Access, barriers to participation and success amongst mature adult students at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college in the Western Cape

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ABSTRACT

Insights into the experiences of students at TVET colleges can inform policies and practices. This paper focuses on an investigation into students' experiences of access, and barriers to participation, and success at a TVET college in the Western Cape. I mainly used the theories by Margaret Archer (2003), Anthony Giddens (1979; 1984), Albert Bandura (1989; 2001; 2006), Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder (2006), Kjell Rubenson and Richard Desjardins (2009), and K. Patricia Cross (1981) related to structure and agency to analyse my data. Data was collected from interviews with the exit level students at a TVET college who are registered for a National Certificate (Vocational) programme.

The evidence of this qualitative research revealed that students experience several institutional, dispositional and situational barriers, but find ways of overcoming these in order to complete their studies successfully. Findings show that elements of 'agency' such as 'intentionality' 'forethought' and self-reflectiveness are prevalent in the ways that students overcome barriers. The findings further revealed that the majority of participants accessed vocational education at a TVET college to improve their lives with the desire and intention to study further. This study generally suggests that intentionality and resilience, amongst other factors, are important elements of agency and are used to explain and interpret the positive relationship between agency, barriers to participation and success.

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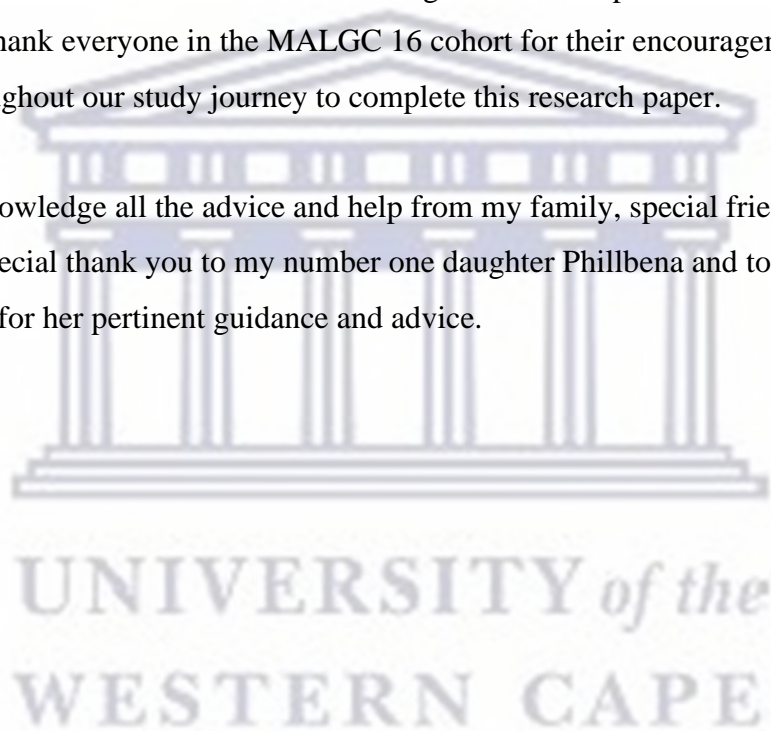
DECLARATION

I, Sylvia Phillipine Larke, hereby declare that this research paper, Access, barriers to participation and success among mature adult learners at a Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college in the Western Cape is my own work. It has not been submitted previously to another university for any degree.

This research paper is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters in Adult Education and Global Change at the University of the Western Cape. All sources included in this study have been acknowledged as complete references.

Date: 23 November 2020

ABBREVIATIONS/ GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
EU	European Union

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

It is generally understood that access to education is one of the most critical issues facing South African society at present (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Groener, 2013). Many South Africans experience challenges to access education due to structural barriers and educational policies. This research study focuses on access, participation and barriers to participation among adult students at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College. I have lectured in the TVET sector for the past two decades, during this time I have observed that mature adult students experience various challenges related to access and participation particularly related to teaching and learning and socio-economic problems (finances, social and political challenges) which hinder success. I am particularly interested in systematically exploring the way adult students have overcome numerous difficulties and challenges in order for them to succeed. My intention is to take the findings into account when designing teaching and learning strategies which are sensitive to access and participation. The purpose of the research study is to address the dearth in research on accessing and participating in adult education in the TVET sector. This topic is important in the field of adult education because access to education is one of the most critical issues facing South African society at present (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Groener, 2013). Many people still struggle to access education. For this reason, the South African government has prioritised access to and success in higher education as evident in the White Paper on Education (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013). As a result, several research studies have been conducted on access in relation to TVET colleges. For instance, Lesley Powell argues 'research has made an important contribution to the transformation of FET colleges in South Africa' (Powell, 2013, p. 59). However, according to Papier (2011), DHET (2011), and others, research on access to TVET colleges is limited. [1]

Research focus on structure and agency in the TVET sector is limited. Powell (2013) notes that 'very few studies exist that consider the agency and perspective of college students and staff and none that try to mediate between structure and agency in their analysis of the colleges' (p. 75).

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[1] Previously TVET colleges were known as Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges.

My interest is prompted by Rubenson and Desjardins' (2009) identification of what is missing from the body of knowledge in the field of adult learning. These authors identified the inadequate scholarly attention given to the issues related to participation and barriers in adult education (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

Some of the key research areas in this field focused on including bounded agency, structural and dispositional individually–based barriers (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) developed a model on 'Bounded Agency' which I will discuss later in this paper. Their research findings have emphasised that adult learning is relevant and important for global participation and development in building a global knowledge society. Participation in adult learning is important because it develops individual agency and enhance learning across different aspects of society. It is one of the foundational pillars of a knowledge society. What is missing are alternative theoretical models on participation and barriers (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

Successful participation in adult learning could enable adult students to function optimally by participating in and contributing to the development of a society based on social justice and inclusive economic growth. I am a TVET college lecturer who teaches mature adult students. By implication, I am involved in facilitating and promoting adult learning in preparing students more effectively for the working world and technological advancement. Adult learning contributes positively to the wellbeing of nations and individuals as emphasised in a range of policy documents (DHET, 2013). For example, the European Union (EU) links adult learning with a lifelong learning agenda in terms of developing the knowledge economy (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 188). According to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), 'Adult learning can be seen to promote competencies that help individuals adapt to the demands of the new economy and enable full participation in economic and social life' (p. 188). The development of such competencies is extremely relevant to the role of TVET learning opportunities for adult students in South Africa.

The kind of adult learning, which is prescribed by TVET colleges ties it to the world of work with its economic objectives (Human Capital Model). However, as various scholars, such as Emjedi (2016) have emphasised, it is also important to include a learning focus on social justice in the TVET curriculum to develop a sensitivity to issues of social transformation based on

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equality and rights (Emancipatory Model). Prominent leaders in our society (such as civil society leaders and various academics) have promoted alternative models to foster diversity for doing things differently, yet many more practical models are required in our public colleges. The focus of the adult learning curriculum I am engaged in as a TVET lecturer is directed at professional vocational development, employment and income generation, based on the underlying principles and broader objectives of social justice and equality. My teaching is focused on explicitly promoting these broader underlying objectives. For this reason, I am particularly interested in further exploring ways in which this aspect of the TVET curriculum could be enhanced to further promote access and participation of adult learners.

For the purpose of my academic research study, I am focussing on access, participation and barriers to participation in adult learning in TVET colleges. The focus on access and participation intends to shed light on the reasons for the high dropout rate so that these factors can be better addressed within the TVET sector to ensure lower attrition and greater success. This research study will consider the more nuanced experiences and perceptions of adult students and previous research studies in this regard. This study also seeks to ascertain how resilience is applied among students with reference to agency, barriers to participation and success.

1.2 Rationale

Insights into the experiences of students at TVET colleges can inform policies and practices. This paper focuses on an investigation into students' experiences of access, barriers to participation, and success at a TVET college in the Western Cape. The evidence reveals that students experience several institutional, dispositional and situational barriers, but find ways of overcoming these in order to complete their studies successfully. Preliminary findings show that elements of 'agency' such as 'intentionality' 'forethought' and self-reflectiveness are prevalent in the ways that students overcome barriers.

Having lectured in the TVET sector for the past two decades, I have observed that mature adult students experience various challenges, such as socio-economic problems, related to access which hinder success. I am particularly interested in investigating ways in which adult students overcome difficulties and challenges in order to succeed. My intention is to take the findings

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into account when designing teaching and learning strategies that could be more sensitive to access and participation.

1.3 Research problem

The White Paper for Post School Education and Training promotes access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges. While the government has made institutional changes and allocated resources to facilitate such access, mature adult students experience various barriers to access and participation according to my research. This study addresses the contradictions between the policy intentions, and the barriers to access and participation in TVET colleges. Investigating mature adult students' access and success in post school education and training through TVET colleges illuminates how their agency inadvertently addresses these contradictions. In 2016, 120 students from various cultural backgrounds enrolled in the Level 2 NCV Primary Health Programme at a TVET college. In total 66 students of that cohort sat for their final external Level 4 exit examinations in November 2018. They experienced many challenges prior to and during their three years of study, including failure to pass, poor matric results, poor economic circumstances, dropout from school, and others. The NSFAS bursary scheme covered their tuition fees, travel allowance and hostel accommodation, in cases where the student had applied and qualified for it.

1.4 Research Aims

1. To investigate the relationship(s) between access, participation and barriers to participation in adult education.
2. To develop new theoretical insights about the relationship(s) between access, participation and success in adult learning.

1.5 Research questions

1.5.1 Main research question

What are the relationships between access, participation and barriers to participation among mature, adult students at a TVET college in the Western Cape?

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1.5.2 Sub-questions

What structural barriers affect mature adult students' participation in adult learning?

What dispositional individually-based barriers affect mature adult students' participation in adult learning?

How do the relationships between structural and dispositional individually-based barriers affect mature adult students' participation?

1.6 Limitations

This study is limited to a specific programme level at a specific college - level 4 students from the NCV Primary Health programme at a TVET college. This is a limitation because there are many other NCV programmes. Students from the other departments could also have been chosen as participants. Other limitations are timeframe and mature students.

1.7 Anticipated Findings

Evidence of barriers to access, and participation in adult learning in TVET colleges.

Sources of evidence, such as the nuanced experiences and perceptions of adult students,

Successes as a result of participation.

SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this section I construct a conceptual framework by reviewing literature relevant to agency, barriers to participation and success. The conceptual framework which framed my investigation comprises theoretical perspectives drawn primarily from Margaret Archer (2003), Anthony Giddens (1979; 1984), Albert Bandura (1989; 2001; 2006), Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder (2006), Kjell Rubenson and Richard Desjardins (2009), and K. Patricia Cross (1981). I have also used secondary sources as indicted in my research paper.

2.2 Access to TVET, agency and structure in South Africa

In the preface to the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013), Dr Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, emphasises the importance of access to education in addressing the key socio-economic challenges of poverty and inequality: 'Access to quality post-school education is a major driver in fighting poverty and inequality in any society' (DHET, 2013: p. viii). Highlighting the significant role of the TVET college sector in the provision of post-school education and training, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) further states that the college sector needs to grow, noting that it 'is central to the provision of post-school education and training, and is the area targeted by the DHET for greatest expansion and diversification' (p. 11). This statement indicates the need for more students to access TVET colleges and for the 50 TVET colleges nationwide to expand and improve their programmes. The DHET identifies the TVET colleges as its highest priority, with the key objectives of improving access, throughput rates, and management capacity (DHET, 2013).

When reviewing the literature related to access to TVET, agency and structure in South Africa, Powell (2013) maintains that, there is a stronger emphasis on the elements related to structure (the college system, the institution and the economy) than on human agency. She points out the limitations of this bias, noting:

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It is done at the expense of human agency, particularly of the students who study at the colleges and the staff who work there. It is also done at the expense of analyses that attempt to mediate between structure and agency and between policy and its enactment at the institutional and classroom levels (Powell, 2013, p. 60).

Powell and McGrath (2013; 2014) create awareness about how students participate in studying at TVET colleges as a way of holistic advancement. Their study on why students access TVET colleges portrays how agency was exercised by the students; Powell and McGrath were interested in understanding the factors important to students and how accessing college would assist them in meeting their life goals. They concurred with Archer (2003) 'in seeing a life project' as 'an end that is desired, however tentatively and nebulously, and some motion, however imprecise, of the course of action through which to accomplish it' (Powell & McGrath, 2014, p. 216). Their intention was to highlight agency. For them the TVET college advances individual life projects of students, thereby advancing agency (Powell & McGrath, 2014). Similarly, Hitlin and Elder (2006) state that in the vast available literature not much research has been done on human agency.

2.3 Agency, barriers to participation, and overcoming barriers to participation (success)

Several scholars engage theories of structure and agency in researching and studying education. This research study draws on these theories to construct a relevant conceptual framework. I draw primarily on research conducted by Giddens (1979, 1984) and Archer (2003) to explain the relationships between the individual (the agent) and various social structures. These scholars argue that the individual uses agency to access structures which can be constraining or enabling. If, for example, the student understands the language of the institution, he/she can engage successfully with its structures as rules and resources. According to Giddens (1979), this 'unintended consequence of my speaking the sentence …, is bound in directly to the recursiveness of the duality of structure' (p. 77-78). Agency empowers the student to powerfully engage with the structures that are embedded in an institution and that could lead to success, depending on whether structural and dispositional barriers are overcome.

Scholars explain agency and the characteristics of agency in various ways. I start with definitions of agents as provided in the literature.

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2.4 Agents

Giddens (1984) states that people are 'purposive' agents, determining and usually able to explain their reasons for carrying out certain activities if requested to do so. Sewell (1992) critiques the argument by Giddens by arguing that all human beings are agents because we are born with agency, noting that 'a capacity for agency – for desiring, for forming intentions, and for acting creatively – is inherent in all humans' (p. 20).

Similarly, Archer (2003) asserts that individuals as human agents 'possess properties and powers distinct from those pertaining to social forms', referring to particular human characteristics such as 'thinking, deliberating, believing, intending, loving, etc.' (p. 2). Luckett and Luckett (2009) argue that Archer (2003) endorses the 'full properties and powers of learners as agents' by focusing on the ways in which their 'key values, desires and concerns – which' she describes as the "internal conversation" (self-talk) – are developed into projects and practices that defines character (p. 1). According to the schema developed by Archer (2003), it is through projects and practices that individuals (students) experience themselves as primary agents and make changes in their lives; for example, by accessing opportunities to study further and improve their knowledge and skills for better employment opportunities. Archer (2003) determines that inherently humans have the freedom to make decisions regarding their actions, although with varying degrees of freedom. This being the case, 'agents enjoy their own powers of reflexive deliberation' (p. 7).

Likewise, Bandura (2006) asserts that people or agents are able to self-organize, self-regulate and self-reflect as a proactive capability. Thus, they are participatory agents who can contribute to adjusting their life conditions. These attributes are particularly applicable to the students who attend a TVET college. For these students, admission to a college it is a new opportunity to empower themselves as purposive agents.

2.5 Agency

The concept of agency is extensively discussed in the literature and conceptualised in many different ways (Giddens 1979, 1984; Hitlin and Elder, 2006; Luckett and Luckett, 2009). Some of the key definitions and descriptions of agency are presented below, highlighting various dimensions of the concept.

The view postulated by Giddens (1994) is that the individual as perpetrator initiates agency to intervene in a particular event. According to Giddens (1984), 'agency refers to doing' (p. 10).

Hitlin and Elder (2006), in their interpretations of human agency, refer to freedom as an aspect of agency (drawing on Alexander, 1992, 1993) along with the ability to initiate self-change (drawing on Thoits, 2003). Furthermore, they highlight the four aspects identified by Bandura (2001): 'intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness/self-regulation, and self-reflectiveness' (Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 35).

In addition, Luckett and Luckett (2009) "drawing on Archer's theory of human agency" support the view that the potential for human beings is to transform their positioning by society through their own actions as well as through joint actions with others (p. 1). They argue that the concept of 'agency' in the learning process is neglected by dominant theorists, favouring Archer's social realist theory 'of agency and modes of reflexivity' which 'offers a way forward by reinstating the full properties and powers of learners as agents' (Luckett & Luckett, 2009, p. 1). The authors believe that Archer's schema of agency moves towards recovering human agency, especially in the way students learn how to overcome historic legacies relating to South Africa's history of apartheid and inequality (Luckett & Luckett, 2009).

Luckett and Luckett (2009) argue that Archer (2003) reinstates 'the full properties and powers of learners as agents' (p. 1) by focusing on the ways in which their key values, desires and concerns – which she describes as the internal conversation (self-talk) – are developed into projects and practices that defines character. Furthermore, Luckett and Luckett (2009) continue (as mentioned earlier) that according to the schema developed by Archer (2003), it is in actions that individuals (students) experience themselves as primary agents and make changes in their lives; for example, by accessing opportunities to study further and improve their knowledge and skills for better employment opportunities.

Giddens (1984) and other scholars, like Archer (2003), concur that the 'two "faces" of the power' of agency are the capability to make decisions based on preferences and the ability to mobilise institutional bias (p. 15). In terms of capability, the agent has the power to define his/her own decisions which are favourable to his/her situation, and to draw on certain institutional structures that can support rather than block their agency (Giddens, 1984). Archer

(2003) states that 'agents possess properties and powers distinct from those pertaining to social forms' (p. 3). Individuals have the capacity to change their socio-economic situations (e.g., to move out of poverty) by exercising agency (Archer, 2003; Luckett & Luckett, 2009). Giddens (1984) adds that an agent will lose power if he or she fails in the 'capability to "make a difference", that is, to exercise some sort of power' (p. 14).

Hitlin and Elder (2006), point to a disconnect between adult students' belief in their potential agency and having the capacity and opportunity to successfully practise their agency due to various structural constraints. For example, the environment of the individual does not always afford learning opportunities. Hitlin and Elder (2006) assert that adult students

> may feel as if they have the freedom to act without also having a corresponding belief in their capacities to act successfully. Alternatively, somebody who occupies a disadvantaged position in a social system may feel strongly agentic as to their capacities for action without feeling they have structurally constrained opportunities for such action. Agency refers to the sense of having the capacity for meaningful and successful action, something related, but not equivalent, to the perception of having structural opportunities to exercise such capacities (p. 40).

Hitlin and Long (2009) further explain these often-opposing dimensions related to 'human agency' as 'a person's objective opportunity to exert control over their life and their subjective belief about their ability to exert control' (p. 138).

Agentic individuals, according to Hitlin and Elder (2006), can think more carefully about their actions in various situations and how this would affect the rest of their lives. When agency is viewed as the ability to think through (conceptualise) situations and the implications of their actions, Hitlin and Elder (2006) note that capacity is associated with resistance and transitions.

2.6 Agency, intentions and intentionality

Bandura (2001) sees intentionality as a core feature of personal agency. He discusses intentionality as a main agentic feature. For Bandura (2001) 'agency refers to acts done intentionally' (p. 6) and elaborates further that:

an intention is a representation of a future course of action to be performed. It is not simply an expectation or prediction of future actions but a proactive commitment to bringing them about. Intentions and actions are different aspects of a functional relation separated in time. (p. 6).

Bandura (2001) further emphasises the importance of the behaviours related to intentionality, including planning, foresight, motivation and self-regulation – considered critical in exercising agency.

An agent has to be not only a planner and forethinker, but a motivator and self-regulator as well. Having adopted an intention and an action plan, one cannot simply sit back and wait for the appropriate performances to appear. Agency thus involves not only the deliberative ability to make choices and action plans, but the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution (p. 8).

Bandura (2006) also points out the direct relationship between intent and reflection in guiding human action: 'if there is intent, a person will exercise forethought, self-reflective, self-reactiveness and then self-reflectiveness on the intention which reflects human behaviour' (pp. 164-165).

Giddens (1984) defines 'intentional' in terms of an expected outcome: 'characterizing an act which its perpetrator knows, or believes, will have a particular quality or outcome and where such knowledge is utilised by the author of the act to achieve this quality or outcome' (p. 10). Giddens (1984) problematises the view 'that human agency can be defined only in terms of intentions' (p. 8). This argument is considered short-sighted as it ignores other factors such as the role of the individual and the social constraints in which the human agent finds him-/herself. According to Giddens (1984, p. 9), capability surpasses the role of intention in agency since people's capability to act is the power of agency. He (1984) points out that 'agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place' (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). Giddens sees agency as 'a necessary feature of action that, at any point in time, the agent 'could have acted otherwise': either positively in terms of attempted intervention in the process of 'events in the world', or negatively in terms of forbearance' (Giddens, 1984, p. 56).

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Rather than defining agency as intentionality, Hitlin and Elder (2006) instead emphasise that intentionality is just one aspect of agency, while Archer (2003) points out the value of intentionality as an aspect of agency by firstly defining and designing the action required to fulfil a certain objective.

2.7 Agency, actions and intervention

According to Giddens (1984), agency is an action, since 'agency refers to doing' (p. 10). For example, students exercise agency when they apply to a college to study and accept the offer to study; they are creating an intervention to potentially change the course of their lives. Thus agency, as exercised in this context, is an act of intervention (Giddens, 1979). Agency also refers to an ongoing series of related actions. For Giddens (1979), the activities of an agent (action), need to be analysed and understood in relation to the broader context within which the action takes place. For Giddens (1984), 'agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened' (p. 9). His conception of agency involves a kind of '"intervention" in a potentially malleable object-world' which 'relates directly to the more generalized motion of Praxis' (Giddens, 1979, p. 56). Praxis is explained by King (2010) as 'regular patterns of enacted conduct by active actors who interact with each other in situations in habitual, reflexive, reflective, and more conscious ways' (p. 10).

Intervention may also be described as agentic action. For example, students assert agentic action when they register to study and confront barriers to participation in studying. According to Hitlin and Elder (2006), 'agency refers to the sense of having the capacity for meaningful and successful action, something related, but not equivalent, to the perception of having structural opportunities to exercise such capacities' (p. 40).

2.8 Agency and human freedom

According to Sen (cited in Deneulin, 2004), freedom is agency, as it concerns 'the ability of people to help themselves and to influence the world' (p. 2). Deneulin (2004) further explains that Sen (1999) emphasised that people are actively responsible for their own futures in terms of their own value systems and objectives. Thus, the freedom that is central is freedom as

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agency: the power to act and achieve those goals that one values. In terms of this research, human freedom is of course limited by a sense of moral and ethical responsibility. In other words, freedom is the power exercised when deciding to act responsibly in order that the goal pursued makes a positive contribution to oneself and the world.

Reinforcing the ideas of Sen, Archer (2003), claims that humans have degrees of freedom in which they can determine their own course of action. The extent to which participants adjust their attitude to the degrees of freedom they are willing to enjoy for themselves will influence how much of the barriers they are able or willing to face and overcome.

2.9 Agency, capability and capacity

As indicated earlier, Giddens (1984) disagrees with some scholars that human agency can only be explained in terms of intentions. Giddens (1984) argues that a person's capability is just as important. Giddens (1984) asserts that any action is dependent on the capability of a person to change and improve their situations. If we consider the capability dimension in relation to education, then it implies that any student can make a difference in his/her life course by applying to study and the capability to study successfully. There is agency in the way students access education and agency and in the way they overcome barriers. Giddens (1984) refers to this as transformative capacity which means achieving an intended outcome or desire.

Expanding on Giddens's conception of agency, Hitlin and Elder (2006) describe agency as representing 'a human capacity to influence one's own life within socially structured opportunities' (p. 57). A person has the capacity to effect change in his/her life by taking advantage of opportunities to support these changes. For example, students can take advantage of structured education opportunities through the TVET sector to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to secure employment.

Hitlin and Elder (2006) draw on Clausen (1991, 1993) and Giddens (1984) in stating that agency is a capability. These scholars state that 'agency has been thought of alternately as a capacity, an attribute, evidence of resistance, and as a structurally defined property of persons' (p. 36). Hitlin and Elder (2006) continues that agency is 'a variable, an individual-level capacity' (p. 37). Adult students who enter an institution of learning exercise agency, not only in applying for registration, but in maintaining their focus and remaining diligent in the face of

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obstacles over a sustained period of time. In addition, Sewell (1992) argues that the capacity for agency is inherent for all humans, but it is not specific according to him. He agrees that humans all exercise agency (Sewell, 1992).

Hitlin and Elder's (2006) definition of agency as a capacity encompasses planfulness, self-efficacy and optimism. In the model that they use, agency is represented as 'an individual capacity, one that is both the result of individual differences (planfulness) as well as achieved successes (self-efficacy) and a sense of temporal, self-reflective understanding about one's life chances (optimism)' (p. 60).

2.9.1 Agency and self-efficacy

Hitlin and Elder (2006) start their discussion on self-efficacy by referring to Gecas (2003) who considers 'self-efficacy as the most important mechanism of self-agency' (p. 40). Citing Gecas (2003), whom the authors say draws on Bandura (1997), agrees that 'self-efficacy is defined 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' (Hitlin & Elder, pp. 40–41).

The notion of self-efficacy as closely linked to personal control is echoed by Mirowsky and Ross (cited in Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p. 41) Hitlin and Elder (2006) also link the element of control to 'mastery', which is described as 'the degree to which people feel they can control the forces that affect their lives' (p. 41). They contend that such people ('with greater levels of efficacy') tend to be more successful (Hitlin & Elder, 2006, p .41).

Similarly, Bandura (2001) highlights the importance of having personal control as a key element of agency. For him the foundation of human agency is found in efficacy beliefs, explaining that:

> unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators; they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions (p. 10).

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This core component, efficacy, leads to development and change as an agent.

Hitlin and Elder (2006) further connect optimism with self-efficacy as key factors underlying agency. They define optimism as self-belief (the idea that 'I know if I do this I can succeed') which in turn is connected to capability. What students think of themselves affects their ability to act as causal agents in their lives, a key observation made Hitlin and Elder (2006) about the social psychological effects on the capacity of individuals to act with agency. They point out:

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

2.9.2 Agency and optimism

Hitlin and Elder (2006) state that an individual's optimism is related to believing that he or she has the capability to successfully achieve a given desire. I interpret Hitlin and Elder's (2006) ideas about optimism as a positive attitude as described by Boeren, Nicaise and Baert (2010).

Boeren et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of a positive attitude to learning as an aspect that ensures successful participation in educational activities. Such positive attitudes are based on an understanding of the personal relevance of the learning, having confidence, and a sense of satisfaction (Boeren et al, 2010, pp. 49-50). Added to this a positive learning climate will take into consideration the individual, educational and broader social context to enable student agency (Boeren et al, 2010). These factors determine the level of success in education.

2.9.3 Agency and planfulness

Hitlin and Elder (2006) understand planfulness as a personal trait guiding agentic action. According to these authors, the three dimensions involved in planful competence are 'intellectual investment, dependability, and self-confidence', all of which allow people 'to make' and 'sustain effective long-term plans' (p. 42). Hitlin and Elder (2006) argue that highly

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agentic individuals have a combination of high levels of planfulness and self-efficacy, asserting that the level of planfulness impacts on the levels of self-efficacy and on optimism.

2.10 Agency and resilience

As shown by various studies (Hitlin & Elder, 2006; Bandura, 1989; Makoelle & Malindi, 2015), resilience is a human capability driving humans to action to attain certain outcomes.

When a person possesses a resilient self-belief, it provides long-term staying power to the end. The TVET student who possesses this resilient self-belief, will generally continue with successful studies for the full duration of the course. The view expressed by Makoelle and Malindi (2015) supports this agentic capability as inclusive also of a student's physical and social ecology. In this respect, Makoelle and Malindi (2015) describes resilience as involving both internal assets and external resources:

> firstly, internal assets such as intellectual, communication, decision-making and problem-solving; positive self-concept, feelings of self-worth and confidence; a strong sense of autonomy, identity, purposefulness and positive values and beliefs; and a strong internal locus of control. Secondly, external resources from the immediate environment, which include a stable and consistent relationship with a caregiver, a supportive family that encourages competence, a network of peers, supportive significant others, and a supportive neighbourhood (pp. 3-4).

This quotation provides a valuable explanation of both the internal and external resources that individuals draw on as resilience measures in order to exercise agency successfully.

2.11 Agency and power

Giddens (1984) highlights the importance of power in the context of the agency to transform situations, stating that 'an agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to "make a difference", that is, to exercise some sort of power' (p. 14). He points out that 'power' includes intent, will and capacity as well as the ability to influence.

2.12 Agency and structure

The relationship between agency and structure is closely connected to the definition of power explained above. Agency involves the capability of the individual but also has a collective property, involving resources, institutional structures, and choices in terms of how to act, among other aspects.

Giddens (1979) describes power 'as both the capability to achieve an objective and as a collective property' (p. 69). He acknowledges that power is a feature of 'the duality of structure' (p. 69). Explaining the 'notion of the duality of structure', Giddens (1984) asserts 'that the structural properties of social systems are both medium and the outcome of the practices they recursively organise' (p. 25). Furthermore, structure is 'both constraining and enabling' (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Agents are 'able to monitor their activities and those of others' in their daily activities and they are able to 'monitor that monitoring' daily (Giddens, 1984, p. 29).

Giddens (1979) treats 'resources as the "bases" or "vehicles" of power', through which 'structures of domination' are reproduced with parties drawing on the 'duality of structure' to interact and reduce structures of domination (p. 69). Giddens (1979) argue that power in social theory is central to human agency; 'a person or party who wields power could "have acted otherwise" and the person or party over whom power is wielded, would have acted otherwise if power had not been exercised' (p. 91).

Giddens (1979) views power relations as always 'two-way' in terms of the relationship between autonomy and dependence, with agents displaying both qualities in the course of their interaction: 'even the most autonomous agent is in some degree dependent, and the most dependent actor or party in a relationship retains some autonomy' (p. 93). For example, students are dependent on government's resources but also have the autonomy to engage government around fulfilling their needs. Structure cannot determine all aspects of agency; people have the autonomy to act in a variety of ways, as Giddens (1984) points out that 'structure, as recursively organised sets of rules and resources, …is marked by an absence of the "subject". The social systems in which structure is recursively implicated, on the contrary, comprise the situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and space' (p. 25).

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King (2010) notes that Giddens's understanding of structure provides a bridge between structure and agency, 'focusing on systems and structures as patterns of enacted conduct' (p. 12).

According to Archer (2003), consensus has not been reached about what structure and agency are within a social structure. There are several scholars who critique Archer's view. Some would say that agency and structure are intertwined (such as Giddens), while Archer (2003) uses the separation as her point of departure. Archer (2003) debates the interplay between the structural powers and agentic powers, investigating how structures influence agency 'and how agents use their personal powers (such as thinking, deliberating, believing, intending, loving and more) to act in such situations' (pp. 2-3). Archer (2003) notes that people are not all constrained and enabled in the same ways since their actions are as a result of their different interests/objectives and social contexts' (Archer, 2003, p. 4).

Archer (2003) argues that 'constraints and enablements derive from structural and cultural emergent properties' which limit or support their actions (projects) (p. 7). Archer (2003) distinguishes between the existence of structural properties and how agents exercise their causal powers ('reflexive acuity, creativity and capacity for commitment') (p. 7). Archer (2003) claims that the relationship between structures and agents, and how structures influence agents, depends on our 'human reflexive abilities' playing a mediating role 'between the distinctive properties and powers' of structure and agency (p. 14). This relates to a student or agent entering a place of learning and participating in academic and social life.

2.13 Structure

According to Giddens (1984), 'structure refers to rules and resources' associated with the way in which the social system is reproduced (p. 17). He further defines structure as 'sets of transformation relations organised as properties of social systems' (p. 25). King (2010) argues that Giddens (1984) seeks to find a way to integrate human action with 'the larger systems, structures, and institutions of which we are a part' (p. 9).

2.13.1 Structure as rules

As indicated above, one of the key elements of structure is rules. Giddens (1979) argued that although rules are regarded as an isolated formula, this formula only exists in conjunction with practice. He further indicated that the fullness of rules 'can only' be understood in 'the context of the historical development of social totalities as recursively implicated in practices' (Giddens, 1979, p. 65). Whenever there is a development, it brings about rules. This argument can be seen in the educational context of a new social construct - the TVET colleges, nested within the new DHET educational system, guided by new rules demonstrating that 'rules and practices only exist in conjunction with one another' (Giddens, 1979, p. 65). The DHET is a structural property, as part of a social system, from which flow 'rules and practices', as claimed by Giddens (1979, p. 65). To mention one example, a structure, such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursary scheme covers the education costs of the TVET student completely, including travel allowance and hostel accommodation, should the student have applied and qualified for it (DHET, 2018). To enable and improve access to education and training at TVET colleges, the government instituted this bursary scheme for needy students in 2007 for the first time because 'the provision of student financial aid is critical for enabling access to TVET colleges' (DHET, 2018, p. 5).

The NSFAS policy rules and guidelines (DHET 2018) state clearly:

> Each student enrolled in the state-funded programme must be subsidised by the state at 80% of the total programme cost. The difference of the 20% of the total programme cost, which constitute college fees, must be recovered from the student. In order to ensure that College fees do not constitute a barrier to access to state-funded programmes, … the Government shall establish and maintain a national TVET College bursary system… to ensure that academically deserving and yet financially needy students gain access to education and training opportunities in TVET Colleges. The bursary amount covers the 20% portion of student fees for academically deserving and financially needy students' (2018, p. 4). This comes with certain eligible criteria, such as 'Must not be enrolling for a qualification equivalent to previous learning that was state-funded' (p.8) and … 'recipients who FAIL to progress to the next level of their studies should NOT be awarded a bursary to repeat a level that they failed (p. 15).

Regarding the promotion of student access, NSFAS policy guidelines state that the 'disbursement of travel and accommodation allowances … is intended to improve the retention rates in the college sector, thereby promoting student access' (DHET, 2018, p. 20). The NSFAS policy guidelines/rules demonstrate Giddens' point that 'the structured properties of social systems' are their institutionalised features which gives "solidity" across time and space' (p. 24). With structures, Giddens (1984) refers to 'the relations of transformation and mediation which are the 'circuit switches' underlying observed conditions of system reproductions' (p. 24).

2.13.2 Structure as resources

Giddens (1979) defines resources as the 'media whereby transformative capacity is employed as power in the routine course of social interaction' (p. 92). Sewell (1992) simplifies this definition as 'resources are anything that serve as a source of power in social interaction' (p. 9). Sewell (1992) continues to argue that 'the notion of structure' makes dealing with change awkward, because structure implies stability (p. 9). Students or agents make use of resources as they interact with their learning environment (Giddens, 1979).

2.13.3 Structure as schemas

Sewell (1992) uses the term schemas or procedures instead of rules. According to him, various schemas which Giddens (1979) explains as 'generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life' make up structures (Sewell, 1992, p. 8). Sewell (1992) elaborates that structures are mental schemas or ideas (p. 6). Students or agents can put such schemas into practice in the learning environment as the opportunity presents itself.

2.14 Bounded agency, structure and barriers to participation

Numerous scholars, such as Rubenson and Desjardins (2009; 2013), Cross (1981), Boeren (2011), Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), and MacKeracher, Suart and Potter (2006), have researched barriers to participation in education. Particularly relevant to my study on adult learners is the view of MacKeracher, et al. (2006) that '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).

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Through their "Bounded Agency Model", Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) present a valuable theoretical perspective on the interaction between the individual and various structures, which together may be viewed as the two overarching main barriers to participation, also known as structural and dispositional individually-based barriers (p. 195). Their findings suggest that 'broader structural conditions and targeted policy measures' have to be considered when discussing barriers and the impact of barriers on participation (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, pp. 195-196).

Desjardins and Rubenson (2013) view the concept of barriers, also named constraints, as complex and wide ranging, as noted in their 2003 Eurobarometer Data Nordic study. According to these authors, structural and individual constraints, though distinct, lend themselves to strong interactions which influence the agents will to want to pursue adult education (Desjardins and Rubenson).

Desjardins and Rubenson (2013) (as well as Cross, 1981) identify situational, institutional and dispositional barriers, described as follows: 'Situational (e.g., obstacles arising from one's situation in life at a given time), institutional (e.g., practices and procedures that discourage or prevent participation), and dispositional (e.g., attitudes and self-perceptions about one's situation or self as a learner)' (pp. 262-263). The authors further categorise situational and institutional constraints as primarily structurally-based, and dispositional constraints as individually-based. Dispositional barriers are associated with individual agency in terms of the individual's capability to make choices and to act in certain ways in relation to the circumstances confronting them. Furthermore, the authors emphasize the importance of drawing on both external resources (e.g., financial support) and internal resources (e.g., competencies) to enable agents to achieve their objectives. However, the authors note that the individual capabilities to use available resources and immediate opportunities might be inadequate, 'either consciously by revealed preferences or unconsciously as a consequence of bounded agency' (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 263).

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) define barriers to participation in a slightly different manner, adding informational and psychosocial barriers to the situational and institutional barriers described by Desjardin and Rubinson (2013) and Cross (1981) above. Their descriptions of the situational and institutional barriers echo the descriptions provided by Desjardins and Rubinson

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(2013) and Cross (1981). Informational barriers are defined as 'institutional failure in communicating information on learning opportunities to adults …[involving] the failure of many adults, particularly the least educated and poorest, to seek out or use the information that is available' (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 137). Furthermore, Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) define psychological barriers, often termed as attitudinal or dispositional barriers, as 'individually held beliefs, values, attitudes, or perceptions that inhibit participation in organised learning activities' such as 'lack of interest, too old to learn, and so forth' (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 137). Their psychosocial barriers correspond with the individual dispositional barriers in the schema of Desjardins and Rubinson and Cross.

I agree with Boeren (2019) who refers to the relation between agency and structure:

> in adult education, Kjell Rubenson and Richard Desjardins' *bounded agency model* draws on the idea that decisions to participate in adult education activities are bounded by structural elements, commonly influenced by the type of welfare state regime the adults live in (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009) p. 282.

Boeren (2019) continues that previously (in 2016) she had indicated 'that participation can be theorised as an interplay between an individual's social and behavioural characteristics, the availability and structures of education and training providers, and the role of supporting governments' p. 282. I understand this "interplay" to clarify the interrelatedness between agency and structure.

2.14.1 Further descriptions and definitions of barriers

In their survey on adult education and training in Canada, MacKeracher et al. (2006) take the categories of barriers by Cross (1981) further, identifying situational barriers, institutional barriers, dispositional or attitudinal barriers, and academic barriers.

Similar to the descriptions provided by Desjardins and Rubinson (2013), Cross (1981) and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), the situational barriers are described as consisting of 'broad circumstantial conditions that hamper the ability of adult learners to gain access to and pursue learning opportunities' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 2). These conditions include, amongst others, multiple conflicting home responsibilities for work, children, family; lack of childcare

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services that are affordable and adequate; commitments to jobs; problems with transport; having a disability such as learning, sensory or mobility; and not receiving support from others (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

Institutional barriers are described as consisting 'of limitations inherent in the methods institutions use to design, deliver and administer learning activities' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 2). These limitations are related to the complexities of financial support, resources, negative attitudes, and recognition of prior learning (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

Dispositional or attitudinal barriers contribute to how students perceive their abilities to pursue and finish their field of study (MacKeracher et al., 2006). These perceptions are said to 'include low self-esteem, negative attitudes about being an adult learning – too old, too busy, too tired, too sick, not smart enough, not rich enough, don't have enough time, don't need any more education, don't have adequate language skills; and not interested' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 2).

Academic barriers are described as relating to the key skills required for successful learning such as 'literacy, numeracy, comprehension, 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). MacKeracher et al. (2006) also identified poor lecturing skills as a pedagogical barrier in that some lecturers/facilitators lack understanding of 'how adults learn' (p. 2).

2.15 Barriers to participation

2.15.1 Structural barriers

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) emphasise the significant effect of structural conditions in limiting individual agency, noting that 'these conditions play a substantial role in forming the circumstances faced by individuals and limit the feasible alternatives to choose from, and therefore they can 'bind' individual agency' (p. 196). This boundedness refers to structural and individual constraints such as family-, job- and institutional-related barriers (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

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'Structural barriers' are described as the way social and economic institutions impact on for example family social policy with regards to support via social policy, government funded education and training, to achieve equitable distribution of resources. (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013).

2.15.2 Institutional barriers

Cross (1981) describes institutional barriers as consisting 'of all those practices and procedures that excluded or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities' (p. 98). The author groups these practices into five problematic areas namely scheduling, location, interest and relevance of course content, procedural and time constraints, and limited information (Cross, 1981).

Financial aspects, a dearth of suitable courses and the scheduling thereof fall in the category of institutional barriers, as indicated by Rubenson and Desjardins (2009). Boeren et al. (2010) cite Cross, stating that institutional barriers are linked to the 'characteristics of the educational institution and educational opportunities' (p. 54).

MacKeracher et al. (2006) provide a comprehensive list of what they call programme or structural factors. According to the authors, these factors consist 'of limitations inherent in the methods institutions use to design, deliver and administer learning activities' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 4). These limitations are related to the complexities of financial support, resources, negative attitudes, recognition of prior learning and inadequate student support services (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

2.15.3 Individual barriers and dispositional individually-based barriers

As mentioned earlier, Desjardins and Milana (2007) consider individual constraints as those incidences when a student has difficulty to act when required to do so in the wake of facing a given circumstance. According to Cross (1981), dispositional barriers are linked to the individual's psychological characteristics (cited in Boeren, 2011). These barriers refer to how the student perceives him-/herself concerning how he/she experiences his/her learning based on previous learning experiences. It can be supposed that the way in which the student was

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involved with learning and the past learning environment contributes to the way in which he/she currently experiences learning.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) state that 'dispositional barriers refer to perceptions like little to gain by participation, 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). Thus, for them, 'Dispositional barriers can be seen as factors that restrict a person's capability and hence freedom to participate. Furthermore, dispositional barriers can be affected and even caused by structural barriers, such as institutional and situational ones' (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 196).

Desjardins and Rubenson (2013) elaborate on dispositional barriers as individually based in relation to the agency of individuals when it comes to choosing and acting within their daily circumstances. This is built on the main premise that individual agents make use of internal and external resources in realising things that are important to them, intentionally or unintentionally. They view dispositional barriers in two ways, referring to 'low resources' and the individual's belief that they have limited individual capabilities to utilise available resources. Dispositional barriers may exist consciously, as with personal preferences as they become known, or unconsciously, as is the case when bounded agency applies (Salling-Olesen, as cited in Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013).

MacKeracher et al. (2006) state that 'dispositional factors are also referred to as learner-inherent or attitudinal factors' (p. 5). They relate 'to learners' perceptions of their ability to seek out, register in, attend and successfully complete learner activities' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 5). Some factors mentioned by the authors are 'self-confidence, attitudes about self that may adversely affect learning, or prior negative experiences in learning activities' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 5).

2.15.4 Situational barriers

According to Cross (1981) 'situational barriers are those arising from one's situation in life at a given time' (p. 89). Situational factors such as lack of childcare, transportation, **etcetera**, are mentioned.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) found that institutional and dispositional barriers are more dominant than situational barriers. Distinguished here are barriers 'that are job or family related' (Desjardins & Milana, 2017, p. 9). MacKeracher et al. (2006) state that 'Situational barriers occur because of circumstances learners encounter in their current life situations' (p. 14). Indicative of situational barriers are scarcity of time, financial problems (such as money for transport, no car), 'multiple conflicting responsibilities for home, family, children and work', and transport problems, as cited in MacKeracher et al. (2006, p. 14). Situational factors, at times referred to as life factors (cited in MacKeracher et al., 2006) 'consist of broad circumstantial conditions that hamper the ability of adult learners to gain access to and pursue educational opportunities' (p. 4). Examples given, among many others, are travelling distance, family support, discretionary resources such as time, energy, finances, multiple roles and responsibilities with regard to work, family and community (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

Based on their findings, MacKeracher et al. (2006) make it clear that some factors fall within several categories at once, and may be institutional, situational and dispositional in nature, 'depending on the source of the problem' (p. 5). They give the example of financial support that is a situational barrier due to lack of funds, an institutional barrier when fees are high and extra funds are needed for additional resources, and a dispositional barrier when one must weigh the cost of participation 'against the anticipated benefits' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 5).

2.16 Overcoming barriers to participation

According to Desjardins and Rubenson (2013), barriers to participation are rooted in the specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts within which educational opportunities (access and participation to education and training) are organised. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) state that access to finances and learning opportunities (relevant to the individual's aspirations) can aid individuals to overcome barriers (p. 202). This relates especially to adult students in TVET colleges and their success.

Summary

In this section, I reviewed the theoretical concepts and perspectives relating to my research study on agency, access, structure, barriers to participation and success to construct a conceptual framework. The interrelatedness of these concepts was explained in terms of my

main primary sources - Giddens (1979, 1984) and Archer (2003) as well as secondary sources. I have used Cross (1981) as my primary source to show how agency is hindered by barriers. Secondary sources used in this regard were Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) and MacKeracher et al. (2006). The literature also shows how agency in its many facets can lead to overcoming barriers which is ultimately success.

SECTION THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

In this research study I adopted a qualitative semi-structured research approach which Bryman (2012, 2016) defines 'as a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a research strategy, it is broadly inductivist, constructionist, and interpretivist, but qualitative researchers do not always subscribe to all three of these features' (p. 380; p. 548). However, I used a deductive approach in my research methodology. The perceptions of the participants were the driving force of the interviews. As a researcher and lecturer at a TVET college simultaneously, I had a good understanding of the students' experiences related to access, barriers to participation and success.

3.2 Research site

I had chosen a Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET) College, in the Western Cape as my research site. The college employs academic, administrative and student support staff who aid and support students during their studies. My particular programme of choice (Primary Health) was in the exit National Qualification framework (NQF) Level 4 certificate (vocational) qualification which has been in existence since 2013 in the TVET sector.

3.3 Research participants and selection

3.3.1 Sample description

I selected 20 research participants who were the oldest in the class based on the following criteria: mature adult students registered for the National Certificate Vocational Level 4 programme and who had successfully completed the first two years of study – NQF Level 2 and NQF Level 3. The participants consisted of all the men (five) in the programme and the remainder of the sample were women (15) as the majority of the students are females in this particular programme.

3.3.2 Sampling strategies

3.3.2.1 Purposive sampling

I used purposive sampling to select my participants 'on the basis of knowledge of a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study' (Babbie 2013, p. 128). Babbie (2013) gives a further useful definition for purposive sampling as '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 most useful or representative' (p. 128) which was appropriate for my research as I know my adult students and work with them on a daily basis. I sampled participants in a strategic way relevant to the research goals and questions with clarity about the criteria for the participants, which might change over the course of the research. An advantage of this method is that there was a wide variety of participants 'who differ from each other in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research question' (Bryman 2012, p. 418). A disadvantage is that purposive sampling does not allow for generalization to a population.

I selected 20 research participants based on the following criteria: mature adult students, the oldest in the group, registered at a TVET College in the Western Cape, registered for the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) Level 4 Primary Health programme and who have successfully completed the first two years of study on the National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 2 and NQF Level 3. The participants needed to be registered at the TVET College where I conducted the research. The participants were within their final year of study and studying the National Certificate (Vocational) Level 4 Primary Health programme. My aim was to target the more mature students within the programme. The participants consisted of all the men (five) in the programme and the remainder were women (15) as the majority of the students are females in this particular programme.

3.3.2.2. Snowballing technique

Snowball sampling, as an example of purposive sampling, is defined by Babbie (2013) 'as a nonprobability sampling method whereby each person interviewed may be asked to suggest additional people for interviewing' (p. 129). If, for whatever reason, I was unable to find 20

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students to participate in the research study, I would have applied 'snowballing sampling' in that I would have asked the original participants to introduce me to other possible participants' (Babbie, 2013, p. 129; Bryman 2012, p. 424). Advantages are that 'snowballing sampling' lends itself to uncovering more information than initially anticipated by the researcher through a 'wide diversity of people' (Bryman 2012, p. 424) and 'it is able simultaneously to capitalize on and to reveal the connectedness of individuals in networks' (Bryman 2016, p. 329). A disadvantage is opposition or indifference to the research (Bryman 2016).

If any one of the questions presented to the students was not clearly understood, I suggested a likely answer to the participants by, if needed, using prompting as a technique. I made sure that I used this approach consistently throughout with all the participants once I applied it.

3.4 Method of data-gathering

3.4.1 Semi-structured interview

Babbie states that a 'qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry, including the topics to be covered' (Babbie, 2013, p. 346). By following a qualitative research approach, my research method included face to face semi structured interviews. Face to face semi structured interviews ensured that the required targeted group could be accounted for. The data that was collected can be verified personally.

Bryman (2016) offers a useful definition of a semi-structured interview as 'a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview guide but is able to vary the sequence of questions' (p. 156). Questions were more general, open ended in nature and allowed for a greater level of flexibility. I had a series of questions in its general form that I either kept to or moved away from depending on the responses from the participants. I was also able to vary the sequences of questions if needed. I tried not to lead the participants in any particular response direction during the interview (Bryman, 2012, p. 473; Bryman, 2016, p. 369- 370).

All conversations (in person or otherwise) with the aim of collecting data, were conducted in English. I acted consistently with all my participants and afforded each one a specific time

allocation in which to complete the semi structured interview. As such I was sensitive to the participants' time by being ready and having all the needed information with me. I kept my language informal but not casual and made the necessary effort to balance objectiveness and friendliness.

The focus of discussion was supported by the main research questions and aims. The information gathered from the participants was collected during the face to face semi structured interviews scheduled at a time which was mutually convenient to both parties and took place in natural and relaxed environments. I explained the use of all recording devices whether in text, video or voice recording. It was also made clear to participants that should they, for whatever reason, not wanted to continue with the interview, it would be stopped and would be recorded as either 'not done or incomplete' during the data capturing stage.

3.5 Research instrument

3.5.1 Interview Guide

I used an interview guide (Appendix A) as my research instrument to gather data which included a set list of open-ended questions. Each participant was asked to give his or her own unique answers (Babbie 2013). Bryman states that an interview guide is more useful because this 'brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered is much less specific than an interview schedule' (Bryman, 2012, p. 470).

There are both advantages as well as disadvantages in making use of the interview guide. The participant is not influenced by other participants as the interview takes place on a one-on-one basis and information shared remains confidential. As I conducted the interviews myself, there was a greater level of uniformity. The positive points include being able to record the participants own words; the participants are not influenced by other participants as the interview takes place on a one- on-one basis and information shared, remains confidential, as well as allowing for a greater level of flexibility (Babbie 2013, p. 346).

The disadvantages include the need for time, the need for specifically scheduled time periods, as both parties may not always be available at the same time and the information captured

during the interview while using the interview guide may be misunderstood and incorrectly transcribed.

3.6 Data Capturing

I recorded the interviews using an electronic recording device – a recorder.

3.7 Data analysis

According to Babbie (2013) 'the aim of data analysis is the discovery of patterns among the data, patterns that point to theoretical understandings of social life' (p. 396). Similarly, my aim of data analysis was to discover patterns in the data. Bryman (2016) suggests that coding of the data should take place as soon as possible as 'it is a mechanism for thinking about the meaning of data and for reducing the vast amount of data confronted with' (pp. 451-453).

I used the thematic data analysis approach to analyse my data and used the six-phase process as indicated by Braun and Clarke (2006:87) cited by Bryman et al. (2016): 'familiarising yourself with your data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report' (Bryman et al. 2016, p. 351). Bryman suggests a generic qualitative data analysis approach which includes: familiarization of data, initial coding, elaboration of codes into themes, evaluation of higher order codes or themes, examination of possible links and connections, and writing up of insights (2016, pp. 457-459).

3.7.1 Data processing

I transcribed all the interviews into text under the headings of interviewer and participant as suggested by Babbie (2013), 'the key process in the analysis of qualitative social research data is coding-classifying or categorizing individual pieces of data-coupled with some kind of retrieval system' (p. 396).

3.8 Research ethics statement (Ethical issues)

In accordance with the literature, I took into account ethical issues related to my research. Research ethics is important to consider as it is defined as 'conforming to the standards of

conduct of a given profession or group' (Bryman 2016, p. 32). Therefore, I aimed to not harm participants and protected their personal information and ensured that confidentiality was taken into account under 'informed consent' (Bryman 2016, pp. 34-36). I first gained permission from the participants to record the interviews and accepted that some may prefer not to be recorded.

I applied for consent from the institution which I selected as my research site. I prepared a letter for the participants which provided information about the research study. In this letter I committed to maintaining the confidentiality of participants' information (Babbie, 2013, p. 36). Scholars like Babbie (2013) emphasise the importance of confidentiality in research ethics. I prepared a consent form which the participants were required to sign upon agreement to participate in this study. I am keeping all consent documents in a safe place that no one has access to.

3.8.1 No harm to participants

I conducted my investigation in ways that would not cause any harm to the participants. Participation was secured on a voluntary basis with the participants' full understanding and knowledge of the research. The burdens and benefits of my research will be shared fairly within the broader community (Babbie 2013).

3.8.2 Voluntary Participation

I regard voluntary participation as important, critical, crucial, and mandatory. I explained that participation was voluntary and that their consent was required. Participants could withdraw during the research period if circumstances required it without giving any reasons (Babbie, 2013).

3.8.3 Informed Consent

I ensured that the participants understood what is meant by giving their consent in taking part in the research. As such I highlighted the purpose of the research, the extent thereof and the rights of the participants to withdraw at any time.

3.8.4 Consent from institution

I prepared a letter (Appendix B), an application of consent to conduct research at a TVET College in the Western Cape. In the information sheet I indicated that the data gathered would be stored for 5 years.

3.8.5 Consent from individual participants

I prepared an information sheet (Appendix C) which provided details about myself, why I was doing the research and what it was about. I also explained that confidentiality, anonymity, right to consent to participate and to withdraw from research would be guaranteed.

3.8.6 Consent from participants

I prepared a participant consent form which participants signed as an indication of their consent. In the form I made it clear what they were consenting to, e.g., participating in interview (Appendix D).

3.8.7 Anonymity and Confidentiality

I ensured that the personal information of the participants was concealed when I publish the research paper by using pseudonyms to conceal the identities of the participants (Babbie, 2013, p. 35). Babbie (2013) asserts that 'the protection of subjects' interests and well-being is the protection of their identity, especially in survey research (p. 35). Confidentiality is described by Babbie as ''the researcher can identify a given person's responses but promises not to do so publicly' (2013, p. 36). I was able to maintain confidentiality by not sharing any information about the participants with other persons and keeping the completed consent forms, and electronic recording secure during the course of the research and thereafter.

3.8.8 Data storage and maintenance

I will store all data in a secure place for five years after the completion of the research to secure safety and integrity of the data set.

SECTION FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The comprehensive review of the research literature by scholars provides a useful and informed framework to interpret and analyse the primary data collected (MacKeracher et al., 2006).

4.1 Data presentation and analysis

The data collected in this study is classified as qualitative and was obtained using semi-structured interviews. The presentation of the data reflects mainly the comments by the participants, which were made while the researcher listened intently and tried to process the stories related by the participants. Active processing while listening made it possible to identify 'moments of significance' in the participants' narratives. A moment of significance is similar to what Archer (2003) refers to as an 'internal conversation'. To identify moments of significance, the researcher listened for a pivotal experience that drove or motivated the participant to want to change his or her situation, and to make the decision to study further. In identifying that experience, the researcher hoped to be able to show what the 'push' or 'why' factors are that drive agency or enable a person to overcome barriers, so that the barrier is experienced as not as formidable as it once may have seemed.

Agency may have to be developed, and barriers have to be overcome, in order for anyone to achieve a particular goal. The 'moment of significance' identified for most participants provides a point of reference which may inform the usefulness of this study.

The main research question guiding the data collection and data analysis process was: '*What are the relationships between access, participation and barriers to participation among mature, adult students at a TVET college in the Western Cape?'*

The data analysis is based on the seven steps indicated by Bryman (2012; 2016) as relevant to qualitative data analysis. They are:
- Familiarise oneself with the data to be analysed.
- Code the data.
- Build the codes into themes.
- Identify subthemes.
- Identify interconnectedness between themes and subthemes.

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- Write down any insights gained.
- Explain the importance and significance of themes.

This section includes a description of the context and background of the research participants, followed by a discussion of the following key themes:
- Adult students as agents
- Agents, agency, intentionality and access to TVET college
- Agency, barriers to access and participation, and addressing barriers

4.2 Context and participants' profiles

Out of the 20 students, ten described themselves as Xhosa in terms of cultural identity, nine described themselves as Coloured and one described herself as White, according to the old (pre-1994) apartheid classification system. To protect the identity of the participants and for confidentiality, I used pseudonyms. Below I present a brief profile of each participant interviewed, including the reasons why they had chosen to study and some of the barriers they faced.

Charles is a 24-year-old Coloured male from the Western Cape whose mother tongue is Afrikaans. He has no dependants. He dropped out of high school after passing Grade 10. He and his mother live alone in Ravensmead. He worked for two-and-a-half years from nine to five making ends meet. He has one older employed sister. He felt that he needed to be educated to provide for his family and himself and become somebody in life. He was encouraged by his mother to study to advance his life and not to be a 'no-body'. His first choice was another programme, but when he was turned away because it was full, he turned to Primary Health and was accepted into the programme. He struggles to get to campus by 08:00 when the first class starts and to attend classes regularly. He cycles or walks to college.

Thabo, aged 23, is an isiXhosa-mother-tongue-speaking Xhosa male from the Western Cape. He has no dependents. He has one older sibling who is a teacher. He lives with his parents in Khayelitsha. He failed matric and took a gap year before coming to the college to study again. He applied to study after his gap year because his dream is to become a doctor. An important barrier for him is understanding medical terminology in English.

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Senzo, aged 22, is an isiXhosa mother-tongue-speaking Xhosa male from the Western Cape. He has no dependants. He lives in the student hostel in Parow. He completed matric, but his marks were not very good. He did not qualify for entrance to university and decided to study through the TVET programme to improve his marks. Initially he struggled with living on his own in the hostel and having to fend for himself, which caused him to become demotivated at times.

Terence is a 22-year-old Afrikaans-mother-tongue-speaking Coloured male from the Western Cape. He lives in Kuilsriver with his mother. He has no dependants. He does not have matric. He worked for himself for a few years before studying at the college. He applied to the college to study, hoping to be accepted to get a higher education so that he could earn more money. He studies from 12:00 until 02:00 because noise pollution is an issue in his living environment.

Jason is a 19-year-old English-mother-tongue-speaking Coloured male from the Western Cape. He has no dependants. He came with both his parents to apply for the course. He told his parents that he wanted to study this course. At school, he did not study the subjects that he wanted to focus on. He lives with his parents and his brother. His parents influenced him to study further and to work hard to be successful. He did not finish matric and always wanted to go into the medical field. He is the youngest student of the cohort. A barrier for him is getting to college at 08:00 because of train delays and cancellations.

Lindiwe is a 43-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. She has two dependants. She is married. Her husband encouraged her to study and supports her financially. She lives in Nyanga. She was afraid that she would not be successful because of her age and because she had last been in school so long ago.

Zameka, a 36-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape, is married and in the process of getting divorced. She has two dependants. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. She was staying in Caledon and moved to Khayelitsha. She has matric but the results were not good so she decided to study further for self-empowerment and so that she could work for the future of her children.

Nompumelelo is a 34-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape. She has one dependant. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. She thought that she was too old to study and was discouraged by seeing all the young people in the class, but she took the opportunity so that she could 'be

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herself' and study further for herself. Her sister, brothers and cousin support her. She lives with her boyfriend who allows her time to study, while her child lives with her sister. She has matric, but her results were not good. She decided to study to improve her results. Finances to travel to college is a barrier to participation.

Analo is a 33-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape. She has one dependant who is in crèche. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa and she lives in Khayelitsha, which has a high level of noise pollution. Her husband passed away. Her guardian supports her financially. She is determined to make a success of her life by studying further. She experienced a lot of stress emotionally and financially after the passing of her husband because finances decreased. She had transport difficulties, saying that if her bus is full, she has to wait another two hours for the next one. If that bus is also full, she must take a taxi, which costs more money. This situation causes her to arrive late at college.

Asakhe, is a 32-year-old Xhosa female from the Eastern Cape, Johannesburg. She has two dependants. Her mother pushed her to go to college. She now lives in Mfeleni, Philippi, which is far from the college. She arrives home late after a day at college and then needs to take care of both family responsibilities and studies. She thought at first that she was too old to go back to school because there were so many younger people there. Her brother and sister support her financially. She decided to study to create a better future for her children. She constantly struggles with a place to stay in Cape Town.

Sisipho is a 32-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape. She has two dependants. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. Before her husband passed away, he encouraged her to study further. She supports herself financially with her own business. She thought she was too old to study but came back to study after ten years to earn more money so that she could change her life. Adapting to student life was difficult for her; she could no longer help her son with homework and had to organise aftercare for him. Family responsibilities are a barrier to full participation.

Thuli is a 32-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape. She has one dependant who is at a crèche. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. She is supported by her family and lives in Khayelitsha. Her mother looks after her child when she arrives late from college, and at times she has to take time off from college to take care of her child.

Sarah is a 30-year-old White female with one dependant. Her home language is English. Her mother supports her financially and emotionally. Her mother is a nursing sister who works in Gauteng. Her parents are divorced. She lives with her aunt and uncle in Brackenfell. She was determined to study and be successful because she was told a lot in her past that she would fail because of her age and who she associated with.

Siziphiwe is 29-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape. She has no dependants. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa and she lives in Khayelitsha. After college hours, she used to have to take care of her sister's children, but now they are in a crèche. She struggles with English. Her sister supports her financially.

Zola is 29-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape. She has no dependants. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. She is supported by her sister. She makes extra cash for herself by selling things. Her parents have passed away. She travels by taxi to college from Khayelitsha. She wants to improve her educational standard.

Thandokazi is a 29-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape with no dependants. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. She is motivated to study by the support and encouragement of her mother who never went to school. She lives in Crossroads. She failed matric a few times. She wants to complete her matric to earn more money so that she can contribute to the household income. Transport is a barrier because she needs to board the bus at 06:50 every morning.

Nikki is a Coloured female from the Western Cape, aged 30 years, with two dependants. She is married and supported by her husband, and lives in Ravensmead. Her mother tongue is Afrikaans. She decided to study again so that she could earn more money after her studies. She struggles with English as the medium of studying. Barriers to participation are finances, being a housewife, a mother, a wife and a student who had a miscarriage in Level 4. She was absent a lot from college. She can only tend to her studies after everyone is asleep at night.

Amanda, aged 28 years, is a Xhosa female with one dependant. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. Her family and her mother support her. She lives with her mother and younger sibling who encouraged her to study because he was already studying at a TVET College. She does not have Grade 12. She struggles financially to get to college every day.

Buhle is a 28-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape with one dependant. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa. Her sister and her boyfriend support her, emotionally as well as financially. Her child is with her aunt in the Eastern Cape. She lives with her boyfriend in Khayelitsha. She passed Grade 12, but not very well and wanted to go to university to study nursing. Her studies are affected by having to get up very early in the morning to get to the train station. She fears being robbed or physically attacked, so she goes later to the station and arrives late at the college.

Sisanda is a 28-year-old Xhosa female from the Western Cape with one dependant. Her mother tongue is isiXhosa and she lives in Dunoon. She does not get a NSFAS bursary because she previously studied in another department and was unsuccessful, because she found the work too difficult; as a result, she now she has to pay for herself. She works weekends to support herself and her sister helps. She is redoing Grade 12 after failing it. Her sister takes care of her child after hours during the week when she is at college. It is a struggle for her to support herself by working and being a student.

From the above, it is clear that the participants faced multiple barriers but were motivated by the prospect of improving their situation in life as they thought and deliberated about their future.

In sections 4.3, 4.4. and 4.5. I present a discussion, analysis and interpretation of the data that I collected from the participants whom I interviewed. I discuss adult students as agents; agency, intentionality and access to TVET college, and barriers to access and participation based on the primary data in relation to the literature.

4.3 Adult students as agents

Archer (2003) asserts that individuals as human agents 'possess properties and powers' which are 'distinct from those pertaining to social reforms. Among them features 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).

The following responses show acts of deliberating, believing and intending expressed by the participants. Senzo, Siziphiwe and Charles demonstrated deliberating as they weighed up the pros and cons of further studies:

I was once in matric; so, what happened was when I got to Grade 12 my marks were not good, so I couldn't qualify for university. So as a person who is determined to go far in the future, I had to make a decision; either to stay back or do something about it. So that's why I came to [this college] to actually study this course because I knew that I wanted to do something that's health related. Seeing that this course is more health related and it will take me to where I want to go, so I decide to come (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Studying is the key to success and you can't be empowered in life without it. It's because it motivates me to study further if I want to, so I can have the qualifications I need. [I want] to pass my Level 4 and to get a job or study further (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

I had time, after I dropped out at school, I had time to work and see how life is outside. So, I didn't have high education or good certificates. I didn't have any papers to get a good job. I was working 9 to 5 making ends meet. That was like proof to me that I was never going to get anywhere in life if I didn't have the right education; to get the things I want in life, like for instance provide for others or buy a car. So, I decided to come back and get educated to get a nice certificate, qualification, so at the end of the day I could provide for my family and for myself (Charles, Interview, August 8, 2018).

Sisipho demonstrated thinking and believing when she decided to study again after working for some time:

Previously I was working at the clinic as an HIV counsellor. And what I saw was that if you are not educated, you won't be paid enough money for survival, so I decided to come back to school so I could change my life. I wanted to be a nurse, and this is the starting point for me. I want to study further so I can be a qualified nurse (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

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Thabo took a gap year after failing matric. His thought processes during this time demonstrated fairly deep thinking about the trajectory of his life and what it would take to get where he really wanted to be.

> First of all, … I become very cross at myself when I failed my matric and I was very angry and I was down. And then I took the gap year and when I took the gap year, I thought 'What I'm going to do about my life?' Then I thought I must stand up and try and find something that is interesting. That is why I came to [this college] and I heard about [this programme] and I say, 'No man, in my life I want to be a doctor, because I'm also good at Life Science, and HBM [Human Body and Mind] is the same as Life Science. That's what make me to proceed. I'm very comfortable now because I see the light at the end of the tunnel (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

Analo and Zola demonstrated intending when they made it their intention to study further:

> It's because of I want my child to have a better education, because the time I was studying my parents didn't have much money. So, if I study before I could be something, so I decided to study, now I got a child. My intention - I want to study further so I that I can have maybe a diploma, or degree. I can't just have a certificate (Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

> I feel very happy because it was my intention to come to school to further my study to have that opportunity to have that thing that could inspire me in future (Zola, Interview, 14 August, 2018).

4.4. Agency, intentionality and access to TVET college

Intentionality is an important element of agency as it explains and interprets the reasons that people assert their agency to access education. Without a sense of purpose – an intention – there would be no need for an act of agency. The findings reveal that agency was enacted by the participants, not just once, but in 'a continuous flow of conduct', as Giddens, (1979, p. 55) puts it. Some participants had previous knowledge and experience of institutional training, but as

their comments show, their previous studies did not have a significant impact upon their lives and goals. It is only when the realisation dawned on them that acquiring an education is a key act of agency - and one that stood the greatest chance of positively influencing their lives - that the relevance of the college and their studies became clear to them. In this regard Buhle and Sisipho expressed themselves as follows:

It is difficult to get a job if you are uneducated so that's why I decided to study (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Previously, I was working at the clinic as an HIV Counsellor. What I saw was that if you are not educated, you won't be paid enough money for survival, so I decided to come back to school so that I could change my life (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Archer's (2003) ideas are pertinent here for interpreting ways in which participants experience themselves as agents in order to make changes in their lives. An outsider may even be able to assess an individual's chances of success at college in relation to the degree of agency demonstrated at the individual level, both at the outset of their endeavour and throughout its duration. Through continually renewing acts of agency, individuals show that they are strongly motivated to succeed or attain a particular goal. One could argue that a college provides the ideal avenue for the exercise of agency, as it is a place where agency may be productively directed in ways that enhance the person's entire life.

The stories participants related in terms of agency show an awareness of what Powell and McGrath (2014) refer to as a 'life project' (p. 216). A life project does not always go according to the agent's initial intention. The data shows that participants embarking on their return to further education experienced a tentative and at times nebulous journey that was not always coherent. In most cases, the course of action adopted is imprecise, especially at first, while the person endeavours to work out, refine and accomplish goals (Powell & McGrath, 2014).

Thandokazi, for example, provided a glimpse of how learning, although valuable, may sometimes be a long and trying journey for some:

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First, I failed my matric, so I tried to do it again, over and over, but still failed…
So, I decided this 2016, let me just focus on my studying, go back and start over
again, in order to get my matric again (Tandokazi, Interview, August 22, 2018).

Analo related her journey as follows:

Because of now, as I said, the father of my child passed away, so the time he was
alive … so the thing was easy, but now when my child doesn't have something
and I think it's stressing me, and then now I can't be working hard at my studies.
But it's not like I'm failing. I'm not failing; it's not like I studied two years back
(Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

4.4.1 Intention to complete matric

A strong reason why many participants chose access to the TVET college and study was the
intention to complete a matric-equivalent qualification in Primary Health, which would act as
a pathway into further qualifications in this field. This was expressed by Terence, Thandokazi,
Jason and Thabo as follow:

Basically, because I wanted to, like, further myself in life because I don't have
matric, so this is a NCV [National Certificate Vocational] course. So, I thought
I'd do this and then go further again; so that is, like, why. I want to study further
and get a higher education to earn more money (Terence, Interview, August 15,
2018).

My intention is to study further in order to get my degree so I can get a better job;
for health reasons and to help my family and the community (Tandokazi,
Interview, August 22, 2018).

[This course is] actually the building blocks for me to start off, because I didn't
finish matric, so I actually got, like, an education so now I can move on from there
(Jason, Interview, August 24, 2018).

I don't have matric; [I want] to study further. First of all, ma'am, when I started this course, I was a little bit afraid of what - maybe, what new information I was going to get. As the time goes, I met with very comforting lecturers and very lovely lecturers, and started to get interested in learning more of what does Primary Health really mean (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

4.4.2 A larger vision and intentionality

Some participants did not complete matric at high school, yet the data shows they practiced intentionality in deciding to complete matric at college and pursue nursing. Nompumelelo, Sisanda and Amanda showed how having a sense of the future and a vison of their lives and future careers spurred their intentionality:

I've decided to study because I want to have a matric certificate. I didn't do well on my matric, so I decided to study to improve. I want to study this programme so that I can help others; if I go further to study, to do nursing. Once I have my Level 4 certificate, I want to study further (Nompumelelo, Interview, August 27, 2018).

Because I failed Grade 12, so I decided to study over and not to redo grade 12 again. Because I want to be a nurse, I want to study further (Sisanda, Interview, September 13, 2018).

I wanted to further my studies and I want to do something more important with my life, so I can take care of my children. As I said, because I want the foundations of nursing so that I can go to be a nurse. Since it is equivalent to Grade 12, it's so that I can get the certificate and apply for what I want and that is nursing at other institutions (Amanda, Interview, August 30, 2018).

4.4.3 A specific goal and intentionality

Intentionality to become a nurse is evident as a strong reason for exercising agency to access the TVET college. The participants' responses indicate that they had a clear purpose in pursuing

a career in Primary Health. They believed that a career as a nurse would provide personal and career satisfaction:

> Firstly, I want to further my studies so that, um, I can be able to achieve my career. My intention is to study further doing the nursing (Thuli, Interview, August 29, 2018).

> Firstly, I decided to study because I wanted to be self-empowered so that I can work for the future of my children because I was uneducated. I only have matric. So, when I looked around, I realised matric won't help me, so I had to study further. I want to study further in health, in nursing (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

> I decided to study again because I want to better my education and I want to have a better job. I said [this course] is the first step that would lead me to nursing. As I said, I always wanted to be a nurse. I will study further (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

> I wanted to do nursing because my mother is a nurse. I want to go work in the medical field and study further and then start working (Sarah, Interview, August 6, 2018).

> I study this programme because it's the basics of nursing which I want to do. To add it to my matric results and apply to university (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

> It was difficult for me to get a better job and to get where else I want to be. I want to improve my education standard. Primary Health, it's a good course and it can put me somewhere else. Like I said before, I want to be a nurse one day. It is the basic for my career, to study further. I feel very happy because it was my intention to come to school to further my study, to have that opportunity to have that thing that could inspire me in future (Zola, Interview, August 14, 2018).

4.4.4 Agency and human freedom

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Archer (2003) states that humans have degrees of freedom according to which they can determine their own course of action. The extent to which individuals adjusts their attitude to the degree of freedom they aim to enjoy will influence how many of the barriers they are able or willing to face and overcome.

This research shows that participants were not willing to let go of the freedom that financial wellbeing would bestow on them, and showed resilience and fortitude in overcoming obstacles to that freedom. The participants also showed that in exercising their agency they were exercising their freedom. Through so doing they started to develop an initially tentative sense of purpose for their lives. They showed awareness of how freedom to choose developed and sharpened their sense of purpose, and they enlivened that sense of purpose by taking appropriate action (Giddens, 1984). A value that human freedom gives to an individual is the ability to explore and satisfy the need for self-worth, and to choose a path of self-actualisation. However, human freedom cannot flourish where there is a lack of resources and opportunity. As Terence response reveal, where such resources exist, a student can exercise freedom and go about improving him-or herself:

> Basically, because I wanted to, like, further myself in life, because I don't have matric. So, this is a NCV course, so I thought I do this and then go further again; so that is like, why (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Jason felt that at school he was not able to study what he wanted. His choices widened when he came to college and he saw that the opportunity to make choice, interpreted here as freedom, would help him do something with his life:

> I started studying when … just after I left school, so it was like, how can I say, it was the next option for me to do because I just left school and at school, I wasn't actually given the subjects that I wanted. So, it wasn't an option for me to go into the field that they were going to place me. I feel that is the experience I can gain, and so I can actually do something with my life and maybe get a job or study further and get qualifications (Jason, Interview, August 24, 2018).

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For Zameka and Buhle, the opportunity to study Primary Health would give them the freedom to live out their dream of becoming nurses:

> Firstly, I decided to study because I wanted to be self-empowered so that I can work for the future of my children because I was uneducated, I only have matric so when I looked around, I realised matric won't help me, so I had to study further (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

> I applied for this course because at the time I was at high school my grades were a mess, so I didn't pass Grade 12. So, I decided to come here so that I can qualify to go to university to continue to do nursing (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

4.4.5 Agency and the capability of learning

Giddens (1984) argues that people have to possess the capability of doing the things they wish to do and of applying themselves to their tasks. Agency is not, in other words, a mere intention or willingness to act; it has to be expressed in action, which requires some ability. However, as the participants demonstrated, agency often begins tentatively, and may be accompanied by apprehension and self-doubt. Thabo's earlier remark in relation to intention to complete matric serves to illustrate this:

> I don't have matric; [I want] to study further. First of all, ma'am, when I started this course, I was a little bit afraid of what - maybe, what new information I was going to get. As the time goes, I met with very comforting lecturers and very lovely lecturers, and started to get interested in learning more of what does Primary Health really mean (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

This shows that Thabo had the latent capability to learn, but fear and a lack of confidence made him doubtful of his ability to do so. It was the supportive environment that assured Thabo he had the capability to handle new information, and enabled him to keep engaging in agentic acts.

4.4.6 Agency and internal conversations

The data from participants shows that when they faced difficult moments in their lives, they were able to review and reflect upon their key values, desires and concerns and focus on these to embolden themselves to act and restore purpose in their lives. Archer (2003) describes these moments of reflection as the 'internal conversation' (p. 16) or self-talk that individuals go through, that ultimately define character.

The data shows how participants underwent this internal conversation and, in some cases, experienced a 'rebirth' of character and values, which empowered them. They were able to look reflectively at their lives and decide what to do to cause a better alternative outcome than they had hitherto experienced. Terence provides an example of an internal conversation:

So, I thought, I do this and then go further again; so that is like, why. I want to study further and get a higher education to earn more money (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Many participants engaged in self-talk, some in the face of critical and negative comments from others as expressed by Sisipho:

The negative emotions that I had is when a person asks you about the Primary Health and then you explain it and they say that you are wasting your time. You should've gone somewhere else than wasting your time here (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

However, the internal conversation can also be encouraged by others, so that some end up making choices that are surprising even to themselves. The encouragement alone will not do it; there has to be an internal recognition of the need to do something with one's life, as Terence shows in the following excerpt:

[I was] lost, lost. I was like what am I going to do in life now. I think everyone reaches that age where you, like [think] what am I going to do? And then most of my friends were studying, and they told me to study; it's like your friends set a goal for you, also. As I said, I was kind of introvert also, so now I just feel easier about everything and everything around me also, more confident. I never thought I was going to study further. I was actually working so I never thought - I thought like,

just apply and see, and that's also a reason. I use to be lazy for study but now it's like, nice now. (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018)

4.4.7 Agency and making use of resources

Participants made use of inner and outer resources. Optimism is one of the inner resources. According to Hitlin & Elder (2006), optimism is a component of agency. The data collected in this study confirms research by Hitlin and Long (2009) which found that a positive attitude enhances agency. Sarah communicated how she had learned to use her time wisely on campus as she became more optimistic about her studies:

> Well, I got some explanation from my mother about the subject and then I understood a little bit better than before, and now I understand better because I passed, *t*hus far. So, Level 2, I used to go home early, Level 3 I stayed a little longer and now I just stay until the last minute. I don't stay out late anymore, and I write down my own notes and pay attention to what's happening in class (Sarah, Interview, August 6, 2018).

Lindiwe used her time by going over her work that she learned on campus and asking for help:

> Nothing much, but in Level 3 there was too much work. I dealt with it by making sure that every day I went through what I had learned that day. My friends and I help each other solve the problems with the [subject] that I'm struggling with now (Lindiwe, Interview, August 29, 2018).

> I struggled with [subject]. I tried the lecturer to be more specific because it was the first time that I was doing it, so it was very challenging for me, but as the teacher see that more of the students are struggling with it so she tried to be broader so that we can understand it. And I passed it on the second term. Level 3 was great. Level 4 it was [trickier] at the beginning but now it's fine (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Siziphiwe and Analo used peer support to follow up on work when they did not understand something:

To accept sometimes that you don't understand everything, and I deal with it by following up with peers so I can understand (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

Not now, but firstly, I was struggling a lot with [subject] but as the time goes by [things improved]. That time I was frustrated because when the lecturer is there in the class, so the people who knows this subject, so she was just like, she's moving. But the next year I got Ms. [lecturer] and then she just taught us that you don't understand, and I ask the other students to help me because I couldn't even say the other word. So, it was so difficult for me sometimes. I decide to quit but I said, no I won't do that. I decided I'm going to be strong, not like the other subject that I'm doing I did know before. I just learn*ed* it here so I have to (Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

Zola initiated extra classes and study groups:

I'm giving myself extra time, extra classes at school and I'm organising some groups to have that study groups, so that we can improve our education standards (Zola, Interview, August 14, 2018).

Terence, Buhle and Lindiwe shared how their lecturers served as an invaluable resource in helping them overcome their barriers:

Positively, it is kind of overwhelming to see how much they know and they can actually teach you, because you can sit in class thinking this person know so much. They are teaching us and like sometime it's like we only get one period per day with this person, like, can't they teach us more*? S*ometime the periods are very good, and you walk out of the class with a bit of knowledge, was that even enough that I was walking out with? Can't I focus a bit more - it's really good, the lecture itself (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Yes, they have the subject knowledge and are qualified because they make the lectures so that we can understand (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

They have enough knowledge and they can teach (Lindiwe, Interview, August 29, 2018).

Senzo's experience was that lecturers were passionate about their work:

All the lecturers they are very good at what they do, they are very passionate, every single subject (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Jason and Thabo shared how thorough and committed the lecturers were:

Most of the time they give enough information (Jason, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Yes, our lecturers are professionally qualified because they know very well how to teach and they explain the information to us correctly. Even if a student maybe doesn't understand the question or the work, they try all their means to make sure that each and every student do understand the work, so at the end of the year they could pass (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

It is clear that it was not only the knowledge of the lecturers that impressed these participants, but their dedication to their jobs and their caring attitude toward the students. Thandokazi, Zameka and Lindiwe shared how lecturers cared about participants:

My experience of my lecturers [is that] they are very supportive and also, I have experienced that if you don't come to school, you fall behind. But they make sure that you stayed on the track all the time (Tandokazi, Interview, August 22, 2018).

My friends told me that [this college] can help me take this course. I was in [another] college before where I started to do this course. Then my lecturer referred me to this campus because it was nearer to my husband and I was staying in Caledon and wanted to be closer (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

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The lecturers know what they are talking about and my experiences with them are good (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

4.4.8 Agency and support from family

Families acted as tremendous resource for some participants, giving them the encouragement they needed to continue when their own inner resources flagged. Senzo was supported by his family:

My family was very supportive; is very supportive of any decisions I want to take. So, like when I failed matric, they were supporting me in what I want to do. So, I decided, I did a lot of research, and came across this, and then I decided, and then they supported me with the decision. (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Sisanda, Nompumelelo, Buhle and Zola were helped by their sisters respectively:

My sister helped me to apply and she's always there for me when I want to do something. I didn't get the bursary – I had to pay for myself. I didn't get the bursary because I did study at [this college] before, but I found it very difficult and dropped out (Sisanda, Interview, September 13, 2018).

She (my sister) is making a small business to sell perfumes so when she has money, she gives me and when she doesn't, I ask my boyfriend to give me money (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

My sister helped me a lot because my child was staying with her in Langa (Nompumelelo, Interview, August 27, 2018).

It [my environment] contributes a lot, because when I'm studying, the children they go to the other room and my sister give me space when they go to the other rooms and turn off the TV (Zola, Interview, August 14, 2018).

Lindiwe was supported by her husband:

My husband supported me. I heard about it from one of my friends (Lindiwe, Interview, August 29, 2018).

Sarah was supported by her mother:

My mother is helping pay for my studies so that made it possible. Well, in studying itself, and some emotional support because if I tell my mother about my marks and studies then she encourages me (Sarah, Interview, August 06, 2018).

4.4.9 Agency and resilience

The data shows that participants exercise resilience on a daily basis as they struggle to make ends meet, manage homes and study. Thandokazi and Senzo expressed resilience in the following ways:

I describe myself as a hard worker. In fact, I was a hard worker and am still a hard worker, and I'm not a quitter. Once I start with something I make sure I finish it. I don't just leave it like that, I actually finish it (Tandokazi, Interview, August 22, 2018).

[…] one thing I learned about myself is I'm a very determined person, I don't fall back easily, I learned from my mistakes and, ja, like I believe that. (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

4.5 Agency, barriers to access and participation, and addressing barriers

This research has argued that agency cannot stand alone as a way of understanding the behaviour of individuals who desire to change their circumstance. In this regard agency refers to the 'how' of needing to change, but there is also a 'why' element that spurs on agency. Giddens (1994) states that agency refers to the capability of people to do things for themselves and not simply to intend to do things. For this, there has to be an underlying sense of purpose.

Participants demonstrated a keen awareness of the 'why' factors that prompted their agency. Without a good reason to take an action, people easily lose interest in sustaining the action over

time. In this study, participants were able to overcome their barriers because they were clear about their overall purpose.

This research shows that it is the 'push factors' (why) that most influence agency. Should the push factor be absent or of low intensity, agency will be impacted. For example, Nikki encountered delays in her studies due to falling pregnant during high school. In the end, having a baby and an insufficient income was a reasonable push factor for her to explore ways to improve her education and find a better job opportunity:

> I didn't finish matric when I was at the secondary school. I fell pregnant and then I looked after the baby. I went to work and then work was easy and the salary was good at that point in time. And then after I just didn't get the satisfaction of earning that little salary anymore and then I decided to come and study, because I wanted to become a midwife (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Time and again, participants showed that barriers were overcome by the strength or urgency of the push factor in their lives. The push factors drove them to take definitive action to change their circumstance. Capability may be measured by the extent to which the push factor triggers the kind of action that will orchestrate a meaningful change. This research provides highlights from the lives of the participants where they enacted their capabilities and experienced positive changes in their behaviour. Their own changed behaviour encouraged them to face the challenging moments as they battled to overcome the real and constraining barriers. Zameka stated that to become self-empowered was a core push factor, which she knew she could attain only through education. This meant to take action, not merely to feel motivated:

> Firstly, I decided to study because I wanted to be self-empowered so that I can work for the future of my children, because I was uneducated. I only have matric so when I looked around, I realised matric won't help me, so I had to study further (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Barriers to study do not mean an incapacity to achieve, but can either affirm or disempower the overarching sense of purpose. A strong sense of purpose empowers the individual to overcome obstacles and reach their goals. Barriers also create learning opportunities in which Thabo, for

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example, was able to develop insight and build skills. Thabo learned that overcoming obstacles was not easy:

[…] first of all, it was not easy, but I learned that in life you have to push hard. Although sometimes maybe you can, maybe, fall down, in life you have to push hard. And what I learned about myself is that I'm a quick learner and I'm capable in doing what I want in life (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

Most participants were able to identify their many and varied barriers, and all had developed a variety of skills to overcome them. Comments show that some participants simply accommodated the barriers, possibly not realising their own potential to develop the knowledge and skills to remove them. In most cases, however, participants found all sorts of ways to overcome their barriers, based on their continued determination. In overcoming their barriers, they had developed knowledge, the skill of endurance and tremendous perseverance. Zenzo and Buhle expressed themselves as follows:

Positive, I was very proud of myself that I actually was able to do something after the downfall of matric and I actually excelled in my studies. I did very good. I was proud of myself that I was able to get a few distinctions at the end of the year. (Senzo, Interview 15, August, 2018).

The time I came here I had a low self-esteem but now I saw that I improved my self-esteem. I believe in myself and I don't go to other people to check what they do. So now I believe in what I do (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Activating agency for something as significant as a course of study changes people, and opens a window through which people begin to view the future differently, as can be seen in comments by Lindiwe and Zameka:

Before, I didn't think that I would make it to the college and I didn't think that I would pass. But now, I can see that I can do it. I can still go further and succeed. (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

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Before I said, okay, I have my matric results. But for me, to live a better life I have to go to school to study further. By doing that I was trying to empower myself to get more skills. And now, in this situation, I believe I am going to reach my goals for a better future (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Thabo revealed that the male students experienced a disadvantage, sensing themselves to be 'overpowered' by the women in class. However, he showed that by working together, the males and the females were able to overcome the barrier of misunderstandings and learning difficulties:

Sometimes, since we are a few men in our class, we feel like some ladies … sometimes girls are trying to overpower us and our views are not taking seriously because they are the majority in class. We try our best to read the point and work with them, so that they can see the view of our opinion so we come with better solutions, especially with discussions or group work (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

When participants apply at the TVET College to study, there is an element of planfulness. Hitlin and Elder (2006) draw on Clausen, who developed 'the concept of planful competence, an individual characteristic that guides agentic action across the life course' (p. 41). Lindiwe demonstrated her planfulness as follows:

I decided to study again because I want to better my education and I want to have a better job. I said [this course] is the first step that would lead me to nursing as I said I always wanted to be a nurse. I will study further (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

4.5.1 Structural barriers

Powell (2013) maintains that in the literature concerning the TVET sector, there is a stronger emphasis on 'structure: the college system, the institution and the economy' than on human agency (p. 60).

Financial reasons, a lack of appropriate courses, the scheduling of these courses, transport challenges and high costs, amongst many other factors, feature as structural barriers according to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009). These authors categorise broad structural barriers into 'institutional and situational barriers' (p. 196). Citing Cross (1981), Boeren et al. (2010) stated that institutional barriers are linked 'to the characteristics of the educational institution and educational opportunities' (p. 54). Cross (1981) describes institutional barriers as consisting 'of all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities' (p. 98). The author groups these practices into five areas; 'scheduling problems, problems with location or transportation, lack of courses that are interesting, practical, or relevant; procedural problems and time requirements; lack of information about programs and procedures' (Cross, 1981, p. 104).

Scholars (Giddens, 1979, 1984; Archer, 2003) argue that the individual uses agency to access structures, which may be constraining or enabling. In respect to this study, participants encountered both constraining and enabling aspects in the various structures that affected their lives while pursuing studies. What kept them going in the face of constraining moments was their resilience, fueled by a strong sense of purpose and a sense of the necessity of attaining their goals. In facing these structural constraints, they were able to unlock structurally enabling resources embedded in the structures they had access to. At first, many of these constraining aspects in the structures that affected them seemed insurmountable, but through their own determination and persistence they found ways to overcome. One of the biggest structural constrains was transport difficulties which resulted in their late arrival home in the evenings after classes. Terence expressed his challenges as follows:

> The time frames are the worst, and the travelling. When we get home, it is like, late, like, how do I say, internet cafés and resources are closed, is not always available that time of the day (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Siziphiwe turned her transport challenges into an opportunity to study.

> I travel about half an hour from Khayelitsha and when there are issues it takes about an hour. And when I'm sitting on the bus I can study and sometimes I get home late and then the library is closed (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

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Analo showed how crime affects transport, causing her to frequently miss the first period of the day. Crime may be considered a social problem that has become a structural barrier for many.

> It [travelling] is very difficult. It's not easy at all because of the trains. The people are taking the cables, so now they make the queue long at the taxi rank, so we have to wait there for long queues and sometimes we missed two or one period. So, it's not easy at all. And then if you going to wait for the bus - because Khayelitsha it's a big place it's not just like a small place - if the bus is coming to me, it's already full. So I must wait two hours there, and then after 7 there is no other busses, so I have to have money for the taxi again. It affected my studies a lot, especially now in Level 4, because it depends on the lecturers. This year I struggle a lot, especially English because that's the only period, if you late she doesn't allow you to go in, but the others are fine (Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

The study suggests that the agency applied by the participants was of such a nature that they were able to endure the negative by 'acting otherwise' (Giddens, 1984, p. 56), so that they could attain alternative outcome for their lives. Zameka 'acted otherwise' by working hard and not giving up:

> I don't let barriers get me down. I struggle with the computer, but I am fighting to learn more. (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Nompumelelo decided to act differently from what she saw in her community, taking an entirely different direction from that of many of her peers by studying:

> I stay at Langa community. Some of the people they're my age, they are just doing nothing – they are drinking. So, I think, instead of staying at home doing nothing, I can take this opportunity and study (Nompumelelo, Interview, August 27, 2018).

Sarah made the decision to turn away from negative influences in her life:

> Well, in the Level 2, I had some bad friends who always wanted to go out drinking but I stopped it (Sarah, Interview, August 06, 2018).

Despite difficulties with a particular subject, Analo showed resilience and a determination not to give up:

> … firstly, I was struggling a lot with [subject] but as the time goes by [things improved]. That time I was frustrated because when the lecturer is there in the class, so the people who knows this subject, so she was just like, she's moving. But the next year I got Ms. [lecturer] and then she just taught us that you don't understand, and I ask the other students to help me because I couldn't even say the other word. So, it was so difficult for me sometimes. I decide to quit but I said, no I won't do that. I decided I'm going to be strong, not like the other subject that I'm doing I did know before. I just learned it here so I have to (Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

MacKeracher et al. (2006), like many other authors, make it clear that some factors are both institutional and situational in nature, 'depending on the source of the problem' (p. 5). The authors give the example of financial constraints and financial support, that is a situational barrier due to lack of funds, an institutional barrier when fees are high and extra costs are needed for additional resources, and a dispositional barrier when one must weigh up the cost of participation 'against the anticipated benefits' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 5).

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) state that 'structural conditions play a substantial role in forming the circumstances faced by individuals and limit the feasible alternatives to choose from, and therefore they can "bound" individual agency' (p. 196). This boundedness refers to individual constraints such as family, job and institutional barriers (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). 'The capabilities of the individual to make use of available resources and opportunities that are at hand may be limited, either consciously by revealed preferences or unconsciously as a consequence of bounded agency' (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 263).

Based on the findings of Makoelle and Malindi (2015), it becomes clear that when agency is applied to structural barriers, individuals call upon inner reserves such as resilience and intentionality. Participants exercised their agency daily in dealing with unsafe and unreliable transport, time delays in getting to campus and home after classes, financial constraints and

distances to college. Transportation emerged as the main structural barrier for most of the participants.

4.5.1.1 Unsafe transport

Violence and crime are major issues affecting transport in some areas of South Africa. Thabo and Buhle indicated that violence on the roads is a barrier for them:

> Sometimes there [in Khayelitsha] is taxi fighting and there is gun shooting, so we don't have means to come to school because we are afraid. My personal issues that are influencing my progress is sometimes … I'm living in Khayelitsha, sometimes we have a problem with transport and that makes us maybe to come late at school. Sometimes there are taxi fighting and there are gun shooting so we don't have means to coming to school because we are afraid (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

> Yes, it [travelling] does affect my studies because I become afraid to go to the station early and then I wait [at home] and then I get to college later and I miss a period of class (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Nikki commented on the times that taxis are on the road due to crime:

> It's not difficult. Actually, it's not supposed to be difficult, but with the gangsters robbing the taxis now, there's no more taxis really on this road [Connaught Road], so there's only a certain time when the taxis are driving the most, and then a certain time when they stop. Because they know now when the gangsters are going to start targeting the taxis. I stay in Ravensmead (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Siziphiwe and Lindiwe shared how travelling is made difficult by strikes:

> It's difficult [to travel] sometimes because of strikes and some days it's easy (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

> No, it [travelling distance] does not affect my studies. Only when there are strikes because then the busses are full and then I am late for college because everyone is

taking the bus. Sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's not easy, especially when there are taxi strikes. I'm from Nyanga (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

4.5.1.2 Inefficient transport

The inefficiency and unreliability of public transport in South Africa is notorious for causing lateness of arrival to work, school and tertiary institutions. It becomes a structural problem of its own, quite apart from the aspects of danger and crime. Because of inefficiencies in public transport services, participants had to deal with inconsistency in their scheduled travelling times. Train delays are common, partly because of criminal activity, which results in participants being late for classes, as noted by Thabo and Jason:

> My personal issues that are influencing my progress is sometimes, I'm living in Khayelitsha, sometimes we have a problem with transport and that makes us maybe to come late at school. The only thing that would be … is like, the trains is delayed, but more or less I am here every day (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018). (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

> Sometimes it [travelling] can be difficult because the trains are a lot of the times late and delayed and cancelled. It [travelling] can affect my studies by I'm not able to get to college, I will not be able to get to work to complete the day. Most of the time [it is] the first class that I miss (Jason, Interview, August 24, 2018).

4.5.1.3 Suffering financially

Many of the participants rely on public transport, particularly taxis and trains since these are considered the cheapest modes of transport. Delayed trains lead to extra expenses as the participants were forced to take other modes of transport, such as taxis or buses, which are more expenses than trains as shared by Terence and Analo:

> It's not easy, but it's not difficult also, because the train station is not that far from the house, but the only thing would be the delayed trains; but I could take a taxi, also. So, it is kind of easy but the taxi would be more of expensive (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

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It [travelling] is very difficult. It's not easy at all because of the trains. The people are taking the cables, so now they make the queue long at the taxi rank, so we have to wait there for long queues and sometimes we missed two or one period. So, it's not easy at all. And then if you going to wait for the bus - because Khayelitsha it's a big place it's not just like a small place - if the bus is coming to me, it's already full. So, I must wait two hours there, and then after 7 there is no other busses, so I have to have money for the taxi again. It affected my studies a lot, especially now in Level 4, because it depends on the lecturers. This year I struggle a lot, especially English because that's the only period, if you late she doesn't allow you to go in, but the others are fine (Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

4.5.1.4 Distance to college

Three participants, Asakhe, Siziphiwe and Sisanda, communicated that the long travelling distances affected their studies:

It's far for me to travel to college. I come from Mfeleni, and that is in Philippi. It affects my studies because I leave late from the college and then I get home [late] and I still have to do homework (Asakhe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

I travel about half an hour from Khayelitsha and when there are issues it takes about an hour. And when I'm sitting on the bus I can study and sometimes I get home late, and then the library is closed (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

It's easy when I'm coming to school but when I go back home it's not easy, because I have to take almost three taxis to get home. But in the mornings, it's easy – one taxi (Sisanda, Interview, September 13, 2018).

Travel fatigue as a result of having to travel a long distance may also be considered a barrier, as Sisanda and Terence conveyed:

I'm tired when I get home because it took a long time to get home, so I don't want to focus on my studies. But in the mornings, I'm okay because I get to college on time (Sisanda, Interview, September 13, 2018).

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I come home late and tired (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Terence expressed his concern about institutional scheduling of classes:

The time frames are the worse, and the travelling. When we get home is like late, like, how do I say, internet cafés and resources are closed, is not always available that time of the day (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Participants showed persistence in dealing with transport issues as communicated by Terence:

The only thing that would be, is like, the trains are delayed, but more or less I am here every day (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

'Lack of government financial support for both learners and providers' (HRDC/CMEC, 1997, cited by MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 15) was identified with reference to the NSFAS policy and guidelines, as mentioned under point 4.2 in this study. The responses below are from Nompumelo, Sisanda, Sizipho and Nikki who did not fulfill the NSFAS criteria for financial support:

It's only the finances and sometimes I struggle to have the money to come to college, but I make the efforts to be here because I don't get a bursary travel allowance (Nompumelelo, Interview, August 27, 2018)

The only thing that negatively influenced me is that I'm the only student in my class that didn't received a [NSFAS] bursary, so I'm not so happy about that. So, finances are sometimes an issue, because I have to pay for myself, and my sister helps me (Sisanda, Interview, September 13, 2018).

Sizipho communicated that her sister assisted her financially:

Finance, but it wasn't easy. But I tried to pay it because I'm paying for it. My sister's support helped me (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

It was only through the support of her husband and family that Nikki was able to attend college:

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Yes. Financially they are helping me buy the things that I need, my husband the most (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Participants relayed their stories of dealing with lack of finances. Their stories show a great deal of resilience and determination. Amanda 'made things' to sell to supplement her finances:

I can say that financial, because sometimes I struggle to get money to come to college. Although I try to make some things to get here because I don't want it to be a barrier to come to school (Amanda, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Asakhe was living with a friend because she did not have the money to pay for a place to live while studying:

I struggle with a place to stay because I come from Johannesburg. I'm staying with a friend now. I have tried to work hard and to be patient with myself because I didn't want to drop out. So, I speak with my friend, so I am able to complete this course (Asakhe, Interview, 24 August, 2018).

Sometimes Zameka and Buhle did not have sufficient money for both food and transport. When this happened, they simply did not eat:

Sometimes I struggled with hunger. I deal with it by drinking water and study. During lunch, I can also go to the [college]feeding scheme to get something to eat (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Hunger. I go for the fittas (small packet of chips) and if the fittas is finished then I just don't eat (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Buhle and Nompumelelo expressed how financial constraints affected their ease of attending college in this way:

It's when I don't have money to come to school, then I miss out a bit. Yes, but I know that they can't support me because my mother and father passed away and so I am dependent on my sister (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

It's not easy to travel to college because most of the time I take the train. I don't have the money for the taxis, I take the train for free. It [travelling] affects my studies because now in June I didn't pass [a subject] because I was late because the trains were delayed by one and a half hours (Nompumelelo, Interview, August 27, 2018).

4.5.1.5 Language barriers

Academic barriers, such as a lack in English competence, has impacted the students' ability to fully interact with skills relating to 'literacy, numeracy, comprehension, critical and reflective thinking, and writing essays and tests' (MacKeracher et al., 2006, p. 2). English was a language and learning barrier for most of the participants as they do not practice English as home language. The medium of teaching and learning at the TVET college is English, constituting an institutional policy experienced by many as a structural barrier. Participants spoke of difficulties with comprehension when asked about the institution's language policy.

Siziphiwe struggled with spelling in English:

The first one is English. I struggle with that and I think that's all. If I could get someone to help me with spelling, it would help me a lot (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

The language itself was a challenge for Asakhe, Senzo and Sisipho:

In Level 3, my challenge was the language – English (Asakhe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Maybe, okay, this is one of the issues, because there are students that struggle, there are students that are good with Afrikaans and some are [better] in Xhosa… (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Yes, it is true. English is a second language for me and it is very difficult (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Analo struggled with English because of late-coming:

… maybe I can say it depend on the lecturers, because now this year I'm struggling a lot with English because the only period that is, and if you late she doesn't allow you to go in. Now this year I'm struggling a lot with English (Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

4.5.2 Institutional barriers

The participants used agency to overcome a variety of institutional barriers, including the language barrier, which may be considered both structural and institutional in nature. Thabo and Thandokazi said:

In [this programme] there is a subject called [name of subject]. That is a difficult subject to me but I try to make the best I can and I study hard. If I maybe don't understand a question I go maybe to other Xhosa students, because sometimes it is easy when someone that speaks your language to explain to you how does this works, or because sometimes English have words that I won't understand (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

Learning in English, there is no other thing to study, and to ask your lecturer if you don't understand something in English. More especially if there is a question that you don't understand, you have to read it over and over, if still you don't understand, you must ask the lecturer to explain for you (Thandokazi, Interview, August 22, 2018).

MacKeracher et al. (2006) also identified poor lecturing skills as a pedagogical barrier in that some lecturers or facilitators lack understanding of 'how adults learn' (p. 2). Participants indicated that interactions with lecturers in a top-down approach was a skills transference barrier. Senzo shared how he interacted with a lecturer:

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I've never failed any subjects but, one academic challenge I had was last year. I actually thought I wouldn't make it in this one subject, maybe because I didn't - a bit of misunderstanding between me and another lecturer. But I worked hard regardless, and solved it and did good at the end of the year (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Siziphiwe and Sarah experienced some unfair treatment:

Some unfair treatment [by lecturers]. Some people thought that the approach was not the same towards me and other students (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

Sarah responded that she was not successful in one subject because of the top-down approach by a lecturer.

Me and the lecturer didn't have a good connection. Yes, for that specific subject, [I lost my confidence]. (Sarah, Interview, August 6, 2018).

The participants exercised agency to overcome the top-down approach as expressed by Sisanda. She showed agency in how she dealt with the institutional barrier of language and difficulties with lectures, also revealing that despite a possible top-down approach, lecturers were approachable and helpful when asked for help.

I'm not doing so well in [subject] and if I get bad results, I always go to the lecturer to explain what I did wrong, so I can understand (Sisanda, Interview, September 13, 2018).

4.5.2.1 Institutional difficulties when applying for NSFAS

When asked about NSFAS policy requirements, some responses were about the long queue to be assisted and that getting the documented proof of need was difficult to obtain. For Thabo it was the long wait to be assisted that was most difficult:

What was difficult when I came to apply [was that] there were long queues and a lot of students, but I was lucky enough to be accepted (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

Zola, Thandokazi, Nompumelelo and Lindiwe communicated that obtaining the necessary documents required for the bursary application was difficult:

I experience [difficulty] when the institution had to have the documents like proof of address, mother's death certificate and other documents. It was so difficult for me to get them (Zola, Interview, August 14, 2018).

The bursary application was long because I had to come back the next day, the first time I went for the interview I had to come with my parents, so my mom came along with me and she waited for me (Tandokazi, Interview, August 22, 2018).

I had problems with my parents' documents for getting a bursary because I was accepted at [this college] but needed the documents for the bursary. Because they wanted proof that my mother was not working, and my father passed away, so I had to go to Home Affairs so they could give me his death certificate (Nompumelelo, Interview, August 27, 2018).

Being turned away for some documents that you must bring and certify and then you come back and they tell you no, you must bring other documents. That was for the bursary, but to get in the college was not very difficult (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Sisipho had difficulty applying for the bursary:

I didn't have any difficulties. The only difficulty I had was when applying for the bursary (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

4.5.2.2 Student support services

As reported by MacKeracher et al. (2006), a further institutional barrier experienced by some students on campus is 'inadequate student support services' (p. 15).

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It was interesting and unexpected to discover that several participants did not require or use student support services on campus. Nikki expressed her experience with the students support service as follows:

> I went there once but they didn't help us. Someone told us that if we have a problem, even with the finances, go to the student support and we spoke to them, but this lady said sorry they can't help us (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Sarah explained that the participants received information:

> Yes, the college told us, and we got pamphlets but I never used it (Sarah, Interview, August 6, 2018).

Terence and Thabo did not use the service:

> No, not at all, like, I just, well, I come at home and like, I'm not as tired as I usually am. Then I will rest and read through the work I did for the day, just like half an hour, 20 minutes, and I would like, just do that when I'm not tired (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

> No, in our college we do have mentors which assist us, but in Level 4 we have no mentors but we mentor other Level 3 students (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

However, Asakhe, Zola and Zameka were assisted and found the service useful, as indicated by their responses. In their cases, student support services constituted an institutional help rather than an institutional barrier.

> Yes, they have helped me a lot because when you write exams you are panicking, and I didn't have the skill on how to study, and they helped me with that (Asakhe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Yes, ma'am, it helped me a lot. They come to our class and gave us the study guides and they provide us with the equipment we need when we study (Zola, Interview, August 14, 2018).

Yes, especially the past few months and they already know me and my situations. I was very sick, and eyes were yellow, and it was very stressful and depressing (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Resilience was indicated by participants when they applied for bursaries or accessed institutional support. They overcame institutional bias through self-efficacy and intervention, despite their opinion of institutional bias. In other words, they were willing to stand in long queues to access funding, as expressed by Zameka:

I was afraid that maybe next year I can't get anything for me to do and then I end up being a housewife. I'm afraid of doing nothing or getting rejected by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Thandokazi remarked that as a part-time student she found help from her lecturer and also relied on her own determination to succeed:

For now, it's one subject, so it's not easy to be a part time student, because I only attend twice per week. So, most of the time I fall behind but I tried to ask the Miss some of the stuff I don't know. She's willing to help even when I fall behind with practical, I always ask, but and I don't give up. For now, my fear is that I don't, I'm afraid to fail (Thandokazi, Interview, August 22, 2018).

Nikki balanced her time between her challenges at home and the demands of college life:

My personal things were having to be a housewife, a mother, a wife and studying. It's a lot of stuff at once. Finances. My husband is the only one working, so there's not always finances, even travel allowance. I'm not getting travel allowance, so there's that personal struggle that I must always figure out a way to get to college. And my health - I was sick this year and I had a miscarriage just a month ago, and

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I didn't even know I was pregnant – that's why I was so, a lot of days absent, but I've got medical proof for that (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Analo relayed her story of becoming a single parent after her husband died, showing that despite the setback, she remained committed to passing her courses:

Because of now, as I said, the father of my child passed away. So, the time he was alive so the thing was easy, but now, when my child doesn't have something and I think it's stressing me, and then now I can't be working hard at my studies. But it's not like I'm failing. I'm not failing; it's not like I studied two years back (Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

4.5.3 Individual or dispositional barriers

The data uncovered in this study confirms findings by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), who stated that psychological barriers, also described as dispositional barriers, are largely due to the multiple and varied 'values, attitudes, and experiences associated with differing levels of socioeconomic status' (pp. 138 - 139). An example of such individual or dispositional barriers that stood out in Darkenwald and Merriam's (1982) study was 'lack of confidence in one's ability to learn' (p. 139). Hitlin and Elder (2006) state that 'positive relations influence human agency' (p. 57). This study confirms the findings in the literature that individuals pursuing adult education often have negative opinions and attitude about themselves, either with regard to age or capabilities, and also about what others perceive of them. In the face of these dispositional barriers, participants applied resilience, self-efficacy, intentionality and planfulness (Hitlin & Elder, 2006; Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1979; 1984).

4.5.3.1 Lack of self-confidence

A low confidence level is a dispositional barrier as it relates to a student's self-perception about his or her emotional competency to succeed despite being provided with a positive environment in which to flourish (Cross, 1981). Sarah's attitude and self-perception was negative at first, but changed by her own decision:

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Well, I've been told a lot that I will fail because of my past ways of doing things and my age and just who I associated with. But I changed that, and proved them wrong with my marks (Sarah, Interview, August 6, 2018).

Nikki placed her confidence at a low level as she had been out of school for so long:

I was happy and scared to study because I was like, 12 years, no I was last in 2005 in the school and I started in 2016 in a college so it's a whole – a lot of years passed. I feared not passing the most (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

4.5.3.2 Lack of external validation

According to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) students who are confronted with negative comments from others might succumb to a belief that they may be too old or unqualified to pursue further learning opportunities. Zameka responded in this way to the question about negative barriers:

The negative … when I started this course, my friends and students told me I was wasting my time by doing this Primary Care because for three years it's just going to be a waste of time for me because I have matric already. I told them but it's not going to be a waste of time, because my matric wasn't that good, so that's why I decided to do this course. And at the end of it, I'm going to learn a lot of stuff and I believe I can go somewhere to practice what I've learned (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Desjardins and Rubenson (2013) elaborate on dispositional barriers as those individual, often internal factors that hamper agency when it comes to choosing and acting within one's daily circumstances. Lindiwe expressed how her difficulty in focusing acted as a dispositional barrier:

What I can say, you know, when something happens to you it's like, at home, to your family or when you lose someone, so you lose focus. That could lead me to not doing this, that I wouldn't be able to do this course, that it would make me drop out of school (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

The overcoming of dispositional barriers is built on both the internal and external resources unique to each person. Often this involves thinking fairly broadly and deeply about what matters to the individual; what their values are, as opposed to the values of their family or peers. This ability to separate oneself from others and pursue one's own goals in the face of structural, institutional, dispositional and situational barriers was clear from many of the responses. Lindiwe expressed how her own dispositional barrier of difficulty with sticking to plans in the face of obstacles challenged her:

> I struggle with maybe not balance the plan with my studies. Like your plan doesn't go the way it's supposed to go (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

Dispositional barriers include the belief that one has limited individual capabilities to utilise available resources. This belief may be held consciously, as it becomes known to the individual, or unconsciously, due to bounded agency (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013). Sisipho explained how negative comments and thoughts affected her:

> The negative emotions that I had is when a person asks you about the [this programme] and then you explain it and they say that you are wasting your time. You should've gone somewhere else than wasting your time here. What I feared most is if a person is saying that in front of others, I feel embarrassed as if I don't know what to do with my life. Positive for me, is when I see other students who studied are working and that is positive for me, because I know when I am finished also, I will find a job (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

4.5.3.3 Lack of self-esteem

The empirical evidence cited by MacKeracher et al. (2006) of 'low self-esteem, general nervousness about the ability to succeed, past negative experiences as a student' (p. 18) amongst adult students is confirmed by my data. Lindiwe expressed how her thoughts changed in this regard:

> Before, I didn't think that I would make it to the college and I didn't think that I would pass. But now, I can see that I can do it. I can still go further and succeed (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

Participants had to employ a variety of tactics to overcome their dispositional barriers. According to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), policy documents indicated that 'the well-being of nations and individuals' (p. 188) are related to adult learning. When asked about overcoming negative emotions, participants revealed their inner resourcefulness.

Senzo had to become self-reliant because he did not get enough financial support:

> Negative emotion*s*, it was. I didn't get enough support from home financially. *L*ike I'm staying at the *r*esidence so I have to buy my own groceries. So, it was hard to actually, to - like the whole transition from staying at home to staying alone constantly provide since I'm here. Everything is now sorted (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

In overcoming her dispositional barriers, Nikki became more aware of how she learned:

> I was successful in Level 2. For the struggles, I spent more time with the subject that I was struggling with. In Level 4 I felt I wasn't here much*,* and I'm actually fearing exam time a little bit. *A*nd another teacher told me that my marks and that I was absent made her see me as a visual learner. What I put on the paper is what I learned in class. I'm not much of a studier but I do study when I have to (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Nompumelelo, Siziphiwe and Sisipho worked hard at their self-belief and expressed themselves as follows:

> I didn't think I would manage or pass but I worked hard so that I can pass my course. I was scared I wouldn't pass (Nompumelelo, Interview, August 27, 2018).

> The positive one is to be able to enter and learn this programme first*,* and negative is not maintaining the marks I need for this course. I fear most because I don't want to fail (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

When I was busy with an assignment, like the [subject] assignment. I did not do life science at high school, so it was new to me, it was a new challenge, so I had to learn from scratch. It was very difficult for me. Even when the lecturer was standing there explaining things - the bones, I did not know any names of the bones, so it was very difficult. But now, you can go and ask, and I am up to date with [the subject] (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Participants exercised self-efficacy in overcoming their barriers. Nompumelelo, Buhle, Lindiwe and Zola communicated how they dealt with difficult situations by simply pressing on and applying themselves. Fear of failure seemed to be their biggest dispositional barrier:

I am struggling with computer because I'm a slow learner with the computer. It was my first time in Level 2 that I used a computer. I was scared I wouldn't pass. I ask other learners, and I go to the media Centre and I take someone who knows how to use a computer, so they can show me what to do (Nompumelelo, Interview, August 27, 2018

I struggled with the computer in Level 2 because it was my first time to use a computer when I came to this college. I never used one before. The negative was that it was a lot of work and I was overwhelmed at that time. I feared that I might fail (Buhle, Interview, August 30, 2018).

When my child is sick it did affect me negatively, because I get that stressed. So, it affected me as well to my studies. No, I do attend classes. I feel excited and scared at the very same time. What I fear most is not to get successful at the end of the year or not to pass the exam (Lindiwe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

I fear that as I have a challenge with [….] I fear that I could fail [….], but I'm putting in more effort to practice over the weekend (Zola, Interview, August 14, 2018)

The fear of failure motivated participants to press on regardless, and to make sure they passed at the end of their course. Amanda and Terence expressed themselves as follows:

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Having the fear that I would fail and repeating the subjects (Amanda, Interview, August 30, 2018).

Fear, Miss. Fear of not passing, that was the main thing. But as I passed the first year, I was more confident in like, going further, because in the beginning everything was so new to me and I was like, Wow! (Terence, Interview, August 15, 2018).

Zameka relied on her focused approach to her studies:

The t*oyi*-t*oyi*. They like doing that at this college and I prefer not to attend those t*oyi*-t*oyi*s. I don't want to support that. I'm fine with all of my subjects. I just struggle with the computers sometimes (Zameka, Interview, August 30, 2018)

4.5.4 Situational barriers

Cross (1981) explains situational barriers as barriers that arise 'from one's situation in life at a given time', such as 'lack of time due to job and home responsibilities, lack of money, lack of child care, and lack of transportation' and so forth (p. 98). Charles highlighted a situational barrier that was unique to his area.

Like at the moment we dealing with a water crisis at home, but I mean everyone does in the country. So, actually my problem I have at home is [that] we get water but we get water at a certain time. The water is only there for like 20 minutes. So, we have to tap out all the water in those 20 minutes otherwise we won't have water for the day. So, um, that happens every morning at 4:30. So I have to get up early to make sure we have water otherwise we wake up for work or college, we have to wash, Miss, we have to drink coffee and all that other stuff throughout the day, like we have to make food at night and if there is no water, we cannot. We use a kettle and my mother recently bought us an urn to warm the water (Charles, Interview, November 29, 2018).

My data reinforces the statement by MacKeracher et al. (2006) that 'situational barriers occur because of circumstances learners encounter in their current life situations' (p. 14). Indicative

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of situational barriers are 'scarcity of time, financial problems, multiple conflicting responsibilities for home, family, children, and work, and transport problems' as cited in MacKeracher et al. (2006, p. 14). It is not surprising that the participants in this study mention cost as a situational because all participants were in the low-income group.

The barriers that most affected these students' participation in education were the need for family support, family responsibilities, lack of self-support and noise pollution, as the following comments revealed.

4.5.4.1 The need for family support

Participants needed their families to support them in various ways. The need for family support was shared by Senzo:

> Yes, I still need my family to support me because I'm not working. I'm a student and I'm still dependent on them, especially money for food, travelling and clothes (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

4.5.4.2 Home and family responsibilities

A motivating or push factor for many participants is their responsibility toward their family. Many participants found their own families to be the push factor that enabled them to enact agency and embark on a course of study. Their families provided them with the strength to continue. This concurs with Giddens' (1979) findings. Giddens refers to 'agency not as a series of discrete acts combined together, but as a continuous flow of conduct' (p. 55). Their ability to enter into this 'continuous flow' of agency was in large part facilitated by supportive families. For this reason, many participants felt they were obligated to families, and had to do their part. They faced family responsibility by adopting a 'stop, review and go' agency approach.

Challenges participants face in their households were relayed as follows by Sisipho and Lindiwe:

> For me, what I am struggling with is the time for exams. It is too much information and also, I have other responsibilities at home that I have to take care of. So, the

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study time for me becomes short because I have to study and still look after the household (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

When my child is sick it did affect me that negatively, because I get that stressed so it affected me as well to my studies. No, I do attend classes (Lindiwe, Interview, August 29, 2018).

Participants displayed agency in managing family responsibility in the following ways. Nikki expressed how she managed by studying late at night:

I study at night when everyone is asleep because I don't have a lot of freedom in the house. It's either I must take the time when they (the children) are all at the soccer, my husband is still at work, or I must find a time when they all asleep and I must be up late (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Thuli managed by asking someone to cook for her:

Sometimes I ask someone at home, can you cook for me, because I come late. If there is a traffic jam, I won't be able to cook. I have to focus on my books (Thuli, Interview, August 29, 2018).

4.5.4.3 Lack of self-support

Participants made sacrifices to study as fulltime students. Nikki explained what the lack of self-support cost her:

I had to speak to my husband first and come to an agreement that this is what we going to sacrifice for the next three years (Nikki, Interview, August 23, 2018).

4.5.4.4 Unconducive environment: noise pollution and space

Challenges participants faced in their community and home environments related to noise and space disruption, as expressed by Siziphiwe, Sisanda, Thabo and Siziphiwe.

We are six at home and there are four children. There is not a lot of space and there is too much noise (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

It's not easy – especially during the day. There's always noise. And also on the weekend, there is always people fighting. I live in Dunoon and that's on the N7 (Sisanda, Interview, September 13, 2018).

In our settlement is small houses, but I try my best I can to study (Thabo, Interview, August 16, 2018).

There is not a lot of space and there is too much noise (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

Some participants, like Asakhe, Analo, Siziphiwe, Sisipho and Thuli, overcame community and home challenges by accessing the library:

It's quiet but sometimes I just prefer to go study in the library because during the weekend there is a lot of noise (Asakhe, Interview, August 24, 2018).

It's not easy at all, Miss. We all know that if you staying like in the informal settlement, the noise pollution. So even if it's at night, if I want to study, I must go to the library or I must be here. So, if I'm at home it's not a good environment for me to study (Analo, Interview, August 22, 2018).

Honestly, it's not easy to study at home. I would rather go out and study at the library. (Siziphiwe, Interview, September 13, 2018).

It is very noisy at home. So, when it is time for exams I have to go to the library because it is quiet there (Sisipho, Interview, August 23, 2018).

Um, let say for instance when I'm writing exams, I will ask them to put the volume down of the music because I'm studying just for concentration. Yes, I study at home or at the library (Thuli, Interview, August 29, 2018).

Senzo made use of the study room at the hostel where he lives:

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There (at the hostel) is a study room so everyone goes there for silence and everything, so it's better for me because I'm a person that doesn't like to study with noise and everything (Senzo, Interview, August 15, 2018).

It becomes clear from the multitude of barriers participants faced that they were already 'success stories' in some respects, simply by exercising agency to apply and enroll in a course of studies. Once studying, their structural, institutional, dispositional and situational barriers continued, although they managed, by drawing on inner resources, to overcome many of their dispositional barriers. Through a strong sense of purpose, and by exercising agency in a 'continuous flow' (Giddens, 1979, p. 55) they were able to find ways to work around their many barriers and be successful.

SECTION FIVE: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this section I present a summary of my study, the findings, some recommendations and some concluding remarks.

5.1 Summary

The aims of this study were, firstly, to investigate the relationship(s) between access, participation and barriers to participation in adult education. Secondly, it was to develop new theoretical insights about the relationship(s) between access, participation and success in adult learning.

The research problem addressed in this study is: The White Paper for Post School Education and Training promotes access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges. While the government has made institutional changes and allocated resources to facilitate such access, mature adult students experience various barriers to access and participation. This study addresses the contradictions between the policy intentions, and the barriers to access and participation and success in TVET colleges. Investigating mature adult students' access and success in post school education and training through TVET colleges illuminates how their agency inadvertently addresses these contradictions.

The participants shared their individual pivotal experiences that motivated them to want to change their situations, and to make that decision to study further. In identifying that experience, the researcher showed what the 'push' or 'why' factors are that drive agency or enable the participant to overcome barriers.

The following research questions were the focus of the study:

Main research question
What are the relationships between access, participation and barriers to participation among mature, adult students at a TVET college in the Western Cape?

Sub-questions

What structural barriers affect mature adult students' participation in adult learning?

What dispositional individually-based barriers affect mature adult students' participation in adult learning?

How do the relationships between structural and dispositional individually-based barriers affect mature adult students' participation?

The conceptual framework which framed my investigation comprises theoretical perspectives drawn from Margaret Archer (2003), Anthony Giddens (1979; 1984), Albert Bandura (1989; 2001; 2006), Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder (2006), Kjell Rubenson and Richard Desjardins (2009), and K. Patricia Cross (1981).

I adopted a qualitative research approach, a semi-structured interview method, and an interview guide. I used the purposive sampling technique to select 20 registered research participants in the National Certificate (Vocational) Primary Health Level 4 programme, consisting of 5 men and 15 women, as the majority of the students in this particular program, are women. The participants were between the ages of 18 – 45.

This study made use of an audio recorder and field notes during the data capturing process. All the interviews were transcribed into texts. The texts were captured in a computer data file for analysis. To minimize the risk of losing the data, hard copies were printed and saved on a USB drive for storage purposes. The study identified codes, themes and patterns from the responses to the interview questions (Bryman et al. 2016) as a way to organise the captured data. Recurring themes were identified, as well as variations and similarities in responses.

5.2 Findings

The findings confirm similar findings of previous studies, such as the Eurobarometer survey, 2003 (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). This validated my research study. My findings related to some key issues raised by the participants with regards to access, participation and barriers to participation.

1. Adult students' improved self-awareness of their interests reflects agency that resonates with Archer's (2003) argument that individuals as human agents 'possess properties and

powers' which are 'distinct from those pertaining to social reforms. Among them features 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).

2. Adult students asserted agency by intentionally seeking access to the TVET college to gain a qualification, confirming Archer's (2003) belief that 'only people possess the intentionality to define and design courses of action in order to achieve their own ends' (Archer, 2003, p. 6).

3. Evidence revealed that adult students assert agency to access TVET college programmes in order to gain a qualification that in turn will provide access to employment, income and a better life for themselves. This evidence resonates with Bandura (2006) who describes people or agents as 'self-organising, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are not simply onlookers of their behaviour. They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them' (p. 164).

4. Adult students actively exercised degrees of human freedom by making use of the opportunities of choice at the TVET college to appreciate more what they were meant to do with their lives. This connects with Archer (2003) that 'by their nature, humans have degrees of freedom in determining their own courses of action' (p. 6-7).

5. Adult students' participation in adult learning is affected negatively by structural barriers, such as the time frames of the college classes, the unsafe and inefficient transport system, time delays in getting to campus and home, financial cost, extra cost for additional resources and support, location and distance to college This ties in with Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) who note that 'structural conditions play a substantial role in forming the circumstances faced by individuals and limit the feasible alternatives to choose from, and therefore they can 'bound' individual agency' (p. 196). This boundedness refers to individual constraints such as family, job and institutionally related barriers (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

6. Adult students overcame structural barriers by showing persistence, determination and resilience in dealing with transport issues, receiving financial assistance from family and supplementing income through entrepreneurial activities, overcame institutional bias through self-efficacy and intervention despite their opinion of institutional bias and balancing time between challenges at home and the demands of college life.

7. Dispositional barriers, such as the cost of participation, lack of confidence in one's ability to learn, negative opinions and attitude about themselves, either of age or capabilities, also

about what others perceive of them, affect mature adult students' participation in adult learning. Previous negative learning experiences were not viewed as deterrents rather it was seen as enabling mature adult students' participation in adult learning.

8. Adult students displayed resilience in the ways that they overcame dispositional barriers by becoming self- reliant, becoming aware of own learning styles, by developing and exercising self-efficacy which links with Hitlin and Elder's (2006) thinking regarding resilience, self-efficacy, intentionality and planfulness.

9. Adult students as agents, experience situational barriers such as a lack of finance, need for family support, family responsibilities, self-support, noise pollution and space disruption. Institutional support from structures such as NSFAS provided financial support which enabled adult students to address a lack of finance as a situational barrier, enhancing their agency to succeed.

10. Adult students overcame situational barriers by studying late at night, accessing the local library, using the study room at the hostel, asking someone to take over the cooking responsibilities, and becoming self-reliant. The ways through which students used institutional resources to overcome situational barriers point to a relationship between agency and structure.

11. Certain relationship features have emerged that compares how the structural barriers weigh up against dispositional individually-based barriers. According to this study, relationships are the bridges between adult students and the TVET setting as proof that a nurturing environment fosters trust and support. The findings suggest that despite certain dispositional barriers, the students' responsibility toward themselves create the determined agency to succeed. Thus, we can now agree with Rubenson and Desjardin (2009) that agency is dependent upon the interplay of structural and dispositional barriers that individuals encounter as they participate in education.

12. When adult students are faced with difficult moments in their lives, they had been able to review and reflect upon their key values, desires and concerns and focus on these to embolden themselves to act and restore purpose in their lives to bring about an alternative outcome to their existing status quo. This finding resonates with Archer's (Archer, 2003) internal conversation where 'agents enjoy their own powers of reflexive deliberation' (p. 7).

13. A positive attitude towards the financial and academic support from the institution and lecturers were displayed. Participants indicated that this support contributed to their success. Although the students had agency, and were confronted with barriers, they

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expressed gratitude for the positive support rendered by the college and that helped them to be motivated to continue. This resonates with Hitlin and Elder (2006) who says that 'agency represents an individual capacity, one that is both the result of individual differences (planfulness), as well as achieved successes (self-efficacy) and a sense of temporal, self-reflective understanding about one's life chances (optimism)' (p. 60).

5.3 Designing a teaching and learning strategy

The findings imply the design of teaching and learning strategies which are sensitive to access and participation as it relates to adult students. I identified the following elements which the strategies should include, namely access to TVET colleges, a resilient aligned environment, supporting the students' capabilities, and. agentic action.

5.3.1 Access to TVET colleges
The TVET college is ideally suited for adult students who wants to improve on their qualification. This finding suggest that adult students are accessing TVET colleges.

5.3.2 A resilient aligned environment
TVET colleges do provide the supportive environment for adult students to foster their resilience and to overcome barriers.

5.3.2 Supporting the students' capabilities
The findings have shown that students thrive academically when the TVET college provides them with the necessary institutional support, such as lecturer, financial and any other academically related support.

5.3.4 Agentic action
Students assert agentic action when they go register to study. When students as agents, confront barriers to participation they are making an intervention which according to Hitlin and Elder (2006) can also be described as agentic action.

5.4 New theoretical insights and perspectives

I derived new theoretical insights and perspectives on the relationships between access, participation and barriers to participation among mature, adult students at a TVET college in the Western Cape.

It is often assumed that all students who pursue studies at a TVET college are under the age of 18. However, evidence from my research shows that adult students are pursuing studies at a TVET college with the medium age being 28 years old.

Archer's (2003) theoretical perspective articulates agency as human reflexive deliberations. Based on reflexive deliberations, Archer (2003) has helped me to gauge the level of determination my adult participants had to undertake to eventually enrol for a TVET course. Thus, for the student to overcome any obstacle or barrier was not insurmountable because achieving a life changing goal was more important. Through this concept of agency, a theoretical insight was derived that adult students consciously and deliberately access TVET college programmes in order to gain a qualification that could enable them to find employment and support their families.

Rubenson and Desjardins' (2009) theoretical perspective argues that a person's capability to participate depends on the material, social and institutional environments. A new theoretical insight can be derived from the evidence that adult students successfully overcame financial barriers to participation by drawing on financial support from their income-earning partners, and by engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

Hitlin and Elder's (2006) theoretical perspective purports that people as agents, display resilience in pursuing their life's course. A theoretical insight that contributes to this perspective can be drawn from the evidence that adult students' displayed resilience by adjusting their academic, family, and community responsibilities in the course of pursuing their studies.

5.5 Implications for further study

This is a limited study and more research is needed to understand the way adult students overcome certain structural, dispositional individual-based and situational barriers within the TVET sector.

Further research is needed to establish the number of adult students who are registered in TVET colleges. Findings from such research could inform TVET colleges and policymakers about the institutional changes that could facilitate widening access for adult students.

5.6 Recommendations

This study recommends that the student support services at the TVET colleges should make students more aware of the relevance and usefulness of the service so that more students will use the service in future.

Based on this study and especially regarding the medium of language instruction, it is recommended that in order to ease the learners' capability to grasp English medium instruction, a language laboratory should be equipped to include a schedule for Basic English that students must attend when they enrol for their first year of study.

A further recommendation is the flexibility that is needed in drawing up class schedules or time-tables. The research shows that students face barriers every day with regards to transport that is unreliable and also unsafe. It may be necessary to have essential courses scheduled for later in the day, yet not too late where students have difficulty getting home in the afternoon.

5.7 Conclusion

This study was based on exploring the relationships between access, participation and barriers to participation experienced by mature, adult students who are returning to TVET colleges. The intention of this study was to design a teaching and learning strategy that is sensitive to the students' needs relating to access and participation. The findings clearly suggest that there is an interrelatedness between agency and barriers to student participation and success. One of the primary elements this study found is that students possess an internal resource in terms of resilience as an innate capability. The students have developed a resilient capability before they decided upon enrolling at a TVET college. They have acquired this capability as a result of having to navigate through difficult social circumstances. Adult students are more than capable to pursue their goals given the proper infrastructure and enabling environment. This study has shown that adult students applied agency as their paramount skill to face barriers and achieve success in a TVET college. Similarly, in his State of Nation address (Ramaphosa, 2019) the

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president of South Africa mentioned that South Africans 'are a people of resilience, of determination and of optimism'.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Interview Guide

1. Name _____

2. Surname _____

3. Current Age

18- 20	21-25	26-30	30-35	36- Older

4. Gender

Male	Female

5. Race_____

6. Home Language (mother tongue)

Xhosa	English	Afrikaans	Other

7. Number of dependants _____

8. Ages:

9. Why, at this point of your life, have you decided to study?

10. What prompted you to apply for this course?

11. What factors were at your disposal that enabled you to apply?

12. Why did you want to study this programme?

13. What is your intention with the qualification?

14. How is this course contributing to what you want to do in 3-5 years?

15. What did you learn about yourself when you took that first step to apply to study?

16. How has being a mature student helped to guide you through your study experience?

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17. How best can you describe through your experience what it is to be a student?

18. What arrangement did you have to make to ensure that your studies in addition to any other responsibilities you may have had were satisfactorily taken care of?

19. What recourse or resources did you identify in order to enable yourself to build your academic capabilities?

20. What are some efforts you struggled with or succeeded in toward completing your studies?

21. What are some of the personal constraints that have negatively influenced your progress since you started the programme?

22. When you started out on this course, what were some of the positive and negative emotions you experienced?

23. What did you fear most about the negative emotions you experienced?

24. Do you have need of your family to support you financially while you are studying, or are you able to do so yourself and how?

25. How does your environment at home contribute in allowing you to study with ease?

26. Is it easy or difficult to travel to college and why?

27. If the travel distance between home and college is not a problem are you able to accomplish more from your studies (please explain); if travel distance is a problem, how does it affect your studies?

28. What were some of the difficulties you may have experienced in the application processes to study for your course?

29. Did the content of the course you enrolled for meet your requirements? How did this influence you thus far?

30. What are some of the professional qualities and competencies you would expect from your lecturers in order for you to prosper in your studies? What were your experiences thus far in this regard?

31. Have you had need to make use of the student support services offered to students at the college? If so, how has it been of help to you; if not, how did you manage through your study process?

32. How do you foresee that your studies should improve your current situation in life?

33. How would you use your completed studies to drive the changes or career you seek for your life?

34. If you are given an opportunity to pursue in further studies, once completed with current studies, why will you make a choice for or against it? Please explain.

35. Say for example you are approached by someone who wants to study this course what would you tell this person about the ability to succeed? What ability should that person have in order to succeed?

36. Describe what you thought of yourself before you made a decision to study, and how would you describe yourself now that you have reached this stage of your life?

37. Our medium of instruction is through English; what suggestion would you have in order to help you or other students if you found difficulty in learning through this medium of instruction?

38. Can you provide reasons and examples of any academic challenges you may have experienced, and how you proceeded to deal with them?

39. Which of the following (racial discrimination, prejudice, bigotry, harassment, hunger or other), if any, did you experience at college and how did you manage to deal with these challenges?

_____
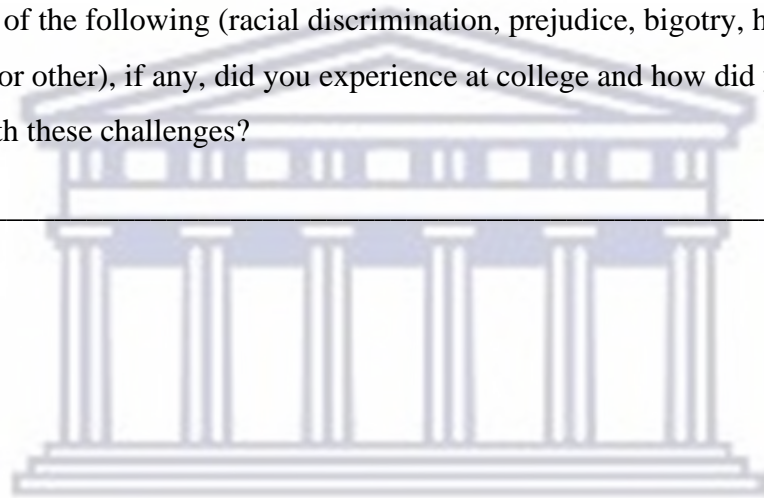
Appendix B – Request for permission to conduct research

The Campus Manager

████████████

████████████

████████████

████████████████

████

28 June 2018

Dear Sir

KIND REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am currently registered as a student at the University of the Western Cape in the Master's degree M.Ed. in Adult Learning and Global Change. As part of the Master's program, I am required to conduct a research study. My research topic focusses on access, participation and barriers to participation among adult learners at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College. I would like to request your permission to conduct the research study at ████████████, specially involving students enrolled in the Primary Health Department – Level 4 – as interview respondents. The rationale for the research focus and for the specific request is outlined below.

Having lectured in the TVET sector for the past 20 years, I have observed that adult students experience various challenges related to access, participation and success particularly related to teaching and learning and socio-economic problems (financial, social and political challenges). I am particularly interested in systematically exploring the way adult students have overcome barriers in order to succeed. My intention is to take the findings into account when designing teaching and learning strategies which are sensitive to access and success. This topic is important in the field of adult education because access to education is one of the most critical issues facing the South African society at present. The specific purpose of the research is to investigate the relationship(s) between access, participation and barriers to participation (success) in adult education.

I kindly request permission to conduct an investigation into access, participation and barriers to participation among adult learners as those are important issues in the TVET college sector.

I have been lecturing in the Primary Health Department for the last 5 years. Now that I am a student, I would like to conduct some research in this particular programme so that it has practical value for my further development as an educator which, in turn, will allow me to contribute more effectively to our work in the broader TVET sector.

I kindly request permission to conduct an investigation into access, participation and barriers to participation among adult students at ▆▆▆▆▆▆. More specifically, I would like to select 20 participants from the level 4 student body of the Primary Health Department. My data collection methods include conducting interviews, using an interview guide. All participants will receive a letter of consent informing them of the purpose of the

Study and requesting their agreement to be included as research participants. They will be requested to sign the letter of consent. I undertake to observe confidentiality.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact my academic supervisor or myself. I include the following contact details:

Researcher:	Sylvia P Larke
Contact Number:	▆▆▆▆▆▆
Email:	slarke@northlink.co.za
Tel:	▆▆▆▆▆▆
Course:	Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change
University:	University of the Western Cape
Supervisor:	Professor Zelda Groener
Email:	zgroener@uwc.ac.za
Tel:	+27(0)21 959 2801

I hope this request meets with your approval.

Thank you

Sylvia Larke

http://etd.uwc.ac.za/

APPENDIX C – Information Letter(s) to participants

Dear ………………………………….. (name to be inserted later)

I am currently registered as a student at the University of the Western Cape in the Master's degree, M.Ed. in Adult Learning and Global Change (ALGC). As part of the Master's program, the university requires of me to conduct a research study. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. My research topic focusses on access, participation and barriers to participation among adult learners.

During my 20 years as a lecturer in the TVET sector, I have observed that adult students experience various challenges related to access, participation and success particularly related to teaching and learning, finances and social challenges. I am particularly interested in systematically exploring the way adult learners have overcome difficulties and challenges in order to succeed. My intention is to take the findings into account when designing teaching and learning strategies which are sensitive to access and success. This topic is important in the field of adult education because access to education is one of the most critical issues facing the South African society at present.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the relationship(s) between access, participation and barriers to participation (success) in adult education.

I would like to request an interview with you at a time which is convenient for you. The interview is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. If you agree, I will provide you with an interview consent form and request that you sign it before I conduct the interview. I would like permission to record the interview with you using an electronic recording device.

I will treat the information that you share with the strictest confidentiality and will maintain your anonymity. All data in this research project will be securely stored for a period of five years.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact my academic supervisor or myself. I include the following contact details.

Researcher: Sylvia P Larke

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Contact Number:	███████████
Email:	slarke@northlink.co.za
Tel:	021 931 8238
Course:	Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change
University:	University of the Western Cape
Supervisor:	Professor Zelda Groener
Email:	zgroener@uwc.ac.za
Tel:	+27(0)21 959 2801

APPENDIX D – Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: Access, barriers to participation and success amongst mature adult students at a Technical and vocational Education and Training (TVET) college in the Western Cape

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Signing this form indicates your consent for your participation in the research project. Please be assured that information provided will be held in the strictest of confidence and that you will not be compromised in any way.

By signing this form, you agree to the following statements:

- I have read and understood the information letter.
- I have read and understood the consent form.
- I freely consent to be interviewed by the researcher.
- I give permission that the interview can be recorded with an effective recording device.
- I understand that my words may be quoted and used in publications, reports and in webpages but my name will not be mentioned.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the research project at any time and no questions will be asked about the reasons why I no longer want to participate.

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   Sylvia P. Larke

Researcher signature   _____

Appendix E– Ethical Approval

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

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07 June 2018

Ms SP Larke
Faculty of Education

Ethics Reference Number: HS18/3/10

Project Title: Access, barriers to participation and success among mature adult students at Northlink Technical Vocational and Training (TVET) College.

Approval Period: 06 June 2018 – 06 June 2019

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

PROVISIONAL REC NUMBER - 130416-049

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

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