were self-sufficient, that is, they could produce all the food they needed through primitive agricultural methods. In urban areas people were satisfied with non-skilled labour opportunities.

These ideas and beliefs resulted in a high rate of illiteracy. Illiterate parents reared illiterate children who had the same ideas and beliefs. But there were other factors that contributed to illiteracy.

Poverty is one of the major causes of illiteracy in the black population, especially in the rural areas. Before the advent of democracy in this country, disadvantaged communities had to pay for the education of their children from grade one, though they had no source of income (Hutton 1992:7).

Family planning was not known, hence the breadwinner was faced with the huge problem of supporting a large family. It was a mammoth task to pay for the education of many children in the large family. Other social problems such as teenage pregnancies worsened the situation in the society. The product of such pregnancies were children who had no supporters, hence they could not attend schools (Hutton 1992:7).

On the other hand, politics and violence also contributed to the escalating problem of illiteracy. There was an ongoing conflict between the state and the political organisations. Many young men and women went into exile, missing formal education opportunities. A turning point was reached in the history of this country in 1976, when the children clashed with the government of the day over Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. It was this conflict which led to the exodus of school children to the neighbouring countries in order to join the banned organisations. Those school children also missed opportunities of being formally educated.

This conflict was followed by faction fights among political organisations. The violence prevented many black children from attending schools. Children did not have the opportunity to develop a positive attitude towards formal education. Furthermore, the so called Bantu Education was regarded as a tool used by the white government to weaken the liberation struggle. It was completely rejected by the black communities (Hutton 1992:10).

In past years, there were efforts to get black children to school. However, various detrimental factors existed, such as the shortage of schools. For example, in the early sixties there were very few secondary schools per magisterial district. In the Lower Umfolozi magisterial district, there was only one junior secondary school and no high school. There were also few primary schools in this magisterial district. The shortage of schools contributed to the problem of illiteracy. The limited number of schools could not even accommodate the children of those families who realised the need for formal education. In the late seventies the existing schools were inundated with children. Many applications were turned down because of the shortage of classrooms. This also limited opportunities for attending school (Hutton 1992:11).

1.2.1.2 The situation today

Although the past was characterised by illiteracy, the situation gradually changed. Improved forms of communication ensured that the testimonies of successful black and other educated people reached greater numbers of people. Many avenues are open for an educated person;

formally educated people are usually more successful than non-educated people. Many people wanted to earn a better living and realised that formal education could be the answer.

Many parents' perceptions of education have changed drastically since the early eighties. They have become aware of the importance of education. They have realised that educated people are more successful than the non-educated (ANC 1994:6). Enlightened parents want to change the negative attitude of their children towards formal education.

It is unfortunate that although parents want to change the attitude of their children, they cannot do it from a position of strength. Many have not had school education and those who attended school only passed lower grades. In the past, Grade 10 was regarded as being sufficient if a person wanted to be trained for a particular profession. However, today Grade 10 is no longer regarded as such.

Many children believe that their parents do not understand the situation today. They take initiatives without consultation with their parents. For example, in 1993 children decided to boycott payment of the examination fee for Grade 12. Their argument was that their parents were exploited. They felt that they could speak on behalf of their parents because parents were viewed as uninformed. Their greater political awareness also made them believe their parents were inactive.

In the above vein, the government has realised the importance of ABE. It has also realised the importance of the empowerment of disadvantaged communities through ABE, so that community members can play a meaningful role in the community and educational programmes. Consequently the government established the National Investigation into Community Education (NICE). The task of the NICE was to investigate and recommend a national framework for the provision of education and training for adults who were excluded from such opportunities in the past (ANC 1994:4). This led to renewed interest in adult (education) centres.

There are three types of adult centres in the area where the research was conducted. First, there are those adult centres which have been under the ex-KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture (DEC) and the Department of Education and Training (DET). These adult centres are referred to as night schools. Tutors are mainly school teachers from the surrounding areas. The centres are controlled by the district managers. The deputy chief education specialist is responsible for ABE in the whole region. These adults centres usually use schools as ABE centres after hours.

The second type of adult centres are those centres which are controlled by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The third group are for the workers of a company or factory. They usually operate within the premises of the company or factory. Examples in KZN are: Portnet Adult Centre, Sugar Mill Adult Centre, Alusaf Adult Centre and Bell Adult Centre.

Although ABE has been more actively promoted, ABE learners still experience many problems. Ideals of ABE are often not realised in practice, as will be indicated in the next section.

1.2.2 Exploration of the problem

In exploring the problem, attention will be paid to:

- Problems the researcher identified in his initial literature study.
- Problems the researcher recalled from his own experience in relation to ABE.
- Problems the researcher identified from his informal probe into ABE in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal.

1.2.2.1 *Initial reading by the researcher*

The following problems were identified by the author during his readings. As there are similarities and differences among different types of adult centres, there are also similarities and differences in the problems that can be identified in different centres (Masifundisane 1996:4).

- Barriers to learning may be self-imposed or may result from past involvement with school teachers. Bad experience in school may determine adult learners' attitude towards a return to a learning environment (Walkin 1990:16). For instance, if a person had an experience of failure during his/her school years, he/she is likely to associate education with humiliation. He/she will avoid humiliation by being a non-participant in ABE (Easton 1991:63).

Furthermore, some adult learners associate learning with children. They do not envisage themselves as being learners. One adult learner once said,

For three evenings, I stood outside and looked through the window. I first wanted to see if the tutor hits learners like the teachers do with our children at school. Once I was sure there was no caning, I had the courage to join the class (Wedepohl 1988:51).

- Some adult learners are not successful in the ABE programme. Tiredness, shift work and classes held after hours in urban and industrial areas are some of the major causes of drop-out rates. Adult learners experience fatigue during class sessions, thus learners' progress is hampered. Sometimes the adult learner may fall asleep in class if he/she is tired (Wedepohl 1988:60). In rural areas, taboos concerning literacy and lack of community support discourage adult learners. Friends and neighbours may joke about going to school at an adult stage (Hutton 1992:74). It is also stated that in some areas, such as rural areas, more conservative members of the community sometimes see the effort to become literate

as a betrayal. Some people believe that education may alter peoples values and can thus be threatening to community values (Kemp & Van den Berg 1995:13).

- Domestic obligations may prevent adult learners from attending classes. For example, if a mother does not have a baby-sitter, she cannot attend classes because adult centres in the area do not provide a child care service (Kemp & Van den Berg 1995:13).
- In a school situation, adult learners are often physically uncomfortable in child size furniture and psychologically uncomfortable in traditional classroom settings which emphasise the distance and inequality between a teacher and a learner (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:186). Kanwal (1990:27) states,

Adult learners associate rooms in which chairs are placed in rows with childhood and passivity.

- The learning materials and curricula used in the adult night schools have often been designed for children, not adults (Favish & Omar 1995:3). According to the National Education Programme Investigation (NEPI 1992:3) many of the courses and methodologies used promote unacceptable values and bear little relation to workers' lives and work situations. Problems and assistance differ, depending on the programmes. Before the late eighties, most company programmes had no trade union involvement in the planning, implementation, developing and monitoring of the adult courses. The prevalent top-down approach has led to confusion, resentment and even resistance (Hutton 1992:74). Furthermore, the result has been the failure of many courses, because workers have questioned the usefulness of participating in literacy programmes which do not appeal to them and which they have been unable to influence (NEPI 1992:11).

- Other problems concern management's ignorance about literacy issues, workers' learning needs, education values, the nurturing of ineffective practices and formative evaluation (Hutton 1992:74).

The low priority of literacy in individual training programmes, combined with the ambiguous attitude of trade unions towards literacy programmes initiated by industry has prevented the effective establishment of programmes and support of enduring quality (Hutton 1992:74).

There is no coherent approach to ABE among different companies or even in the same company. Certificates given to an adult learner by a company or NGO's have very little meaning for another employer. They are often not transferable because ABE courses are so different and many are very narrow (Favish & Omar 1995:2).

- Each literacy organisation often decides fairly arbitrarily what to cover in the courses. As a result the actual skills covered in each programme differ enormously and there is no clear basis for comparing the courses or assessing the actual content (NEPI 1992:14). Courses are often not recognised and do not give credits towards or give equivalents to formal school standards. It is therefore usually difficult for a worker to complete courses to enter formal education or training with any advanced standing (NEPI 1992:14). In some company programmes the tutors are selected solely by the management and as a result they often do not have the confidence of workers (NEPI 1992:3). The dropout rate is high because it is difficult to maintain motivation over a long time. Adult learners have to attend classes for long periods of time. There is no consensus on paid study time. The majority of adult learners are attending classes in their own time (NEPI 1992:12). This situation reduces the number of participants in the programme.

1.2.2.2 The researcher's experience and past observations

The following discussion is based on the researcher observations with regard to the ABE learners' problems in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal.

- The majority of adult learners come from disadvantaged communities. Some of them are unemployed or earn little income. These people are sometimes unable to pay for education or buy prescribed text books. Furthermore, they have a problem in paying for the transport to and from adult centres on a daily basis. In the researcher's opinion the problem is dominant in urban areas. It is aggravated by unemployment.
- Other problems mentioned by adult learners at the adult centres concern the type of work they do. Shift work may disrupt the regular attendance of an adult learner. The learner in that situation is likely to miss some of the very important class lessons. This situation may lead to disappointment at the end of the course. Furthermore, construction workers have a similar problem because they may change the place of work at any time.
- It is also found that the fear of being tested may hamper the progress of learners. One tutor mentioned that he does not tell learners if he wants to assess them. He mentions that at one time he experienced absenteeism of more than 50 percent in his class due to the writing of a test on a particular day.
- Dissemination of information in communities concerning ABE has not been done satisfactory, especially in rural areas. There are people who have never heard about ABE in their lives. Adult educators do not go to the communities and tell people about ABE.
- There are often no books, materials or library facilities set aside for adult learners. The only reading material is a prescribed textbook. In the urban areas, there are public libraries, but the materials found in these structures are not suitable for ABE learners.

1.2.2.3 Informal probe into the situation in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal

The probe covered the problems and personal particulars of adult learners. Respondents were chosen from 16 different adult centres situated in the researcher's local vicinity.

Both rural and urban adult centres were represented equally in order to counter the influence of the geographical difference and social influence of the surroundings of each adult centre. The adult learners were unknown to the researcher. The researcher was assisted by the tutors in randomly choosing two ABE learners per adult centre. The respondents represented both male and female learners.

(a) Nature of the investigation

The investigation was conducted in the form of informal interviews. The time spent with adult learners varied between 20 to 25 minutes per learner. Some learners were shy and reserved, especially the female adult learners.

The behaviour of the female respondents was influenced by the African culture and beliefs and therefore the researcher had to spend more time with such adult learners.

(b) Personal particulars regarding participating adult learners

The age of the adult learners varied between 18 and 55 years. The majority of learners were females. Although there were learners who had never attended school, most learners had left school at the primary level during their school going age and were in Grades 2 to 5.

The majority of adult learners stayed far from adult centres and they therefore walked long distances from classes in the evening. The average distance travelled was found to be 4 kilometres. Although some learners were not married, the majority had children and they stayed

with their families. Most of the adult learners had been involved in ABE for a period of not less than two years.

(c) Learner problems

Problems highlighted by the adult learners were the following:

- They feel unsafe in the evening after classes because there is no public transport.
- Some tutors come irregularly or late for classes. This causes learners to spend limited time in class sessions.
- There are no resource materials which adult learners can use to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.
- They come to classes exhausted after work.
- There is limited time for doing homework and study.
- The furniture they use is small and it is meant for small children.
- Some classes have broken windows.
- Friends despise them for participation in ABE programmes.
- Family problems, as well as social and religious commitments, cause them to miss some of the classes.
- Night shift work causes absenteeism.
- Lack of child care services may cause learners to be reluctant to leave a child behind, especially when the child is not feeling well. This may result in the adult learner missing some of the class sessions.
- The lack of electricity in some of the centres caused sessions to be shortened, especially in winter.
- Sometimes the ABE results are not available at the end of the year. This is caused by poor administration and management of the ABE programme.
- Children may be noisy at home to such an extent that it is difficult to study.

- Adult learners do not have separate rooms in their homes for study because they come from the poor section of the community.
- School children come and disturb adult learners during the class sessions by being noisy.
- Children laugh if an adult learner fails to answer questions correctly. This causes adult learners to be reluctant to take an initiative in class sessions.

On the basis of the researcher's exploration of the research area, as described above, a further delimitation of the study could be done.

1.2.3 Delimitation of the field of study

The study was delimited to focus on the relationship between the ABE learner and

- the physical environment in which ABE takes place
- the learning contents
- himself/herself
- those who are close to him/her and almost mutually involved in ABE such as spouse, children and friends.

Having delimited the field, the research problems and related research questions could be formulated.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RELATED QUESTIONS

The research question was formulated as follows: What physical, affective, cognitive and volitional problems do ABE learners experience as revealed in their relationship towards

- the tutor
- the learning content

- himself or herself
- others close to the learner?

The research question determines the research aim and objectives.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this research was to determine the problems of learners in ABE. Subsequent objectives were to determine the physical, affective, cognitive, and volitional problems of learners in ABE; problems with reference to the learner's relationship towards the tutor, the learning content, the learner himself or herself and finally towards others who are close to the learner, such as the spouse, children and friends.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The government has decided to invest millions of rands in ABE as one of its RDP projects (ANC 1994). The implementation of such a programme needs careful planning. The significance of the study is that it highlights the problems encountered by the learners in ABE. Understanding ABE learners' problems could lead to better training of tutors so that they become more effective in teaching adult learners. Only if such problems are known, can suitable ABE programmes which appeal to adult learners be introduced. Understanding the problems of ABE learners co-determines the success of ABE in general.

Empowerment of communities through ABE can assist in social upliftment, development of the economy and national stability. If people are positive towards literacy, they can improve their education, as well as the country's economy by assimilating new ideas essential for the development of the economy, such as those concerning entrepreneurship. An improvement in the economy could lead to national stability, hence violence and crime could be reduced. Furthermore, this could lead to the improvement of the standard of living.

1.6 EXPLANATION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

The clarification of the following terms and concepts is essential to this research.

1.6.1 Adult learner

The adult learner has progressed to self-directed independence. He/she can be allowed to choose for himself/herself and can be held accountable for what he/she does (Munnik, Möller, Oberholzer & Greyling 1989:6).

1.6.2 Adult Basic Education (ABE)

ABE is a component of adult education. It refers to the provision of education, including basic literacy and numeracy, to adults and youths of post-compulsory school age, including those who have never been to school or dropped out of school before completing junior secondary education (NEPI 1992:7).

A definition of ABE appropriate in the context of South Africa is the following:

... education of adults in areas of primary knowledge such as literacy, numeracy, social and life skills, and understanding of community life necessary for responsible participation in society (Van Heerden 1991:3).

The origin of the term ABE is unclear. It seems that the term was first used by members of UNESCO and the World Bank to promote a form of cost effective mass education suited to developing countries. The aim was to provide a substitute for universal primary education for adults who had never or hardly been to school. ABE was to meet minimum learning needs of individuals and groups to empower them to function in society and to cope with their physical environment (Hutton 1992:223). The purpose of ABE in the broadest possible terms can be

described as the provision of education essential for further learning, for personal development and for effective participation in society. Participation in society implies participation in economic, political, group, family and interpersonal relationships (Hutton 1992:224).

ABE in the new education system consists of four nationally certified attainment levels that will lead to the General Education Certificate (GEC), i.e. the certificate attained at the completion of school-based general education (Niebuhr 1996).

1.6.3 Literacy/illiteracy, functional literacy, marginal literacy

ABE and literacy are closely related. For example, Wedepohl (1988:1) uses these two terms interchangeably. The term literacy is increasingly used to refer to the basic education of adults rather than to the strictly technical skills of reading and writing (Hutton 1992:11). It is used to mean learning to read and write and the acquisition of basic numeracy skills. These skills can be in a person's own language (NEPI 1992:6). A definition of literacy should go beyond a mere ability to read and write. Literacy must be accompanied by understanding and insight, be related to the life of the learner, and contribute to the growth and development of the individual and his/her community (Van Heerden 1991:6). Once a person can speak, read and write in basic English, he/she is functionally literate for the purpose of life in South Africa (NEPI 1992:6).

A person is literate when he/she has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him/her to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his/her group and community and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him/her to continue to use these skills towards his/her community's development (Chandran 1994:514).

Illiteracy can be defined as a complete inability to read, write or compute. People who are functionally illiterate may be able to decode some commonly used words and signs, such as their

names, but are unable to complete a job application form, read television schedules or write a cheque (Gartin & Murdick 1992:220; Chandran 1994:5 14).

A person is marginally literate if he/she is able to read and write, but with difficulty and little understanding (Gartin & Murdick 1992:220).

It is important to note that various categories of literacy/illiteracy are relative. Deetlefs, Norton and Steinberg (1991:8) emphasise this as follows:

The level of literacy required for effective functioning can be widely different depending on the development of the country, the community and the time. For example, in some rural communities, it might be enough for people to write their names and letters to their families, while in urban communities people need to read road signs, adverts and newspapers before they can function effectively. In yet other communities, it might be expected of people that they can read and write in a second language before they are considered functionally literate.

1.6.4 Numeracy/innumeracy

Numeracy is generally understood as the mathematics skills needed for active participation in daily life. Innumeracy is a severe disadvantage for adults, particularly for those living and working in an urban environment (Hutton 1992:21).

Innumerate people are disadvantaged in several ways; they are dependent on other's knowledge and goodwill to help them conduct their daily affairs. For instance, they are usually cheated and humiliated because of their ignorance. An innumerate person may not be able to count change when he/she buys either from the shop or the street vendor (Gartin & Murdick 1992:222).

1.6.5 Adult educator

The adult educator is someone who is involved in ABE programmes. He/she may be teaching and managing or supervising an ABE programme. The term covers tutors of adult learners, administrators of ABE programmes and education specialists in ABE.

1.6.6 Tutor

The tutor assists in adult learning, but never dictates the outcome of the experience (Jarvis 1990:130). According to McKay and Northedge (1995:90), a tutor is someone who makes it easier for adult learners to learn. For the purposes of this study, the terms tutor and facilitator are synonymous.

1.7 METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The research involved an extensive literature survey, followed by empirical research. The latter had both quantitative and qualitative components, and was conducted in two educational regions in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal, namely Empangeni and Ulundi.

1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION

CHAPTER 1

This chapter presents an orientation to the research under the following subheadings: Awareness of the problem, exploration of the problem, and delimitation of the field of study. Furthermore, it deals with the formulation of the problem, significance of the study, main research questions, the research objectives, explanation of terms, and the method of investigation.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter reports on the first part of the literature review. It deals with the concept of ABE and different programmes of ABE. Identifiable elements of ABE such as contents, materials, facilities and tutors are looked into.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter deals with the second part of the literature review. The focus is on ABE learners and their problems. The relationship between the learner and tutors, learning content, other learners, and those who are closely related to the learner, are discussed.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter deals with the research design of the empirical investigation.

CHAPTER 5

In this chapter the empirical findings are presented, analysed and interpreted.

CHAPTER 6

This chapter presents a synthesis of the data obtained, as well as recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to present the context of ABE in South Africa, specifically in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal.

For this purpose, three types of ABE programmes, namely non-governmental organisation (NGO) ABE programmes, the private sector ABE programmes and the state ABE programmes will be discussed.

The discussion of the historical background of ABE is essential in exploring the context of the South African situation.

2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The story of the introduction of literacy training in South Africa has not been investigated in any coherent fashion, and remains open to conjecture (Screen 1990:21, French 1988:27).

Although literacy arrived in South Africa with the establishment of the Dutch Refreshment Station at the Cape in 1652, it was introduced to many of the peoples of the sub-continent by the missionary movements of the nineteenth century, the extension of the white colonisation and the industrial revolution centering on discovery of diamonds and gold (French 1988:27).

Each of these contributory factors emerged from specific ideas and objectives underlying it. Literacy was more a means to specific secondary ends than being an end in itself. Missionaries, for example, wanted to promote the Christian religion among African people (Hutton 1992:52).

Although all the early literacy efforts had a common goal, there had not been complete harmony between the efforts. It is recorded that missionaries met with strong opposition from settlers.

However, in the early twentieth century, literacy gained momentum in spite of the frustrations the missionaries experienced. In the 1920's and 1930's various efforts were undertaken to promote literacy among black South Africans. For example, the Carnegie Library was involved in taking appropriate reading materials from an urban base to the people in remote rural areas (Hutton 1992:55).

The industrialisation of South Africa accelerated rapidly during the Second World War. At the end of the war in 1945, there was a dire need to provide literacy for the workers needed by the industries whose economies were improving rapidly. Furthermore, a need was felt to cater for returning troops and the workers of the war. These people needed literacy and training urgently so that they could be absorbed by the industries (French 1988:27).

The post war period was a period of liberal optimism about the possibilities of creating a new South Africa. The United Party government instituted a commission of inquiry into ABE which set up a plan designed to foster local efforts. This official commission on ABE included a number of liberals from the Institute of Race Relations (Screen 1990:20; Hutton 1992:56; French 1988:27).

The outcome of the commission's work was the recommendation that night schools should be encouraged through state subsidies. The influence of international interest in literacy work, linked to decolonisation, boosted the national eagerness to eliminate illiteracy in the country (Hutton 1992:36). Enabling legislation was passed, but before it could be implemented on any scale the National Party came to power in 1948.

The Nationalist government undermined the policy of support for night schools in a number of ways. For example, applications for subsidies were often ignored or unsuccessful (Hutton 1992:56; Screen 1990:21).

At the same time the sheer burden of legislation directed at residential segregation, general control over education for blacks and state security made it discouraging if not impossible to conduct adult education (French 1988:27).

Bird (1984) has eloquently described how night school officials in the Witwatersrand were subjected to harassment and humiliation (Screen 1990:21). Even literacy organisations with an accommodating attitude to state authority had found themselves entangled in the legal net (French 1988:27).

The fact that literacy was supported by the Communist Party made the Nationalist government to perceive it as a fertile soil for the propagation of the communist ideology. Furthermore, the government was afraid that the launching of ABE might awaken aspirations of liberation in black people (Mathonsi 1988:13).

All NGO literacy work had been in one or another way illegal because anything identifiable as education for blacks was required to be registered with the then Department of Education. This was a bureaucratic process unacceptable to many people involved in ABE programmes (Hutton 1992:57).

Until the mid 1970's, the state took no positive steps to promote ABE and literacy work. Progressive literacy projects were looked on with suspicion by the Nationalist government and the security police (Hutton 1992:57).

Literacy services were improved in the 1970's. Various factors led to a growth in the provision of literacy services. The economic growth of the 1960's increased pressure from the private sector regarding the need for a more skilled workforce. The influence of the world-wide literacy movement was felt by educationists concerned about the increasing rate of adult illiteracy and the inadequacy of formal education provision (Screen 1990:27; French 1988:21). Furthermore, there was some growth of literacy work linked to notions of liberation. On the other hand, authorities decided to encourage literacy work in order to pre-empt its use by radical movements (Screen 1990:21; French 1988:27).

In the mid 1970's the state became involved in adult literacy work for the first time, when ABE sections in the education department for blacks were established. The state started to be even more directly involved in adult education, through the Department of Education and Training (DET), after the De Lange investigation (1981). The DET was responsible for night schools in the

Republic of South Africa. The latter was a part of South Africa distinct from the so called TBVC states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei) and the self-governing territories such as Qwaqwa, Lebowa, KwaZulu, Kangwane, Gazankulu and KwaNdebele (Van Heerden 1991:17).

Already in 1976, the DET started to conduct literacy courses at adult education centres. Courses to teach adults to read and write were developed by the DET and implemented for the first time in 1986. Courses were developed for the following languages: Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Tsonga, Afrikaans, English and Ndebele. Furthermore, advisors for adult education were trained and appointed in each of the various regions in the same year (*Educamus* 1990:9).

The ABE programme of the DET was operated and structured in the following way: There was a regional office in each of the eight regions. There were public centres which were financed by the DET with full-time principals and administration staff. Public centres had satellites where classes were given, but administration was through the public centre. There were also state-aided centres, mostly in churches, mines and prisons, subsidised by the DET. Finally, circuit centres were used for the upgrading of DET tutors (Van Heerden 1991:17).

Many big companies, such as Anglo-American Corporation, and the churches had set up night schools in terms of the DET guidelines. The then Department of Prisons also used the DET programme (Van Heerden 1991:18).

Today, there are three types of ABE programmes operational in the country, namely the NGO ABE programmes, the private sector ABE programmes and the state ABE programmes (NICE Report 1994:4).

As all programmes are fairly dynamic and in line with changing needs, it has to be borne in mind that they are undergoing changes due to the socio-political changes taking place in the country. The new dispensation in South Africa will definitely affect all ABE programmes.

2.3 ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.3.1 NGO ABE programmes

International agencies such as the International Institute For Adult Literacy Methods (IIALM) in Teheran, the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) in Canada, the German Foundation for International Development (DSE), the UNESCO Institute of Education based in Germany and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) have played a major role in promoting literacy world-wide by promoting networks and exchanges, publishing journals and books about research findings and case studies and providing funding and personnel for specific initiatives (Hutton 1992:43).

For a long time, South African literacy agencies were largely excluded from these networks due to the domestic policy. South African agencies were only given a chance to work together with the international agencies from the beginning of 1990. Since then contacts have gradually been building up (Hutton 1992:43; Van Heerden 1991:27).

NGOs can be national agencies which work in close co-operation with the state. Such national NGOs can be responsible for a large proportion of literacy work within a country. On the other hand, literacy NGOs can also be relatively small scale agencies which may be part of other organisations like churches, rural development projects, women's organisations and trade unions (Hutton 1992:43).

Many NGOs were oppositional to the previous government and were regarded with suspicion by the state. However, some NGOs were working closely with the state, such as Operation Upgrade (Hutton 1992:52; Screen 1990:21).

A number of NGO literacy organisations were established with the common purpose of providing ABE to adults and out of school youth (Hutton 1992:25). Most of them are governed by a board of trustees or board of directors depending on whether the organisation is established as a trust or a company. Most of them are managed by directors or co-directors and tuition or training is provided by educators or trainers who either have previous experience in the relevant area or have

been given in-service training. There are no clear norms and standards that regulate the activities of these NGOs and as such there is no guarantee of recognition of the qualifications offered by most of them (NICE Report 1994:42).

NGO literacy organisations are relatively successful in literacy work, probably due to the fact that they are usually located in some form of grass-roots community group (Hutton 1992:43).

Most of these organisations are established on a voluntary basis. They usually get the financial support from the private sector and international agencies (NICE Report 1994:42). A national literacy conference was held in 1986, in which the National Literacy Cooperation (NLC) was formed by a group of about 30 non-governmental progressive literacy organisations from all over South Africa. The objective was to achieve capacity and develop strategies to counter reduced funding (Spies 1995:35; Van Heerden 1991:27).

The NLC believes that it is the government's responsibility to make sure that all citizens of the country are literate. The NLC now describes itself as being nonsectarian in political orientation but in the past it was generally regarded as aligned to the mass-based democratic movement (Van Heerden 1991:28).

It is believed that the agencies in the NLC reach about 9 000 learners in South Africa each year. Attendance is affected by factors such as transport, unrest and employer demands. However, it is worth noting that many learners have been attending classes for several years and group cohesiveness is often remarkable.

It is important to mention that during the amalgamation of agencies in 1986, there were a few agencies who refused to be part of NLC. These NGOs formed what is called the Non-Aligned Literacy Forum. This is a small group compared to the NLC. The difference between these two organisations is that while the NLC is more sympathetic to the ANC/COSATU alliance, the Non-Aligned Literacy Forum is more sympathetic to the black consciousness organisations (Van Heerden 1991:28).

The curricula and methodologies are more or less similar in both organisations. The learner-centred approach is highly recommended. The common objective of the NLC and the Non-Aligned Literacy Forum was to meet the urgent needs of adult learners. Both organisations do not have a specific target group of learners. They cater for a variety of learners who come to the centres with different needs. Some learners, for example, want to be able to read and write, others want to improve their qualifications, thus their employability. On the other hand, others merely want to improve their communication skills (Hutton 1992:57).

2.3.2 Private sector ABE programmes

Industry and commerce are responsible for a considerable sector of literacy provision in the country. About 45 per cent of adult literacy instruction in South Africa is provided by the private sector (Van Heerden 1991:21; Hutton 1992:44).

Literacy classes are usually conducted as part of the internal training programmes of the organisations. These are generally regarded as part of the general upgrading and development of the work force. In many instances, literacy programmes within industrial and commercial organisations are supported by outside specialists, and commercial agencies. The agencies sell training courses and materials to particular companies at a considerable cost (Hutton 1992:44; Van Heerden 1991:21).

Companies introduce literacy programmes for various reasons. Firstly the rationale is to curb the problem of shortage of skilled workers. Many workers cannot cope with further training if they have limited literacy skills. Secondly, international literacy year campaigns and pressure from the trade unions have influenced many companies to introduce literacy programmes in their work place. Thirdly, a number of companies provide ABE programmes with the purpose of increasing the productivity of the company (Hutton 1992:44; NICE Report 1994:42; Van Heerden 1991:21). Finally, companies introduced ABE programmes in order to improve the communication skills of the workers. South Africa has 11 official languages which are spoken daily. If English is taught in the ABE classes, communication becomes easier among the workers themselves and also between the workers and management.

Concepts such as productivity, percentage increases and quarterly results do not translate in most of the country's indigenous languages. As a result, many blue collar workers who know little English, struggle to understand these concepts and often associate productivity increases with retrenchment, which can cause go-slow strikes and other work-related problems. Literacy training programmes equip individuals with communication and thinking skills and therefore reduce the number of strikes and other work-related problems (Burroughs 1994:16).

Actual needs often force workers to join ABE programmes. A need for promotion or a need to secure a job are examples of such needs (Van Heerden 1991:16). However, learners sometimes join ABE programmes with objectives different from those of the company management.

Success in achieving the objectives of the ABE programme depends on the planning of management and a good relationship between management and the workforce. Workers react positively if they are involved in the planning of the programme.

To date, industrial programmes have been disappointing in terms of actually eradicating illiteracy, though there have been isolated local successes. Only the bigger, more established sectors of industry seem to be able to provide structured programmes (Van Heerden 1991:26).

2.3.3 State ABE programmes

The largest number of adult literacy learners are enrolled in the state ABE centres. The provision of adult literacy education is usually implemented in similar ways in all provinces in South Africa (Hutton 1992:41). The only difference lies in the stages of transformation of the ABE programme. For example, KwaZulu-Natal is still far behind with regard to transformation. Here content meant for school children is still often used.

Each provincial ministry has inherited adult education centres, most of which are located in schools. The education centres operate four nights a week. These centres are managed by part-time principals, known as supervisors. Tuition is given by part-time practising school teachers who are given limited training in ABE. Tutors are paid for their extra work at an hourly rate by the provincial department of education (NICE Report 1994:42; Hutton 1992:76; Van Heerden

1991:18; *Educamus* 1990:9). Chief education specialists for ABE are responsible for the training of tutors (*Educamus* 1990:9).

Evidently, each of the aforementioned ABE programmes has its own unique features. There are, however, some general considerations pertaining to these programmes.

2.3.4 Some general considerations pertaining to ABE programmes

If one compares ABE and formal schooling systems, ABE is less organised than the formal schooling system in South Africa. The provision of ABE is characterised by fragmentation, lack of accreditation and poor adult learner mobility.

The fragmentation and lack of nationally and regionally/provincially accepted norms for ABE contributes to the underdevelopment of the provision of education to adults and out-of-school youth. Lack of community and stake-holder involvement in the governance and administration of current provider institutions further compounds the problem (NICE Report 1994:41).

Some general considerations with regard to the different ABE programmes are presented in the following subsections.

2.3.4.1 Tutors

Any school teacher can be employed as a tutor. They are recruited and placed in classes without being formally interviewed. They join ABE programmes with a vague idea of what is expected of them and are often unsuitable for teaching adults. This means that school teachers resort to teaching content and methods they use at school (NICE Report 1994:42). UNISA has recently started to train ABET tutors as a way of alleviating the problem of ABE tutors.

After tutors have been employed, usually on a part-time basis, they do not undergo intensive training like school teachers. They only receive training through workshops and short courses which run for a few days (Hutton 1992:21).

2.3.4.2 *Learning materials*

School syllabuses are often used in many adult centres. Materials designed for children usually have irrelevant content for adults. The materials used are prescriptive in nature, which helps an unskilled tutor but can be boring to the adult learners (Van Heerden 1991:18; NEPI 1992:14).

Few adult centres have started to use appropriate learning materials from institutions such as the English Resource Unit (ERU).

Although there is quite a lot of developed education and training materials available, most of these materials were developed before the conceptualisation of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and the establishment of the Independent Examination Board (IEB) and therefore do not adequately take into account core competencies and outcome standards (Van Niekerk 1996b:37).

2.3.4.3 *Learner support systems*

There is mostly no support system in terms of career counselling, proper placement procedures which recognise prior learning, mentorship and supervision, study, and support groups (Van Niekerk 1996b:40; NEPI 1992:41). Furthermore,

apart from curriculum content and context, group and individuals' social transactions between male facilitators/tutors and female adult learners or vice versa can lead to power struggles, inhibition, intimidation, sexual harassment and corruption (Van Niekerk 1996b:40).

2.3.4.4 *Target group*

Each type of ABE programme focuses on a particular group of adult learners from three main categories of adult learners, namely pre-employed, employed and unemployed adult learners.

The private sector ABE programme focuses on employed adult learners because employers want to improve productivity of the company. NGO and state ABE programmes focus on the pre-employed and unemployed adult learners because their main objective is to empower individual citizens of the country and to improve literacy in society.

2.3.4.5 Time scheduling

There are basically two options for attending ABE classes, namely during working hours and after hours. The first option caters for the unemployed and pre-employed adult learners. On the other hand, the latter option caters for all three groups of adult learners.

The first option has less problems because it occurs during the day when there is transport and adult learners are not exposed to criminal elements. On the other hand, adult learners who attend classes after hours may experience shortage of transport at night and they may also be exposed to criminal elements.

The fact that tutors are mainly school teachers employed by the education departments on a part time basis, impedes the success of the first option because they are not available during the working hours. The success of the second option is not guaranteed either, as tutors are exhausted at the end of a working day.

2.3.4.6 Assessing adult learner's literacy placement level

Class placement of adult learners is one of the most difficult tasks because adult learners are inclined to join higher classes than those for which they are ready. This problem was noted in the initial investigation by the researcher. An example of this is an adult who left school at grade two during school-going age and then joined a grade higher than grade two. To avoid this kind of situation, many adult centres use placement tests to assess illiteracy levels.

Apart from the more general considerations as given above, it is also important to highlight the problematic aspects of each of the ABE programmes.

2.3.5 Problematic aspects of ABE programmes

2.3.5.1 Problematic aspects of NGO ABE programmes

There are no clear norms and standards that regulate the activities of NGOs and therefore there is no guarantee of recognition of qualification offered by most of them (NICE Report 1994:42).

The NQF will change this.

Furthermore, ABE venues used are mainly church halls and community halls, often without the necessary desks or chalk boards. In some exceptional cases, adult learners even have to kneel down when they are writing.

ON the other hand, learning content and teaching methodology are often of a high standard and in line with global literacy teaching developments.

2 3.5.2 Problematic aspects of private sector ABE programmes

The development of ABE programmes in the private sector depends mostly on the initiative of the top management. Workers have normally only limited say in the planning of the programme. The ABE programme has to satisfy the needs of the company. Pertinent features are the following:

- In the programmes offered by industries, adult learners experience pressure because if they do not achieve the job requirements, they may either be demoted or lose the job (Hutton 1992:58; NEPI 1992:12).
- ABE programmes are mostly controlled by the company. The company management often has little knowledge of, or consideration for literacy issues, worker's learning needs and educational values (Hutton 1992:52).
- Often there is a tendency in the company management of neglecting the participation of adult learners in deciding on programmes suitable for the workers. In many instances, all stakeholders are not always meaningfully involved in the planning, implementation and

monitoring of programmes (Spies 1995:35; NEPI 1992:12). According to Hutton (1992:53) the following are typical characteristics of an industrial literacy programme:

- A tendency to abandon rather than to evaluate and improve ailing programmes.
 - A general attachment to quick-fix ideas about learning with a consequent failure of both the process and the product.
 - A general failure to manage the 'ecology' of literacy by combatting the disadvantages of the industrial setting for learning and fostering those factors which could enhance learning.
 - A low priority of literacy in industrial training programmes combined with the ambiguous attitude of trade unions towards literacy programmes initiated by industry. These have prevented the effective establishment of programmes and support services of enduring quality (Hutton 1992:74).
- Most of these programmes are not appropriately accredited except for being recognised by the company itself and its satellites (NICE Report 1995:47).
 - Fluctuating budgets and interests for literacy work have affected the overall provision of industrial programmes. In some cases the programmes have stopped due to financial constraints in the company. In that situation, adult learners are forced to have a break. This condition causes learners to forget the literacy skills they have already acquired (Van Heerden 1991:25).
 - Middle management and trainers may grudgingly yield to pressure from the head office, perceiving literacy programmes as an increased work-load, and resent the arrangements that top management have made with the unions. This means that policy decisions made at head offices are not necessarily effectively implemented at a local level (Van Heerden 1991:26).

2.3.5.3 Problematic aspects of state ABE programmes

During the initial investigation (Section 1.2.2.3), the researcher discovered that there were financial hardships experienced by the KZN Department of Education in running ABE programmes. For example, some classes, especially grades 6 and 7, were suspended in some

centres in the KZN province in 1996. The reason given was shortage of funds. Furthermore, other adult centres were closed down due to the same reason. Shortage of funds is also the reason given for restricting tutors to only working two hours a day. The following remarks are also relevant:

- There is only one Chief Education Specialist or Deputy Chief Education Specialist per region in the province. His/her duty is to monitor any form of adult education including ABE programmes. In addition to this job, he/she has to perform other duties related to formal education as superintendent in education management.
- There is one Deputy Chief Education Specialist per district. Supervisors are usually principals of schools or any educator employed by the DOE on a part time basis. Tutors are also employed on a part time basis.
- Educational institutions are used as adult centres. The available furniture is usually too small for adult learners, especially if the adult centre is situated in a primary school. There is also inefficient payment of tutor salaries. Furthermore, inefficiency in the processing of appointment forms is common. It is common for a tutor to work for six months without payment. Owing to this problem some tutors do not give their best. They come to work irregularly and are not well prepared because there is no incentive to motivate them.
- It has been found that supervision of adult centres is very poor. It is very rare that the officials responsible for a district visit all centres in the district in one year. The chief education specialist does not have enough time to visit all adult centres because he/she is employed on a part time basis. Absenteeism among tutors is sometimes high because there is nobody to control and assess work.
- During the initial investigation, one of the supervisors mentioned the existence of ghost tutors. In this case, the person in charge of the adult centre registers the names of the non-existing tutors in order to embezzle government money.

2.3.6 Synthesis

In conclusion, some key issues, namely funding, personnel, formal training, remuneration, learning context, and learning programmes are discussed below.

2.3.6.1 Funding

The funding in each programme is unique, in the sense that private sector ABE programmes are less troubled in this regard. The private sector is self-sufficient, while the NGO sector relies on donations. If there are no donors, a NGO literacy programme may close down. For example, after the 1994 elections, some international donor agencies decided to divert their funds to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Owing to this change, many NGOs lost thousands of rands. The state ABE programme is also unfortunate in the sense that it gets only a relatively small share of the National Education Budget (NEPI 1992:40).

2.3.6.2 Personnel

There is a tendency on the side of the government to treat ABE as less important than formal education. For example, the staff in the ABE section of the KZN DOE is employed on a part time basis. This applies to the Deputy Chief Education Specialist and tutors. The Deputy Chief Education Specialist is employed on a part time basis in the sense that in addition to ABE duties, he/she is expected to be involved in the formal education programme.

The state ABE programme uses school teachers as tutors while the other two programmes use both school teachers and non-school tutors. The latter are usually trained by NGOs in andragogical skills. Non-school tutors receive training in the form of workshops or short courses. School teachers can also undergo non-formal training on how to impart knowledge to the adult learners. Unfortunately, non-school tutors are not trained in guidance and counselling during their training. Guidance and counselling is compulsory in the training of school teachers.

The weakness of the state adult centres is that they are directly managed by district offices and thus lack a sense of autonomy and self-reliance. They have limited capacity and thus experience pressure from youth and adults alike (Department of Education 1997:28).

2.3.6.3 Formal training

The lack of intensive formal training for adult educators has resulted in a scarcity of experts in this field. Even those institutions of higher learning which realised the need for adult education, neglected ABE. Universities such as UNISA and the University of Natal have only lately started to train ABET practitioners.

The national DOE does not recognise the certificates of adult tutors obtained from NGOs. This action demotivates tutors who are interested in ABE. Only tutors who are trained by universities and technikons are recognised by the national DOE.

2.3.6.4 Remuneration

The remuneration of ABE practitioners has not been addressed satisfactorily. For example, there are no formal salary structures, no standards and no law requiring that they are paid (Masifundisane 1996:1). Certificates obtained from workshops or short courses are not recognised in the remuneration of tutors. Only certificates obtained from colleges of education and universities are recognised.

Fortunately, although faced with little or no financial remuneration, poor working conditions, little resources and no organisations to take forward their cause, many ABE tutors continue to plough their efforts into helping adult learners in their communities (Masifundisane 1996:1).

2.3.6.5 Learning context

In the private sector programmes, learners learn under pressure. For example, if the learner is not interested in the ABE classes, he/she may lose his/her job or promotion. This tends to be a weakness of the private sector ABE programmes. On the other hand, private sector programmes have one distinct advantage. Adults do not have to contend with the scorn and mockery of neighbourhood youth. In the state ABE centres school pupils do come and attend the evening classes with adult learners. In some instances they disturb the programme by making a noise.

The private sector ABE programmes have the advantage of good venues, with proper furniture and organisation, while NGO adult centres often have problems of insufficient facilities and furniture.

State ABE centres are often still based on the ill-conceived idea of replicating conditions of schooling for adults. ABE centres of the KZN DOE, although they serve adults, function like schools in all respects. These centres have tended to waste public resources and have generally failed the target groups they were meant to serve, with serious shortcomings in their curricula, staffing and management (Department of Education 1997:28).

2.3.6.6 Learning programmes

Concerning learning programmes, the following pertinent points can be made:

- The learning materials are different among the three types of ABE programmes. The state ABE programmes still tend to cling to the application of the formal school curriculum, while the other two programme types are now using newly designed curricula meant for adult learners.
- In the planning stage of literacy programmes, adult learners are mostly not sufficiently consulted.

The overview as presented in this chapter thus far has highlighted the contextual problems with which ABE learners have to cope. However, the new SAQA/NQF dispensation can bring an improvement, as will be indicated in the next section.

2.4 THE NEW ADULT BASIC EDUCATION DISPENSATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The new ABE dispensation, as enshrined within the NQF, incorporates significant changes. Instead of teaching formal school syllabuses, learners will be taught relevant information. For example, a woman learning sewing skills does not need the history of Europe or a lesson on a flower, but she needs numeracy skills so that she can learn measurements. Furthermore, a learner-

(Van Niekerk 1996a:29; Niebuhr 1996:48; Department of Education 1997:8; Burroughs 1994:16).

In accordance with NQF requirements, curriculum development will be outcomes-based. This implies that learners should demonstrate their ability to attain the required learning outcomes (Niebuhr 1996:45).

ABE will be coordinated within the NQF which would ensure links between different parts of an integrated education system. This would help to ensure that ABE is not marginalised but integrated within the mainstream provision of education (Department of Education 1995:1).

The NQF dispensation of ABE is laudable since learning programmes, through their design and delivery, will have to be responsive and sensitive to the learning needs of the adult learners. This is in line with the main objective of ABE. The ABE programmes will accommodate the needs of learners in an inclusive way, and address their holistic development. Furthermore, there will be a uniformity in all ABE programmes so that the certificates obtained by learners are recognised nationally. This approach will minimise the problems experienced by learners in the different ABE programmes.

In the NQF, the key matters as discussed in the previous sections will be treated in such a way that obstacles found in the old ABE system will be largely eliminated. Other relevant issues in the new ABE dispensation are the following:

2.4.1 Community colleges

ABE programmes will *inter alia* be incorporated into new educational institutions known as community colleges. A community college is an educational institution which offers a wide range of programmes within a single institutional framework, to a diverse range of learners with varying abilities, levels of prior achievement and educational goals (Venter 1996:8).

Community colleges will be funded by the individual provincial governments.

In addition to the financial support from the government, there are five possible sources of funding for the community college sector namely (1) fundraising from local and international donors (2) fundraising events or campaigns (3) existing government allocations (4) user and/or community contributions and (5) employer contributions (NICE Report 1994:32).

2.4.2 Personnel and training

ABE is becoming a profession in its own right. There are few professionally qualified adult educators or tutors. Fortunately, various universities and technikons are establishing programmes related to ABE with the aim of producing experts in the field of ABE. For example, the University of Natal has introduced ABE regional support agencies.

Vista University has established ABE resource units on every campus and UCT, UNISA and UWC are involved in significant research related to ABET (Spies 1995:36; Van Niekerk 1996b:39). Adult educators and tutors will no longer have subject matter expertise only, but they will also be skilled in the management of learning and learning institutions. They will no longer depend on short courses on basic skills before they teach, because they would have been involved in intensive training. They will have confidence and skills to evaluate, adapt, improvise and generate learning materials and practices so that meaningful, relevant and contextualised learning can take place (Van Niekerk 1996b:30).

2.4.3 Recognition of prior learning

ABE will be offered in the form of outcomes-based education in a system of open mobility. The latter makes it possible to credit learners' achievements at every level, whatever learning pathways they may have followed, and at whatever rate they have acquired the necessary competence. It also provides for the recognition of prior (experiential) learning (RPL).

Learners will be expected to demonstrate through agreed procedures that they have met the required learning outcomes before they are awarded credits. Credits will only count towards a given qualification if they are relevant to that qualification (Niebuhr 1996:30).

Finally, the national DOE will recognise the training of tutors done through NGOs. Such tutors will have to undergo a special test to demonstrate that they are capable of teaching adults.

2.4.4 Remuneration

The delay in the payment of tutors will be dealt with. The KZN DOE has already introduced administrative staff employed full time under the new Sub-Directorate of Adult Education (Masifundisane 1996:15).

2.4.5 Target groups

An addition to the three groups of adult learners namely employed, unemployed and pre-employed adult learners, the new ABE system will also pay attention to disabled adult learners.

The first target group are employed adult learners who need reskilling to upgrade their existing skills, to improve their positions and cope with new technology. Reskilling is also important for workers so that, in case someone is retrenched, he/she will be able to apply for the new job.

The second target group are the unemployed adult learners, for example, women as learners, especially rural women. Many women live in impoverished rural areas as farmers, mothers and homemakers. Women in the vast majority of rural households are forced to spend more than four hours a day collecting water or firewood. These life-sustaining activities are not remunerated. Fifty percent of these women are dependent on social pensions and remittances, making them highly dependent of state run support systems and the support of migrating family members. These women have limited access to education and training and production resources. Over half of the unemployed in South Africa are women, which means that poverty has been feminised (Department of Education 1997:77).

The third target group are pre-employed adult learners. This group consists mainly of youths who have no employable skills and who still need initial skilling in life. Youth hardest hit by unemployment and poverty are those in prison and homeless youth. After acquiring literacy, they

will have better changes to be absorbed by training institutions, so that they gain the appropriate skills required by industries.

The fourth target group are the learners with disabilities. Most people with disabilities encounter daily discrimination and marginalisation, because of their disabilities. In the past, disability has been regarded as a health and welfare issue with little commitment from other areas of government responsibility, like education, employment service delivery, recreation and public transport (Department of Education 1997:76).

Provision will be made for support services for the four target groups. These will provide assistance with regard to career guidance and decision making. Furthermore, support services will provide study counselling and advice with regard to examinations (Department of Education 1997:78).

The new ABE system as enshrined in the NQF is meant to correct all the past discrepancies in the provision of ABE. When fully operational, a variety of target groups will benefit significantly.

2.4.6 Learning programmes

Until recently, curricula, although specifying goals, aims or objectives as a point of departure, were content-based, and organised in terms of prescribed and optional content which was to be offered at specific stages and for fixed periods in institutions of learning (Niebuhr 1996:48).

In the new system of education, curricula developed in accordance with NQF requirements will be outcomes-based. This implies that learners can demonstrate their ability to attain the required learning outcomes. It does not matter what content helped them to do so or where, when and how they acquired such ability. In terms of learning programmes, the NQF will only specify unit standards which define the required specific outcomes and their associated performance and assessment criteria (Niebuhr 1996:48). The curriculum, however, consists of more than this.

Specific outcomes are informed by knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Essential outcomes and their attainment are demonstrated within specific contexts. Providers therefore need to take the process further than the mere statement of desired specific outcomes and performance.

For Further Education and Training (FET), full unit standards will be developed. These must be agreed upon jointly by the school and ABE sector. It must be remembered that ABE level 4 is equivalent to the senior phase of compulsory schooling and results in a GET certificate, the first qualification on the NQF. This means that specific outcomes in general education and training (GET) must have strong links with ABE to ensure progression for ABE learners (Niebuhr 1996:49).

The ABE framework is less detailed compared to the framework for compulsory schooling. The reason is to allow adult learners following modular curricula to accumulate credits at their convenience, guided by rules of combinations and their personal and career objectives (Niebuhr 1996:49).

In sum, the new ABE dispensation has the potential to ignite meaningful growth, and to assure an elevated status of ABE learners. Evidently, this will impact positively on the socio-economic position of many South Africans.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, a general overview on ABE in South Africa was presented, highlighting problems, as well as future prospects. This provides the essential framework for the next chapter, which focuses on the problems experienced by adult learners participating in ABE.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING ADULT LEARNERS AND THEIR PROBLEMS IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO persons are illiterate when they are lacking in essential knowledge and skills which enable them to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in their community and whose attainments in reading, writing and numeracy skills make it possible for them to continue to use skills towards their own and the community's development (Deetlefs et al 1991:8).

People usually define illiteracy in terms of standards set by formal schooling. For example, in South Africa a person who has attended schooling for a period of less than five years is said to be illiterate. Such definition is problematic, because an illiterate person in developing countries like South Africa may be literate in poor or underdeveloped countries such as Burundi and Rwanda. Furthermore, an illiterate person in an urban area may be regarded as literate in a rural area. The implication is that sometimes illiteracy depends on the level of development of the community or country in which adults find themselves (Deetlefs et al 1991:12; Hutton 1992:11).

The second problem concerning this definition is that the fact that someone went to school for five years or ten years, tells us very little about what he/she still can do concerning reading and writing skills. The main thing about literacy is that literacy skills are perishable when somebody remains inactive as far as learning is concerned, especially in lower classes (Hutton 1992:11). Deetlefs et al (1991) talk about four broad levels of ABE which are essential for the disadvantaged communities. These are first level literacy, second level literacy, first level post-literacy and second level post-literacy. By post-literacy, they refer to "higher levels of education when people use their skills to gain general information and other skills" (Deetlefs et al 1991:12). They describe these levels as follows:

First level literacy:

- This level has to do with reading and writing in one's mother tongue. It also includes an introduction to numeracy skills. This is for people with less than one year of schooling. The people in this category are totally illiterate on entry.

Second level literacy:

- This level involves the learning to read, speak and write English as a second language. It is for people who have had between one year and four years of formal education. The majority in this group is semi-illiterate in their first language. They are characterised by limited knowledge of English as a second language, and a poor background of general education (Deetlefs et al 1991:9).

First level post-literacy:

- This level involves people with four or five years of schooling. People in this group are technically literate in their first language with basic knowledge in the second language. They are capable of using literacy skills to learn different subjects such as history, basic science and geography up to an equivalent of grade seven.

Second level post-literacy:

- A learner on this level is capable of doing subjects like history, numeracy and practical skills up to an equivalence of the grade nine level. The learner has five to seven years of formal schooling. After completing the second postliteracy level, a learner can join the standard eight (grade 10) class in formal education or study to be an artisan (Deetlefs et al 1991:12).

The various level of literacy provide the framework for the following sections on the personhood and relationships of adult learners.

3.2 UNDERSTANDING ADULT LEARNERS

Understanding adult learners is not easy. So many factors have an influence on adult learners and simplistic generalisations serve little purpose. This can be one of the reasons why efforts exist to group adult learners. In this discussion, two groupings will be discussed by way of examples:

- A grouping according to the learning behaviour of adult learners
- A grouping according to two broad areas of abode of adult learners.

The first grouping is based on the fact that learners have different learning styles. These styles reflect personal characteristics, attitudes toward learning, past experience and how learners have learned to learn. Furthermore, ABE learners should be viewed in the light of difference in culture, occupation, personality, physique, age, level of development, experience, intellectual ability, academic progress, motivation and personal circumstances (Adey, Heese & Le Roux 1990:38).

The second grouping of ABE learners is based on the fact that the environment of the learner has an influence on his/her cognitive development. The exposure to a challenging environment encourages him/her to take further steps towards learning day by day. It broadens the thinking of an individual learner.

3.2.1 Types of adult learners

Endorf and Mcneff (1991:20) divide adult learners into five groups namely

- (a) confident, pragmatic, goal-oriented adult learners;
- (b) affective learners;
- (c) learners-in-transition;
- (d) integrated learners, and
- (e) risk takers.

3.2.1.1 Pragmatic goal-oriented learners

These are self-sufficient learners. They are confident and are eager to work with peers in an academic setting. In this group a support system of peers within the social setting of the institution is unnecessary (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:21). They are selfdirected and introspective. They are in competition with themselves, not with their peers. Their learning style is interactive and experiential. They are not side-tracked in pursuing their goals. They keep their goals in mind. Furthermore, they appreciate having their ideas heard. Realising personal goals is a top priority. They appreciate the utility and purposes of learning (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:21; Walker 1992:28).

3.2.1.2 Affective learners

They respond to the affective element of learning. They enjoy to be with other adults who share similar values and experiences (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:21). They do not like to question a tutor. To them a tutor is a source of knowledge, wisdom and expertise. Education in general is an end in itself. Education does not need to be job-related in these learners (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:21). These learners are willing to take responsibility for their own education and are excited about the environment. They willingly co-operate in meeting a tutor's expectations (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:21).

3.2.1.3 Learners-in-transition

These learners are in a transition state. They are developing independence as learners. They have not yet fully developed their educational goals.

These learners are interested in knowing how to use their education and how to connect their experience with what they are learning in class (Rossman, Fisk & Roehl 1989:32). They are pragmatic in their approach to learning and recognising their educational progress. They enjoy a sense of equality with their tutors. They like discussion and interactive learning. They do not want to be fed with information. Furthermore, they do not regard tutors as experts in all areas (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:22).

3.2.1.4 *Integrated learners*

The perception of these learners is that life and career are integrated rather than separate entities. These learners are interested in personal success and enjoy the accomplishment of new learning. They are relaxed learners, stimulated and satisfied in the association with other adult learners. They feel in control and have a sense of freedom as a result of knowing the techniques for academic success. They can direct energy towards learning and not just to survival in an academic setting (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:23; Rossman et al 1989:16). They understand learning as their own personal responsibility and establish relationships with tutors.

Integrated learners are truly self-directed adults whose educational plans fit into the total picture of their lives. They like to be recognised as meaningful contributors to the process of education. They reject any notion of apprehension about returning to school or to the learning centre. Integrated learners are not the type who will be satisfied as mere receivers of information (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:22; Walker 1992:32).

3.2.1.5 *Risk takers*

These learners are willing to take risks in order to accomplish educational goals. Recognising the need for further education to change jobs, these learners enjoy new ventures and are willing to work hard to meet the goals set by the institution (Quigley 1993:115; Endorf & Mcneff 1991:23). They enjoy the relationship with tutors rather than to rely on support groups. They are sufficiently self-confident to "go it alone". They appreciate the support they receive from the institution and look to tutors for learning and guidance (Endorf & Mcneff 1991:22).

3.2.2 *Adult learners as rural and urban learners*

Unlike urban adults, rural adults often do not value formal education. This attitude originated at a time when the local economy required that even relatively young children be available to work on farms and in the mines (Ferrel & Howley 1991:369; Barker 1985:52). Rural adults usually

spend less time in school than their urban counterparts, hence they may lag behind in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics.

On average, rural adult learners are older than their urban counterparts and have completed fewer years of formal education. In view of that, rural adults are more likely to feel uncomfortable in developing study skills or may lack confidence in their learning ability. They may be fearful of how family members or individuals within the community might react to their interest in education (Barker 1985:5; Ferrel & Howley 1991:367). Unlike urban learners, rural adult learners experience significant barriers such as long distances from the learning centre, lack of prior educational attainment and lack of a counselling service (Easton 1991:63).

For the purposes of this dissertation, the focus will be on ABE learners as individual persons, specifically with reference to their physical, emotional, intellectual and volitional behaviour. Thereafter some essential relationships will be discussed.

3.3 THE PERSONHOOD OF THE LEARNER IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

The circumstances and problems of adult learners are closely related to the physical status and the affective, cognitive, and volitional behaviour of an adult learner. It is therefore imperative that these modalities of behaviour should be discussed.

3.3.1 Physical status and related problems

The following comments apply to the matters regarding physical status and problems in ABE:

- An illiterate adult learner may be affected by the feeling that his or her ability is not what it was and that he or she will encounter difficulties in study programmes (Rogers 1989:53). The old proverb that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks is not only misleading but it is also inappropriate since older people can learn new things just as young people can do. However we cannot deny the fact that learning abilities do decline with age but the rate is negligibly small (Rogers 1989:152).

- It is generally agreed that if there is an age limit for learning performance, it is not likely to occur until the age of 75, when deterioration of the body functions begins to set in. According to Walker (1992:26) and Rogers (1989:10) adults up to the age of late-forty do not undergo dramatic physiological changes which influence learning. Compensation for the gradual decline of learning performance can easily be handled via eye glasses, hearing aids and increased illumination.
- It is true that some illiterate adult learners may feel some loss of confidence as their physical changes increase with age. Research supports the sometimes traumatic effects of ageing (Roger 1991:152). Elevated blood pressure, decreased strength, coronary problems, chronic diseases, the male climacteric menopause and vision problems may all set in during this period.
- The two most vital organs, namely the heart and the brain, receive the most attention in studies of the elderly, since there is a gradual reduction of efficient functioning of these two organs. With increase in stress and sedentary living habits the heart in particular and the cardio vascular system in general may have trouble meeting a sudden and abrupt change. The challenge may result in a stroke or heart attack (Calder 1993:40).
- The ability to assimilate and process information depends on the level of physical health. Physical health and physiological conditions can affect learning and cognition in various ways. For example, inadequate cerebral circulation or stress can impair memory (Jarvis 1990:85).
- Differences among adult learners may be due to physiological changes in hearing or other health factors, rather than to the actual decline in cognitive ability. ABE learners learn very well if they are assured that their cognitive functions do not decline markedly. In fact, it has been demonstrated that reasoning ability continues to increase until the eighth decade, unless health is a factor (Malone 1986:22).

- In an ABE learner, the body has entered a catabolic process. Physical ability peaks between ages 18 and 30, while actual degeneration begins between the ages of 42 and 60.
- There is evidence to support the theory that inactivity in learning, rather than age, is related to the lower learning ability of some older adults. In the research conducted by Rossman et al (1989), it was found that there was a slight decline in learning ability with age for those who had not participated in a learning programme for some time. In contrast, there was no decline in learning ability for those who had recently participated in the ABE programme (Rossman et al 1989:29). The recent participants appeared to have a broader background knowledge and a clearer understanding of such things as tutor style and personal learning objectives (Gartin & Murdick 1992:220).

Problems associated with physical circumstances play an important role in the learning of an illiterate adult learner. Problems of this nature are discussed below.

Adult learners may bring to ABE sessions physical concerns that can impair successful learning. Some ailments will be outside the tutor's responsibilities, for example, adult learners who come to a session after a long day of physical labour. However, if the tutor is aware of learners' circumstances their time together can be made more constructive by centring activities around the adult learners' interests. Furthermore, the problem can be solved to a significant extent by allowing for occasional breaks, being relaxed and making sure that adult learners see some measure of success during the session (Hiemstra 1991:150).

The problem of frequent absence may be caused by a chronic illness, an unstable family situation, job insecurity or child care demands. These absences can be discouraging to a committed tutor. According to Hiemstra (1991), the tutor should try to discover the reasons, either through a telephone call, a visit to the home or conversation with class members who may be acquainted with the adult learner in question (Hiemstra 1991:151).

Physical problems may be caused by strong mental resistance to learning, generally reinforced by years of academic failure which can act as a barrier. For example, one adult under pressure to

achieve a pass in the ABE class developed severe headache. Several doctors maintained that he was in sound health. When the adult learner finished the course successfully, the headache disappeared (Hiemstra 1991:151).

Poor vision and hearing can affect adult learners in various ways. The sharpness of the eyes and ears usually declines with age. Hearing and vision can often be corrected with glasses and hearing aids or simply by carefully choosing where one sits in a class or asking people to speak louder if one cannot hear (Steinback 1993:72). As vision and hearing play an essential role in ABE, some problems in these two sensory areas are mentioned below.

(a) Vision problems

Eighty five percent of all learning occurs through vision (Rossman et al 1989:16). Although the average life span of the eye exceeds life expectancy, there is a steady decrease in the average efficiency of the eye with advancing age. The percentage of the adult population with defective vision shows a sharp increase from 23 percent at the age of 20 to 95 percent at the age of 70 (Rossman et al 1989:16). The near point of vision, the distance from the eye at which an object can be seen clearly, begins to move away from the eye after the age of 10. The most striking change occurs between 45 and 55 years of age. The decrease in vision after or at least at the age of 40 years appears to reflect different changes (Rossman et al 1989:16). The size of the pupil, the pupil diameter, gets smaller when the adult learner becomes older, thus reducing the amount of light reaching the retina. Dark adaptation, i.e. visual sensitivity that occurs after remaining in the dark, decreases. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that the dark-adaptation threshold increases with age (Rossman et al 1989:16). Consequently, illumination needs attention. It is possible to compensate for the changes in pupil size by increasing the amount of light. For a normal learning task an adult at the age of 20 requires 100 watts of illumination but by the age of 50, 180 watts are required for the sake of compensation for pupillary changes (Rossman et al 1989:16). The ability of the eye to respond to a visual stimulus is also affected by the aging process. Thus, not only is more light needed to compensate for the pupillary changes, but it is also needed to compensate for the decrease in visual recognition that accompanies the natural ageing process (Hiemstra 1991:51; Rossman et al 1989:16). Contrast has a pronounced effect upon the

speed of reading. Reading speed is reduced significantly when the words being read are not in sharp contrast with the paper on which they appear.

The ability of the eye to see objects clearly both far and near begins to decrease at about age six and constantly decreases until about the age of 60. After this age it levels off until old age. This occurs due to a loss of elasticity of the lenses of the eyes, causing the lense to have a more fixed focus and reduced ability to adjust to objects close to the eye (Steinback 1993:17; Rossman et al 1989:17).

There are some definite changes due to age insofar as colour vision is concerned. After age 35 more blue light is needed to get a sensation of blue. The loss of yellow-blue discrimination diminishes as one moves towards the red end of the colour spectrum. Thus, after age 35, learning tasks involving colour will need to use strong rather than subtle tints (Rossman et al 1989:17).

Sight plays a vital role in learning, thus ABE tutors should pay due attention to the learning problems caused by defective vision.

(b) Hearing problems

In most people, the trend is such that the peak of hearing performance seems to be reduced before the fifteenth birthday, and there is a consistent gradual decline until about age 65. Furthermore, the loss of hearing efficiency as one ages, is complexed by a slowing of the central hearing process. Individuals respond less quickly to auditory stimuli, as they become older. For this reason many older individuals find it difficult to follow rapid speech, despite little or no hearing loss.

Research has shown that the average hearing loss shows a marked and continuous increase after the age of 45 (Rossman et al 1989:17). The loss of hearing is due to changes in the ear. These changes result in reduced ability to discriminate among sounds, causing impairment in speech discrimination. As one ages, it becomes increasingly more difficult to differentiate between the sound of the letters v, d, b, or p. Between the ages 25 and 55 hearing discrimination decreases

slightly, but after 55 the loss is more dramatic (Rossman et al 1989:18). Hearing loss due to ageing is not equal across all frequencies of sound. It has been proved that most individuals at the age of 40 will show some loss of high-tone perception. Impaired hearing has been found to be more pronounced among men, compared to women (Rossman et al 1989:17).

Hearing long sentences reduces one's ability to recall long sentences. It is therefore recommended that the tutor should use short sentences, especially when giving direction for learning.

This is important when dealing with individuals suffering from a hearing loss, as the inability to hear can produce emotional anxieties, such as fear and insecurity. Thus in turn, an inability to hear can interfere with learning on both a physical and emotional level (Rossman et al 1989:18).

Reaction time, including the time taken to recall information, slows with ageing. However, the decline is very often slow. Reaction speed has been found to increase from early childhood, reach its maximum at about 18 years of age and then significantly decline beyond the forties (Rossman et al 1989:181).

Beyond 40 it may take a little longer to respond to questions, but whatever adults lose in speed is generally made up for in accuracy and quantity of knowledge (Witthaus 1992:72; Steinback 1993:73).

Background noise, other conversation and other activity in the room tend to become more distracting as one ages. The change begins as early as at the age of 30 and becomes more evident as one gets older (Steinback 1993:73).

Hearing loss, if not treated properly, can act as a barrier to ABE learners. This implies that tutors should be well informed about the hearing loss due to aging.

(c) Other health problems

Everyone is susceptible to health problems during adult life and certain illnesses or disabilities are commonly associated with specific stages of human development. A broken bone may be discomfoting and a nuisance for a young adult, but it can be a major handicap for a senior citizen. It is imperative that the tutor should be alert to health-related constraints and the stress they impose on the adult learner (Hiemstra 1991:59).

In a study of problems of older adults in ABE, the major causes of dropout were found to be associated with ill health (Witthaus 1992:40; McKay & Northedge 1995:23). The condition of the mind is related to the condition of the body. Exercise, rest and good nutrition are important to maintain high-functioning memory and thinking skills (Steinback 1993:73).

3.3.2 Affective behaviour and related problems

The following issues regarding affective behaviour and problems of ABE learners are important to the ABE practitioner:

- The main causes of anxiety among adults are awareness of the process of aging, physical tiredness, declining powers of memory and concentration, the fear of failing in front of the group, the attitude of exalting others as better or better educated than oneself, lack of experience by the tutors in knowing how to deal with these problems, and the lack of a support service (Rogers 1989:16; Perin & Greenberg 1994:36). Rossman et al (1989:16) add the following causes of anxiety: the fear of disappointing someone, for example a tutor, and a lack of trust in oneself.
- Adults may be affected by the emotional responses to physiological changes. They tend to become less confident of their own abilities, thus they may take longer to perform familiar tasks (Rossman et al 1989:18).

- Anxiety reaches the highest level during the period of evaluation. The adult learner may perform badly, even if he or she is capable of passing the examination, if he or she has a problem of anxiety. Over-anxious adult learners usually tend to lose self-confidence and become dependent on authority for guidance (Roger 1991:165; Perin & Greenberg 1994:136; Rossman et al 1989:32). Anxiety is lowest when the adult learner is faced with physical tasks (Roger 1991:165).
- Sweating, shaking and other signs of distress are possible signs of anxiety. More usually, anxiety is confined to inner emotions which the learner seeks to hide. The learners avoid the testing situation by either absenting themselves physically or day-dreaming (Roger 1991:165; Jarvis 1990:84; Ferrel & Howley 1991:369).
- Learners will often avoid reading in order to escape the emotional pain associated with previous failure in the reading process. Anxiety regarding reading can result in stress and neuroses that can prohibit adult learners from interacting with written symbols (Gartin & Murdick 1992:222).
- *"Some learners may not have the courage to ask for explanation if they do not understand the subject matter"*. Such learners may pretend that they are listening (McKay & Northedge 1995:31).
- Writing anxiety is largely an adult problem. Children often write stories and essays with less hesitancy than adults. Adult learners are concerned about the quality of writing, about what the audience will think, about whether what they have to say is worth saying (Rossman et al 1989:32; Sommer 1989:18).

Sommer (1989) conducted research about writing anxiety among adult learners. In his research, he posed the following question to three respondents:

When you read something you have written, what is your response to it? List what you like and what you don't like.

The three adult learners responded to the question as follows:

Learner A: *"I don't like reading what I write. I don't even like other people to read what I write. If I had a choice, I would not take a writing course".*

Learner B: *"I am very critical about my writing. Many times I find that my work is dull and lacks life".*

Learner C: *"I always rewrite what I have written, at least a couple of times. I always find errors and room for improvement. I have some difficulty in putting on paper what is in my mind sometimes".*

All three of them indicated anxiety in their writing. They expected to find errors in abundance in their own work. Writing is revealing and leads to exposure of the writer. Situations where learners are exposed to writing and reading contribute to the stress learners associate with writing (Sommer 1989:20). Adults are also more easily frustrated than adolescents. A low sense of self-esteem that is reinforced by the difficulty of the task, the conditioning of prior educational experience and the belief that adults are intrinsically limited in their ability to learn, aggravate the situation (Sommer 1989:28). However, adults have less of a tendency towards rebelliousness, competitiveness and self-indulgence. They are generally more objective and stable (Sommer 1989:22).

- Fear and anxiety are part of writing, but this does not mean that these emotions should dominate the process of learning to write or that a learner cannot gain confidence in his/her work through reinforcement and an atmosphere of support (Sommer 1989:28).
- Many adult learners are worried. There are several reasons for this. Some feel that they are lacking in essential skills. Others feel that they will not be able to cope, that they are getting too old, that they cannot remember or concentrate, and that they are bound to fail (Roger 1991:49).

- The concepts of anxiety and self-concept are closely related. Anxiety stems from a fear of the unknown, a fear of failure and a lack of self-esteem. So often a fear of approaching the first learning experience is exaggerated in the learner's mind (Rossman et al 1989:16). Much of this anxiety is probably derived from school experience in which a major emphasis was placed on achievement as represented by grades rather than on a mastery of the subject matter, or the achievement of goals (Roger 1991:50).
- Women are more fearful than men about tasks such as essay writing at the start of a course. It has been found that prior achievements at school do not strengthen women's confidence when they return to education in later life (Walker 1992:35).
- The previous experience in formal schooling may either inhibit or facilitate learning. For example, if the early school experience was characterised by low achievement and feelings of failure, there is a likelihood that the learner will have no interest in participating in ABE (Wolvin 1991:10). In contrast, early success experience will motivate learners to partake in the ABE programme.
- It may take several years for the negative attitudes to fade and be replaced by the perception of benefits and voluntary participation in education activities.
- Adult learners have often been deeply conditioned by their previous schooling. The perception had been created in the minds of many adult learners that the appropriate role of a learner is that of a dependent, more or less passive recipient of transmitted content or information (Hiemstra 1991:9). Problems arise when tutors take this stance and start treating adult learners as if they are dependent personalities, for such an approach induces an inner conflict within the adult's deep psychological need to be self-directive (Hiemstra 1991:9).
- Most adults approach adult learning activities with specific expectations about what they will gain from the experience. Adults have a strong need to gain new knowledge and skills

in an institutional situation, but only when there is no danger of losing hard-won prestige (Rossman et al 1989:24).

- It is quite common for adult learners to fear that people in the community might laugh at them for attending an ABE class. Adult learners may not want to participate in class because they are afraid that the classmates or even the tutor will laugh at them. Humiliation of a learner by either classmates or a tutor leads to the situation where a learner may decide to drop out. "This occurs when the tutor does not talk to the adult learners as mature adults or the tutor does not treat them as equals" (McKay & Northedge 1995:30).

The ABE practitioner should especially be aware of the following affective problems of ABE learners:

- If the mind of an adult learner is dominated by worries and fear, he/she will not be able to pay attention in class. Fear in itself is a psychic block or barrier. This explains why some learners do not participate in group discussions.
- The fear of being too old may be more pronounced if one older learner is in class with many younger learners or if the tutor is too young compared to the adult learners. The elderly learners do not feel comfortable with, for example, teenagers, and vice versa (McKay & Northedge 1995:31).
- The feeling of low self-esteem and doubts about one's personal ability to succeed academically serve as a block to learning. Many adult learners experience this feeling to such an extent that they fail to cope with work.
- A negative self-concept constitutes the greatest single obstacle to the realisation of a goal. It thwarts motivation. When goals are continually blocked, learners experience disappointment, frustration and anger which is expressed through some form of behaviour. This includes acts of aggression or emotional outbursts (Walker 1992:5).

- Not all adult learners regard themselves as independent, self-directed learners. Those who have not studied for a considerable time may be unsure about themselves and their abilities. Furthermore, they may have a great need for directed and tutor-centred education (Walker 1992:27).
- Female adult learners seem to be more fearful than male adult learners about tasks such as note taking and essay writing at the start of a course. Female adult learners who married young or have been unemployed for a considerable time seem to experience the problem of lack of confidence. It has been found that female adult learners tend to be especially concerned about mathematical skills (Walker 1992:28). If tutors do not deal effectively with these learners, the dropout rate will be significantly increased. One adult learner once said:

I had a teacher that was really giving me problems. He made me hate school and was lashing out at me. I had an option to either drop out or be kicked out (Quigley 1993:105).

The next section elaborates on the intellectual behaviour of the ABE learner.

3.3.3 Cognitive behaviour and related problems

In the adult years, there is a gradual decline in the adult learner's cognitive development due to the decline in the central nervous system. However, performance increases up to the age of 50. The decline is faster if the cognition is not stimulated.

Brundane and Macherarcher (1987) stress that despite this decline, the basic ability to learn remains essentially unimpaired throughout the life span and logic processes improve as one becomes older (Walker 1992:26; Rossman et al 1989:29). Cross-sectional studies of learning ability typically report a decline with age in test performance. Furthermore, cross-sectional research suggests that intelligence peaks between the 20's and early 30's and then declines. On the other hand, longitudinal work reveals a gradual rise in intelligence up to the mid 40's, a

plateau in the 50's and thereafter an increased decline with age (Sutcliff 1990:33; Fry 1992:301). Most intellectually able persons increase their learning abilities more rapidly during adolescence and early adulthood, and then continue to increase it gradually or to maintain their learning ability throughout adulthood and into late life. By contrast, the less intellectually able persons not only increase learning ability more slowly but also reach a lower plateau earlier and decline more rapidly.

A steady decline in performance in intelligence tests occurs with increasing age. The decline in some performance tasks which require high speed, visualisation and perceptual motor skills, provides a useful basis for understanding shifts in the ability to perform various types of intellectual tasks during adulthood and later life. Research has demonstrated the decline in numeracy skills and vocabulary recall scores at the age of sixty (Fry 1992:307; Jarvis 1990:111). According to Jarvis (1990:111), the decline in intellectual functioning among the aged is attributable to poor health, social isolation, economic plight, limited education, low motivation or other variables not intrinsically related to the aging process.

Adult learners want educational experience or knowledge that is related to their job or life situation. They are more interested in applied knowledge than in theory. They enter into a learning situation in a problem-centred frame of mind (Rossman et al 1989:31).

The following remarks are also relevant:

- ABE learners prefer experiential learning, such as group work or team work. In this type of learning, the learner is directly and actively involved in a learning situation which requires some personal restructuring of knowledge. Learners are able to learn from one another (Elsdon 1985:36).
- When ABE learners first enroll for ABE classes, they are just testing the water. If they experience problems, they will quickly withdraw. However, if they find it comfortable, they may stay (Rogers 1989:53).

- Adults do not like competitive class activities. They have a lessened concern for speed in learning since they are more concerned about accuracy. They learn more effectively if they can learn at their own pace (Slotnick 1993:7).
- Adults prefer to use what they have learned as soon as possible. Furthermore, they learn best when they feel a need to learn and when they have a sense of responsibility for what, why and how they learn (Slotnick 1993:10).
- ABE learners learn best when they can find out how well they are progressing. They appreciate reinforcement and praise, as well as immediate recognition for their achievement (Brookfield 1991:25).
- *The beginner learner may feel demoralised if he/she is placed at a level where he/she cannot cope. Furthermore, the more advanced learners may become bored in a class in which only basic skills and competencies are being taught. Both of these cases might make learners drop out of the classes* (McKay & Northedge 1995:23).
- An adult learner is a self-directed problem solver, that is, the learning of adults is self-directed. They learn because they want to, not because someone is pushing them to learn. They are responsible for their own lives (Slotnick 1993:7; Walker 1992:16).
- The youth think of education as an accumulation of knowledge for use in future. In contrast, adults tend to think of learning as a way to become more effective in problem-solving, especially for career enhancement (Walker 1992:91).
- The adult learners' level of readiness to learn is related to the developmental phase in their life cycle. For example, when people enter the labour market, their first developmental task is to find jobs and they are ready to learn skills required to master the job. As they continue to climb the occupational ladder, their developmental tasks change and they develop a need for management training (Knowles 1990:51; Walker 1992:28).
- It has been found that adult life is characterised by moments of stability, growth, order and periods of change. The most meaningful learning mostly occurs in the period of change, when people prepare themselves to adapt to change (Walker 1992:28; Knowles 1990:32).
- Most purposeful learning by an ABE learner occurs as a result of his/her purposeful attention to information. The learner attends to information in many ways, such as looking at a display, reading a book, through a discerning attitude and by listening to a presentation or discussion (Rossman et al 1989:36, Jarvis 1990:68).

- A change in presentation stimulus overcomes the problem of attention decline. In an expository discourse, the problem of attention decline may be solved by using various media such as slides, short films, class discussions and individual written tasks (Jarvis 1990:26). Sustained attention also improves adult learners' memory.
- There are three phases in the adult learner's memory, namely registration, retention and recall. Registration includes exposure to the stimulus or information, the acquisition of information and the electrochemical process by which the information is encoded in the brain. Retention includes the persistence or decay of the neural traces that are encoded. Recall involves the searching and retrieval process by which the individual recovers or remembers the information (Rossman et al 1989:37). Advancing age is proportionally related to an increase in registration deficit. If the material is not meaningful and the criterion for acquisition is a fixed number or trial, there is a marked decline in retention (Rossman et al 1989:37). If the material is meaningful, then its recall or retrieval improves. Furthermore, when the recall conditions are very similar to those under which the original registration occurs, the recall or retrieval of information improves. In general, there is a gradual decline in recall ability during adulthood (Calder 1993:11; Rossman et al 1989:37).

Various recent studies have been successful in showing that intellectual and cognitive decline in old age is not necessarily irreversible (Fry 1992:30). Evidence exists that positive cognitive developmental changes are evident into late adulthood. Many researchers agree that these observed intellectual functioning changes originate from the changes of fluid and crystallised intelligence, as well as other related factors (Jarvis 1990:112; Fry 1992:302; Walker 1992:6).

For the purposes of this study a discussion of the following six factors pertaining to cognitive functioning, namely fluid intelligence, crystallised intelligence, practical intelligence, plasticity of intelligence, social class level and personality (Fry 1992:309; Rogers 1989:180; Jarvis 1990:12; Rossman et al 1989:37), is necessary.

Fluid intelligence in an ABE learner consists of the ability to perceive complex relations and to engage in short-term memory. It also involves the ability for concept formation, verbal and

inductive reasoning, and abstraction. This type of intelligence is relatively formless and independent of experience and education. It can “*flow into*” various intellectual activities (Fry 1992:307).

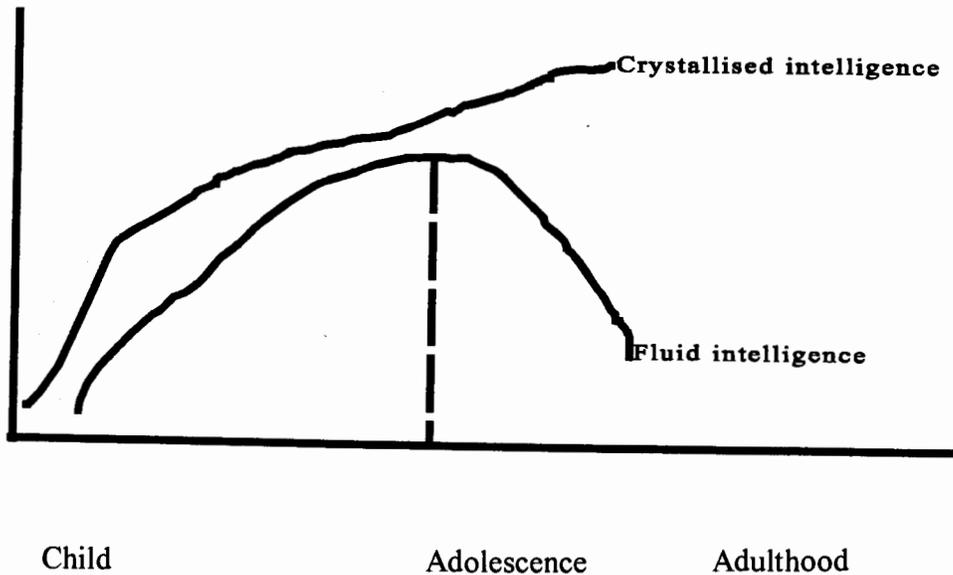
On the other hand, crystallised intelligence is affected by education and the environment and is largely a function of experience and knowledge of the intellectual and cultural heritage of society. It is based on acculturation (Fry 1992:309). Carolyn (1991:40) summarised her views on crystallised intelligence as follows:

Crystallised intelligence consists of the ability to perceive relations and to engage in formal reasoning and abstraction based on familiarity with knowledge of the intellectual and cultural heritage.

Examples of abilities associated with crystallised intelligence are the following: general information, vocabulary, practical reasoning, numeracy reasoning and individuals’ ability to abstract information from the social and physical environment (Fry 1992:304).

Both fluid and crystallised intelligence increase from childhood to adolescence. However, fluid intelligence tends to peak during adolescence and to decline gradually during adulthood. On the other hand, crystallised intelligence increases throughout almost the entire period of development from childhood to late maturity. This information can be expressed graphically as follows (see Figure 3.1):

FIGURE 3.1



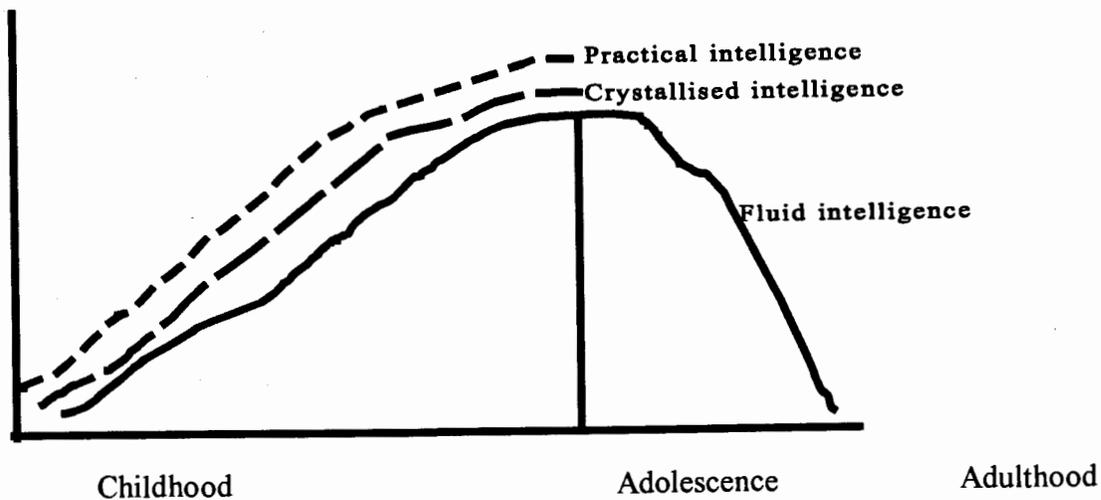
Fry (1992:310)

It does not mean that these changes can be easily observed, because an ABE learner is capable of compensating for the decline in fluid intelligence by greater reliance on crystallised intelligence. It is therefore obvious that while fluid intelligence decreases and crystallised intelligence increases, general learning ability remains relatively stable (Fry 1992:310).

The third factor that influences learning ability is practical intelligence. This is more related to crystallised intelligence which reaches a peak in adulthood. Practical intelligence determines the ABE learner's performance in every day tasks of life. It is stable till later life. In later life the continued growth of crystallised and practical intelligence depends predominantly on the adult learner's level of motivation for information retrieval and educational activity (Fry 1992:310).

The profiles of the first three factors can be demonstrated graphically as follows (see Figure 3.2).

FIGURE 3.2



Fry (1992:310)

Some researchers believe that crystallised intelligence increases up to about the age of 60. Beyond that age, it seems to depend a great deal on what an ABE learner is doing. Those actively involved in intellectual pursuit maintain and even increase the abilities that are more clearly related to acculturation (Jarvis 1990:85).

The fourth factor that influences the learning ability of an ABE learner is the plasticity of intelligence. This factor suggests that much of the loss in cognitive performance and fluid ability associated with age is reversible and that, given appropriate training conditions and interventions, the cognitive performance of an ABE learner can be restored to its previous level of competence (Fry 1992:311). It has been discovered recently that most illiterate adult learners in their fifties

have about the same ability to learn as they had in their twenties, if they can control the pace of learning (Jarvis 1990:85).

The decline in learning ability may appear during the sixties and beyond. However, most ABE learners can learn almost anything they want to if they are sufficiently motivated and willing to persist. The exception to this is when some ABE learners experience a terminal decline in health that greatly reduces the ability to remember and learn (Fry 1992:3 12).

The fifth factor is the social class level and the level of education attained. As each recent generation attained a higher level of formal and informal education, the performance on tests of learning ability has been increasingly higher in young adulthood, and has maintained the relative advantage at successive ages (Jarvis 1990:112).

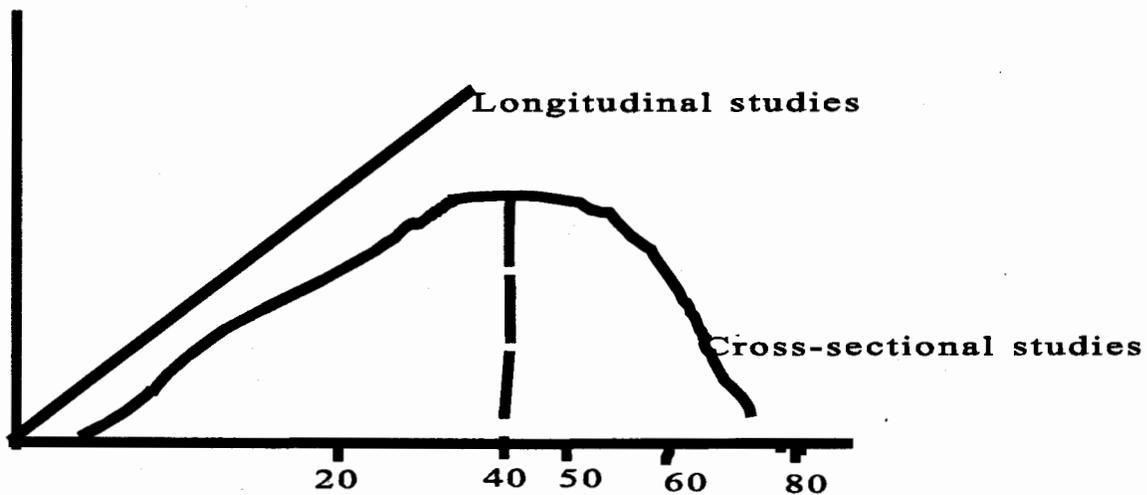
The last factor is personality. ABE learners generally compensate for their loss of quickness by increased attention to accuracy. They show more task orientation than young learners, with a desire to do the job right and a reluctance to suffer a blow to self-esteem by being proved wrong (Rogers 1989:180). Consequently, an ABE learner will operate with greater skills and deliberations than a young learner, who may need to try out several approaches before finding one that works. However, the superior experience and knowledge of adults may make them more reluctant to take risks and explore new approaches (Jarvis 1990:113). Fry (1992:312) views the personality factor in a different perspective. According to him, each engagement in a complex or too challenging activity or feeling of hopelessness and defensiveness arising from social rejection and discrimination can discourage an ABE learner from trying something new (Fry 1992:312).

Problems associated with intellectual behaviour play a key role in jeopardizing the chances of learning among ABE learners. The following comments apply:

- The performance in different academic subjects changes with age. There is a progressive improvement in achievement in the humanities, social sciences and History and a general decline in Mathematics and Natural sciences (Rossman et al 1989:29).

- Memory also changes with age. In the later years memory traces are harder to retrieve as other information intervenes.
- The average mature person takes relatively longer to think and to respond, generally needing more time to assimilate and accommodate new learning content (Walker 1992:26).
- The problems of life that one faces do not disappear when one is engaged in an educational endeavour and will undoubtedly affect learning factors such as retention, interest and comprehension (Rossman et al 1989:29).
- According to Rossman et al (1989:29), there is evidence to support the theory that inactivity in learning, rather than age, is related to the lower learning ability of some older adults. Thus the adult level of education, as well as the recency of participation in an educational activity, appear to be related to the ability to learn.
- The results of longitudinal studies show a significant decline in verbal performance scores between the ages of 60 and 70 and demonstrate further decline in verbal tasks for the age 70 to 80 years (Fry 1992:307).
- Aging is associated with a general reduction in working memory capacity and a reduction in the cognitive resources. However, although some cognitive abilities degenerate with age, only five percent of the population at the age of 65 years and older has become frail enough to require residential care (Gibbons, Reed & Holt 1992:94).
- Generally speaking, the intellectual abilities and learning effectiveness of older persons are not merely genetically programmed, but are influenced by exogenous factors such as self-knowledge, motivation and expectation (Fry 1992:305).
- Cross-sectional studies of learning ability reported a typical decline in a test programme, while longitudinal studies depict the opposite of this behaviour. The relationship between learning ability and age based on the cross-sectional studies is represented by the lower trend in the graph below (Figure 3.3). By comparison, longitudinal studies of learning ability, based mainly on re-administration of intelligence tests, indicate a high degree of stability between 20 and 50 years of age (Fry 1992:305).

FIGURE 3.3



Fry (1992:305)

Through using a combination of cross-sectional and longitudinal data, a linear decrement in primary mental abilities scores, starting from young adulthood and ending with substantial decrement beyond the age of 67, has been demonstrated (Fry 1992:308).

- Many older learners undoubtedly acquire a broad understanding of day-to-day tasks, but unfamiliar and complex learning tasks are frequently confusing for older learners who, under the circumstances, may attempt to extract meaning from the unfamiliar task by misperception. It has been demonstrated that the tendency for perceptual distortion increases with age (Fry 1992:314).
- Memory capacity decreases in older adults if manipulation of information or division of attention during information input, is required. Morris and Guca (1989) confirmed a

noticeable decline in working memory with ageing (Fry 1992:314). Their studies suggested that the older adults' difficulty has primarily been in the processing aspects of working memory rather than in storage aspects. Ageing is associated with a general reduction in working memory capacity and a reduction in the cognitive process (Fry 1992:315).

There are clear indications of some deterioration in problem-solving performance with age. Some proportion of this decline may reflect cohort differences, implying that older adults may not have been exposed in their youth to the more scientific problem-solving approach stressed in current education performance (Fry 1992:316).

It has been acknowledged that there are several dimensions of less effective problem-solving strategies that characterise the older learner, and which need to be redressed or remediated. Principal among these are the following:

- *“a tendency of older adults to continue to rely on concepts and strategies that may have been effective in problem solution in the past but are currently ineffective;*
- *a tendency to stay with familiar problem solutions easily accessible in the mental repertoire, instead of generating novel solutions;*
- *a tendency to rely on long-term memory for prepared problem solutions rather than searching for new and relevant information”* (Fry 1992:316).

In summary: Since the extent of susceptibility to distraction and cognitive interference increases with age, older learners experience more difficulty in complex problem-solving tasks, requiring concentration on multiple dimensions of the tasks. If the rate of exposure is too fast or too slow, there is increasingly more forgetting among adult learners. The use of practice and rehearsal is used to prevent this problem (Fry 1992:3 18).

However, elderly persons often have negative self-conceptions of ageing and memory loss, and are thus prone to sabotaging their own learning potentials.

The understanding of cognitive problems in ABE will enable tutors to eliminate disappointment and discouragement among adult learners. Any ABE practitioner should be able to understand the influence of the above mentioned factors affecting the cognitive behaviour of the adult learner. The knowledge of these factors will enable the ABE practitioner to develop new skills in giving guidance to an adult learner.

3.3.4 Volitional behaviour and related problems

The role of volition in adult learning also requires attention. In this section matters such as adult learners' motivation, participation and involvement will be discussed.

Motivation is extremely complex and not often fully understood. It is best seen within the framework of an adult's needs, goals, habits, values and self-concepts (Rossman et al 1989:23).

The ABE learner's willingness to engage in learning depends upon factors such as the perception of the value of learning, the acceptance of what and how to learn, the need for self-esteem or social affiliation with others, and expectations from life (Rossman et al 1989:23).

Crous, Lessing, Mellet, Nieuwoudt and Van Rensburg (1989:171) view motivation as an intentional action which provides meaning, undertaken by adult learners under their tutors' guidance so as to eradicate perceived discrepancies between their self-concepts and their adequate selves. It is observable by the intensity of the learners' involvement in the relevant actions.

An ABE learner can either be intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated. The former implies that adults learn under pressure due to an external stimulus or stimuli, such as examinations, rewards and social recognition (Crous et al 1989:175). Research has shown that intrinsic motivation is far more important than extrinsic motivation, especially when dealing with ABE learners. For this reason the andragogical focus mostly is on intrinsic motivational factors. An ABE learner will generally be more motivated if the tutor assists the learner to recognise the personal value of the material being presented (Rossman et al 1989:23). ABE learners generally enter a learning centre with a high degree of readiness to learn. However, ABE learners prefer

answers that are practical and relevant. If ABE learners see that relevant knowledge can be gained from activities in ABE or developmental education programmes, they are more likely to participate. The intensity of motives will deepen. In contrast, if irrelevant knowledge is gained, they will drop out. The intensity of motives will lessen (Rossman et al 1989:22; Malicky & Norman 1996:144).

Knowledge of the "*teachable moment*", a moment of readiness, is very important when one teaches adults. A teachable moment refers to a moment when the learner has a need for a skill or knowledge that will help to solve a life problem (Rossman et al 1989:28). ABE learners are not always interested in total involvement in each instructional situation in which they take part. They are rather inclined to distribute their energy according to the kind and amount of learning they feel would be most beneficial to them at the time and in the future (Malicky & Norman 1996:144; Rossman et al 1989:23).

Intrinsic factors such as the following might encourage learners to get involved in ABE:

- Knowledge of other previously illiterate adults who have achieved success through ABE.
- Earlier exposure to written language or observable models of functional literacy.

This does not mean that extrinsic motivational factors such as the following are insignificant:

- Children who need help with their homework.
- Geographical mobility that creates the need for written communication.
- Availability of easy and useful reading material.
- Literacy integration into ongoing development projects aimed at solving felt basic needs.
- Social pressure.
- Democratic, open and involved attitudes on the part of literacy tutors, as opposed to discouraging, superior and patronising attitudes (Lind 1988:150).
- Salary increase (Slotnick 1993:7).

The following considerations are also important:

- An adult learns better if it has been spelt out in explicit terms what he/she should be able to accomplish at the end of the learning task. The following serves as an example:

This course will provide participants, who have a basic proficiency in photographic principles, with knowledge of photographic chemistry for black and white and colour film processing and printing (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:3).

- Neglecting opportunities for questions, small group discussions, buzz group activity, and attempts to make a connection between learners' experience and the content, is poor facilitation (Brookfield 1991:12).
- The voluntary nature of ABE learners' involvement can easily be hampered if learners feel that ABE classes do not meet their needs. The same holds true if ABE learners feel that they are being treated in a humiliating or insulting manner (Brookfield 1991:12).

The problems associated with intellectual behaviour are closely associated with volitional behaviour problems. Some of the problems associated with volitional behaviour are discussed below.

Tobias (1991:403) found that, compared to younger adults, older adults are less likely to participate in learning activities, irrespective of the type of learning programme. Like schooling, age exerts effects on participation that are independent of other variables such as income and occupation. Roger (1991:14) supports Tobias (1991) as follows: "*The participation rate for older people is substantially lower than that for younger adults*". Those who do participate, undertake relatively fewer learning activities.

However, adult learners often know what they want. They are willing to work hard to get it. If the goal is too remote, motivation weakens. There are also other factors which demotivate the adult learner, such as bad teaching styles, bad relations with the tutor or with other learners, and bad working conditions. The effects of these factors tend to last a long time. The most important factor in motivating learners is the attitude of the tutor. In a situation where learners are perceived as

lazy, unintelligent, reluctant and unable to learn, constructive learning will not materialise. All that is needed, is motivation (Roger 1991:14).

The condition of poverty in rural areas, lack of self-confidence, disillusion regarding the benefits of literacy, discouraging teaching methods and the lack of easy and useful reading materials are factors that contribute to low attendance and weak motivation (Lind 1988:150).

A conducive climate for learning is the basic requirement in the ABE classroom. It implies issues like a good relationship between the learner and the tutor, good teaching styles and mutual understanding among learners. These conditions motivate ABE learners to be more determined in their participation.

In conclusion: An adult learner is motivated to participate in the ABE programme by the personal and contextual circumstances in which he/she finds himself or herself. An adult learner usually participates in ABE with the aim of improving his/her standard of living.

The discussion of the personhood of the ABE learner provides the necessary background for dealing with the ABE learning context in terms of relationships. The next section elucidates the ABE learner's relationship with the physical environment, the tutor, the learning content, the self, and family and friends.

3.4 THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE LEARNER IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

3.4.1 Relationship with the physical environment

Adults are more likely to be influenced by their surroundings than children and their motivation may be increased through adequate space, appealing decoration and usable furnishings (Hiemstra 1991:18).

There are various models which can be used to describe the effects of physical environment on ABE, for example the psychological model, the sociological model, the architectural model and

depend on the relationships of the interacting individuals, how they feel and what they are doing. Adults who are eager to participate will locate themselves in the optimum participation location (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:188, Hiemstra 1991:18).

One adult learner told me that he sits in the row farthest away from the tutor so that he will not be called on.

Another learner once spoke of an uneasiness when the tutor paced the floor nearby the learner's seat (Hiemstra 1991:27).

In a room where chairs are arranged in straight rows and lined up behind each other, the message is given that adult learners should not interact with each other but should focus their attention only on the tutor. This arrangement is known as the sociofugal seating arrangement. It may be counterproductive in adult education settings.

The opposite of the sociofugal seating arrangement is the sociopetal seating arrangement. The latter facilitates face-to-face sightlines among learners and enhances participation and interaction in the classroom. In the sociopetal pattern, chairs are arranged in a circular or semi-circular setting. This pattern is more appropriate for adult learners because most of them associate the sociofugal seating arrangement with childhood and passivity (Hiemstra 1991:17; Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:188).

One of the reasons for using the sociopetal seating arrangement, especially in large groups, is that it brings more people closer to the heart of the teaching action; it also creates much better sightlines.

Physical elevation of the tutor can create better sightlines for learners, however its disadvantage is that an elevated platform can suggest a hierarchy in the learning environment, one in which the tutor is presented as the only source of knowledge in the room (Hiemstra 1991:28; Brookfield 1991:12).

General estimates indicate that while about 75% of learning is accounted for by motivation, meaningfulness and memory, the remaining 25% is dependent upon the effects of the physical environment (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:186). The following comments apply:

- Older learners prefer to sit alone or with other older learners. Ethnicity also influences some aspects of learning. For example, learners of the same ethnic group tend to sit together and avoid interaction with other ethnic groups (Dirkx & Spurgin 1992:32).
- Learning may be affected by classroom temperature. A high temperature or too low a temperature may impede the concentration of the adult learners (Calder 1993:87).
- Bad illumination, as well as disturbing sounds or movements provide barriers in which the chances for effective learning are decreased. ABE learners who have sight problems in a class with poor light may not be able to see what is written on the board. Learners sometimes are shy and they may not be able to state their problems of sight. It is the duty of the tutor to see to it that there is good light in the classroom (Calder 1993:87).
- The chairs and desks pose serious problems to the learning if they are small. It is demeaning to ask adults to squeeze into chairs and desks meant for elementary school children. Evidently adults are physically uncomfortable in child size furniture. Furthermore, a seat which is not flat may cause problems because of the varied conformation of human buttocks and perineal regions, as well as difficulties in changing position in a shaped seat (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:187). A seat that will not enable a person to maintain a good posture, will cause overstrain of any particular group of muscles and cause fatigue. A space for easement to maintain the best sitting posture for a lengthy period is essential (Hiemstra 1991:18).

In sum: Adults are psychologically uncomfortable in traditional classroom settings which emphasise the psychological distance and inequality between the tutor and the learner (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:186). The sociopetal seating arrangement without a lectern in front is probably the best conducive seating arrangement for adult learners. Many building interior and furnishing designs inhibit mobility and accessibility for handicapped and elderly learners (Hiemstra 1991:18). Fixed furniture can actually inhibit social interaction and classrooms with seats bolted to the floor are good for maintenance but are not very good for learning activities other than

lectures. Such a setting does not stimulate growth (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:189). Concern for the older learners and the physiological changes of aging have led some adult educators to recommend changes in the physical environment to compensate for learner deficiencies (Hiemstra 1991:18). Recommendations include that seats bolted to the floor should never be used in ABE classes. A sociopetal instead of a sociofugal seating arrangement should be used, incorporating normal chairs and desks instead of child size furniture.

3.4.2 Relationship with the tutor

The relationship between the adult learner and the tutor can either have positive or negative effects in learning. According to Quigley (1992a:25) many adult learners drop out because of their relationship with the tutor in the classroom. A tutor with a good approach and good skills in motivating adult learners has a positive learning influence on learners.

Paulo Freire, considered to be one of the world's experts in adult education, once said:

The tutor's relationships with the learners, and the teaching methods he/she uses should break with traditional attitudes and practices (Wedepohl 1988:38).

In the old-fashioned way of teaching, the tutor is an authoritative figure. She/he is seen as superior, the learner as inferior. The tutor knows everything, the learner knows nothing. The learner should accept what she/he is told without questioning it. Learners have no say in their education.

This traditional model of education keeps people passive, dependent and helpless (Wedepohl 1988:40). Paulo Freire suggested a problem-solving way of learning as being the best approach to be used in ABE. In this approach tutors and learners come together as equals. They learn by talking together openly. The learners have a voice. The content of education is not imposed from outside. The learner's own life experiences and problems are the starting point of class discussion. Tutors and learners work together to find the solution to their problems. A tutor learns as much from the learners as they do from the tutor. Once the problems have been identified, the tutor and

learners decide together how they can act to change the situation (Wedepohl 1988:46). The cooperation of the two parties helps learners to figure out their problems and to work towards the common goal.

On the other hand, if the tutor is authoritative and “superior”, the learners’ confidence in their ability to take the lead themselves is weakened. In this tutor-learner relationship, there is limited dialogue. Dialogue, however, is the major element of successful teaching in ABE (Wedepohl 1988:43).

The tutor’s leadership role performs an important part in creating and maintaining an optimal social environment. The adult-adult relationship is very important in ABE. One way to foster a good adult-adult relationship is to permit learners to bring their other life roles, especially those roles to which the learning applies, into the learning situation (Quigley 1992a:25). Without a constructive adult-adult relationship, crucial elements of these outside experiences may go unstated and the possibility of significant learning will be lessened. No tutor can be successful in ABE without including learners’ experiences in learning activities (Quigley 1992a:25).

According to Calder (1993:9), the tutor should sense and respond positively to learners’ initial expressions of preference for, or dissatisfaction with the learning procedure, as well as cues. This should take place over and above the teaching-learning episode that reflects satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

An ABE learner will be responsive if a tutor uses informal conversation to obtain sufficient information regarding the participants’ background, for example on educational level, recent relevant experience, educative activity, related proficiency and interests (Calder 1993:6). An understanding of various motives and expectations that adults bring to ABE activities is very important. It enables tutors to identify more readily the important reasons for participation in specific programmes and then to modify the programmes, if necessary. For example, if some participants are interested in formal conversation with other participants, this can be accommodated through small group discussions (Quigley 1992a:26).

A successful tutor respects, trusts and believes in his/her learners and also respects their language and culture (Wedepohl 1988:43). ABE learners accept a tutor who is able to respond with sympathy and understanding, patience and concern, and can communicate, using a variety of methods, techniques and devices designed to help adult learners (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:185). It is important that tutors should be alert to their own reactions that might indicate prejudice, superiority, condescension or a patronising manner (Quigley 1992a:26).

It is true that a small percentage of adults cannot learn without direct guidance from the authority figure. This means that such people should be assisted in seeking learning opportunities that include guidance of that nature (Quigley 1992a:26).

Any tutor who behaves in a manner that is disrespectful to the learners, denigrates their contribution or embarrasses them publicly through extended attention to their failings, will not be acceptable to ABE learners. Such behaviour is educationally disastrous (Brookfield 1991:13).

Tutors frequently find themselves drawn more deeply into the learners' lives.

As this happens, they often feel the need to make choices, for examples between helping a learner with a maths problem or listening to stories of physical abuse, frustrated dealing with social service agencies or resistant and worrisome health problems (Dirkx, Fonfara & Flask 1993:51).

Few tutors have theoretical knowledge of ABE learning as gained through an ABET certificate or diploma courses. The majority of tutors are without andragogical skills. However, tutors are in the forefront in the struggle against illiteracy. They are expected to be armed with the appropriate skills of teaching adults, otherwise they will indeed contribute to the problem of illiteracy by demotivating ABE learners.

Most tutors are recruited and placed in classes without a formal interview and with only a vague idea of what is expected of them. School teachers employed as tutors are inclined to use a child-centred approach when teaching adults. They do not realise that adults need to be treated

differently (Wedepohl 1988:33). Consequently, many tutors teach the adult learners the way they were taught when they entered school. They may think that the learners know nothing and they must tell them everything. They may let learners read words and sentences which do not make sense and which are totally irrelevant to the learners' own lives. They do not understand what happens when one reads and what therefore works best (Wedepohl 1988:37). Furthermore, some tutors laugh when an adult learner makes a mistake. This behaviour creates a serious problem in the learning situation (Wedepohl 1988:33).

The following considerations are also relevant:

- The attitude of the tutor may cause learners not to like the programme. This happens when tutors speak to the learners in such a way that they embarrass learners or when learners are treated poorly and are constantly reprimanded (Nwakeze & Seller 1993:18). Wedepohl (1988:44) illustrates a bad attitude of a tutor to the learning situation by referring to an ill-trained tutor who had the idea that she should "baby treat" the adult learners. The example concerned a health worker who was teaching basic health care to a group of mothers. She lectured to them as follows:

Your children get sick because of your own dirty habits. Of course you don't mean any harm, you just do not know any better. But I will tell you what to do, so listen carefully.

- (i) *Boil water*
- (ii) *Build latrines*
- (iii) *Wash your hands before you handle food*
- (iv) *Wash food (Wedepohl 1988:44)*

This kind of teaching belittles the mothers and they feel ashamed and hopeless. If a tutor wears a uniform which separates her from the mothers and makes her to appear as if she were superior, it could give her outside authority. This may strengthen people's respect

for her, but it could also weaken their confidence in their own ability to take the lead themselves (Wedepohl 1988:44).

- If a tutor does not build on the adult learners' experience, the learner could be discouraged. This is aggravated if tutors do not involve learners in deciding what to learn and how to learn it (Hutton 1992:2).
- The lack of consultation with the learners may be a problem. If a tutor uses a top-down approach, that action may lead to confusion, resentment and even resistance and failure on the part of the adult learners (Hutton 1992:12).
- When tutors doubt their own worthiness and role as facilitators, they are likely to be unable to foster positive self-concepts in their adult learners (Rossman et al 1989:36).
- There should be a firm sense of boundaries between the learners and the tutors. If these boundaries are unclear, a tutor may respond to his/her learners by either overidentification with them, or by demonstrating an unwillingness to attend to more personal issues. Overidentification may result in a confusing and potentially dangerous blurring of professional roles. However, being unwilling to attend (albeit selectively) to learners' personal issues may inadvertently communicate a lack of care or concern for the learners' lives (Dirkx et al 1993:54). A tutor with adequate boundary awareness is able to move freely in and out of the lives of others without losing a sense of self.
- Many adults attend ABE classes within the sociocultural and psycho-social contexts of poverty, underemployment or unemployment, physical and emotional abuse, dysfunctional families and severe health problems. Tutors' ignorance of these problems may result in learners leaving the programme (Dirkx et al 1993:54).

Evidently, the tutor plays a crucial role in sustaining adult learners' participation in ABE classes. If a tutor does not have appropriate skills in tutoring ABE learners, he/she may demotivate ABE learners to such an extent that they drop out.

3.4.3 Relationship with the learning content

Learning content refers to the whole corpus of knowledge and skills used to empower ABE learners. The type of the learning content is very important, as is the way in which it is presented.

The readability of the material to be used in the didactic environment is very important. Difficult learning content may discourage adult learners. Learning content which is at the level of adult learners promotes and strengthens the desire to learn.

Many decisions have to be made and careful planning has to be done before the introduction of a learning programme. Such planning involves matters like identifying desired learning competencies, determining associated requirements and acquiring the necessary learning resources, such as books, articles and audio-visual materials (Hiemstra 1991:45).

A useful device for organising the various learning materials is a workbook or study guide. A workbook or study guide provides *inter alia* for an orientation to the course, the syllabus, descriptions of suggested requirements and outcomes, simulation studies, skills-based learning activities and functional reading activities (Hiemstra 1991:45).

Tobias (1991:410) conducted a study to find out which subjects older ABE learners prefer to study in comparison to younger adults. He also wanted to identify reasons why older people engage in learning activities. He found that the most common fields of learning were related to crafts, hobbies, sports and physical recreation, as well as cultural, political, social and trade union matters. Furthermore, they expressed interest in general education which includes literacy, numeracy, language, philosophy and the natural and social sciences necessary to obtain a school certificate (Tobias 1991:410). The reasons given for participation in the formal education programmes were the following: To make contributions to their communities, to spend their spare time in a more enjoyable manner, to learn more about their special interests and to be vocationally educated (Tobias 1991:412). Younger adults prefer to participate in vocational activities and to be vocationally better educated.

Lurie (1990:26) states the following principle concerning ABE learning content:

What adults learn, should relate directly to their own lives. If adults are to be motivated and learning is to be meaningful, the content of the programme should be relevant and useful .

A good starting point in curriculum design concerns the identification of specific learning goals with reference to the difficulties and interests of the individual and the communities in which adult learners live (Lurie 1990:26). Carns, Payne, Carns, Lyman, Raffield & Wooley (1995:166) put it as follows:

Adult learners choose to attend programmes which will help them to meet a variety of goals.

The priorities among these are mostly to increase employability, to become eligible for promotion, to become more active in the education of one's children and to be a better educational achievement role model for one's children.

What adult learners learn should have meaning, make sense to them, be useful to them and help them deal with life's problems (Wedepohl 1988:60). One needs to learn about people's lives before starting to teach them. Wedepohl (1988:60) also states that the learning material should build on what learners already know; what knowledge and skills learners already have.

It is recommended that adult learners should be involved in deciding and planning what, why and how they will learn, as opposed to traditional programmes where decisions on what to learn are made outside the community concerned (Lurie 1990:26).

The following comments also apply:

- In the ABE programmes for the private sector, there is little uniformity in the content offered. Each literacy centre decides for itself what to cover in the course.

- Lind (1988:151) found that discouraging teaching methods and the lack of easy and useful reading material are factors that cause low attendance and weak motivation.
- “The learning materials and curricula used in the adult night schools had been designed for children, not adults” (Favish & Omar 1995:3). This type of education often focuses on teaching learners a great deal of information or factual content from different subjects with a view to examinations. In such cases the adult learner tries to cope through rote learning. Examinations often emphasise mechanical memorisation and not functional outcomes (Favish & Omar 1995:8).
- It has been mentioned that a large percentage of adult learners drop out because of irrelevant learning material (Quigley 1993:79). One learner once said:

We need day-to-day life experiences taught to us, like going to the bank, filling in forms and going to the library. Everything that people take for granted is needed. We need to know how much does a shirt cost if it is written 20% off (Nwakeze & Seller 1993:18).

- Adult learners prefer a curriculum that is learner-centred with learning opportunities capitalising on the learners’ experiences.

It is unfortunate that the curriculum for the workers in the private sector centres does not provide people with a deep understanding of the world of work and production, other necessary knowledge and technical, analytical, logical and organisational skills to operate more creatively and independently (NEPI 1992:263).

Instead it focuses on the development of life skills, attitudes and behaviour. In this situation workers are deprived of the opportunity to acquire a solid formative education (NEPI 1992:263).

It is essential that ABE learners should be taught relevant learning content because if they find that the learning content is not relevant they tend to be reluctant to participate. For example, numeracy helps them to make family budgets, while the European history seems to serve little or

no purpose at all. The presentation of the lesson should be done in such a way that it motivates learners. Self-directed learning should always be promoted.

In sum: An inability to comprehend or cope with the printed material oppresses the illiterate adult. Frequently, printed material is regarded as a threat and a constant reminder of one's inadequacy (Wedepohl 1988:12). Mastering the printed material demystifies this threat and contributes to a growth in self-confidence.

3.4.4 Relationship with the self

An ABE learner has unique characteristics which distinguish him/her from children as learners. Any individual who embarks on a study of adult learners with the aim of focussing on the learner's behaviour, should consider these characteristics beforehand. The learner's behaviour is shaped by the rich experiences gained in everyday life. These determine an individuals' self-concept.

Self-concept is formed by the perceptions, ideas and feelings that people have about themselves. Rossman et al (1989:34) comment as follows: "Self-concepts are created through interaction with others and experiences in society". Self-concept is framed during early childhood years, but will change throughout a person's lifetime. It is a person's total appraisal of his/her appearance, background and origins, abilities, resources and feelings that culminate as directing forces in behaviour (Rossman et al 1989:34).

In an adult learner the self-concept influences behaviour patterns and adjustments. The degree of success in life experiences will determine how individuals feel about themselves (Quigley 1992b:104). An adult learner who is able to deal effectively with failure, has essentially a high positive self-concept. Such an individual possesses confidence, dignity, self-respect and good personality integration. She/he appreciates her/his own merits, yet acknowledges her/his faults. Conversely, an adult learner with low or negative self-concept lacks confidence and has low expectations and a general feeling of inadequacy. Since there is usually no general societal interest in ABE and developmental education programmes, it is not surprising that the self-concept of

ABE learners is generally low (Rossman et al 1989:35). Women especially often hold themselves in low esteem and underestimate their abilities. This may be due to negative stereo-typing, and the frequent dismissal of women's capabilities, potential and accomplishments as inferior (Lurie 1990:26; Rossman et al 1989:35). The tutor should be able to cope with this problem of the lack of self-confidence among learners, especially female learners. Furthermore, it is important for tutors to remember that many ABE learners may be dropouts psychologically long before they become dropouts physically.

ABE learning programmes should provide opportunities to ABE learners to experience success. Otherwise learners will develop a low or negative self-concept and a lack of self-confidence. Furthermore, if adult learners experience failure after failure, it can be expected that sooner or later they will come to believe that they are failures themselves, and will behave accordingly.

The self-concept may be changed by gaining positive experiences. It is therefore recommended that tutors should present adult learners with success experiences that counter the negativism caused by a poor self-concept. To put it differently, adult learners should initially be given work which they can accomplish with ease. Even the first test should be such that learners will develop self-confidence. Each adult learner should be viewed as a unique person with unique potential problems, concerns and feelings (Rossman et al 1989:35).

An ABE learner's concept of self-directivity could be in direct conflict with the traditional practice of the tutor telling the learners what they need to learn. It is for this reason that in ABE, great emphasis is placed on the involvement of adult learners in a process of self-diagnosis of needs (Jones 1991:94). Adults bring a rich source of knowledge, as well as attitudes with them into the learning situation that can affect their learning and ability to learn (Rossman et al 1989:23). In Quigley's (1992b:104) words, "the effectiveness of adult learning varies with learning ability, but it is also affected by the adult's accumulated knowledge, as well as the approach the adult takes to the learning activity".

An ABE learner is often imprisoned in a culture of silence. Even if he/she has grievances, he/she is afraid to voice them, and he/she is also hesitant to ask questions in class (Lurie 1990:26).

Therefore, an ABE learner needs a class atmosphere that is friendly and informal, and in which he/she is known by name and valued as a unique individual (Brookfield 1991:12). Northedge & McKay (1995:31) put it as follows:

If a learner is tense and nervous, he/she cannot make sense of what is taught in the class. In that situation he/she may not have courage to ask for explanations if he/she does not understand the subject matter. The learner may pretend that he/she understands what the tutor says.

The approach to learning depends on the individual learner. Each learner is unique with regard to self-concept and self-image. These differences have been shown. For example, Calder (1993:8) has demonstrated experimentally that adult learners can be divided into two groups, namely serialists or step-by-step learners, and holists or global learners. The two groups have been shown to adopt different learning strategies and to have different kinds of learning difficulties. Calder (1993:8) has further shown that teaching methods which impose holist strategies on serialists or serialist strategies on holists result in little or no learning.

The outlook of the adult learner differs drastically from that of the pupil. He/she is no longer interested in childish fantasy or animal type stories. Instead he/she seems more interested in utilitarian topics such as the improvement of him/herself and his/her family and better jobs. Furthermore, he/she may be more motivated to listen and read materials that may increase his/her competence in a current situation (Rossman et al 1989:30).

The following remarks on problems concerning the ABE learner's relationship with the self are also relevant:

- Nothing makes an adult feel more child-like than being judged by another adult. An adult learner is menaced by evaluation through objective tests and on a competitive basis (Rossman et al 1989:31).
- Adults are afraid of being wrong and of being laughed at. A tutor's and peer's disapproval demotivates an adult learner.

- Low self-concepts are exhibited by the learners who insist beforehand that they cannot do a certain task. They avoid certain activities, fearing failure, thus perpetuating low self-concept (Rossman et al 1989:36).
- Adults can have internal or personal constraints that affect their learning efforts. Some learners have unrealistic self-expectations of own achievements, resulting in dissatisfaction with not receiving the highest possible grade in an assignment. Another discouraging self-expectation is the notion of having been away from school too long and therefore being unable to keep up with younger people (Hiemstra 1991:51).
- Adult learners may define themselves largely by their experience and may have a deeper investment in its value. When they find themselves in a situation in which their experience is not being used or recognised, it is not just their experience that is being rejected but they feel rejected as persons (Walker 1992:281).

Each of the problems highlighted above should be addressed by a competent tutor who respects his/her learners as mature individuals.

3.4.5 Relationship with family and friends

An adult learner has family duties and obligations, which often conflict with regular class attendance, although the scheduled number of hours for adult literacy instruction is usually much lower than the primary school hours devoted to the acquisition of literacy (Lind 1988:24). This implies that the time is often not enough for mastery of class work.

The role of the family is a major factor in adult learning and has both positive and negative aspects. It provides a challenge of living in close contact with other people, of building a home or of rearing children and providing learning opportunities. The adjustment to marriage, financial pressures and the demands of growing children often take priority over formalised learning situations (Lind 1988:24).

The essence of change and adaptation to change is probably the greatest within the family context and hence can provide a fertile environment for adult learning, because an adult has to learn to

cope with changes in family life. For example, a divorced wife may join baking classes or sewing classes so that she can support her family. In each and every family no two days are the same. Children change from various stages very quickly, and between parents and in-laws the relationships are seldom constant. Parents get divorced, new individuals are born, parents have to rear children, children have to leave home, children get married, parents have to accept the reality of retirement and the elderly die. Each of these stages provides teachable moments to the individuals concerned (Lind 1988:25; Roger 1991:7).

Developmental tasks are particularly applicable to those living in the family situation. These tasks relate to different roles an individual can be expected to play in response to the continuously changing needs and social roles throughout life. Development tasks are specific to each transition period. The major development tasks in each transition period are the following:

- Early adult transition: leaving the family, choosing a career and starting a family.
- Mid-life adult transition: assessing family relations, evaluating career work situations and adjusting to children leaving the home.
- Late-adult transition: adjusting to retirement, adjusting to loss of a spouse and adjusting to declining health (Merriam 1986:6; Roger 1991:7). The development tasks for each stage should be completed before passing to a next stage.

Development tasks are also known as passages (Lind 1988:25; Hiemstra 1991:58). The changes in developmental tasks may affect an ABE learner negatively, especially when the new developmental task demands more attention from the adult learner. For example, when an adult gets married and has children, it implies more responsibility from the adult learner.

Contemporary families experience the challenges of separation, divorce and remarriage, as well as increased geographical mobility. These may seriously affect adult learning. Those who choose to live by themselves should face the adjustments of developing social contact. Most adults should also learn to live with ageing parents (Lind 1988:26).

Family responsibilities stem from a self-imposed commitment to the family. Their significance in terms of impact depends on an adult learner's economic level, education or financial level and associated cultural and ethnic background (Lind 1988:26). For some adults the experience of taking children to the mall, movies or the park may be very important in maintaining family life. For others, the activities of supporting the family through little league coaching or baking cakes or making chili for church supper may be the best way of preserving family connections and building strong family ties (Hiemstra 1991:58). These activities may coincide with the ABE classes and may thus jeopardise the chances of participating meaningfully in the ABE programme.

Another external source of constraints relates to a variety of community-based obligations such as church commitments, associations with neighbourhood groups and membership of service clubs (Roger 1991:7).

Adult women are often in the midst of a role transition as children mature and domestic responsibility decreases. This is sometimes known as the beginning of the "empty-nest" stage (Walker 1992:35). At this stage, the mother is in the thirties or older; many have spent more than ten years in child-rearing and are able to work or study because children are at school.

It has been found that in the life-cycle of the family, families with children between 13-20 years of age have greater financial expenditure and demands on family resources than at any other time during the family life cycle (Walker 1992:36). Circumstances for divorced and single parents are even worse (Rogers 1989:123). Especially women tend to time their re-entry into education in terms of the responsibility associated with the life cycle of their children and the total family unit, rather than their age. Some women feel they are too old to sit with junior learners in the classroom (Walker 1992:36).

Learners sometimes experience a lack of family support. Friends and neighbours may joke about their going to school at such a late stage (Hutton 1992:8 1). The following comments also apply:

- Women's household and family duties keep the female adult learners so busy that they have difficulty to attend ABE classes. Furthermore, they often have no one to care for

their children (Kemp & Van den Berg 1995:13). If they keep on thinking about the chores which they have to do, it can inhibit their concentration (McKay & Northedge 1995:32).

- Being away from home at night often induces fears and anxiety (Van Niekerk 1996b:34).
- For many adults, time taken for studying is taken at the expense of the family. Whitener (1991:182) reports that some learners have said that their families had been inconvenienced by their participation in the ABE programme. Some families are more supportive of adult learning. According to Courney (1991:64) families appear to be generally encouraging and happy about studies, although women studying are approved of slightly less (Courney 1991:64).
- While the marital status plays a minor role in determining the participation of men in ABE, it plays a major role in that of women. The majority of adult women returning to adult education are usually married with children. When planning re-entry, the spouse's consent is often required for the participation and funding of courses, while child-care arrangements for dependent children have to be made and domestic responsibilities have to be adjusted (Walker 1992:3). Husbands whose primary emphasis is on their work, leave the emotional needs of the family to their wives who will experience role conflict and suffer stress if they follow careers as well (Walker 1992:4). Female adults continue to be primarily responsible for the organisation, running and maintenance of the home even where husbands are willing to partake in household tasks and parenting (Campbell 1996:244; Lemmer 1992:292).
- Working and learning mothers often lack support from family members, particularly children. Usually these women turn to friends for support, which is often unsatisfactory (Walker 1992:38). The irony is that friends and family, particularly those who have no desire to study, tend to regard these women with suspicion as being "liberated" and their effort to study as an act equated with radical "feminism" (Walker 1992:39).
- Husband's moral and in some cases financial support is essential. As the women study and the work load increases, the physical support in sharing domestic duties and responsibilities is even more important, as husbands easily become increasingly more negative, adding to the stress the female learners experience (Bittel 1990:11; Walker 1992:39; De Barros 1989:23). Some husbands feel threatened by their wives' academic achievement and newly acquired skills. They begin to regard themselves as failures. When

husbands have career transfers, wives are faced with many tasks related to their domestic role, such as children's schooling, medical and dental care and domestic services (De Barros 1989:24; Bittel 1990:11). Situations where husbands are physically present, yet uninvolved due to illness, a personal inability or attitude, create more problems as wives have to brace the husband's share of problems and tasks as well (De Barros 1989:24; Walker 1992:3 9).

- Mid-life adult learners are often held responsible for the care of sick and/or ageing parents, besides coping with the care of children.
- Education gaps often exist in the black communities where predominantly illiterate parents often disassociate themselves from their children because they feel exposed to ridicule when they cannot, for example, help with homework due to their inability to read and write. Unfortunately this has far-reaching detrimental effects on their relationships with their children (De Barros 1989:23).

It is important that the tutor should be knowledgeable about problems caused by ABE learners' family and community obligations. When the tutor understands the difficulties experienced by the ABE learners, he/she will plan his/her work in such a way that he/she aims at helping them to overcome their problems. For example, he/she will provide guidance and counselling where marriage problems impede learning. If the problem of child care is a barrier, then the ABE institution can make arrangements so that the service is provided.

In conclusion, ABE learners' problems associated with families and friends should be taken seriously, especially in terms of potential strain on marriage. If a husband/wife takes a decision alone with regard to participation in the ABE programme, i.e. without the consent of partner, it may lead to serious misunderstandings or even divorce.

The tutor has to be sympathetic to the ABE learner because family obligations may prevent a learner from making satisfactory progress. Furthermore, the impact of social activities as potential barriers to studying should never be underestimated.

3.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher highlighted the effects of ABE learners' personal and learning circumstances. Problems related to the self, the family, the physical environment, the tutor and the learning content, as experienced and conceptualised by the ABE learner, were discussed. If these problems are not attended to, they may cause the ABE learner to drop out, thus perpetuating illiteracy problems. The challenges to adult practitioners are to understand and to meaningfully alleviate ABE learners' problems, thus facilitating optimal participation in ABE classes.

The problems experienced and conceptualised by adult learners, as discussed from different perspectives, serve as a frame of reference for the empirical investigation.

The next chapter deals with the methodology of the empirical investigation.

CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

After enlightening Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Chapter 2 and conveying a general picture of the problems of ABE learners in Chapter 3, an exposition of the empirical research methodology is presented in this chapter.

The empirical investigation was aimed at ABE learners' perceptions of literacy classes in terms of problems which influence their achievements in ABE.

4.2 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The main purpose of the hypothesis is to act as a tentative solution to a problem or a tentative explanation for a phenomenon. The research hypothesis states the anticipated relationship between the variables involved in the investigation. Furthermore, the hypothesis directs the investigation by indicating the procedure to be followed and the types of data to be collected. Finally, it provides a basis for interpreting the results and drawing conclusions (Bester & Olivier 1992:19).

The following hypothesis regarding the problems of ABE learners was derived from the preceding literature study and the researcher's experience. It also relates to the objectives of the study as stated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.4).

The hypothesis for the empirical investigation was formulated as follows:

ABE learners are adversely influenced by the following factors, in order of impact:

- Affective problems
- Volitional problems

- Cognitive problems
- Physical problems
- Problems related to the physical environment
- Problems related to the learning content
- Problems related to the learner's relationship with the self
- Problems related to family and friends
- Problems related to the tutor

The following sections will deal with research approaches, sampling procedure, the use of questionnaires, the use of interviews, and the administration of the investigation.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACHES

4.3.1 General background

In order to provide a good foundation for the discourse, the terms *method* and *technique* are defined briefly. *Method* is defined as a special form of procedure, especially in any branch of mental activity or a scheme of classification, while *technique* is defined as a means of achieving one's purpose, especially skillfully. *Technique* is a specific device or means of collecting the data, such as an interview or a questionnaire. *Method* has a broad meaning while *technique* is used to specify (Merriam & Simpson 1995:225).

In this study two research approaches, namely quantitative research and qualitative research were used. The difference in these two approaches as seen by Brotherson (1994:104-105) lies in the views about the nature of reality. In the qualitative approach all parts of phenomenon are seen as interrelated and dynamic, each influencing the other.

Instead of seeking determination of cause and effects, qualitative inquiry looks for understanding of human relations in a web of interactions and interconnected factors, events and processes as they are constructed in the minds of people (Brotherson 1994:103).

On the other hand, quantitative research focuses on the facts and causes of behaviour and a belief that these accumulated facts do not change (Brotherson 1994:103; Schumacher & McMillan 1993:425).

Löfstedt (1990:74) is against counterposing quantitative and qualitative forms of research. He believes that neither approach should claim any monopoly on the true and useful modes and methods of research. A researcher chooses an approach which is based upon his or her unique research questions and epistemological beliefs (Löfstedt 1990:74).

4.3.2 Quantitative research

Quantitative evidence refers to information of a statistical, numerical nature about an object, person, concept or phenomenon (Brotherson 1994:103).

Well-executed quantitative research with an understanding of context can provide important insights into certain human affairs. The quantitative method uses the language of numbers, that is, the data is represented in numerical values rather than in the form of verbal reports. The use of mathematical symbols permits an economical summary of information (Kincheloe 1991:144). Furthermore, statistical analysis gives the research the advantage of power of expression (Merriam & Simpson 1995:72). Another advantage of this method is that it produces data that are accurate and representative.

Media that can be used in quantitative research are questionnaires, standardised interviews, structured observation, inventories, rating scales and unobtrusive measures (Brotherson 1994:103). The questionnaire is the only quantitative medium which is used in this study.

4.3.3 Qualitative research

Qualitative research refers to the study of the social world which seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those studied (Fox 1991:203). It involves the idea of making judgements.

The function of this appraising aspect of qualitative research is to describe the essential qualities of events, to interpret the meanings and relationships among those events, and to appraise the significance of the events in the larger picture of social and educational events (Kincheloe 1991:144).

In making these judgements, qualitative research should be about social values and human interests on which its appraisals are grounded (Kincheloe 1991:145).

The features of qualitative research are the following:

- In qualitative research, the interaction between the respondent and inquirer is dominant. The researcher is seen as the instrument growing in knowledge and insight and truth is believed to be primarily a matter of perspective. The nature of this approach is ideographic (Brotherson 1994:102).
- The researcher collects data on many variables, and mostly in a naturalistic setting. Naturalistic setting implies that the variables being investigated are studied where they naturally occur and not in a research-controlled environment (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:425). Owing to the naturalistic setting of qualitative research, it is frequently referred to as naturalistic research or field research (Gay 1992:142).
- In qualitative research, the researcher is trying phenomenologically to understand every person in his/her life world. In order to get more information about a respondent, the researcher penetrates the respondent's life world and in doing so sets aside his/her own life world for a while (Bester & Olivier 1992:4).
- Qualitative research views experience holistically, as researchers explore all aspects of an experience. The underlying complexities of experience so often missed by quantitative researchers can be addressed by the qualitative researcher (Kincheloe 1991:144).
- The major difference between the qualitative and quantitative research approaches is that the latter is concerned with the frequency, while the first approach is concerned with the more abstract characteristics of events (Kincheloe 1991:143).
- Knowledge of human beings involves an understanding of qualities which cannot be described through the exclusive use of numbers. As qualitative researchers direct their

attention to the meanings given to events by participants, they come to understand more than what a list of descriptions or a table of statistics could support. On the other hand, quantitative research is very important in a variety of educational contexts, for it often serves as a check for qualitative data (Kincheloe 1991:143).

The researcher can use techniques such as observations, unstructured interviews, field notes, life histories or standardised and unstandardised tests. These techniques are suited to adult education studies because of the scope of influences associated with working with adults in various settings (Fox 1991:202, Bester & Olivier 1992:4). A researcher who is working with these media and techniques should be able to acknowledge his/her own assumptions, so that he/she can examine evidence in a productive manner (Fox 1991:202).

In order to throw more light on the connection between these two approaches, a brief discussion of triangulation is necessary.

4.3.4 Triangulation

Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of behaviour (Cohen & Manion 1989:269). The use of multiple methods, or the multimethod approach as it is sometimes called, helps to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint (Cohen & Manion 1989:269). According to Altrichter (1996:117) triangulation gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation. Furthermore, contradictions which are often hidden in situations become more visible, enabling a more profound interpretation.

Finally, in triangulation, the additional use of a second method helps to close the gaps left in using a particular method and to maximise the advantages of the two methods used (Altrichter 1996:117). The reliance on one method may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular slice of reality he/she is investigating (Cohen & Manion 1989:269).

4.4 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

4.4.1 Target population

The target population of this study were learners at adult centres in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal. There are three types of adult centres, namely Private Sector ABE centres, NGO ABE centres and the State ABE centres, as discussed in Chapter 2. All three types of ABE centres were involved in the investigation.

4.4.2 Research population

The research population for this study were adult learners from Grade 2 to Grade 5. This group was semi-illiterate to a varying extent. These respondents were chosen for the following reasons:

- Unlike adult learners who have never been to school, these learners can recall the problems they experienced during their school going age.
- They can also state the problems they experience as ABE learners.
- They are familiar with the elements of the ABE teaching-learning situation, such as the tutor, learning materials and methodology.

4.4.2.1 *Geographical area*

Eight adult centres run by the KZN Department of Education were selected, four in the Ulundi region, and four in the Empangeni region. These regions were chosen because they were in the researcher's proximity, but also regarded as representative of KZN. The chosen adult centres were:

1. Thambolini Adult Centre (State)
2. Esikhawini Adult Centre (State)
3. Gobandlovu Adult Centre (State)
4. Mzingwenya Adult Centre (State)

5. Sinqobile Adult Centre (State)
6. Masibumbane Adult Centre (State)
7. Anglican Church Adult Centre (NGO)
8. Municipality Adult Centre (Private sector)

Since NGO and Private Sector adult centres are relatively less in number, the majority of the centres chosen were State adult centres.

4.4.2.2 *Quantitative investigation*

Four adult learners, one each from Grades 2 to 5, were selected from each of the eight adult centres for the questionnaire survey. A total of 32 learners were chosen because of the time constraints involved when one has to read and translate the questions for each learner. In each adult centre, the researcher requested an alphabetical list of learners for Grades 2 to 5. In each grade a systematic random selection of the learners was done. Starting from number one in each list, the researcher selected every 10th or 15th learner depending on the size of the class.

The choice of one learner per grade in each centre prevented the possibility of learners to discuss the questions with other participants.

4.4.2.3 *Qualitative investigation*

From the four participants per adult centre as mentioned above, one respondent was chosen to partake in a partly-structured interview. This distribution of learners helped to give, as far as possible, a true representative picture of the opinion of learners in both regions. At each centre, the learner who seemed to have the most problems was selected for the unstructured interview.

4.4.2.4 *Pilot study*

A pilot study is indispensable for successful research and administering of the research data. It is a useful tool for determining the shortcomings in the envisaged method. The purpose of a pilot

study is to form an idea of how the research situation will materialise. The researcher is able to find out whether the approach and strategies he/she has in mind are effective or not. Through the pilot study the researcher is also able to estimate the time needed to complete the questionnaire, problems that the subjects experience in the research situation, items the respondents do not understand, information provided in the questionnaire which could serve as a basis for the qualitative interview, the duration of the qualitative interview and how the planned techniques have to be managed (Merriam & Simpson 1995:154).

Only one learner was used in the pilot study. The learner was selected randomly from the adult centre nearest the researcher's home town. The researcher chose a number in the middle of the alphabetical list for the Grade 2 class. The centre chosen for the pilot study was not used in the actual research because the repetition of this exercise might have had an influence on the result.

4.5 THE USE OF QUESTIONNAIRES

4.5.1 General background

A questionnaire encompasses a variety of items (questions) to which the subjects respond to elicit their reactions, beliefs and attitudes (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:46). It is commonly used as a tool for collecting data. The advantage of a questionnaire is that it can be used with a large group of subjects and is easy to administer, compared to other research techniques (Bester & Olivier 1992:33).

There are mainly two types of questions which can be used in a questionnaire, namely open (or unstructured) questions and closed (or structured) questions. The latter type of question is worded in such a way that a short, concise answer can be given. The subject can report yes or no, or can choose from a number of alternatives. Furthermore, the questionnaire is not time-consuming and the data is easy to tabulate and analyse. Finally, it is less open to misrepresentation (Bester & Olivier 1992:36).

Unlike closed questions, open questions allow the respondents to answer in their own words. The respondent is given enough space to express his/her ideas or views in order to ensure that the question will be valid (Fox 1991:15). It is usually preferable to use open questions when the investigation is still in the initial stage, since the answers they elicit may help the researcher to demarcate the field of study (Bester & Olivier 1992:36). In this type of question, there are no alternatives, and subjects reveal their own views and provide answers that fall within their frame of reference. The disadvantage of this type of question is that it can be difficult to interpret and to tabulate and summarise the data in a research report. One may have a great diversity in the subjects' responses, so that responses have little in common (Bester & Olivier 1992:36). It is usually advisable to limit the number of open questions.

The following guidelines for compiling effective questionnaires apply:

- Bester and Olivier (1992:36) recommend comprehensive questionnaires in order to avoid omitting some relevant and essential information.
- When one compiles a questionnaire one has to consider the neatness and conciseness of the question. Furthermore, clarity and preciseness maximise the information obtained from the respondents. The following serves as a bad example: "*Do you spend a lot of time studying?*" There is no measurement for the notion "A lot of time". One learner may regard one hour as a lot of time, while one hour may be too little to the other learner. Instead a better version would be: "*How many hours do you use for studying?*" (Bester & Olivier 1992:36).
- A questionnaire can be effective if the instructions on the front page are clear to the respondent. If respondents do not understand how to respond, they can provide irrelevant information (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:240).
- Double-barelled questions (i.e. two-in-one questions) should be avoided at all cost because these may confuse the respondent, and data analysis is compromised.
- Questions are phrased as objectively as possible in order to prevent respondents from channeling their thoughts in a particular direction. Identification of a well known person or agency can create bias, for example, "*Do you agree with the opposition party's ABE policy?*" This is likely to elicit a response based on attitude towards the opposition party.

Some items provide biased responses because of the social desirability implied by a certain answer. Social desirability is the tendency to respond to items so that the answer will give a good impression of the subject (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:241).

- Questions may contain sensitive issues that may influence the attitude of a respondent. In a good questionnaire, sensitive questions are asked either in the middle of a questionnaire or towards the end (Bester & Olivier 1992:38). This approach is adopted in order to avoid the situation where subjects may feel threatened by questions. Furthermore, questions are asked from the general to the specific in order to help respondents to organise and maintain continuity of thoughts (Cherian 1996:133).
- Categorisation of the items or questions help to guide the respondents thinking and unconsciously confine it to certain topics (Bester & Olivier 1992:37)
- Descriptive qualifiers such as *often*, *sometimes*, *seldom* and *few* have a tendency of channeling respondents' ideas in a specific direction (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:242; Bester & Olivier 1992:39).

The general background on questionnaires as given above, enabled the researcher to understand the basic requirements for compiling an appropriate and effective questionnaire.

4.5.2 The questionnaire in this investigation

Closed or structured questions were used in this study because of their advantages as stated above. Respondents had to choose between "agree" and "disagree" because they were semi-illiterate. The researcher assisted respondents by translating each question into Zulu.

In compiling the questionnaire, the researcher considered the criteria for constructing a questionnaire spelt out by Bester and Olivier (1992:39). These criteria are the following:

- Is the question related to the research goal and research problem?
- Is the question appropriate?
- Will the respondents be able to answer the question?
- Does the question contain sensitive issues that may influence the attitude of a subject?

With reference to these questions, the researcher was able to design relevant questions which elicited the required information from the subjects.

Ninety questions were developed for the questionnaire, consisting of 41 positive statements and 49 negative statements. The items were mainly developed on the basis of data in Chapter 3, but data from Chapters 1 and 2, as well as the researcher's own experience, were also used. Items based on the physical behaviour and physical problems of the ABE learner were developed from section 3.3.1. Questions measuring affective behaviour and affective problems were developed from section 3.3.2. Items on cognitive behaviour and cognitive problems were formulated from section 3.3.3. Items on volitional behaviour and volitional problems of the ABE learner were developed from section 3.3.4. Items on the ABE learner in relationship towards the physical environment were developed from section 3.4.1. Items on the relationship between the learner and the tutor in ABE were developed from section 3.4.2. Items on the relationship of a learner towards the learning content were developed from section 3.4.3. Items on the relationship towards the self were formulated from section 3.4.4. Finally, items on the relationship of the learners towards the family and friends were developed from section 3.4.5.

The following is a summary of the questions as divided into positive and negative statements and also indicating each variable:

- Matters related to learners' physical being are covered in items 11,12,17 and 18 (positive statements) and 13, 14, 15, 16, 19 and 20 (negative statements.)
- Matters related to learners' affective being are covered in items 22, 24, 28 and 30 (positive statements) and 21, 23, 25, 26, 27 and 29 (negative statements).
- Matters related to learners' cognitive being are covered in items 31, 34, 35, and 40 (positive statements) and 32, 33, 36, 37, 38 and 39 (negative statements).
- Matters related to learners' volitional being are covered in items 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47 and 49 (positive statements) and 48 and 50 (negative statements).
- Matters concerning the relationship between the learner and his/her physical environment are covered in 58 and 59 (positive statements) and 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57 and 60 (negative statements).

- Matters concerning the relationship between the tutor and the learner are covered in items 61, 62, 63, 65, 68 and 70 (positive statements) and 64, 66, 67 and 69 (negative statements).
- Matters concerning the relationship between the learner and the learning content are covered in items 72, 74, 75, 78, 79 and 80 (positive statements) and 71, 73, 76 and 77 (negative statements).
- Matters concerning the relationship between the learner and the self are covered in items 81, 82, 84, 85 and 88 (positive statements) and 83, 86, 87, 89 and 90 (negative statements).
- Matters concerning the relationship between the learner and his/her family and friends are covered in items 92, 93, 97 and 98 (positive statements) and 91, 94, 95, 96, 99, and 100 (negative statements).

The item numbers, variables and scoring direction can be summarised as follows:

Item number	Variable	Scoring Direction
11, 12, 17, 18 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20	Learner's physical circumstances Learner's physical circumstances	+ve -ve
22, 24, 28, 30 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29	Learner's affective circumstances Learner's affective circumstances	+ve -ve
31, 34, 35, 40 32, 33, 36, 37, 38, 39	Learner's cognitive skills Learner's cognitive skills	+ve -ve
41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49 48, 50	Learner's volitional circumstances Learner's volitional circumstances	+ve -ve
58, 59 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 60	Learner's relationship with physical environment Learner's relationship with physical environment	+ve -ve
61, 62, 63, 65, 68, 70 64, 66, 67, 69	Learner's relationship with the tutor Learner's relationship with the tutor	+ve -ve
72, 74, 75, 78, 79, 80 71, 73, 76, 77	Learner's relationship with the learning content Learner's relationship with the learning content	+ve -ve
81, 82, 84, 85, 88 83, 86, 87, 89, 90	Learner's relationship with the self Learner's relationship with the self	+ve -ve

92, 93, 97, 98	Learner's relationship with the family and friends	+ve
91, 94, 95, 96, 99, 100	Learner's relationship with the family and friends	-ve

The range of positive statements (41) and negative statements (49) is summarised as follows:

	Positive	Negative
Physical matters	4	6
Affective matters	4	6
Cognitive matters	4	6
Volitional matters	8	2
Matters related to the physical environment	2	8
Matters related to the tutor	6	4
Matters related to the learning content	6	4
Matters related to the self	5	5
Matters related to family and friends	4	6

The questionnaire was intended to be used in a closed interview. The researcher recorded the response of each respondent on a data sheet for an optical mark reader.

The questionnaire was formatted as follows:

SECTION A

1. Your gender

Male	1
Female	2

2. Your marital status

Married	1
Unmarried	2
Widow	3

Divorced	4
Separate	5

3. Your family situation

I live alone	1
I live with spouse	2
I live with spouse and children	3
I live with spouse, children and other relatives	4
I live with a relative	5

4. Your age

Below 30 years	1
30 - 40 years	2
41 - 50 years	3
Over 50 years	4

5. Class in which you are now

Grade 1	1
Grade 2	2
Grade 3	3
Grade 4	4
Grade 5	5

6. The highest grade you passed at school

No schooling	1
Grade 1	2
Grade 2	3
Grade 3 or higher	4

7. Your adult centre is situated in a(n)

Urban area	1
Rural area	2

8. Your home is situated in a(n)

Urban area	1
Rural area	2

9. Your work status

Full time job	1
Part time job	2
Unemployed	3

10. The time you spend at home studying per day is more or less

One hour	1
Two hours	2
Three hours	3
Four hours	4
Five hours or more	5

SECTION B

I am going to make statements about you and your experience in the Adult Basic Education classes. If you agree with the statement say “agree” or nod your head. If you do not agree, say “disagree” or show it with your head. There are no right or wrong answers here. Just be very honest.

Agree	1
Disagree	2

11. You learn easily in class

12. You remember well in class

13. You find it difficult to concentrate in class

14. You are tired in class

15. You suffer from ill-health in class

16. You cannot hear well in class
17. You see well in class
18. You are keen on writing in class
19. You cannot sit for a long time in class
20. You are hungry in class
21. In class others are usually better than you
22. You become tense when you write a test in class
23. You easily get tense in class
24. You have confidence in yourself in class
25. When in class, you feel uneasy because you are away from home
26. It is bad to make mistakes in class
27. In class, you always expect to find errors in your work
28. You feel good about your achievements in class
29. You are not at ease amongst others in class
30. You are as good as younger learners in class
31. You understand explanations in class
32. You are a slow worker in class
33. In class, you are not good at solving problems
34. Your age makes it difficult for you to cope in class
35. In class, the more you know, the more you can do
36. In class, if you make mistakes you feel discouraged and disappointed
37. In class, it is difficult to write down what is in your mind
38. In class you do not understand what you learn
39. In class you forget what you learn
40. When questioned in class you usually have a good answer ready
41. In class, you don't work on something which is of little value
42. A hardworking role model motivates you in class
43. You want to decide what you should learn in class
44. You are interested in learning what is relevant to your needs
45. You work hard to achieve success in class
46. You want to be a knowledgeable person in class

47. You are eager to learn new skills in class
48. You are not a successful person in class
49. You compete against yourself in class
50. You do not have an urge to learn in class
51. In class, you feel like a child
52. The temperature in your class is not good
53. Your class is too dark
54. Noise in class hampers your concentration
55. In class, room decoration distracts your attention
56. The area in which you meet is unsafe at night
57. You attend classes in a shabby building
58. You sit comfortably in class
59. You live near the ABE centre
60. There are too many learners for the room in which you meet
61. You like to please your tutor in class
62. Your tutor comes to class well prepared
63. You feel free to discuss matters with your tutor in class
64. Your tutor does not respect your language
65. Your tutor is understanding in class
66. Your tutor treats you like a child in class
67. Your tutor is sarcastic in class
68. Your tutor is always on time in class
69. In class your tutor does not allow you to discuss what you learn
70. Your tutor enjoys working with your group
71. It is more important to be able to read than to write
72. You enjoy reading and writing
73. The work is difficult in class
74. You have enough reading material in class
75. The work you do in class is useful
76. The reading material in class is boring
77. You pay too much for the learning material

78. You can choose what to learn in class
79. In class, you enjoy working with numbers
80. In class, the work you learn makes you more eager to learn
81. You think you are clever in class
82. You do your best in class
83. You are nervous when the tutor asks you a question in class
84. You are a good learner in class
85. You like to discover new things in class
86. You do not want to be corrected by others in class
87. You do not want to be the first to answer a question in class
88. In class you prefer to sit with learners even if they are younger than you
89. In class, you prefer to have a tutor of your own age
90. In class you do not want to sit in front
91. Your family duties make it difficult for you to attend classes
92. Your family members help you at home so that you can attend ABE classes
93. Your family members feel proud of your attendance of ABE classes
94. Your neighbours joke about your going to ABE sessions
95. Your family problems affect your learning in class
96. Attending ABE classes makes it difficult for your family to cope
97. Your friends share in your ABE success
98. Your family members share in your ABE success
99. A husband feels threatened by the wife's learning success in ABE
100. People keep on disturbing you when you are studying at home

4.6 THE USE OF INTERVIEWS

4.6.1 Interviews: an orientation

The purpose of interviewing is to allow one to enter into the other person's life-world. The interview aims to find out what is in some one else's mind. It is used to gain information on issues

which cannot be observed directly (Fox 1991:204). The following considerations are also important:

- The researcher can interview an individual by using a structured or unstructured approach (Anderson 1992:175). These approaches differ in respect of the types of questions used by a researcher and the style he/she uses. In the former type of interview the interviewer takes the lead while defined guidelines are allowed. It is usually used in collecting information from a group of subjects (Anderson 1992:175; Fox 1991:204).
- Interview questions can focus on experience, behaviour, opinions, values, feelings, knowledge, sensory perceptions and the individual's background or demographic information (Leedy 1993:192).
- Interviewing is not about asking any question in any way. The questions for the interview should be as carefully planned and as accurately worded as the items in a questionnaire (Leedy 1993:194). Fox (1991:204) adds that an interview demands considerable thought and planning for its effective administration.
- The protection of the identity of a respondent should be guaranteed before the interview begins. A researcher may have skills of interviewing but in order to be successful, he/she should be able to handle situations involving sensitive issues. For example, a situation might arise where the respondent will just refuse to impart information to anyone. This can be prevented by being able to establish a rapport with the subject. This exercise distinguishes the interview from normal conversation (Merriam & Simpson 1995:150).
- The strength of the interview is that the interviewer is capable of being flexible and making adjustments depending on the response and attitude of the interviewee (Merriam & Simpson 1995:150).
- Although notes are taken during the interview, electronically recorded interviews are preferable because note-taking may result in missed information and thereby reduce the validity of the interview results. On the other hand, one cannot deny the fact that the disadvantage of electronically recorded interviews is that some interviewees are sensitive to electronic recording devices and this may result in resistance or even refusal to participate (Merriam & Simpson 1995:150).

- The interview permits the researcher to follow up leads that appear during the interview, thereby obtaining more information and greater clarity. By using deliberate encouragement and establishing good rapport, a researcher can obtain information a participant would reveal in no other way (Merriam & Simpson 1995:151).

4.6.2 Structured interview

The structured interview is characterised by a series of closed or structured questions which can be used to elicit information from the respondents. This type of interview is often advisable because it is easy to administer and the interviewer can easily control the process as he/she is expected to take the lead. This technique is invaluable for collecting data from groups of interviewees (Merriam & Simpson 1995:151).

Fox (1991:204) describes a structured interview as:

an interview which consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words.

This technique is used when it is important to minimise variation in the question posed to interviewees. Its advantage is that it reduces the possibility of bias that comes from having different interviews for different people (Merriam & Simpson 1995:151).

When the respondent is asked structured questions, he/she is expected to select a response from the alternatives provided by the interviewer. A structured interview was used in this study because the subjects could not fill in the questionnaire as they were mostly semi-illiterate. The questions were posed in Zulu. Each respondent was given enough time to answer all questions. A respondent had to respond by saying “agree” or “disagree” or indicate the answer through nodding his/her head.

4.6.3 Unstructured (or partly structured) interview

In this type of interview questions arise spontaneously from the conversation. It is advisable to start with simple and interesting questions, if one wants to obtain a good response. The interview is handled in such a way that subsections or topics flow from simple to more complex questions. It is important to explain the purpose of the interview, because if a respondent knows what it is all about, he/she is more likely to give the information needed by the interviewer (Anderson 1992:176).

Tape recording is recommended because the record of what is said is more authentic and the interviewer gets a chance of concentrating fully on the interview (Anderson 1992:175).

It is imperative that the interviewee should clearly understand the questions, and that the questions are introduced in logical progression. The experienced researcher will always keep in mind that he/she should avoid interrupting the interviewees train of thought at all cost (Merriam & Simpson 1995:151). Furthermore, the interviewer should understand the response before moving on to the next questions. He/she should let the interviewee articulate his/her answers rather than assume what the response will be (Merriam & Simpson 1995:151).

Partly structured interviews were used in this study. Interviewees were invited to provide additional information in a dialogue with the researcher. In this way the interviewee could freely reveal his/her feelings. Respondents were asked open questions and were given enough time to respond to the questions. The questions for the partly structured interview were derived from experience gained during the pilot study (see 4.4.2.4). Respondents were given the opportunity to clarify certain statements. Furthermore, observations made during the structured interviews called for further investigation. To elicit more information, the following statements were selected to form the basis of the partly structured interview:

Item 14: You are tired in class

Item 19: You cannot sit for a long time in class

These items focus on the physical problems hampering learner's participation in ABE.

Item 25: When in class, you feel uneasy, because you are away from home

Item 30: You are as good as younger learners in class

These items focus on the ABE learner's affective problems.

Item 32: You are a slow worker in class

Item 40: When questioned in class, you usually have a good answer ready

These items focus on the cognitive problems of ABE learners.

Item 43: You want to decide what you should learn in class

Item 48: You are not a successful person in class

These items focus on the volitional behaviour and problems of ABE learners.

Items 54: Noise in class hampers your concentration

Items 56: The area in which you meet is unsafe at night

These items address the issue of the physical environment and problems related to the physical environment.

Item 65: Your tutor is understanding in class

Item 68: Your tutor is always on time in class

These items focus on the problems of the ABE learner's relationship with the tutor.

Item 74: You have enough reading material in class

Item 77: You pay too much for the learning material

These items focus on the problems of learners in relation to the learning content.

Item 83: You are nervous when the tutor asks you a question in class

Item 87: You do not want to be the first to answer a question in class

These items focus on the problems related to the self.

Item 91: Your family duties make it difficult to attend ABE classes

Item 100: People keep on disturbing you when you are studying at home.

These items focus on problems related to families and friends.

4.7 ADMINISTERING THE INVESTIGATION

4.7.1 Permission from authorities

Six months before the start of the field work, a written request for research access to the selected ABE centres was sent to the Superintendent General (SG) of Education in KZN. The letter highlighted the aims of the study, the importance of the research for adult learners and the involvement of the adult learners in the research.

After the SG had granted permission, the researcher wrote a letter to each adult centre supervisor, accompanied by a copy of the letter of consent from the SG. Since the researcher was a provincial co-trainer of adult practitioners and was familiar with the Chief and Deputy Chief Education Specialists for ABE in the province, he asked for assistance from them concerning the preparation of the field work.

4.7.2 Collecting data

Each participant was told that he/she had been randomly selected from the group of adult learners. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and that their contributions were highly appreciated for the sake of better understanding of ABE learners' problems.

4.7.2.1 The pilot study

The researcher used a quiet room for the interview. He first greeted the learner and started a general discussion to serve as an ice-breaker. He then explained to the learner the purpose of the research and allowed the respondent to ask questions.

The researcher started the closed interview by asking the learner to respond by saying “agree” or “disagree”. The researcher then recorded each response on the data sheet as the exercise proceeded.

After the completion of the closed interview, a partly structured interview was conducted with the same learner, after allowing for a break of about five minutes. During this break, the researcher together with the respondent were discussing general matters such as a hobby of the respondent. This helped to create a relaxed atmosphere.

During the partly-structured interview, the respondent was asked questions, related to the responses in the closed interview and was asked to make comments. The respondent was given ample time to respond to the questions.

The time taken for both the structured and partly-structured interviews was noted. The research instruments were subsequently refined.

4.7.2.2 *Quantitative investigation*

After sending letters to the supervisors, a follow-up was done telephonically regarding the researcher’s visit. The researcher then visited each adult centre selected, in order to make preliminary arrangements with the adult centre supervisors. In the absence of the supervisor the researcher consulted senior tutors. The researcher requested alphabetical lists of Grades 2 to 5 for selection purposes.

On the day of the closed interview, the researcher arrived before the class commenced so as to make proper arrangements beforehand. In each adult centre the researcher chose four learners. The learners were chosen from each grade, that is Grades 2 to 5 (section 4.4.2.2). The researcher first explained the purpose of the research to each learner. He then discussed some relevant themes as an ice breaker. When the researcher was convinced that the respondent was relaxed, he commenced with the structured interview. Each respondent was given enough time to respond to a question or statement. If the question was not clear to a respondent, the researcher explained it

further to the respondent. This action minimised the chances of misleading results. During the interview each response was transferred to a data sheet. At the end of the interview the researcher thanked the respondent.

4.7.2.3 *Qualitative investigation*

The partly structured interview was conducted with selected respondents for the sake of obtaining more personal information from the learners with regard to the problems of adult learners. The researcher selected interviewees who displayed the most problems during the closed interview. One learner per adult centre participated in the partly structured interview.

The researcher used shorthand to record responses. Shorthand was used because it does not seriously disrupt the flow of conversation. Data was also captured with a tape recorder to enable reliability checks.

In closing the interview, the researcher once again expressed his appreciation for the participant's contributions.

4.8 CONCLUSION

The main objective of this chapter was to discuss the methods of research which were used in identifying the problems of ABE learners. The structured and partly structured interviews, as well as the sampling method, pilot study and research administration were discussed. Through the appropriate application of the chosen approaches, methods and techniques, meaningful data on various problems of adult learners could be gathered.

The next chapter focuses on the findings of the research.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS OF THE EMPIRICAL SURVEY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Strategies used in the research were discussed in the previous chapter. These were quantitative and qualitative research strategies. In the former, structured interviews were used while in the latter partly-structures interviews were used. These instruments were tested in a pilot study. In this chapter both the quantitative and the qualitative data are analysed and the hypothesis tested on the strength of the results.

5.2 QUANTITATIVE INVESTIGATION

5.2.1 Data analysis

Table 5.1: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	7	21,9
Female	25	78,1
Total	32	100

Questionnaires were administered to 32 respondents. Seven were males and 25 were females. The ratio of male to female learners depicts the general nature of the population of ABE learners.

Table 5.2: Marital status of respondents

Marital status	Frequency	%
Married	18	56,3
Unmarried	14	43,8
Total	32	100

Out of 32 respondents 18 (56,3%) were married and 14 (43,8%) unmarried.

Table 5.3: Family situation of respondents

Living (with)	Frequency	%
Alone	4	12,5
Spouses and children	7	21,9
Spouses and relatives	9	28,1
Relatives	12	37,5
Total	32	100

Out of 32 respondents four (12,5%) stayed alone, seven (21,9%) stayed with spouses and children, nine (28,1%) stayed with spouses' children and relatives, and 12 (37,5%) stayed with relatives. The two latter figures show the inclination towards extended families which is the common habit among the African families.

Table 5.4: Age profile of respondents

Age	Frequency	%
Below 30 years	3	9,4
30 - 40 years	11	34,4
41 - 50 years	14	43,8
Over 50 years	2	6,3
Unspecified	2	6,3
Total	32	100

In the sample of 32 respondents, three (9,4%) respondents were younger than 30 years, 11 (34,4%) between 30 and 40 years old, 14 (43,8%) between 41 and 50 years old, two (6,3%) over 50 years old and two (6,3%) were unknown. The optical reader could not identify the responses of the last-mentioned respondents on the work sheets.

Table 5.5: Grade of respondents

Grades	Frequency	%
Grade 1	1	3,1
Grade 2	7	21,9
Grade 3	9	28,1
Grade 4	5	15,6
Grade 5	10	31,3
Total	32	100

In the sample of 32 respondents one (3,1%) was in Grade 1, seven (21,9%) were in Grade 2, nine (28,1%) were in Grade 3, five (15,6%) were in Grade 4 and 10 (31,3%) were in Grade 5.

It is noticeable that the majority of the respondents were in Grades 3-5. Table 5.5 shows that the highest number of respondents were in Grade 3 and above (75,0%). The implication is that many people do go to school at their early age but they do not complete primary education due to different reasons.

Table 5.6: Highest grade passed in school

Highest grade	Frequency	%
No schooling	7	21,9
Grade 1	6	18,8
Grade 2	6	18,8
Grade 3/higher	10	31,3
Unspecified	3	9,4
Total	32	100

The above table shows the highest grade passed by each respondent during his/her school-going age. Seven respondents (21,9%) did not attend school in their lives, six respondents

(18,8%) passed Grade 1, another six respondents (18,8%) passed Grade 2, ten respondents (31,3%) passed Grade 3 and higher grades.

Table 5.7: Location of adult education centres

Location	Frequency	%
Urban	17	53,1
Rural	15	46,9
Total	32	100

In the sample of 32 respondents 17 (53,1%) attended urban adult education centres and 15 (46,9%) rural adult centres.

According to the data in table 5.7 adult education centres in the sample were almost evenly distributed in terms of urban or rural location. In actual fact there are more urban adult education centres than rural adult education centres in KZN. The implication is that the Department of Education needs to put in place a mechanism which will help to promote ABE programmes in rural areas. This is a critical issue because the illiteracy rate is higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

Table 5.8: Location of respondents' homes

Location	Frequency	%
Urban	10	31,3
Rural	22	68,8
Total	32	100

Ten respondents (31,3%) stayed in the urban area while 22 respondents (68,8%) stayed in the rural area. Table 5.7 shows that there were more adult education centres in the urban area compared to the rural area, while table 5.8 shows that most adult learners stayed in the rural area. The implication is that adult learners often travel from the rural areas to attend adult education centres in the urban area.

Table 5.9: Occupational status of respondents.

Occupational status	Frequency	%
Full time	13	40,6
Part time	6	18,8
Unemployed	13	40,8
Total	32	100

In the sample of 32 respondents, 13 (40,6%) were full time employed, six (18,8%) were part time employed and 13 (40,6%) were unemployed. These statistics depict the rate of unemployment in the area.

Table 5.10: Respondents' study time per week

Respondents' study time	Frequency	%
One hour	17	53,1
Two hours	13	40,6
Three hours	2	6,3
Total	32	100

In the sample of 32 respondents, the study showed that 17 (53,1%) ABE learners were using one hour, 13 (40,6%) were using two hours and two (6,3%) were using three hours per week.

Table 5.10 shows that the majority of learners did not invest enough time in their studies. Probably this was because they had other commitments as adults which affected their education. This situation implies the need for a tutor who can show understanding of ABE learners when they report that they could not do homework because of other commitments.

The commitments or problems that may hinder ABE learners to engage themselves in ABE programmes are represented in the questionnaire as items or statements.

The items are grouped into nine categories of problems of ABE learners. Each category is represented by 10 items. The grouping of the problems is as follows:

- Physical problems of ABE learners
- Affective problems of ABE learners
- Cognitive problems of ABE learners
- Volitional problems of ABE learners
- Problems related to the physical environment
- Problem related to the tutor
- Problems related to the learning content
- Problems related to the self
- Problems related to the family and friends

Tables 5.11 to 5.19 indicate the frequency distribution of responses.

The tables include the items and the corresponding response percentages. The researcher decided to use “+” to indicate a strongly positive finding (60% or higher). On the other hand “-” is used to indicate a strongly negative finding (60% or higher). The direction of other responses is left blank.

Table 5.11: Physical problems

NO	ITEM	AGREE %	DISAGREE %	DIRECTION
11	You learn easily in class	50	50	
12	You remember well in class	31,2	68,8	-
13	You find it difficult to concentrate in class	53,1	46,9	
14	You are tired in class	71,9	28,1	-
15	You suffer from ill-health in class	59,4	40,6	
16	You cannot hear well in class	9,4	90,6	+
17	You see well in class	50	50	
18	You are keen on writing in class	87,5	12,5	+
19	You cannot sit for a long time in class	40,6	59,4	
20	You are hungry in class	28,1	71,9	+

ABE learners are affected by physical problems. Physical problems are those problems that are mostly associated with ageing. For example, the sharpness of the ear usually declines with age (Steinback 1993:73).

Physical ability peaks between ages 18 and 30.

Beyond 40 years, memory traces are hard to retrieve as other information intervenes thus indicating cerebral changes (Sutcliff 1990:32).

Above 50 years of age poor sight and hearing and painful arthritis joints can make learning difficult (Rossman et al 1989:45).

The responses to some statements indicate positive findings. For example 90,6% of the respondents disagreed with "*You cannot hear well in class*". This constitutes a positive response of more than 60%. This contradicts somewhat with the problem of poor hearing as mentioned by Rossman et al (1989:45). Furthermore, 87,5% of the respondents agreed to the statement "*You are keen on writing in class*". This also constitutes a positive response.

The responses to other statements are either neutral or close to neutrality. They constitute a divided experience of learning circumstances. The statement: "*You learn easily in class*" serves as an example. In this case 50% of the respondents agreed and 50% disagreed. The other statement is "*You find it difficult to concentrate in class*". In this case 53,1% of the respondents agreed and 46,9% disagreed. According to Jarvis, stress and anxiety among adult learners may affect concentration in class (Jarvis 1990:82).

Table 5.12: Affective problems

NO	ITEM	AGREE	DISAGREE	DIRECTION
		%	%	
21	In class, others are usually better than you	87,5	12,5	-
22	You become tense when you write a test in class	75,5	24,5	-
23	You easily get tense in class	68,6	31,4	-
24	You have confidence in yourself in class	65,6	34,4	+
25	When in class, you feel uneasy because you are away from home	46,9	53,1	-
26	It is bad to make mistakes in class	65,6	34,4	-
27	In class, you always expect to find errors in your work	81,2	18,8	-
28	You feel good about your achievements in class	100	0	+
29	You are not at ease amongst others in class	59,4	40,6	-
30	You are as good as younger learners in class	15,6	84,4	-

Responses to the following statements constitute pertinent negative findings:

The first statement is: *"In class, others are usually better than you"*.

This problem is confirmed by Quigley when he mentions anxiety as a major problem among adult learners. Adult learners do not compare themselves favourably with fellow learners (Quigley 1993:103). Eighty-seven per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement.

The second statement is: *"You become tense when you write a test in class"*.

This problem is confirmed by Sommer when he states that ABE learners are afraid of being subjected to testing (Sommer 1989:22). Seventy-five per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement.

The third statement is: *"You easily get tense in class".*

Almost sixty-nine per cent of the respondents experienced this problem. McKay & Northedge (1995) mention this problem as follows:

If you are tense and nervous, it is difficult to make sense of what the tutor says in class (McKay & Northedge 1995:31).

The fourth statement is: *"In class, you always expect to find errors in your work".*

Eighty-one per cent of the respondents agreed with this statement. Sommer found that ABE learners do not like other people to read what they have written because they believe that there are errors in their work (Sommer 1989:220). Making errors is viewed in a serious light (65,6% of the respondents agreed that it is bad to make mistakes).

The fifth statement is: *"You are as good as younger learners in class".*

Eighty-four per cent of the respondents apparently believed that they were no longer as smart as they had been during their school-going age. This is more pronounced when an ABE learner feels that he/she is too old to learn (McKay & Northedge 1995:31).

The response to the two remaining statements constitute positive findings. The two statements are:

"You have confidence in yourself in class".

"You feel good about your achievements".

Nevertheless, some learners do experience problems, especially in the case of the lack of confidence. For example, the feelings of low self-esteem and doubts about one's personal ability in class act as barriers to learning (McKay & Northedge 1995:31).

Table 5.13: Cognitive problems

NO	ITEM	AGREE	DISAGREE	DIRECTION
		%	%	
31	You understand explanations in class	56,2	43,8	
32	You are a slow worker in class	65,6	34,4	-
33	In class, you are not good at solving problems	62,5	37,5	-
34	Your age makes it difficult for you to cope in class	90,6	9,4	-
35	In class, the more you know, the more you can do	93,8	6,2	+
36	In class, if you make mistakes you feel discouraged and disappointed	18,8	81,2	+
37	In class, it is difficult to write down what is in your mind	93,8	6,2	-
38	In class, you do not understand what you learn	71,9	28,1	
39	In class, you forget what you learn	90,6	9,4	-
40	When questioned in class, you usually have a good answer ready	46,9	53,1	

The responses to the following statements constitute negative ones:

The first statement is: *"You are a slow worker in class"*.

Sixty-five per cent of the respondents experienced this problem. This problem is confirmed by Favish & Omar when they say that adult workers want to work at their own pace. They are more concerned with accuracy than with speed (Favish & Omar 1995:9).

The second statement is: *"In class, you are not good at solving problems"*.

Sixty-two per cent of the respondents experienced this problem. This finding concurs with the researcher's experience in ABE. ABE learners, especially female learners, do not want to be exposed to work that demands solving complex problems.

The third statement is: *"Your age makes it difficult for you to cope in class"*.

More than 90% of the respondents experienced this problem. It stems from the attitude of an ABE learner towards his/her age. He/she may think that he/she is too old to learn (McKay & Northedge 1995:31).

The fourth statement is: *"In class, it is difficult to write down what is in your mind"*.

This problem was experienced by 93,8% of the respondents. During the qualitative investigation the researcher also found that the majority of ABE learners experienced this problem.

The fifth statement is: *"In class, you do not understand what you learn"*.

Seventy-two per cent of the respondents agreed to having this problem. This occurs when an ABE learner is afraid of asking questions because of the lack of self-confidence. In most cases this occurs when the learner is expected to express himself/herself through the medium of English. Even if he/she does not follow the discussion in class, he/she keeps quiet (McKay & Northedge 1995:30).

The last statement is: *"In class, you forget what you learn"*.

Ninety per cent of the respondents agreed. The ability to recall what you have learned decreases as you become older (Rossman et al 1989:24). Ageing is associated with a general reduction in working memory capacity and a reduction in cognitive resources (Fry 1992:315).

The responses to two statements constitute positive findings.

The two statements are:

In class, the more you know the more you can do (93,8% agreed).

In class, if you make mistakes you feel discouraged and disappointed (81,2% disagreed).

Table 5.14: Volitional problems

NO	ITEM	AGREE %	DISAGREE %	DIRECTION
41	In class, you don't work on something which is of little value	84,4	15,6	+
42	A hardworking role model motivates you in class	90,6	9,4	+
43	You want to decide what you should learn in class	96,9	3,1	+
44	You are interested in learning what is relevant to your needs	100	0	+
45	You work hard to achieve success in class	100	0	+
46	You want to be a knowledgeable person in class	100	0	+
47	You are eager to learn new skills in class	100	0	+
48	You are not a successful person in class	34,4	65,6	+
49	You compete against yourself in class	56,4	43,6	
50	You do not have an urge to learn in class	25	75	+

The responses to all statements constitute positive findings. However, problems related to volition do exist to some extent. For example, 25% of the respondents agreed with the statement *"You do not have an urge to learn in class"*.

According to Lind, the learner should be motivated towards the learning needs. The learner should see the learning experience as being of value, and relevant to one's own personal needs (Lind 1988:150). The response rates in Table 5.14 represent a positive picture in this regard.

Table 5.15: Problems related to the physical environment

NO	ITEM	AGREE %	DISAGREE %	DIRECTION
51	In class, you feel like a child	90,6	9,4	-
52	The temperature in your class is not good	31,2	68,8	+
53	Your class is too dark	28,1	71,9	+
54	Noise in class hampers your concentration	28,1	71,9	+
55	In class, room decoration distracts your attention	6,2	93,8	+
56	The area in which you meet is unsafe at night	28,1	71,9	+
57	You attend classes in a shabby building	31,2	68,8	+
58	You sit comfortably in class	52,5	37,5	
59	You live near the ABE Centre	46,9	53,1	
60	There are too many learners for the room in which you meet	31,2	68,8	+

The response to the majority of the statements in this table constitute positive findings. The response to only one statement constitutes a negative finding, namely *"In class, you feel like a child"*. More than ninety per cent of the respondents experienced this problem. This is caused by the fact that some ABE learners believe that education is meant for children, as is evident from the furniture in many ABE classrooms. The perception is also strengthened by the attitude of some tutors towards the learners (Brookfield 1991:13).

Notwithstanding the positive state of affairs as represented in Table 5.15, it is apparent that there are problems related to the physical environment. In the initial stage of the research (section 1.2.2) the researcher found that ABE learners often stay far away from the adult centre. Furthermore, it was observed that in some centres school children do come and disturb ABE learners by making noise. In some cases ABE learners were found to be overcrowded in a class.

Table 5.16: Problems related to the tutor

NO	ITEM	AGREE %	DISAGREE %	DIRECTION
61	You like to please your tutor in class	90,6	9,4	+
62	Your tutor comes to class well prepared	93,8	6,2	+
63	You feel free to discuss matters with your tutor in class	87,5	12,5	+
64	Your tutor does not respect your language	6,2	93,8	+
65	Your tutor is understanding in class	96,9	3,1	+
66	Your tutor treats you like a child in class	28,1	71,9	+
67	Your tutor is sarcastic in class	12,5	87,5	+
68	Your tutor is always on time in class	96,9	3,1	+
69	In class, your tutor does not allow you to discuss what you learn	15,6	84,4	+
70	Your tutor enjoys working with your group	100	0	+

The responses to all statements indicate positive findings. However, that does not imply that problems related to these items do not exist. For example, in one of the adult centres visited by the researcher some of the tutors were rebuking ABE learners. This was done if the ABE learner did not understand what he/she was taught.

Brookfield mentions that denigrating the contribution of the learners or embarrassing them publicly through extended attention to their apparent failure, can discourage ABE learners (Brookfield 1991:13).

It should be kept in mind that the statements in Table 5.16 are sensitive when one considers the relationship between the tutor and the learner. It is possible that some ABE learners did not believe the researcher when he assured them that the identity of each respondent would not be revealed and the information given would be treated as confidential.

Table 5.17: Problems related to the learning content

NO	ITEM	AGREE %	DISAGREE %	DIRECTION
71	It is more important to be able to read than to write	0	100	+
72	You enjoy reading and writing	90,6	9,4	+
73	The work is difficult in class	68,8	31,2	-
74	You have enough reading material in class	21,9	78,1	-
75	The work you do in class is useful	100	0	+
76	The reading material in class is boring	3,1	96,9	+
77	You pay too much for the learning material	43,8	56,2	
78	You can choose what to learn in class	15,6	84,4	-
79	In class, you enjoy working with numbers	84,4	15,6	+
80	In class, the work you learn makes you more eager to learn	0	100	-

With regard to the statement "*The work is difficult in class*", 68,8% of the respondents agreed. During the qualitative investigation (section 5.3), the researcher found that some learners convinced themselves that the work they were doing in class was difficult. An ABE learner often doubts his/her ability. This is fairly common among female ABE learners (Walker 1992:35).

The statement "*You have enough reading material in class*", was disputed by the respondents during the probe. Seventy-eight per cent of the respondents claimed that they did not have enough reading material. They claimed that they did not buy prescribed textbooks because they were not encouraged to do so. They only relied on notes given by the tutors.

The third statement which elicited mostly negative response is "*You can choose what to learn in class*". According to the observation and experience of the researcher, ABE learners do not have a say in choosing the learning content. During the qualitative investigation (section 5.3) most ABE learners confirmed that they did not have options in choosing what to learn.

The fourth statement to which the response was conclusively negative is *“In class, the work you learn makes you more eager to learn”*. All respondents disagreed. This is connected with the information reflected in Table 5.16 where it is indicated that 68,8% of respondents claimed that the work they do in class is difficult. The finding concerning item 80 is indicative of serious demotivational aspects in the learning content.

The respondents to the other five statements constitute positive findings. These statements are the following:

- *It is more important to be able to read than to write*
- *You enjoy reading and writing*
- *The work you do in class is useful*
- *The reading material in class is boring*
- *In class, you enjoy working with numbers*

Although the responses to these items constitute positive findings, it does not mean that problems do not exist concerning these items. For example, with regard to the first two statements, it was mentioned that ABE learners do not like to write because of the fear of the judgement by the reader (section 3.3.2). One adult learner said: *“I write because I have to. If I have had a choice I wouldn't take writing courses”* (Sommer 1989:22). The fourth statement certainly applies in many cases, when viewed in connection with the response to item 80.

The response to the third statement shows that learners regarded the work they did in class as relevant to their needs.

With regard to the last statement, the researcher found during the informal probe (section 1.2.2.3) that the majority of learners were interested in numeracy. They gave various reasons why they liked numeracy. The following reasons were given: to be able to calculate change if they buy; to be able to calculate a price reduction (eg 10%) and to be able to understand what it means if the boss says he/she will increase salaries, for example by 5%.

Table 5.18: Problems related to the self

NO	ITEM	AGREE %	DISAGREE %	DIRECTION
81	You think you are clever in class	43,8	56,2	
82	You do your best in class	96,9	3,1	+
83	You are nervous when the tutor asks you a question in class	56,2	43,8	
84	You are a good learner in class	50	50	
85	You like to discover new things in class	100	0	+
86	You do not want to be corrected by others in class	50	50	
87	You do not want to be the first to answer a question in class	53,1	46,9	
88	In class, you prefer to sit with learners even if they are younger than you	50	50	
89	In class, you prefer to have a tutor of your own age	43,8	56,2	
90	In class, you do not want to sit in front	53,1	46,9	

The responses to the following statements were not conclusively negative or positive:

- *You think you are clever in class*
- *You are nervous when the tutor asks you a question in class*
- *You are a good learner in class*
- *You do not want to be corrected by others in class*
- *You do not want to be the first to answer a question in class*
- *In class, you prefer to sit with learners even if they are younger than you*
- *In class, you prefer to have a tutor of your own age*
- *In class, you do not want to sit in front*

With regard to the first statement, it is difficult to generalise the ABE learner's self-perception of cleverness. If a learner passes some of the subjects, he/she may regard himself/herself as

a clever person. In response to this statement 43,8% of respondents regarded themselves as clever. This corresponds with the response rate concerning the third statement (item 84).

With regard to the second statement, the majority of ABE learners are nervous when the tutor asks a question, because of the lack of self-confidence (section 3.3.2). This is due to the fear of the unknown and a lack of self-esteem. This condition usually acts as a barrier to learning (Rossman et al 1989:16).

During the qualitative investigation (section 5.3), ABE learners mentioned that they preferred to be corrected by the tutor rather than their colleagues. They mentioned that their colleagues might laugh if they made mistakes. The fourth statement seems to be related to the fear of making mistakes in front of the other ABE learners.

With regard to the fifth and eighth statements, Rossman mentions that this attitude is caused by the lack of self-confidence among ABE learners (Rossman et al 1989:15).

Regarding the sixth statement, ABE learners often fear that they are too stupid to learn and that others will see them fail (Rossman et al 1989:15). For this reason, older learners do not want to be in a class with many younger ABE learners.

With regard to the remaining statement, in the researcher's experience older ABE learners do not like a younger tutor. They prefer a tutor of their age. This is due to the fact that they believe that the younger tutor does not understand their problems. They anticipate that he/she may laugh at them if they make mistakes.

The responses to only two statements in this table constitute positive findings namely:

- *You do your best in class*
- *You like to discover new things in class*

During the researcher's informal probe (section 1.2.2.3), the majority of the ABE learners indicated that they were committed to their work. They appeared to be determined to discover new things which would enhance their progress.

Table 5.19: Problems related to the family and friends

NO	ITEM	AGREE %	DISAGREE %	DIRECTION
91	Your family duties make it difficult for you to attend classes	46,9	53,1	
92	Your family members help you at home so that you can attend ABE classes	65,6	34,4	+
93	Your family members feel proud of your attendance of ABE classes	100	0	+
94	Your neighbours joke about your going to ABE sessions	65,6	34,4	-
95	Your family problems affect your learning in class	53,1	46,9	
96	Attending ABE classes makes it difficult for your family to cope	37,5	62,5	+
97	Your friends share in your ABE success	90,6	9,4	+
98	Your family members share in your ABE success	84,4	15,6	+
99	A husband feels threatened by the wife's learning success in ABE	65,4	34,6	-
100	People keep on disturbing you when you are studying at home	59,4	40,6	

The responses to five statements constitute positive findings, although ABE learners do experience problems to a greater or lesser extent. It appears that family members and friends are generally supportive, but the percentages reflecting the contrary are not insignificant.

Walker mentions that working and learning mothers often lack support from family members especially children. Those family members who have no desire to study tend to regard these

female ABE learners with suspicion (Walker 1992:39). On the other hand, Courney mentions that family members appear to be generally encouraging and happy about the learning family members (Courney 1991:614).

Responses to two statements constitute negative findings. The two statements are as follows:

- *Your neighbours joke about your going to ABE sessions*
- *A husband feels threatened by the wife's learning success in ABE*

This finding confirms similar findings by Walker (1992:39).

5.2.2 Testing of hypothesis

The hypothesis for the empirical survey was formulated in Chapter 4 (section 4.2). It states that ABE learners are influenced by the following factors, listed in their expected order of impact:

- Affective problems
- Volitional problems
- Cognitive problems
- Personal physical problems
- Problems related to the physical environment
- Problems related to the learning content
- Problems related to the learner's relationship with the self
- Problems related to family and friends
- Problems related to the tutor

The results of the research shows the following order of impact:

Table 5.20: Problematic impact of learner and contextual factors

Factors	Strongly negative responses out of 10 items
• Affective problems of ABE learners	6 (60%)
• Cognitive problems of ABE learners	6 (60%)
• Problems related to the learning content	4 (40%)
• Physical problems of ABE learners	2 (20%)
• Problems related to the family and friends	2 (20%)
• Problems related to the physical environment	1 (10%)
• Volitional problems of ABE learners	0 (0%)
• Problems related to the tutor	0 (0%)
• Problems related to the self	0 (0%)

This finding reveals that the hypothesis is partly upheld. The order of impact needs to be changed so that it tallies with the information reflected in Table 5.20.

Categories with the least influence cannot be rejected because they do affect ABE learners to a varying extent, as indicated in Chapter 3.

5.2.3 Summative remarks

The data shows that all problems mentioned in the literature research (Chapter 3) do affect ABE learners. The fact that problems related to the tutor, the self and volition appear to be relatively less serious does not mean that they do not affect ABE learners. However, it appears from the empirical study that the relative impact of problems is the strongest in the first three categories as stated in Table 5.20.

For verification purposes, a qualitative investigation was also conducted. (See sections 4.3.3 and 4.4.2.3.) The findings are presented in the next section.

5.3 QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

In this section the findings of the qualitative investigation are presented and interpreted. Eight respondents were interviewed, one from each adult education centre (section 4.4.2.3). These were learners who seemed to be affected by most of the problems as mentioned during the structured interview. The purpose was to make an in-depth study of the influence of these problems on an individual respondent through questioning. The researcher had to enter into the life world of the individual respondent and to allow him or her to reveal his or her feelings with regard to these problems.

5.3.1 Background information on the participants

In order to provide the necessary contextual information, the background data on respondents is provided together with comments on their behaviour during the interviews.

- **Interviewee A**

This interviewee was a female adult learner, 35 years of age. She was a housewife and unemployed. She appeared to be shy and reluctant to speak. The researcher had to use special skills in order to make her speak during the partly structured interview. She had been studying for two years.

- **Interviewee B**

This interviewee was a female adult learner of 45 years of age. She was married. She lived with her husband, children and grandchildren. She was also shy. She kept on stating that all that she wanted to study was English. She appeared to have many problems that interfered with her education. She had been studying for a period of five years. She had repeated four classes during her study time.

- **Interviewee C**

This was a female adult learner of 43 years old. She was confident of passing the examination. She was unemployed and unmarried. She lived with her children and grandchildren. Her main problem was poor health. She still believed that education could help her to be employed. She supported her family by selling fruit and vegetables as a street vendor.

- **Interviewee D**

This interviewee was a female adult learner who was 30 years of age. She was employed and usually came to the adult education centre tired. She had repeated two classes. She attributed her failure to the hard work she did during the day. Sometimes she slept in the class room because of tiredness. Her objective was to learn English so that she could communicate with her employer. She appeared to be determined to achieve success. She was shy during the interview.

- **Interviewee E**

This was a male adult learner who was 45 years of age. He was employed in one of the local building construction firms. He appeared to have many problems that hampered his progress. He had repeated two classes. He attributed his failure to his age. He believed he could not cope with work and studies at the same time due to his age. He appeared to lack self-confidence during the discussion. His main objective was to get a better job after completing his studies.

- **Interviewee F**

This interviewee was a male adult learner who was 40 years of age. He was employed by one of the companies in town. He usually came to the adult education centre very tired after work. He was worried that he would forget what he had learnt because of his age. He appeared to be determined in achieving success in his studies. He was married and lived with his family. He was the sole breadwinner in his family.

- **Interviewee G**

This interviewee was a male adult learner, 33 years of age. He was married and employed in town. He did not live with his family. He visited his family over the week-ends. He attributed the problems he experienced in ABE to the fact that he did not have enough time to study because he did all the cooking and cleaning as he was staying alone.

- **Interviewee H**

This interviewee was a male adult learner who was 38 years of age. He was married and employed. He appeared to lack self-confidence. He felt he could not cope with his studies because of his age. In spite of the problems he experienced he was determined to learn English so that he could communicate with his boss.

The following comments can be made:

- A common problem among African female adults is that most of them are shy when they talk to a male person they do not know. This shyness is due to the influence of the African culture. It takes time for an African female in an interview situation to relax, unless a male interviewer has good skills of establishing the rapport.
- Most of the participants wanted to learn English, especially those who were employed. They wanted to communicate with their employers. Those who were unemployed, believed that if they could get education they could be employed.
- Those who were employed came to the adult education centre tired. It is obvious that a tired person cannot do homework properly and consequently he/she may fail at the end of the year. Perin and Greenberg (1994:36) confirm the problem of tiredness among employed adult learners.
- Finally, most adult learners have a tendency of telling themselves that because of their age, they cannot cope with the ABE programme. Usually this leads to

a lack in self-confidence. Once the learner has this problems, it becomes very difficult to achieve success (section 3.3.2).

5.3.2 Interview findings

For the purposes of the partly-structured interview items (statements) were selected from the questionnaire in such a way that two statements were selected from each category (cf section 4.5.2). This was done to ensure that each category was represented, and to enable the researcher to identify the areas that presented serious problems to the ABE learners.

The actual choice of the statements in each category was done through purposive sampling. The researcher had to make sure that he chose those statements which did not need further explanation before the learner could respond.

The interview was coupled with the observation of participants. In order to execute the partly-structured interviews the following items were used.

CATEGORY 1: PHYSICAL PROBLEMS OF ABE LEARNERS

Statement (a): You are tired in class

Eight ABE learners were interviewed. Six respondents agreed entirely with the statement. It was remarkable to note that those two learners who did not experience this problem were unemployed adult learners. The six learners complained about two main problems that hampered their progress. Firstly they were tired after work. Secondly, they did not have time to study because they arrived late at home after attending adult lessons.

Statement (b): You cannot sit for a long time in class

Three ABE learners agreed with this statement. They attributed this problem to the type of furniture they were using and their state of health. In some ABE centres, ABE learners used furniture meant for primary school learners. They had to squeeze themselves into the desks.

CATEGORY 2: AFFECTIVE PROBLEMS OF ABE LEARNERS**Statement (a): When in class you feel uneasy because you are away from home**

Out of eight ABE learners, five learners agreed entirely with this statement. They all felt that their children were not safe at night during their absence because of the high crime rate. The remaining three learners did not have this problem because children were with their spouses and relatives at home.

Statement (b): You are as good as younger learners in class

Six learners out of eight believed that they were no longer as smart as they were during their school-going age. They attributed this problem to ageing. They felt they needed special treatment from the tutors in order to pass. They had convinced themselves that because they were old, they might not be able to cope with work in the classroom.

CATEGORY 3: COGNITIVE PROBLEMS OF ABE LEARNERS**Statement (a): You are a slow worker in class**

All interviewees agreed with this statement. They believed they were slow because of their age.

They believed that, compared to the school children, they needed more time whenever they wrote tests or examinations.

Statement (b): When questioned in class, you usually have a good answer ready

The participants all disagreed with the statement. Some ABE learners mentioned that the tutor sometimes asked for work of the previous day. They mentioned that they were unable to answer questions in class because they could not study and do homework due to tiredness and the shortage of time.

CATEGORY 4: VOLITIONAL PROBLEMS OF THE ABE LEARNERS**Statement (a): You want to decide what you should learn in class**

They all agreed with the statement. They wanted to learn what was relevant to their needs. Six interviewees emphasised that they wanted to learn English because they regarded it as a key subject in getting a good job. Furthermore, they wanted to increase their employability. They mentioned that some of the content in ABE was irrelevant to their needs. According to Lurie (1990:26) what adults learn, should relate directly to their own lives.

Statement (b): You are not a successful person in class

Four learners believed that they were not successful. They attributed their failure to the problems they encountered, such as the problems of tiredness after work, the fact that they were too old to learn, ill-health and nervousness in the class when they were evaluated.

CATEGORY 5: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**Statement (a): Noise in class hampers your concentration**

Five interviewees disagreed with the statement. They claimed that there was no noise in their classes, because they were all adults. Those that agreed with the statement claimed that they had a problem of school children who usually came and attended evening classes with them. These school children usually made noise when the tutor was not in the classroom.

Statement (b): The area in which you meet is unsafe at night

Three interviewees agreed entirely with the statement. This was probably due to high crime rate in the area. Adult education centres do not have security measures at night.

CATEGORY 6: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE TUTOR**Statement (a): Your tutor is understanding in class**

Three out of eight interviewees disagreed with the statement. They complained that their tutors reprimanded them if they had not done their homework. They felt that they were treated like children.

Statement (b): Your tutor is always on time in class

Half of the respondents agreed with the statement. The other half claimed that their tutors did not come on time in class. They mentioned that some tutors came irregularly to the adult education centres.

CATEGORY 7: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE LEARNING CONTENT**Statement (a): You have enough reading material in class**

All respondents disagreed with the statement. They claimed that they did not have prescribed text books. They depended on the notes given by the tutor. They mentioned that they had no access to the school library. Public libraries are open during the day while the employed learners are working.

Statement (b): You pay too much for the learning material

All interviewees disagreed with the statement. They mentioned that they bought only exercise books. Most of them claimed that they had not been informed that they should buy text books.

CATEGORY 8: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE SELF**Statement (a): You are nervous when the tutor asks you a question in class**

Seven respondents out of eight agreed with the statement. They mentioned that they were nervous because they might make mistakes in front of the class. They anticipated that colleagues might laugh at them if they made mistakes. One of them stated categorically that she never raised her hand in class even if she knew the answer because she was afraid of making mistakes in front of the class.

Statement (b): You do not want to be the first person to answer a question in class

Again seven ABE learners agreed with the statement. The reason as given above also applied here.

CATEGORY 9: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS**Statement (a): Your family duties make it difficult for you to attend ABE classes**

Six respondents agreed with the statement. They claimed that they attended classes at the expense of their families. Female respondents mentioned that they cooked very late for their families.

Statement (b): People keep on disturbing you when you are studying at home

Seven respondents agreed with the statement. They mentioned that children disturbed them by playing radios and TVs. Those that had babies claimed that their babies disturbed them, especially if the baby was not feeling well. They also mentioned that visitors disturbed them, and that invitations to gatherings such as evening church services and social club meetings could be problematic.

5.3.3 Summative remarks

The following summative remarks can be made:

- Most of the respondents were tense when the interview began because they were not sure what was expected from them. As the interview proceeded, they usually started to relax and adjusted themselves to the situation. The majority appeared to have problems in the ABE classes. The researcher kept on giving them motivational comments during the proceedings. Some respondents had a problem in answering questions which were related to the relationship between the learner and the tutor. The researcher had to be very tactful in order to make them to elicit the needed information.
- The qualitative investigation revealed that cultural behaviour may affect the results of the interview. The interviewer should always be very tactful during the process of the interview so that the cultural influence is reduced to the minimum.
- Respondents were affected by all the problems chosen from the different categories with the exception of the problems in the category dealing with learning content. The problems in this category did not affect the learners because they were not encouraged to buy the learning materials. However, the fact that they did not have text books was a problem in itself because they appeared to rely on the notes given by the tutor. Notes give mostly limited information. ABE learners need to have text books so that they can effectively learn on their own.
- The respondents indicated that they were affected by the reduction of quickness due to age which caused them to be slow workers in class. Jarvis (1990:112) indicated this effect of ageing.
- The qualitative investigation also showed that poor tutor-learner relationships affect ABE learners. This indicates that the very positive findings concerning tutors as reflected in table 5.16 (section 5.2.1) should be treated with some caution. If the tutor-

learner relationship is poor, ABE learners may decide to abandon the ABE programme (Quigley 1992a:25). It is imperative that the tutor should create a conducive atmosphere for learning.

- Some statements appeared to affect more than 90% of the participants in the qualitative survey. For example, ABE learners agreed with the statement "*You want to decide what you should learn in class*". During the research survey the researcher learnt that in all adult education centres involved in the survey, ABE learners mostly did not have a say in choosing what to learn in class (table 5.17, section 5.2.1). According to Lurie (1990:26) learners should be involved in deciding what they will learn in the ABE programme.

The qualitative approach helped the researcher to challenge the ABE learners to rate their problems without any fear. The problems stated by the learners seem to tally with those problems mentioned by many researchers in the literature survey.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the analysis of the data obtained through using quantitative and qualitative investigation methodology. The elicited information was carefully interpreted and the problems of the ABE learners were identified.

With reference to the testing of the research hypothesis, as largely verified by the qualitative investigation, it can be concluded that tutors should have profound personal and contextual knowledge of their ABE learners, covering all nine categories of typical ABE learner problems as used in this survey. The implications for ensuring quality ABE provision are evident.

Chapter 6 gives a brief summary of the findings, as well as conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the synthesis of research data, as well as conclusions and recommendations on problems of ABE learners. This is done in view of the research aim of this study as formulated in Chapter 1 (section 1.4).

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

6.2.1 Chapter 1

An initial literature survey revealed that ABE learners encounter problems when they participate in the ABE programme. For example, ABE learners who are workers experience fatigue after long working hours (Wedepohl 1988:60). They also often claim that they become a joke to their neighbours when they return to school at a later stage (Hutton 1992:74). These problems tally with the researcher's experience and observations. However, the effect of these problems varies.

The aim of the research was to identify problems of ABE learners. It sought to identify physical, affective, cognitive and volitional problems, and to establish the relative impact of these problems. Furthermore, the researcher sought to explore the learner's relationship with the physical environment, tutor, learning content, the self, and family and friends.

6.2.2 Chapter 2

This chapter focuses on the situation of ABE programmes in South Africa with special reference to the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal.

Historically, the provision of ABE suffered after 1948 under the Nationalist government, because the government ignored applications for subsidies which were to finance ABE programmes. This severely inhibited the development of ABE programmes. It reduced the number of ABE learners drastically (Hutton 1992:56; Screen 1990:2). However, ABE provision improved gradually over the years.

The following can be remarked regarding the status of ABE in South Africa.

- Education Departments still regard their role in providing ABE as only a second order priority, compared to providing for other sectors of education.
- Private sector programmes are usually well organised and have good facilities, while NGO programmes often have inadequate facilities, but good learning materials.
- The new NQF dispensation of ABE is laudable since ABE learning programmes will have to be responsive and sensitive to learner needs.

6.2.3 Chapter 3

This chapter focuses on the literature study concerning the problems of ABE learners. The following typical problems and issues represent the gist of the chapter:

6.2.3.1 *Physical problems*

- Roger (1991:52) mentions that an adult learner may be affected by the feeling that his/her learning ability has deteriorated.
- Physical health-related problems had been quoted as additional problems of ABE learners (Jarvis 1990:85). This is due to the physiological changes of the body (Malone 1986:22). This view is supported by Rossman et al (1989:18) when they state that reaction time slows with ageing, including the time taken to recall information.
- Conversation and other activities in the room tend to be more distracting to adult learners (Steinback 1993:73).

6.2.3.2 *Affective problems*

- ABE learners are threatened by evaluation. Perin and Greenberg (1994:169) confirm this when they state that some ABE learners absent themselves in order to avoid evaluation.
- ABE learners often do not ask for further clarification during a lesson. Even if they do not understand, they keep quiet because they are afraid of showing their ignorance (McKay & Northedge 1995:30).
- ABE learners often expect to find many errors in their work (Sommer 1989:22).
- ABE learners are sometimes treated like children (McKay & Northedge 1995:30).

6.2.3.3 *Cognitive problems*

- Susceptibility to distraction and cognitive interference increase with age. Hence ABE learners experience difficulties in solving complex problems (Fry 1992:316).
- Many ABE learners sabotage their learning potential because of negative self-conceptions of ageing (Fry 1992:316).

6.2.3.4 *Volitional problems*

- ABE learners become demotivated if the learning content is irrelevant (Rossman et al 1989:22; Malicky & Norman 1996:44).
- Bad teaching or a bad relationship between the adult educator and ABE learners may cause ABE learners to drop out. Roger (1991:14) mentions that some adult educators do not respect ABE learners.

6.2.3.5 *Relationship with the physical environment*

- Hiemstra (1991:88) believes that some ABE learners do not want to sit in front because they feel uneasy when the adult educator paces the floor near them.

- According to Calder (1993:87), a too high or low temperature may act as a barrier to ABE learning. Furthermore, bad illumination may reduce chances of success among ABE learners.
- If a primary school is used as an adult education centre, chairs and desks pose a serious problem because ABE learners are expected to squeeze themselves into small chairs and desks meant for primary school children (Hiemstra & Vosko 1988:181).

6.2.3.6 *Relationship with the tutor*

- According to Hiemstra & Vosko (1988:181) ABE learners accept a tutor who responds with sympathy, understanding and patience.
- ABE learners feel embarrassed and disappointed if they make mistakes in class, especially if someone laughs at them (Wedepohl 1988:33).

6.2.3.7 *Relationship with the learning content*

- The readability of the learning content may be the cause of the withdrawal of ABE learners from programmes (Hiemstra 1991:45).

6.2.3.8 *Relationship with self*

- An ABE learner cannot cope with work if he/she is tense and nervous. Under these conditions, ABE learners may pretend that they understand what is taught (Northedge & McKay 1995:31).
- Older ABE learners prefer to sit alone or with other older ABE learners.

6.2.3.9 *Relationship with family and friends*

- According to Hutton (1992:8 1), ABE learners sometimes do not get family support. Furthermore, an ABE learner may be reluctant to be away from home at night. Learners may be worried about the safety of their children (Van Niekerk 1996b:38).

- Husbands may feel threatened by the academic achievements of their wives (De Barros 1989:24; Bittel 1990:11). This condition can cause the husband to regard himself as a failure (Bittel 1990:11).

6.2.4 Chapter 4

This chapter deals with the methods used in the empirical survey, consisting of a quantitative and a qualitative investigation.

In the quantitative investigation a structured interview was used, involving 32 ABE learners. The questionnaire (or structured interview schedule) consisted of nine categories of questions, each category with 10 statements. The statements were used to explore the problems of ABE learners in each category.

In the qualitative investigation, a partly-structured interview was used, involving eight participants. The participants had to comment on selected statements, purposively selected from the afore-mentioned questionnaire.

The research design proved to be adequate for the purposes of the study.

6.2.5 Chapter 5

This chapter deals with the findings of the empirical investigation. It was found that the effect of the problems vary. In some cases most of the respondents experienced a particular problem, e.g. *"Your age makes it difficult for you to cope in class"* (90,6%) (Table 5:13). Evidently such a problem needs urgent attention.

The order of impact of problems on ABE learners had changed from that of the hypothesis (section 4.2). According to the empirical data, the order is as follows:

- Affective problems of ABE learners

- Cognitive problems of ABE learners
- Problems related to the learning content
- Physical problems of ABE learners
- Problems related to the family and friends
- Problems related to the physical environment
- Volitional problems of ABE learners
- Problems related to the tutor
- Problems related to the self

In each category of problems, the following issues need urgent attention because of the high percentage of respondents experiencing these problems.

6.2.5.1 Affective problems (Table 5.12)

- In class others are usually better than you : 87,5% agreed
- You are as good as younger learners in class : 84,4% disagreed
- In class, you always expect to find errors in your work : 81,2% agreed
- You become tense when you write a test : 75,5% agreed

6.2.5.2 Cognitive problems (Table 5.13)

- In class it is difficult to write down what is in your mind : 93,8% agreed
- In class you forget what you have learnt : 90,6% agreed
- Your age makes it difficult for you cope : 90,6% agreed
- In class you do not understand what you learnt : 71,9% agreed
- You are a slow worker in class : 65,6% agreed

6.2.5.3 Problems related to the learning content (Table 5.17)

- In class the work you learn makes you eager to learn : 100% disagreed
- You can choose what to learn in class : 84,4% disagreed

6.2.5.4 Physical problems of ABE learners (Table 5.11)

- You are tired in class : 71,9% agreed
- You remember well in class : 68,8% disagreed
- You suffer from ill-health in class : 59,4% agreed

6.2.5.5 Problems related to family and friends (Table 5.19)

- Your neighbours joke about you going to ABE sessions : 65,6% agreed
- A husband feel threatened by the wife's learning success in ABE : 65,4% agreed
- People keep disturbing you when you are studying at home : 59,4% agreed

6.2.5.6 Problems related to the physical environment (Table 5.15)

- In class you feel like a child : 90,6% agreed

In the remaining categories, the problems were relatively less serious. The categories are as follows:

6.2.5.7 Volitional problems of ABE learners (Table 5.14)

6.2.5.8 Problems related to the tutor (Table 5.16)

6.2.5.9 Problems related to the self (Table 5.18)

In conclusion, it can be stated with confidence that the study identified problems of ABE learners, as well as the extent to which learners feel that the problems affect their learning. The aim of this study was met, although further study is necessary to determine the impact and solution of these problems in more detail.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

The research aim of the study (section 1.4) states the identification of the problems which impair adult learners in ABE programmes. This study was able to identify these problems in terms of learners' physical, affective, cognitive and volitional perspectives. Furthermore, problems were identified in terms of learners relationship with the tutor, learning content, self, physical environment and family and friends.

Problems under each category were identified and their relative impact determined. Problems which need urgent attention were identified.

Evidently the most serious issue concerning the problems of ABE learners in KwaZulu-Natal is the need for professionally trained adult educators. Such adult educators are capable of understanding the full scope of personal and contextual problems of ABE learners, and to plan and manage tuition accordingly.

For example, a person not trained in ABE cannot understand that ABE learners are so task-oriented that they reduce speed to maintain a high degree of accuracy (Rossman et al 1989:18). Furthermore, an untrained adult educator cannot understand the importance of affective problems of ABE learners. Such a tutor cannot provide the emotional support learners may require to confront the anxiety and stress inherent in their interacting with the written word (Gartin & Murdick 1992:22). Perin and Greenberg (1994:136) mention that fear and anxiety may be due to an ignorance of a tutor who does not know how to deal with these problems.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for the ABE providers to increase both the number and the quality of adult educators.

In sum, this study verifies earlier research findings (both locally and in other developing countries) concerning ABE learning obstacles and problems, thereby highlighting the disconcerting situation that these problems appear to be continuous and in dire need to be

rectified. On the other hand, the study highlights the perseverance of the typical ABE student, notwithstanding personal and contextual hurdles. This finding, more than all others, justifies vastly increased investment in the ABE sector.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The professional training of ABE practitioners should receive renewed and urgent attention.

Motivation: Only a professionally trained person will be able to deal effectively with needs and problems pertaining to the personhood and relationships of ABE learners, as identified in this study.

Recommendation 2: Provincial education departments should pay renewed and urgent attention to ABE provision. The following recommendations, which specifically mention the KZN DOE, should therefore be viewed as relevant to all provincial education departments.

Motivation: Provincial education departments are in the best position to provide high quality ABE on a significant scale.

Recommendation 3: The KZN Department of Education (DOE), as a matter of urgency, should employ Deputy Chief Education Specialists who will attend to ABE on a full-time basis.

Motivation: At present, the Deputy Chief Education Specialists are employed full-time in formal education. They attend to ABE on a part-time basis. If there are Deputy Chief Education Specialists tasked with ABE, they will have more time to concentrate on the problems of ABE learners. At present the Deputy Chief Education Specialists do not have enough time to visit adult education centres and organise workshops for adult educators. More workshops are needed to train adult educators because very few of them are trained to teach adult learners.

Recommendation 4: There should be one Deputy Chief Education Specialist per district.

Motivation: At present there is only one Deputy Chief Education Specialist per region who is responsible for ABE/ABET. Each region has five districts. Deploying a Deputy Chief Education Specialist per district will enable him/her to visit each centre on a regular basis and to give meaningful support to the supervisors and adult educators. Furthermore, it will enable him/her to make sure that the physical environment used for ABE programmes is up to a required standard.

Recommendation 5: The KZN DOE should increase the budget for ABE.

Motivation: At present the ABE budget is less than five percent of the total education budget. Money is needed for the training of supervisors and adult educators through workshops. Increased expenditure can also be used for upgrading the salaries of adult educators. If a person is not satisfied with his/her salary he/she may neglect his/her work.

Recommendation 6: The KZN DOE should train tutors on the NQF and unit standards.

Motivation: There has been a paradigm shift in the education system of South Africa. Tutors should be informed about NQF structures and how to formulate unit standards. Furthermore, they should be trained in designing and developing programmes which are acceptable to SAQA. This training will enable tutors to select relevant learning content.

Recommendation 7: Supervisors and adult educators should be employed on a full-time basis in ABE.

Motivation: Most adult educators are school teachers. If these teachers are not employed full-time in ABE, they may apply for promotional posts in formal education. Once an adult educator is promoted to a post of a principalship, he/she is no longer allowed to be involved in the ABE programme. This constitutes a loss to the KZN DOE if money has been spent on

developing that particular adult educator, and may sustain the shortage of trained ABE educators.

Recommendation 8: The KZN DOE should recognise ABET certificates and diplomas in terms of salary scales. For example, with a matric pass plus a Unisa ABET certificate, a tutor is only paid for a matric certificate. If these certificates and diplomas are not recognised, adult educators will leave the KZN DOE and look for employment in the private sector. The exodus of trained tutors will force the KZN to employ untrained tutors who cannot create a climate which is responsive to the personal needs and contextual problems of ABE learners.

Recommendation 9: ABE programmes should be responsive to the needs of the community.

Motivation: ABE learners should be taught relevant learning content. For example, informal traders of vegetables and other commodities should be taught numeracy and English.

Recommendation 10: The KZN DOE should put in place mechanisms that will disseminate information about ABE/ABET, especially in remote rural areas.

Motivation: Many people in rural areas have not heard about ABE programmes. These people should be taught basic business management and agriculture methods. This can reduce the problem of unemployment and poverty. According to the researcher's experience, one of the reasons why adults do not participate in ABE programmes, especially in rural areas, is because they have never heard about ABE learning programmes.

Recommendation 11: The KZN DOE should provide a guidance and counselling support service for ABE learners.

Motivation: A guidance and counselling service will help ABE learners to choose relevant subjects and to cope with typical personal and contextual problems as identified in this study.

Recommendation 12: The KZN DOE should provide in-service training (INSET) for supervisors and adult educators.

Motivation: INSET programmes will help adult educators to improve their knowledge of ABE. At the end of the course an adult educator should be issued with a certificate which he/she can use to apply for a promotion post. A certificate will serve as incentive for professional growth in ABE.

Recommendation 13: There should be an ABE learners' representative committee in each ABE centre.

Motivation: The committee can liaise between the ABE learners and the management/tutors in the event of specific needs or problems.

Recommendation 14: The KZN DOE should improve the administration of ABE.

Motivation: It is not uncommon for an adult educator to work for three to six months without pay. Such maladministration is intolerable and unacceptable due to its strong demotivational effects.

6.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

ABE practitioners, supervisors and adult learners should be encouraged to conduct action research on the needs and the problems of ABE learners. Such research is essential for meaningful staff development and quality ABE learning.

6.6 CLOSING REMARK

Estimates indicate that at least 30% of the South African population is functionally illiterate, and that less than one per cent of adult illiterates in South Africa are currently involved in ABE (section 1:1). This means that the country is far from solving the problem of illiteracy.

Evidently, the issues of a high illiteracy rate and ensuing ABE learner problems are not confined to KwaZulu-Natal. It is therefore clear that the findings and recommendations of this study are highly relevant in the national context of illiteracy and poverty eradication.

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