CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to determine how national women in education can be empowered and their leadership developed for Emiratisation in the UAE (Section 1.3). This chapter presents a discussion of the research design developed to explore the aim of this study. Firstly, a justification for the research design chosen and a description of the research setting is provided. Next, the data collection method including ethical measures, verification strategies and standards implemented, and the research instruments employed is discussed. Finally the procedure employed for the analysis of data collected using the various research instruments is provided.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions or problems (Kerlinger, 1986:279). It is a complete scheme or programme of the research (Kerlinger, 1986:279). The design describes the procedures for conducting the study, including when, from whom and under what conditions data were obtained. Its purpose is to provide the most valid, accurate answers as possible to research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:31).

A research design may be qualitative and/or quantitative. According to Creswell (1998:15), “qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting.” A quantitative research design, in contrast, adopts a positivist philosophy of knowing the emphasised objectivity by using numbers, statistics and experimental control to quantify phenomena (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:32). A qualitative research design is selected for the purposes of this study because it contains features, which enable the researcher to obtain thick descriptions and to attain depth of information for a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

4.2.1 Features of a qualitative research design

The following five features are characteristic of qualitative research, namely,

- Assumptions about the world;
- Goals;
- Multi-method strategies;
- Researcher's role; and
- Context sensitivity.

In order to provide a context for the choice of this design for the purposes of this study, each feature is described briefly below.

4.2.1.1 Assumptions about the world

Qualitative research is based on phenomenological research traditions (Cherry, 2000:49). It assumes that multiple realities are socially constructed through individual and collective definitions of the situation (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:14). Data consists of words in the form of rich verbal descriptions. Qualitative research has been described by some as *anecdotal* because findings contain quotations and they try to describe what a particular situation or view of the world is like, in narrative form (Suliman, 2000:184).

4.2.1.2 Goals

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding social phenomena from the participant's points of view. It enables "the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or a small group of participants, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves" (Colorado State University Writing Center Website, 2002:1). Thus, people's individual and collective social interactions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions are analysed and described.

4.2.1.3 Multi-method strategies

Researchers study participant's perspectives with interactive strategies (observation and interviews) and non-interactive strategies (use of documents). Research strategies are flexible, responsive and on-going (Pole & Lampard, 2002:12). Typically an emergent design is used and the researcher makes decisions about data collection strategies during the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:15). The researcher therefore, refrains from assuming the role of the expert. Instead the participants are the experts and interaction with participants dictates an evolving design.

4.2.1.4 Researcher's role

Qualitative researchers become immersed in the situation, past or present, and in the phenomenon being studied. This type of research is grounded in the German term *verstehen*, which means empathetic insight (Bhaskar, 1989 as cited by Cherry, 2000:41). This occurs through the researcher's participation in a research role or through historical empathy with participants in past social events (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:15).

4.2.1.5 Context sensitivity

The qualitative researcher believes that human actions are strongly influenced by the settings in which they occur. Qualitative researchers "go to a particular setting because they are concerned with context" (Suliman, 2000:183). According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993:15) "qualitative research develops context-bound generalisations," however, it must be highlighted that in some instances research conducted may lead to findings that could be applied to other contexts, settings or to other groups (see Applicability in Section 4.4.2). Nonetheless, "to divorce the act, work or gesture from its context is for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance" (Suliman, 2000:183). In qualitative research, an attempt is made to investigate behaviour as it occurs naturally in which there is no conscious manipulation of conditions or experiences. Although this is the ideal, it is also true that the very acts of reflection or interview may influence participant experience.

4.2.2 Research design of this study

The research question (Section 1.2) of this study seeks to explore how national women in education can be empowered and their leadership developed for Emiratisation in the UAE. Based on the premise and the features of an exploratory qualitative research design, this design was considered suitable for the purposes of this study.

According to Cherry (2000:12), a qualitative exploratory research design is very useful when we know little about a group of people or phenomenon. A literature search revealed sparse published information regarding employment, barriers and leadership as experienced by UAE national women educators or Arab women in general. This study therefore, adopted an exploratory qualitative research design to consider the experiences of UAE national female educators at different stages of their careers, drawing conclusions only from that participant group and only within their specific context. A qualitative research design was preferred to a quantitative design because "the researcher had little control over the events and the study required a contemporary focus within a real life context" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:376). In addition, exploratory research designs require a problem that seeks holistic understanding of the event or situation in question using inductive reasoning from specific to more general terms (Colorado State University Writing Center Website, 2002:2).

For the purposes of this study, an exploratory qualitative research design provided a window on how a range of factors cumulatively impacted employment and leadership opportunities of UAE national women educators. Emphasis was placed on the examination of the perspectives and experiences of national female educators, pertaining to any barriers they may have encountered during employment and career development. Their current leadership roles within the context of leadership style and their participation in the decision-making process were explored.

In the UAE, the MOEY fulfils the criteria of a research setting as defined by Holliday (2002:38), namely, it has a sense of boundedness, the provision of a variety of

relevant and interconnected data, has sufficient richness and accessibility and is of reasonable size.

4.3 RESEARCH SETTING

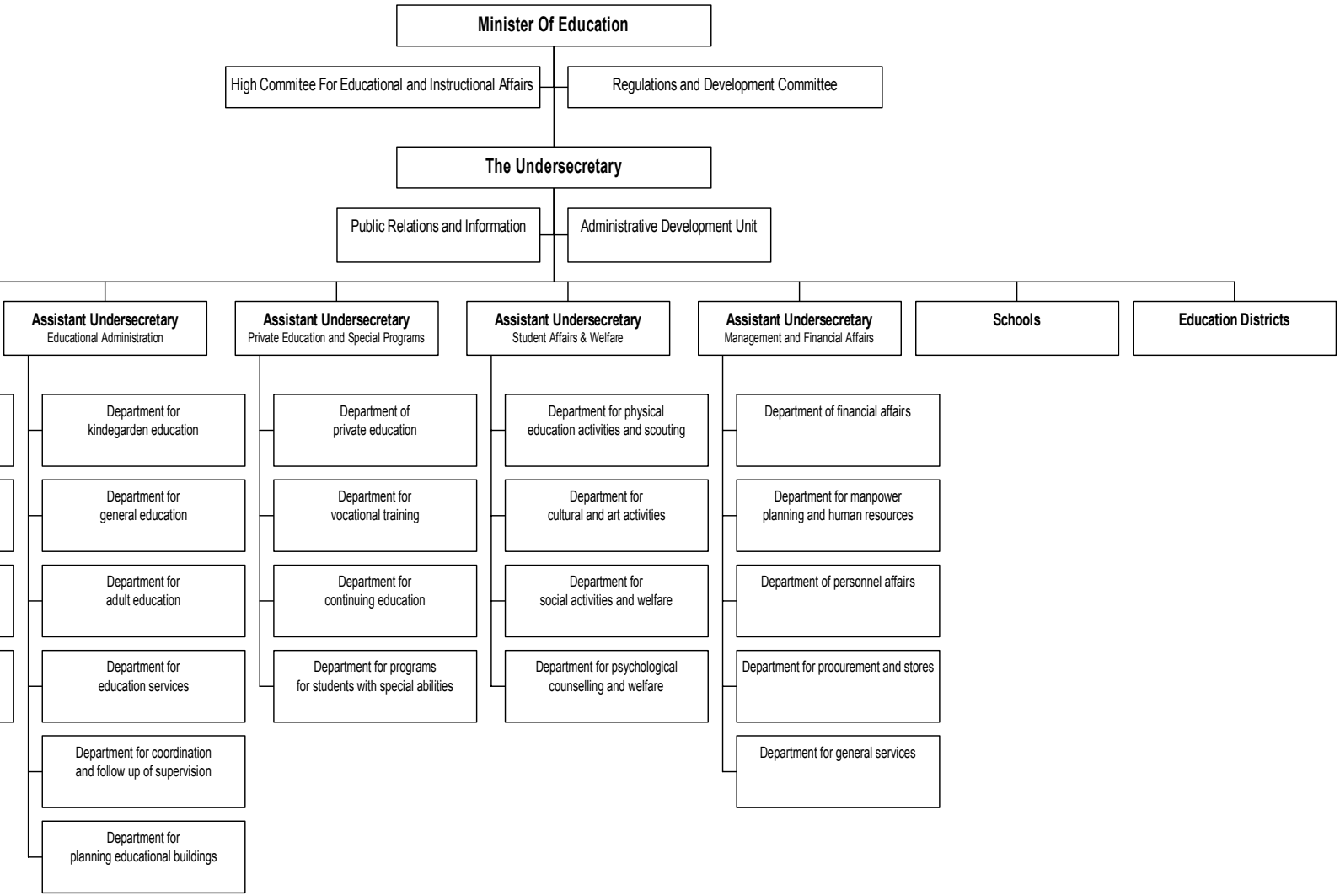
4.3.1 The Ministry of Education and Youth (MOEY)

The system of education management is centralised in the UAE and falls under the control of the MOEY. Figure 4.1 shows an organisation chart for the structure of the MOEY. It shows that the High Committee for Educational and Instructional Affairs is the main policy making body of the MOEY. It is an inter-ministerial committee comprising the Ministers of Education, Planning, Finance and Industry, Labour and Social Welfare, the Chancellor of UAEU, the Undersecretary of the MOEY and two members nominated by the Minister of Education (Suliman, 2000:164). The main task of this committee is to approve major policy decisions affecting the general orientation of education in the UAE.

The Regulation and Development Committee is an internal body made up of the Minister of Education, the Undersecretary and five Assistant Undersecretaries. It drafts educational policies to be approved by the High Committee for Educational and Instructional Affairs, proposes the education budget, proposes internal regulations on matters like admissions, examinations, promotions and determines distribution within schools like class sizes and number of teachers (Suliman, 2000:165). These committees assist the Minister in the general running of the MOEY. Two units are attached to the Undersecretary, namely, the Administrative Development Unit and the Public Relations and Information Office. In addition, the Undersecretary has five Assistant Undersecretaries, who head the following departments, namely,

- Educational programs and curriculum;
- Educational administration;
- Private education and special programs;
- Student affairs and welfare; and
- Management and financial affairs.

FIG 4.1: ORGANISATION CHART OF THE MOEY



For purposes of educational administration, the country is divided into nine regions, seven run by Educational Zones which are regional offices and two by a representative office. The Educational Zone is in charge of the day-to-day running of the schools at the level of administration, personnel management, instruction or educational supervision (Suliman, 2000:165). School principals, inspectors and other administrators report to the Educational Zone. They cannot circumvent the Educational Zone and report directly to the MOEY (Suliman, 2000:165).

4.3.2 Schools

Public schools are segregated on the basis of gender but in some instances mixed classes occur at kindergarten and lower primary levels. In public schools female educators may teach female children at all levels of education and male children up to elementary level, male educators on the other hand, cannot teach female children at any level in public schools. A school typically has five employees who take care of administration, namely, a principal, vice-principal, an officer and one or two secretaries. The teachers themselves perform a large share of the clerical work connected with examinations, grade reporting and computations, apart from their teaching responsibilities, committee work and extra-curricular responsibilities. An Officer of Student Affairs is responsible for student discipline. This post was eliminated but reinstated after school discipline deteriorated.

Supervisory powers are concentrated at the central MOEY with limited powers for decision-making delegated to the Educational Zones and practically none to the schools. All major decisions, including the employment of teachers, are taken at central level. Education is financed by the federal government but is largely funded by the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (Suliman, 2000:168).

4.3.3 Access to the research setting

I attempted to seek approval and collaboration from the MOEY for conducting this study in early 2002 but access to the site proved difficult because of a lack of information relating to MOEY procedures. After several failed attempts over a three month period I was informed by a MOEY official that I could not represent myself as

a researcher and that it would be better if I were introduced to the Undersecretary of the MOEY by a local institution. A letter of introduction was kindly provided by the Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Zayed University (Abu Dhabi campus). Approval from the Undersecretary was obtained in March 2002 by means of an official MOEY letter (**Appendix B**). This approval permitted me to obtain assistance from various departments at the MOEY and at the Educational Zones in order to initiate the process of sampling and data gathering. However, the foremost consideration in this study was the ethical measures necessary for the use of human subjects. These were developed as part of the research methodology.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODS

4.4.1 Ethical measures

Ethics are considered to deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:182). According to Gillespie (1995:884) "ethics emerge from value conflicts among those in a profession. These conflicts are expressed in discussions and decisions that relate to individual rights. For example, when conducting a research study, the researcher tries to minimise the risk to individual rights. However, there is conflict between a person's right to privacy versus the researcher's need to know. Researchers must try to minimise risks to participants, colleagues and society while attempting to maximise the quality of information they produce."

Qualitative researchers need to be sensitive to ethical principles because of their research topic, face-to-face interactive data collection, an emergent design and reciprocity with participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:397). Criteria for research design involve not only the selection of information rich informants and efficient research strategies but also adherence to research ethics (Kumar, 1999:190). A code of ethics was set up for the purposes of this study and an application to the Zayed University Human Subjects Committee for ethics approval was made. Approval was obtained in September 2002 (**Appendix C**). The following aspects formed the code of ethics employed for the purposes of this study and are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

4.4.1.1 Informed consent as dialogue

Participants were initially contacted by means of a telephone call followed by a visit. During my visit to each participant, they were "informed of the purpose of the study and was (were) assured of confidentiality and anonymity" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:398). In addition, the time anticipated for their participation and my research role was explained. Although Christians (2000:138) mentions that, "subjects must agree voluntarily to participate, that is, without physical or psychological coercion," and I made every effort to inform participants in a manner that would encourage free choice of participation, I could not negate the *effect* of contacting participants either by telephone or by a visit. Certainly, in the UAE context, potential participants may feel it discourteous to refuse or they may feel as though they were *letting me down* by refusing to participate.

In order to minimise this effect, participants were not required to give an immediate response, instead, they were provided with a letter of information and an appropriate consent form to be signed and posted at a later date (**Appendix D**). After receipt of the consent forms educators who agreed to participate were requested to provide convenient dates and times for focus group and individual interviews. While focus group times were chosen to accommodate the majority of participants, individual interview times were more flexible with most participants being interviewed at their requested time. A recording studio was suggested as the venue for interviews, however, in instances where participants were not able to come to the recording studio, transportation was provided or the participant was interviewed at a venue of her choice. All participants were invited to ask questions, prior to and throughout the duration of the research study.

4.4.1.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Codes of ethics insist on safeguards to protect people's identities and those of research locations (Christians, 2000:139). All personal data have to be secured or concealed and made public behind a shield of anonymity (Christians, 2000:139). According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993:399), researchers have a dual responsibility, firstly, the protection of the participant's confidence from other actors

in the setting whose private information might enable them to identify them and secondly, the protection of informants from the general reading public. During this study, all reasonable steps to maintain the confidentiality of participants were taken. For example, the findings of the research have been recorded in such a way that participants could not be identified and appropriate codes and pseudonyms were used when individual statements were quoted.

4.4.1.3 Deception, privacy and empowerment

Deception is viewed by most researchers as violating informed consent and privacy (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:399). Other researchers suggest that field workers negotiate with participants so that they understand the power that they have in the research process. This power and the decisions that come with it may be an exchange for the privacy lost in the participation of the study (Lincoln, 1990 as cited by McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:399). In this study, participants were made aware of the purpose of the research and a letter of information was distributed with the consent forms.

4.4.1.4 Harm, caring and fairness

Although physical harm seldom happens to participants in qualitative research, some persons can experience personal humiliation and loss of interpersonal trust (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:400). While it is recognised that any study carries the potential for harm to participants, it was hoped that the confidentiality procedures outlined in this proposal would have countered the most obvious problems. For example, attribution of statements was carefully monitored to ensure that participants were not likely to be adversely affected by issues of power and status. This measure was considered so that participants would not feel constrained to share information because of fear of repercussions from within their institution, workplace or home.

4.4.1.5 Participants right to decline

Each participant was informed of their right to decline participation in this study, which would be respected at any time and for any reason. A statement relating to this right was also placed on the consent forms (**Appendix D**).

4.4.1.6 Arrangements for participants to receive information

Participant permission to audiotape interviews and focus group sessions was requested because it was a means of obtaining accurate information. Participants were informed that they would be given a copy of their transcript to check and modify if necessary. I also clarified that the information obtained from their participation would only be used after I received their written acceptance of the transcript. In addition the final synthesis of the data would be provided for each participant to review.

4.4.1.7 Conflicts of interest

While no obvious conflicts of interest were identified initially, these could occur during the course of the study. It was decided that in this unlikely eventuality, advice would be sought from the Zayed University Human Subjects Committee.

It was hoped that, with these ethical measures in place, participants would feel comfortable about sharing their experiences and perspectives openly and without fear of any repercussions. In addition, participants would accept my involvement within the context of the research setting with the knowledge that information imparted at any stage to me would be utilised within the ethical bounds provided above. Qualitative researchers strive for understanding, that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with informants, spending extensive time in the field and probing to obtain detailed meanings (Stake, 1995:107). During or after a study, qualitative researchers ask, “Did we get it right?” (Stake, 1995:107). This question introduces standards of quality and approaches to verification in qualitative research.

4.4.2 Approaches to verification and standards of quality

According to Creswell (1998:194), verification is a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis and report writing of a study, while standards are criteria imposed by a researcher and others after the study is complete. There are multiple views of verification in qualitative research where writers may view it from a quantitative perspective to find equivalents (for example, LeCompte & Goetz, 1982), or employ distinct language to provide legitimacy for it in naturalistic research (for example, Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Eisner, 1991), or reconceptualise it within a post-modern framework (for example, Lather, 1993; Richardson, 1990), or suggest that it is a distraction of good research (for example, Wolcott, 1994).

For the purposes of this study, Guba's (1981 as cited by Krefting, 1991:214–222) model of trustworthiness was chosen. This model is based on the identification of four aspects, namely, truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Truth value considers whether the researcher has established confidence in the findings of subjects or informants and the context within which the study was undertaken (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited by Krefting, 1991:217). Applicability refers to the degree to which findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or with other groups. Consistency alludes to the reproducibility of the findings if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context and neutrality, which is freedom from bias in research procedures and results (Sandelowski, 1986 as cited by Krefting, 1991:216). This model of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981 as cited by Krefting, 1991:214–222) was used to develop strategies that would introduce standards of quality into this study. The strategies implemented were credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Table 4.1).

TABLE 4.1: A SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES USED FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS

Strategy	Criteria	Application
Credibility	Prolonged and varied field experience	Six months of preparatory work at the MOEY prior to data collection in which I familiarised myself with the setting and with potential participants. In addition, I had opportunities to meet, interact with and observe participants in work related encounters during the research period. Focus group and interview materials were prepared using the literature review, field notes and observations.
	Reflexivity	A field journal was kept in which field notes were taken during preparation for the study and throughout the duration of the study.
	Triangulation	The data collection methods, field notes, data analysis and literature review were used to verify observations and categorisation of the data gathered.
	Member checking Participant review	Participants were requested to do a terminal member check for accuracy during data collection. Transcripts and field notes were also triangulated with literature.
	Peer examination	Participants reviewed my synthesis of all the data gathered for accuracy of representation. My supervisor reviewed the synthesis of all data gathered.
Transferability	Nominated sample	A purposive sampling technique was used and the criteria used for selecting participants are provided in Section 4.4.3.1.
	Sample comparison	The sample chosen was reflective of female educators at different stages of their careers.
	Dense description	A complete description of methodology is given in Section 4.4.3.2 including planned observations, focus group sessions, interviews and document analysis.
Dependability	Dependability audit	Interview questions were developed after doing a literature review and conducting pilot interviews. A full description of the data analysis protocol is provided. In addition, my supervisor provided valuable input with respect to interview material.
	Methodology triangulation	The research methodology is fully described. The data collection methods, field notes, data analysis and literature review were used to triangulate and verify observations and categories identified from the data gathered.
	Peer examination	My supervisor reviewed the synthesis of all data gathered.

	Evaluation	A consensus discussion of the synthesised data was held with my supervisor.
Conformability	Audit	My supervisor reviewed the synthesis of all data gathered.
	Triangulation	As discussed above.
	Reflexivity	As discussed above.

4.4.3 Data collection

A time line relating to data collection is provided in Table 4.2 below. It indicates sampling, the time of data collection, the data collection instruments used and its purpose with respect to this study.

TABLE 4.2: TIME LINE OF THE STUDY IN TERMS OF THE INSTRUMENT USED, ITS PURPOSE AND TIME FRAME

Instrument	Purpose	2002				2003			
		Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Sampling	To select participants who could contribute to this study and whose profiles fulfilled the pre-selected criteria (Section 4.4.3.1).								
Planned observation	To witness, experience and record participant interaction and behaviour in certain situations. Also used as a means of experiencing and recording pertinent processes (for example, teacher evaluation process).								
Pilot interviews	To refine interview guides by evaluating questions and as a measure of over-coming technical problems should they arise.								
Focus Groups	Used as a means of getting participants together in homogeneous groups in which issues of employment, barriers and leadership from national female educators could be discussed.								
Individual interviews	Used to gather descriptions of individual participant perspectives and experiences with respect to employment, barriers, career development and leadership roles.								
Review of documents	Used as a means of triangulating data collected during observation, focus group sessions and individual interviews.								

4.4.3.1 Sampling

According to Cherry (2000:54) there are two types of approaches to qualitative sampling, namely, the traditional social science approach and the phenomenological approach. In this study, a phenomenological approach was used which employed a theory-based data selection process in which strategic decisions about who should be included in the study were made. A purposive sampling method was used (Burns & Grové, 1987:218) as it was an appropriate way of "selecting information rich cases for study in-depth" (Patton, 1990:169 as cited by McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:378)

and as a means of "…increasing the utility of information obtained from small samples" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:378).

The sampling population for this study constituted only national female educators employed by the MOEY. The participants were divided into three categories, based on their position at different career stages. The groups were as follows:

a. Educational leaders

This group consisted of national female educators in management positions, namely, principals, vice-principals, subject coordinators/supervisors, inspectors, directors and assistant undersecretaries. The MOEY Department of Personnel Affairs provided me with profiles of participants. From these profiles, fifteen prospective participants were approached and invited to participate in this study. Of these, eight signed their consent forms agreeing to participate. The criteria used for the selection of this group were as follows:

- Participant's experience in a management position (a minimum of five years was considered reasonable experience in a management post);
- Participants who experienced systematic career progression (where an employee started her career as a teacher and was later promoted); and
- Participants who supervise national female subordinates.

b. Experienced teachers

This group consisted of experienced national female educators teaching in MOEY schools. The MOEY Department of Personnel Affairs provided me with profiles of fifty educators particularly applicants who expressed interest in promotion and those who were denied promotion on previous application/s. Of the fifteen individuals invited, ten agreed to participate. The criteria for selection of this group were as follows:

- Participant's teaching experience (five years of experience is a primary MOEY criteria for promotion application);

- Participants who have expressed interest to their supervisor or principal for promotion; and
- Participants who previously applied for promotion but were not selected (optional criteria).

c. Novice teachers

This group was made up of novice teachers with less than a year's working experience. The reason for choosing this group was to evaluate novice teacher experiences of barriers to entry into the education sector. The MOEY Department of Personnel Affairs provided me with profiles of fifty novice teachers. Of these fifteen individuals were contacted but eleven agreed to participate. The criteria for selection of this group were as follows:

- Recently employed by the MOEY (less than a year of teaching experience); and
- Experienced barriers/problems with placement.

Details of the actual participant compositions are shown in Table 4.3. Prospective participants were initially contacted by telephone in which I introduced the research study. I requested a meeting with individual participants in order to discuss the purpose, relevance, background and intent of the study. If prospective participants agreed, appointments were made. At this initial meeting each participant was provided with a letter of information and an appropriate consent form (**Appendix D**). Consent responses were not required immediately and the time-frame for responses (whether positive or negative) was set for two weeks after my visit. Once all responses were received, the process of data gathering commenced.

TABLE 4.3: NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS, THEIR POSITIONS AND RECRUITMENT WITHIN THE THREE GROUPS

Group	Number of Participants	Composition
Educational leaders	8	Two principals, two supervisors, two inspectors, one director each with an average of twenty years of service with the MOEY and one assistant undersecretary with six years of service with the MOEY. Career progression systematic in most instances. All participants managed and were in direct contact with at least ten national female subordinates.
Experienced teachers	10	Five participants had between 5-10 years teaching experience while the other five participants had between 10-15 years of experience. Most participants expressed interest in promotion. Two participants had previously applied for promotion but were not selected.
Novice Teachers	11	All participants in this group were education graduates who were recently placed by the MOEY. All participants had less than a year's teaching experience. Most participants had experienced some problems with placement into government schools. Most participants had experienced some problems with placement into government schools.

4.4.3.2 The researcher as instrument

A researcher's task involves many roles that he/she develops as he/she becomes interactive to obtain the data and establishes social relationships with participants. The qualitative researcher is a sensitive observer and records phenomena as faithfully as possible (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:416). Unlike mechanical devices the researcher is able to raise additional questions, check out *hunches* and move deeper into the analysis of the phenomenon. Valid data result, when events unfold naturally and the participants

act in a typical fashion in the researcher's presence. The researcher assumes an interactive social role in which he/she records observations and interactions with participants in many situations. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993:415), five possible roles for researchers are observer, participant, observer-participant, participant-observer and interviewer. For the purposes of this study the roles of observer and interviewer were chosen.

a. Observer

According to Foster (1996 as cited by Pole & Lampard, 2002:71), "observation is a matter of collecting information about the nature of the physical and social world as it unfolds before us directly via the senses rather than indirectly via the accounts of others." It is a demanding and complex task, which can be rewarding because it allows the researcher direct access to a social world differing from his/her own. By emphasising the role of the researcher in attributing meaning to what is being observed, Foster implies that observation may be as much about the construction of data as it is about its collection (Pole & Lampard, 2002:71).

Six months of preparatory work at the MOEY was conducted to "acquire background knowledge, to build contacts, to prepare the material required for data gathering and to clarify the approach to question development" (Folch-Lyon & Frost, 1981:443-449; Kingry, Tiedje & Friedman, 1990:124-125; Morgan & Spanish, 1984:253-270). The process of observation was used to gain entry into the world of the participants, to witness the activities that constitute their world by being there and watching. Observation is a research method, which relies on the capacity of the researcher to interpret the situation as it unfolds, the researcher is therefore the principal instrument of the method (Wolcott, 1981:247). Although, it is difficult for researchers to plan observation, four strategies suggested by Wolcott (1981:248) were adopted in the early stages of observation, namely, observing and recording as much as possible, observing and looking for nothing in particular, looking for paradoxes and looking for the key problem confronting the group. In this way, I was able to find focus and plan pertinent observation

opportunities accordingly. Table 4.4 shows the planned observations conducted for the purposes of this study.

In my role as observer, observations were made without contributing to the discussion. None of the planned observations were audiotaped and the intention of observation was to witness, experience and record human behaviour. Observation is also an active process, which includes muted cues, facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice and other non-verbalised social interactions, which suggest subtle meanings of language (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:422). Detailed descriptive field notes were kept of planned and coincidental observations with no pre-specified observation schedule. The notes were written in real-time in a form of personal shorthand attempting to capture the essence of the situation observed. These were later re-worked for clarity and entered into my field journal. The field journal was kept throughout the research process and included the following information:

- The daily schedule and logistics of the study;
- Observations;
- Planned observations;
- A methodology log; and
- A personal diary.

TABLE 4.4: PLANNED OBSERVATIONS, PURPOSE AND FOCUS

Planned Observation	Purpose	Focus
Ministry Meeting 1	Human resource development on the agenda.	Contribution of national women in the meeting.
School Visit	Observation of a day in the life of a principal.	Log of activities and daily decisions by the principal. Observation of a staff meeting.
Supervision Round	Two schools visited to observe evaluation process.	Evaluation process.
Workshop	Classroom management – novice teachers.	Support given to novice teachers.
Staff Meeting	Interaction of principal in meeting	Contribution of national women at the

	with subordinates.	meeting and Emiratisation progress/plans.
Ministry Meeting 2	Training needs - focus on teaching with technology.	Contribution of national women at the meeting and training opportunities.
Committee Meeting	Future training needs.	Contribution of national women at the meeting and the discussion of future training opportunities.
Internal MOEY Hearing	Problematic working relationship between national female subordinate and national male superior because of promotion.	Barriers to career development and promotion opportunities.

b. Interviewer

The role of interviewer was selected for the purposes of this study. In this role, I presented myself "as a learner and approached the interviews as a woman-to-woman discussion" (Spradley, 1979 as cited by Fontana & Frey, 2000:655) in which participants were the experts. Pilot interviews were conducted prior to the actual focus group and individual interviews sessions to evaluate the questions in the interview guides and to overcome any technical problems.

(i) Pilot interviews

Two pilot interviews and one focus group session with two national female educators who were ex-employees of the MOEY were conducted prior to interviewing participants. These two individuals were experienced with the research instruments and were able to provide an evaluation of the questions in the interview guides. Evaluation was based on suggestions made by Pole and Lampard (2002:135-136). These included:

- Are the questions asked clearly specified and unambiguous?
- Are questions asked in a linear and incremental manner so that questions follow a logical order?
- Do the questions asked provide latitude for a range of different views?
- Were any questions inappropriate from a cultural perspective? (In some instances, certain questions required reformulation).

- Does the interviewer probe and seek clarification on responses where necessary? (Probe notes were made on the interview guide based on the pilot sessions).
- Does the interview come to a conclusion by allowing any loose ends to be tied up?
- How effective and unobtrusive is the recording process?
- How much of time is required to answer all questions with sufficient room for conversation?

Based on comments and suggestions provided by interviewees in the pilot interviews, some of the questions on the interview guides were rephrased for better understanding. In addition, the pilot interviews made me aware of potential technical problems that could occur. For example, difficulties in recognising various participant voices in the pilot focus group session made it imperative that short notes with participant identification codes be taken during actual focus group sessions to ease transcription later on. After re-working the guides and discussing these with the pilot interviewees, focus group sessions and individual interviews with participants were conducted.

(ii) Focus group sessions

A focus group session is a qualitative research technique, which is used to gain insights into the dynamic relationships of attitudes, opinions, motivation, concerns and problems related to current and projected human activity (McDaniel & Bach, 1994:4). A focus group may be defined as "a researcher selected group convened for the purpose of discussing a specific research topic" (Barbour, 1999:S19). This approach to collecting qualitative data is based on the assumption that people are an important source of information about themselves and the issues that affect their lives and that they can articulate their thoughts and feelings (Winslow, Honein & Elzubeir, 2002:566).

The group session emphasises the creation of an unstructured (although subtly directed), informal and permissive atmosphere in which a dynamic group interaction develops. It is conducted as an open conversation in which each participant is encouraged to comment,

direct questions to other participants, or respond to comments made by others including the facilitator. Interaction amongst respondents is encouraged to stimulate in-depth discussions of various aspects of the topic. To ensure that all topics are covered, the facilitator introduces and directs the discussion of topics and encourages participation in the conversation. This discussion is the basis from which information is obtained.

Focus groups are known to have a variety of advantages but they do have some problems as well. It is advantageous as "an effective approach to collecting data from members of groups that are generally hard to reach such as the disadvantaged or disfranchised" (Barbour, 1999:S20). It encourages participants to disclose behaviours and attitudes that they might not consciously reveal in an individual interview session" (Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981:455). Focus groups can evoke a level of candour and spontaneity from members that provide data not accessed by more conventional interview techniques (Winslow *et al*., 2002:567). Given the proper environment, participants are less on guard against personal disclosures because the atmosphere is tolerant, friendly and permissive even when selfish, egocentric, aggressive, daring or questionable judgments are voiced (Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981:455). The lively dialogue activates memories, feelings and experiences in a manner similar to the process of free association (Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981:455).

The use of focus groups in some instances may, however, be disadvantageous. For example, participants may feel intimidated and may not be completely honest if a superior or more experienced participant was present. Dominant speakers may consider themselves *self-appointed experts* and inhibit group participation with their persistent contribution and views. Shy respondents or reflective thinkers on the other hand, may not speak immediately but they often have great insights. It often takes a lot more effort to get these participants to elaborate on their view.

Bearing these factors in mind the focus group sessions were considered an important tool for getting participants together in homogeneous groups in which the issues of employment, barriers and leadership could be discussed in a way that was meaningful

and important to national women educators. In addition, the experiences of Winslow *et al*., (2002) encouraged me to use this research method because they "were found to be more flexible as they left a lot more room for variation in responses" (Fontana & Frey, 2000:649). In this study, three focus groups sessions of about two hour durations were held. Participants within the groups of education leaders, experienced teachers and novice teachers were interviewed seperately. In these homogenous groups participants could share their experiences and perspectives in a non-threatening atmosphere, and this arrangement negates the intimidation participants may feel if superiors or more experienced colleagues were present. Focus groups sessions were held at a date and time that was convenient to most participants. Formal invitations with the necessary ethical clauses of confidentiality and anonymity were sent to each participant. All participants who agreed to participate in this study (Table 4.3) were invited but due to some not being able to attend, the number of participants that actually participated was as follows:

- Six educational leaders;
- Nine experienced teachers; and
- Eight novice teachers.

All focus groups conducted for this study were in English, however, a translator was available to assist if necessary. The translator, in addition, assisted with taking short notes with participant identification to facilitate the transcription of the audiotapes. Separate sessions were held for the different groups with sensitivity to UAE culture. For example, focus groups were not held during prayer time and refreshments were provided after the focus group sessions in keeping with traditional Arabian hospitality. The sessions were held in a seminar room where participants sat around a table. The informal *majlis* seating arrangement for the focus group session as suggested by Winslow *et al*., (2000:573) was not considered appropriate for this forum. In fact, there appeared to be an advantage to having the seminar arrangement because the problems encountered by Winslow *et al*., (2002:573) regarding side conversations and disruptions amongst participants were not experienced in any of the sessions held for the purpose of this study. In addition, no discomfort was noted amongst the participants who were used to attending workshop sessions at the same venue. In fact, the more formal setting probably contributed to

participant focus on the topic of discussion. Participant permission was obtained prior to audiotaping focus group sessions. None of the participants objected to being taped and the instrument was ignored during the discussion.

In each session, a power-point presentation (**Appendix E**) provided an introduction to the focus group session and contained the questions to be explored during the focus group session. In this introduction the purpose of the focus group was explained and participants were told that they were invited because they had knowledge of the concepts to be discussed. The questions regarding the concepts of employment, barriers and leadership were carefully structured and sequenced based on a review of the literature and on information obtained in the pilot interviews (Novacek, Raskin & McElwain, 1990:1-51 as cited by Poggenpoel, Nolte, Dorfling, Greef, Gross, Muller, Elzabe & Roos, 1994:131-136). Participants were asked to respond to the questions relating to women and work and to leadership. The sequence of questions directed further inquiry and information from participating national female educators. The sessions were facilitated by creating an open, non-threatening environment and as far as possible, my attitude was permissive and the conversations were directed subtly. In order to avoid a serial group interview (in which participants answer questions independently in turn), I attempted to get participants to "interact with each other in a way that additional information could be revealed" (Calder, 1977:355). I also attempted to include and encourage all participants so that every participant contributed to the discussion, without being overwhelmed by the dominant participants (if any were present) (as suggested in Gage, 1980:22; McDaniel, 1979:17). In all the groups lively and spontaneous discussion was encouraged, however, the time factor was taken into account and conversation was redirected when necessary.

My observations were recorded in my field journal immediately after the focus group for analysis later on and as a verifying measure. Transcription of the focus group session from the audiotape was done as soon as possible after the sessions and participants were identified by means of the short notes taken during the session when there was doubt.

(iii) Individual interviews

According to Pole and Lampard (2002:126) an individual interview is "a verbal exchange of information between two or more people for the principal purpose of one gathering information from the other(s)." The interview has become a contemporary means of story telling where persons divulge life accounts in response to interview inquiries (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998 as cited by Fontana & Frey, 2000:647). In recent years researchers have questioned the use of traditional interview techniques because response rates have been declining suggesting that fewer people are willing to disclose aspects of themselves or that they are growing tired of being interviewed. It must be remembered though, that each interview context is one of interaction and relation, the result, therefore, is as much a product of this social dynamic as it is a product of accurate accounts and replies.

Nevertheless, the interview method was considered a suitable instrument for this study because it has been described by Kvale (1983:174) as, centered on the interviewee's life-world in which we seek to understand the meaning of phenomena in the participant's life-world. The interview focuses on certain themes, is open for ambiguities and changes and is an inter-personal interaction (Kvale, 1983:174). A semi-structured interview technique was chosen because "it is a basic method of data gathering the purpose of which is to obtain rich, in-depth experiential account of an event or episode in the life of the respondent" (Fontana & Frey, 2000:646). One of the main advantages of the semi-structured interview is that it provides uniform information, which ensures comparability of data.

Individual semi-structured interviews were held with educators at different career stages because "they are likely to be more knowledgeable and informative about the subject under investigation" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:378). The purpose of the interview was to gather descriptions of the life-world of a female educator with respect to her experience and perspectives on employment, barriers, career development and leadership. Using this method interviewees "would be given latitude to talk about issues which were relevant to themselves and which related to their own, often unique experiences" (Pole & Lampard, 2002:136). In addition, the individual interview provided a basis for discussion, which would cover topics in the guide but not constrain the conversation or ignore the

importance of issues raised by the interviewee in the course of discussion. This approach afforded a reasonable degree of reflexivity of the kind identified by Mason (1996 as cited by Pole & Lampard, 2002:137) which meant that key themes were not set in stone but open to revision as the research progressed.

An interview schedule was drawn up and participants were interviewed at a time convenient for them. The majority of interviews were held in a recording studio or at the participant's office. A translator was available at every interview to clarify questions or responses when necessary, but for the most part interviews were conducted in English. An interview guide was created for the purposes of this study and is shown in **Appendix F**. In all interviews biographical data were collected initially to supplement the profiles provided by the MOEY. Then the interview progressed into more direct, descriptive and complex questions. This approach enabled interviewees to get comfortable before taking the opportunity to be discursive, to provide details on their experiences and knowledge of practises and processes, to reflect on their experiences and to offer their opinions. Within the boundaries of this interview structure, the style of questioning gave greater latitude for the interviewee to pursue issues which she considered important to her circumstances. Interviews were terminated by inviting the interviewee to summarise her thoughts or to reflect on the overall content of the conversation before she was thanked and the interview brought to a close.

All interviews were audiotaped with participant permission to facilitate transcription. In addition, notes were taken during the course of the interview to assist in formulating new questions about important issues and to give participants the sense that their information was important motivating them to provide more details.

All the data obtained from the focus groups and individual interviews were transcribed and copies of the transcriptions were hand-delivered to participants. Participants reviewed the transcripts over a two-week period and resubmitted these with their comments. Changes to the transcripts included deletions, changes to statements or

retraction of information imparted during focus group sessions or individual interviews. Once the accepted transcripts were received, the process of data analysis was initiated.

4.4.3.3 Other documentation

According to Bryman (1989, as cited by Pole & Lampard, 2002:153) the effective use of archival information in organisational research is often achieved through its use alongside data from other sources such as interviews. Although the analysis of documents was not the focus of this study, the MOEY constitution and supporting policy documents relevant to employment, training, teacher evaluation processes and promotion criteria were made available by the MOEY Department of Information and Research. All documents were in Arabic and were translated for the purposes of this study. These documents acted as information sources and were used as a means of triangulating data collected during observation, focus group sessions and individual interviews.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Many studies using qualitative methods are not reflexive enough about the interpreting process, common platitudes proclaim that the data speak for themselves, that the researcher is neutral, unbiased and invisible (Fontana & Frey, 2000:661). This is very hard to achieve as the researcher becomes buried under an increasing amount of field notes, transcripts, newspaper clippings and audiotapes (Fontana & Frey, 2000:661). In this study, a multi-method approach was used where data gathered from observations, focus group interviews, individual interviews and document analysis supplement each other as part of data analysis.

Pole and Lampard (2002:190) mention that during data collection, *processual* data analysis occurs because the researcher is continuously engaged with the data as it is collected. *Processual* analysis is important in informing data collection and in shaping the direction of research (Pole & Lampard, 2002:190). Therefore, for the purposes of preliminary data analysis, I read through my field notes and listened to the audio tapes of each session several times in order to get an adequate impression of the discussion climate and to make verbatim transcriptions in which psychological indicators like hesitations, pauses and enthusiasm were noted. In this way an attempt was made to get familiar with the data. In addition, data gathered from initial observations and interviews provided direction for framing further questions on the basis of on-going interpretation and analysis. Summative data analysis was, however, conducted using a combination of Giorgi (1985:10-19) and Kerlinger's (1986:447) data analysis methods. The steps used were as follows:

- I reviewed all the data (all transcribed material from focus group sessions and interviews, field notes and relevant documents) first in a general manner to obtain a sense of the data and themes emerging. A more detailed review followed with bracketing (placing preconceived ideas within brackets) and intuiting (focusing on national female educators' views on the concepts of employment, barriers and leadership). This

provided structure to the data gathered and allowed for triangulation between the various research instruments used. The universum consisted of all transcriptions, field notes and document analysis.

- The data was evaluated holistically and an attempt to identify the major categories represented in the universum was made. These major categories were reflected within the different dimensions of the national female educators' work environment, namely, physical, psychological, social, spiritual and patterns of interactions between those dimensions.
- Units of meaning that were related to the holistic interpretation and within clearly identified major categories were underlined.
- These units were then placed into the major categories.
- Sub-categories within the major categories were then identified.
- A literature control was conducted to identify this study's similarities, differences and contributions to that of previous research.
- Consensus discussions were held with my supervisor about the analysis of the data.

In this way the data were analysed and major categories and sub-categories emerging from the data were identified. The management of data according to biographical information, major categories and sub-categories formed the basis from which I attempted to place into perspective that data obtained in terms of the aim and objectives of this study.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a detailed description of the research design of this study. It focused on the theoretical purpose and justification of the methodology chosen, ethical considerations, informal and formal data gathering techniques and an explanation of the data analysis method used. The next chapter presents the findings of this study as a result of data analysis. It discusses the data obtained and interprets the findings in relation to the research aim of this study.