

Access, barriers to participation and success amongst adult students in an undergraduate academic programme at a University in the Western Cape

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ABSTRACT

The choice of topic for the research paper was influenced by my experiences of attending university as an adult student and contemporary policy developments. In its White Paper for Post School Education (2013) the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) expresses intentions to expand access to post-school education for all people of all ages, including adults. The research paper focuses on the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success related to adult students who attended a university.

It is my assertion that adult students are agents, and that their agency determines the course of their lives. Comprising theoretical perspectives on agency and structure (Giddens, 1984) (Archer 2003) and barriers to participation Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) my conceptual framework provides the analytical lens through which I investigate the reasons that adult students assert their agency to access university, and how they mediate barriers to participation to achieve success

I adopted a qualitative approach. Using an interview guide, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 graduates who as adult students had completed an undergraduate programme for adult educators at a university in the Western Cape.

Findings revealed that all adult students, who asserted agency to access higher education and who were successful, experienced barriers. Age, workplace and family support were contributing factors for accessing and successfully participating in educational activities. Structural conditions were both constraining and enabling. A recommendation is that higher education institutions must recognise barriers experienced by adult students and provide support to overcome these barriers. Insights derived from this study should be used to assist adult students to overcome individual and structural barriers to participate successfully.

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Lastly, I would like to single out my professor and supervisor, Zelda Groener, and express my profound gratitude for her professionalism in the manner in which she conducted her supervision. Her academic standards, level of guidance and selfless sacrifice over numerous weekends over the years is a testament of her dedication to her profession and her quest to ensure that students complete their studies successfully. Thank you for getting me to push harder, for disrupting my thinking and for always availing yourself.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research paper entitled *Access, barriers to participation and success amongst adult students in an undergraduate academic programme at a University in the Western Cape* is my own work and that it is submitted in partial fulfilment of a degree in Masters in Adult Education and Global Change at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

I declare that this research paper has not been submitted to any other university for a degree or examination and that all resources used and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Howard Vita Stevens

Signed: 

January 2020



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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

DHET Department of Higher Education and Training

PSET Post-School Education and Training

ICT Information Communication Technologies

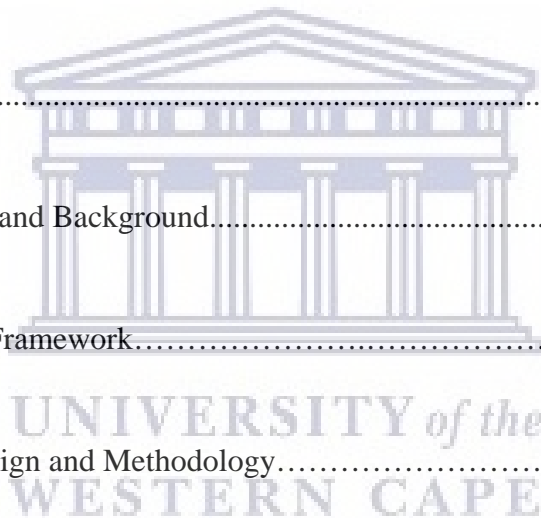
IES Institute for Employment Studies

UWC University of the Western Cape



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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

In this section I introduce the important components of the research study. It explains the background and context, and rationale for the study. It describes the research problem, research aims and research questions. Furthermore, it discusses the anticipated findings, limitations and concludes with an outline of the research paper.

Background and context

As employers seek to employ people who have the necessary skills, knowledge and qualifications, it makes finding work for the less skilled and qualified increasingly challenging. The South African government, in its bid to redress inequality in education, raised expectations with its *Higher Education Act 101 of 1997* (RSA) that implied an open door policy for students, including adults. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) enforced a mandate that everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education, in the language of his/her choosing (DHET, 2013). This human right to education speaks to access and participation in adult learning. However, a study by Buchler, Castle, Osman and Walters (2007) found that adult students were inadequately supported at all levels of higher education.

A study by the DHET's statistics for post-school education and training (PSET) for the period 2013 - 2016 supports Buchler et al. (2007) claim that support for adult students is lacking. The national statistics for post-school education and training for undergraduate enrolments and graduation rates between 2013 and 2016 are empirical evidence that there is a need to question the goals of the White Paper on PSET as the relationship between the total number of students accessing further education and the total number of students completing their studies successfully is disproportionate.

Table 1

Statistics for registration and graduation rates for public higher education institutions from 2013 till 2016

Year	Average registration and graduation rates			
	Undergraduate degree		Undergraduate certificate/diploma	
	Registered	Graduated	Registered	Graduated
2013	53%	15%	28%	18%
2014	54%	16%	28%	19%
2015	53.6%	45.8%	27.6%	26.8%
2016	54.3%	17.7%	26.1%	20.9%

Note: From Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa DHET, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016

The statistics thus indicate that while access to post-school education expanded, the throughput rates are quite low.

This prompts questions about access and success. Buchler et al. (2007) suggested in their study, with regard to adult students in a time of much needed skills, that the open-door policy was supposedly not of great importance to the DHET. Buchler et al. (2007) highlight that there was a lack of sufficient support for adult students at all levels of higher education. They perceive this outcome of their research findings as a major problem, and suggest that through national education development programmes adults' accumulated experiences could be substantially improved to become a central force that can be utilised to strengthen South Africa.

This research study addresses the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success of adult students in an undergraduate programme. The notion of adult students as agents asserting agency to access higher education opportunities and agents asserting agency to overcome barriers to participation to complete their studies successfully is a central concern of this research study.

Rationale

My research is informed by my curiosity which stems from my experiences as an adult student. For this reason, I explore the extent to which the goals of the White Paper for Post-School

Education and Training (DHET, 2013), with regard to access and participation of adult students, are being achieved. The White Paper advocates “a post-school system that can assist in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa” (DHET, 2013, p. 4). However, the White Paper failed to adequately stipulate how PSET institutions manage an influx of adult students and what measures of support to provide to adult students who access higher education and overcome barriers to participation.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) observe that there have been fewer empirical studies on participation and barriers to participation in adult education. This observation prompted my research interest in understanding adult students’ participation and barriers to participation.

Furthermore, Hitlin and Elder (2006) assert that there are few empirical studies about human agency. I hope that my empirical study makes a small contribution to the empirical research about agency, participation and barriers to participation.

Research problem

Government policy promotes the expansion of access to higher education for students, including adults. It is often the case that the particular circumstances of adult students are not recognised by higher education institutions. This could undermine adult student success. Therefore, there are contradictions between the higher education institutions’ non-recognition of the barriers confronting adult students, their achievement of success, and the government’s intention to expand access that is accompanied by success.

Research aims

To investigate the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success pertaining to adult students in an undergraduate higher education programme.

To develop new theoretical insights about the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success in respect of adult students in an undergraduate higher education programme.

Research questions

Main research question

What are the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution?

Sub questions

What structural barriers affect adult students' participation?

What dispositional barriers affect adult students' participation?

How do adult students address/overcome barriers that enable them to participate successfully?

Anticipated findings

I anticipate that this study will generate findings about the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution? In addition, I hope to provide evidence that adult students experience and overcome structural and dispositional barriers to complete their studies successfully.

Limitations

The design of the current study is subject to limitations. First, the study was limited to only making use of a qualitative research method. Second, this study was also limited to a sample group of only 20 participants. Finally, it was limited to one research site and one undergraduate programme at one university.

Overview of research paper

In Section 1, I outline the rationale, research problem, research aims, research questions, anticipated findings and limitations of this study.

In Section 2, I construct a conceptual framework by reviewing the relevant literature.

In Section 3, I present the research design and methodology used in this study.

In Section 4, I discuss the data analysis.

In section 5, I address the findings, make pertinent recommendations for future research and provide a conclusion for the research study.

SECTION 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK/LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this section, I construct my conceptual framework in which I include theoretical concepts and perspectives that I identified through a literature review. The main components of my conceptual framework are as follows: access to post-school education, barriers to participation, agency and structure. The main theories from which I draw these components are as follows: structuration theory, agency and structure.

Agency, structure and access to higher education in South Africa

Czerniewicz, Williams and Brown's (2009) theoretical perspectives resonate as these analyse a historically disadvantaged South African higher education system. They proclaim that South Africa's bid to compete for global economic reform through a competitive work force came at a time when higher education institutions were poorly resourced, segregated and discriminated against as a result of the previous apartheid regime (Czerniewicz et al., 2009). In an attempt to redress these conditions, the new democratic government restructured the higher education system and promoted access for a diverse group of students. However, the restructuring of the higher education system saw an increase in the access of students at a time of limited funding and inadequate infrastructure (Czerniewicz et al., 2009).

Czerniewicz et al. (2009) study draws on Archer's understanding of the relationship between agency and structure to explore how students of different economic backgrounds from three South African universities navigate challenging situations. Their study focussed on students' access to Information Communication Technologies (ICT) during contact time and after hours. Czerniewicz et al. (2009) data showed that students were generally satisfied with ICT access on campus; however, students highlighted the need for off-campus access to the internet as it was not available. Their data suggested that students in low socio-economic groups do not have access to computers and the internet off campus; yet, those who did not have access to ICT succeeded by using their cellular phones as a means to access the internet, albeit at their own expense.

As stated previously, the restructuring of South Africa's higher education system allowed for an increase in access to higher education programmes (Czerniewicz et al., 2009). Luckett and Luckett (2009) asserted that South Africa has a shortage of skills and suggested that the South

African government needs “to increase the enrolments and graduation rates of higher education programmes in the ‘scarce skills’ fields” (p. 3). They state that less than 50% of students who gained access to education successfully in the scarce skills fields complete on time. According to Luckett and Luckett (2009), the “government initiatives such as the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative and the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition together with the Department of Labour’s National Skills Strategy and Skills Development Fund” (p. 3) were put in place to redress the shortage of skills. In addition to the above initiatives, different government departments and private companies are jointly funding programmes like the Masakh’iSizwe bursary project in a bid to address the skills shortage crisis (Luckett & Luckett, 2009). According to Luckett and Luckett (2009), the Masakh’iSizwe bursary project is currently providing full bursaries to about 300 disadvantaged students. Additional to the bursaries, the Masakh’iSizwe project launched three support programmes in 2007 to improve the academic and professional development levels of students (Luckett & Luckett, 2009). Findings from one of the Masakh’iSizwe support programmes revealed “the need for a finer theorisation of identity formation and social agency ... to better meet students’ needs” (Luckett & Luckett, 2009, p. 5).

Increasing access to higher education institutions is not without criticism and challenges as stated by Pym and Kapp (2013). Bourdieu (as cited in Pym & Kapp, 2013) was concerned about whether students have the necessary capabilities needed to be successful at higher education institutions. Bourdieu’s concern raised the question of whether higher education institutions have the ability to manage challenges that arise from a more diverse and disadvantaged group of students. Pym and Kapp (2013) claim that “in the post-Apartheid era, the South African Higher Education sector has remained racially skewed” (p. 1).

Agents

In this section, I present adult students as agents. First, I will briefly discuss what is understood as adult students in higher education. Bourgeois, Duke, Guyot and Merrill (as cited in Buchler et al., 2007) describe “mature adults, for the purposes of higher education contexts, as having had ‘a significant break, with other life-[experience] and work-experience, prior to entering higher education” (p. 128). According to Buchler et al. (2007) various descriptions are used to describe adult students in the context of accessing higher education, such as, students who did not attend higher education immediately after completing their secondary schooling. Students that might be older than the general student demographic and students who might be working

full-time. Buchler et al. (2007) continue to assert that “adult learners carry ‘adult responsibilities’ through their economic, family or community commitments. They bring complex life experiences to the learning environments and their time is often very constrained precisely because of their multiple roles and responsibilities” (p. 128).

The concept ‘agent’, has been discussed in adult education literature over the past decades with scholars having overarching views as to its meaning. For Giddens (1984), “to be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons” (p. 3). According to Giddens (1984), agents as human beings possess the ability to demonstrate reflexivity, not only as being purely aware of what they are doing, “but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life” (p. 3). Furthermore, Giddens (1984) states that “competent agents ... will usually be able to explain most of what they do, if asked” (p. 6).

Sewell (1992) points out that “to be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree” (p. 20). According to Sewell (1992), agents are assertive enough to work alongside and in opposition to others.

Agents, according to Bandura (2001), are people with experiences and not just bystanders observing the unfolding of day-to-day events. Bandura (2001) claims that “to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions” (p. 2) and that “an agent has to be not only a planner and forethinker, but a motivator and self-regulator as well” (Bandura, 2001, p. 8). For Bandura (2001), agents are not just the perpetrators of action, but also possess the capability to consciously assess internal and external processes and influences.

Agents, according to Archer (2003), have the ability and control to demonstrate a host of human attributes which she conveys as:

agents possess properties and powers distinct from those pertaining to social forms. Among them feature all those predicates, such as thinking, deliberating, believing, intending, loving and so forth, which are applicable to people, but never to social structures or cultural systems (p. 2).

These qualities are found within people as living entities and not in structures, social or otherwise (Archer, 2003). Hitlin and Elder (2006) define agency as human capabilities and it can be used to affect the life of the individual exercising it. The participants in this study who are students in higher education can be identified as agents.

Agency, intention and intentionality

Here I discuss some definitions and descriptions of agency, intentions and intentionality. Agency is a highly contested concept with authors differing in their conceptualisations. 'Agency' is a central concept in Giddens's (1979) theories of structure and agency. Presenting action and agency as similar, Giddens (1979) states that:

'action' or agency, as I use it, thus does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to *a continuous flow of conduct*. We may define action, if I may borrow a formulation from a previous work, as involving a 'stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world' (p. 55).

Agency and intention

Giddens (1979) avers that "the concept of agency ... [involves] 'intention' in a potential malleable object-world" (p. 55-56). Subsequently, Giddens's (1984) thinking evolved from first introducing the idea that agency is defined as intentions. Here the assumption was that for someone to be able to act there must have been an intention to act. This refers to the intention to act with a purpose. Should the action not be intentional then the action can be seen as a reaction and not as an intended action. Consequently, I propose that agency prompts participation. Adult students as agents, exercise agency when they access education. The act of accessing education in this example refers to an action that has taken place; this action by an agent conforms to Giddens's (1984) notion of agency. According to Giddens (1984), agency does not refer to the intention of someone to act but the execution of the intended action. Intention without action cannot be seen as agency. Agency can be explained as an individual with the intention to study and the capability to complete the study registration form or calling higher education institutions to enquire about a particular course. However, for an individual to have the intention to further his/her studies, but not act on the intention, cannot be seen as agency.

The focus for Giddens is the action taken by agents and not so much the intention to act as the intention to act might not lead to action (Giddens, 1984). Although adult students assert agency, they may experience dispositional and structural barriers. When confronted with barriers, they exercise agency to overcome those barriers. The way in which they exercise that agency might result in academic success.

King (as cited in Archer, 2003) asserts that we are not what we appear to be, but what we make of ourselves, and that our destiny is not cast in stone or predetermined. It is fluid as we can influence it through internal conversation. This resonates with me as it, in my view, encapsulates both Giddens (1984) and Archer's (2003) understanding of agency.

Agency is thus, an act of intervention. For Sewell (1992), agency refers to the perpetrators or actor's capacity "for forming intentions" (p. 20). This capacity for developing intentions "is inherent in all humans" (Sewell, 1992, p. 20). Human agency is discussed widely in the literature, and there are many conceptualisations. According to Hitlin and Elder (2006), scholars, who examine agency, frequently take a narrow view of it as their approaches are fragmented thus limiting them to the complexity of agency. These different understandings range from moments of freedom to the capability to bring about self-change. Ahearn (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) defines agency as the "sociocultural mediated capacity to act" (p. 35). Bandura (2001) asserts that intentions refers to the planning of actions. Bandura (2006) proposes that "people form intentions that include action plans and strategies for realizing them" (p. 164). For Bandura (2006), agents do not only plan or think ahead, but possess the capacity to strategise, organise and manage themselves to realise the intended action. Thus, intention without action is not agency.

Although scholars have different views and understandings of agency, their interpretations are not without criticism. Critics such as Archer (1982) refer to Giddens's (1979) definition of agency, as excessive voluntarism, where agents have too much free will. Giddens (1984) is additionally criticised by Hitlin and Elder (2006) for his "overly cognitive view of agency" (p. 35). For Hitlin and Elder (2006), he fails to understand that human senses, desires and needs are fundamental and not secondary to human agency.

Agency, as discussed above, refers to individuals as agents that actively change the world not of their making. The focus here is on individual action as agency. I find that Archer's (as cited

in Lockett & Lockett, 2009, p. 6) “map of selfhood” goes beyond agents as individual actors. Agents, although as individuals, group together to critically reflect on the world not of their making, and plan interventions to change their situations as a collective. This collective social activity, through conversation with others, develops into causes and these causes act to motivate individuals to act as a collective.

Agency and intentionality

Giddens’s (1979) description of agency was limited and confusing for some scholars. Therefore, Giddens (1984) subsequently informs us that agency does not refer to the intentions or actions of someone’s behaviour, but that there is intentionality when people assert agency; it is a deliberate act on the part of the individual. Intentionality as defined by Giddens (1984) is “characterizing an act which its perpetrator knows, or believes, will have a particular quality or outcome and where such knowledge is utilized by the author of the act to achieve this quality or outcome” (p. 10).

Bandura (2001) avers that “intentionality and agency raise the fundamental question of how people bring about activities over which they command personal control that activate the subpersonal neurophysiological events for realizing particular intentions and aspirations” (p. 5). For Bandura (2001), intentionality is demonstrated when the act of agency is done with intent. It is an action that is deliberate, thought out or planned. For example, the action of a student arriving late to class due to a protest on his way would not be seen as an intended action; thus the student is not an agent of that result. However, should the student deliberately want to be late for class due to unfinished tasks or assignments, then that act of agency would be considered intentional.

Archer (2003) asserts that people and not social structures possess features like intentions among others. Furthermore, Archer (2003) declares that “only people possess the intentionality to define and design courses of action in order to achieve their own ends” (p. 6). Intentionality is one of the four aspects of agency identified by Bandura (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006). Bandura (2006) maintains that for agents, intentionality means involving themselves in activities which they can control and that are connected to known outcomes.

Agency, action and intervention

Adult students as agents, assert agency through their actions to deliberately intervene in ways that allow them to participate in educational activities. Giddens (1979) proposes that the action of agents must not be understood “as a series of discrete acts combined together, but to a *continuous flow of conduct*” (p. 55). For Giddens, action taken by agents is understood as the production and reproduction of rules and resources. The outcomes of these actions could be known, unknown, intentional or unintentional by its perpetrators (Giddens, 1979). Giddens (1979) defines agency “as involving a stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world” (p. 55). Giddens (1979) asserts that agency involves “intervention in a potentially malleable object-world, [that] relates directly to the more generalised notion of *Praxis*” (p. 56). Giddens (1984) further states that the action taken by an agent “would not have happened if that individual had not intervened” (p. 9).

According to Clausen (1991, 1993), agentic action can be brought upon by one’s capability to plan; thus, planful competence can assist in agentic action over the course of one’s life. Although both Giddens (1984) and Archer (2003) perceive action as a human characteristic, Hitlin and Elder (2006) use the term “human action” (p. 37). They maintain that all people have the capability to act, that is, agentic capability. Giddens (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) holds the view “that agentic action may involve resistance to social pressure, it may underlie life course transitions, and it may also play a role in building social structures” (p. 39).

Agency, capability and capacity

Adult students as agents, assert agency through their capabilities and their capacities to act in ways that could change their pre-existing conditions in order to participate in educational activities. Giddens (1984) informs us that agency does not refer to the intentions of someone’s behaviour or action but the capability of someone to act at any time. Agency thus refers to the capability of someone to stop or change his or her action anytime during the process of behaving. What is interesting to note here is that the individual controls his/her action by having the capability to intervene. Giddens further asserts that the agent will stop existing the moment he/she no longer has the capability to affect change in his/her life (Giddens, 1984).

Although I find Giddens’s (1984) definition of agency intriguing and agree with his interpretation of agency, I find it difficult to agree with the statement that the agent will stop to exist when he/she loses the capability to exercise agency.

Giddens (1984, p. 14) claims that “action depends upon the capacity of the individual to ‘make a difference’ to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events”. Giddens (1984) states that “action is a continuous process, a flow, in which the reflexive monitoring which the individual maintains is fundamental to the control of the body that actors ordinarily sustain through their day-to-day lives” (p. 9). Archer (2003) agrees with Giddens (1984), as do I, that agents as human beings have the capability and control to demonstrate a host of human qualities like emotions, thinking, reflecting and so on.

Sewell (1992) argues that agency is an instinctive human capacity in much the same way that respiration is a human capacity. Hitlin and Elder (2006) proclaim that agency was alternatively thought of as a capacity. For them, drawing on Giddens, “agency represents a human capacity to influence one’s own life within socially structured opportunities” (Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 57). Agency is thus an individual capacity for significant and maintainable action (Hitlin & Elder, 2006). Hitlin and Elder (2006) view capacity as individuals acting freely. This capacity to act can be demonstrated when the individual needs to assert agency. They believe that individuals have different levels of capacity to act and as such have different levels of agentic action. For example, those with money have the resources and structures to affect agency more than those without. Hitlin and Elder (2006) describe agency as the capacity to act and they support their claim by citing Ahearn who defines agency as the “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 35).

According to literature, there is a subtle distinction between capability and capacity as the terms are used interchangeably to mean the same thing and in this case, the same thing refers to someone’s power to perform an action.

Agency and self-efficacy

Self-efficacy as a construct of agency is evident in different spheres of research. Bandura (1982) understands self-efficacy as it relates to the opinions of an individual about his/her capabilities in stressful situations. He points out that when individuals who doubt their capabilities to navigate through set situations, face stressful experiences, these experiences influence the individuals and they might either reduce their efforts or succumb to the pressures of that situation. Bandura (1982) points out that agents will wonder if they are capable of carrying out actions that would make them successful. However, the individuals who persist and exercise self-efficacy apply more effort to overcome stressful experiences.

Pearlin (1983) asserts that self-efficacy also includes a level of being able to master influences that affect lives by changing it. People have different levels of efficacy and those with more efficacy will be more effective or have more confidence to change things than those who have less self-efficacy. Baumeister (1999) and Gecas (1986, 2001) introduced the concept of self-efficacy, as motivational. Although Giddens (1984) does not specifically define self-efficacy, his understanding “as characterizing an act which its perpetrator knows, or believes, will have a particular quality or outcome and where such knowledge is utilized by the author of the act to achieve this quality or outcome” (p. 10), describes it, in my view.

Bandura (1986) holds the view that both control and self-efficacy are needed for the realisation of goals. Bandura (1989) points out that “self-efficacy beliefs affect thought patterns that may be self-aiding or self-hindering” (p. 1175). Furthermore, Bandura (1989) states that “it takes a resilient sense of efficacy to override the numerous dissuading impediments to significant accomplishments” (p. 1177). To extend the point of accomplishments, Bandura (1991) argues that after accomplishing their goals, those with a resilient form of efficacy, continue to set more or higher goals for themselves. However, Bandura makes us aware that “burdening people with increased obstacles is likely to lower their perceived self-efficacy for goal attainment and decrease effort rather than raise it” (Bandura, 1991, p. 158). Bandura (1997) asserts that although there are different causes of self-efficacy, hands-on experience is more important than the rest. Bandura (1997) suggests further that self-efficacy is an important feature of agency. He argues that if someone thinks that he/she does not have the capability to change things, then he/she will not try to change things (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (2001) maintains that:

Efficacy beliefs play a central role in the self-regulation of motivation through goal challenges and outcome expectations. It is partly on the basis of efficacy beliefs that people choose what challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend in the endeavor, how long to persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, and whether failures are motivating or demoralizing (p. 10).

According to Bandura (2001), people act if they believe that they can achieve a specific outcome. For him, a positive level of self-efficacy reduces negative emotional and mental stress during challenging situations (Bandura, 2001).

According to Van Breda (2001):

people are constantly busy with judgements of self-efficacy. Every action taken is preceded by an unconscious judgement of one's ability to execute the action effectively. Accurate appraisal of one's efficacy is important so as to avoid taking on tasks that are, in fact, outside of one's ability (p. 49).

Where Bandura (1986) refers to "control" (p. 41), Mirowsky and Ross (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006) refer to "personal control" (p. 41), and elaborate on Bandura's belief that control and self-efficacy are two separate ideas, but both are needed towards realising personal goals.

Gecas (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 40) draws on Bandura (1997) and defines self-efficacy as "the perception of oneself as a causal agent in one's environment, as having control over one's circumstances, and being capable of carrying out actions to produce intended effects". Gecas (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 40) understands "self-efficacy as the most important mechanism of agency". Bandura (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 41) maintains that "[if] people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen". Furthermore, Gecas (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 41) claims that "self-efficacy is one of the important motivations underlying the self-concept. Our global sense of self, self-esteem, is based in large part on our abilities to engage in efficacious actions". Bandura (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 41) maintains that "self-appraisals of personal efficacy are quite important for successful functioning, though opportunities to develop this sense vary by location in the social structure". In addition, Hitlin and Elder (2006) hold the view that the more effective or successful one is, the more one is motivated to escalate efficacy. In my view, drawing on the previously stated definitions and understandings of self-efficacy, I deduce that self-efficacy is a fundamental component of agency.

Agency and planfulness

Clausen (1991, 1993) developed the concept of planful competence which can be described as a person's traits or qualities that assist in agentic action throughout a person's life. Planfulness is a competence. Clausen (1993) elucidates that:

Planful competence entails knowledge, abilities, and controls. It entails knowing: something about one's intellectual abilities, social skills, and emotional responses

to others; one's interests and developing them; and about available options and thinking about how to take advantage of or expand them. Planful competence requires the ability to access accurately the aims and actions of others in order to interact responsibly with them in pursuit of one's objectives. Further, the person must have sufficient self-confidence to pursue his or her goals and desires (p. 19).

I believe that planfulness plays a role in guiding agency and is an individual trait; however, I do not believe that planfulness is part of the concept of agency. Agency does not rely on planfulness for it to occur. For example, one may not be very good at planning, but have a positive level of efficacy (Hitlin & Elder, 2006). Furthermore, Hitlin and Elder (2006) interpret planfulness more as a personal attribute than a component of agency.

Agency and resilience

Studies into resilience, although contested, have seen its fair share of research within the literature over the years. In my search for literature on resilience, I found Antonovsky's salutogenesis paradigm that asks the question, "Why, when people are exposed to the same stress which causes some to become ill, do some remain healthy?" (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 56). I approached the salutogenesis paradigm through the lens of agents affected by constraints who demonstrate resilience as agency to potentially influence the nature of the constraint.

The question to ask concerning agency and resilience is how resilience affects agency and how agency affects resilience. What then is the relationship or interplay between the two? I look to Giddens (1984) and use his structuration theory as a lens to analyse the idea of resilience as it relates to agents. Giddens (1984) maintains that agents are found within structures and the actions taken by actors establish their agency that can possibly change the nature of the structures. He continues to explain that structure can constrain which in turn can affect agents and influence their agency within structure.

Authors, like Vaillant (as cited in Goldstein, 1997, p. 30) argue that resilience is the "self-righting tendencies ... to be bent without breaking and the capacity, once bent, to spring back". The literature provides four patterns of resilience (Polk, 1997). The patterns are firstly, a dispositional pattern, where internal processors promote resilient capabilities. Secondly, a relational pattern which can be understood as how relations with others in society or the world around us can promote resilience; and thirdly, a situational pattern which can be understood as

a stressful event triggered by a specific situation. Finally, there is a philosophical pattern which can be understood as the world views and beliefs that can influence resilience (Polk, 1997). Other authors such as Egeland, Carlson, and Sroufe (as cited in Sonn & Fisher, 1998, p. 458) understand resilience as “the capacity for successful adaptation, positive functioning or competence ... despite high-risk status, chronic stress, or following prolonged or severe trauma”.

Van Breda (2001) avers that “an individual’s resilience at any moment is calculated by the ratio between the presence of protective factors and the presence of hazardous circumstances” (p. 5). Resilience, as described by Donald, Lazarus, and Lolwana (2012) refer to two main components namely, danger and defending, and they point out that resilience is “maintaining a balance between the stressors and developmental risks to which learners are exposed on the one hand, and the protective factors that might be operating for them on the other” (p. 159). What is significant to derive from these definitions is that firstly, individuals demonstrate the understanding that resilience can be seen when they display attributes to overcome difficult situations within their life course; and secondly, is that resilience is an individual attribute.

Masten (as cited in Makoelle & Malindi, 2015) proposes that “resilience denotes the individual’s capacity to achieve positive outcomes despite the experience of adversity, to continue to function effectively in adverse circumstances, or to recover after significant trauma” (p. 3). Resilience, according to Makoelle and Malindi (2015), is not only limited to individuals, but extends to institutions that foster the well-being of individuals and may include, for example, families, schools and socio-cultural systems. Makoelle and Malindi (2015) elucidate that resilience is not only found within individuals, but can be seen as a resource that communities can provide to individuals in culturally meaningful ways. In this way, a student combines his/her attributes to overcome adverse circumstances with resources provided by actors in the student’s social and physical ecology to demonstrate resilience. Makoelle and Malindi (2015), drawing on Giddens (1984), claim that “it is within this agency of learners that the core attribute of resilience is situated” (p. 6).

What is significant in these definitions is that most scholars refer to resilience in relation to adverse, traumatic or challenging events. Following this argument, it seems that resilience occurs in a stressful environment.

Agency and future decisions

Agency and projectivity

According to Giddens (1984), “motives refer to the wants which prompt” action (p. 6). Giddens (1984) adds that “motivation refers to potential for action rather than to the mode in which action is chronically carried on by the agent” (p. 6). This statement resonates with me as most adult students have the intention, although they have not yet intervened, to pursue future educational activities. The motivation to pursue future educational activities is an unintended consequence of participation in an undergraduate academic programme for some adult students. Unintended consequences, according to Giddens (1984), “are events which would not have happened if that actor had behaved differently” (p. 11). To elaborate on motivation, intention and unintended consequences to pursue future educational activities, I refer to Bandura (1991) who asserts that “after people attain the goal they have been pursuing, those with a strong sense of efficacy set higher goals for themselves” (p. 158).

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) contribute to the discussion on future aspirations as they “conceptualize agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, ... oriented toward the future (as a “projective” capacity to imagine alternative possibilities)” (p. 962). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) aver that actors are “capable of formulating projects for the future and realizing them, even if only in small part, and with unforeseen outcomes, in the present” (p. 964). They argue that “projectivity encompasses *the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future*” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971). The imaginative abilities of adult students as agents to anticipate or imagine future educational actions resonates with me as adult students’ thinking may lead to future action.

Agency and power

Power can be understood as having a dual application, namely, as institutional processes of interaction, and as achieving planned results of behaviour. Power, in this sense, is related to action (Giddens, 1979). Power is also known as transformative capacity and that agency as power and action “only exists when an agent has the capability of intervening, or refraining from intervening, in a series of events so as to be able to influence their course” (Giddens, 1979, p. 256). Giddens (1979) describes action as a “stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world” (p. 55). Power,

however, is understood by others as the intention to act or the probability of individuals or groups to achieve planned results. This understanding disregards power as the ability of an actor to achieve planned results through action. Power is fundamentally linked to human agency, as actors who possess and use their power could act differently as they control that power. Actors who have power exercised over them could act differently were that power not used on them. In much the same way that agency cannot be defined as having the intentions to act, so too, is power, as a concept, not related to intention, will or wants (Giddens, 1979). Power, action and agency can be seen as being linked intrinsically, where having the power to achieve planned results can be seen as an action, and the act of achieving results relates to agency.

It is interesting to note that power relations are always a two-way process. These power relations refer to the relationship between independence and dependence. Because of this, the most independent actor is, in some situations, dependent, and the dependent actor retains some independence in a relationship. It is imperative to clarify that power should not be confused with conflict, as the two are not fundamentally connected. While Giddens (1979) believes that power does not only exist when exercised over those needing to be controlled, Bandura (1982) believes that “the less [people] bring their influence to bear on others, the more control they relinquish to them” (p. 144). For Bandura (1982), “the amount of imbalance of social power partly depends on the extent to which people exercise the influence that is theirs to command” (p. 144).

Giddens (1984) asserts that “power characterizes not specific types of conduct but all action” (p. 16). Agency as power and action can be understood as exercised influence over others Bandura (2001), and “collective agency” Bandura (2000, p. 75). Similarly to Giddens (1979), Bandura (2006) asserts that people have the “power to shape their life circumstances and the courses their lives take” (p. 164), and that “one has the power to effect changes by one’s actions” (p. 170).

Idahosa and Vincent (2019) opine that “power does not just come from role, position or responsibility; it lies in the strategic ability to convince and persuade people to see one’s point of view” (p. 157). Idahosa and Vincent (2019) concur with Giddens (1979) that power should not only be associated with conflict, but as a capability to intervene or not intervene. For Giddens (as cited in Idahosa & Vincent, 2019, p. 56), “the most powerful individuals may rely on the least powerful for their agency”.

Bounded agency

Bounded agency is the interaction or relationship between structure and individual agency. Structures, according to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), are broad structural conditions and targeted policy measures that create structural barriers related to family, job and institutions. For Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), structural conditions can bound an individuals' agency through limiting their options in a particular circumstance. While structural conditions can bound agency, the structural condition in itself, can also enable agency. When faced with structural or constraining conditions, actors assert agency to overcome those conditions.

Although bounded agency was identified in the Nordic countries, its ability to change individuals' capabilities to participate in adult education can be applicable in the South African context. According to an observation made by Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), barriers experienced by adult students in adult education in Nordic countries are shared by other countries. Nordic countries saw the need to use bounded agency to guide their economic policies which are specifically designed to address structural and individual based barriers to participation in adult education (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). The South African government also focused its efforts on developing specific policies geared towards participation in adult education and overcoming structurally and individually based barriers with the creation of financial and welfare support for adult students in adult education.

My focus on access, participation and barriers to participation brings me to incorporate bounded agency as part of my theoretical perspective to understand access and participation of adult students at a university in the Western Cape. Therefore, I will focus on dispositional barriers as it relates to the different individual expectations and rewards for reasons why some adult students participate in learning activities and others do not. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) observed that most of the research on participation and barriers to participation was conducted in the 1960s and 1970s; but, there was little interest in promoting alternative theoretical models to better understand participation and barriers to participation.

Structure

I will use Giddens's understanding of structure as rules, resources and knowledgeable (schemas) to illustrate structure and discuss each aspect. Giddens (1984) defines structure in the glossary section of his book titled *The Constitution of Society* as "rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. Structure exists only as memory

traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action” (p. 377). Giddens (1984) explains that structure should not only be viewed as constraining, but should be viewed as both constraining and enabling. Giddens (1984) sees structure as a fundamental part of structuration theory. He elaborates that functionalists and social analysts normally assume structure as a patterning of social relations; however, he claims that structure is more interesting. He understands structure not as patterning, but as an intersection of time and space (Giddens, 1984). Thus, for Giddens (1984) agents produce and reproduce structure.

It is interesting to note the different understandings of structure. Giddens (1984) sees structure as internal memory traces compared to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) who see it as an external human entity. I agree with Giddens’s (1984) view that structures are virtual and found in the minds of agents and not material or tangible objects.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) understand structure as material, social and institutional environments. When structure, that is an external human entity created by the state, is not properly and sufficiently distributed or made available to individuals it may bound agency. Government could be seen as an example of structure. A government can provide transport as a resource to students to access learning. Another example of structure could be how government makes funding available to students to access education or further education. These examples of transport and finance as structures can enable students to access further studies. However, government as structure can also impede students’ access by limiting funding and transport to a few students only. Thus, structure can enable and constrain participation.

Structural conditions

Structural conditions can be seen as policies designed for economic or social well-being or constraints. These conditions may impede or encourage participation in adult learning depending on the state’s view of adult learning. South Africa’s policies can be seen as structural conditions that encourage adult learning participation by focusing on family and work related barriers. For example, the state provides financial aid to those in need, like single parents and disabled adults, in a bid to lighten their financial constraints that prevent them from participating in adult learning. Furthermore, the state developed labour policies to improve access to education and financial support to educational institutions to supply the labour market (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). Assisting civil society to deal with their barriers and

addressing them successfully can be seen as good structural conditions. It is clear that the South African state designed policies that favour both economic and social structural conditions.

Structure as rules

Giddens (1979) states that rules are virtual and according to him in *Central Problems in Social Theory*, it, in one way or another, produces social practice and social systems. Giddens through his theory places a great deal of emphasis on actors as knowledgeable and as such, one can then assume that the knowledge of rules allows actors to act within these rules and society. When Giddens refers to the generalisability of rules as virtual, it must be understood that rules are not limited to a specific or particular instance, but it should be seen as broad and versatile to fit any given situation (Giddens, 1979).

If structure is virtual and rules are virtual, according to Giddens's (1979), and my understanding of it, then policies that the South African government implements to facilitate increased access to education by those previously disadvantaged, can be seen as structure. Actors knowledgeable of the rules of the structure can navigate their way through it. Giddens (1979) goes beyond structure as rules and explains that structure is not limited to rules only but includes resources.

Giddens (1982) explains that:

When I utter a sentence I draw upon various syntactical rules (sedimented in my practical consciousness of the language) in order to do so. These structural features of the language are the medium whereby I generate the utterance. But in producing a syntactically correct utterance I simultaneously contribute to the reproduction of the language as a whole ... The importance of this relation between moment and totality for social theory can hardly be exaggerated, involving as it does a dialectic of presence and absence which ties the most minor or trivial of social action to structural properties of the overall society, and to the coalescence of institutions over long stretches of historical time (p. 37).

Structure, for example, language, has abstract rules that assist in the creation of sentences and speech. Structure as rules can thus be understood as virtual and speech as an action of the rules. Giddens (1984) explains that structure consists of rules. Giddens (1984) uses language to illustrate rules, as he wants to move away from the traditional understanding of structure as a

constraining framework of social practices. He argues that language consists of rules drawn upon by actors as they make use of speech on a daily basis. Giddens (1984) elaborates that language might not fit within all social structures as is; however, it is a practical action in a social practice.

Giddens (1984) defines rules, for example social life, “as generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices” (p. 21). Giddens does not give examples of generalisable procedures; however, it can be assumed that rules can have a wider range of types. In other words, rules can be thought of as existing at various levels (Sewell, 1992).

Structure as resources

Giddens (1984) explains that structure consists not only of rules but of resources as well and defines resources as “the media whereby transformative capacity is employed as power in the routine course of social interaction” (p. 92). Thus, in the South African context structure as resources relates to the state’s ability to provide financial support to those accessing education.

In his article, Giddens (1984) asserts that resources can be divided into two categories, namely authoritative and allocative. Authorisation can be understood as having the capability to assert authority or power over others, and allocation can be understood as having the capability to control objects or tangible materials (Sewell, 1992). Therefore, structure as authoritative resources can be understood as human resources and structure as allocative resources can be understood as non-human resources. Authoritative and allocative resources have a relationship with power. Authoritative resources as human resources can be physical strength and knowledge, that can be used to create, assert or maintain power over others. Allocative resources as non-human resources can be objects, for example, material or manufactured objects that can be used to assert or maintain power over others (Sewell, 1992). What is interesting about the two resources is the fact that they are mediums of power which are distributed unevenly. Sewell (1992) illuminates the fact that although the power of human and non-human resources is distributed unevenly, all humans still possess some aspects of both resources as they, as agents, are empowered to access either one of the resources (Sewell, 1992).

Sewell (1992) echoes Giddens’s definition of resources simply as “resources are anything that can serve as a source of power in social interaction” (p. 9). Sewell (1992) observed that structure has a duality. If this is true, then structure should consist of both rules and resources. To

reiterate, rules are virtual, and resources, according to Sewell (1992), are actual. For duality to exist one has to affect the other and vice versa. In this sense rules affect resources and resources affect rules.

To clarify the duality between rules and resources using South African policies of the education system, it could be observed that rules are policies and resources are financial support. Here, without the financial support, the rules cannot be implemented and at the same time without the rules, financial support would not be possible.

Structure as schemas

Giddens (1979) understands that actors as human beings operate and function within societies as knowledgeable actors. He asserts that it is because of their knowledge of the rules within societies that actors can operate and act within it in any given way (Giddens, 1979). Giddens (1979) defines structure by identifying three distinct characteristics, namely structures as rules, resources and knowledgeability. He regards knowledgeability as schemas that are found in the minds of agents. Sewell (1992), however, sees ambiguity between rules and structure as he views rules as actual and not virtual and as such, it should be resources and not rules. He understands rules as defined by Giddens as schemas and not rules.

Sewell (1992) understands that schemas make up structures, as schemas is a generalisable procedure in the enactment of social life. Generalisable procedures can be understood as being able to be applied in various contexts across different situations. Sewell (1992) agrees with Giddens that generalisable procedures can be seen as virtual and not as rules.

Agency and structure

In this section, I discuss rules and schemas as both relates to structure as one concept, according to Giddens, Sewell and Archers' understanding of it. Giddens (1979) proposes that actors cannot escape social structures and that the interrelatedness of agents and structure is that of duality. Agency and structure as duality, refers to what Giddens (1976) terms "production and reproduction" of social life (p. 102), which can be found through the action of agents. Giddens (1981) maintains his understanding of duality of structure as he "use[s] the phrase 'duality of structure' to mean that structure is both the medium and outcome of social practices if recursively organizes" (p. 171).

In his description of structure as both virtual and actual, structure serves a dual role (Giddens, 1984). This duality is at the core of Giddens' structuration theory and is seen by others as a "patterning of social relations or social phenomena" (Giddens, 1984, p. 16). Giddens (1984) argues that this view of structuration can be understood as the interrelation of dualism to subject and to social objects. Duality refers to social structures as virtual and agents as actors or human beings who are socialised and re-socialised through interacting in social structural situations. Structure influences people and people have an effect on structure. Another way to understand the duality of structure is that structure could not exist without the action of people and without structure, people's actions could be seen as unplanned actions of will. In this way, structure both constrains and enables human agency. Agency, on the other hand, according to Giddens (1984), "concerns events of which an individual is a perpetrator in the sense that the individual could at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently" (p. 9). Giddens believes that dual structures are by definition alterable (Giddens, 1984). Structures are thus seen as both resources and rules according to Giddens (1984) or structure and schemas according to Sewell (Sewell, 1992). If we understand structure to be dual then schemas/rules affect resources, and resources affect schemas/rules (Sewell, 1992).

Both Giddens (1979) and Archer (1995) agree that there is a mutual interdependence between structure and agency. However, Giddens's understanding is that structure does not outweigh agency and vice versa and that they should be viewed as affecting and dependent on each other. Archer (1995) views structure and agency as separate and different. Giddens (1979) understands agents as producing and reproducing society, whereas, Archer understands agents as only the reproducers of society (Archer, 1995). This is an interesting point as Archer disregards the fact that for agents to reproduce society, it must have been produced in the first place. Giddens (1979) views structure as memory tracers living in the minds of agents, whereas Archer (1995) views structure as a collection of social objects.

Barriers to participation

Barriers to adult learning, and barriers that adults experienced in accessing learning, have been discussed in adult education literature over the past 50 years (MacKeracher, Suart & Potter, 2006). The concept of barriers is a highly contested topic. Authors like Cross (1981), Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), Dench and Regan (2000), MacKeracher et al. (2006), and Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) share similar understandings with regard to two types of barriers, namely situational barriers and institutional barriers.

Dispositional barriers as understood by Cross (1981) includes the perception that an adult student has about him/herself in learning activities. Her understanding of dispositional barriers is contested by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) who understand it as psychosocial barriers. According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), psychosocial barriers are “negative evaluations of the usefulness, appropriateness, and pleasurability of engaging in adult education” (p. 139) and “negative evaluations of oneself as a potential learner” (p. 139). MacKeracher et al. (2006) in turn, understand dispositional barriers as an attitudinal barrier. Furthermore, Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) and MacKeracher et al. (2006) go beyond Cross (1981) and include informational and academic barriers as barriers to adult participation in educational activities.

In this section, however, I will only discuss barriers as it relates to individual barriers and structural barriers.

Individual Barriers

Situational Barriers

Cross (1981) views barriers, especially situational barriers, as obstacles to learning. She defines situational barriers as “those arising from one’s situation in life at any given time” (Cross, 1981, p. 98). Examples of situational barriers include: factors relating to the lack of time as a result of work responsibilities, home and family responsibilities; and factors relating to the lack of finance, childcare support and transport (Cross, 1981). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) agree with Cross as they define situational barriers as “an individual’s life context at a particular time, that is, the realities of one’s social and physical environment” (p. 137). It is interesting to note that Cross (1981) and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) gave a broad description of their understanding of situational barriers as it relates to life in general. MacKeracher et al. (2006), however defines situational barriers as “broad circumstantial conditions that hamper the ability of adult learners to gain access to and pursue learning opportunities” (p. 4), and added to the discussion by including “having a mobility, sensory or learning disability; and lack of support from other” (p. 2) as further barriers.

A closer analysis of the definition by MacKeracher et al. (2006), led me to understand that situational barriers can only impede adult participation in learning activities. This is in contrast to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) 2003 Eurobarometer findings that situational barriers can both impede and enable adult participation in educational activities. Although the above

definitions differ somewhat, the examples used by these authors to discuss situational barriers in the literature appear to be similar to some degree.

Dispositional barriers

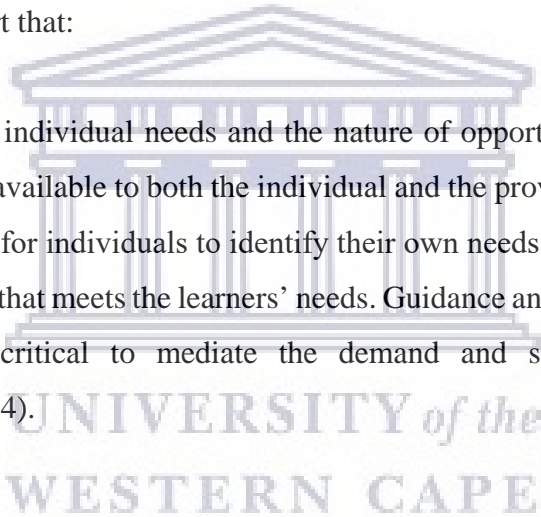
Cross (1981) defines dispositional barriers as “those related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner” (p. 98). According to Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (as cited in Cross, 1981), examples of dispositional barriers include: old age, questioning one’s academic abilities, lack of energy, displeasure for studying and uncertainty of the outcomes of the qualification. Dispositional barriers are understood by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as psychosocial barriers which “are individually held beliefs, values, attitudes, or perceptions that inhibit participation in organized learning activities” (p. 137).

Dench and Regan (2000) raised an interesting fact that poor health and having a disability were some dispositional barriers given by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). They found that challenges with poor health and being disabled could limit participation. These dispositional barriers like limited mobility, difficulties in communication, limited energy and not being able to take care of themselves can limit activities in learning for some. Fagan (as cited in MacKeracher et al., 2006) refers to dispositional barriers as “learner-inherent” (p. 5), and MacKeracher et al. (2006), understand dispositional barriers as it “relate to learners’ perceptions of their ability to seek out, register in, attend and successfully complete learning activities” (p. 5). Following Cross (1981), Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) state that “dispositional barriers refer to perceptions like little to gain by participating, concerns about own ability to succeed, belief that one is too old to go back to study, and bad previous experiences with schooling” (p. 192).

By contrast, dispositional barriers do not refer to financial or time constraints, but differences in the individual’s expected outcomes of participation or non-participation. Research shows that non-participation in adult education can be traced back to adult students’ negative beliefs, views, and experiences of prior education (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). Dispositional barriers can thus hinder an individual’s ability or capability to participate. In contrast to Rubenson and Desjardins’s (2009) findings with regard to the internal processors of non-participation, Paldanius (as cited in Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009) highlights studies that indicate that unemployment and dull jobs are disheartening and reduce participation, and it is

only when individuals are presented with the prospect of increased income in the workplace, that participation is meaningful.

According to Salling-Olesen (as cited in Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013), dispositional constraints as barriers can be seen as having “a low level of resources (external or internal) [which] can act as a constraint” (p. 263), and as having “the capabilities ... to make use of available resources and opportunities that are at hand [which] may be limited” (p. 263). Desjardins and Rubenson (2013) add liquidity constraints to the dispositional barriers discussion and maintain that “liquidity constraints are individually based ... on the extent that financial resources are at the disposal of individuals” (p. 264). They further maintain that information constraints as dispositional barriers “are particularly important for the demand and supply of opportunities to interact efficiently” (p. 264). To support their statement, Desjardins and Rubenson (2013) assert that:



the match between individual needs and the nature of opportunities depends on information that is available to both the individual and the providers. But in many situations it is hard for individuals to identify their own needs, making it difficult to design provision that meets the learners' needs. Guidance and other information support are thus critical to mediate the demand and supply of learning opportunities (p. 264).

Academic barriers

According to MacKeracher et al. (2006, p. 2), “academic factors include skills essential to successful learning. The importance of these factors is based on whether the skills were ever learned; and if learned, the learner's current skill level in light of the elapsed time since last used”. These skills include “literacy, numeracy, and computer-related skills; ability to access and understand information; critical and reflective thinking skills; and skills in writing essays, examinations and tests” (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 2). Academic skill deficits early on in life still remain a challenge for adult students and previously learned academic skills can decrease over time if not utilised (MacKeracher et al., 2006). Although adult students may access higher education through their qualifications, their scholastic ability to participate may not be sufficiently adequate for them to succeed. Furthermore, ERIC Clearinghouse (as cited in MacKeracher et al., 2006) hold the view that “learning disabilities do not disappear when an

individual leaves school but create new problems in relation to work, self-esteem, social interactions and independent living” (p. 19).

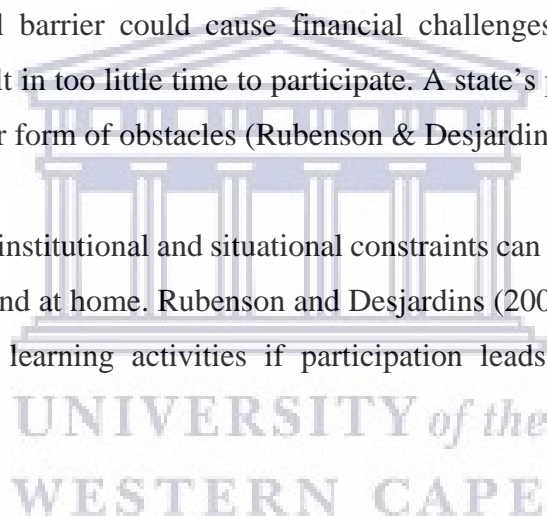
Structural barriers

If one understands that structure can enable agency, as mentioned previously, then structure can constrain it as well. Structural barriers can be understood as external obstacles that individuals experience and that challenge their normal daily life. Examples of structural barriers could include the lack of finance to pursue education, the challenges of accessing transport to be able to attend further education, unemployment and family commitments (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). These obstacles are thus external to the individual and may come in the form of work-related concerns or not being able to find work, not being able to care for your family or afford day-care in order to look for work or further studies. With this in mind, work constraints as a structural barrier could cause financial challenges to participation. Work conditions could also result in too little time to participate. A state’s policies to gain access to adult education are another form of obstacles (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

Structural barriers such as institutional and situational constraints can affect individuals at their place of work, in society and at home. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) claim that people will only participate in adult learning activities if participation leads to better paying work opportunities.

Institutional barriers

Scholars are in agreement with regard to their interpretation of institutional barriers. Cross (1981) defines it as “all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities” (p. 98). Cross (1981) identified that “inappropriate courses of study” (p. 98) are seen by adult students as a barrier and categorised it as an institutional barrier. She points out categorically that courses need to be “interesting, practical, or relevant” (Cross, 1981, p. 104) to meet the needs of adult students. According to Cross (1981), institutional barriers can be clustered into: “scheduling problems; problems with location or transportation; lack of courses that are interesting, practical, or relevant; procedural problems and time requirements; and lack of information about programs and procedures” (p. 104).



Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) echo Cross's view and cite her, that institutional barriers are "erected by learning institutions or agencies that exclude or discourage certain groups" (p. 137). Similarly, Fagan (as cited in MacKeracher et al., 2006) refers to institutional barriers as "program" factors (p. 4), and Potter and Ferguson (as cited in MacKeracher et al., 2006) refer to it as barriers that are "biased against or ignorant of the needs of adult learners" (p. 4). Some examples of institutional barriers in adult education literature include: inconvenient scheduling and location of courses, part-time students to pay full-time student fees, courses not meeting the needs of adult students, poor dissemination of information of learning opportunities by educational institutions, poor quality of support services and inadequate locations for learning (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

Finance, or the lack thereof, as discussed in the examples previously, appears in both situational and institutional barriers. The context in which finance is placed will thus deem it to be either situational or institutional (MacKeracher et al., 2006). To clarify, for finance to be a situational barrier the adult or the family of the adult student does not have funds to cover study fees. For finance to be an institutional barrier, the educational institution does not provide, for whatever reason, financial assistance to the adult student. In addition, factors such as childcare and transportation are considered both situational and institutional barriers depending on the context in which it is found (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

Desjardins and Rubenson (2013) contribute to the institutional barriers discussion by maintaining that liquidity and information constraints are institutional barriers. Expensive study fees and lack of finance are examples of liquidity constraints as institutional barriers (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013). Informational constraints as institutional barriers could be seen as not having sufficient information from educational institutions to determine specific courses of action that could lead to planned and desired outcomes in the future (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013).

Overcoming individual and structural barriers

MacKeracher et al. (2006) reported on findings that could potentially reduce institutional barriers and increase participation. For them factors such as elements of a responsive educational system could improve participation through good institutional policies, and practices and factors such as best practice could improve participation through sound pedagogical practices (MacKeracher et al., 2006). The elements of a responsive educational

system include: recognition, support, flexibility, accessibility, availability, relevancy and respect (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

Recognition refers to adult students accessing learning activities at any time throughout their lives without discrimination from funding agencies. Support denotes “addressing the needs of adult learners in areas related to academic skills, financial support, career development, and family and work responsibilities” (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 6). Flexibility refers to not needing to compromise educational quality, but to appreciate that “the realities of adult learners’ lives often differ dramatically from [those of] ‘traditional’ students” Potter and Ferguson (as cited in MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 6). Accessibility and availability refers to addressing “the need of adult learners to be able to access learning activities at times, locations, and formats suitable to their multiple family, work and community roles and responsibilities” (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 6).

Relevancy refers to addressing “the need for adult learners to have access to learning opportunities with content that is relevant to their family, work and community responsibilities” (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 7). Respect refers to addressing “the need for adult learners to be treated by all staff members of the educational institutions-instructors, administrators, and service providers” (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 7).

Best practice in teaching may not be directly linked to barriers and access; however, research indicates its improvement of learning opportunities, as it is referred to by Potter and Ferguson (as cited in MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 7) as “essential principles for extending and supporting lifelong learning in formal classrooms”. Examples of best practice may include active learning, awareness of learning outcomes, alignment of instructor/student goals, and meaningfully connecting new information to prior knowledge.

History reveals that the apartheid regime in South Africa made it increasingly difficult for black South Africans to free themselves from structural constraints creating a sense of self-doubt in their abilities to access and participate in educational activities; this, however, is starting to change (Lockett & Lockett, 2009). Lockett and Lockett (2009) thus assume that when black South African students apply and gain access to historically advantaged institutions of higher learning, they are demonstrating human agency by overcoming structural and dispositional barriers. They further assert that students navigate through and negotiate around social

structures to achieve their goals and as such become agents for change (Luckett & Luckett, 2009). The following are accounts of how disadvantaged students in the engineering and building field in from the Masakh'iSizwe project overcoming barriers:

“I know I can, or should I say, I will succeed. (Journal 3)”

“The biggest challenge is that I want to prove to myself that I can finish this degree. It is a long-time dream. The disappointment will be huge if I don't complete my studies. (Interview 13)”

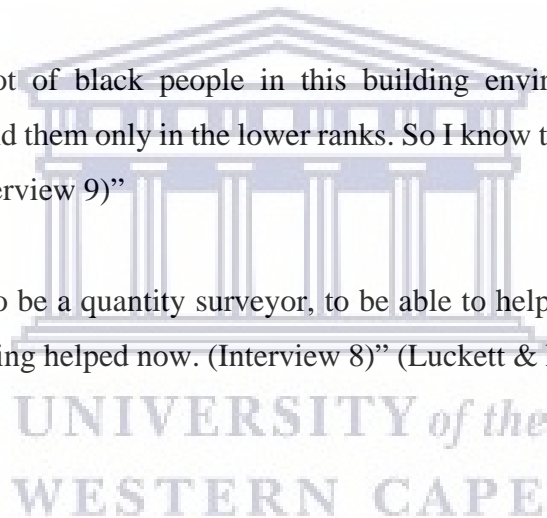
“So I went to work for the first year. Then I got a bursary from you. (Interview 7)”

“There is not a lot of black people in this building environment ... in this profession. You find them only in the lower ranks. So I know that is one thing that motivates me. (Interview 9)”

“In future I want to be a quantity surveyor, to be able to help those in need, as I am one of those being helped now. (Interview 8)” (Luckett & Luckett, 2009, p. 6-7).

Summary

In this section, I construct a conceptual framework that includes theoretical perspectives on structure and agency, and adult students as agents and barriers to participation. This conceptual framework is utilised as a theoretical lens to analyse, in the next section, relationships between access, barriers to participation, and success among adult students at a university.



SECTION 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this section, I discuss research design and methodology according to qualitative research literature. I begin with my research question, an overview of qualitative research approach and the research site used in this study. This is followed by discussions on research participants and selection, research methods, methods of data gathering and thematic data analysis. I conclude this section with a discussion on research ethics.

Research question

What are the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution?

Sub questions

What structural barriers affect adult students' participation?

What dispositional barriers affect adult students' participation?

How do adult students address/overcome barriers that enable them to participate successfully?

Research approach

I adopted a qualitative research approach. According to Bryman (2012), qualitative research in a general sense concerns itself with words and is not about collecting statistics. However, its description is not that simplistic as it has three distinct features. Firstly, it has an inductive view of how it sees the relation between theory and research, although, this paper will adopt a deductive view. Secondly, the epistemological view is embedded in social science and how the participants experience and understand their social reality. In view of this, the epistemology focus is on an interpretivist approach of deducing participants' experiences and understanding of the social world. In addition, Bryman (2016) acknowledges "that, unlike the objects of the natural sciences, the objects of the social sciences-people-are capable of attributing meaning to their environment" (p. 309). Lastly, the ontological view sees constructing meaning as taking place through the social interactions between individuals and that constructing is not an external experience (Bryman, 2012).

Kothari (2004) asserts that a qualitative research approach "is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour" (p. 5). A qualitative research approach is used

to understand why people do what they do and how they feel or what they think of a particular situation. It is through qualitative research that researchers understand what encourages human behaviour and what leads to people's preferences or taste. It is important to note that qualitative research as a subjective and deductive approach of assessment relies on the researcher's insights and impressions. I am a qualitative researcher who went through the same undergraduate programme as the purposive sample used in this research not too long ago. Thus, I was in a unique position to connect with participants in understanding what their social reality was while completing their studies, what motivated their behaviour, and what influenced their attitudes and thinking in relation to the successful completion of their studies.

Crossman (2017) maintains that there is a large body of qualitative research literature in the field of sociology and that social scientists prefer this method as it allows for understanding the meaning people place on their daily experiences. Similar to Bryman and Kothari, Crossman (2017) understands qualitative research as a deductive process that lends itself to investigate the relationship between people's experiences and the meanings and interpretations they place on these experiences and what influences their behaviour. Furthermore, Crossman (2017) claims that qualitative researchers make use of their senses and intellect to gather data and formulate insights into participants' interpretations of their own social life. In addition, Crossman's (2017) interesting point that qualitative research has the ability to produce new theories expanded my insight of qualitative research.

Qualitative research, like so many other research methods, is subject to both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of qualitative research are that it allows for an in depth account of the meaning people place on their everyday experiences, how social power can influence or affect every day experiences, and that it is flexible and relatively cost effective as a research method (Crossman, 2017). Disadvantages of qualitative research include that the findings cannot be extensively generalised, and that the data may be influenced by the researchers' biases in a way that changes it (Crossman, 2017).

Research site

I selected a university in the Western Cape as my research site. This university has a history of struggling against oppression and discrimination of the marginalised people to gain access to quality higher education. This university offers part-time studies to adult students who do not have the opportunity to pursue full-time studies. Adult students can obtain certificate, diploma

and degree qualifications through part-time programmes offered by a division of the Faculty of Education. I focussed my research on students in an academic adult educator programme. My participants are all graduates from a part-time undergraduate programme within the Faculty of Education.

Research participants and selection

Sample description

Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) believe that qualitative research samples are generally smaller than quantitative research samples as what is important in qualitative research is meaning and not necessarily the repeated occurrence of data. It is important to note that the more data collected does not necessarily mean more information, especially if the same information is being collected. In this paper, I followed Green and Thorogood (2009) who assert that “the experience of *most qualitative researchers* [emphasis added] is that in interview studies little that is 'new' comes out of transcripts after you have interviewed 20 or so people” (p. 120).

It is with the understanding of Green and Thorogood (2009) in mind that I selected 20 participants. They were selected based on the following criterion, namely students who have successfully completed an undergraduate programme for adult educators offered by the university. Ten men and 10 women, aged between 18 and 45 years old were approached initially. However, as participation was voluntary, the final sample group consisted of 14 women and 6 men aged between 25 and 60 years old.

Sampling strategies

I made use of purposive sampling to select my participants. Purposive sampling, as Babbie (2013) explains, is “a type of nonprobability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher’s judgement about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (p. 128). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) suggest that purposive sampling is self-explanatory whereby the sample is chosen for a purpose which characterises a specific unit category or site relevant to a specific study. Mason (2002) and Patton (2002) concur with Babbie as they assert that a purposive sampling unit is identified because it has the necessary variables needed to best understand and explore what the researcher intends to study. Burgess (2002) advises that these variables may relate to personal experiences, specific human behaviour, or attitudes.

Where Babbie (2013) favours the term purposive sampling, Honigmann (1982) prefers the term judgement sampling, with LeCompte and Preissle (1993) favouring the term criterion based sampling as they assert that all sampling is purposive. Bryman (2016) refers to it as fixed purposive sampling by describing it as sampling that is decided at the beginning of the research with few or no additions to the sample process during the research. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) do not dispute the definition of purposive sampling as understood by Babbie (2013); however, they agree with Bryman (2016) that criteria are used to identify the sample at the initial stages of the research. It is important to note that “although ‘purposive’ selection involves quite deliberate choices, this should not suggest any bias in the nature of the choices made” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 80). The process of purposive sampling selection must be done objectively in order to stand up against any scrutiny.

Snowballing technique

Although I made use of purposive sampling, I also made use of snowball sampling when I found it difficult to locate members of the specific sample unit. Snowball sampling, according to Babbie (2013), refers to the process in which participants who are part of the research study direct the researcher to other potential participants. I requested the help of the current sample to direct me to others who were not part of the research, but who fell within the criteria of the current sample and research study. I found one man and three women participants through the snowballing technique.

Research method

Semi-structured interviews

I selected the semi-structured interview as a research method. Bryman (2012) refers to the term qualitative interview as an umbrella term that includes the various types of interviews found in qualitative research of which the semi-structured interview is one type of interview. He explains that qualitative interviewing is where the interviewer asks a sequence of open-ended questions that allows the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to answers of importance. The list of questions asked by the interviewer will take the form of an interview guide. Although I made use of a list of questions, the participant had some liberty with regard to how comfortable the participant felt in answering the questions.

Kvale (1996) proposes two alternative positions to interviewing. Firstly, he refers to the 'miner metaphor' that is located within the modern social science research model, which advocates that:

knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal ... [T]he knowledge is waiting in the subject's interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner. The interviewer digs nuggets of data or meanings out of a subject's pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions (p. 3).

The second alternative position falls within the constructivist research model in which knowledge is socially constructed as he asserts that the interviewer travels with the interviewee and through the process of two-way communication meaning is constructed (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) explains that the traveller (researcher) asks the subjects questions about their daily narratives experienced in the world around them and in this process of two-way communication, deeper meaning and understanding of their narratives are constructed.

The interviewer, according to Kvale (1996), is an active participant in data development and the construction of meaning. The key focus of the interview process, in this study, is mainly to obtain data that only the participants in the undergraduate programme can provide. Data in this qualitative research refer to the participant's personal reflection of their experiences during the undergraduate programme as it relates to their agency in accessing, participating and successfully completing further education.

Although I made use of a semi-structured interview as my preferred method of data collection in this paper, it is not without its advantages and limitations. Advantages of this method may include, but are not limited, to having a greater response success rate than that of a questionnaire survey (Austin, 1981). It allows for rich examination of attitudes, beliefs, motivation and feelings (Richardson, Dohrenwend & Klein, 1965; Smith, 1975); it is well suited to validate participants' answers (Gordon, 1975); it acts as a checklist to ensure that all questions are answered and it prevents outside interference from influencing participants' answers (Bailey, 1987).

On the other hand, limitations of a semi-structured interview may include the biases on the part of the interviewer and possibly of the interviewee (Kothari, 2004). It may be difficult to use

this method when pursuing high profile participants. One-on-one interviews are generally more time consuming. There is always the risk that the mere presence of the interviewer may influence the responses of the interviewee. Quality interviews often rely on good interviewer/interviewee relations, and if this is not established, it could jeopardise the interview process and data.

I understood that I as a novice to interviewing, I needed to be aware of variables that could challenge the interview process and the interviewee. Furthermore, I was conscious of how my beliefs and feelings could affect how I asked questions and responded to them. I was mindful of the fact that I needed to demonstrate tact and sensitivity when interviewing so as not to upset the interviewee and have patience to complete the interview.

Research instrument

Interview guide

I used an interview guide as my research instrument (See Appendix A). Bryman (2012) describes an interview guide as a list of questions that will allow the interviewee to elaborate and expand on the list of questions in a semi-structured interview. I chose this research instrument as it did not restrict the interviewee in how to answer, but allowed the interviewee some flexibility in responding spontaneously and without parameters. This interview guide also allowed me “to glean the ways in which research participants view their social world and that there is flexibility in the conduct of the interviews” (Bryman, 2012, p. 473). I conducted the interview in such a way that it gave me insight into how the participant saw his/her social world. Because I used a semi- structured interview, it allowed me some flexibility in conducting the interview as the questions were open-ended, thus giving me an opportunity to follow up on the responses. Although I made use of a semi-structured interview that made use of unstructured questions, that did not mean that the questions were so unstructured that I could not link the questions to the research focus. The interview guide in this research paper consisted mainly of a list of open-ended standardised questions.

Gordon (1975) suggests that the list of standardised questions should be the same in every way for each participant. By standardising questions, different answers can be seen as different participant experiences, instead of different answers to different questions. Denzin (1989) contributes to the understanding of a standardised semi-structured interview guide by illuminating the fact that standardisation should be understood as communicating the main

meaning of the questions and not the reoccurrence of the same words in the questions. Thus, the interviewer should convey the same meaning of each question and not just the words of the questions as the same words may have different meanings for each participant.

The interview guide provided me with certain advantages, as it was flexible enough to allow the interviewees to share more information (Patton, 1990). In addition to the flexibility of the interview guide that allowed me to solicit follow up questions, it also made use of open-ended questions, which provided me with a great amount of data from the interviewees (Patton, 1990).

I found this research instrument helpful as it allowed for flexibility in conducting my interviews; however, it also posed some challenges. Firstly, according to Johnson and Turner (2003), one-on-one interviews can be expensive. Secondly, transcribing open-ended interviews and analysing the data can be time consuming (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Taking cognisance of the challenges of this research instrument, I decided to record all the interviews using an audio recorder. Using an audio recording device allowed me not to write down the interviewee's answers, as I did not want to prolong the interview and focus on writing down what was said and miss what was being said while I was writing (Bryman, 2016). By doing this I would be able to fully capture the responses soon after each interview.

Data capturing

As a qualitative researcher, I drew from Bryman (2016) who emphasises that:

qualitative researchers are frequently interested not just in *what* people say but in the *way* that they say it. If this aspect is to be fully woven into an analysis, it is necessary for a complete account of the series of exchanges in an interview to be available (p. 381).

I recorded my research interviews using an electronic data-recording device to ensure that I captured a true description of what was said and how it was said. Bryman (2016) discusses the recording of qualitative interviews and points out “that, in qualitative research, the interview is normally audio- recorded” (p. 380).

Data processing

I transcribed all interviews into text. Babbie (2013) explains that the data captured would not be interpretable immediately. However, he elaborated that researchers have developed systematic and rigorous techniques to assist with the processing of qualitative data. Coding is an important process of analysing qualitative social research data. Coding can be described as categorising specific fragments of data and depositing it in a way that it can be retrieved when needed (Babbie, 2013). Coding, according to Babbie (2013), has an even greater function not only to analyse the data but also to identify patterns emerging from the data and linking it to theoretical understanding of social life. Strauss and Corbin (as cited in Babbie, 2013) see the process of coding as open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding can be defined as “the initial classification and labelling of concepts in qualitative data analysis. In open coding the codes are suggested by the researchers’ examination and questioning of the data” (Babbie, 2013, p. 397). Axial coding is “a reanalysis of the result of open coding in the Grounded Theory Method, aimed at identifying the important, general concepts” (Babbie, 2013, p. 398). He also states that selective coding “in Grounded Method Theory, builds on the results of open coding and axial coding to identify the central concept that organises the other concepts that have been identified in a body of textual materials” (Babbie, 2013, p. 398).

Bryman (2016) makes us aware of some considerations to keep in mind when developing codes. These include “code as soon as possible”; “read through your initial set of transcripts, field notes, documents” and “do it again” (Bryman, 2016, pp. 451-452). Further considerations to keep in mind before and while coding include “review your codes”; “consider more general theoretical ideas in relation to codes and data”; “remember that data can be coded in more than one way”; “do not worry about generating what seem to be too many codes” and “keeping coding in perspective” (Bryman, 2016, p. 453).

Although the coding process is described as a data analysing tool, it is not without criticism. For Bryman (2016) a criticism of the coding process in qualitative research is that the researcher might misunderstand the context of what the participant responded to. He asserts that the narrative flow of what participants say might be lost if the researcher is not sensitive to the participants’ experiences.

Thematic data analysis

I used a thematic data analysis to analyse my data. Themes can be described as categories that are identified by analysing data that relates to the research focus, that builds on codes found in transcripts, and that provides a theoretical understanding of the data. My thematic data analysis adopted a deductive approach as it “involves a ‘top down’ method and is informed by the researcher’s theoretical framework” (Bryman et. al., 2014, p. 351). Braun and Clarke (as cited in Bryman et. al., 2014, p. 351) describe the thematic analysis as a six-phase process in “familiarising yourself with your data”; “generating initial codes”; “searching for themes”; “reviewing themes”; “defining and naming themes”; and “producing the report”. Bryman (2016) builds on his previous description of themes by extending it to include how it relates to the research focus and that themes could assist in understanding the theoretical application of the data. The function of thematic analysis is to detect and analyse patterns or themes out of the data collected.

Braun and Clarke (as cited in Bryman et. al., 2014) avow that thematic analysis does not concern itself with the frequency or popularity of a theme identified in the data, but, how relevant it is to the research focus. It is the researcher who decides what constitutes a theme and the importance thereof in relation to the research focus. The meaning of thematic analysis is contested among scholars as some believe that it is the same as a code while others believe that it builds upon codes (Bryman et. al., 2014).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis provides advantages to new qualitative researchers as this approach is flexible enough to be adapted to suit the needs of various studies. In addition, new qualitative researchers may find thematic analysis less difficult to understand, as there are not so many processes to follow (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach provides a rich and comprehensive theoretical understanding of the data. Furthermore, thematic analysis is beneficial as it allows the researcher to gain insight into the research participants’ experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Disadvantages of thematic analysis can be found in the lack of extensive literature on thematic analysis compared to other forms of data analyses that might intimidate new qualitative researchers in a way that may impede their ability to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although flexibility is an advantage, it could also be a disadvantage

if the researcher is too flexible and not consistent in the way the researcher develops themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Research ethics statement

Babbie (2013) mentions that ethics or ethical concepts are contested principles as there is more often than not no one explanation of a particular situation in social research, and that great importance should be given to the dimensions of social research as it relates to ethics. I applied ethics as described by Babbie (2013) that are “conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group” (p. 32) to my research. Babbie (2013) states that for social research to be realistic, it must consider four aspects, which are scientific, administrative, ethical and political constraints. In this section, I only described the ethical considerations for my research project as it relates to no harm to participants, voluntary participation, consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and data storage and maintenance.

No harm to participants

I took into account various issues of ethics such as not harming participants. Furthermore, I guarded against harming participants psychologically, steered away from demeaning them and making them feel uncomfortable. I was also aware of and avoided issues of ethics that could be harmful to a participant’s self-esteem as the effects of questioning could linger long after the interview and negatively affect the participant’s self-esteem (Babbie, 2013). I considered three issues as described by Babbie (2013) as firstly, expecting the person to be well aware of the scope of the research and volunteer their participation. Secondly, that the participant not be harmed or possibly be advantaged through the research. Thirdly, that the positives and negatives of research should be made aware of to the participants when conducting my research.

Voluntary participation

Babbie (2013) asserts that social researchers have an ethical norm that emphasises that participation in a social research study should be done on a voluntary basis. Voluntary participation is a fundamental aspect of social research as the participant might not be as invested in the study, as he/she might need to take time away from daily activities to take part in the study (Babbie, 2013). Social research often requires participants’ personal information to be made public and participants need to be made aware of this, even if they are participating on a voluntary basis. I provided participants with an information letter and a consent form that

clearly explained that their participation is not compulsory or expected and that their non-participation would not affect them or me negatively.

Consent from institution

I provided a letter to the registrar of the institution that I selected as my research site to request consent to complete my research study. This letter had my details as a Masters student at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and marked for the attention of the registrar of the institution. The letter explained the focus of my research study and the total number of participants needed to conduct the study. To ensure a favourable response, I informed the registrar of the research approach, method and that participation is voluntary. The consent letter was accompanied with an ethical clearance certificate from the UWC to substantiate and to further cement the legitimacy of my research study and the letter of consent (See Appendix B).

Informed consent

I understand that ethical norms, as no harm to others and voluntary participation as it relates to social research, are embedded in informed consent (Babbie, 2013). I followed Babbie's (2013) understanding of informed consent as "a norm in which subjects base their voluntary participation in research projects on a full understanding of the possible risk involved" (p. 34). I provided an information letter to participants that included a statement that this research study was a course requirement. The letter also includes a statement that highlighted the focus of my research study and that I will be making use of interviews to gather information. I ensured that participants were fully aware that their participation was voluntary, that their responses would be confidential, and that records of their responses would be maintained safely. I requested their permission to make use of a micro-recording device in order to record the interviews. I reassured them that their participation will be kept in strict confidence and that anonymity will be maintained. I informed the participants that a consent form will be provided for them to sign should they decide to participate in this study. I included the contact details of the relevant person with whom they may liaise regarding any aspects of the research study (See Appendix C).

Consent from participants

I prepared a consent form which the participants signed. This form referred to the information letter to participants and explained the purpose and scope of my study to ensure that participants were fully aware and could make an informed decision to participate or not. This consent form

also explained that my study made use of interviewing and that I would need their permission before commencing with the interview. Consent from participants also refers to explaining that participation in the study is voluntary, which meant that the participants were not obligated to participate and that he/she could opt out of the study at any time. Permission from the participants to use a micro-recording device to record our interview was also needed for this study and the consent form stated this request clearly. I ensured that participants were aware that their words might be quoted, however, their names will not be made available in any publication (See Appendix D).

Anonymity and confidentiality

In the consent form to participants, I committed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the details of participants, as I was aware that they would share personal information that could harm them when made public. Babbie (2013) avers that “anonymity is achieved in a research project when neither the researchers nor their readers of the findings can identify a given response with a given respondent” (p. 35). I ensured anonymity by having one-on-one interviews with participants ensuring that no one knew who said what. I made use of pseudonyms as an additional measure to ensure the anonymity of participants. I scheduled interviews with participants off site to secure their anonymity and to accommodate their needs and time as adult students.

I practiced confidentiality as described by Babbie (2013) that “a research project guarantees confidentiality when the researcher can identify a given person’s responses but promise not to do so publicly” (p. 35). There is a clear difference between anonymity and confidentiality, as in the former, one does not know who said what whereas in the latter, one does know but chooses not to make it public. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that the information shared by participants was kept safe and out of public hands (See Appendix C).

Data storage and maintenance

My research study is registered at the University of the Western Cape, and as such, I obeyed and followed its research ethics policies, procedures and practices. I will personally store all data collected relating to my research paper on my private laptop for 5 years. I will create a security pin only known to me on my laptop to secure the data. No unauthorised people will have access to my laptop and data. I will make use of a secondary data storage device and store

all my research data on it and place it in a safe place for 5 years. All the data relating to my research will be deleted by me after 5 years.

Summary

In this section, I discuss the research design and methodology that was used to conduct his study. Furthermore, it elucidates my research participants and the research instrument used to explore my research question, aims and objectives. Lastly, it states categorically, the ethical considerations used to conduct this study.

SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this section, I analyse the data collected in this research study.

My main research question “What are the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution?” was used as a catalyst that informed the data analysis process.

I made use of purposive sampling to select my participants. All 20 participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview as my research method and an interview guide as my research instrument. I transcribed all interviews soon after each interview without searching for codes or themes. Before reading through the transcripts to start coding as discussed by Babbie (2013) and Bryman (2016), I read through Section 2 of this study. The aim was for my conceptual framework to give me more insight to easily identify main themes and categorise sub themes according to my conceptual framework. As a result, when I started coding I could easily group codes not only in similar categories, but under each main theme or sub themes. By referring to Sections 1 and 3, the coding process went beyond identifying similar words or phrases, as it also focused on interpreting the participants’ meaning of utterances.

I adopted a qualitative research approach informed by Bryman (2012) and Kothari (2004), to collect and analyse data for this research study. Both authors understand qualitative research as deducting participants’ experiences and their understanding of their social world. By this they

mean that meaning is constructed through social interaction and that behaviour is influenced by how they feel or think in a particular situation or reality.

The data collected and analysed were in line with the literature of Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) that “barriers lower the extent of participation but may not entirely prohibit participation” (p. 189).

Biographical information of participants

The participants who participated in this research study were all graduates of a two-year undergraduate programme for adult educators offered at a university in the Western Cape. Thirty participants were approached to participate in this study; however, only 20 agreed to be interviewed. The sample group came from two different cohorts who graduated from the same undergraduate programme in 2015 (16 participants) and 2017 (4 participants) respectively. The programme outline consisted of contact time of one evening per week, with classes commencing at 17:00 and ending at 20:00. The format of the two-year programme consisted of individual assignments, group assignments and individual tests.

The ages of the participants ranged between 25-years-old to 60-years-old instead of 18-years-old to 45-years-old as initially planned. The gender of the participants consisted of 6 men and 14 women instead of 10 men and 10 women as initially intended. The mother tongue of all 20 participants is Afrikaans; however, they had no problem being interviewed in English as they could ask questions in Afrikaans for clarity.

Profile of participants

All participants who were interviewed were participants who had graduated from a two-year part-time undergraduate programme in higher education at a university in the Western Cape. They were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Their pseudonyms are not known to them. Their profiles intentionally reveal matters relating to access to further studies, barriers to participation and success among participants in a higher education institution.

Roy is a 44-year-old coloured male who resides in Mitchells Plain. He revealed that opportunities to study during the previous apartheid regime were there, but the means to access

it wasn't always there. As a married man and father of two children, Roy made the decision to further his studies almost 20 years after completing his matric. He quoted maturity and having the opportunity to study, in addition to being a motivator for his family, as reasons to further his studies. With the support of his family and classmates, Roy overcame stressful academic challenges, questioning his own capabilities and life commitments to complete his highest qualification to date. However, Roy is set to apply and complete his Masters in Adult Learning in the near future.

Jean is a 60-year-old coloured woman who resides in Mitchells Plain. She is a married mother of four children. Jean is an educator at a high school situated on the Cape Flats. Although she is a high school educator, she always wanted to teach adults and says "I thought it would be fun to teach adults". This motivated her to apply to further her studies. Jean encountered an obstacle as she wanted to apply for a specific programme, but had to settle for a different one as her programme was only being offered the following year. On acceptance, Jean questioned her own capabilities to succeed and experienced challenges with working in a group as she is used to working independently. Jean overcame group dynamics through the support of her lecturers and her peers to complete her studies successfully. If she could, Jean would register to complete her degree or her masters in the future.

Maurischa is a 55-year-old coloured woman and mother of four children who resides in Sherwood Park. Maurischa is self-employed as she owns an Early Childhood Development Centre situated on the Cape Flats. She always wanted to further her studies and now that her children are all grown up, she seized this opportunity. "For personal reasons, to be a motivation to others and to get a qualification" were some of the reasons given by Maurischa when asked why she applied to study. She elaborated by saying "people respected me for studying at a university, was a bonus". Although Maurischa had a great belief in herself to succeed, she thought of dropping out as the academic pressure in her final year was too overwhelming and intense and she wanted to leave. Losing her grandmother, who raised her and her brother in the same year, made her lose focus as well. The support from family, friends, colleagues and sharing in group work activities allowed her to complete her studies successfully. Maurischa would like to pursue her heart's desire to become a lecturer in the early childhood development sector in the future.

Gadija is a 56-year-old coloured woman who is widowed with seven children who resides in Kuils River. Gadija got married at an early age and started her family. She did not have an education and when she started to work she realised that she did not have matric or a formal qualification. She knew that one day she would be needing a qualification to apply formally for the position she was acting in at the time. When her husband passed away due to illness, and seeing that all except one of her children were grown-ups, she felt that nothing was standing in her way. At that stage, she felt that her life had just started and she applied for Recognition of Prior Learning to do her undergraduate studies. Gadija experienced challenges at the beginning of her studies; feeling overwhelmed she questioned herself and ask: “What am I doing here?” Her biggest fear was doubting her capability to comprehend academic literature. With the support of her lecturers, peers and the team spirit in class she managed to complete her studies successfully. However, she still wants to pursue a degree in the future.

Jane is a 50-year-old coloured woman who resides in Ravensmead; she is a divorced mother of two children. She was forced to access further studies to improve her employment and salary prospects at a mature age. Jane found participating in the programme extremely challenging as she had to juggle her family commitments and studies at the same time. She felt, at times, like dropping out as she did not have the finance to cover her study fees and transport to class. Jane overcame feeling demotivated through her family who motivated her and provided transport, through one-on-one sessions with her lecturers and through the assistance of her group during group work to complete her studies successfully.

Eric is a 45-year-old coloured man who resides in Belhar. He is married and a father of one child. He realised that in order for him to progress at his workplace, he needed a university qualification. Finance, reading academic articles, academic writing and an unaccommodating manager at work were some of the challenges he experienced. Eric overcame these challenges through the support of his wife, guidance from peers, surrounding himself with people who were a positive influence in his life and through “Taking out a loan here and there”, as he put it, to be able to graduate.

Mike is a 53-year-old coloured man who is married with three children and resides in Bellville. Mike’s road to academic success started in 2006 as he wanted to empower himself, improve his working conditions and be of support to his community. He experienced challenges from work when he wanted to go to university during the day as he had to take the day or a few hours

off from work. Another challenge came from his colleagues who were scared that his studies could lead to his job advancement ahead of them. Mike overcame his academic and dispositional challenges through the motivational support from his group members, one-on-one sessions with his lecturer and by receiving a bursary.

Aneesah is a 50-year-old coloured woman who resides in Mitchells Plain and is married with two children. After raising and sacrificing for her family she wanted to be independent and do something for herself that could create more options for her in the job market. Aneesah did not expect to succeed as the academic expectations at times, coupled with the financial constraints to cover her study fees, were overwhelming. Through developing a new mindset, being focused, and through the support of her family, lecturers, peers and making arrangements with credit management, she graduated successfully.

Belinda is a 50-year-old coloured woman who resides in Somerset West and is married with two children. She pursued higher education when she was promoted from an administrator to a case-worker. This promotion involved training adults; however, she found it difficult to communicate and connect with her students and as a result she was advised by her supervisor to study a programme in adult learning. When she commenced her studies, she experienced difficulties in staying focused, being able to digest information, and group work, and thought of dropping out when her daughter fell ill and passed away. Belinda overcame incredible situational barriers and demonstrated resilience by successfully completing her studies through the support and motivation from her family, financial incentives and resources from her workplace, one-on-one sessions with the lecturers when she missed classes and the assistance from her group members.

Kenneth is a 54-year-old coloured man who resides in Belhar and is married with two children. He accessed further studies to “Just enrich myself”. During the course of his studies he experienced transport challenges that caused him to miss several classes, arrive late or leave early as he used public transport. As a result, it affected his motivation levels and thoughts of dropping out lingered in his mind. Juggling his studies and family life, not getting off from work and “understanding the academic language” were huge barriers for him. Kenneth attributed his successful completion to his age, as he states that “With age comes experience and experience helped me a lot”. In addition to his age, Kenneth states that through the support

from his family and the fact that he became friends with his group members that met regularly to discuss the course assignments, he completed successfully.

Tauriq is a 56-year-old coloured man who resides in Surrey Estate and is married with two children. He accessed formal education as “Studying has always been in the bloodline of our family and the acquisition of knowledge has always been a very strong motivator for me”. Tauriq experienced several barriers such as finding the time to study, the space at home to study, unreliable transport, finance to cover his study fees and a lecture room that was claustrophobic. He overcame most barriers through the support of his wife, his unwavering faith, and having the patience, perseverance and the enthusiasm during class after a long day at work to continue and complete his studies.

Lynette is a 41-year-old coloured woman who resides in Ravensmead and is married with two children. As an adult educator, she was motivated to apply formally to study further when she “realised that we have an impact in the lives of these learners”. Lynette had difficulties understanding the theories discussed within the programme. However, her challenges extended beyond the content and to the lecturer’s inability to spend more time ensuring the complete and full understanding of the content by participants at the beginning of a module. She completed her studies successfully through the support of her husband, supervisor, her personal experiences, and sharing with her group members. She found the informal learning environment less threatening, and stated that it contributed to her success.

Estelle is a 41-year-old unemployed coloured woman who resides in Maitland and is a single mother with one child. She accessed higher education because she was coaching adults in various sporting codes as a hobby and always wanted to work with adults in a teaching capacity. While participating in her studies, Estelle experienced various challenges that made completing her studies difficult. She expressed that she had no transport and as a result had to make use of public transport that was not reliable and safe. She was robbed of her laptop while travelling and lost all her academic work. As an unemployed adult student, she “Had to skarrel for registration fees and pay it off”, that made it a bit difficult for her. Estelle completed her studies successfully, through the support of her family giving her motivation and space to study, although she must still pay off her study fees. Her study group assisted with reading and discussing the academic articles and assignments and she also made use of one-on-one time with the lecturers.

Mia is a 47-year-old coloured woman who resides in Bonteheuwel and is a divorced mother with two children. She accessed further studies as she wanted to be an example and motivator to her children and her family by being the first to achieve and complete a university qualification. While studying she experienced self-doubt in her academic abilities, she missed out on classes due to her getting divorced and found group work extremely challenging. One of her biggest concerns was the uncertainty of the weight and value of the programme being recognised by organisations outside of the university. Mia completed her studies successfully through the support of her workplace, giving her time off and internet resources. Her family motivated her to continue and she received a bursary to cover her study fees. Working one-on-one with her lecturers and getting notes and learning materials from her peers when she missed class, also contributed to her success.

Lucile is a 43-year-old coloured woman who resides in Kuils River and is married with one child. She always wanted to be in the education sector, but never completed her studies. Years later she saw an advertisement in the newspaper from the university about adult learning programmes and she applied. Lucile had to give up teaching church youth and family visits or outings to be able to focus on her studies. Her challenges while studying ranged from taking over her husband's responsibilities when he fell ill to not having finance to cover her study fees. Further challenges were academic as she states that "You know this thing of academic writing is a challenge for me, and so I would think that I am on the right track just to find that I'm not". Language challenges during group work was another challenge for her as she indicates that "There was a lot of cultural barriers because of the language barrier and when there was group work you almost did not want to be in a group where there were different languages". Lucile overcame her challenges to complete her studies successfully through the support of her family, getting her mindset right to study, arranging one-on-one sessions with the lecturers and making arrangements with student finance to pay off her study fees.

Natasha is a 35-year-old coloured woman who resides in Kuils River and is married with two children. She is an employee at the same university that she studies at and her reason for accessing higher education was that she "Deals with adult learners every day; so I thought I do training every day why not get a qualification for it". Coming from a technical background, she found the theory, academic reading and writing a challenge. She completed her studies with the support of her parents and husband. She was fortunate not to pay study fees and only had to

pay her registration fee to study. Natasha found working in a group helpful and when she did not understand, she could arrange for consultation with the lecturers.

Daisy is a 55-year-old coloured woman who resides in Kuils River and is married with two children. She never had the opportunity to pursue her studies when she was younger and seeing that her children were now adults, she decided to access further studies and reach her goal of completing her master's degree. Daisy found registering a challenge as she had to provide all her credentials to the university. Group work was difficult at time seeing that not everyone was on the same level. Her work did not support her studies at all as it was not in line with her job at the time. English as the medium of instruction was a challenge for her home language is Afrikaans. She found the venue not learner friendly as it was small and always dirty. Daisy overcame her challenges by leaving Sunday school to have time to study. Her family took over the house duties when she was in class and although group work was a challenge, the group still worked together.

Maggie is a 40-year-old coloured woman who resides in Belhar and is married with two children. She accessed further studies for personal development and for economic reasons, as she wanted to improve her job prospects and salary. Maggie found juggling work, family and her studies a challenge at times. She doubted her capabilities when it came to writing assignments and experienced financial and transport challenges. Every year the registration process was a challenge as she states that "The process of registration at the university is always a problem, always. They will send you to this department and when you get there they send you back to the first department. So that to and from was a normal thing". Further challenges experienced were group work as not everyone pulled their weight with regard to tasks, the venue was small, crowded and dirty, the internet was not always available at the university and printing facilities seemed to cater for the daytime students only. Maggie overcame her challenges and successfully completed her studies by scheduling less family visits and gatherings with friends. Her husband and specific students with whom she became friends were a major motivation for her. The open door policy that the lecturers had for consultation, made completing her studies easier.

Brandon is a 26-year-old single, coloured man who resides in Ravensmead and has no children. He was the youngest participant interviewed and a full-time sports science student at the same university where he registered for the undergraduate programme. Brandon applied for the

programme to get into mainstream education. He found paying attention in class a challenge as he has Attention Deficit Disorder. Brandon questioned his ability to contribute to discussions in class and within group work activities as he felt that he was too young and lacked life experience to make valuable contributions to the topic at hand. Completing assignments and participating in group work was challenging for him. He overcame some of his challenges through the pedagogy used to facilitate the programme, as it taught him to understand how he learned. His parents were a great source of motivation that helped him to complete the programme together with the support of peers and the lecturers who made time to assist him when he did not understand.

Laura is a 55-year-old coloured woman who resides in Retreat on the Cape Flats. She is married with two children. Laura was raised during the apartheid era and her parents wanted her to follow a different field. She “Always wanted to be a teacher” and accessed further learning after supporting her children through their studies. Laura experienced challenges in class as she found it difficult to articulate herself using academic language. “Group work sucked” was her response when asked about challenges in class as she had difficulties with some group members. She also had to make arrangements with the university to pay off her study fees. Laura overcame her challenges through the support of her family, peers and lecturers.

Agents, agency and access to higher education

Adult students as agents: Access to higher education

According to Giddens (1984), “to be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons” (p. 3). Archer (2003) describes agents as human beings who have the ability to control and demonstrate capacities for thinking and reflecting. These capacities according to Hitlin and Elder (2006), are human capabilities that can be used to affect the lives of those exercising them.

The following responses indicate acts of agency by the participants, who thought and reflected on their lives, in order to access higher education:

I turned fifty the year I started to study and people said, “Are you mad; why would you want to study”? I did not care what my age was at the time and I did not care

what people thought. I felt at that stage, my life really started (Gadija, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Yes, it was a factor, realising that I was at a more mature age and I realised that I wasted such a lot of time in my life, but the time that I did study was actually the right time, as I was forced to educate myself and study further (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

I think on the one side I was ready for that type of demand and I was more mature to decide to continue to study (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

Yes, because you realise that you are not getting younger, you getting older and the sooner you finish what you attempt to complete the sooner the better (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

The responses from Kenneth and Lynette below refer to their experiences and it resonates with Bandura (2001) as he asserts that people “are agents of experiences rather than simply undergoers of experiences” (p. 4):

Yes, with age comes experience, and experience helped me a lot and that contributed to make the course easier for me (Kenneth, Interview, September 4, 2018).

I would say, yes, it did, not just my age but my personal experience as well (Lynette, Interview, September 11, 2018).

In contrast to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) who state that there is a “belief that one is too old to go back to study” (p. 192), the responses indicate that age is an enabling factor for some participants to access and pursue higher education:

Pursuing higher education after years of being told what she could or could not do, Laura demonstrated self-efficacy through persisting with her studies to reach her goal. Her response echoes Bandura’s (1989) understanding of self-efficacy as “it takes a resilient sense of efficacy to override the numerous dissuading impediments to significant accomplishments” (p. 1177):

When we were growing up, we were still part of apartheid and my parents told us what we must do, but I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. When I was in high school they told you that you can only do this or that. So I had to go as far as standard eight, do my matric part time and complete my teacher's diploma. I never got an opportunity to do anything for myself. Personally, I just wanted to do something for me and that was my motivation (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

Agency, intentionality, access to higher education: personal development and self-empowerment

Morstain and Smart (as cited in Cross, 1981) **assert** that motivation for participation are factors such as demonstrating “cognitive interest”, demonstrating “professional development” and demonstrating “social welfare” (p. 86) as agency asserted through intentionality.

The next responses suggest a need to learn for the sake of learning or to gain knowledge. The responses demonstrated cognitive interest as discussed by Morstain and Smart (as cited in Cross, 1981) who assert that participants participate “to learn just for the sake of learning, to seek knowledge for its own sake, and to satisfy an inquiring mind” (p. 86), The responses resonate with me as intentionality as acts of agency which Giddens (1984) avers as “characterizing an act which its perpetrator knows, or believes, will have a particular quality or outcome and where such knowledge is utilized by the author of the act to achieve this quality or outcome” (p. 10):

It was just for self-enrichment (Kenneth, Interview, September 4, 2018).

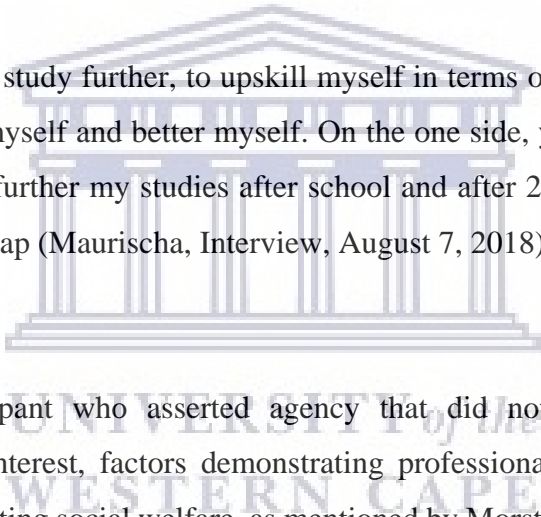
Initially it started when I was employed at another organisation it was for personal development and also to assist in other programmes (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

I always believed that every year is a new year and you need to empower yourself. You need to understand why certain things are happening. I like to think that every year I would take on a challenge of doing a course (Estelle, Interview, September 12, 2018).

Firstly, it was to empower myself and to show others that no matter your age you can still study (Mike, Interview, August 10, 2018).

Yes, most definitely, because I was getting older and I was thinking, I did nothing for myself and I made a lot of sacrifices for my family, now my children are big and now it is my time to educate myself (Aneesha, Interview, August 18, 2018).

Maurischa's response refers to factors demonstrating professional development which can be explained by Morstain and Smart (as cited in Cross, 1981) as follows, "to give me higher status in my job" (p. 86). Her response describes intentionality in participating in higher education as illuminated by Archer (2003) who declares that "only people possess the intentionality to define and design courses of action in order to achieve their own ends" (p. 6):



I always wanted to study further, to upskill myself in terms of the work that I'm doing. To upskill myself and better myself. On the one side, yes, and not having the opportunity to further my studies after school and after 20 years deciding to study was a huge leap (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

Mike is the only participant who asserted agency that did not only relate to factors demonstrating cognitive interest, factors demonstrating professional advancement, but also included factors demonstrating social welfare, as mentioned by Morstain and Smart (as cited in Cross, 1981). Furthermore, Morstain and Smart (as cited in Cross, 1981) hold the view that factors demonstrating social welfare include "to improve my ability to serve mankind, to prepare for service to the community, and to improve my ability to participate in community work" (p. 86):

It was to empower myself, to get better working conditions, and to be of help to my community (Mike, Interview, August 10, 2018).

Roy, Lucile and Daisy indicated their need to pursue tertiary qualifications as the reason for accessing higher education. By accessing and participating in educational activities they demonstrated agency and intentionality as discussed by Giddens (1984), as the intention by agents to deliberately act:

On the one side I wanted to further my studies and I also wanted a degree that was the reason for applying to study further (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

Initially I always wanted to be in the teaching sector but never completed my studies and years later I saw an ad in the paper from the university about adult learning and I applied for it (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

I never had an opportunity back in the day and now that my children are big I decided that it is now my time to achieve my goal to get my masters (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

In accessing higher education, the participants' responses reflect agency and intentionality.

Agency, intentionality, access to higher education: desire to teach adults and make a difference

Bandura (2001) claims that intentionality is demonstrated when agency is seen as an intended action that was planned. The following responses reveal that accessing higher education was planned deliberately:

To be independent, to educate myself and to make a difference in my community and to empower others, but mostly my children (Aneesha, Interview, August 18, 2018).

I always wanted to teach adults. I was already in my 50s so I decided that I better apply or I will never do it (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

Firstly, I wanted to improve on the job that I was doing. I felt I lack connecting with participants and therefore I felt that I need to do a course in adult learning (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

It's because I'm in the adult education environment, and I realised that we have an impact in the lives of these learners that I decided to do the diploma programme (Lynette, Interview, September 11, 2018).

The fact that I worked with adults - I was working in a coaching capacity - there was a need to understand certain individuals - how to break through certain barriers when it comes to working with adults. It was very interesting to note that although there were different adults at different stages in their lives, but who at some stage go through the same things in life (Estelle, Interview, September 12, 2018).

I wanted to teach adults, I thought it will be fun to teach adults. I was close to retiring age and I wanted to do something instead of staying at home (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

Besides wanting to get into mainstream, I wanted to learn the various types of learning and trying to address certain aspects of learning, whether facilitating or becoming a teacher (Brandon, Interview, September 25, 2018).

In this theme, participants' responses exposed their intentions to further their studies. Although their reasons ranged from teaching adults to making a difference, they all shared the common objective of fulfilling a need. Based on the responses, it is evident that the participants as agents intended to access higher education. Their actions to access education were deliberately thought out activities. Furthermore, by acting on their intentions they demonstrated intentionality. In my view, it is common sense that in order to act unless as a reaction, there must have been an intention to act in the first place. Thus, intention is an antecedent to action.

Agency, intentionality, access to higher education: better job, better money

In their article Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) mention that “not participating becomes a highly rational act and it is only when participation will result in better and higher paying work that it is meaningful” (p. 192). In addition to participating to increase their salaries, participants demonstrated intentionality by accessing higher education as an intended action with a purpose (Giddens, 1984). Furthermore, if one assumes that an increase in salary accompanies a higher status at work, then the participants accessed higher education for professional advancement which supports Morstain and Smart's (as cited in Cross, 1981) discussion.

The following responses were deliberately grouped under this theme as they specifically refer to accessing higher education with the hope of an increase in income:

It was to uplift myself and educate myself in order to get a better job and a better salary and to fulfil my passion to educate others (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

To become qualified in a certain course to be able to earn better money (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

I think also it was economically driven as the more you do the more you know the more you earn (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

Agency, barriers to participation and overcoming barriers

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) highlight a significant point for discussion when they state that “barriers lower the extent of participation but may not entirely prohibit participation” (p. 189). The data collected in my study found that participants experienced situational, dispositional and structural/institutional barriers.

Agency and overcoming situational barriers

Situational barriers

Authors such as Cross (1981) classifies situational factors as barriers to adult learning when she defines it as “those arising from one’s situation in life at any given time” (p. 98). MacKeracher, et al. (2006) define situational barriers as “broad circumstantial conditions that hamper the ability of adult learners to gain access to and pursue learning opportunities” (p. 2). According to MacKeracher et al. (2006), “most adults, participation in learning activities is a matter of choice that must be fitted into work, family and community responsibilities, and other interests and obligations” (p. 2). These responsibilities, interests and obligations in the daily environments of adults may create barriers to accessing, participating and succeeding in adult learning activities. Instances of situational barriers discussed within literature include factors relating to the lack of time because of work responsibilities, home and family responsibilities, finance, childcare, transport and general lack of support.

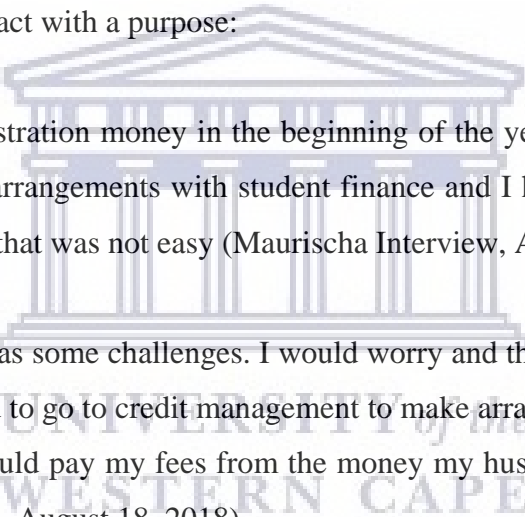
Agency, capacity for planful competence, and overcoming financial constraints, capacity and power

Financial constraints emerged out of my data as a barrier to educational activities. Authors such as Cross (1981), Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), MacKeracher, et al. (2006) and Rubenson

and Desjardins (2009), all concur that financial constraints are factors relating to situational barriers. Cross (1981) states that “the cost of education ... leads all other barriers” (p. 100).

My data revealed that participants demonstrated agency through their capability to act and to exercise power to achieve a specific outcome. The statement “action depends upon the capability of the individual to ‘make a difference’ to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events” (Giddens, 1984, p. 14), is particularly pertinent to the participants’ responses as they acted to change their situations. The responses reveal capacity for planful competence to overcome financial constraints:

Maurischa, Aneesha, Lucile and Laura asserted agency to overcome financial constraints by making arrangements to pay off their study fees. Their responses echo what Giddens (1984) refers to as the intention to act with a purpose:



Not having the registration money in the beginning of the year was a challenge, and I had to make arrangements with student finance and I had to stand in long lines for two years, that was not easy (Maurischa Interview, August 7, 2018).

Financially, there was some challenges. I would worry and think will I be able to cover my fees. I had to go to credit management to make arrangements to pay off my study fees. I would pay my fees from the money my husband gives for food (Aneesha, Interview, August 18, 2018).

The financial constraints were heavy. Luckily, I could make arrangements to pay with the university (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

With anything that you do, it will have a financial implication. I tried to work out a plan. I never made a loan but I made arrangements with UWC to pay off my fees monthly and I had to make sure that my payments are up to date and that it was completed before the end of the year (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

Estelle made use of an Afrikaans vernacular term ‘skarrel’, loosely translated as ‘to run around’ or ‘make a plan’ to describe how she asserted agency to overcome her financial constraints and cover her registration fees by paying it off. She states that:

The finance! Seeing that I wasn't working, I had to 'skarrel' for registration fees and pay it off, that made it a bit difficult for me. I did not I must still pay (laugh). I was at the stage to pay my fees but I felt that I did not get value for my money so I decided not to pay seeing that the course did not carry weight (Estelle, Interview, September 12, 2018).

Archer (2003) argues that “agents possess properties and powers Among them feature all those predicates, such as thinking, deliberating, believing, intending, loving ... applicable to people, but never to social structures or cultural systems” (p. 2). The following responses exemplify agents as described by Archer (2003) who are consciously reflecting on their situations and asserting agency to overcome financial constraints:

It was tough because it was two of us studying, but while challenges remain like your bond and travelling expenses, we had to find the resources or restructure our finance to keep on studying. (Tauriq, Interview, September 7, 2018).

Financially it was not the easiest; we had to pinch here and there (Eric, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Financial constraints were a huge thing, because there was that yearly registration fee and apart from the registration fees, you had to make monthly payments as well, and it was not possible to make the monthly instalments. And of course, if you cannot adhere to the monthly instalments, then you make it harder on yourself because if you want to register again, they demand more money (laugh) so that was the one thing and sometimes transport as well (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

I had to manage my finances, when I planned to study they could not give me the amount the year before so how can you plan. I paid the study fee off during the year (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

Well, that is where the belief and the faith had kicked in and that also helped. There had to be a sacrifice, everybody sacrificed. The incentive also helped when studying in line with your job function and I even got back more that I spent and

it wasn't planned for because the organisation that I work for stopped with the incentives, so it was a bonus for me (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

Breier (2010) points out that “some students do persist and achieve their qualifications despite financial hardship” (p. 659). In my view, it is evident from the participants Jean, Gadija, and Eric's responses that paying the course fees out of their own pockets is a motivational factor to success. The following responses affirm that:

I found that I had to pay my own fees so I made arrangements with the university to pay off the fees monthly and by the end of the year my fees were fully paid (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

I paid for my studies the first year, and only in my final year I got a bursary to pay for my studies (Gadija, Interview, August 8, 2018).

I took a few loans here and there and pay them off (Eric, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Luckily for me, I was on a sports bursary at the time so I did not have any financial difficulties (Brandon, Interview, September 25, 2018).

Jane's response is evidence of her capability to exercise power over someone to sponsor her full study fees. Her response echoes Giddens (1979) who declares, that power “is harnessed to actors' attempts to get others to comply with their wants” (p. 93). Her response confirms this:

I overcame my financial constrains by getting a sponsor to pay my studies in full (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

The responses are consistent with the literature as it relates to finance as a situational barrier to participants. The responses demonstrate that “money [is] not [an] endless resource[s], so people have to make choices regarding how they want to spend their resource[s]” (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 191).

Agency, capacity for resilience, and overcoming family-related and personal events as barriers

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) claim that barriers relating to family such as “my family commitments take up too much energy tended to be mentioned more frequently than job-related ones” (p. 191). Participants’ responses are similar to the literature. However, the responses indicate that participants asserted agentic resilience to overcome family-related and personal events as barriers.

According to Egeland, Carlson, and Sroufe (as cited in Sonn & Fisher, 1998), resilience is seen as “the capacity for successful adaptation, positive functioning or competence” (p. 458) in stressful situations.

Belinda, Mia, Lucile and Gadija asserted agency through being resilient in making arrangements to continue their studies. In my view, their responses point out that participants as agents must not only be capable of action but demonstrate the ability to consciously assess internal and external processors and influences (Bandura, 2001). The following responses indicate how participants as agents navigated through family-related barriers by asserting agency through being resilient:

Yes, when my daughter got sick I did not attend class regularly, but I managed to complete by arranging private sessions with the lecturer (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

Yes, I did, I went through a divorce and I skipped classes and the lecturer said I must come to class and I explained my situation and I returned back to class (Mia, Interview, September 14, 2018).

My husband took ill and his responsibilities became my responsibilities and it got too much, I could not keep up with assignments, but I arranged with my lecturer and she accommodated me and I did not quit (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

I lost my husband, my children were adults although I had a so called “laammetjie” who was at high school and I felt that there is nothing standing in my way to study. On occasion I had to take her (daughter) to class and I asked

permission for her to be there. I had to make physical and mental adjustments, but not really adjustments in my house (Gadija, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Aneesha, took on a personal challenge to herself to see if she could complete her studies despite facing family-related challenges.

No, not really. Because of challenges and family responsibilities. Not only within my own family, but family like in-laws and being there for my mother and other functions. So I did not really know what to expect and I did not expect to succeed. It was a personal challenge to myself to see, can I do this. Being able to study at university level (Aneesha, Interview, August 18, 2018).

The following participants' responses show that they deliberately acted in ways that could benefit them and their families:

Sometimes I had transport problems and I could not come to class, that led to a decrease in my motivation levels. I had to make many changes especially with time management. I had to make changes in my family life, I had to juggle my study times and accommodate my family as well. Going to class or attending a study group took away a large chunk of my family time (Kenneth, Interview, September 4, 2018).

I lost my mother and my grandmother who was a great inspiration for me, I experienced death while I was studying. On my last year it became very difficult. The work became very intense and when I failed a semester I wasn't focused I was distracted and I wanted to leave, but then you think you started why do you want to leave (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

Yes, (laugh). It's not easy, the pressure is huge because of work and family. I think there is more pressure and responsibilities for a wife and still studying (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

The following participants' responses reveal how their families accommodated their studies through adjusting parts of their family responsibilities:

The family was very supportive, especially when you need to meet deadlines then you need to distance yourself or create a space. I was lucky enough to have the support of my family that gave me some time off so I can focus on my studies (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

I had to get my family members to do stuff that I use to do; like cooking and cleaning. I had the support of my husband and daughters (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

I needed to arrange with my husband, he needed to help me with the cooking and arrange with my children to feed themselves and to do chores so that I get a break to do assignments (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

Luckily, for me, I did not have small children, they were big enough to take care of themselves. There was one incident at home when my son was robbed at gunpoint and I had to leave class to attend to that, luckily he was not hurt but we had to process that trauma. I had to mobilise my neighbours and inform them when I am in class for them to keep an eye out (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

I have a very understanding wife that would accommodate the times I had to go to class and when I needed to study. Both my and her parents would look after my children or make food or take them places or be available (Eric, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Responses from Maggie, Jane and Lucile revealed that they had to rearrange their family life and other commitments to have enough time to complete their studies. They stated that:

There were a lot of adjustments that I needed to make, because to work and to study and to have a family- it wasn't easy. I needed to have less family visits and less gathering with friends, you needed to use your time wisely (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

That was difficult, in the beginning it was not easy to manage everything, the studies and I had to work and look after a family. But then I learned about

organising your time. I literally had to draw up a schedule to work with and I had to sacrifice a lot. Luckily my sons were big already, but if there were tasks at home I could not do because of study commitments I had to ask someone to do that for me or to assist me to do it. Or I had to find time to do it like get up early in the morning or go to bed late or sacrifice parties, social gatherings and family gatherings (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

I had to give up teaching children's church and other personal things like family visits or outings had to take a back seat (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

It is interesting to note that most of the responses about family come from women. Out of the six male participants, only one expressed concerns relating to family. This phenomenon demonstrates that “woman have been found to be more prone to refer to family responsibilities than men” (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 191). Not only did a significant number of participants' experience family-related barriers, but they made use of their family to support and motivate them to participate successfully and succeed in higher education. Their responses suggest that they negotiated their way through everyday family events which resonates with Giddens's (1984) notion that an agent is “the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life” (p. 3).

Agency and overcoming dispositional barriers

MacKeracher, et al. (2006) refers to dispositional barriers as “attitudinal factors-relate to learners' perceptions of their ability to seek out, register in, attend and successfully complete learning activities” (p. 5). They assert that “self-confidence” and “attitudes about self that may adversely affect learning” are dispositional factors (MacKeracher, et al., 2006, p. 5). My data revealed dispositional barriers relating to negative expectations to succeed and how participants as agents demonstrated the capacity for self-efficacy to overcome them.

Agency, capacity for self-efficacy, and overcoming not expecting to succeed

The data show that participants were not expecting to succeed:

I was full of misgivings, I thought I would not be able to cope (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

At the beginning I had my little doubts and fears of writing exams, because I have an anxiety disorder that prevents me from progressing faster in life (Lynette, Interview, September 11, 2018).

Although many participants shared this view, they did not succumb to this view of themselves. Their responses were:

I always thought to myself that I will never be able to pass the exam or that I will not be able to complete that study or the research that I needed to do. I question how will I be able to do it where and how will I do it, where do I begin to answer this question, but as I went on, it became easier it's almost like exercising your body. The same with my studies, the further I went or the effort I put in the better I will become (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

At first I had self-doubt but after my first assignment where I achieve 75% was a motivation for me (Mia, Interview, September 14, 2018).

There were times that I doubted myself, but I think I believed that I could (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

It was daunting, after 30 years that I was back in studying was a bit daunting. Sometimes I felt that I am not going to make it, it felt like it was above what I expected, but as the weeks goes by you realised that this is part of what you do every day (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

In my view, the participants asserted self-efficacy in overcoming doubt about their capabilities to succeed. Their responses relate to self-efficacy as the opinions of an individual about his/her capabilities in stressful situations (Bandura, 1982).

Agency, capacity for self-esteem, and overcoming lack of confidence: agency, capabilities and self-efficacy

According to Larson and Milana (2006), lack of confidence in one's own abilities is a barrier commonly found in participants between the ages of 55-64. although two participants, Eric and Lynette, did not fall within the ages of 55-64, they experienced barriers relating to their lack

of confidence in their capabilities. Furthermore, contrary to Larson and Milana (2006) who suggest that the oldest and the youngest participants who experience a lack of confidence in their abilities are more likely to stop participation, my data revealed that the oldest and youngest participants continued to complete their studies successfully.

It is apparent from my data analysis that there is a correlation between the participants' responses and how Gecas (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 40) defines self-efficacy as "the perception of oneself as a causal agent in one's environment, as having control over one's circumstances, and being capable of carrying out actions to produce intended effects".

Although Jane and Lynette experienced a lack of confidence in their capabilities to succeed, they asserted agency by acting in a way that allowed them to overcome their fears. Their responses were:

Yes, I believed. In the beginning it was a bit difficult, I had to find myself because the work was difficult especially the readings, as I did not understand the readings or you did not really understand what the lecturer was saying, but then I realised that you needed to do your own research and read up before the time, you need to put in effort or you needed to sit and listen and not think of anything else. It was difficult in the beginning but it became easier over time (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

That has to do with the way I conceptualise information. I find it difficult to understand theory. If I can't draw a picture in my mind, then I'm lost. I had to come home and research the theories and practically put it in my work, and then I have my light bulb moment, other than that 'nee dit gan n bietjie lank vat'. It was my first time studying at university and the lecturers could spend a little bit more time and give more insight in the beginning. They do support in terms of referring you to research sites, but they must just give more in the beginning for you to understand better (Lynette, Interview, September 11, 2018).

This supports Bandura's (1989) view that "it takes a resilient sense of efficacy to override the numerous dissuading impediments to significant accomplishments" (p. 1177).

Laura's response below highlights an interesting point for discussion, in that she makes reference to overcoming lack of confidence in her capabilities through asserting agency to seek assistance from her peers. This resonates with Sewell (1992) who states that agents are assertive enough to work alongside others; Polk (1997) who points out how relations with others in society or the world around us can promote resilience; and Bandura (2006) who argues that "most human pursuits involve other participating agents, so there is no absolute agency" (p. 164). In my view, she asserted agency and self-esteem in seeking support from others:

Sometimes I wasn't always able to articulate what my thought processors were. And you know when you at university you have to speak a different language. Like they expected you to speak academic language and I wasn't always able to articulate that and that was a bit of a challenge to me. And the other thing is that lecturers doesn't always make it clear to you. We had a lecturer there that stood in for somebody and I thought, Oh My God what is this now. This person is speaking above and he did not bring the material across as what's expected, but with the assistance of my group, and I think this is important that you need to associate yourself with other fellow students because sometimes we think we on our own but actually there are more people who feel the same (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

Gadija, Eric and Kenneth completed their studies successfully, and as such, one could deduce that they overcame the lack of confidence in their capabilities:

The biggest challenge was the reading, the constant reading. I never read so much as I did at the time and I think the fear was that I would not be able to comprehend or to take in everything that I was reading (Gadija, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Speed reading and comprehension is a major challenge. Reading an academic document is not the easiest thing in the world. Your mental ability and fatigue impacts on your ability to read with understanding (Eric, Interview, August 8, 2018).

When I started studying I had a huge challenge, coming from a technical field where we use technical phrases to communicate that was not on a high level.

Understanding the academic language was a huge barrier for me (Kenneth, Interview, September 4, 2018).

Some participants, such as Aneesha, Lucile, Natasha and Daisy revealed having the right mindset contributed to their success:

I had to develop a whole new mindset, to be focused, determined and to not give up and to stick to that (Aneesha, Interview, August 18, 2018).

I had to get my mindset straight. I needed to get into the groove of studying. I had to inform my family about me studying and also adjust my sleeping patterns (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

I think getting into the mode, after 10 years after school, getting your mind ready. I'm from a technical background and this course was more theory and I had to get use to academic articles and academic reading (Natasha, Interview, September 20, 2018).

It's a mindset change and failing is not an option (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

Contrary to the literature of Bandura (1982), who maintains that agents will question their capabilities to succeed, the responses from Jean, Estelle, Lucile and Maggie suggest that they had high levels of self-esteem and a sense of self-belief in their capabilities to ensure a successful outcome. Reflecting or evaluating past academic experiences assisted in contributing to their sense of self-esteem and self-belief in the capabilities:

Seeing that I studied the previous year I knew I could do it (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

I'm very driven and it's a drive that I don't know where it comes from and to a certain extent I'm a perfectionist and I need to finish what I started and be the best that I can be (Estelle, Interview, September 12, 2018).

I did believe that I would succeed. I did not go into it thinking that I'm going to fail; I went into it knowing that I will succeed. I always succeeded when I did academic things. The journey along the way was a challenge but when I started out I believed that I could do it (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

There was some reflection done. I needed to remind myself that I did previous courses before and I came through that and if I could have managed to get through that then it's possible for me to get through this as well (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

This resonates with Hitlin and Elder (2006) who maintain that “self-esteem ... [is a] self-conception[s] derived primarily from past experiences and evaluations” (p. 47).

Maggie, Brandon and Laura identified support, interaction with others and availability of resources as factors contributing to their successful participation:

I needed to reassure myself all the time that I can and that this is possible, and I needed to tap into my support structure because you needed affirmation and you need to know that you are on the right track (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

The thing is that I was always the youngest in the class and being with much older and more experienced adults made it a lot easier for me (Brandon, Interview, September 25, 2018).

Factors in success like having people in your life that you can really depend on, the availability of resources at the university, the fact that we could go to the library, and the fact that I could meet with students outside of my group (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

It is evident from the responses that participants experienced various forms of barriers relating to the lack of confidence in one's own capabilities. The data suggest that four specific barriers relating to the lack of confidence in capabilities emerged, namely: reading, academic language and comprehension of theory. Also evident from the responses is the agency and self-esteem

asserted by participants to achieve their goals and overcome dispositional barriers. In addition to the four specific barriers relating to the lack of confidence in capabilities, responses further revealed that three categories such as mindset, self-belief and support from others are key factors needed in overcoming barriers related to confidence. These responses reveal that participants demonstrated control over their situation and navigated through it to ensure planned results.

Agency, resilience and overcoming group work constraints

For many participants working within a group presented challenges to their abilities to participate. However, they asserted agency by controlling their behaviour and through their action to intervene (Giddens, 1984). The responses of these participants reveal this:

I am a shy person and an introvert and I did not like it when I had to stand up and report back after working in groups, that was a barrier for me, but I just had to do it (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

I don't like group work much, but people were eager to work together (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

Group assignments were a bit challenging. Being fresh out of school, I felt inferior to what others brought to the table, it was almost like mine wasn't good enough (Brandon, Interview, September 25, 2018).

The literature suggests that dispositional barriers are inherent factors relating to the adults' ability to participate. However, my data suggest that some challenging factors were brought about through other members of the group, and not as internal perceptions that hampered individuals' participation. The following responses about group work reflects challenges Sewell's (1992) contention that agents are assertive enough to work alongside and against others:

A barrier for me was group work; there are very dominating characters that made it difficult to participate. I was almost pushed out of the group, but luckily the lecturer announced that there will be Saturday classes so I attended that instead of doing the group work (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

In the beginning it was quite daunting; especially group work was not nice for me seeing that everyone is not on the same level. But we got use to each other (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

I don't like group work, I can work in a team and I respect other people's views and so on but you can't always let one person take over and you must just listen (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

I had a challenge in group work with others who did not do what they were supposed to do and you had to carry them doing all the work (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

It was rather challenging a lot of times to deal with different mindsets when working in a group and getting consensus of what the instruction was; was challenging. Getting a person to understand was a great challenge. There were intellectual differences as well, concepts as abstract ideas were very difficult to make people understand (Eric, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Team work, there was always a challenge. When you needed to present and one of the members were absent. Not all group members would pitch up when we decided to meet (Mia, Interview, September 14, 2018).

Group work was a challenge, with too big an age gap with the older participants always wanting to be right and as a result my marks went down the drain (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Group work was always a challenge, always a challenge as some people just don't pull their weight man, (laugh). You step on people's toes sometimes because they need to know that they need to pull their weight, and it's not easy and people feel offended because they think that other things take priority but at the same time you also have priorities (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

Well, group work sucked because I find that in group work you do your best and give of your best and other people just fall around and stand around but they get

credited with the same marks and you've done all the hard work (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

Agency, capacity for intentionality, and overcoming academic barriers

MacKeracher et al. (2006) “academic factors include skills essential to successful learning. The importance of these factors is based on whether the skills were ever learned; and if learned, the learner's current skill level in light of the elapsed time since last used” (p. 2). Some participants experienced English as the medium of teaching and learning as a barrier. Although all participants understand and converse in English in various spheres of their lives, they found the academic language used to facilitate the undergraduate programme a barrier and as such, asserted agency through their capacity for intentionality to overcome their academic barriers.

English as a medium of teaching and learning as a barrier

According to Marsh (2006), English “carries the mantle of the language of power” (p. 30). It is fast substituting mother tongue as the chosen medium of instruction and is the cause of extensive learning failures in several countries (Marsh, 2006). On some continents, attempting to learn through English has led to confusion, despair, and high drop out rates” (p. 30). Marsh (2006) suggests that challenges of English as the medium of instruction is not limited to developing countries.

The responses from Daisy, Roy and Jane suggest that they asserted agency by deliberately acting in ways that would result in a planned result or some positive outcome (Giddens, 1979, 1984) to overcome a language barrier. They stated that:

We grew up with Afrikaans and in class, English was the medium of instruction and it was difficult to understand. I would make notes and underline the words and go home and look it up (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

English is used at my workplace so I'm used to it. It's just later on as the course progressed some of the terms and the concepts that were used was difficult to grasp and you had to read up on them (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

I am bilingual, but sometimes the words the lecturers used was difficult to understand and to comprehend. I had to look up words that I did not understand or that I did not fully understand (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

The data confirm that English as a medium of instruction is a barrier to learning activities for some students. The responses support Marsh's (2006) argument that it contributes to a sense of hopelessness among some students.

Structural barriers

While participants revealed several structural barriers, they did not say how they overcame these barriers. According to adult education literature, structure can be both an enabling and constraining factor in relation to access, participation and success of participants. In this section, however, I will focus on structure as a barrier to participation. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) refer to structural barriers as external challenges that participants experience in their daily lives that affect their participation. An example of a structural barrier which lowers participation found in the day-to-day lives of adults, according to the literature, could include an institutional barrier such as limited transport to and from classes. My study revealed that the participants experienced structural barriers. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) postulate that structural barriers include both institutional and situational factors, and that these factors can affect participants' everyday social environment.

Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers, refer to the obstacles or challenges educational institutions or agencies create to prohibit, interrupt or dispel participants from accessing, participating and succeeding in adult learning activities. Authors, such as Cross (1981), define institutional barriers as "all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities" (p. 98). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) concur with Cross (1981) as they cite her that "institutions ... exclude or discourage certain groups" (p. 137), while others such as Potter and Ferguson (as cited in MacKeracher, et al., 2006) argue that institutional barriers are "biased against or ignorant of the needs of adult learners" (p. 4).

My study suggests that a significant number of participants experienced institutional barriers. The examples of institutional barriers found are consistent with my literature review as they refer to poor quality of support services, inadequate locations for learning, and courses not meeting the needs of participants (MacKeracher, et al., 2006).

Poor quality of services

It is evident from Maggie's response that she asserted agency by negotiating her way around stressful situations produced by barriers relating to services. Her response supports Bandura's (1982) notion of self-efficacy, that individuals who assert more effort in self-efficacy overcome stressful situations:

The internet on campus was not always the best or accessible, sometimes you get off work early and you go to campus thinking that you are going to use the internet, but when you get there you find out that the internet is not accessible and then you stuck again. I always had a laptop, but I needed a printer. You can print at the university, but when you want to print you must stand in long queues and wait for the daytime students to get done printing (laugh). And when you leave work early and get to class thinking you can print quickly, but there is nothing like quickly, (laugh) there are queues! there are queues! (laugh) (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

Inadequate locations for learning

The class was too small, there was no air conditioners in winter, it was very cold, it was very cramped up (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

The one lecture room was a bit crowded (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

The room was terribly claustrophobic. Adult learning within the confines of the university is its best kept secret. Adult learning should be in a more prominent space because from a historical perspective there are many people working in the community that needs that piece of paper and it's all about the piece of paper. Adult learning is almost an afterthought, it should never be an afterthought (Tauriq, Interview, September 7, 2018).

The venue was too small and not conducive. We weren't taught academic processes like plagiarism and how to paraphrase and if it was done in the beginning, it would have made studying so much easier (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

The classroom was not conducive to teaching; it was dirty and they would never clean it. I think the part time students are getting a raw deal because we are paying the same, but we don't get the same as the full-time students. Like sometimes they just book the room for something else and then we must look for a venue (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

The room was sometimes a bit small when we were a big group at times and sometimes you were a bit cramped and you couldn't write because we were too many sitting at the table (laugh). The room was always dirty, sometimes it looked as if the cleaners did not come to clean, but you can't always leave that to the cleaners. People must take responsibly for the room as well. Sometimes we needed to open the door or try to open the windows (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

Course not relevant

Some participants felt the course lacked relevancy and practical application, and did not guarantee security or advancement in the workplace. This resonates with Cross (1981) who claims that “the lack of courses that are interesting, practical, or relevant” (p. 104) are institutional barriers to participants:

Yes, but I feel the course lacked in a way that it did not teach a subject. That person will not be able to teach because they were not trained in a subject (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

There were modules that I don't think was for me, but the majority was helpful. I could benefit a lot out of it especially the module that was in line with my field (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

Not really what I expected it to be. Some of the modules is relevant to the work I'm doing today. They could have put in module that teach you how to educate the communities (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

In the sense that the role I play at work as a mentor, teacher and a guide seems like a natural fit for me. Maybe not all the modules were appropriate for me and I would want to change them (Eric, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Not really. I thought it would be more practical (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

How can I use the diploma and register with the teaching board where they advertise jobs? But they don't have that, how can I use this diploma? As I was looking forward to be working with adults and this course was not recognised and it was accredited. Is it recognised outside of this university? You pay all this money and you can't do anything with it. It was the correct course for me, but it must be value for value. How can you use it? (Estelle, Interview, September 12, 2018).

Although you got the diploma, organisations do not recognise it (Mia, Interview, September 14, 2018).

In terms of what I wanted to achieve personally, yes, but where I find myself in the work space, it does not seem to carry weight (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

My data revealed that some participants expected a course tailored to their specific needs and experienced barriers when the course did not deliver as expected.

Too much red tape

Furthermore, Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (as cited in Cross, 1981) found that “too much red tape in getting enrolled” (p. 99) constituted an institutional barrier. Although this was not a significant finding in my study, it, however, was evident that participants found credentials and bureaucracy a barrier to participation in learning:

The challenge was that I had to prove to the university my credentials. In the modern world that we live in, I cannot believe that the university could not do the checking on line (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

I tried to register for an isiXhosa course in the past, but the bureaucracy of the university made that impossible (Kenneth, Interview, September 4, 2018).

Agency, capacity for forethought, workplace demands/support and overcoming demands of the workplace

According to the literature of Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), structural barriers may come in the form of work-related concerns. These work conditions and concerns could also result in too little time to participate. A significant number of participants demonstrated foresight to plan deliberate courses (Bandura, 1989) of action to overcome demands of the workplace through arranging with their employers in ways that contributed to successful participation:

The following responses suggest that participants made use of their capacity for foresight in acting in ways to ensure that they could attend class, exams and make use of workplace resources:

Time, access to internet, I did not have internet at home but I got it from my work. I could go there to do my assignments (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

No, I always had problems when I needed to leave early or write exams. I had to get a letter from the university when I needed to write (Jane, Interview, August 8, 2018).

If I wanted to go to university during the day, I had to book a few hours off or they will take a day off your leave. Even my own colleagues were not happy for me studying, because they think tomorrow I might get a better job supervising over them because I'm studying (Mike, Interview, August 10, 2018).

Yes, I was able to take study leave, could make use of their resources unofficially. It was more of a gentleman's agreement between me and my supervisor (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

I made time. My work was fine with me studying (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

Roy was the only participant who indicated that he could make use of his time during work hours to go through his readings and complete his assignments:

Luckily for me I was able to use the works time to do some of the reading and assignments and also make use of their resources (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

Time off from work is a common factor identified by participants as contributing to their successful completion:

They were very passionate about my studies and they gave me time off (Mia, Interview, September 14, 2018).

Management would be flexible if you need to study and will give you time off to do that although unofficially (Gadija, Interview, August 8, 2018).

My job enabled me to study in that I worked from Monday to Friday. My work is very flexible in that I work from 7:30 a.m. to 16:30 p.m. and I could make it to class in the evening and there were a lot of time to study. There is a programme at my work that gives 20-days study leave for exams etcetera. my work encourages me to grow and to empower myself (Gadija, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Although Mia and Maggie could get off from work by leaving early, they had to recompense the time they took for their studies:

I made arrangements at work when leaving early and work my time back (Mia, Interview, September 14, 2018).

By giving time off and with the evening classes I could leave early and work the time back (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

Natasha and Maggie stated that they could only get time off from work to study and attend exams:

I could take off for study and exam times (Natasha, Interview, September 20, 2018).

At the time my work allowed me some time off for exams only (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

Finance

Mike and Belinda highlighted that their workplaces supported them financially through the provision of a bursary and contributed towards some of the study fees:

My work gave me a bursary to study (Mike, Interview, August 10, 2018).

The provision of resources - resources in the form of time off and resources by getting a discount when you study, they would cover some of my fees. My employer also made me see my lack of knowledge that also encouraged me to study (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

Support

Both Maurischa and Laura demonstrated the capacity for foresight to shape their workplace situation in such a way that it benefitted them:

I had the support of staff that worked in my place and looked after the children that I worked with (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

Well, they were very supportive because I never allowed my studies to get in the way of my work so there were never a problem (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

Masten (as cited in Makoelle & Malindi, 2015) suggests that “resilience denotes the individual’s capacity to achieve positive outcomes despite the experience of adversity, to continue to function effectively in adverse circumstances, or to recover after significant trauma” (p. 3). Lucile’s response thus suggests that she asserted agency through being resilient to overcome her work related barrier:

It is not easy because they don’t consider the adult education field important, but I got support from some (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

My data similarly reflect the findings of the 2003 Eurobarometer that states that participants experienced job related factors as barriers as indicated by the following responses:

They did not support me as they did not see my studies as part of my work (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

If you are a permanent worker, you don't get a lot of time to study and go to the library (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

I'm constantly busy at work and there was no time to do study things during work hours (Natasha, Interview, September 20, 2018).

The participants' responses coincide with what Giddens (1984) explains that structure should not only be viewed as constraining, but should be viewed as both constraining and enabling. The responses lead one to deduce that workplace conditions can be an enabling factor for the successful participation of adults in learning activities.

Success

Completion of qualification

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) aver that "it is only when participation will result in better and higher paying work that it is meaningful" (p. 192). This is evident in the responses which acknowledge that successful completion provided the means for improved working conditions:

I know with all the qualifications that I completed within adult learning, it has only opened doors for me. I could apply for different positions. It only helped because it speaks of your capabilities and it speaks of you being equipped to fulfil a certain role (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

I was approached by an organisation to become a lecturer because I have done this course (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

It gave me the opportunity to study for my masters and it created more options in the job market (Aneesha, Interview, August 18, 2018).

I got an increase and it made me a better, more rounded person and my salary also increased (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

I got a position here at my current place of work (Lucile, Interview, September 18, 2018).

Lynette and Laura are the only two participants who did not identify monetary reasons as an outcome of their studies. Their responses reflect self-development and factors contributing to the work environment respectively:

I can see the difference from where I started off and where I find myself now with my learners in my class. The programme really contributed to my development (Lynette, Interview, September 11, 2018).

I could relay which were relevant like the theories to the work that we do and that you could communicate with your colleagues about the theories and I sometimes find that the theories are relevant in meetings and that was cool (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

Continued relationships beyond the classroom/qualification

The data shows that continued relationships beyond the classroom was an unintended consequence of access and participation. The responses indicate that relationships were formed through participation and that some participants became friends while others still keep in contact with their study groups after completing the programme:

My fellow students became friends, with many of them I became friends and I'm still in contact with them (Maggie, Interview, September 21, 2018).

I was part of a study group and we were friends for a very long time and there was always that help that I got from them (Kenneth, Interview, September 4, 2018).

The group of four are still keeping in touch. We still have the group on WhatsApp (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

We made friends in our course, we were all like a whole group, and we work together well. We will make time to go to each other houses to do assessments (Natasha, Interview, September 20, 2018).

Drawing from the literature, it is evident that the participants demonstrated resilience in completing the programme successfully. While Van Breda (2001) maintains that resilience is an individual attribute, my data suggest that resilience was fostered through group work and friendship. Friendship is a resource provided by actors in the student's social and physical ecology to demonstrate resilience (Makoelle & Malindi, 2015).

Future aspirations

Most of the participants in this study identified the need to continue their studies and obtain some form of formal qualification or degree. In my view, taken from the data, it would appear that when participants accessed higher education and overcame structural and dispositional barriers, they were motivated to continue their studies in future:

I would like to register for the degree programme. The Master course is the next step (Roy, Interview, August 2, 2018).

Maybe I would have gone on to do my degree or Masters (Jean, Interview, August 6, 2018).

I would like to register for Masters (Aneesha, Interview, August 18, 2018).

I would have liked to register for the Masters at UWC (Belinda, Interview, September 4, 2018).

My Masters and my Ph.D. (Tauriq, Interview, September 7, 2018).

It would be in education. Like my Masters (Daisy, Interview, September 20, 2018).

To complete my law degree (Estelle, Interview, September 12, 2018).

If I could I would like to finish my degree (Gadija, Interview, August 8, 2018).

I would register to become a lecturer, in ECD for adult learners (Maurischa, Interview, August 7, 2018).

For social work (Mia, Interview, September 14, 2018).

I would definitely study for my Master in education (Laura, Interview, February 14, 2019).

Mike and Eric were the only two participants who did not specifically indicate the need to pursue a degree qualification, however, they stressed the need to further their studies:

In my daily employment I will register for a supply chain course (Mike, Interview, August 10, 2018).

I haven't looked out there in terms of what is on offer, but I am leaning towards the adult learning field (Eric, Interview, August 8, 2018).

In my view, the participants exercised self-efficacy by completing the undergraduate programme successfully. Their responses concur with what Hitlin and Elder (2006) aver, that the more effective and successful one is, the more one is motivated to increase efficacy. Furthermore, Tinto (1993) affirms that the more successful and motivated students are in their studies, "their concerns appear to shift towards a greater emphasis on academic issues" (p. 125). Finally, participants' responses resonate with Bandura (1991) who holds the view that after individuals reached their goals, and in this case, graduating the undergraduate course, those with a resilient form of efficacy continue to set higher goals for themselves.

SECTION 5 SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this section, I present a summary of this research study, the findings, recommendations and a conclusion.

Summary

This study is informed by the research problem related to adult students' experiences of access and success. It also seeks to understand to what extent the interplay between agency and structure influences the relationships among access, barriers to participation and success of adult students in an undergraduate academic programme at a university in the Western Cape.

This research study had two aims. Firstly, it investigated the relationships between access, barriers to participation among adult students and success in an undergraduate programme. The second aim is to generate new theoretical insights about the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success of adult students at a university in the Western Cape.

I investigated the following questions:

Main research question:

- What are the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution?

Sub-research questions:

- What structural barriers affect adult student's participation?
- What dispositional barriers affect adult student's participation?
- How do adult students address/overcome barriers that enable them to participate successfully?

My conceptual framework comprises theoretical perspectives of structure and agency pertaining to access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution. Among others, Giddens (1984) and Archer (2003) feature prominently in my conceptual framework. I use my conceptual framework as a theoretical lens to investigate the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution.

This study made use of a qualitative research approach with the aim of interpreting how adult students understand, perceive and give meaning to their experiences while participating in

higher education activities. I utilised purposive sampling to identify adult students who had successfully completed an undergraduate academic programme at a university in the Western Cape. I invited 30 adult students to participate in this study; however, only 20 responded favourably. The sample consisted out of 14 women and 6 men between the ages of 25 and 60 years old.

I used semi-structured interviews as my research method to collect data and an interview guide as my research instrument. I made use of thematic data analysis to analyse the data. My data analysis process utilised a deductive approach as it “involves a ‘top down’ method and is informed by the researcher’s theoretical framework” (Bryman et al., 2014, p. 351).

Findings

My findings revealed that there are definite interrelationships between agency and structure. My findings further revealed that structure and agency significantly shape the relationship between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution, and that there is a relationship between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution.

Access

- Age, level of maturity and life experience influenced adult students’ decision to access higher education. For a few of these students, education opportunities were limited or not accessible during the apartheid regime.
- A few adult students waited until their children were adults or able to support themselves before they pursued higher education.
- The majority of adult students accessed higher education for personal development and self-empowerment.
- A significant number of adult students accessed higher education for economic empowerment, better jobs or better working conditions.
- A few adult students accessed higher education for the desire to support, uplift and empower others.
- A student close to retirement specifically accessed higher education to serve their community.
- A couple of adult students accessed higher education to gain a qualification.

Barriers to participation

What structural barriers affect adult students' participation?

- Adult students experienced financial constraints and found it challenging to cover the cost of their studies.
- All adult students, with the exception of one, experienced demanding family-related commitments and challenges during the course of their studies.
- Lack of confidence in academic abilities was a barrier for many students.
- Group work, English as a medium of teaching and learning, academic English and academic writing were challenges for many of the students.

What dispositional barriers affect adult students' participation?

- Poor quality of academic support services, inadequate facilities for lectures, and the lack of tailor-made courses were barriers for many adult students.
- Workplace commitments were a constraint for some adult students.
- Institutional barriers relating to academic and financial support were experienced by a few adult students.

Overcoming barriers to participation and success

How do adult students overcome barriers to participation and achieve success?

- Adult students overcame their financial constraints to pay for their studies by arranging with the university to pay off the study fees, acquiring a sponsor or bursary, restructuring their finances or by taking out a loan at the bank.
- English as the medium of teaching and learning was a barrier overcome by a few adult students through independent reading and research after class.
- The majority of adult students overcame their lack of confidence in their academic abilities through independent study and research after each class, utilising study aids, remaining focused and peer support.
- A great deal of adult students overcame workplace commitments through negotiating for time off with their employers.
- Successful participation engaged adult students in self-reflection on past academic achievements as a motivation to complete their studies.
- Establishing alliances with peers contributed to successful participation.

- Self-belief, being focused and resources such as peer support, financial aid, the internet and family support were contributing factors in the successful completion of most adult students.
- The availability of resources such as one-on-one time with lecturers and being able to pay off their study fees provided by the university contributed to the successful participation of adult students.
- Workplace resources such as paying for study fees, the use of the internet, computers, photocopying assignments and time off from work were contributing factors for success for some adult students.
- A significant number of adult students experienced family support as a motivational and enabling factor that contributed to their success.

New theoretical insights and perspectives

Inspired by Rubenson and Desjardins' (2009) statement that there has been little interest from scholars' publications on the participation and barriers adult students experience, this study generates new theoretical insights about the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students in a higher education institution; types of barriers and how students overcome barriers.

My research question focused on adult students in a higher education institution. More specifically, I investigated the structural and dispositional barriers that affect adult student's participation and how do adult students address/overcome barriers that enable them to participate successfully?

My research study revealed that adult students as agents asserted agency when they accessed higher education. Additionally, my research study found evidence that adult students experienced situational barriers, dispositional barriers and structural barriers while participating in educational activities. Furthermore, it reveals that when confronted with barriers, students exercise agency to overcome the barriers.

My research study echoes Cross (1981) who maintains that dispositional barriers are "those related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner" (p. 98) and what Potter and Ferguson (as cited in MacKeracher, et al., 2006) aver that institutional barriers as structural barriers are "biased against or ignorant of the needs of adult students" (p. 4). My research study

also corroborates Giddens's (1984) view that structure should not only be viewed as constraining, but should be viewed as both constraining and enabling.

In conclusion, overwhelming evidence from this study mirrors Rubenson and Desjardins's (2009) assertion that barriers may slow down adult participation, but do not prevent adults from participating in educational activities.

Access

Findings do not support the literature from Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) who in their study found that participants had a "belief that one is too old to go back to study" (p. 192). My participants perceived their age, level of maturity and life experience as attributes that could contribute to their success.

Gecas (as cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 40) claims that "the perception of oneself as a causal agent in one's environment, as having control over one's circumstances, and being capable of carrying out actions to produce intended effects". Findings from my study support the latter that some adult students specifically postponed accessing higher education until their children were adults.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) contend that the workplace is a constraining environment. Contrary to the latter, my findings suggest a new theoretical insight that a significant number of adult students indicated that the workplace was an enabling factor for successful participation. Employers provided support and encouragement by allowing time off to attend classes and write examinations, allowing the use of resources such as the internet and by contributing to study fees.

Breier (2010) points out that "some students do persist and achieve their qualifications despite financial hardship" (p. 659). Findings from my study corroborate Breier's claim and revealed that while financial and workplace constraints were situational barriers for most adult students, they explored new and creative ways of asserting agency to gain access and continue to participate in higher education.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) assertion that "not participating becomes a highly rational act and it is only when participation will result in better and higher paying work that it is meaningful" (p. 192). By contrast, my findings suggest that access to higher education can be interpreted as a rational act to obtain a university qualification and to render service to their community.

Barriers to participation

Marsh (2006) avers that “attempting to learn through English has led to confusion [and] despair” (p. 30). My findings support Marsh’s claim as it revealed that English as the medium of teaching and learning and academic writing was a barrier to participation for most adult students. Adult students reported experiencing dispositional barriers as a result of what they term ‘academic language’ and academic writing expectations with which they were unfamiliar with at the time. Adult students asserted acts of agency when confronted by their own lack of academic capabilities by deliberately acting in ways that had a positive outcome or end result (Giddens, 1979).

Larson and Milana (2006) assert that adult students between the ages of 55 and 64 years old lack confidence in their ability to participate in educational activities. My findings do not support Larson and Milana’s claim and suggest a new theoretical insight that the lack of confidence in one’s ability to participate in academic learning activities was not restricted to ages 55 to 64 years old only. Adult students as young as 26 years old experienced a lack of confidence in their ability to participate in academic learning activities. Both the oldest and youngest adult students who experienced a lack of confidence in their capabilities to complete successfully and did not drop out.

Success

Cross (1981), MacKeracher et al. (2006) and Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) widely noted family responsibility and commitments as barriers to adult learning. Contrary to the before mentioned scholars, my findings suggest a new theoretical perspective that a significant number of adult students revealed that family is not a barrier to success. Family as an enabling and motivational factor towards successful participation, was unanticipated.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) claim that work-related concerns were a barrier. In contrast to the latter, my findings suggest a new theoretical perspective that a significant number of adult students indicated that they received support from their workplaces in the form of resources, time off and finance. This enabled their successful participation.

Main findings about the relationship between access, barriers to participation, overcoming barriers and success.

- Adult students needed to assert agency in identifying structural resources in the environment and to access those resources to overcome barriers and succeed.

- Overcoming structural barriers was the most critical challenge that adult students confronted in order to succeed.
- The interconnectedness of structure and agency allowed adult students to access higher education, overcome barriers and succeed.
- Overcoming dispositional barriers in order to succeed proved to be an overwhelming experience for adult students.

Unintended findings

The data revealed that an unintended consequence of access and participation was that relationships continued beyond the classroom. Accessing and participating in academic activities as adult students resulted in the development of friendships between peers that expanded beyond the classroom. The responses point out that relationships were initially formed as a means to participate successfully, however, some adult students became friends while others still kept in contact with their study groups years after completing the programme.

Recommendations

The aim of this study was to investigate what are the relationships between access, barriers to participation and success among adult students at a university. Based on the research, I recommend the following:

- Universities should consider adopting policies that facilitate financial support to adult students who have been out of formal education for more than 20 years.
- Universities should give support to adult students to develop their academic skills such as academic language and academic writing in order to participate successfully on a tertiary level.
- Universities should provide more flexible and tailored course content or modules according to their needs of adult students.
- Universities should include mother tongue as a medium of instruction to accommodate all adult students.
- Universities should give support to and strengthen adult students to overcome lack of confidence in their abilities to participate successfully.

Conclusion

In response to the apartheid regime's unequal, unjust and discriminatory education systems, the new South African government adopted a social justice policy to redress inequalities in

education that promotes access to higher education for the marginalised communities. This research study confirms that the particular circumstances of adult students must be considered in order for government to succeed in respect of access and success.



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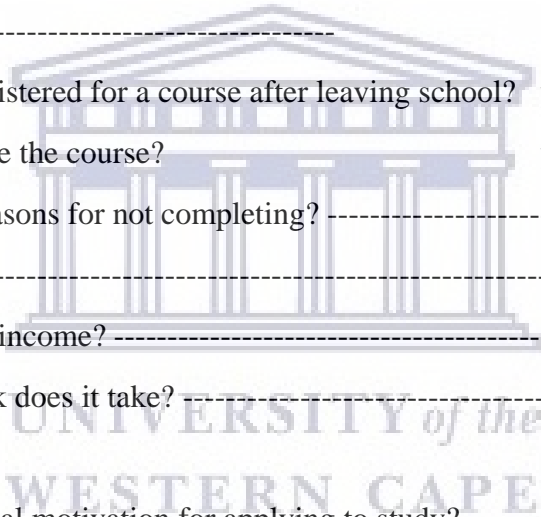
Appendix A

Interview guide

Personal information

1. Name -----
2. Date of birth-----
3. Address-----
4. Gender: Male Female
5. Home language -----
6. Other language -----
7. Marital status: single married divorced widowed living together
8. Number of dependants -----
9. Highest qualification -----
10. Did you previously registered for a course after leaving school? yes no
11. If yes, did you complete the course? yes no
12. If no, what were the reasons for not completing? -----

13. What is your source of income? -----
14. How many days a week does it take? -----



Agency

15. What were your personal motivation for applying to study?
16. Did your self-motivation changed over the course of your studies? If yes, please elaborate.
17. In what way did you organise your life to make it possible to study?
18. What arrangements did you have to make with others to ensure that your family is cared for
while you are attending classes?
19. What were your personal changes that you had to make during the course of your studies?

Dispositional barriers

20. Did your age contributed to you studying?
21. When you started the course did you believe that you would succeed?
22. If yes, what has contributed to that belief?
23. Did you ever think about leaving the course, if yes, why?

24. and what made you change your mind?
25. What personal challenges did you face in considering to register for this course?
26. What challenges of own abilities did you experience while participating in the course?

Structural barriers

27. Did you feel that this course was the correct course for you?
28. If you could, what other courses would you have registered for?
29. In what way did your job enable you to study?
30. Did your workplace support with your studies? Please elaborate.
31. In what way did your job impede or make it difficult to participate in your studies?
32. How did the outcomes of your studies affect your job?
33. What support did you have outside of work or the classroom?
34. What role did your family play with regards to your studies?
35. How did you manage work and family while studying?
36. What challenges did you experience in the classroom?
37. How were you supported during class?
38. What were your thoughts on the language used to facilitate the course?
39. What resources did you need to complete the course?

Overcoming dispositional and structural barriers

40. When faced with work related challenges, what course of action did you take to overcome it?
41. When faced with family-related commitment challenges, what course of action did you take to remedy it?
42. How did you overcome financial constraints if any while studying?
43. When you felt demotivated at times while studying, how did you overcome it and continued your studies?
44. When you questioned your abilities to succeed what message or self-talk did you have to tell yourself to continue your studies?

Appendix B

The Registrar

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am a registered Masters student at the [REDACTED]. To complete my Master's degree in Adult Learning and Global Change I am required to conduct a research project. My research study will focus on the relationships between the socio-economic challenges affecting adult students' participation while studying and those they overcame while completing the undergraduate academic programme for adult educators offered in the faculty of education at the [REDACTED]. I am hereby seeking your permission to conduct my research study by interviewing 20 adult students at your institution.

I will use semi-structured interviews as my research method and an interview guide as my research instrument. All participants will receive a letter of consent explaining the purpose of my research. Their participation will be voluntary.

To assist you in reaching a decision, I attach a copy of the ethics clearance certificate issued by the [REDACTED].

Should you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

Researcher:	Howard Stevens
Contact number:	(084) 032 5473
Email:	hv.stevens@gmail.com
Course:	Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change
University:	[REDACTED]
Supervisor:	[REDACTED]
Email:	[REDACTED]

Appendix C

Information letter to participants

Dear participant

My name is Howard Stevens and I am registered as a Masters student at the [REDACTED] and enrolled in the Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change. As a course requirement, I must conduct a research study. The focus of my research will allow me to explore the relationships between structurally and individually based barriers affecting adult students who participated and completed an undergraduate academic programme for adult educators at the [REDACTED].

This letter is addressed to you as you have already completed the undergraduate academic programme for adult educators and I believe that you are in a unique position to contribute significantly to this research study. I am thus inviting you to participate in this research study.

By participating you would contribute to research findings that could add value to how the faculty of education at the [REDACTED] view students' participation to learning.

This research study will include interviews and I would like the opportunity to interview you at your convenience. The interview will be conducted on a voluntary basis and you could opt out at any time should you choose to. I would like to request your permission to use a micro-recorder to record the interview. I will issue you with a consent form that you need to sign should you choose to participate. Your participation will be kept in the strictest confidence and anonymity and the data collected will be safely stored for five years.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my professor should you have any question regarding the research study.

Researcher: Howard Stevens
Contact number: (084) 032 5473
Email: hv.stevens@gmail.com
Course: Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change
University: [REDACTED]
Supervisor: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Appendix D

Participant consent form

Dear participant

Thank you for availing yourself to participate in this research study. By signing this consent form you are agreeing to participate in this research project and that the study has been described to you in a language that you understand. That you are fully aware that your identity will not be disclosed and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and this will not negatively affect me in any way. Furthermore, by signing this consent form you agree that:

- You have read and understood the information letter and consent form provided.
- You freely consent to be interviewed by the researcher
- You freely consent to be audio recorded.
- You understand that your words may be quoted and used in publications, reports and in webpages but your name will not be used.

Please sign this form and return it to the person that gave it to you.

Name of Participant: -----

Participant Signature: -----

Place of Interview: -----

Date of Interview: -----

Researcher Signature: -----

