

**AN ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT LEARNERS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES IN POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING**

by

Susheila Moodley

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PROMOTER: Prof FJ Nieuwenhuis

Co-PROMOTER: Dr SP van Tonder

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work submitted here is the result of my own independent investigation. Where help was sought, it has been acknowledged. I further declare that this work is submitted for the first time at this university/department towards a PhD degree and that it has never been submitted to any other university/faculty/department for the purpose of obtaining a degree. I furthermore cede copyright of the thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

Susheila Moodley

Date: 25 June 2018

I have lived my life by the following philosophy:

Surround yourself with the dreamers and the doers,

The believers and the thinkers,

but most of all Surround YOURSELF with those who see GREATNESS

Within you, even when you don't see it yourself

I have had the privilege over the past 50 years of my life to have these kinds of people in my life .. and they have propelled me to heights I had never imagined possible.

I have stood on the shoulders of giants in achieving this goal. The strongest shoulders upon which I have stood is that of my husband. At the end of my Masters, his conversation encouraged me to move to the next step which was my PhD.

Thank you my love....

Thank you for your love and support and unwavering encouragement

Thank you for giving me the time and space to complete this goal and walk this journey...

Thank you for seeing me and seeing what I want to achieve in this gifted life that I have the privilege of living.....

To my children, THANK YOU for your support, for your love and for the joy you bring to me life every minute of everyday

With Love and Gratitude

"Sine Metu Vivre"

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with a focus on the two broad areas of interest that I have as a practitioner in the field of adult education and training, i.e. assessment practices in PSET institutions and the effect of these assessment practices, specifically on the learning and learning achievement of adult learners with learning disabilities. It can be assumed that most adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET environments are most probably subjected to learning, teaching and assessment practices that cater for learners without significant learning disabilities. Therefore, current assessment practices in the PSET environment may not provide an equitable opportunity for adult learners with learning disabilities to demonstrate the learning outcomes achieved against the set standards.

It was therefore necessary to investigate the experiences and perceptions of adult learners with learning disabilities and their lecturers/facilitators/instructors of the current assessment practices in PSET programmes, and if the practices are not appropriate, to investigate how the relevant learners' achievement of the same learning outcomes and set standards might be assessed in alternative, inclusive and more equitable ways.

The study focused on achieving the following four objectives:

1. To investigate the possible positive and negative effects of assessment practices and concessions reported in literature, on adult learners with learning disabilities' ability to demonstrate their competence against minimum standards.
2. To investigate how adult learners with learning disabilities' in PSET experience and perceive the assessment practices they are currently subjected to, and how these practices influence their learning and ultimate achievement.
3. To determine how the facilitators/lecturers/instructors of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET experience and perceive the assessment practices they use to assess their learners with learning disabilities, including the effect

that they believe their practices might have on these learners' learning and ultimate achievement.

4. To compile and validate an assessment framework that will optimally cater for the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET.

The literature review informed the initial empirical study as well as the assessment framework that was finally compiled, evaluated and validated by a panel of purposively selected experts.

The empirical phase of the research was mixed methods in nature and used a multi-pronged data gathering strategy. The first phase of data collection included a survey questionnaire using open-ended questions posed to the two participant groups, i.e. currently enrolled adult learners with learning disabilities and their lecturers/facilitators/instructors. The second phase of the data gathering involved focus groups and one-on-one interviews with some of these learners, their lecturers/facilitators/instructors as well as two specialists. Finally, the integration of these collected data and the literature study findings was done by comparing and converging these data to compile a proposed assessment framework for assessing adult learners with learning disabilities in a PSET environment.

The proposed framework was presented to the panel of experts for their evaluation and validation, using a survey questionnaire that allowed this participant group to rate all the features and sub-features of the proposed framework. The data gathered in this phase was then used to amend and finalise the assessment framework, which is the final outcome of this research study.

As pragmatist, the value of the study lies in the practical aspect that the framework offers, i.e. the opportunity to use the assessment framework as a vantage point for the development of an inclusive assessment environment that has the ability to improve the assessment experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities by providing practitioners and policy makers with practical tools to realise their inclusion agenda.

Key terms:

Assessment; learning disability; adult learning; post-school education and training; inclusive education; inclusive assessment; assessment concessions; teaching and learning practices aligned to learning disability; assessment practices; alternative assessment practices; innovative assessment practices.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
AfL	Assessment for learning
AT	Assessment task
CA	Constructive alignment
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CPD	Continuous professional development
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance
FETI	Further education and training institution
HEDSA	Higher and Further Education Disability Services Association
HEI	Higher education institution
HETI	Higher education and training institution
ILO	Intended learning outcomes
INDS	Integrated National Disability Strategy
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NSF	National Skills Fund
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PALC	Public adult learning centre
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate of Education
PSET	Post-school education and training
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SWD	Students with disabilities
TLA	Teaching and learning activity
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
ULD	Universal learning design

CONTENT

	PAGE
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO STUDY	12
1.1 INTRODUCTION	13
1.2 LAYOUT OF THIS CHAPTER	15
1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	15
1.3.1 Post-school training	17
1.3.2 Inclusive education	18
1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	20
1.4.1 Research problem	20
1.4.2 Definition of learning disability as used in this study	21
1.4.3 Research questions	22
1.4.3.1 Primary research question	22
1.4.3.2 Secondary research questions	22
1.4.4 Aims of the study	23
1.5 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY	24
1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY	24
1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	26
1.7.1 Research design	26
1.7.2 Research methodology	28
1.8 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE STUDY	28
1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	29
1.10 STATUS AND ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER	30
1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	31
1.11.1 Practitioners in the field	31
1.11.2 Scholarly literature	31
1.11.3 Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disability)	32
1.12 CHAPTER LAYOUT	32
CHAPTER 2 – CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON ASSESSMENT IN POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	34
2.1 INTRODUCTION	35
2.2 DEFINING ASSESSMENT	37
2.3 PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT	38
2.3.1 Principles of effective assessment practice	39
2.3.1.1 Constructive alignment and deep approaches to learning	40
2.3.1.2 Assessment criteria and transparency of the assessment process	40
2.3.1.3 Assessment tasks should resemble the real world	41
2.3.1.4 Focus on assessment for learning and assessment as learning	41
2.3.1.5 Programme of assessments	41
2.3.1.6 Assessment results and feedback on assessment	43
2.3.1.7 Continuous professional development of staff and institution	45

	PAGE	
2.3.1.8	Assessment literacy among learners and learner involvement in assessment development and implementation	46
2.3.1.9	Credibility of assessment instruments: validity, reliability, fairness (including integrity) and practicability	47
2.3.2	Implications of the principles of effective assessment	50
2.3.3	Implementing principles of effective assessment	51
2.4	PURPOSES AND FORMS OF ASSESSMENT	52
2.4.1	Assessment for learning	53
2.4.2	Assessment as learning	54
2.4.3	Formative assessment and assessment for learning	55
2.4.3.1	Deep learning	55
2.5	ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING	58
2.5.1	Conventional assessment and assessment of learning	59
2.5.2	High-stakes summative assessment	60
2.5.3	Overreliance on summative assessment and its effects	61
2.5.4	Surface learning	63
2.5.5	Formative and summative assessment – striking a balance	64
2.6	AUTHENTIC AND ALTERNATIVE/INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT	66
2.6.1	Alternative/innovative assessment	66
2.6.2	Authentic assessment	67
2.6.3	Assessment of competence	68
2.7	ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES IN A PSET ENVIRONMENT	70
2.7.1	Feedback – current challenges in pset environments	71
2.7.2	Challenges with assessment complexity	73
2.7.3	Challenges of massification on assessment	74
2.7.4	Challenges of assessment literacy among learners	74
2.7.5	Access to sufficient resources to ensure assessment good practice	75
2.8	ASSESSMENT CONCESSIONS	76
2.8.1	Accommodations/assessment concessions	76
2.8.1.1	Categories of accommodations/concessions	77
2.8.1.2	Implementing assessment accommodations and concessions	78
2.8.1.3	Extra time as a concession	80
2.9	CONCLUSION	81
CHAPTER 3 – INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE EXTRINSIC BARRIERS TO LEARNING EXPERIENCED BY ADULT LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES		83
3.1	DEFINING LEARNING DISABILITY	85
3.1.1	Conceptual and operational definitions	86
3.2.2	First two seminal definitions for learning disability	89
3.1.3	A South African definition of learning disability	94
3.1.4	Towards a final definition of learning disability for this study	95

	PAGE	
3.2	DEFINING BARRIERS TO LEARNING	97
3.2.1	Institutional Barriers	99
3.2.2	Contextual barriers	107
3.2.2.1	Contextual barriers (societal, economic, policy) that impact on learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)	118
3.3	CONCLUSION	132
CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY		135
4.1	INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE	136
4.2	PARADIGMATIC ORIENTATIONS	138
4.2.1	Theoretical paradigm	138
4.2.2	Research paradigm	141
4.2.2.1	Research paradigms compared	142
4.3	RESEARCH DESIGN	146
4.4	SAMPLING	150
4.5	DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS	154
4.5.1	Survey questionnaires	155
4.5.2	Focus group interviews	155
4.5.3	One-on-one interviews	156
4.6	DATA COLLECTION PROCESS	156
4.7	DATA ANALYSIS	162
4.7.1	Analysis of survey data	165
4.7.2	Analysis of Interview data	169
4.8	TRUSTWORTHINESS AND DATA VERIFICATION STRATEGIES	170
4.8.1	Dependability	171
4.8.2	Credibility	172
4.8.3	Transferability	173
4.8.4	Confirmability	173
4.8.5	Validity	174
4.8.6	Reliability	175
4.9	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	176
4.9.1	Respect of participant	177
4.9.1.1	Written informed consent	177
4.9.1.2	Voluntary participation	177
4.9.1.3	Beneficence	178
4.9.1.4	Respect for the participant/protection of the participant and Justice	178
4.10	CONCLUSION	179
CHAPTER 5 – DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION		180
5.1	INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE	181
5.2	INSTITUTIONAL STORIES	183
5.3	RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' STORIES	201
5.3.1	Learner Profile	201
5.3.2	Lecturer profile	208
5.3.3	Disability specialists' profile	213

	PAGE	
5.4	TEACHING/LEARNING STORIES	214
5.5	ASSESSMENT STORIES	221
5.6	ALIGNMENT STORIES	235
5.7	MIND-SET STORIES	240
5.8	THEMES THAT EMERGED	245
5.8.1	Institutional stories	246
5.8.2	Participant stories	247
5.8.3	Assessment stories	248
5.8.4	Teaching and learning stories	249
5.8.5	Mindset stories	249
5.9	CONCLUSION	250
CHAPTER 6 – PROPOSED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK		252
6.1	INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE	253
6.2	PROFILE OF THE FRAMEWORK EVALUATION PANEL	254
6.3	BACKGROUND TO THE DESIGN OF THE PROPOSED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK	256
6.4	THE TENTATIVELY PROPOSED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK	257
6.5	EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK	259
6.5.1	Evaluation process	259
6.5.2	Evaluation outcomes/results	260
6.5.2.1	Continuous professional development	266
6.5.2.2	Advocacy and awareness; career development; testing protocols and support programmes	268
6.5.2.3	Monitoring and evaluation processes	272
6.5.3	Learner needs analysis and support	274
6.5.4	Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)	279
6.5.5	Assessment processes – assessment literacy and assessment appeal procedures	283
6.5.6	Assessment Tasks/Instruments	287
6.5.6.1	Assessment tasks (general)	287
6.5.6.2	Formative assessment	290
6.5.6.3	Summative Assessment	293
6.5.6.4	Authentic assessment	295
6.5.6.5	Principles of good assessment	298
6.5.7	Accommodations and concessions	305
6.5.8	Feedback	310
7.	ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK	310
8.	CONCLUSION	320
CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY		322
7.1	INTRODUCTION	323
7.2	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	325
7.2.1	Research question 1	325

	PAGE	
7.2.2	Research question 2	326
7.2.3	Research question 3	328
7.2.4	Research question 4	329
7.2.5	Research question 5	331
7.3	FINAL ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK	332
7.3.1	Pillar 1 – Leadership and management pillar	335
7.3.2	Pillar 2 – Learner needs analysis and support	338
7.3.3	Pillar 3 – Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)	339
7.3.4	Pillar 4 – Assessment processes	341
7.3.5	Pillar 5 – Assessment tasks/Instruments	342
7.3.6	Pillar 6 – Accommodations and concessions	346
7.3.7	Pillar 7 – Assessment feedback	347
7.4	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	349
7.5	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	352
7.6	RECOMMENDATIONS	352
7.7	CONCLUSION	354

	PAGE	
FIGURES		
Figure 1.1:	Layout of Chapter 1	15
Figure 1.2.	Conceptual framework of the study	26
Figure 1.3.	Sequential mixed method design (Subedi, 2016:573)	28
Figure 1.4:	Layout of the seven chapters in the thesis	33
Figure 2.1	Key themes examined in Chapter 2	36
Figure 2.2:	Social constructivist process: two parallel cycles (Source: Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005:236)	44
Figure 2.3:	Sambell et al. – assessment for learning model	53
Figure 2.4:	Holistic view of the assessment process (Source: Farrel & Rushby, 2016:115)	65
Figure 3.1:	Contextual barriers to learning	98
Figure 3.2:	Enrolment of learners with barriers to learning (sensory and learning disabilities) in PSET institutions (DHET, 2017)	126
Figure 4.1:	Layout of Chapter 4	137
Figure 4.2:	Explanatory sequential mixed method design (Subedi, 2016:573)	148
Figure 4.3:	Actual data collection process – Amended Subedi approach	150
Figure 4.4:	Actual data collection process followed	161
Figure 4.5:	Thematic analysis process - Psychology Department of the Auckland University	164
Figure 4.6:	Rationalised themes across all data sets for currently enrolled learners	167
Figure 4.7:	Rationalised themes across all datasets – facilitators/lecturers/instructors	168
Figure 4.8:	Specialist themes	169
Figure 5.1:	Age range of enrolled learners	202
Figure 5.2:	Nature of disability with which learners are diagnosed	202

	PAGE
Figure 5.3: Nature of the learner disability that facilitators were facilitating at the time of this research	203
Figure 5.4: Age range of facilitators/lecturers/instructors in pilot survey	208
Figure 5.5: Gender distribution of facilitators	209
Figure 5.6: Experience of facilitators with learners with barriers to learning (learning disability) among pilot participants	210
Figure 6.1: Gender distribution of expert panel	255
Figure 7.1: Layout of Chapter 7	325
Figure 7.2: Proposed assessment framework	333

	PAGE
TABLES	
Table 1.1: Census statistics for 2011 – population with and without disabilities	16
Table 1.2: The pragmatist's view of ontology, epistemology, and axiology within this paradigm (Eaton & Ihuah, 2013:938)	27
Table 2.1: The difference between assessment of, for, and as learning	66
Table 3.1: Anti-discriminatory legislation	120
Table 3.2: Massification of post-school education and training	121
Table 4.1: Pragmatist knowledge generation	140
Table 5.1: Resources available to PSET institutions in respect of Inclusivity	196
Table 6.1: Assessment Framework – rating criteria	260
Table: 7.1: Adapted assessment practices and their possible effects	330

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO STUDY

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The report by Human Rights Watch (2015:2) entitled “Complicit in Exclusion - South Africa’s Failure to Guarantee an Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities” identified the following six key findings in their study of children with disabilities in South Africa:

1. Children with disabilities face discrimination in accessing education within the public school environment.
2. This discrimination further manifests itself in the lack of reasonable accommodation made available to learners.
3. Fees and expenses required to attend such specialised educational facilities further exacerbate this discrimination.
4. Learners in South African public educational institutions are frequently exposed to violence, abuse, and neglect; in particular, individuals such as learners with barriers to learning who are vulnerable to the aberrant behaviour of others and the resultant stress they have to bear.
5. The lack of quality education offered to learners with disabilities because the education offered to this cohort of learners is of a lower quality than that offered to their non-disabled counterparts. This poor quality is further evident in teaching and learning practices including the lack of skills among teachers to cope effectively with learners with barriers to learning.
6. The lack of preparation for life after basic education is a consequence of the elements highlighted above and contributes directly to the practice of young adults staying at home after compulsory education. This is evident in the less than 1% of adult learners enrolled in post-school education and training given a 7.5% prevalence rate in South Africa (Statssa, 2011:4).

This view is corroborated by a report in the Daily Maverick (August 15, 2015) which asserts that the picture painted for public education at a basic level is far more serious

at a post-school education and training level. The article claims that as much as 80% of learners with disabilities do not access post-school education and training opportunities. The policy of inclusive education fails in equal measure to that of both post-school education and training and basic education. Of interest in this report is the focus on barriers to learning in general and specifically on sensory barriers with little mention of learning disabilities, which should also be categorised as a barrier.

A presentation by the South African Teachers Union (SAOU, 2015) indicated that approximately 20% of all learners' experience barrier to learning in one form or another throughout their school education. Specifically, SAOU claimed that in 2012 there were at least 231 459 (1.16%) learners in special and mainstream schools faced with learning disabilities. The implication is that there are approximately 400 000 learners in the system without any support. Many of these learners will never qualify to continue with higher education programmes, but may end up in Technical and Vocational Colleges offering post-school programmes.

When we consider barriers to learning it is important to reflect on the holistic needs of these learners given that these barriers could include physical impediments (e.g., hearing, sight, movement), neurological barriers, cognitive barriers (e.g., learning skills), environmental challenges (e.g., impoverishment, malnutrition), emotional challenges, financial difficulties, among others. Our focus needs to be on learning and assessment, and our expectations of learners and their readiness to perform. Within an inclusive setting this is seldom practised, and in literature, appears to be a poorly researched area.

In this study, the focus is on assessment as it relates to the teaching and learning experience of learners in the post-school education and training environment. The study therefore sets out to investigate the current assessment practices in post-school education and training institutions that either support, or inhibit adult learners with learning disabilities from demonstrating their competence, measured against minimum standards.

Given the contextual orientation articulated above, the aim of this chapter is to provide a broad overview of the study as presented in the ensuing chapters. This is done by reflecting on the research problem and its background, progressing from there to the research questions that the study must answer, and in this context providing the

study's aims and objectives. Following demarcation by delineating the field of study in which it is anchored a succinct account of the research design and methodology is provided to address the problem that I intended to solve. Finally, I express my views on the significance of the study. Figure 1.1 below reflects the layout of this chapter.

1.2 LAYOUT OF THIS CHAPTER

Figure 1.1 below presents the general layout of this chapter.

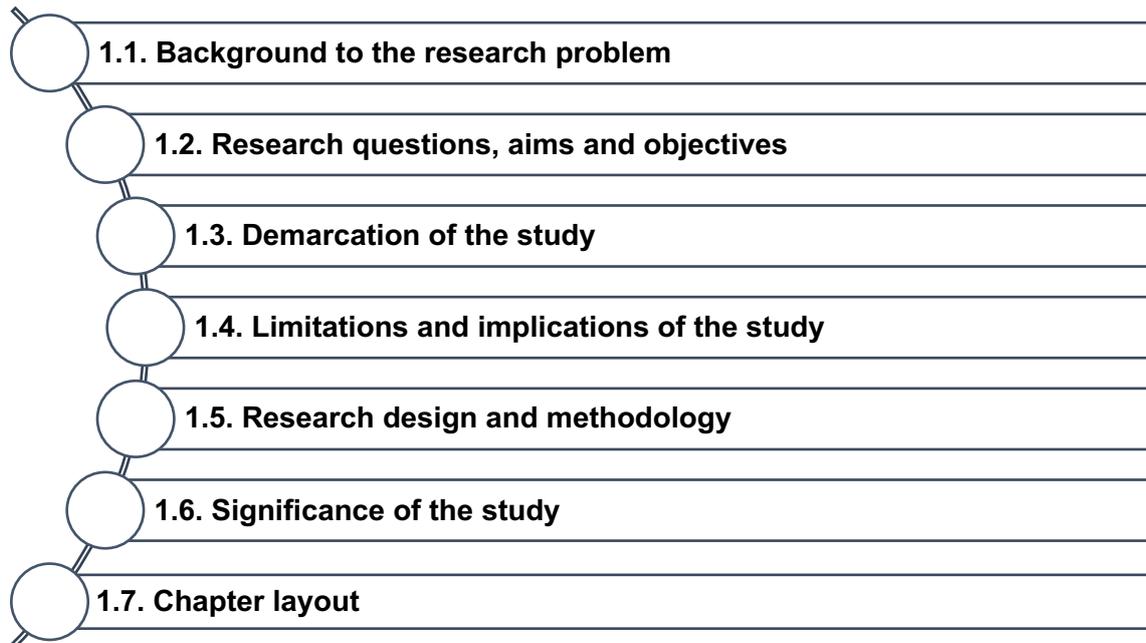


Figure 1.1: Layout of Chapter 1

1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Census 2011 (Statistics South Africa 2014: v) (see Table 1.1) suggests that approximately 2.87 million South Africans (7.5%) live with some form of disability. In 2011, only 5 807 students with disabilities were enrolled in 22 of the 23 registered higher education institutions (RSA DHET, 2013:46). This amounted to 1% of the total enrolment, and 0.2% of the total disabled population. From these statistics, we can

assume that only a limited number of eligible learners are enrolled in post-school education and training (PSET) programmes.

Table 1.1: Census statistics for 2011 – population with and without disabilities

Province	With disabilities		Without disabilities		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Western Cape	222 333	5,4	3 914 513	94,6	4 136 846	100,0
Eastern Cape	472 106	9,6	4 448 179	90,4	4 920 285	100,0
Northern Cape	92 731	11,0	747 310	89,0	840 041	100,0
Free State	234 738	11,1	1 888 869	89,0	2 123 607	100,0
KwaZulu-Natal	620 481	8,4	6 728 673	91,6	7 349 154	100,0
North West	254 333	10,0	2 285 298	90,0	2 539 631	100,0
Gauteng	485 331	5,3	8 627 419	94,7	9 112 750	100,0
Mpumalanga	205 280	7,0	2 727 519	93,0	2 932 799	100,0
Limpopo	282 797	6,9	3 846 966	93,2	4 129 763	100,0
South Africa	2 870 130	7,5	35 214 746	92,5	38 084 876	100,0

The National Plan on Higher Education (RSA DHET, 2001:5) identified adults living with disabilities as a target group for increasing the general participation rate in higher education to between 15 and 20% by 2011. The Integrated National Disability Strategy (RSA Office of the Presidency, 1997:41) set increased participation of a diverse range of stakeholders, including people living with disabilities, as a focus for higher education and training. It also focused on greater responsiveness to the social and economic needs of the disabled: the higher the level of education of adults with disabilities, the greater the opportunity for economic self-sustainability. Alongside this context, the DHET (RSA DHET, 2013:46) subsequently reported an underutilisation of funding allocated to disabled learners. In 2010, 47% of the budget allocated for this purpose remained unspent. In 2011, 55% of the budget remained unspent.

In 2011, the approximately 2.87 million disabled people in South Africa were all potentially collecting a disability grant of approximately R1 500.00 per month. This would amount to an annual spend of R4.3 billion (SASSA, 2016:1–7). There is consensus that people living with learning disabilities do not enjoy high employment rates, which results in lower income levels and higher levels of poverty (2010:1). The Integrated National Disability Strategy (RSA, Office of the Deputy President, 1997:6) confirms that these high levels of poverty are compounded by the low levels of education and skills. Therefore, focus on making PSET institutions accessible to people living with disabilities, in particular people with learning disabilities, is integral to ensuring their economic independence. It is important to note that insufficient

attention is given to the specific nature of barriers to learning. In the context of the national plan on higher education and the integrated disability strategy, disability is used a general term to encompass sensory barriers as well as barriers to learning that may rise from a learning disability.

1.3.1 Post-school training

At this point, a definition of what constitutes a PSET institution is required. PSET includes, but is not restricted to, adult education and training provided by technical and vocational education and training (TVET) providers, universities, and other higher education institutions such as nursing and agricultural colleges. The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (RSA, 2013) specifically describes post-school education and training as encompassing the following types of institutions, which fall under the purview of the Department of Higher Education and Training:

- 23 public universities (with two more having been established in 2014);
- 50 public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges (formerly known as further education and training [FET] colleges);
- public adult learning centres (soon to be absorbed into the new community colleges);
- private post-school institutions (registered private FET colleges and private higher education institutions, also to be renamed TVET colleges).

Based on this definition I identified the institutions that I intended to include in this study. Specifically, I focused on adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) who have completed school or further education and training college learning programmes, and who are enrolled for programmes at NQF level 5 or higher. Therefore, the study is limited to the 50 public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges (formerly known as further education and training [FET] colleges) and the private post-school institutions (registered private FET colleges and private higher education institutions—also to be renamed TVET colleges—with a specific focus on NQF 5 post-school qualifications. This area is of particular interest to me as it falls within the ambit of my field of expertise.

1.3.2 Inclusive education

There is recognition that if adult learners with learning disabilities are to benefit from the limited PSET opportunities that do exist, a review of the curricula and policies for integrating adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) into our existing PSET institutions is essential (i.e., to enable inclusion/inclusive education). White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (RSA, 2001:6) presents this educational philosophy in the context of education in South Africa. It included the expectation that it will meet the needs of ALL learners, i.e., that all learners, irrespective of ability or disability, may sit in the same classes (they are not separated from one another) and the needs of all are attended to in an equitable manner. The context of inclusion in this study took the following view:

That the aim of inclusion is to treat all learners in the same manner and yet treat them in a manner that considers their individual needs (Warnock et al., in Mutanga, 2013:80) – “their exceptionalities” (Shyman, 2015:351). Shyman stresses further that all learners, irrespective of “their exceptionalities” (2015:351) have the right to access a normal classroom environment.

White Paper 6 (RSA, 2001:6) takes the following view of inclusion:

- An environment where all learners can learn despite their differing learning needs.
- An environment in which the educational structure, systems, and methods of teaching and learning are conducive to meeting the varying needs of the learner.
- An environment that understands that inclusivity means changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula, and a classroom environment that maximises learner participation and minimises learning barriers.
- In the context of post-school education and training, inclusion is a strategy used in addressing the increasingly diverse classroom that post-school education and training institutions face due to massification.

This has already been confirmed in the Integrated National Disability Strategy of 1997 (RSA Office of the Deputy President, 1997:40): “Equity for learners with learning disabilities implies the availability of additional support mechanisms within an inclusive

learning environment.” It is therefore necessary to review the experiences that learners with learning disabilities have of teaching, learning, and assessment.

To ensure the achievement of these goals the lived experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities from a learning, teaching, and assessment perspective must be re-engineered and might require special interventions. According to Matshediso (2010:741), “The interventions must understand disability discrimination within the spectrum of barriers to learning and as a creative and sustainable effort to improve the social and academic experiences of students.”

Despite the plethora of statutes in South Africa aimed at inclusivity and the integration of people living with barriers to learning, including learning disabilities, their impact is not seen on the ground in the form of greater numbers of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in PSET institutions. Furthermore, statistics show little evidence of increased access to these institutions, improved learning progress, or learning achievement (higher throughput rates).

Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in PSET environments are most probably subjected to learning, teaching, and assessment practices that cater for learners without significant learning disabilities, even though learners with disabilities might sit in the same class. It may not provide an equitable opportunity for adult learners with learning disabilities to demonstrate the learning outcomes achieved measured against set standards. This is supported in the following research report on disabled learners’ experiences: “Disabled students indicated greater difficulties than non-disabled students in taking notes, hearing the lecturer, reading course materials, access into buildings and having appropriately formatted handouts” (Madriaga et al., 2010:41). It is therefore necessary to investigate the experiences and perceptions of adult learners with learning disabilities of the current assessment practices in PSET programmes. If these practices are not appropriate then the manner in which their achieving the same learning outcomes, as measured against set standards, may be assessed in alternative, equitable ways.

Against this background, the research problem is presented next.

1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.4.1 Research problem

Adult learners with learning disabilities in the PSET contexts are subjected to learning, teaching, and assessment practices that mainly cater for learners without significant learning disabilities (Couzens, 2013:26). Research on inclusive education in higher education over the past decade has focused primarily on issues of access (White Paper on Post-Secondary Education, 2013; Mutanga, 2017; Pudaruth, Gunpath & Singh, 2017), and support (Pudaruth, Gunpath & Singh, 2017), whereas other issues have not received much attention. From my own experience, I have noted that assessment practices are just as important, yet there is a paucity of research conducted in this area. In a study conducted by Sachs and Schreuder (2011) in Israel it was found that "...students with disabilities invested more time to meet the demands of their studies, participated in fewer social and extra-curricular activities, and used computers and information technology less" (Disability Studies Quarterly, 2011:2). In South Africa, very few studies have been conducted that focus specifically on barriers to learning and the assessment of students in post-secondary education. This study sets out to investigate how institutions deal with the assessment of students with disabilities and how these processes could be enhanced.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (RSA DHET, 2013:44) has reported the following: "There has been increasing acceptance that people with disabilities can play active roles in transforming their lives and can contribute to society. Access to proper education and training opportunities is fundamental to this."

This intent to incorporate people with disabilities, including learning disabilities, into post-school education and training (PSET) programmes is evident in the following:

- White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education 2001.
- White Paper on Post School Education and Training 2013.
- National Plan for Higher Education 2001.
- Integrated National Disability Strategy 1997.

Despite the abundance of statutes intended to create an environment that would provide access to post-school education and training opportunities for people with

disabilities, the system has failed to achieve this in the domain of post-school education and training (PSET) for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (White Paper 6; RSA DHET, 2013). The various statutes, enacted to improve the education and training experiences of learners with barriers to learning, whether sensory or as a result of a learning disability, focus on disability in a broad context. Specifically, one of the areas that emerged in the study was the lack of a generally accepted definition for barriers to learning because of a learning disability, thus making a diagnosis and creating a plan of action difficult for most PSETIs in South Africa. My particular interest lies in the learner whose barrier to learning is due to a learning disability. It is therefore necessary to define barriers to learning that specifically result in a learning disability.

1.4.2 Definition of learning disability as used in this study

Shapiro (2011:211); Butter and Hasselhorn (2011:76); Flanagan and Harrison (2012:655); and Nel and Grosser (2016) define learning disability as a “variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organisation or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information. These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological process related to learning in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning...Learning disabilities range in severity and invariably interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following important skills: oral language (e.g., listening, speaking, understanding); reading (e.g., decoding, comprehension); written language (e.g., spelling, written expression); and mathematics (e.g., computation, problem solving).” The conceptual definition used for this research study (Nel & Grosser, 2016; Butter & Hasselhorn, 2011; Shapiro, 2011) encompasses the following:

- Learners whose learning disabilities may negatively affect their acquisition, organisation, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information.
- Learners whose learning disability results from an impairment in one or more of the processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering, or learning. They include language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions

(e.g., planning and decision-making), social perceptions, and social interactions.

Human Rights Watch supports this definition of a learning disability in their 2015 report: “Difficulties in learning specific skills, such as reading, language, or math. They affect people's ability to interpret what they see and hear or to link information. Children with learning disabilities may also have trouble paying attention and getting along with peers. Learning disabilities are not related to intelligence or educational opportunity” (Complicit in Exclusion, 2015: ii).

This study did not include learners whose barrier to learning included sensory disabilities.

1.4.3 Research questions

The following are the primary and secondary research questions formulated to underpin my research study. Through the literature review and the empirical study I attempted to answer the research questions and thus solve the research problem presented above.

1.4.3.1 Primary research question

The primary research question emanating from the research problem is the following:

How do the assessment practices currently used in PSET programmes support adult learners with learning disabilities in demonstrating their competence as measured against the learning outcomes of the programme?

1.4.3.2 Secondary research questions

The primary research question was divided into four secondary research questions that collectively provided an answer to the primary question:

1. What assessment practices reported in literature support, or inhibit adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from reflecting their competence as measured against the learning outcomes of the programme?
2. How do current assessment practices that adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in a PSET programme experience, influence their learning progress and learning achievement?

3. How do current assessment practices used by the facilitators/lecturers/instructors of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in PSET programmes, effect learners' learning progress and learning achievement?
4. How could current assessment practices in PSET programmes be adapted to cater optimally for the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)?

Based on the primary and secondary research questions, the aim and objectives of the study are articulated below.

1.4.4 Aims of the study

The primary aim of the research study is to investigate how assessment practices currently used in PSET institutions support adult learners with learning disabilities and how they inhibit them from demonstrating their competence measured against identified minimum standards.

This primary research aim includes the following research objectives:

1. To investigate the positive and negative effects of assessment practices and concessions reported in literature on the ability of adult learners with learning disabilities to demonstrate their competence against the learning outcomes of the programme.
2. To investigate how adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET experience the current assessment practices, and how these practices influence their learning progress and learning achievement.
3. To determine how the facilitators/lecturers/instructors of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET perceive the assessment practices they use to assess their learners with learning disabilities, including the effect that they believe their practices might have on these learners' learning progress and learning achievement.
4. To compile and validate an assessment framework that will optimally cater for the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in PSETIs.

1.5 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study as they relate to the development of an assessment framework that would cater optimally for the assessment needs of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET institutions focus on the assessment experiences of this cohort of learners and how it could be improved. The study targeted adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) enrolled in learning programmes at NQF level 5 or higher. Furthermore, the study falls within higher education studies in the ambit of course design. More specifically, the study demarcates assessment development and implementation, and student experience as key themes in higher education and training research. These key themes have been demonstrated by Tight (2012:7), and confirmed by Wilkinson and Van Jaarsveldt (in Bitzer & Wilkinson, 2009:394).

1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Ravitch and Riggan (in Rogers, 2016:1709), refer to a conceptual framework as a conceptual map that focuses on the main concepts to be studied in a research study and should include key factors, variables, and the relationship between these.

This study aimed to explore the current assessment practices as they relate to adult learners who experience barriers to learning, specifically learning disabilities. To that end, the focus of the study is assessment as a concept within the broader landscape of teaching, learning, and assessment. Therefore, the discussions and debates reflected in this research study focus on defining assessment and formulating its purpose. The debates and discussions further progress to an exploration of the three forms of assessment, namely, assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning (Price et al., 2011:486; Baartman et al., 2007:17; Bastiaens, Kirschner & Van der Vleuten, 2007:120; Kilfoil, 2008:126; Sambell, 2016:8).

Having explored the purpose and forms of assessment, I present the distinction between traditional/conventional assessment (norm-referenced assessment) (Price et al., 2011:486; Geyser, 2004:90; Sambell, 2016:3; Baartman, 2017:117) and authentic/alternative assessment (criterion-based assessment) (Kaur, 2016:4; Klenowski, 2014:451; Bevitt, 2014:3; Autin, Batruch & Butera, 2015:10) which is typically performance- and competency-based assessment. In the context of these distinctions, the debate presents authentic assessment as the preferred assessment

approach for adult learners with barriers to learning, i.e., learning disabilities (Bastiaens, Kirschner & Van der Vleuten, 2006:153; Sambell, 2016:1; Kaur et al., 2016:4; Bevitt, 2014:3). It also presents the advantages of this assessment approach and enabling adult learners with learning disabilities to meet the minimum standards required for competence (Klenowski, 2014:451; Baartman et al., 2007:117). The study further explores current assessment practices compared to that which is considered best practice in the literature (AAHE, 2003; SAQA, 2001, 2015; Baartman et al., 2007; Sambell, 2016; Price et al., 2008, 2011; Boud Assessment 2020, 2010; Smith, 2013; Couzens et al., 2015 Bevitt, 2014, Jones et al., 2016; Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006; Geysler, 2004; Price et al., 2008). The study finally uses these discussions and debates to present a final framework for assessment.

Figure 1.2 below represents the relationship between current assessment practices, assessment good practice, the link with the empirical study intended to identify the elements of the proposed assessment framework, and the outcome of the research study, namely an assessment framework for adult learners with learning disabilities in post-school education and training. Current assessment practices form the basis of good assessment practice viewed as the goal that we are striving for, specifically the progression towards authentic assessment. The empirical study will reveal the elements of the assessment framework, which will become the means to achieve good assessment practice.

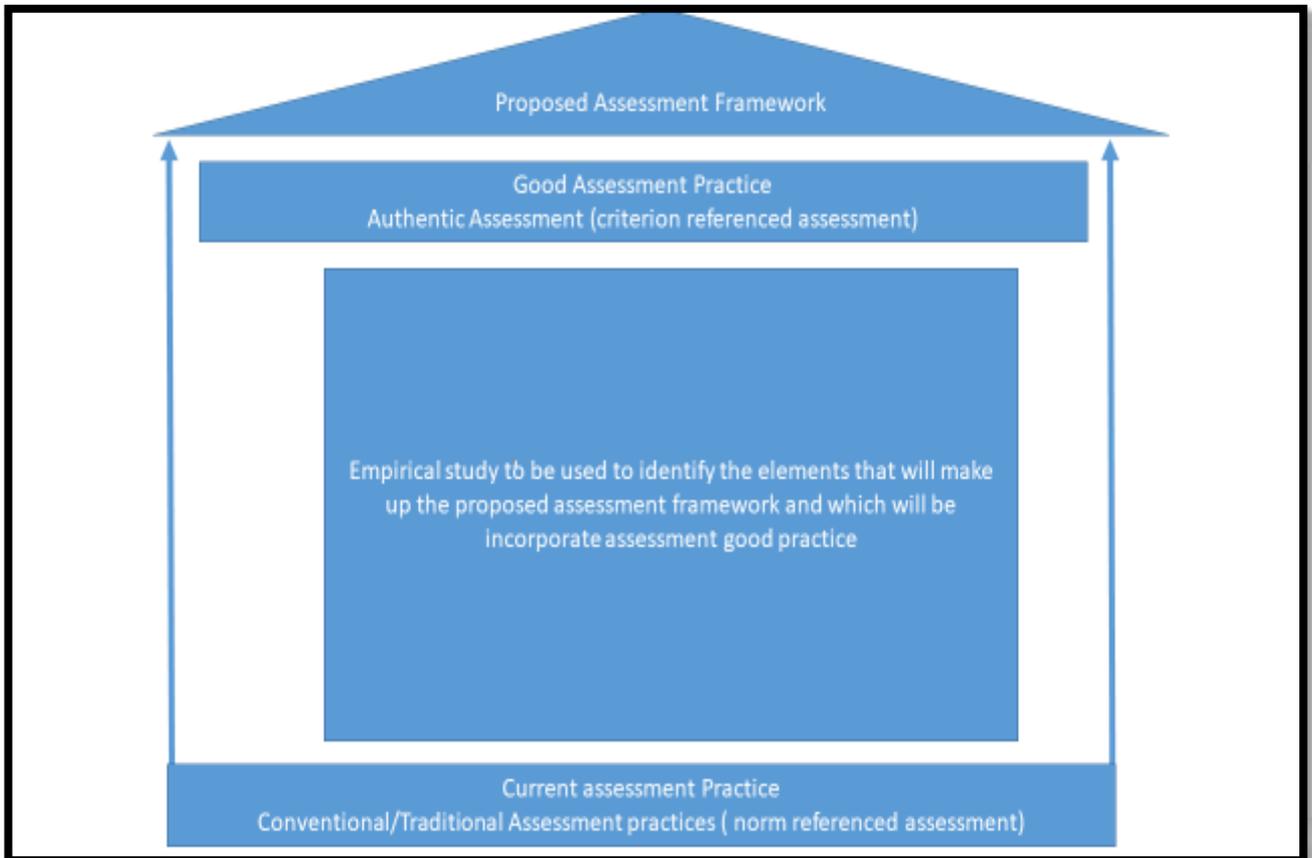


Figure 1.2. Conceptual framework of the study

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 Research design

The research design of this study is informed and guided by the main research question: *How do the assessment practices currently used in PSET programmes support adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in demonstrating their competence as measured against the learning outcomes of the programme?* The research question deals with the practical problems experienced within the field of inclusive education and the assessment of learners with barriers to learning. My research interests are imbedded in the field of practice as to how practitioners can resolve problems in education (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:14). In terms of assessment, my research focused on ontological pragmatism.

Pragmatism as a paradigm is characterised by a focus on the outcome of research; it is entrenched in communication, finding shared meaning, focusing on the outcome of the research, and providing practical solutions that are actionable in solving the research problem (Eaton & Ihuah, 2013:936).

The characteristics of the pragmatist paradigm described above are well reflected in Dewey's five-step approach to inquiry (Morgan, 2014:1047):

1. What is the problem – recognition of the problem?
2. If I define the problem like this, what difference does it make to the way in which the problem is seen?
3. What actions can I take/should I take to respond to the problem?
4. What are the potential consequences of my anticipated actions?
5. Implement the actions that are likely to address the problem.

Table 1.2: The pragmatist's view of ontology, epistemology, and axiology within this paradigm (Eaton & Ihuah, 2013:938)

Pragmatism	
Ontology	Which view best answers the question? The researcher is seen as external and there are multiple views.
Epistemology	Whether meaning is subjective or objective, they can nonetheless provide facts to the questions being asked in the research study. In generating knowledge, the focus is on practical application.
Axiology	Axiology focuses on the values that underpin the research conducted as well as how the data is interpreted.
Research method	Use of qualitative and quantitative tools for data collection.
Methodology	Mixed methods approach

As reflected in Table 1.2, the pragmatist paradigm lends itself to a mixed methods approach to operationalising the research design.

1.7.2 Research methodology

The mixed methods methodological approach looks at a complex social phenomenon from a number of perspectives, understanding such a phenomenon in a way that would not have been possible using a single approach (Shannon-Baker, 2016:321). Eaton and Ihuah (2013:938) concur and suggest that this is a key advantage of the mixed methods approach. They suggest that such an approach is complementary and thus provides a better understanding of the research problem. Subedi (2016:571) suggests that a mixed methods approach provides for a practical and applied philosophical approach to research.

I opted specifically for an explanatory sequential design (Subedi, 2016:573) as the basis for my data collection. The approach was to collect quantitative data from the key survey participants by means of a questionnaire, which I hoped would provide a general view of the landscape around the research problem. Once this has been achieved and analysed, I would be able to design the qualitative data collection tools required to extract, refine, and confirm further information that would provide solutions to the research problem.

Figure 1.3 below represents the approach I took to the research method, i.e., a sequential mixed method design.



Figure 1.3. Sequential mixed method design (Subedi, 2016:573)

1.8 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE STUDY

How is quality assured in a qualitative research study? The subjective nature of qualitative research is well captured in the view of McMillan and Schumacher (2014:347) that the ultimate aim of qualitative research is to investigate and

understand participants' perspectives on a social phenomenon, which affects their feelings, beliefs, ideas, thoughts, and actions.

Given that qualitative research is a subjective process, other measures should be applied during the research process to ensure that the results can be trusted and the quality of the findings assured, even though generalisability is always difficult in qualitative studies of this nature. In this study, I ensured the quality of the study results through the following measures:

- Constructing the study in a manner that conforms to the six norms of scientific research; and
- Aligning the study with Lincoln and Guba's (1985:296) "truth value" (i.e., the four pillars of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability).

I conducted an extensive literature study that incorporated both local and global perspectives on assessment forms in post-school education and training, specifically in the context of the experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities.

I used multiple data-collection methods, including survey questionnaires, focus groups, individual interviews, and a validation panel for the assessment framework. The panel, comprising experts in the field of adult learners with learning disabilities and assessment, evaluated and validated the final assessment framework.

I quoted verbatim from participants' responses to ensure the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. None of the participants was identified (see ethics), thus protecting their anonymity.

Furthermore, I kept a detailed journal of all activities, my observations in the field, and all changes made to the research design in order to build an audit trail. Triangulation of the data further ensured the dependability of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:245; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:355).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

"Research ethics deals primarily with the interaction between researchers and the people they study. This means that if a choice must be made between doing harm to a participant and doing harm to the research, it is the research that is sacrificed" (Mack, 2011:8).

As a researcher studying adult learners with learning barriers (learning disabilities), I was keenly aware of the ethical implications of working with a vulnerable participant group. To ensure that the group would not be compromised in any way, I did the following to ensure that generally accepted good practice was followed throughout the research study. This included the following measures:

- Written, informed permission was sought from PSET establishments where adult learners with learning disabilities were attending teaching and learning.
- Written, informed consent from all the selected learners, facilitators, and expert participants was ensured.
- All participants were offered the right to voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. This right to withdraw was exercised in this study by one institution.
- All participants were offered the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of information. Participants were given the option to remain anonymous through all stages of data collection. In the data analysis phase, I was the only person privy to the research data, including questionnaires, focus group transcriptions (video, voice, and written) as well as individual interviews (video, voice, and written). The identities of the participants were kept confidential at all times.
- All raw data (questionnaires completed manually) were kept safely in a locked cabinet, together with written copies of all transcriptions used to analyse the data collected. In addition, my computer is password protected. No one, other than myself, has access to my computer and the data stored in respect of this research study.
- Finally, I received ethical clearance from the University of the Free State (ethical clearance number UFS-HSD2017/0552).

1.10 STATUS AND ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

I am the parent of a profoundly disabled adult daughter, and the greatest challenge that I face is that she will be cared for in my absence, personally and financially.

My personal considerations aside, I have accumulated a wealth of experience and expertise in adult education and training on a professional level. I have an undergraduate degree in Education and a Master's in Higher Education Studies. I own

and manage a private further education and training college that provides financial, advisory, and intermediary services (FAIS) as well as compliance training to the financial services sector (FAIS Act [No 37 of 2002]). I am of the belief that people with disabilities can and should be supported in achieving independence. This belief is echoed in the following:

Ultimately, they have the ability to “play active roles in transforming their lives and can contribute to society. Access to proper education and training opportunities is fundamental to this” (RSA DHET, 2013:44).

1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant in the insight it provides into a group of learners who have been identified as under-researched, i.e., adult learners whose barrier to learning is a learning disability. This was evident in the paucity of literature available on this particular population. Specifically, they are the least researched population (intellectual and mental disorders) despite the proven reality that this population appears to be the most vulnerable in the context of society as a whole, and certainly within the labour market. In addition, this section of the learner population has seen significant growth in PSET institutions (Goode, 2007:37; Hart, Grigal & Weir, 2010:135; Greve, 2009:11).

Furthermore, the research has particular significance for the following groups of stakeholders:

1.11.1 Practitioners in the field

Given its ability to provide solutions to educational problems and improve educational practices, the significance of this research lies in its ability to provide students, policymakers/legislators, government, and the post-school education and training sector the practical tools to improve the teaching, learning, and assessment experiences of current learners with learning disabilities in PSET programmes through the proposed assessment framework.

1.11.2 Scholarly literature

The significance of the study for scholars in the field lies in the fact that this research population is under-researched whilst being recognised as an ever-growing population within PSET institutions (Goode, 2007:37; Hart, Grigal & Weir, 2010:135; Greve,

2009:11). In addition, the assessment framework generated from this empirical study becomes a framework that can be used by practitioners and policy makers, and can be measured in terms of its contribution to improving accessibility and improved learner progress and learner achievement.

1.11.3 Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disability)

In my view, the significance of this study lies in the positive effect it will have on stakeholders' experiences in teaching, learning, and assessment. The extent to which the proposed assessment framework, once implemented, can be measured in terms of its contribution to ensure greater accessibility to PSET institutions as well as the degree to which these implemented practices can improve learner progress and learner achievement.

1.12 CHAPTER LAYOUT

Each chapter in this thesis contributes to solving the research problem presented in section 1.3 of this chapter. The thesis has two distinct aspects. Firstly, it covers the literature review chapters, which present the context of the research study and specifically reflect the current academic thinking (chapters 2 and 3) in respect of assessment practices experienced by adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET institutions. Secondly, the remaining chapters (4, 5, 6, and 7) cover the results of the empirical study as well as the proposed assessment framework, i.e., the outcome of the research study.

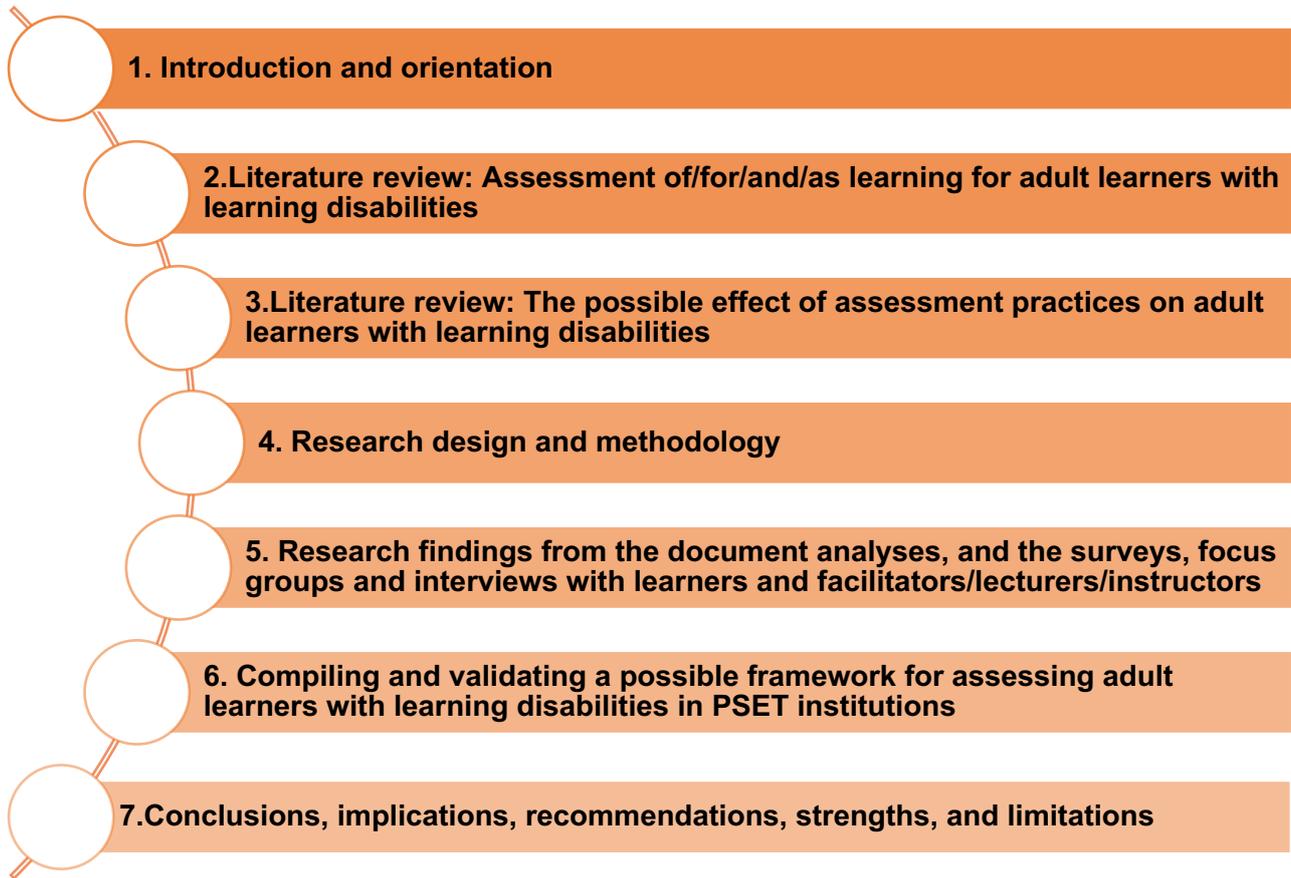


Figure 1.4: Layout of the seven chapters in the thesis

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE
ON ASSESSMENT IN POST-SCHOOL
EDUCATION
AND TRAINING

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON ASSESSMENT IN POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 served as an orientation to the entire research study, from the articulation of the problem statement to the methodologies used to gather the relevant data in order to answer the primary and secondary research questions. Chapter 2 begins a journey of exploring current debates on the subject of assessment in the higher education and training (HET/PSET) sector in respect of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). Specifically, Chapter 2 is concerned with providing answers to the first research question, namely, “What are the current perspectives on assessment *of/for/as* learning in the higher/post-school education and training sector, for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)?”

Deliberations on the constructs, ‘assessment *of* learning’, ‘assessment *for* learning/, and ‘assessment *as* learning’, in this chapter are informed by current debates on the subject of assessment in post-school education and training. Deliberations on assessment in the context of the workplace and the professional environment tend towards polarization: researchers have to determine not only the frequency of assessment and the methods that could/should be used to this purpose, but also how these could be aligned to the delivery and intended outcomes of the academic or workplace programme. In addition to the consideration of matters like these, researchers and/or lecturers have to decide how to go about judging what has been learnt, what individual learners’ competence levels are, and whether the results of assessment indicate their ability/potential to progress to further learning or to professional practice, - high-stakes assessment, in the latter case (Baartman et al., 2006; Bastiaens, Kirschner & Van der Vleuten, 2007:120; Kilfoil, 2008:126; Sambell, 2016:8).

The review of literature in this chapter, which focuses on current debates regarding assessment *of* learning, assessment *for* learning, and assessment *as* learning, is structured in the form of the key themes reflected in Figure 2.1, which follows.

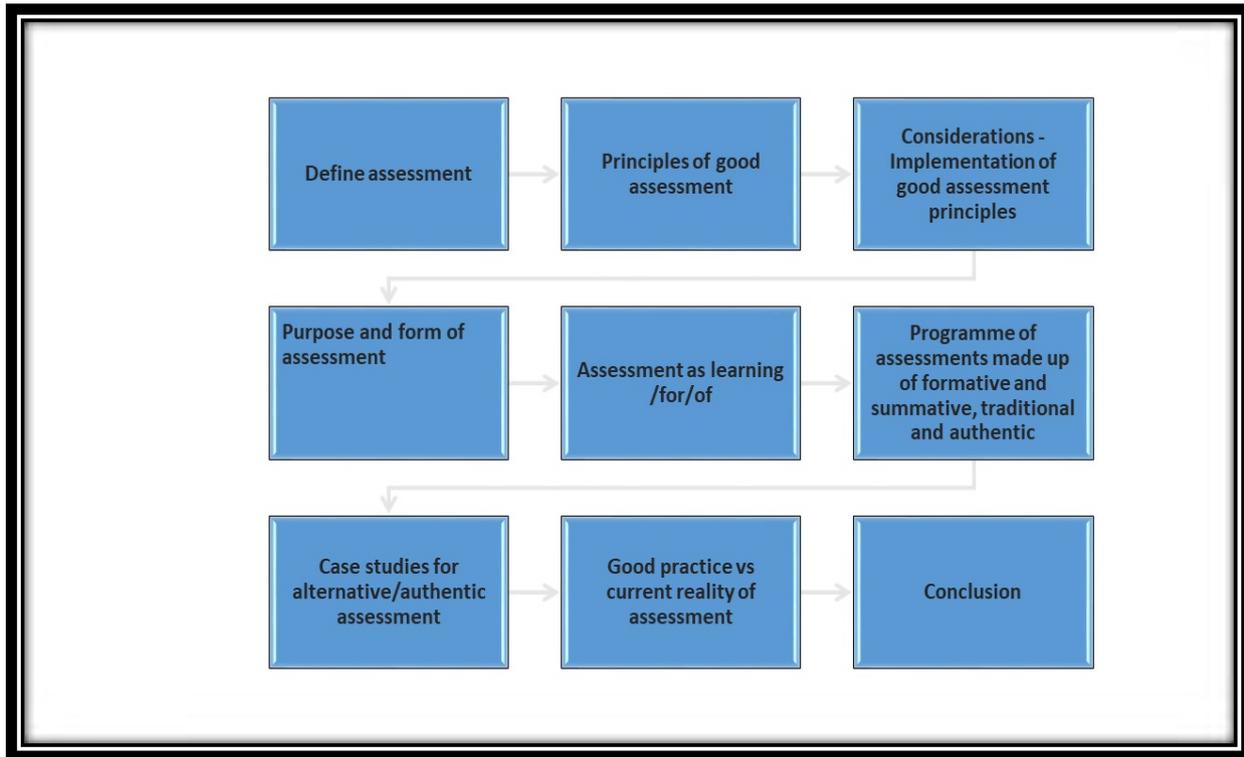


Figure 2.1 Key themes examined in Chapter 2

The debates highlighted in this chapter are contextualised within the policy framework for higher and post-school education and training in South Africa. Specific attention is paid to views on assessment in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (RSA, 1997), the National Qualifications Framework Act (RSA, 2008), the Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training (RSA, 2012), the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (RSA, 2013), the Integrated National Disability Strategy (RSA, 1997), the National Plan on Higher Education (RSA, 2001), and the White Paper on Inclusion (RSA, 2006).

The literature reviewed in this chapter reflects gaps in current debates on assessment in post-school education and training, some of which reflect gaps which this study hopes to address, specifically gaps which could be filled by answering the questions namely:

- How do assessment practices currently used in PSET support and/or or inhibit adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in their attempts to demonstrate their competence against identified minimum standards?

2.2. DEFINING ASSESSMENT

Indications from the literature review are that there are a number of definitions for assessment. Beets (2009:184) who, for example, suggests that “assessment should be seen as an act of informing judgement, posits that the integration of teaching, learning and assessment prepares learners for a lifetime of learning”, while Baartman et al. (2007:117) regard it “as a means of guiding learner development and improving teaching”. According to Bastiaens, Kirschner and Van der Vleuten (2006:153) this (the integration of teaching, learning and assessment) this is achieved by means of a programme of assessments. Informed by these views, Baartman et al. (2007:117), adopt as basis for their deliberations on assessment Cizek’s (in Baartman 2007:117) comprehensive definition of assessment, which is cited below.

“1. The planned process of gathering and synthesizing information relevant to the purpose of a) discovering and documenting learner strengths and weaknesses, b) planning and enhancing instruction and c) evaluating progress and making decisions about learners.

2. The processes, instruments, methods used to gather information.”

According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, 2015:4), assessment is a process used to identify, gather, and interpret information and evidence against the required competencies in a qualification, part-qualification, or professional designation in order to make a judgement about a learner’s achievement. Assessment can be formal, non-formal or informal and could serve more than one purpose. It could be used to assess learning already done but also to determine learning that would inform and shape teaching and learning yet to be facilitated.

Reflected in all these definitions is the notion that assessment serves a dual purpose, namely (a) to judge learners (i.e. assessment *of* learning), and (b) to improve learning and teaching (i.e. assessment *for* learning). Also evident from a comparison of these definitions is that the terms, 'alternative assessment', 'authentic assessment', and 'innovative assessment' are used interchangeably by different authors to refer to any type of assessment which deviates or differs from conventional/traditional assessment practices (summative, examination-based assessment, for example). By implication, alternative assessment is non-traditional, non-conventional/innovative in nature but, as indicated in literature, regardless of whether it is innovative or traditional, assessments need to be authentic.

With these definitions of assessment serving as my frame of reference, I would like to consider what constitutes effective assessment practice.

2.3. PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT

It is my contention that in all higher education and training endeavours one should strive for excellence and best practice. This implies that:

1. There should be a constructive alignment of teaching/learning activities (TLAs), assessment tasks (ATs), and the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) (Biggs & Tang, 2007:54).
2. Through this constructive alignment, the development of lifelong learners, in society who apply a deep approach to their learning endeavours, should be ensured.

In order to provide a holistic view of effective assessment, I reviewed a range of publications in which different scholars' views on the principles of effective assessment were discussed. More specifically, the views of the following scholars were compared and analysed to this purpose: Geyser (2004), the AAHE (2003), SAQA (2001:2015), Baartman et al. (2007), Killen (2007), Sambell (2016), Price et al. (2008; 2011), Boud Assessment 2020 (2010), Smith (2013), Couzens et al. (2015), Bevitt (2014), Jones et al. (2016), and Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick (2006). What emerged from my review was that all these scholars argued that effective assessment practices should be

underpinned by principles which could potentially ensure not only that there is a constructive alignment between teaching, learning and the desired learning outcomes but also that the focus of teaching and learning would be on encouraging learners to apply deep approaches to their learning endeavours and to commit to lifelong learning.

All these scholars identified the same eight principles (discussed in detail below) as key to good assessment practice. Moreover, the premise on which all good practice assessment models rest is that there should be a constructive alignment between teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) tasks. Informing this premise is the common assumption amongst these scholars that learners who are exposed to such a constructively aligned process would develop a commitment to lifelong learning because it enables them to apply a deep approach to learning in their learning endeavours.

Geyser, in “Principles of sound assessment” (2004:90-98), insisted that assessment must encourage learners to apply a deep approach to learning so that higher order cognitive skills are developed. According to Geyser (ibid), these skills are essential to ensuring innovative and critical thinking among learners. Indicated in its nine (9) principles of good assessment practice, is the American Association of Higher Education’s conviction that assessment should be used as a means of improving learning. This, the AAHE argues, is possible only through assessment as learning and assessment for learning (2004:92-95). Boud and Associates, in “Assessment 2020”, reinforce the views expressed by Geyser and the AAHE. They suggest further, that self-assessment is an integral part of this development of deep learning, hence the adoption of such an approach may have the effect of enabling learners to develop a passion for and a commitment to lifelong learning.

2.3.1. Principles of effective assessment practice

The eight key principles of effective assessment practice which are explored hereafter were distilled from the analysis of the range of assessment principles espoused by Geyser (2004), the AAHE (2003), SAQA (2001:2015), Baartman et al. (2007), Killen (2007). Sambell (2016), Price et al. (2008; 2011), Boud Assessment 2020 (2010), Smith (2013), Couzens et al. (2015), Bevitt (2014), Jones et al. (2016), and Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick (2006).

2.3.1.1. Constructive alignment and deep approaches to learning

Geyser (2004), the AAHE (2003), and Boud and Associates (2010) agree that assessment must be integrated into the learning programme design process from the outset if a constructive alignment is to be achieved between the teaching, learning and assessment activities/tasks and the intended learning outcomes. Boud and Associates (2010) further suggest that assessment tasks should in themselves be learning activities, thus ensuring the creation of formative assessment opportunities in which the focus is not necessarily or exclusively on grades and marks.

2.3.1.2. Assessment criteria and transparency of the assessment process

All the authors reviewed shared a consistent view that assessment criteria must be clear to all stakeholders and that there should be a common understanding among lecturers (assessors) and learners of what learner competence is deemed to be. While agreeing with this view, the AAHE added that there should also be clarity amongst both these parties on what exactly it is that is being assessed and on how competency can be achieved and should be demonstrated. In this regard, Boud et al. (2010) suggest that lecturers and learners should enter into a kind of partnership which enables the parties concerned to engage in dialogues aimed at the clarification and common understanding of the assessment process as well as the criteria and standards that will be used to judge learner competence in relation to the assessment task.

The forming of partnerships like these, and the engagement of the parties concerned on assessment issues is, according to Price et al. (2008), absolutely critical given the socially constructed nature of assessment. In fact, according to some researchers (Price et al. 2008:5; Sambell, 2016:7; McArthur, 2015:8), assessment standards should be generated as a social and collaborative activity because, it is “when learners share an understanding of academic and professional standards in an atmosphere of mutual trust that learning works best” (Price et al., 2008:5).

Implied in all these arguments is the notion that the assessment process must be transparent if it were to be effective. By implication, according to Geyser (2004), learners must receive constructive feedback on their performance of the assessment task, that is, feedback which includes guidelines on how the assessment task should have been completed. Such guidelines, or even exemplars of model assessment tasks could, according to Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick (2006:7), be provided to learners' prior

or post assessment. Doing so would go a long way to ensuring the transparency of the assessment process (Smith 2014:58; Jones et al., 2016:5).

2.3.1.3. Assessment tasks should resemble the real world

That assessment tasks should resemble the real world is also referred to as authentic assessment. Suggested in the AAHE's principles of effective assessment practice is the notion that authentic assessments resemble real-world requirements – such as the circumstances under which the task would have to be executed, its duration and the associated complexity.

2.3.1.4. Focus on assessment for learning and assessment as learning

Implied in this principle is the need to focus on assessment *for* and *as* learning as a way to move away from the traditional marks/grades approach. Informing this principle is the premise that assessment should be seen as part of the teaching and learning process (Boud and Associates, 2010:1). More specifically, the assessment task should be used as a learning activity, thus removing the focus from grades and marks in the assessment *of* learning to assessment *as* and *for* learning (Sambell, 2016:1). This principle supports Geyser's (2004:90-98) view that assessment tasks should also fulfil diagnostic needs because, as Price et al. (2008;1-10) as well as Smith (2013:45). point out, it challenges practitioners to use means other than grades and marks to determine whether or not the intended learning outcomes have been achieved by the learner. On the one hand, the assessment *for* /*as* learning approach provides lecturers with the means to inform learners on their progress; on the other hand, it gives lecturers an indication of the ways in which they could or should adapt teaching and learning activities in order to improve learners' performance in assessment tasks.

2.3.1.5. Programme of assessments

As indicated earlier, regardless of variations in the assessment principles put forward by different scholars, there seems to be a general consensus among them that once-off summative assessments in themselves do not constitute best practice assessment: there should be a balance between summative and formative assessment. Such a balance, according to Baartman et al. (2007:117), could best be achieved through the

introduction of a programme of assessment. A “programme of assessments” (Bastiaens, Kirschner & Van der Vleuten, 2006:153) is characterised by multiple assessment tasks, including authentic and alternative assessment tasks, which constitute a continuum in which conventional and alternative assessments represent the opposite poles of the continuum. Included in the programme of assessment should be a continuum of assessments from diagnostic and formative assessment opportunities all the way through to summative assessment. Furthermore, it is suggested that formative assessment feedback should provide learners with information on their progress which would enable them to bridge the gap between their current and required performance. The AAHE (2003) therefore calls for continuous rather than once-off assessments, suggesting that integrated approaches to assessment should cover all aspects of the topic to be assessed, including knowledge, skills and attitudes. Brown (2001), concerned about the possibility of assessment fatigue, suggests that assessment should be integrated and clustered while Boud and Associates (2010) advocate for the integration of assessment into curriculum planning. Doing so, they argue, would ensure assessment is viewed holistically and conducted in an integrated and sequential manner.

The recommendation that a programme of assessment should replace once-off summative assessments, implicitly lends support to the reviewed scholars’ definitions of assessment as a means of guiding learner development and improving teaching since it has the dual function of enabling the learner and the lecturer to make formative judgements about the former’s performance, providing them with the opportunity to diagnose the learner’s strengths and weaknesses while at the same time providing the lecturer with guidance on how teaching and learning approaches could, or should, be modified. Such an approach will not only yield a more holistic picture/profile of the learner’s performance (Klenowski, 2014:446; Price et al., 2011:490) but would also represent a fairer outcome for the learner. Since the programme of assessment involves continuous as well as continual assessments, with individual assessments integrated in a manner that encourages a deep approach to learning, it would contribute markedly to the final high-stakes judgement that will eventually be made about learner competence (Sambell, 2016:3; Baartman et al., 2006:158; Beets, 2009:195).

2.3.1.6. Assessment Results and feedback on assessment

Another commonality amongst the scholars whose work I reviewed to identify the principles underpinning effective assessment practice, is that they all emphasize the importance of communicating assessment results in a constructive and developmental manner to ensure that learners know how to address their weaknesses in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The AAHE (2003), regarding assessment as a necessary element of public accountability, posits that feedback to all stakeholders is an integral part of the accountability process. Boud et al. (2010), on the other hand, view assessment results and feedback on it as constituent elements of assessment as learning. Thus, they posit that feedback must be affirmative in nature, not only providing the learner with information on his/her performance against the assessment task, criteria and standards, but also being relayed in a manner that encourages the learner's commitment to lifelong learning.

Price et. al. (2008:1-10). in their six tenets for assessment, suggest that assessment results and the manner in which these are communicated could be used as the means to redirect and refocus learning for all stakeholders, but specifically for lecturers and learners. Their tenets reflect a social constructivist approach to learner assessment in the sense that they regard three conditions - knowledge of standards, the ability to compare standards to learners' own work, and the ability of the learner to take the necessary steps to close that gap – as imperative to effective assessment feedback (Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005). The social constructivist nature of these tenets, and of the views that Price et al. (2005:236) hold on assessment in general, are illustrated in Figure 2.2, which follows.

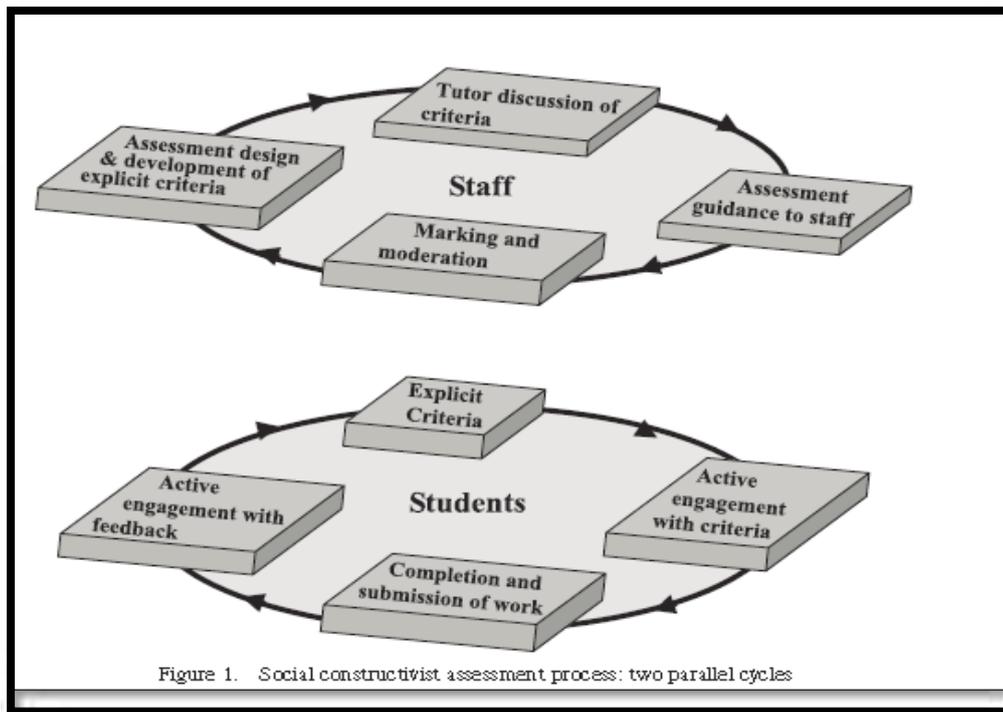


Figure 2.2: Social constructivist process: two parallel cycles
 (Source: Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005:236)

Intrinsic to the social constructivist view (Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005:236) is the use of reflective self-assessment prior to the return of the assessed work, an exercise regarded as an opportunity for learners to engage with assessment standards. Generic feedback that highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the submitted task to all learners, so social constructivists argue, enable learners to first apply the general feedback to their own work and then, if necessary, to rework the task based in terms of the feedback provided. During the course of doing so, learners not only develop a clear understanding of the assessment standards but also learn how to use insights gained from reflecting on their work to improve the task concerned.

The seven (7) principles informing the good feedback model proposed by Nicol and McFarlane-Dick (2006) suggest that feedback should facilitate self-assessment, and encourage teacher, learner and peer dialogue around learning motivation. Not only are learners' self-efficacy enhanced by their inclusion as active participants in the assessment process, but feedback also contributes to the clarification of good performance standards (goals, assessment criteria and standards), as do the use of

exemplars. The information provided to the learner regarding his/her own learning must, however, be of a high quality. Since lecturers have the ability and the opportunity to identify errors and misconceptions in a learner's thinking process, their feedback is critical to learner progress and the achievement of his/her goals (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006). There is also a general consensus amongst scholars that constructive feedback on assessment stimulates positive motivation and self-esteem (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006:12; Hanafi & Shevlin, 2004:444), both of which are deemed essential to successful learning.

Key to all these views is the notion that a programme of assessments made up of multiple low stakes assessment (that is, formative assessment, not linked to marks but focusing on improving learner performance) tends to improve learners' self-esteem and commitment to ongoing lifelong learning. Moreover, the assessment results and feedback following assessment provide lecturers with information that can be used to redirect and refocus teaching, learning and assessment practices (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006:12; Hanafin & Shevlin, 2004:444; Price et al., 2008;1-10).

2.3.1.7. Continuous professional development of staff and institution.

In best practice assessment institutions the institution and its staff members have adopted and are committed to an assessment for learning / as learning approach. Implied in the adoption of such an approach is the institution's continuous commitment to the ongoing professional development of all staff and relevant stakeholders in with regard to their capability and competence in assessment practice (Boud et al., 2010; Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006). By implication, curriculum review is an ongoing process, as is eliciting feedback on curriculum practices from relevant stakeholders, learners and employers included (Boud et al., 2010).

According to Boud et al. (2010), curriculum and assessment practices should be benchmarked against national and international standards. Since, according to the AAHE, the public accountability of an institution tends to be determined by/measured against its assessment results, eliciting and providing feedback to learners and stakeholders is are essential to the continuous improvement cycle of redirecting and refocusing teaching, learning and assessment practices. Also, since assessment is

based on professional judgement, according to Price et al. (2008:5), it is wise to establish suitable fora whose responsibility it would be to develop and shape such standards among all stakeholders. In order to effectively contribute to such fora, the competence and capability of participants are not only critical but essential (Price et al., 2008:5).

2.3.1.8 Assessment literacy among learners and learner involvement in assessment development and implementation

Learners should be actively engaged in assessment standards (Smith, 2013:58) because such engagement develops in them an in-depth understanding of the standard by which they are being measured, which in turn, enables them to self-monitor and self-evaluate. Price et al. (2008:6) moot that when learners are interactive partners of academic professionals in the assessment process, they forego their traditional role as the “instructed” and become part of the learning community. Kaur et al. (2016:9), in a study conducted at a Malaysian university, found that learners can play a valuable role in the design and implementation of assessment practices at post-school education and training levels. At this university, the faculty and learners jointly designed an assessment rubric detailing the assessment criteria and standards, an exercise which, from a learner’s perspective resulted in a more positive learning environment. Learners were more motivated and engaged, leading to the adoption of deep approaches to learning, the effective use of a variety of learning and assessment methods, forms and tasks which addressed individual learning needs. Kaur’s findings were supported by Boud et al. (2010), who argue that learners should be formally orientated into understanding and applying assessment practices. According to them (Boud et al., 2010), such practices enable educational institutions to cater to the diverse and varying needs of learners. By implication, such an approach would also cater for the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities).

2.3.1.9. Credibility of assessment instruments: Validity, reliability, fairness (including integrity) and practicability.

During the first decade of this century, assessment debates in South Africa focused primarily on the credibility of assessment, that is, on whether or not assessments could be regarded as valid, reliable, fair, and practicable (SAQA, 2001; SAQA, 2015). These criteria, being essential elements in a good practice assessment model, deserve a more detailed discussion, particularly given the “high stakes” (Bartman et al., 2007:116) nature of assessment in PSET environments.

a. Reliability

Reliability is defined by SAQA (2001a:18; 2015:15) as consistency in assessment, i.e., “the same judgements being made in the same or similar contexts each time a particular assessment for specified stated intentions is administered.” Bartman et al. (2007:164), on the other hand, define it as knowing that one would get the same results if the learner took the assessment again, at a different time, in a different context, and with a different assessor. Killen (2007:322), also equating reliability with consistency, in essence concurs with SAQA (2001:18; 2015:15) and Bartman et al. (2007:164), arguing that assessment task is unreliable if it produces a different result when taken on more than one occasion and/or if a learner’s performance on the same assessment task is judged differently by different assessors. Killen (2007:322) adds, moreover, that a reliable assessment should be free of measurement error.

Geyser’s (2004:96), views on the reliability of assessments is more multi-faceted. According to her, assessments are reliable only if:

- There is no assessor bias.
- A consistent standard is applied by all assessors.
- Learners are provided with guidelines and support before, during, and after the assessment process.
- Assessment is consistently administered.

Explaining her reasons for these claims, Geyser (2004) argues that, while an assessment could be considered reliable if the same result is achieved when it is marked again, reliability is not determined by the assessment task only. Consideration

should also be given to the way/s in which assessment records are stored, how learners' work is assessed and which quality assurance processes are adhered to during internal and external moderation.

b. Validity

The SAQA (2001:17; 2015:15) definition of validity focuses on the extent to which the assessment is successful at measuring what it intends/claims to measure. Both Geyser (2004:96) and Baartman et al. (2007:164) agree with this definition, referring to Geyser's (2004:90-98) caution that the assessment task must be appropriate to and aligned with, the learning outcomes of the programme and/or module concerned. Killen (2007:325) disagrees with this definition of validity, arguing that it is not the task that must be scrutinised for validity but the interpretation of the data collected from learners' completed assessment tasks and the decisions made based on this data.

Applied to adult learning, especially to adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), these definitions raise questions about the validity of assessments conducted in this context. More specifically, it raises two questions: (a) whether or not the assessment tasks and the ways in which they are constructed, consider the learning disability of the learner, and (b) whether the tasks used for assessment empower or inhibit these learners' learning progress and achievements?

c. Fair, inclusive, and non-biased

The SAQA (2001a:16; 2015:5) definition of fairness, namely that it means "learners are assessed on what they know and have been taught", suggests that the assessment questions presented to learners must relate to the cognitive and affective curriculum covered in teaching and learning. In addition, according to SAQA, there should be no bias towards any learner on the basis of social class, ethnicity, gender, or disability. By implication, assessment is fair only if it neither hinders nor advantages one learner over another.

Killen (2007:330), considering the notion of fairness, asks three questions: (a) Is the assessment task fair? (b) Is our judgement of the learner's performance of the task fair? (c) Is our decision fair? He then points out that not only is it difficult to achieve

fairness in the setting of assessment tasks but it is even more difficult to ensure that the inferences made during the marking of assessment tasks are fair. He concludes that, in order to enhance the fairness of assessments, the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) must be clear; the alignment between the learning outcomes and the assessment task must be articulated, and the use of assessment rubrics may ensure that the task set assesses what it intends to assess. Killen's views as summarised here are clearly underpinned by Geyser's (2004:90-98) principles of effective assessment referred to earlier.

Related to the 'fairness' of assessments is its 'integrity'. The integrity of assessment, according to the 2015 SAQA National Policy (2015:7) on Assessment, refers to "honesty and transparency" in every part of the assessment process. Implied in this is the notion that (a) assessment questions must be based on work actually covered; (b) learners must at all times be honest about what they offer to be assessed; (c) markers must strive to understand what is offered by learners for assessment, grading assessment tasks fairly at all times, and (d) moderators must moderate a fair sample of examples against a fair range of cases.

What could be inferred from the above is that fairness and integrity are not only related but intricately intertwined, the suggestion being that without integrity there can be no fairness, and vice versa.

d. Practicability

One of the principal challenges facing PSET institutions as they attempt to address the needs of massification, is that assessment must be practicable. SAQA (2001a:19; SAQA, 2015:17) defines practicability as the assurance that "assessments take into account the available financial resources, facilities, equipment and time". Should assessments require "elaborate arrangements for equipment and facilities", and should they be costly", according to SAQA (ibid) the assessment system will fail.

e. Transparency

SAQA (2015:8) defines transparency in assessment as the extent to which the assessment criteria and processes are known, visible to, and understood by learners and the various role-players in the assessment process. By implication, this includes

ensuring that the criteria and standards are known and understood by all stakeholders, and that learners not only understand the assessment process but also know what their rights are should any dispute arise as a result of the assessment outcome.

In the context of good assessment, the credibility of the assessment as a major criterion or principle of effective assessment is assured by collectively applying the principles of validity, reliability and fairness – including inclusivity and a lack of bias, integrity, language sensitivity, range of the assessment task, and practicability (SAQA, 2001:15-19; SAQA, 2015:11).

2.3.2. Implications of the principles of effective assessment

The different models on the principles of effective assessment reflect strong correlations, suggesting that debates on assessment within South African HET and PSET environments are in line with those of their counterparts in the rest of the world. The models referred to above all place a strong emphasis on the constructive alignment of teaching/learning activities and assessment tasks with the intended learning outcomes. They encourage the use of a variety of valid assessment forms, instruments, and presentation modes over a period of time in order to make a judgement about a learner rather than reliance on a once-off, high-stakes summative assessment. In addition, they stress the need for clear assessment criteria that render the entire assessment process transparent. In all these models there is a strong focus on assessment tasks that are authentic (realistic and relevant) and reflect the circumstances within which the relevant competence would need to be displayed. They emphasise the need for learner feedback in order to ensure learner success prior to, during, and after the assessment process. Finally, assessment must be valid, reliable, fair, practicable and credible. In addition to this, it should encourage learners to apply deep approaches to learning.

The rationale behind the formulation and use of principles for effective assessment is the need to provide a benchmark for practice which could guide practitioners in the search for excellence in their field. In the field of assessment these benchmarks serve as a yardstick against which assessment practices can be measured and continuous improvement of practice achieved.

2.3.3 Implementing principles of effective assessment

How do practitioners apply the principles of effective assessment, and what should be done in practice to ensure adherence to these principles?

Price, Donovan, Rust, and Carol (2008:2), in their paper, “Assessment Standards as a Manifesto for Change”, identify the following six principles for effective assessment practice. These principles, extracted from their practice, correlate with the principles of effective assessment practice discussed above:

1. Assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning. According to Price et al. (2008:2), assessment results should be used to redirect and refocus teaching and learning efforts in order to improve the level of learning from the learners’ perspective.
2. Move beyond learner achievement in terms of marks and grades in the assessment system, and focus on establishing whether the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. This requires that constructive alignment is in place in the development phase of the programme and that there is a more focused development of assessment tasks. The assessment task must be aligned to the intended learning outcomes, thus ensuring a valid assessment.
3. Ensure a common view of quality among learners and academic staff. A recurring theme in literature is that the views held by academic staff and learners as to what constitutes a quality submission in terms of assessment tasks are inconsistent. By implication, it is important to develop learners’ assessment literacy skills.
4. Recognise the importance of feedback in the assessment process as a means of beginning a dialogue between learners and academic staff on assessment standards and the requirements of the assessment task concerned. Price et al. (2008:5) are of the opinion that when learners understand the academic and professional standards required of them, and if such understanding comes about in an environment of mutual trust, we can be assured that the learning process will be effective.
5. Learners should be encouraged to engage with assessment standards (i.e., the levels of difficulty/complexity/quality required) and criteria of the assessment task.

The value of such engagement is that they develop an internalised sense of what the standards mean, and the extent to which this enables authentic self-assessment and self-regulation (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006:2). In an ideal world, professionals in a PSET environment would want learners to have a realistic sense of the quality of the assessment submission because it allows “learners to integrate, engage as interactive partners in a learning community and relinquish passive roles of ‘instructed’ within processes controlled by academic experts” (Price et al., 2008:6). A process like this involves all the stakeholders and gives substance to the concept of agency, specifically among adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities).

6. Assessment should be based on professional judgement. Price et al. (2008:5) contend that the best way to ensure acceptance of an assessment judgement is to ensure that the standards against which the assessment task is measured have been established in a consultative and interactive manner by all stakeholders. Only if the standards were generated in an inclusive manner like this would they reflect the commitment of all stakeholders.

Having identified the fundamental best practice principles that should form the foundation of our assessment practices, the purpose of assessment as well as the forms that assessment can and should take will be discussed further.

2.4 PURPOSES AND FORMS OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment should be fit for purpose (Geyser, 2004:90-98). Indications from the literature reviewed are that assessment serve three purposes which, in turn, lead to three typical forms of assessment. Forms of assessment are defined as approaches to and strategies used in assessing learning, and are used with particular purposes in mind.

2.4.1 Assessment for learning

Assessment for learning is characterised by a multitude of assessment forms and tasks, as well as flexible presentation modes. It is not focused only on making formative (i.e., developmental) judgements about learner performance: it is also diagnostic in nature, identifying the learner's strengths and weaknesses, and providing strong indicators of the teaching and learning activities, methods, and approaches to be used. Ideally, this approach is continuous in nature, focusing on the integration of various aspects of the subject to be assessed in order to ensure that the learner is encouraged to adopt a deep approach to learning (Killen, 2007:321-322; Sambell et al., 2013:5).

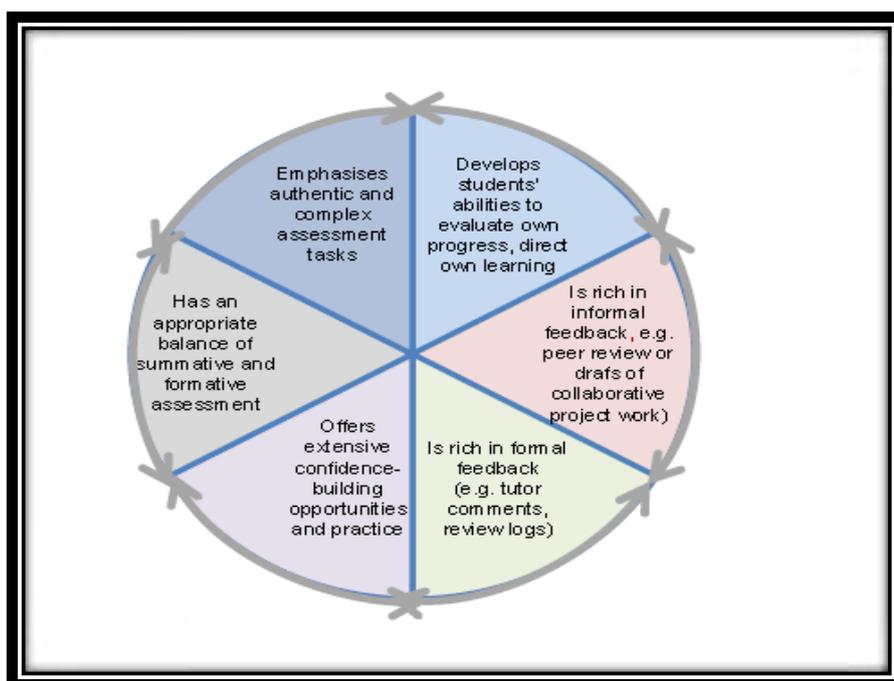


Figure 2.3: Sambell et al. – assessment for learning model

Sambell et al. (2011:10) (see Figure 2.3), which focuses on assessment for learning (AfL), has become the basis of assessment practice at the Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning (CEFTL). Worthy of note in this model are the following key elements, all of which resonate with the principles of effective assessment discussed earlier:

- The emphasis on formal and informal feedback from a variety of stakeholders, learners, peers, and lecturers.

- A programme of assessments that reflects a balance between formative and summative assessment.
- An emphasis on authentic assessment tasks.
- Opportunities for formative assessment as a means of creating practice opportunities before the final summative assessment.
- A focus on the time expended on a task, i.e., providing the learner with enough time for active learning exercises, authentic assessment tasks, peer and self-assessment opportunities, all of which should ultimately result in a deep approach to learning.
- The learners' ability to assess their own progress and ability against assessment standards. This requires opportunities to be created for self-assessment as well as learner development in assessment literacy (Smith, 2013:45).

2.4.2. Assessment as learning

Assessment as learning is an extension of assessment for learning, and since the focus of assessment *for* learning is on developing/informing a learner's learning, it is also referred to as formative assessment. Assessment as learning serves as a means of empowering learners to take control of their learning and self-assessment, thus developing critical, reflective thinkers. In assessment as learning, the focus is on the learner as a reflective being. According to Van Tonder, Wilkinson, and Van Schoor (2005), giving learners the opportunity to take ownership of their own learning also gives them the opportunity to actively create knowledge through a teaching and learning process that encourages interaction, sharing, and critical reflection. In the process of doing so, their thinking is transformed and, consequently, their motivation increases, thus making a deep approach to learning a reality (Van Tonder, Wilkinson & Van Schoor, 2005:1292). Assessment as learning strongly focuses on self-assessment and peer assessment, with feedback serving as a means of improving learning and encouraging learners to adapt their learning approaches towards the development of new understanding (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006:8).

2.4.3. Formative assessment and assessment for learning

Indications from the literature reviewed for this study are that formative assessment should not be coupled with marks (Kilfoil, 2008; Gravette & Geysler, 2004; Hanafin & Shevlin, 2007:444), the argument being that its intention should be to promote/advocate assessment *for* and *as* learning. It follows that formative assessment should therefore be descriptive and developmental in nature, providing learners with specific and focused feedback that will enable them to master their chosen field of study (or discipline). The literature also suggests that formative assessment should be continuous, preferably starting from the onset of the learning programme (Kilfoil, 2008; Race, Brown & Smith, 2005), permeating the entire curriculum and, hopefully, resulting in the development of a deep approach to learning among learners (Sambell, 2016:3)

Kilfoil's (2008) view that formative assessment is assessment without marks is based on her contention that this would force learners to truly engage with the feedback provided. Feedback should therefore focus their attention on reviewing and improving their approach to learning, thus achieving the goal of becoming deep thinkers who use deep approaches to learning (Autin, 2015:4).

2.4.3.1. Deep learning

Deep learning is defined as an “approach and an attitude to learning in which the learner uses higher order cognitive skills (such as the ability to analyse, synthesize, solve problems, and think meta-cognitively) in order to construct long-term understanding. By implication, deep learning involves the critical analysis of new ideas, linking these to already known concepts and principles and an understanding of how these could be used for problem-solving in new, unfamiliar contexts.

Deep learning entails a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on the way learners act, think, or feel” (Hermida, n.d.). A deep learning approach, by contrast to a surface approach, is characterised by assessment that is meaningful, is aligned to the intended learning outcomes articulated for the learning programme, and uses a variety of assessment tasks across a range of situations to assess the ability of the

learner to respond and reflect on what has been learnt and on which competencies have been acquired (assessment of competence).

Deep approaches to learning encourage a learning delivery environment that is collaborative, operating from the premise that learners have an existing body of knowledge in place which can and should be drawn on in order to create new knowledge and opportunities for problem-solving, critical thinking, and innovation. There is a strong focus in these approaches on feedback to learners that is meaningful, timeous, and intended to provide them with guidance on where their strengths and weaknesses lie with regard to the expected outcomes. Deep approaches to learning encourage the use of multiple assessment tasks, rather than a once-off summative examination as is the current experience in PSET because, so it is argued, the use of multiple assessment tasks present the learner with many opportunities to demonstrate what s/he has achieved (i.e., what s/he has learnt and which competence s/he has acquired) (Beets, 2009:185). Finally, since there has to be a commitment to developing critical thinkers, assessment must be used to enhance the learning process and enhance a deep approach to learning (Geysler, 2004:92; Sambell, 2016:3).

Although by definition a deep approach to learning assumes a self-motivated learner who is inspired to learn and sees the value of the learning process, deep learning can be encouraged by means of a sound teaching and learning approach, the selection of appropriate teaching and learning activities, and the alignment of the intended learning outcomes, assessment methods and tasks (Biggs & Tang, 2007:54). A deep approach to learning is also stimulated through the provision of meaningful and developmental feedback to learners, feedback that is relevant and timeously given with the intention of ensuring progress and the achievement of the anticipated outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2010:65; Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006:9; Sambell, 2016:4). Transparent assessment criteria also serve as a critical tool in the encouragement of a deep approach to learning (Price et al., 2012:484; Smith, 2014:45; Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006:7; Sambell, 1999:119).

Deep, critical, and innovative thinking among learners can be brought about by changing their past experience of assessment to experiencing it as a tool for improved learning (Geysler, 2004:92). In order to effect this change, facilitators/lecturers need to remove the anxiety that exists around assessment by steering away from the single examination-based summative approach to assessment to one which is used for the assessment *of* learning, *for* learning, and *as* learning. The focus therefore has to shift from a quantitative score-based, norm-referenced, approach to a qualitative criterion-referenced approach (i.e., measuring learner performance against assessment criteria) (Geysler, 2004:102). In addition, assessment should be integrated, with multiple forms, multiple methods and multiple instruments (tasks) being used in a coherent programme of assessment (Baartman et al., 2006:158; Beets, 2009:195; Sambell, 2016:3) which aligns the assessment task to the nature of the learning barrier/disability experienced by the learner.

This approach stresses the need for assessment practice that provide learners with the feedback, support, and guidance they need to achieve the intended learning outcomes (Baartman et al., 2006:158; Beets, 2009:196; Rust, 2002:152; Bailey et al., 2012:42). This, so it is argued, could best be achieved through the integration of assessment into the programme development and implementation process (Biggs & Tang, 2007:55; Simkin et al., 2011:43; Sambell, 2016:3). By implication, the approach also emphasises the value of regular reflection – on all aspects of learning, teaching, and assessment – and subsequent improvement. In fact, according to Brown et al. (1997:21), “it could be said that unless a university is committed to active, deep, autonomous learning by its learners, then it is not providing a higher education”.

Formative assessment is considered a valuable tool in developing a deep learning approach among learners providing while, so it is suggested, also providing practitioners with the opportunity to evaluate and assess classroom practices by reflecting on their practice and their learners’ performance (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006:13; Kaur et al., 2016:8). Such reflection offers them the opportunity to consider what can and should be re-taught in order to improve classroom practice, learner performance, and achievement.

To sum up, formative assessment has a variety of benefits, included in which are the opportunity to use assessment as a learning tool (Autin, 2015:4; Kaur, 2016:4; Sambell, 1999:117); allowing for reflection on the part of the lecturer and the learner (Autin, 2015:4; Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006:13); providing the learner with the opportunity to review work that was submitted, understand the strengths and weaknesses of the submission, and resubmit the assessment task based on a thorough understanding of the standards being used to judge the submission (assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning) (Boud, 2010:1; Bevitt, 2014:3; Sambell, 2013:5, and having an overall positive impact on learners' learning (Autin, 2015:4).

Frequently used formative assessments include a variety of methods and assessment tasks (i.e., a programme of assessment), appropriate feedback, and an understanding of assessment standards, all of which are critical to the development of learners who can apply a deep approach to learning. However, none of its benefits can be realised while conventional/traditional assessment methods and tasks remain the norm.

2.5. ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

Assessment of learning is assessment aimed at making a judgement about the learner (e.g. how much s/he has learnt). This judgement usually results in an achievement or a mark. The awarding of the grade has one of two consequences: the learner either progresses to the next stage of his/her development path (next year of study, graduation, entry into professional practice or promotion in a post-school role), or exits the system. Such a judgement therefore has "high stake" consequences (Baartman et al., 2007:121). Current assessment practices in this category are mostly characterised by the use of traditional/ conventional assessment forms that are *summative* in nature (Geyser, 2004:90: Price et al., 2011:486), often a once-off examination with high stake consequences. Assessment of learning is therefore also referred to as summative assessment.

While there is consensus about the purpose of assessment (Geyser, 2004:91;Brown, Bull & Pendlebury, 1997:8) as that of judging learner performance and identifying

areas of development for the learner and the lecturer, there is also consensus that in the PSET context, assessment *for* learning is neither taking place to the extent that it should nor to the extent that it is articulated in various policy statements (White Paper on Higher Education RSA, 1997; Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training, 2012).

2.5.1. Conventional assessment and assessment of learning

Although we are clear about the need for constructive alignment in our assessment practices, PSET environments are accused of failing to practise what has been identified as constructively aligned assessment. Assessment in PSET continues to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, is largely summative in nature, with examinations, multiple choice questions and essay-based assignments being the most popular assessment tasks. In the context of this study, and the definition of barriers to learning (learning disabilities) informing it, the emphasis on these types of assessment tasks suggests that current assessment practices effectively assess the extent of the learning disability rather than learning progress or achievement.

Conventional/traditional assessment is typically summative in nature, test- or examination-based, once-off, and largely aimed at the assessment *of* learning (Geyser, 2004:90). Its primary purpose is to determine what the learner has learnt, how much of this s/he is able to demonstrate during assessment, and how these efforts can be marked or graded in order to determine whether progress has indeed occurred (assessment of learning) (Geyser, 2004:92). In respect of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), how do these conventional/traditional assessment practices influence their ability to demonstrate the required level of learning and learning achievement as well as their ability to demonstrate their competence against minimum standards?

Indications from literature are that there is a general willingness on the part of PSET institutions and lecturers/teachers/instructors to consider and implement teaching accommodations (see 2.8.1.), but a complete reluctance to, for example, modify

examinations, change their format, or provide alternative examination accommodations, including the devising of parallel examinations aligned to the learner's disability (Vogel et al., 1999:183; Konur, 2006:360). Their concern seems to be that doing so may compromise academic standards (Vogel et al., 1999:173) and that these alternative formats may in fact advantage learners with disabilities. Kaur et al. (2016:4) argue, however, that the use of traditional assessment methods in a diverse class is inequitable and unfair since it fails to consider a multitude of factors, including language, cultural, and social background and, by extension, disability and the nature thereof. Kaur et al. (2016:5) conclude that designing and implementing inclusive, situationally sensitive assessment will ensure that learners are provided with greater opportunities for fairness and equity during the assessment process to which they are exposed (Ashworth, Bloxham & Pearce, 2010:212; Madriaga et al., 2010:656).

As explained earlier in this chapter, assessment is a key driver of what learners choose to focus on, i.e., what they choose to learn (McArthur, 2015:1; Sambell, 2016:1); "Assessment is at the heart of the learner experience" (Brown & Knight, 1994:1). Historically, summative examination-based assessment was the key means by which learners were assessed, thus determining what and how they learnt. Put differently, learners focused on what they believed they would be assessed on (McCoubrie, 2004:710). This view, namely that learners' perceptions of assessment define the curriculum, is corroborated by Rust (2002:145), Geyser (2004:91), Kilfoil (2008:115); and Sambell (2016:1), all of whom agree that assessment is core to the determination of a student's learning experience. In addition, they agree that this "hidden curriculum" (McCoubrie, 2004:710; Sambell & McDowell, 1998:392) will determine whether or not the learner takes a deep or surface approach to learning.

2.5.2. High-stakes summative assessment

Typically, high-stakes summative assessment - the assessment *of* learning - is key to employment and lifelong learning opportunities (Riddell & Weedon, 2006:51; Price et al., 2011:487). In the PSET context globally there is an unrelenting focus on high-stakes assessment, or a testing culture (Sambell, 2016:3), which speaks directly to

the primary and secondary roles that assessment plays in 21st century education at primary, secondary, and PSET levels (Klenowski, 2014:468). These primary and secondary roles include the determination of overall educational policy and priority; tracking and streaming learners; diagnosing and providing support and remediation for learners; planning (including curricula) for the year; holding teachers and institutional management to account for learner and institutional performance and, finally, certification and exit levels.

The purpose of assessment is twofold: the first-order purpose being to use assessment scores to determine performance and, ultimately, grade promotion, while the second-order purpose is to use assessment scores as metrics against which facilitators/lecturers/instructors and institutional management could be held responsible and accountable for the performance of its learners. That the focus on the first-order purpose of assessment has been lost, is reflected in the reliance of the education system at all levels on limited and conventional/traditional assessment methods (Klenowski, 2014:462; Hanafin & Shevlin, 2004:436; Price et al., 2011:483).

2.5.3. Overreliance on summative assessment and its effects

Predictably, high-stakes assessment (once-off, written, summative assessment) (Hanafin & Shevlin, 2007:442; Price et al., 2011:487; Sambell, 2016:3) has a negative impact on progression; that is, the outcome of this assessment could not only impede the learner's progression (Price et al., 2011:487) but could also fail to provide her/him with the opportunity to recover her/his position. Summative assessment, being a measurement of learning achievement, typically takes place at the end of a programme or period of learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011:197). Its focus, according to Sadler (in Price et al., 2011:487), is on the summing up of what the learner has achieved, a summary which, in essence serves as an end of programme report specifically emphasizing whether or not the learner will be certified. "It is essentially passive and does not formally have an immediate impact on learning" (Sadler in Price et al., 2011:487).

Indications from literature are that there is general consensus that summative assessment has some value but that there has to be a greater balance between it,

formative assessment, and a programme of assessments (Price et al., 2011:488; Sambell, 2016:3). High-stakes assessment should be supported by appropriate preparation for learners, including practice using formative assessments, feedback on formative assessment, and sufficient time to integrate the feedback (York in Price et al., 2011:487; Ashworth, Bloxham & Pearce, 2010:213). This practice can be achieved through low-stakes assessment opportunities that are individual or group-oriented, providing learners with the opportunity to engage with one another, to collaborate and participate. What might result from this is that they will develop a sense of the required criteria and standards while practising for the final summative assessment (Sambell, 2011:10).

An overreliance on summative assessment eliminates the benefits of formative assessment, thus perpetuating a surface learning approach. Societies and economies of the 21st century need deep, innovative, and critical thinkers (Geysler, 2004:91) who are able to solve the challenges that face global societies and economies. These challenges include access to housing, sanitation, education, and healthcare. There is a strong need to address the considerable disparity between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” and to provide the means of growing the global economy in order to address global unemployment challenges, particularly youth unemployment, thus ensuring societal economic independence and sustainability, a crucial goal in the disability sector where poverty and disability are two sides of the same coin (Howell, 2005:25; RSA, DHET, 2013: xi).

In order to address some of these global disparities, deep and critical thinkers who can find solutions to these global challenges are imperative. The development of such thinkers will not take place in a context where the emphasis remains on conventional/traditional methods of teaching, learning, and assessing. What is needed, is a focus on non-conventional (i.e., alternative) forms and tasks as well as response modes of the assessment task. Authentic, alternative/innovative assessment methods and tasks that encourage deep learning and, by implication, lifelong learning, should be encouraged because, as Rust (in Van Tonder, Wilkinson & Van Schoor, 2005:8), Sambell (2011:10) and Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick (2006:7), posit, a deep learning approach involves continuous formative assessment –

assessment *for* learning – with clear assessment criteria and formative feedback at regular intervals.

2.5.4. Surface learning

Hermida (n.d.) defines surface learning as a “tacit acceptance of information and memorisation as isolated and unlinked facts. It leads to superficial retention of material for examination and does not promote understanding or long-term retention of knowledge and information.”

A surface learning environment is characterised by assessment that drives how and what learners learn. In addition, learning is typically aimed at *passing* the assessment, referred to by Lewis and Elton (in Biggs & Tang, 2007:169) as “backwash.” Learners define what they should learn based on their perception of the assessment. Rust (2002:148) suggests that the expected nature of the assessment will dictate whether a learner takes a deep or surface approach to learning. Baartman et al. (2007:121) concur, asserting that learning is influenced by assessment practices, and that lecturers/facilitators/instructors and learners are equally responsible for the continued existence of surface learning. In a surface learning environment, learning is teacher/teaching-based rather than learner-centred, and is often experienced by the learner as a static and a one-directional communication process (Biggs & Tang, 2003:83). The assessment tasks/instruments and methods used are static, predictable, and unlikely to be related to learning outcomes or the learning experience (Biggs & Tang, 2003:83), thus perpetuating “the hidden curriculum” concept while encouraging the surface learning approach. Furthermore, the attitude of the learner is marked by pressure exerted by external factors (e.g., from parents, society), anxiety, and a fear of failure (Rust, 2002:148) and, specifically learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), by low self-esteem (Shapiro, 2011:217; Lyon, 1996:14).

In the case of a diverse classroom, which comprises learners from diverse language and cultural backgrounds as well as learners with disabilities, a further challenge includes the negative attitudes of lecturers/facilitators/instructors and fellow learners (Van Jaarsveld & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015:208; Hanafin & Shevlin, 2007:441) towards learners with disabilities who soon realize that to overcome this challenge, they have

to find and improve their own coping mechanisms. These include displaying higher levels of assertiveness (they often have to demand and coordinate their own access to support and accommodation), accessing notes from friends and peers, repeating courses, and establishing the necessary support systems among friends and family, all of which consume additional time that could have been spent on learning endeavour, but instead contributes to higher levels of stress and anxiety (Hanafin & Shevlin, 2007:442; Couzens et al., 2015:38).

2.5.5. Formative and summative assessment – striking a balance

Val Klenowski (2014:450) underscores the need for balance between summative and formative assessment. Using the OECD as a case in point, she argues that the learner should be placed at the centre of the evaluation and assessment framework and that a variety of assessment methods and tasks should be used in order to develop a holistic view of her/his progress. This, in the context of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), would suggest that the learner and the nature of the disability should dictate the type of assessment methods and tasks employed, thus providing opportunities for the learner to demonstrate the learning achieved as well as the competence acquired when measured against minimum standards.

The suggestion of the learner at the centre of the assessment and evaluation framework is informed by a 'systems thinking' approach to learning (Farrel & Rushby, 2016:115), as reflected in the flow diagram in Figure 2.3. The diagram reflects a holistic view of the assessment process, including a clear profile of the learner (e.g., nature of the disability), current and future knowledge and skill requirements, as well as the teaching, learning, and assessment processes to be followed in achieving the ideal state. It also reflects the iterative nature of teaching, learning, and assessment.

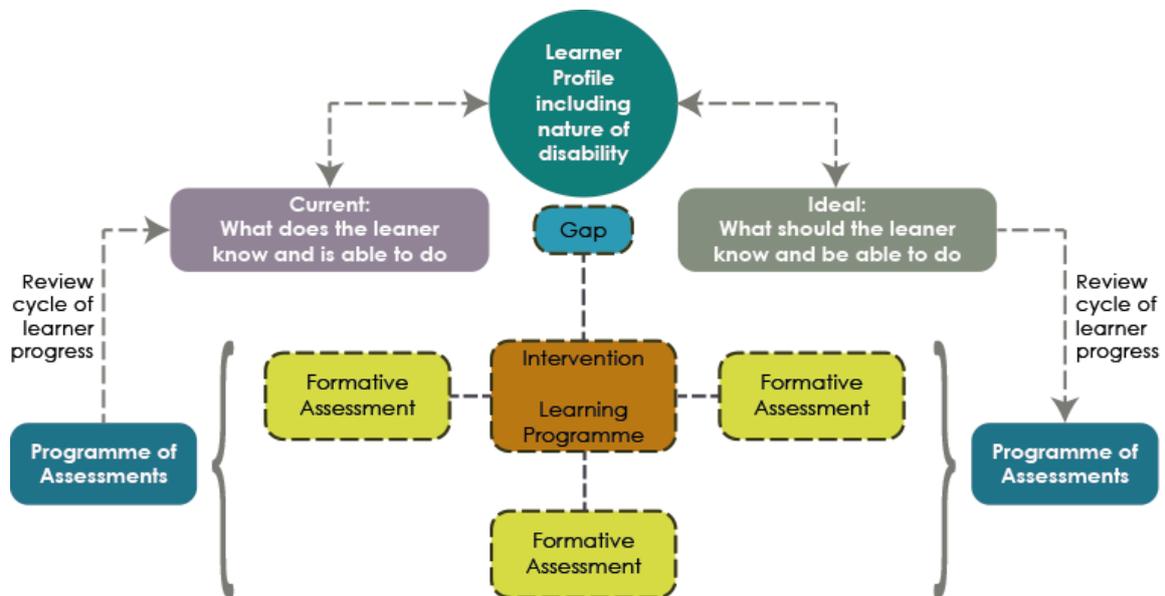


Figure 2.4: Holistic view of the assessment process (Source: Farrel & Rushby, 2016:115).

Continuous and multiple assessment events are integral to ensuring that both the learner and the lecturer have a consistent view of the learner’s performance and level of learning achievement. Farrel and Rushby (2016:115) contend that effective learning programmes are capable of providing learners with frequent opportunities to monitor both their understanding of and progress in the learning programme. Feedback is critical to this process. Farrel and Rushby are further of the view that assessment and feedback are central to both learning and the learners’ experience of learning (Farrel & Rushby, 2016:2: Sambell, 2016:1: McArthur, 2015:1).

The distinction between these three purposes and forms of assessments is well summarised in Table 2.1, which follows.

Table 2.1: The difference between assessment *of*, *for*, and *as* learning

Assessment <i>of</i> learning	Assessment <i>for</i> learning	Assessment <i>as</i> learning
Assessment <i>of</i> learning is the type of assessment most institutions and learners are accustomed to, i.e., it is summative in nature, conducted at a particular point and intended to establish how much the learner has learnt; it grades the learner appropriately, and determines progression to the next level of learning.	Assessment <i>for</i> learning is a form that is best used by the facilitator/lecturer/instructor in order to determine the progress that the learner is making in achieving the learning outcomes. It is primarily diagnostic and is often used to plan further learning, teaching, and assessment activities in order to facilitate learners' achievement of the learning outcomes. It requires that learners are provided with timeous and constructive feedback so that remediation can be effected.	This is the most innovative approach to teaching/ learning and is aimed at enabling learners to become actively involved in their own assessment. This form of assessment includes self-regulation, self- and peer assessment, involvement of the learner in the design and implementation of the assessment tasks, as well as the design and implementation of the assessment criteria and standards/levels of performance. As is the case with assessment <i>for</i> learning, this assessment approach relies heavily on providing the learner with timeous and constructive feedback so that remediation can be effected, including by the learner him-/herself.

Moodley, S (2013:39)

2.6 AUTHENTIC AND ALTERNATIVE/INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT

2.6.1 Alternative/innovative assessment

Alternative assessment, also referred to as innovative assessment, is characterised by multiple assessment forms, tasks, and response modes (Baartman et al., 2006:156; Sambell, 2003; Race, 2003; Bevitt, 2014:3). In the programme of assessment proposed by Baartman et al. (2006:156) and Simkin et al. (2011:43) assessment is conceptualised as a continuum which includes traditional as well as alternative assessments (Brown, 2003:9). Not only is the assessment continuum intended to provide the lecturer and the learner with myriad opportunities to determine whether or not the intended learning outcomes have been achieved, but also to create multiple

assessment opportunities and the use of a variety of assessment forms and tasks. The result, so it is assumed, will be continuous, thus learners will receive ongoing feedback on their progress while lecturers/facilitators/instructors will have to constantly adapt their learning programme plan and the ways in which it is implemented (Geyser, 2004:92; Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006:14).

2.6.2 Authentic assessment

A key criterion of effective assessment is that it should be authentic. What this means, is that (a) the extent to which the work produced can reliably be believed to be that of the learner; (b) assessment is conducted in an environment in which the learner is likely to perform these outcomes, and (c) the context of the assessment task is real-life related (Sambell & McDowell, 2003:76). The emphasis here is not on the extent to which a learner has *acquired* knowledge – the kind of learning valued by academia; rather, it is on the learner's ability to *use* knowledge in the performance of one or more tasks. The ability to do so, referred to as 'competence' is the kind of learning valued by industry, and can only be assessed by means of 'performance-based' assessment.

Since learners are required to perform certain tasks in order to prove their competence – their mastery/achievement of learning outcomes, in this case - it is imperative that the necessary assessment opportunities are created for them to do so. By implication, the kind of education they need to prepare them for performance-based assessment must be "learner centred and competence based" (Baartman et al., 2007:14).

Since authentic, performance-based assessment, could be either summative or formative, and could entail the use of different methods, it could be regarded as non-traditional/non-conventional or alternative/innovative assessment. The opposite is not, however, necessarily true: alternative/innovative assessment is not necessarily authentic or performance based. Only if alternative assessment has the attributes of authentic/performance-based assessment outlined above, can it be regarded as authentic.

2.6.3 Assessment of competence

While literature offers a variety of definitions for competence, it is important to define the term here as it is used in this thesis. Of particular interest in the context of this study, are the conceptualizations of competence reflected in the bulleted points which follow:

- Competence is defined as the ability to integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the performance of job requirements, measured against agreed standards (Beets, 2009:192).
- Competence is the ability to integrate/connect performance and decision making with understanding, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances (Beets, 2009:193).

What is common to both these definitions are the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (i.e., competencies), the ability to fulfil a job function to a pre-defined standard of performance, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, suggesting the ability to problem solve and think critically and creatively.

These definitions suggest that the ways in which we develop and deliver our learning programmes must be aimed at ensuring that learners are able to acquire the requisite competences. Given that, we must assess for competence (Baartman et al., 2007:117), not only for knowledge. The assessment of competence, however, presents the same credibility challenges as those presented for conventional/traditional assessment. What is imperative in both instances is that assessment tasks/instruments should stand up to scrutiny. The traditional view of what constitutes credible assessment is reflected in the key principles by which it is informed - reliability, validity, fairness, and practicability (SAQA, 2015:11).

Irrespective of what is being assessed or of the paradigm within which assessment forms (e.g., assessment *for* learning, assessment *of* learning, or assessment *as* learning) are constructed, the assessment, both the form and the task have to be credible and of a quality standard. It is, therefore, not surprising that one of the most significant themes to emerge in the literature is the credibility and quality of

assessment forms and processes – captured in the terms, ‘validity’, ‘reliability’, ‘fairness’ (including inclusivity and non-biasedness), ‘practicability’, ‘transparency’, ‘integrity’, ‘accountability’, ‘language sensitivity’, and ‘assessment range’ (SAQA, 2001:15-19; SAQA, 2015:) – which form the basis of effective assessment practice. It also lies at the heart of debates on academic standards and the extent to which accommodations / concessions afforded to learners with disabilities uphold or devalue academic standards (Kaur et al., 2016:2; Couzens, 2015:24; Vickerman, 2010:30).

Hypothetically, one form of alternative assessment is oral assessment, specifically the use of an oral presentation as an assessment task. As is the case with all assessment tasks, the criteria that will be used to judge the performance of the learner doing an oral presentation or test must be clear. Opportunities must have been created prior to the assessment to discuss the criteria and their application to ensure a sound understanding by learners of the assessment requirements (Price & O’Donovan in Kilfoil, 2008:120). Ensuring that learners thoroughly understand the assessment requirements prior to the assessment, as a means of empowering them to take ownership of their own learning (Kilfoil, 2008:122), emerged in the reviewed literature on contemporary assessment perspectives as a general principle of effective assessment, sometimes referred to as the principle of transparency (e.g., SAQA, 2015:8). Oral presentation allows for the focus to be directed towards the learner’s ability to present and convey a particular line of argument or a specific body of information rather than towards her/his use of grammar or referencing, as would be the case in an academic essay. As an alternative assessment task, oral presentation allows the lecturer to focus on other aspects of performance that would ordinarily be ignored in conventional/traditional academic essays used as assessment tasks.

Implicit in the consideration of a ‘programme of assessment’ (i.e. the use of multiple forms, tasks, and response modes from the outset of the learning programme) as an alternate/innovative form of assessment is the need to consider the time involved, the resources required, and the effect it might have on learning. Key questions to ask during the course of such consideration are: (a) Can this be practically achieved and are there tangible examples of these assessments in practice? (b) Does the literature provide concrete examples of alternative/innovative assessment methods or tasks

being used and the effect of these on learner learning and learning achievement? Excellent examples of alternative and innovative assessment methods employed within a PSET context with adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), which might assist in the answering of these questions, can be found in the two studies discussed in Section 2.7, which follows.

2.7. ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES IN A PSET ENVIRONMENT

In the context of PSET transformation in South Africa, three considerations in respect of learner assessment are critical (CHE, HEQC, 2004:122), namely:

1. Equitable access must be supported by equitable output (i.e., higher rates of access to PSET, higher graduation rates, and retention of learners in the different qualification levels). This requires, by definition, that PSET takes an assessment *for* learning approach in order to remedy the inequities of the country's secondary school system, and assess the extent to which it fails to prepare learners for PSET and, by implication, contributes to our existing poor retention rates in both HET and PSET.
2. The focus must be on credible, robust, and transparent assessment that assesses what it aims to assess, i.e., valid assessment. Given the lack of preparedness of learners entering PSET, there is a need to revisit how we assess, when we assess, the frequency of assessment, and the decisions we make based on the assessment data we collect. These decisions cannot only be about the learners, but must also be about reflecting on our own practices and determining the extent to which our reflections improve our practices and, therefore, learners' opportunities for success.
3. The third element relates to the extent to which assessment is used to inform and improve both teaching and learning.

In comparing current assessment practices against the best practices articulated earlier, it becomes clear that current assessment practices do not necessarily encourage a deep approach to learning among learners (Price et al., 2008:2), hence becoming/constituting the "Achilles heel of quality" (Price et al., 2010:479). Current

assessment practices are one of the areas with which learners usually express the most dissatisfaction. Another concern is the fact that learners often see themselves as involuntary participants in the assessment process, having little or no control over it and its outcomes. They see themselves as nothing more than the recipients of our assessment practices (Beets, 2009:185). Some of the key experiences that set the scene for current assessment practices in higher and post-school education and training identified by Price et al. (2010:481) are feedback, assessment complexity, massification of assessment, learner literacy, and resources. Each of these aspects is discussed in some detail in the sub-sections which follow.

2.7.1. Feedback - current challenges in PSET environments

If formative assessment amounts to assessment without marks then feedback becomes critical to ensuring that the results of formative assessment are properly understood, that learners have the knowledge and skills to review the assessment submission, understand the feedback provided, and are able to resubmit the assessment once they have measured and reworked it in alignment with the assessment criteria and standards. Indications from the reviewed literature are that feedback has a poor reputation in the PSET context. Some of the evidence cited in the literature suggests that even when feedback is provided it is not understood by the student (Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006:3) and/or it is provided too late in the learning process for it to affect learner outcomes (timing of the feedback) (Beets & Louw, 2011:314). Feedback is often related to the grade only, something which tends to negatively impact on the learner's self-efficacy should the grade be low. Moreover, feedback provided often does not foster learner engagement, a finding which feeds into the argument that learners often do not understand the feedback received (Price et al., 2011:482). In short, the feedback given often has no effect on learner behaviour or their outcomes, thus learners end up making the same mistakes (Fritz in Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005:234). According to Price et al. (2011:482), feedback therefore has value only if its purpose is clear, if it has "utility" value, and if it "can be used in future work"; in other words, if it "accounts for the transfer of tacit knowledge as well as explicit knowledge about standards and disciplinary knowledge"

There is evidence that feedback is arguably the most important aspect of the teaching, learning, and assessment process and has immediate as well as future consequences for the learner (Sambell, 2011:6; Boud, 2010:2; Bevitt, 2014:2; Hanafin & Shevlin, 2007:438; Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006). Since there is also sufficient evidence that learners do desire and appreciate feedback (Sambell & McDowell, 1999:117), effective feedback could be a valuable means towards helping learners understand how things could be done differently.

How then do we improve the process of feedback, specifically with reference to adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), to ensure that in a formative assessment context it does indeed have the effect of assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning?

A further current reality of assessment practice is the focus on grading (allocating marks) to learners' assessment tasks rather than on determining what they have or have not learnt. Consequently, assessment as a vehicle for learning, has failed, its multifunctional role being superseded by the need to award a mark or grade rather than the need to look holistically at assessment - as a means of motivating and challenging learners and/or stimulating their desire to learn - through TLAs and ATs that require collaboration, sharing, debating and, ultimately, constructive feedback that allows them to continue to grow and develop academically. Often the feedback provided is sporadic and scant at best. This leads us to the next concern about the current reality of assessment practices, namely ineffective feedback.

Price et al. (2011:482) describe assessment feedback as haphazard and ill-timed, arguing that this could be why it fails to foster learner engagement. As indicated earlier, they argue that assessment feedback has value only when its purpose is clear, when it can be used by the learner to inform ongoing learning progress, and when it enables the learner to develop a deeper understanding of assessment criteria, standards, and discipline-specific knowledge (Price et al., 2011:482). Moreover, they argue, assessment feedback after the submission of assessment tasks has a lesser effect on learning than feedback before submission, referred to as "feedforward opportunity." (Price et al., 2011:485).

2.7.2. Challenges with assessment complexity

Assessment in the diverse and massified education classroom is complex (Kaur et al., 2016:5). The complexity lies in managing the diversity of learning needs and yet at the same time facilitating the required teaching, learning, and assessment practices. Assessment as a construct requires a wide variety of skills in lecturers/instructors who assess learners in a post-school education and training environment. These skills include assessment design, learning support for diverse learners, communication appropriate to the diversity of learners, the identification and application of assessment criteria and standards, creating stimulating learning environments, and teaching/learning activities (TLAs) that will enable learners to engage in the learning process, thus lending itself to a deep learning approach.

There is little evidence in the literature of the ability of facilitators or learning/ instructors in PSET environments being able to design the types of assessment tasks necessary to the encouragement of a deep learning approach. Klenowski (2014:450) cites as a big concern of the Gordon Commission, the lack of evidence on innovation in teachers'/facilitators'/instructors' expertise in assessment, and on the building of such capability and capacity among teachers/facilitators/instructors. The study further asserts that very few teachers/facilitators/instructors are aware of the assessment *for* learning form, and/or attempt to modify assessment tasks to suit the learning needs of those in their classrooms (Ashworth, Bloxham & Pearce, 2010:211; Diez, Lopez & Molina, 2015:156).

Klenowski expresses the view that teacher capability in assessment, innovation in classroom-based assessment, the use of authentic assessment approaches and assessment for learning, or task-based assessment, are essential practices in inclusive education and, by extension, in inclusive assessment (2014:451). Price et al. (2011:483) support this view, positing that it is the insufficient staff development on new assessment practices that creates an over-reliance on conventional/traditional methods of assessment and, by implication, undermines the fostering of a deep approach to learning (Konur, 2006:362).

2.7.3. Challenges of massification on assessment

Another reality of current assessment practices, i.e., assessment of high-level and complex learning, is the threat inherent to higher education massification. As a result of the large numbers of learners that must be assessed, economies of scale are being applied and therefore assessment forms and methods that are easier to apply prevail (Price et al., 2011:483). Examples of these are multiple-choice question papers and the single summit of assessment at the end of the course. Price et al. (2011:483) suggest that assessment practices are subjected to a variety of pressures from a variety of sources, all of which have an effect on the ability of assessment practices to promote and assess the extent of higher order learning that should be at the core of PSET.

Given the difficulties associated with massification, the focus of assessment therefore remains on assessment *of* learning, despite the aims of social justice and inclusive education. Pressure to produce marks and grades consistently and reliably also remains, reliability in assessment being confirmed through consistency, i.e., “the same judgements being made in the same or similar context each time a particular assessment for specified stated intentions is administered” (SAQA, 2001:18). Consequently, reliability is overemphasised at the expense of validity (i.e. the fitness of purpose of assessment) (Sambell, 1999:120; Geysler, 2004:90-98) and alignment with learner needs and the intended learning outcomes.

2.7.4. Challenges of assessment literacy among learners

Powerlessness experienced by learners in the assessment context is reinforced by the fact that the assessment criteria and standards are not available to learners beforehand, i.e., there is no transparency of assessment criteria and standards (Sambell, 2016:1). Beyond the argument of transparency is the reality that learners do not understand the assessment standards; their ability to respond accordingly is therefore compromised by their lack of assessment literacy. Assessment criteria and standards remain vested in academic, professional, and vocational communities. If assessment is to be inclusive and if it were to add to the social justice agenda, assessment criteria and standards must be transparent (Price et al., 2010; Boud, 2010:2; Smith, 2014:47).

Assessment literacy, or the lack thereof, plays a key role in learner performance in current assessment practices. It follows that there is not only a need for transparency as far as assessment criteria and standards are concerned but also a need to ensure that learners understand the assessment process. According to O'Donovan, Price, and Rust (2004:1), learner performance is enhanced when learners understand the criteria and standards that apply to assessment tasks, the findings of Kaur et al. (2016:14) during their work with linguistically diverse higher education learners being evidence of this. There is also consensus among local (Corus, 2004; Matshediso, 2004; Howell, 2006) and international (Kaur, 2016; Price et al., 2011; Bevitt, 2014; Sambell, 2016; Boud, 2010; Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006:8) scholars that assessment literacy enhances learners' assessment experience and improves their performance (Smith, 2014:47). Seminal research by Astin (in Price et al., 2011:7) asserts that key indicators of learner success include learner involvement in all aspects of the teaching/learning and assessment process, learner-to-learner interaction, and learner/lecturer interaction. Finally, their involvement in learning communities helps to clarify their expectations of the assessment and the essence of learning (Price et al., 2011:484).

2.7.5. Access to sufficient resources to ensure assessment good practice

The final and most damning reality of current assessment practices is the lack of resources required to ensure effective assessment. The lack of resources is a common feature across all post-school education and training institutions the world over. However, to ensure effective assessment and feedback, both of which are critical to achieving the goal of assessment for learning, the required resources must be made available. If teachers/facilitators/instructors are to design innovative, fit-for-purpose assessment that meets learner needs, their capacity and capability to do so must be fostered, and this requires resources through the investment of continuous professional development initiatives. If learners are to develop into reflective learners (assessment as learning) they should not only receive timely and meaningful feedback prior to the summative assessment, but should also be exposed to a programme of assessments (Bastiaens, Kirschner & Van der Vleuten, 2006:153; Sambell, 2016:1) characterised by multiple, authentic, and alternative assessment

tasks – including case study presentations and the use of a variety of response options for the assessment task (written, verbal) – all of which would ultimately give learners a choice with regard to the way in which they can and want to demonstrate their knowledge and/or competence during the assessment process.

Assessment *for* learning requires learner and teacher/facilitator/instructor maturity for self-assessment and peer assessment which, together with meaningful feedback, is valuable in enabling learners to improve and adapt their own development of new understanding and new knowledge (Kaur et al., 2016:3). Despite the paucity of resources, a clear organisational strategy, proper planning, and prioritisation will certainly ensure year-on-year achievement of these goals. A lack of resources must not translate into inactivity and stagnation. *If we always do what we always did we will always get what we always got (Henry Ford).*

The current reality discussed above indicates that adult learners with learning barriers are indeed being assessed within a post school education and training context. In order to ensure some measure of fairness in this assessment process, assessment concessions have been employed by PSET institutions as a means of levelling the playing field. The discussion will now turn to the assessment concessions that are made available to learners with barriers to learning and the effect of these on the learner's experience of assessment.

2.8 ASSESSMENT CONCESSIONS

2.8.1 Accommodations/assessment concessions

The final aspect to be considered in this chapter is that of assessment concessions afforded to adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in a PSET context. 'Assessment concessions' is a "general term" used to refer to "any action taken in response to a determination that an individual's disability requires a departure from the established testing protocol" (Koretz, 2003:6). "Achieve" defines concessions as "the process by which individuals are allocated supports that eliminate barriers to

their full participation in a setting.” (Bell, 2015:13). Koretz (2003:6) suggests that the establishment of a relationship between accommodation/concession and the measurement of learning is critical to increasing “the validity of information about the learners’ disability.” “Accommodations are intended to function as a corrective lens that will deflect the distorted array of observed scores back to where they provide a more valid image of the performance of individuals with disabilities” (Koretz, 2003:7).

2.8.1.1 Categories of accommodations/concessions

Informed/guided by these definitions, Alant and Casey (2005:187) distinguish between specific categories of accommodation and/or assessment concessions:

- Accommodation – refers to largely logistical changes, typically describing the following types of concessions afforded to learners with all forms of disability: changes to the presentation of the test (i.e., larger font); administration of the test; alteration to the student’s response mode(including providing more time and alternative venues); dividing the test into shorter periods; reading the instructions to the student; providing a learner with a scribe; providing alternative formats, for example, braille (Koretz, 2003; Crous, 2004); oral examination, and additional staff in the examination venue to support learners (Alant & Casey, 2005:187).
- Adaptation – refers to limited adjustment to the assessment task itself. Typically, the adjustment would relate to vocabulary and/or the simplification of language and instructions (Alant & Casey, 2005:117).
- Modification – refers to an adjustment of the actual assessment task in order to accommodate the needs of the learner. This is typically the ideal type of assessment concession because it aligns the assessment task with the needs created by the learner’s specific disability. Modifications include question papers that are more visual in nature; questions on audio-tape with the option to answer on tape or type on a computer; oral examinations (Crous, 2004:245); the use of appropriate technology where possible (dictation software, for example); changing the manner in which the learner is assessed (e.g., oral versus written versus demonstration); changing the examination format; changing the manner of responses expected of the student; practical

demonstrations, simulations, and the development of tasks that could be substituted for what everyone else (non-disabled) is required to do (Alant & Casey, 2005:187).

Given that different authors in this field use the terms, 'accommodation', 'adaptation', and 'concession' interchangeably, I have opted to use "concessions" as an umbrella term to reflect all accommodations and concessions that would be afforded to learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in the teaching/learning and assessment context.

Konur (2006:351) went a step further, suggesting that the above accommodations and concessions be classified into four distinct categories:

1. Presentation – how the learning materials are presented, i.e., in braille, as a visual presentation, in written format, and/or by using devices.
2. Time – the time allocated for completing and/or submitting the assessment.
3. Setting – where the assessment will take place (including alternative/non-conventional) venues; accessibility (including availability of headphones to cut out noise); lowering noise levels in the venue, and eliminating possible distractions; access to additional human resources to read instructions and questions.
4. Response format – how the learner will be allowed to respond to the assessment, i.e., using a scribe to write down/type the learner's verbal answers to the question, or allowing the student to use technological devices to answer/perform the task.

2.8.1.2 Implementing assessment accommodations and concessions

The literature reviewed indicates that lecturers/facilitators/instructors are well disposed towards accommodations in the classroom, including the tape-recording of lectures, providing extended completion/submission deadlines for assessments, and even allowing scribes to assist in the taking of notes (Vogel et al., 1999:175) and peer assistance in the teaching/learning environment. However, in terms of assessment

concessions, the only actual concession allowed is additional time and logistical variations, which include the allocation of alternate venues for learners with disabilities.

There is little evidence in literature of modifications (adaptations) being made to assessment tasks in order to address/accommodate the needs of the learner, let alone the needs of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). One of the fundamental concerns regarding the modification of assessment tasks to meet the needs of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) is the extent to which such modifications might unfairly advantage them. In this regard, Alant and Casey (2005:187) argue, that the modification of an assessment task to meet the needs of the learner with disabilities could result in a lower equivalence between assessment for this learner and his/her non-disabled counterpart. Riddell and Weedon (2004:1/4), also regarding the altering of assessment tasks and practices as contentious, argue that it raises questions about fairness (to non-disabled learners) and standards. According to them, altering assessment (modification) is only acceptable if equivalence can be proven, i.e., if the assessment task being completed by a non-disabled learner is equivalent to the assessment task being completed by a learner with a learning disability. Perhaps, so Riddell and Weedon (2006), suggest, all learners should have access to concessions because, as would be the case with those identified as having barriers to learning (learning disabilities), those without such barriers might also be positively affected by these reforms (Madriaga et al., 2010:656; Tinklin, Riddell & Wilson, 2004:3/4)

Concerns are also expressed regarding the potential effect of modification on standards, the possible compromising of academic standards and/or the extent to which such modifications might advantage those with barriers to learning (learning disabilities); hence, the preferred reliance on accommodations as concessions that offer the greatest equivalence.

It is interesting to note that some concessions offered in the classroom context are not extended to the examination context (Alant & Casey, 2005:186). Ideally, accommodations allowed in the classroom should be replicated in the assessment context. In a study, the HED Monitor (2005:27) argues that “alternate” assessment is

not alternate at all, that additional support offered in an assessment context is nothing more than allowing/using extra time, providing alternative venues and/or designated staff, and conducting oral examinations. The assessment task was not modified in any way to meet the specific needs of the learner, more specifically to the needs of the learner with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). Koretz (2003:6) states that it is a consistent finding that no modification to the assessment task takes place.

What remains, therefore, is the question, 'To what extent does existing assessment practice assess the learner's impairment rather than the learning outcomes achieved?' Alant and Casey (2005:186) speak to this in their paper, "The recommendations in this draft document reflect the stance that formal written assessment should be administered in such a manner as to ensure that the results of the learner with an impairment focuses on / reflects the learner's level of achievement, not her/his impaired senses, motor and communicative skills other than when it is these skills which the assessment intends to measure."

2.8.1.3 Extra time as a concession

Time allocated for the completion of an assessment task remains the most commonly used assessment concession. A detailed study (Bell, 2015:22) conducted in New Zealand emphasizes the provision of extra time as an alternative assessment practice with the proviso that there be an established set of standards which determines the amount of extra time granted to learners during assessments (examination). They proposed that, to ensure consistency, fairness, and transparency, the following extensions could be considered:

- Physical disability – 10 minutes per hour.
- Visual/hearing disability – 20 to 30 minutes per hour.
- No allocation for extra time on shorter tests or assignments.

These concessions completely ignore the learner with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), focusing exclusively on learners with sensory impairments. Their study asserts that assessment should provide learners with equal, consistent, and fair opportunities to show what they are capable of (Bell, 2015:62). In addition, extra time

itself does not necessarily provide the learner with the support and opportunity to demonstrate their level of learning and learning achievement. Clearly, alternative concessions must be conceptualised for those learners with “hidden disabilities.” Indications are, therefore that the concessions proposed here are wholly inadequate as regards the provision of the support that learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) need to adequately demonstrate their knowledge and/or abilities. PSET practitioners are doing little to align their assessment practices to the needs of learners and, more specifically, to the needs of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (Tinklin, Riddell & Wilson, 2004:1/4). This lack of accommodation constitutes the provision of inequitable educational opportunities (Bell, 2015:13). In addition, just as it is good practice to involve and engage learners in the assessment process, it is good practice to involve them in the determination of concessions processes. Put differently, the concessions made must be informed by consultations by learners to which these would apply, thus not only acknowledging that “disabled learners bring impairments, capabilities and intelligence to disabling and enabling tertiary educational environments” (Bell, 2015:12) but also providing them with the opportunity of determining the nature of the concessions they need and the ways in which these could be implemented.

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter focussed on answering the following research question: What assessment practices reported in the literature are available to PSET and what challenges do they pose to learners with barriers to learning.

Based on the literature reviewed it is clear that assessment practices in post-school education and training remain mostly conventional/traditional in nature, relying heavily on once-off summative assessments of the written kind, despite the required policy and statutory commitment to continuous, inclusive, authentic and integrated assessment aimed at learner competence. In addition, the only concession afforded to learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) is additional time which, in fact, is not an alternative form of assessment.

Further indications from the reviewed literature are that lecturers/facilitators are not sufficiently skilled to be able to adapt or modify assessment instruments to meet the individual needs of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), thus making clear the importance of continuous professional development for this group of stakeholders.

Finally, there appears to be a lack of alignment between teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks and the nature of the learning barrier experienced by the learner. I have proposed throughout this chapter that there must be an explicit alignment between teaching, learning, assessment, and the nature of the learning barrier experienced by the learner. If not, the assessment instrument may well be assessing the extent of the learning barrier rather than the level of learning achieved against the learning outcomes of the programme.

The literature reviews provided little evidence of assessment practices that support adult learners with barriers to learning. However, a number of case studies were discussed which indicate the propensity for such practices which, if implemented, can and do support the achievement of the intended learning outcomes of the programme. Interestingly, it is worth noting that the best practice elements identified earlier also serve as basis for the implementation of effective assessment practices discussed in these case studies.

To sum up, in Chapter 2, I focused on the constructs of assessment *for* learning, assessment *of* learning, and assessment *as* learning. I provided a reflection of the current perspectives on assessment in a post-school education and training environment with particular reference to adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). The specific focus of the chapter was on practices used to assess adult learners with intrinsic barriers to learning (learning disabilities). In Chapter 3, my focus shifts to the extrinsic barriers to learning experienced by adult learners with learning disabilities, indicating how these might affect the assessment practices to which they are exposed and, specifically, how these practices empower or inhibit their learning progress and learning achievement.

CHAPTER 3

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE
EXTRINSIC BARRIERS TO LEARNING
EXPERIENCED
BY ADULT LEARNERS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE EXTRINSIC BARRIERS TO LEARNING EXPERIENCED BY ADULT LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

In Chapter 2, I explored the debates around assessment practices and processes, specifically, the purposes of assessment, the forms of assessment and the assessment task. Furthermore, I examined the extent to which these supported or inhibited adult learners with learning barriers (learning disabilities) from demonstrating their competence against minimum standards.

This chapter focuses on the extrinsic barriers to learning, that is, those experienced by adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), specifically, those factors within the institutional environment that have an effect on how assessment practices within PSET institutions are experienced. Assessment practices include assessment processes, assessment tasks and the alignment of assessment tasks to teaching and learning activities. Specifically, this chapter presents the argument that assessment practices do not exist in isolation of the broader institutional practices, and are in fact, influenced by these broader institutional practices. Therefore, in this chapter I explore the relationships between broader institutional practices (extrinsic barriers to learning) and how they affect assessment practices, resulting in supporting and/or inhibiting adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from reflecting their competence against minimum standards, their learning progress and /or learning achievement.

One of the key starting points for this discussion has to be the definition of learning disability as a barrier to learning. I begin this chapter by exploring the various definitions offered by scholars in the field of learning disability and conclude it with a discussion on the definition I adopted for this research study and my rationale for doing so.

3.1 DEFINING LEARNING DISABILITY

How do we come to know that a learner has a learning disability?

Shapiro (2011:211) asserts that a learning disability only surfaces as a result of poor performance in the classroom. The classroom is the site at which “academic underachievement” manifests itself. Learning disability is, fundamentally, academic underachievement. Butter & Hasselhorn (2011:76) refer to this as the “unexpectedness of under achievement”, or unexpected failure to learn (Gersten, 2001:280). This “academic underachievement”, what we now refer to as learning disabilities, has its definitional roots in North America as a field of study since 1968.

Learning disability is a contested terrain, with the contestation existing on two fronts: the lack of a widely accepted definition that is both conceptual in nature and operational in application, and the acceptance of learning disability as a recognised disability within the broader disability studies field.

The following is the original definition that I adopted in my research proposal:

Learning disability is defined as a “variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information. These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning and, in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning ... Learning disabilities range in severity and invariably interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following important skills: oral language (e.g., listening, speaking, understanding); reading (e.g., decoding, comprehension); written language (e.g., spelling, written expression); and mathematics (e.g., computation, problem solving)”. This definition was adopted from the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario which adopted the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada’s definition (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2002). Of note is the fact that there is a commonly accepted conceptual and operational definition of learning disabilities within the country, which is then adopted by each federal state.

I further opted to adopt this comprehensive definition for the following reasons:

- Learning disability is fundamentally about “academic underachievement” (Shapiro, 2011:211) that manifests itself as significant difficulties experienced

by the learner in academic performance, including reading, writing, speaking and comprehension at a reading and listening level, as well as mathematical ability. Current teaching, learning and assessment practices are heavily weighted in this realm of reading and writing. Accordingly, this definition correlates well with existing practices and supports the aims of this research study, i.e. the extent to which existing assessment practices in PSET environments inhibit adult learners with learning disabilities.

- Learning disability is of such a nature that its existence could have the effect of impacting self-esteem, vocational education opportunities, socialisation and daily living activities (Lyon, 1996:67; Reif, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1993:124; Siegel, 1999:311). These can, in turn, further exacerbate the learning disability experienced. Therefore, it is important to consider the learning disability within a larger context of the learner's more general experience of post-school education and training (Lyon, 1996:67; Reif, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1993:124; Siegel, 1999:311).

The definition originally adopted for the study required further interrogation so that a final definition for the study could be adopted. This was essential to identifying the correct profile of the participants who would be invited to participate in the empirical phase of the study.

3.1.1. Conceptual and operational definitions

Hammill (1990:74) in his paper "On defining learning disabilities: An emerging consensus", distinguishes between a conceptual definition and an operational definition as follows:

A conceptual definition is intended to describe the condition, in this case, learning disabilities. It allows for a detailed description of what the condition is, what it includes and excludes.

An operational definition influences practice and therefore provides insights into how to observe the condition and/or how to measure it (Qora, 2017). Specifically, an operational definition enables one to identify the condition in an individual, thus making diagnosis clear by specifying criteria and suggesting the management strategies necessary in minimising the effects of the condition. Operational definitions are important in ensuring that diagnosis can be accepted confidently (Kavale et al.

2009:46). Flanagan and Harrison (2012 :655) suggest that operational definitions offer increased reliability and validity in the process of identifying the learning disability.

Siegel (1999:316) is of the view that unless a specific and clear operational definition is adopted by the field of study, the field will fail to advance; thus, post-secondary educational opportunities for individuals with a learning disability will remain inaccessible to them and success elusive. Siegel's view is shared by a variety of scholars in learning disability (Hammill, 1990; Goodley, 2001; Siegel, 1999; Lyon, 1996; Shapiro, 2011; Nel & Grosser, 2016; Riddel, 1998; Butter & Hasselhorn, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2001; Fuller et al., 2008).

One of the more concerning consequences of the lack of a widely accepted conceptual definition and an underpinning operational definition, is the failure to properly diagnose learners with learning disability because of the lack of widely agreed upon criteria for the diagnosis of this condition (Lyon, 1996; Shapiro, 2011; Nel and Grosser 2016). The result of this failure to properly diagnose learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)(Lyon, 1996; Shapiro, 2011; Nel and Grosser 2016), manifests itself in the growing numbers of learners being diagnosed, by a variety of methods, with learning disability across the world (Lyon, 1996:54; Butter & Hasselhorn, 2011:75; Siegel, 1999:305), and an equally growing number of naysayers who question the validity and reliability of the diagnoses of learning disability currently found in PSET institutions (Graham, 2014:11) given the inconsistent definitions and diagnostic protocols used for learning disability.

The discrepancy model has been the key means of operationalising the definition of learning disabilities. The diagnosis is based on a discrepancy between expected performances, normally measured through an intelligence quotient (IQ) assessment versus actual performance in the classroom. However, there is no standardised testing protocol accepted and used by all institutions. Therefore, it is imperative that a widely accepted conceptual definition of learning disability is adopted by the field of study as well as a set of criteria that can be used for objective diagnosis, including standardised testing protocols (Siegel, 1999:308; Lyon, 1996:59).

This lack of a widely accepted definition of learning disabilities manifests itself further in the disjuncture experienced within the disability sector between learning disability and disability in general.

The second area of contestation in the field of learning disability is the place of learning disability in the context of the broader disability debate. Learning disability, has in the main, not been considered a legitimate disability. People with learning disability feel that the broader disability movement has disadvantaged them in this regard (Goodley, 2001:217). Those with learning disability are, as a rule, not regarded as impaired, compared to those with physical impairments (Goodley, 2001:217: Gersten, 2001:280). Goode (2006:43) refers to sensory or physical disabilities as automatically visible. This disjuncture is evident in the literature which expresses the view that sensory disabilities enjoy far greater acceptance in the PSET environment than learning or intellectual disabilities (Matshedisho, 2007:733).

Konur (2007:355) reflects this non-acceptance of learning disability as a real disability in the following: “long standing debate on the existence of such disabilities, the alternative term used for such learners is the 'learners labelled as learning disabled’”. Holloway (2001:606) and Mullins and Preyder (2013:157) in their respective studies found that learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) sometimes felt that they would have preferred to have some sort of physical marker of their disability so that their disability would be legitimately accepted rather than its authenticity questioned. Konur (2007:355) confirms that sensory disabilities have been far more widely accepted than learning or intellectual disabilities (also see Greve, 2009:11).

The lack of such measures as standardised testing protocols to diagnose learning disabilities has not aided the disjuncture that has come to exist between learning disabilities and sensory disabilities. Madriaga (2010;656) makes the point that whatever is done to accommodate learners with barriers to learning (disabilities), be they sensory or learning disabled, will have positive ramifications for the non-disabled learners too.

A widely subscribed definition of learning disability will contribute to this integration of learning disability as part of the broader disability studies field, in that it will not only describe the condition, but provide guidance on how to confirm the existence of the condition (standard diagnostic protocols) and provide a framework for the management of the disability.

3.2.2. First two seminal definitions for learning disability

The debate on the definition of learning disability is not a new one and has challenged this field of study since 1968. The definition offered by the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children (USA) (Hammill, 1990:75), was considered a seminal definition of the field of learning disability when it was adopted in 1977. It defined learning disability as follows:

“Children with special (specific) learning disability exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken and written language. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems that are due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance or to environmental disadvantage” (Hammill, 1990:75).

Further to this seminal definition came the now more widely accepted definition of learning disability by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disability (Reif, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1995) in 1988. Specifically, the concept “learning disability” is defined as follows:

“Learning disability is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the lifespan. Problems in self-regulatory behaviours, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disability but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation or serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences” (Hammill, 1990:77).

If one compares the seminal definition of 1977 (Hammill 1990:75) with the subsequent definition adopted in 1988, and which remains widely used today in the USA, (Bosser,

2009; Fletcher, 2001; Kavale, Spaulding & Beam, 2009), the following is important to note in this conceptual definition of learning disability:

Both definitions agree that a learning disability which is a result of a sensory impairment, is not considered a learning disability.

Both definitions view learning disability as specific to understanding and/or using spoken or written language, mathematics and arithmetic. The 1988 definition presents learning disability as an umbrella term for a large and diverse group of disorders, all of which are experienced by learners as noteworthy difficulties in academic achievement, specifically in the acquisition and use of language in its various forms and mathematics. Scholars in learning disability (Fletcher, 2001; Lyon, 1996; Reif, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1993), refer specifically to seven identified areas of academic under-achievement, i.e.:

- Oral expression
- Listening comprehension
- Written expression
- Basic reading skills
- Reading comprehension
- Mathematical calculations
- Mathematical reasoning

The seminal definition incorporated psychological processes but provided no definition for what these psychological processes include or exclude. This aspect was subsequently eliminated in the 1988 definition. However, the 1988 definition made specific reference instead to learning disability being related to central nervous system dysfunction as a causal factor of learning disability. Therefore, the disorder is intrinsic (Nel & Grosser, 2016:81), i.e. the learning disability experienced by the learner is intrinsic in nature. It exists as a result of the learner's inherent functioning rather than as a result of external factors (extrinsic factors), including environmental and social. Nel (in Nel and Grosser 2016:80) further qualifies intrinsic factors in learning disability as those that the learner continues to experience despite exposure to good teaching and learning practices as well as additional support.

Although the seminal definition specifically refers to children, the definition should not be discounted in its applicability to young adults in a PSET environment. Whilst the

field has struggled to adopt a universally accepted definition of the condition, they have been in agreement that early identification and intervention is critical in ensuring that children with barriers to learning (learning disability) are able to access post-school education and training opportunities as they progress up the learning ladder from primary, secondary and finally post-secondary education (Shapiro, 2011:213; Grunker & Cavendish, 2016:4; Lyon, 1996:72; Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2002:11). The subsequently adopted 1988 definition expanded its range, and therefore suggests that learning disability can be experienced across all ages. It can indeed be a lifelong condition which is particularly important in considering post-school education and training environments and how learning disability is managed within this context. Statistics for the United States show that post-school graduates with learning disabilities graduate at a slower rate than their counterparts who do not have a learning disability, and that as much as a quarter drop out before being awarded their diploma (Bossler, 2009:28).

The subsequent definition of 1988 is finally clear on the fact that learning disability can coexist with other impairments, including those that impact learner self-regulation. Lyon (1996:67) and Butter & Hasselhorn (2011:83) are unequivocal about the coexistence of multiple impairments among learners with learning disabilities, as is Shapiro (2011:211). It is Shapiro's belief that treatment programmes aimed at addressing the needs of learners with learning disability fail because of the failure to detect coexisting conditions.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada presents a conceptual definition, which identifies the condition, as well as an operational one, which allows for the implementation of required management strategies to ensure the adoption of specific learner supports to ensure learner success.

Conceptually, the Canadian definition of learning disability covers a range of disorders; hence the use of learning disabilities rather than learning disability. This range of disorders may affect the learner's use of verbal or non-verbal information from acquisition, organisation, retention and ultimately understanding of concepts. These disorders have the specific effect of producing poor performance in the classroom or "academic underachievement" (Butter & Hasselhorn, 2011:76).

Furthermore, the definition provides a causal link between the learning disability and genetic and/or neurobiological factors and/or injury that may alter the brain's functioning (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2002:11). This alteration has the effect of impairing one or more processes that relate to the learning ability of the learner. These processes are related to the learner's perceptual ability, thought, memory or learning. In addition, the learning disabilities may range in severity and may interfere with the learner's ability to acquire one or more of the following abilities, specifically, oral language ability, including reading, listening, speaking and ultimately understanding; reading ability, including the ability to decode, comprehend and recognise words; writing ability, including spelling and the ability to express oneself in the written form; mathematical ability, including computation and problem solving.

Whilst the learning disability is largely experienced as academic underachievement, there are also difficulties experienced with organisational skills, social perceptions, social interactions and perspectives, all of which have the effect of exacerbating the academic underachievement experienced in the classroom (Shapiro, 2011:211; Rao, 2007:194).

The Canadian definition, as with the definition adopted by North America, the following are excluded as causal factors for learning disabilities: sensory impairments including hearing and /or vision, socio-economic factors; cultural and linguistic differences; and the lack of motivation or ineffective teaching practices. The Canadian definition acknowledges the existence of co-morbidity, i.e. the possibility that the learning disability may co-exist with other conditions, including sensory impairments, medical conditions and attention, behaviour and emotional disorders. Finally, The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2002:11) definition presents an operational aspect of the definition that allows for diagnosis and identifies the necessary measures that need to be in place to ensure the success of adult learners with learning disability in a learning environment. The definition acknowledges the lifelong nature of learning disabilities. In addition, it makes note of the fact that the nature in which the learning disability is experienced over time, may vary depending on the interaction between the demands of the environment and the individual's strengths and needs.

In ensuring the success of learners with learning disability in an educational environment, the definition offered is unequivocal that early identification is essential,

including timely specialized assessments and interventions that involve all stakeholders, including family, school, community and workplace environments. The interventions need to be appropriate for each individual's learning disability type and should include at least the following (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2002:11):

- Specific skill instruction – aligned to the nature of the learning disability and the specific learning needs of the learner;
- Accommodations – in the context of teaching, learning and assessment;
- Compensatory strategies, including concessions; and
- Self-advocacy skills – including programmes that build self-esteem and self-confidence as well as understanding the rights to which learners are entitled.

Thus, the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2002) defines learning disability as a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency. Additionally, these learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision-making). And finally, learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- Oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding).
- Reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension).
- Written language (e.g. spelling and written expression).
- Mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).

Of all the definitions considered so far, the definition offered by the Canadian Association of Learning Disability appears to be most comprehensive, covering not only what a learning disability is, but including the possible origins of the condition as well as expressing how the condition manifests itself (conceptual and operational

definitions). Finally, it considers issues of management and support to ensure that learners are able to progress educationally rather than drop out of educational endeavours. For the purpose of my research, this definition was adopted largely because of its operational aspects with which I aligned myself, given the research nature of this study, i.e. the focus on current assessment practices and the experiences of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities).

3.1.3. A South African definition of learning disability

In a South African context “learning disability” is used to describe children of above-average intellectual potential (above average IQ based on IQ tests used) but who present with symptoms of scholastic difficulty (academic underachievement), i.e., literacy and numeracy (Flack, 2005:321). In defining “learning disability” in a South African context our statutes provide various definitions that are used in a variety of contexts. It must be noted that there isn’t a universally subscribed to definition of learning disability adhered to by all PSET institutions. While the South African legal context provides constitutional protection from discrimination for persons with disabilities in the form of the Bill of Rights and the Promotion of Equality and Prohibition of Unfair Discrimination Act No. 4 of 2000, the term "disability" is not specifically defined in any of these.

In some legislation, disability is defined in terms of the ability of the person to be gainfully employed. For the purposes of the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, "people with disabilities" means, "people who have a long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospects of entry into, or advancement in, employment".

The Social Assistance Act No. 13 of 2004, understands a person with a disability to mean a person who is, "owing to a physical or mental disability, unfit to obtain by virtue of any service, employment or profession the means needed to enable him or her to provide for his or her maintenance". This Act and the Regulations in terms thereof do not define disability.

SARS sheds more light on the legal definition in section 18(3) of the Income Tax Act No. 58 of 1962, which comprehensively defines disability to mean, "a moderate to severe limitation of a person's ability to function or perform daily activities as a result

of physical, sensory, communication, intellectual or mental impairment, if the limitation

–

(a) has lasted or has a prognosis of lasting more than a year; and

(b) is diagnosed by a duly registered medical practitioner in accordance with criteria prescribed by the Commissioner".

The criteria prescribed by the Commissioner, as set out in the Form ITR-DD Confirmation of Diagnosis of Disability for the purposes of the Income Tax Act, investigates disability in the areas of vision, hearing, communication/speech, physical, intellectual and mental and sets out an indication of what is considered to be disability in each area.

Insofar as mental disability is concerned, the Mental Health Care Act No. 17 of 2002, defines, "severe or profound intellectual disability" to mean, "a range of intellectual functioning extending from partial self-maintenance under close supervision, together with limited self-protection skills in a controlled environment through limited self-care and requiring constant aid and supervision, to severely restricted sensory and motor functioning and requiring nursing care".

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by South Africa in November 2007, sets out in article 1 thereof that, "persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". This "definition" is preferred by the South African disability sector.

3.1.4. Towards a final definition of learning disability for this study

In the context of South African policy, the onus is on the PSET institution to implement the necessary practices to ensure that all learners with learning barriers (learning disabilities), are catered for within post-school education and training programmes through flexible curricula, appropriate teaching and learning practices, amended assessment practices and the necessary accommodations and concessions (Integrated national disability strategy, 1997; White Paper 6, 2013;; National Higher

Education strategy, 2001). The operational aspects of the definition provide guidance on the management of this condition among learners and the measures to be taken for effective long-term management.

At an institutional level, “it is up to the tertiary institutions to engage learners with a range of impairments at the levels of policy and governance, while institutions expand the capacity to embed disability access, equity and inclusion throughout their educational environments” (Bell, 2015:3). At the level of professionals, “the challenge for professionals, disability studies specifically and disability research more generally, is both to see what commonalities exist, while being open to the way that learning-disabled people define themselves and how they view the social constructions that define them” (Inglis, 2013:425). It becomes imperative then that an operationally accepted definition generated by all stakeholders is adopted if the experience of learners with barriers to learning (learning disability) in post-school education and training is to be improved to the extent that we are able to track improved levels of enrolment and improved levels of throughput. An adopted and widely subscribed operational definition will enable the practitioners to ensure effective diagnosis and more relevant and appropriate practices which improves their opportunities for learning progress and learning achievement.

The conceptual definition that I will use for this research study will include learners whose learning disability may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. Learners whose learning disability results from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision-making), social perceptions and social interactions.

Finally, learners whose learning disability may interfere with their acquisition and ability to use:

- Oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding);
- Reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension);
- Written language (e.g. spelling and written expression); and

- Mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).

Furthermore, in identifying participants for the study, I sought confirmation of the learning disability through a formalised assessment via the disability support unit or relevant people responsible for supporting adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). The point of departure was that all participants must have been formally diagnosed as having a learning disability. I further requested that the PSET institutions that identified learners for participation in this study, focussed on those learners where early identification of the learning disability could be confirmed, preferably at school level (and preferably that such identification should have taken place using diagnostic assessment tools). I requested that learners participating in the study had to be accessing reasonable accommodations within the classroom as well as having access to concessions in an assessment context, including using assistive technologies where applicable and available. In addition, it was important that learners participating in the study had to have experienced the learning disability over time. Finally, I sought learners who had to have been the recipients of amended learning instruction to meet their specific learning needs, including accommodations and concessions.

I have provided a definition of learning disability as it applies to this research study.

I now shift my focus to the external barriers to learning that learners are likely to face in PSET institutions. Specifically, I will now look at the broader institutional practices and how they influence assessment practices, learning achievement and learning progress.

3.2. DEFINING BARRIERS TO LEARNING

The broader barriers to learning identified by the literature as experienced by learners with learning disabilities is extensive and varied. For the purposes of this review, I have focused on those barriers that were reflected in the literature most frequently and which appear to have had the greatest impact, either positively or negatively, on the assessment practices experienced and learner achievement and progress. It must be noted that assessment does not exist in isolation of the learner's broader PSET experience nor does it exist in isolation of the broader economic, social and policy contexts.

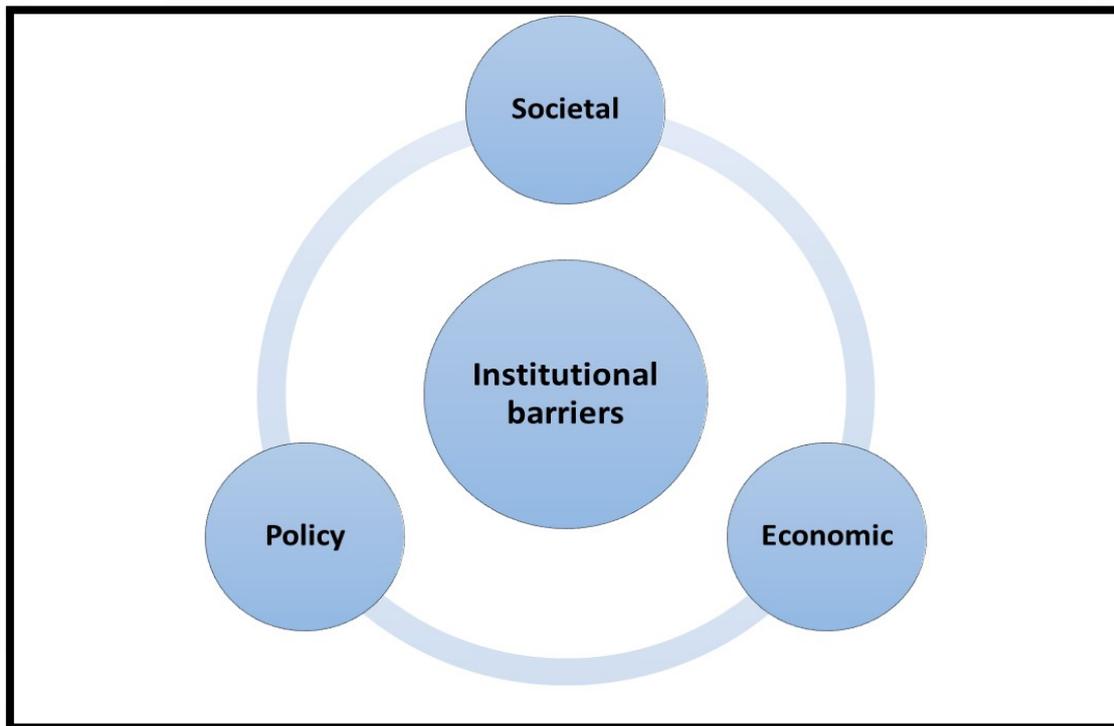


Figure 3.1 Contextual barriers to learning

The above diagram reflects the relationship between broader societal barriers and institutional barriers experienced by adult learners with learning disabilities. Specifically, this section will focus on:

- Institutional barriers. These are barriers that reflect the barriers that exist within PSET institutions and which have an effect on the assessment experience of adult learners with learning disabilities.
- Contextual barriers including policy. Contextual barriers expose the societal barriers that adult learners with learning disabilities are confronted with. Societal barriers include economic barriers, social barriers and barriers that emerge as a result of the failure to sufficiently implement policy such that they have the enabling effect envisioned at their proclamation.

Therefore, this chapter focusses on the overall learner experience of assessment within the context of broader social, economic, policy and institutional barriers and the effect that these external factors have on learning progress and ultimately learning achievement.

In terms of institutional barriers, I will focus on disclosure and the stigma attached to disclosure of the disability (Koretz, 2003:8); inconsistent assessment practices (Kaur et al., 2016:4); second language (English) as a barrier to teaching, learning, and assessment (Cooper, 2016:62; Kaur et al., 2016: 2; Huang et al., 2011:736); attitudes and perceptions of students, lecturers/facilitators/instructors, and staff (Vogel et al., 1999:173; Howell, 2005:45; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015:203); continuous professional development (Monyooe, 2013:112); teaching methods, pace of teaching, and availability of learning materials (Crous, 2004:246).

In terms of contextual barriers, I will focus on economic, social and policy issues that have an impact on adult learners with learning disabilities assessment experience and its effect on learning achievement and learning progress.

3.2.1. Institutional barriers

A. Disclosure

In the context of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), one of the biggest challenges faced by learners, faculty, and the institution is the issue of disclosure – whether to disclose or not and the implications for teaching, learning, assessment, and overall learner support. In many instances learners fail to disclose the disability as a result of the perceived stigma associated with disability. As such the support which may be needed and which can be provided is lacking as a result of the lack of disclosure (Koretz, 2003:8).

This reluctance on the part of learners to disclose their disabilities is evident in the literature, both globally and locally (Borland & James, 1998:98; Konur, 2006:353; Couzens, 2015:38; Mullins and Preyder, 2013:149; Mutanga, 2013). This reluctance to disclose a disability emanates from the manner in which learners see themselves and what they perceive their identity to be (Goode, 2007:36). In most cases they do not see themselves as disabled and therefore believe that there is nothing to disclose (Tinklin, Riddell & 2004:5). In order for learners to access services they must disclose the learning barrier being experienced. Mutanga (2013:71) observes that in order for learners to access support services they must disclose the barrier to learning being experienced. Mutanga argues that the way we see ourselves, our identities are fluid. In failing to recognise this fluidity, in forcing learners to identify themselves as a certain group in order to obtain support services, educational institutions perpetuate socially

unjust practices. The learner that was the subject of this study was epileptic. She did not see her disability as part of her identity. "I am a university learner, not a disabled student." She saw her disability as something that she could control and therefore embraced the differences rather than allowing it to separate her from the broader group that she identified with, i.e. being a university student. These circumstances add to the anxieties and stresses faced by learner with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), which in turn impact their academic performance. Adults with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) have to cope with stress, anxiety, and psychological issues. They show higher levels of stress and anxiety and persistent levels of low self-efficacy; they are inordinately self-critical and lacking in self-confidence (Erikson, Balsecut & Eklinth, 2003:4; Lyon, 1996:67; Goode, 2006:36; Heiman & Precel, 2003:49). All these factors have the effect of inhibiting their learning progress and learning achievement.

B. Inconsistent assessment practices

Inconsistent assessment practices have the obvious impact of inhibiting the adult learner with learning disabilities from displaying competence, measured against minimum standards. These inconsistent assessment practices highlighted included language of the assessment task; inconsistent marking and the disparity between learner understanding of the assessment tasks requirements and the lecturer's expectations.

The PSET classroom is a diverse classroom bringing together a variety of languages, cultures, races, and learners with disabilities. Kaur et al., (2016:4) is of the view that traditional assessment methods in a diverse classroom are inequitable and unfair because it fails to consider such factors as language, culture, socio-economic background and by extension disability. The experiences of teaching, learning, and assessment in a learning environment where English is the language of instruction – for the student it may be a second and sometimes third language – have vast implications for the learner's ability to engage equitably in the teaching, learning and assessment practices. Thus, the language of instruction and assessment, where it differs from that of the student, creates unfair teaching, learning, and assessment contexts, and by extension suggests that the learner's level of learning progress and learning achievement may be compromised. The literature (Kaur et al., 2016:2; Huang et al., 2011:736) suggests that learners whose linguistic diversity is not catered for in

PSET environments, display poorer educational outcomes than their peers. Where English is the medium of instruction, it has the effect of impacting teaching and learning as well as resulting in a poor understanding of the assessment and classroom activities. One of the findings of this study was that learning in a familiar language promotes cognition and academic achievement (Kaur et al., 2016:100). Hence, the correct choice of assessment (language of assessment, response method of assessment and type of assessment task) enables learners learning progress and learning achievement, and ensures engaged learners in the learning process.

C. Attitudes toward learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)

One of the most consistent themes in the literature focuses on the attitudes of stakeholders within PSET institutions, including lecturers/facilitators/instructors, support services, staff (including administration staff), and nondisabled students. There is a general all-round requirement for the provision of sensitisation programmes at PSET level for all stakeholders (Crous, 2004:246; Couzens, 2015:25). These programmes should include the compliance requirements of policy and legal statutes as they apply to learners with disabilities, and the obligations of PSET institutions in respect of these statutes (Koretz, D.M., 2003; Morina Diez et al., 2014; HED Monitor, 2005:17).

HED Monitor also identified the lack of knowledge of institutionally relevant policy. In their 2005 study, they found particular evidence of poor knowledge relevant to policy among key staff, i.e. faculty and management (Howell, 2005:17). There was a general lack of knowledge of White Paper 3, INDS, and the National Plan on Higher Education (Howell, 2005:17). Lecturers/facilitators/instructors are neither informed nor trained to respond to the unique needs of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). In most instances, lecturers/facilitators/instructors have little or no experience in dealing with learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (Vogel et al., 1999:173; Howell, 2005:45; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015:203).

Lecturers/facilitators'/instructors' lack of skills that include how best to improve the teaching and learning experience of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), as well as a lack of understanding in terms of the legal compliance regulations. Studies further suggest that there are attitudinal aspects of faculty behaviour that have the greatest negative impact on learning and academic

achievement of learners (Vogel et al., 1999:173; Howell, 2005:45; Orr & Bachman Hammig, 2009). The above experiences are echoed in South African studies (Howell, 2005; Howell, 2006; Crous, 2004).

Lecturers are key players in this landscape; they either help or hinder the teaching and learning process (Crous, 2004:47; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeye-Ndeyera, 2015:203; Matshediso, 2010:731). Crous, in her local study, identified lecturers'/facilitators'/instructors' attitudes as inhibiting the experiences of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) in PSET institutions. In her concluding remarks she identifies the teaching and assessment of learners with learning disabilities as a highly specialised field, and suggests that within a South African context there are too few professionals capable of working with learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) and learning disabilities in particular. She, too, expresses the view that awareness campaigns and the need for well-trained personnel at PSET institutions are essential if the teaching, learning, and assessment experiences of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) are to be improved. By extension, we can assume that an improvement in these experiences may result in an improvement in learners' levels of learning progress and learning achievement.

HED Monitor (in Howell, 2005:47) also expresses the view that learner performance may currently be jeopardised as a result of inappropriate teaching and assessment methods. In a study conducted by the University of the Free State into the e-learning needs of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities), it was found that none of the lecturers surveyed had received any formal professional development on disability or inclusivity (Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015:202). This has the effect of lecturers "distancing themselves" from taking responsibility for the learning experience of the learner with disabilities in the class (Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015:203; Morina, Lopez & Molina, 2015:152).

The responsibility for learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) is moved to the disability support units, where such exist, or to learner services (Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015:203; Crous, 2004:246). Van Jaarsveldt and Ndeya-Ndereya (2015:203) suggest that this distancing behaviour has the effect of marginalising learners with disabilities. It deprives these learners of the respect and dignity they deserve while denying them a sense of equality in relation to their peers (Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015:203). This lack of connectedness to the lecturer,

referred to above as “distancing”, could impact academic performance as the learner feels alienated and unable to ask for support when needed, and may impact the motivation of the learner to complete the programme of study – a clearly negative impact on learner achievement.

This need to build the skills of lecturers/facilitators/instructors to ensure that they are able to ensure an effective teaching and learning experience for adult learners with learning disabilities, falls into the realm of continuous professional development.

d. Continuous professional development

The literature cites the Finnish and Singaporean models as exemplars for continuous professional development of lecturers/facilitators/instructors and PSET staff (Monyooe, 2013:1). In Singapore, 100 hours of continuous professional development is invested per year. In a South African context such a commitment to continuous professional development is wholly lacking. Within the secondary school education system in South Africa, we have already identified the poor level of schooling as an inhibitor of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) accessing post school education and training including higher education; the example of grade R is cited, where the qualification required to teach at this level is the lowest, suggesting “scholastic mediocrity” and can have academic consequences later on (Monyooe, 2013:112).

e. Current teaching and learning practices as a barrier to learning achievement

The HED Monitor study (2005:23) concluded that the most difficult area requiring the most attention is the teaching and learning process. Teaching and learning in this context refer to the methods of delivery employed in the classroom and the learning environment, as well as the learning activities that learners are exposed to in order to master the subject matter being studied. HED Monitor (2005) specifically calls for flexible teaching and learning environments as well as the adaptation of teaching and learning strategies. Teaching in PSET environments is driven by the lecturer and is therefore individualistic in nature. The extent to which learners with barriers to learning (disabilities), and learning disabilities in particular, are accommodated in the learning environment is determined largely by the lecturer and what the lecturer is willing to do. This individualism comes out clearly in the above description that the accommodations in the classroom are dependent largely on the willingness and goodwill of the lecturer.

Unfortunately, the course head will determine whether or not the learner is accepted into the programme or not (Matshediso, 2007:690). However, complex changes in the teaching environment, policy, changes in the curriculum, and the need for authentic assessment activities all require lecturers to rethink their teaching beliefs and practices (Gregson & Sturko, 2007:1).

The literature provides very little evidence that this rethinking of beliefs and practices has taken place or is taking place. Instead, the evidence points to the persistence of traditional teaching methods and an overreliance on traditional assessment tasks (Klenowski, 2014; Grant, 2008; Hanafin & Shevlin, 2007; Kenny & Neela, 2007). Lecturers play a key role in the experience of the learners (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Orr & Bachman-Hammig, 2009). Evidence points to a reluctance to change the lecturing style or adapt to the needs of the students. Furthermore, there is little evidence of adaptation of the curriculum to meet the needs of the learner from a cultural, language, or disability perspective (RSA, 2001). Where such curriculum adaptation is evident, it is simply because of the goodwill of the lecturing staff, and is often a result of direct interaction and request from the learner (agency). There is strong evidence of agency exercised by learners in the literature, that learners have to negotiate their own support and accommodations, and that they are often at the mercy of the lecturer as to whether or not such accommodations are provided (Vogel et al., 1999:183).

The lecturing style remains PowerPoint based with the lecturer simply reading the slides without much interaction, discussion, or learner engagement on the concepts being examined. The class activities, where such exist, do not link to real-life examples (Vogel et al., 1999:184; Couzens, 2015:37). This lack of curriculum adaptation suggests a lack of constructive alignment, and infers that the assessment tasks that learners are exposed to may be inappropriate in assessing the learning outcomes. In fact, the question to be asked is whether the learning outcomes are being achieved at all; “Learner performance may be jeopardised by inappropriate teaching or assessment methods” (HED Monitor, 2005:17; Howell, 2006:168).

White Paper 6 (RSA, 2006) calls for “a more flexible curriculum, it calls for the pace of teaching to be matched to the needs of the learner, it also calls for adaptations to learning materials to ensure learner needs are met and of course it asks for alternative and authentic assessments.” Of the literature examined in a South African context,

there is little evidence of curriculum at PSET institutions undergoing such adaptation. This lack of adaptation to the needs of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) infers that teaching and learning continue as before. The only evidence of assessment modification evident in the local literature is additional time and alternative examination venues, but absolutely no evidence of modification to the actual assessment task to meet the needs of the learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) can be found. Crous reflects it well when she says that the help that is needed is not required in respect of the impairment. The help needed is in respect of the removal of the barriers that exist to their learning. She suggests that what is required is a reconstruction of the learning environment (Crous, 2004:246). This view is echoed by Teresa Tinklin (in Tinklin, Riddel & Wilson, 2004:2) on the challenges that learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) present to post school education and training including higher education in respect of curriculum, teaching, and learning and assessment: "They may be seen as a litmus test of the ability of higher education to include a diverse range of learners particularly relevant in light of the recent emphasis on initiatives aimed at widening access to higher education to underrepresented groups". Matshediso's (2007:696) view is that for the rights of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) to be real, there is a need for resources, academic staff development and commitment, accessibility, and use of assistive technology and curriculum flexibility.

This need for a flexible curriculum is reiterated in "Hearing the Voices of Disabled Learners in Higher Education" (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010:24). The current experiences of restrictive assessment are a result of inappropriate objectives, lack of adapted equipment, teaching methods and learner discussion opportunities. Furthermore, there is the failure to consult with learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) and learning disabilities specifically, about the barriers to learning experienced by them in teaching, learning and assessment (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010:24). In a United Kingdom context, learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) are entitled to a range of learning, teaching, and assessment approaches to which higher education institutions are compelled to comply (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010:23).

What is interesting is the emerging theme, notably, that the adapted curricula and teaching styles that meet the needs of learners with learning disabilities have in fact

benefitted an entire class of students: “The TIC aims to break down barriers to learning by providing a range of teaching and assessment methods allowing all learners to work to their strengths” (O'Connor et al., 2012:254). Madriagar (2010:8) asserts that we are all impaired in one way or another, and therefore whatever practices are implemented for learners with learning disabilities will be just as beneficial to those who are not disabled. Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, where the study was conducted among learners with learning disabilities, made the following adjustments to teaching and learning that is, the ways of presenting material was learner centred; there was greater use of visual aids and greater use of more accessible materials (materials available on-line and in advance; audio options; visual options).

Whilst teaching and learning have been dealt with in this chapter as one of the inhibitors of the assessment experience of adult learners with learning disabilities, they do form part of the broader category of barriers to learning that adults with learning disabilities experience within PSET institutions. In separating this aspect from the broader category, I wished to accentuate the critical role that teaching and learning play in assessment, and in the overall experience of learners in PSET institutions, particularly learners with learning with disabilities.

As reflected in the HED Monitor (2005), there is no real engagement with the academic community about the importance of teaching and learning processes in ensuring learner success. These barriers to learning have the greatest impact on teaching and learning, and by extension, assessment. The inextricable link between teaching, learning, and assessment cannot be denied. Kaur et al. (2016:2) assert that assessment is integral to teaching and learning and when done properly, has the effect of improving instruction.

e.1. Examples of good teaching and learning practices

There are pockets of good practice, including Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, where curriculum based on universal design principles was used and adapted. Not only was the curriculum redesigned to serve the needs of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) and nondisabled students, but it translated itself into adapted classroom practices, including adjustments to the manner in which the material was presented, the increased use of visual aids, and ensuring that the materials were more accessible. Faculties involved in the study saw the opportunity for their own personal

growth as well as the opportunity to adjust the teaching and learning environment (O'Connor et al., 2012:251). Another such example, The Teachability project (Tinklin, Riddell & Wilson, 2004:2 of 4) was specifically created to provide resources so that academics could review teaching and learning in order to ensure the accessibility of the curriculum for learners with disabilities. Training accommodation (O'Connor et al., 2012:251), as these measures are commonly referred to, includes allowing learners to record lectures, by providing supplementary materials, including written outlines of the lecturer's notes, mentors, tutoring services, and extended deadlines in class projects. In most instances, the training accommodation made within the learning environment was done only in so far as it required the least amount of effort from the lecturer.

3.2.2. Contextual barriers

a. Inclusive education

The South African Constitution (effective 1997) and the Bill of Rights inherent in it, enshrines the human rights of all South Africans by providing protections for the civil, political and socio-economic rights of all citizens of South Africa. Section 29 speaks specifically to the right of all South Africans to an education including people with disabilities. In this regard it ties in with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) to which South Africa is a signatory and in particular Article 24 that outlines the specific educational rights afforded to persons with disabilities and the responsibilities placed on countries who are signatories to the Convention. Specifically, it is worth noting that Article 24 enshrines the right of persons with disabilities to access education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. In addition, signatories to this Convention commit to an inclusive education system that will be dedicated to promoting the principles of lifelong learning.

The following goals were set for achievement by the signatories to the Convention:

- The full development of the human potential of the person with disabilities
- Enabling such persons to participate in society effectively
- To prevent the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the general education system because of their disability
- To enable the person with disabilities to access inclusive, quality, free primary and secondary education

- To ensure access to general and tertiary education as well as vocational education and the necessary reasonable accommodations to ensure effective education as well the individual supports within the environment to ensure optimum education and social development within the context of inclusion

Stemming from this broader global and local human rights framework (South African Constitution and Bill of Rights), the specific statutory framework of South Africa is worth further consideration in the context of inclusion.

b. The legislative framework of inclusion

The Integrated National Disability Strategy (RSA, 1997:40) interestingly which came into effect prior to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, placed the rights of persons with disabilities very firmly on the agenda of a democratic South Africa. The INDS (1997) asserts that equity for learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) must carry with it the availability of additional support mechanisms. The strategy further suggests that, should we fail to implement this policy of inclusivity successfully, post-school education and training will remain inaccessible to learners with barriers to learning (disabilities), and we shall have failed to advance our equity goals as well as failed to broaden the participation of “non-traditional learners”. By extension, the agenda of a socially just society will have failed.

The White Paper 6: Special needs education (RSA, 2001) was seen as a means of creating a single inclusive education system that would right the injustices of the past, specifically in respect of the educational needs of children with special needs. White Paper 6 of 2006 (RSA, 2001:24) had two primary intentions, namely to remove the barriers that limit access; and to generate a strategy to build the capacity of the education and training sector to meet the needs of those learners with special needs. Its primary purpose is to ensure the development of a system that would create the means for learners who are unable to access existing educational opportunities, who experience learning difficulties, and for whom the education system has been unable to accommodate their learning needs. In apartheid South Africa, children with special needs were segregated based on disability and race. This intent, the integration of children with special needs in a schooling context, was extended to the higher education space through the Higher Educational National Plan (RSA, 2001). The

intention of the plan was to increase access for special needs and learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) to PSET opportunities.

The White Paper on Higher Education (2001) also suggests that the development and availability of different institutions, ranging from adult learning centres, training and post-school educational institutions, including higher education institutions, would facilitate services to address the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (disabilities). Therefore, Vision 2030 sets the agenda as “meeting the needs of learners of ALL ages and levels must be a central purpose of the education and training system” (White Paper, 2013: viii). This statement reinforces the agenda for inclusion as a strategy for addressing the social injustices borne by adult learners with barriers to learning (disabilities). The supportive nature of the Integrated National Disability Strategy (RSA, 1997) and White Paper 6 (RSA, 2001) in their philosophies on inclusion, is evident in its reference to **ALL** learners. In addition, it specifies that **ALL** learners are entitled to access a wide range of educational and social options; that they are entitled to education and training in a normal environment, and that they have a right to access those additional resources that would enable the realisation of their full potential.

White Paper 6 (RSA, 2001:6) sees inclusion as an environment where all learners can learn despite their differing learning needs; an environment where the educational structure, systems, and methods of teaching and learning are designed in such a manner as to meet these varying needs of the learner. “Different learning needs arise from a range of factors, including physical, mental, sensory, neurological and developmental impairments, psychosocial disturbances, and differences in intellectual ability” (2001:7). According to White Paper 6 (2001:6), inclusivity means changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula, and a classroom environment that maximises learner participation and minimises learning barriers, thus ensuring the development of each learner’s unique strengths and learning needs. Inclusion in a post-school education and training context is advocated as a strategy for addressing the increasingly diverse classroom that post-school education and training institutions face as a result of the massification of post-school education and training and the support and promotion of South Africa’s human rights agenda. Inclusion as a strategy is therefore a key mechanism for the achievement of social justice across all marginalised groups, specifically people with disabilities.

In South Africa, post-school education and training is not legally obliged to provide the types of support articulated in our policy documents. Matshedisho (2007:734) refers to this as the discrepancy between real rights and formal rights. His observation is that in a South African context the support for learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) is in a contradictory position – on the one hand we espouse disability rights and adhere to a social model on disability; yet in practice our approach is one of benevolence. Furthermore, he suggests that the establishment of support services for learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) is still perceived as optional and charitable (Matshedisho, 2007:695, 697) rather than an obligation of PSET institutions. This lack of the necessary support services will have an inadvertent inhibiting effect on learning progress and learning achievement.

Matshedisho's (2007:691) suggests that all policies, procedures and activities, including strategic planning and resource allocation, should be aimed at enabling learners to participate in all aspects of life in a PSET institution, academically and socially.

c. Inclusion as an educational philosophy

Inclusion as an educational philosophy is concerned with “increasing participation and reducing exclusion” (Kearney & Kane, 2006:7 in Bell, 2015:12). A further definition of inclusion in the context of social justice encompasses the view that education as a non-discriminatory (race and gender) undertaking should provide all learners the deserved admission and a culturally valued curriculum (Shyman, 2015:353). This view is echoed by Moriña, Cortés, and Melero (in Van Jaarsveld and Ndeya-Ndereya 2015: 200) where the inclusive learning environment is described as an environment that engenders free involvement of the learner in the learning process, the provision of learning opportunities for all learners that are equal and of high quality, with the ultimate goal being a sense of belonging experienced by the learner. They further suggest that inclusion must take a learner centred approach. Such an approach should offer a personalised and engaging curriculum. The approach is expected to produce a community of learners who are able to support each other and shape the learning experiences of learners individually and collectively.

In the context of inclusion, the aim is to treat all learners in the same manner and yet treat them in a manner that considers their individual needs (Warnock, Norwich &

Terzi, in Mutanga, 2013:80) – “their exceptionalities” (Shyman, 2015:351). Shyman goes on to suggest that every learner, irrespective of “their exceptionalities” (2015:351) has a right to access a normal classroom environment, where through the necessary support mechanisms, the learner is enabled to access both the physical environment and the learning information provided in such an environment.

To ensure the achievement of these goals (inclusive education), the lived experiences of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from a learning, teaching, and assessment perspective must be reengineered and might require special interventions. The interventions that must be embarked on in reengineering teaching, learning and assessment for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) must understand disability discrimination in the context of a wide spectrum of barriers to learning. This reengineering must also be a creative and sustainable effort at improving the overall experience of learners in PSET institutions – both academic and social (Matshedisho, 2010:741). The reengineering also requires a widely accepted definition of terms, specifically a definition of learning disability which will in turn enable more effective diagnosis as well as provide a framework to understand learner needs and provide services that are relevant and appropriate to these needs. This framework can further provide the guidelines for teaching, learning and assessment modifications that are required to meet the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities.

D. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (BARRIERS FROM POORLY IMPLEMENTED POLICY)

In a South African context, every legislative imperative has intended to create the framework for the integration of people with barriers to learning (disabilities, sensory and other) into the various aspects of society – politically, economically, and socially. In the context of education, this integration has been enshrined in White Paper 6 on Inclusion (2001); the Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997); and the White paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013). Of interest in all these policy documents is that whilst there is a commitment to the integration of people with disabilities, no guidelines have been provided on how this implementation should take place within the various institutions. Furthermore, the National Plan on Higher Education (2001) places the onus squarely on the shoulders of institutions to ensure

that the policy is realised in practice. This places a specific obligation upon PSET institutions.

The discussion below interrogates on the obligations of PSET institutions. It is worth noting that the challenges experienced in implementing inclusive education has in fact become a barrier to learning.

What are these obligations and how have South African PSET institutions responded to them?

D.1. Obligations of post-school education and training institutions (psetis) – accessibility

One of the key obligations placed on post school education and training institutions is their ability to respond constructively to the various policy frameworks. The ability to do this has been impacted by a number of factors identified by Crous (2004:238; HED monitor, 2005:46) specifically, the lack of reliable data on disability. This data refers both to prevalence statistics but also to the nature of the disabilities experienced within the learner population. The above situation is exacerbated by the lack of a consistent definition of disability. As a result of this lack of baseline information, the quantum of what needs to be implemented is difficult to determine; it is incumbent on each university to provide support for learners with disabilities, whether there are five or 500. Finally, the inability to determine the quantum of the situation to be addressed has an effect on the scale of the resources to be allocated, including financial, human, and physical infrastructure.

One of the fundamental obligations of PSET institutions is to ensure that learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) have access to post-school education and training programmes. At the outset this is compromised by the inability of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) to meet the required entry requirements. In this context, the poor primary and secondary education afforded to learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) makes access to PSET impossible for most (INDS, 1997; Howell, 2005:9; CSDA, 2014:17). In addition, the number of disabled learners that go to primary school is limited. Of school-going children with disabilities, 70% are not at school (Donohue & Bornman, 2015:43). At secondary school level, the subjects offered to learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) are inappropriate for entry into PSET institutions. Ineffective career guidance and a lack of life skills to cope in a post-school environment

all conspire to keep learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) out of the post-school education and training environment (Howell, 2005:37). There is a belief that learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) would not cope at PSET level and therefore there is no merit in encouraging them to take such subjects. This attitude of low expectations is evident at a higher education level too, and is discussed earlier in greater depth in the section on faculty attitude and its impact on the academic performance of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities): “They can’t make it” (Howell, 2005:37; Rao, 2007:194; Fuller et al., 2004: 314,316).

The obligation of ensuring access and successful throughput of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) in PSET institutions in South Africa appears to be failing. The following statistics cited by the HED Monitor (2005) in their comprehensive study conducted in 2005 provide some insights. In 2005, there were 1 142 learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) in 22 higher education institutions in South Africa and only 10 in postgraduate studies (as at the time of HED monitor report 2005). This is only 0.2% of the total higher education headcount in South Africa. The census of 2001 estimated that there were 2 255 982 people living with disabilities. This means that only 0.05% of the population are in PSET institutions in South Africa.

Accessibility as a fundamental obligation is proving to be one that PSET institutions appear unable to fulfil.

D. 2. Obligations of PSETI’s once learners are enrolled

Once a learner has been accepted into a PSET institution, a further range of obligations on the part of that institution manifests itself. These obligations impact the general experiences of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in a post-school education and training context, from teaching and learning to assessment practices as well as their general experiences of post-school education and training (Raskind et al. 2003:249). These general experiences have an effect on the overall performance of the learners in their academic performance (Borland & James, 1999; Fuller et al., 2004; Madriaga, 2010; Couzens, 2015; Morina Diez et al., 2014). These obligations include the provision of disability support services to students; suitable teaching and learning practices within the institution; understanding the barriers to learning that learners with learning disabilities face and are likely to face and their effect on assessment practices. In addition, it encompasses taking action for

the removal of these barriers in a structured manner in order to ensure that learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) have the best possible chance of succeeding in their post-school education and training studies.

These core obligations, namely implementing policy into practice, facilitating access, providing support services and structures, and ensuring flexible teaching and learning practices are all echoed by our international counterparts (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Orr & Bachman Hammig, 2009; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010; Holloway, 2001) as being the core obligations of PSET institutions to learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) who have been admitted to these institutions. Holloway (2001:608) advocates a centralised institutional policy that is applied across all departments at PSET institutions. Such an important approach should create an accessible learning environment, a central policy unit aimed at the coordination and implementation of policy, and a point of reference for monitoring and evaluating all programmes and practices implemented. Finally, Holloway (2001:613) suggests as best practice the inclusion of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) in all design and development of support programmes – “Nothing about us, without us” (*Nihil de noise, sine nobis*). Holloway (2001; 601,612), identifies five key obligations of higher education institutions in respect of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) namely, pre-induction support of learners with disabilities. This should include the provision of information upfront, including course information, support systems, and available funding; the design and development of a barrier-free curriculum, consultation and empowerment of learners with disabilities, the development of integrated learner support services and personal development planning that will address the individual needs (learner needs analysis) of each learner with a learner barrier (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010: 30).

Vickerman and Blundell (2010:22) suggest that PSET institutions need to acknowledge their roles and responsibilities in empowering learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) to espouse their views, opinions and experiences (agency). They also suggest that institutions need to take a strategic responsibility to ensure that the needs of these individuals are met. They caution against expecting adaptation to existing practices.

D.3. Leadership and management

Management and leadership have emerged as a strong theme in South African literature as well as global studies (HED Monitor, 2005; Matshediso, 2007; Crous, 2004; Holloway, 2001; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015). The role of management is key to ensuring the implementation of policy into practice, but they are also critical in ensuring the access to funding, instilling a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity; ensuring a commitment to flexible curricula in respect of teaching, learning and assessment practices given that teaching and learning are core to the function of any PSET institution; commitment to flexible management practices; and the identification of an individual who is accountable and prepared to intervene authoritatively, when necessary, to provide the required support.

Holloway (2001:612) reiterates the critical nature of management and leadership involvement in ensuring implementation of policy (also see Matshediso, 2010:737). Holloway's international view is corroborated by Crous (2004: 238) in a South African context. Crous, too, advocates the establishment of a single integrated support unit for the specific purpose of ensuring that learners with barrier to learning (disabilities) are maximally supported.

D.4. Disability support services

There is a clear call for disability support service units, both locally and globally. As post-school education and training has become massified, the PSET classroom has grown in diversity, making it a far more complex teaching and learning environment with far greater demands on all stakeholders (students, faculty, administration, support services) (Tinklin, Riddell & Wilson, 2004; Crous, 2004; Kaur et al., 2016). Disability support service units range from centralised units at PSET institutions (HED Monitor, 2005) to decentralised units taking care of the particular needs in the department. Disability support services are defined as a range of services intended to enable those "with disabilities to continue academic, social, vocational learning in a socially valued academic setting" (Hart et al. in O'Connor, Kubiak, Hardy & Obrien, 2012:248). The services offered in the above context include adoption of the universal design curriculum, mentoring and coaching, securing competitive employment, and instruction in a natural environment together with person-centred development planning (O'Connor et al., 2012:248).

In a South African context, the need for disability support units has grown as the number of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) has increased since 1994 (HED Monitor, 2005:23), and as the focus on redressing the inequalities of the past has taken centre stage. However, these units remain on the periphery of the PSET institutions because of the failure on the part of institutions to integrate them into the core of the university's management and planning units. Given South Africa's past of PSET institutions classified as advantaged or disadvantaged, the resources available to these institutions are evident in the disability support service units that exist and the services they offer. In many instances, the advantaged institutions have had independent units established for a long time and have progressed significantly when compared to their counterparts (HED Monitor, 2005:39). This disparity in the resources available impacts the ability of the institution to respond to the needs of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities). Often these units are combined with other issues that are disability related. However, there is a consistent view on the role that these units play (Crous, 2004:247; Holloway, 2001:613) specifically, advocacy, mediation, life orientation, preparation for post-school studies and technical support, including teaching and learning practices, curriculum and assessment adaptation to meet the needs of students, building awareness among staff, and mediating where problems arise with students.

This peripheral role they played (Matshediso, 2007:736), results in limited involvement in such focus areas as library services, residential accommodation, and physical planning within the university campus with a complete lack of focus on the development of a more flexible curriculum and more flexible teaching, learning and assessment practices (Mullins & Preyde, 2013:153). All of these factors inhibit learner progress and learner achievement.

d.5. Challenges to inclusion

The lack of the above key elements will continue to challenge the implementation of inclusivity in a post-school education and training context. Kaur et al. (2016:1) identified the challenges to inclusive teaching, learning, and assessment as a lack of professional training; overcrowded classes (massification in higher education); teacher skills and attitudes to inclusivity; inadequate support and resources; and the ongoing perception among academic staff that amendments to existing teaching, learning, and assessment practices in order to meet the learning needs of adult

learners with barriers to learning (disabilities), will compromise academic standards. In addition, teaching staff should be able to provide a variety of teaching, learning and assessment approaches and practices that will ensure an engaged learning experience for all learners participating in that learning environment. Van Jaarsveldt and Ndeya-Ndereya (2015;199) suggest that the inclusive environment is only possible when lecturers make it their individual duty to create such an environment. This view is echoed by Couzens (2015:26).

Kaur et al. (2016:2) assert that a diverse learner body has the potential to promote critical thinking skills through the exposure of learners to such diversity. Learners are impacted and engaged when they are exposed to higher levels of academic challenge. They further contend that such active participation and opportunities for collaborative learning has the effect of ensuring the learners' learning development (Kaur et al.2016:3). In addition, they suggest that when adults are exposed to heterogeneity and invited to participate in practices that encourage inclusivity, these occasions provide them with a chance to solve problems, some psychological, some social and some anchored in conflict. At the same time these opportunities provide a means for innovation and the chance to play with new ideas (Kaur et al.2016:3).

If social justice is a means of ensuring "the full range of resources for each person in a community to live a normal human life" (Pendlebury & Enslin, 2004:35) and education is a vehicle to that end, then inclusion becomes the specific means by which vulnerable and marginalised communities can be integrated into the education system. Therefore, access to the resources needed for quality education can ensure the growth and development of people from poverty to decent livelihoods. Ultimately our failure to adequately implement policy into practice will have the effect of inhibiting learning progress and learning achievement for adult learners with learning disabilities.

This section of this chapter (see 3.2) has focussed thus far on the barriers that impact adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) that are experienced within the PSET institutional environment. However, it is worth noting that these barriers also extend to the broader society in which we live and therefore these barriers exist at a societal level and their impact is discussed further below. It is relevant in that it impacts the ability of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from progressing in their learning achievement and from adopting a lifelong learning philosophy.

3.2.2.1. Contextual barriers (societal, economic, policy) that impact on learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)

a. Massification of education

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (RSA, 1997), the National Qualifications Framework Act of 2008 (RSA, 2008), and the Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training (RSA, 2012) have all set a particular agenda for the transformation of post-school education and training in South Africa in motion. One cannot consider assessment in South African post-school and education and training (PSET) context, in isolation of these broader legislative and policy frameworks of education.

The preamble to the Higher Education Act (RSA, 1997) is specific about the stated purpose of the Act being the restructuring and transformation of education and training programmes within post-school education and training institutions in order to enable them to respond more effectively and with greater relevance to the needs of human resource development imperatives, as well as the economic and social development needs of the country. It further expects the creation of new knowledge, the promotion of such values as human dignity, equality, and freedom as the underlying principles of an open and democratic society; a socially just society and finally the respect for and encouragement of democracy, academic freedom, freedom of speech and expression, creativity, equality, and freedom.

The transformation of higher and post school education and training is a global phenomenon driven by internal and external forces, which impact the country and its political and social dispensation as well as PSET institutions.

This international phenomenon has been driven primarily by the movement of higher education and training (HET), from an education perceived as the privilege of the elite to the mass consumption of PSET by people from all walks of life – referred to as massification of PSET (Enders, 2004:378). In the context of disability, massification has been experienced too. It has seen an increase of learners with disabilities, specifically adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (Riddell & Weedon, 2006:59;60). The specific learning disabilities that are on the increase in post-school education and training includes dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and apraxia (Riddell & Weedon, 2006:64; Crozier & Mortimer, 2006:236). Some of the reasons for this increase includes the anti-discrimination

legislation that has been passed all across the world that takes a human rights and social justice view of people with disabilities; the early diagnosis of these conditions, as early as primary and secondary schooling, and the support allowances and support services that are available for learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) in PSET environments.

In addition, learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) have aspirations and are willing to do what it takes to achieve these goals, together with a clear understanding of the rights to which they are entitled (Crous, 2004:228). Finally, a contributing factor to this massification is the increasing number of mature learners to be found in post-school education and training institutions (Riddell and Weedon, 2006:64).

The table below presents some of the anti-discriminatory legislation passed in the countries listed below. These countries were selected because I have reviewed policies and practices around assessment of learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in them.

Table 3.1: Anti-discriminatory legislation

USA	UK	New Zealand	Australia	South Africa
<p>The Rehabilitation Act of 1973</p> <p>Americans with disabilities Act 1990</p> <p>Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004</p> <p>Assistive Technology Act of 2004;</p> <p>Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008</p> <p>Every Student Succeeds Act 2015</p>	<p>Equal Pay Act 1970</p> <p>Disability Discrimination Act 1995</p> <p>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 1995</p> <p>Disability Discrimination Act 2005</p> <p>Equality Act 2006</p> <p>Equality Act 2010</p>	<p>Human Rights Act of 1993</p> <p>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 1995</p> <p>Disabled children's Right to Education 2009</p>	<p>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</p> <p>Disability Standards for Education 2005</p>	<p>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 1995</p> <p>Section 9 of the Constitution 1996</p> <p>Employment Equity Act 1998</p> <p>Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Discrimination Act of 2000</p> <p>White paper 6 on inclusion 2001</p> <p>Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 53 of 2003 (BBBEEA)</p> <p>The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013)</p> <p>Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015)</p> <p>Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Amendment Act 55 of 2013</p>

The table above reflects the international commitment to anti-discrimination. This commitment is reflected in the plethora of statutes intended to eliminate such practices. In respect of South African legislation in particular we have a lengthy list of anti-discriminatory legislation as a direct result of our apartheid past.

The massification of post-school education and training, specifically with regard to adult learners with learning disabilities, is evident in the statistics below.

Table 3.2: Massification of post-school education and training

Country	Growth	Nature of disability	Source
United Kingdom 2000 – to 2005-2006	4.7%-6.9%	Overall disability	Vickerman & Blundell, 2010:23
United Kingdom	5-7% of the case study institutions	Mixed sensory, learning and intellectual disabilities	Goode, J. 2007:37
United Kingdom 2001-2021	Predicted increase of 11% 1 million over the age of 15 with a learning disability	Learning disability	O'Brien and Kumaravelu, 2008:487
United States of America	10-17% annual increase	Learners with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary education	Hart, Grigal and Weir, 2010:135
United States of America	US report 2012	Learning disabilities, the highest growth area 20-60% more likely to access welfare benefits	Swanson, Harris & Graham, 2013 :86 Swanson, Harris & Graham, 2013 :96 Orr & Bachman-Hammig, 2009:1

The statistics reflected above suggest that the massification experienced in PSET institutions is not confined to the general learner population, but is as applicable to

learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) and learning disabilities in particular. The above statistics further support the call for an overhaul of teaching, learning and assessment in respect of learners with learning disabilities. Howell (2006:168) suggests that the attention to teaching, learning and assessment and its impact have had limited attention, but given these rising numbers, should become the priority in the PSET environment.

The current reality of PSET the world over is characterised by the (Gibbons, 1998:51) elements of a diverse learner body – learners from all over the world studying all over the world. With this comes the challenge of diverse cultures, languages, beliefs, practices, abilities and disabilities, and the requirement of all staff within PSET institutions to manage these diverse interactions effectively and with empathy. In addition, it is characterised by the need to do more with less. Since the global financial crisis of 2008, this situation has become even more challenging. The big question for all stakeholders is how to do more with less without compromising the quality of teaching and learning, and how to ensure sustainability.

In the case of post-school education and training in South Africa, the current reality of the PSETs landscape is characterised by a system that fails on two significant levels: it fails to meet the needs of the economy and society, and as a result leaves large numbers of youth (ages between 18 to 24) with few opportunities for training, skills development or employment. The unemployment rate in South Africa is estimated at 27.7% as at June 2017 (Statistics SA, 2017). The Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training describes this current reality in the following terms: “Provision of post-school education and training is inadequate in quantity, diversity and quality” (RSA, 2012: viii). Added to the above are the poor throughput rates experienced at all PSETs (RSA, 2012: xi). If success is to be measured by the number of graduates who successfully complete their degrees, then we are failing. Not only do many learners take longer than they should to graduate, but they also fail to advance towards postgraduate studies (Master’s and PhD) because of the pressure to become economically active (HED monitor, 2005:51).

b. Economic barriers that impact adult learners with barriers to learning

South Africa's substantial disability grant budget is in line with those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. These include: Australia; Austria; Belgium; Canada; Chile; Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Iceland, Ireland; Israel; Italy; Japan; Korea; Latvia; Luxembourg; Mexico; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Turkey; United Kingdom and the USA. These disability benefits place a heavy burden on the public fiscus; it hinders economic growth and reduces effective labour supply (OECD, *Sickness and Disability*, 2010). The OECD countries have the added burden of a rapidly ageing population, and people with barriers to learning (sensory and other disabilities) have been recognised as a group that can and should be mobilised for integration into the labour market. Not only will it address the labour needs of the economy but also provide a wide range of benefits, which include higher employment rates and the social inclusion that come with the integration of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) into the world of work; the reduced risk of poverty; the contribution to improved mental health and lower public spending on disability, thus allowing this spend to be allocated to more prioritised areas of public spending. And most significantly it secures labour supply and can ensure long-term economic output, thus reducing the risk of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty among people with disabilities.

Another common thread evident in the South African and OECD experiences of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) is the direct correlation between disability and poverty (Greve, 2009:7). Within the OECD network it has been recorded that people with barriers to learning (disabilities) experience twice the levels of poverty than their nondisabled peers. In addition, people with barriers to learning (disabilities) are underemployed. The Integrated National Disability Strategy of South Africa (RSA, 1997) stated that people who receive grants (social security benefits) are wholly dependent on these grants for their survival. This affirms the link between disability and poverty in the South African context. The unemployment and underemployment of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) identified by the OECD and member countries are echoed in the Integrated National Disability Strategy of South Africa (RSA, 1997; CSDA, 2014). The Integrated National Disability Strategy (RSA, 1997) identifies a number of reasons for the high levels of unemployment among people with

barriers to learning (disabilities) in South Africa, specifically, inadequate education levels and a low skills base. This translates from school level into higher levels of functional illiteracy at an adult level. Furthermore, the inadequacy at a school level in respect of the access and quality perspectives ensures that the illiterate child with a disability becomes an illiterate adult with a disability, thus making employment access and PSET access virtually impossible. Howell suggests that the combined effects of disability, poverty and inadequate schooling result in inadvertent exclusion from post school education and training (Howell, 2005:25). Adults with disabilities are therefore relegated to sheltered workshops where they earn a pittance, which results in a perpetual dependence on social security grants and perpetuates the cycle of poverty among people with disabilities. In addition, the discriminatory attitudes experienced by people with barriers to learning (disabilities) in all spheres of life, the labour legislation that has failed to integrate people with barriers to learning (disabilities) into the economy and finally the inadequate access to information about available programmes, training courses, and funding mechanisms, as well as how to access these.

A further common thread across the OECD countries and South Africa is the correlation between education, employment, and poverty among people with disabilities. The OECD in its study, "Sickness and Disability," found that people with barriers to learning (disabilities) lack marketable skills, qualifications, and work experience. This exacerbates the difficulties they encounter in finding employment opportunities. Furthermore, the study found that education and qualifications impact the type of jobs accessed and the security of that employment, i.e., the lifespan of the job (OECD, 2010). This view is echoed in the Integrated National Disability Strategy and the poverty and disability in South Africa report (CSDA, 2014). In 1990, research found that 0.26% of the disabled population was employed (INDS, 1997). The Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS) identified the following as key policy objectives: closing the gap between disabled and nondisabled jobseekers; ensuring vocational integration of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) through vocational guidance, vocational training, and selective placement (INDS, 1997:46), and providing a range of occupational choices to meet different needs.

c. PSET as an Active labour market strategy

Since the turn of the century, the OECD countries have opted for an active labour market strategy, which includes actively assisting people with barriers to learning (disabilities) to integrate into the mainstream labour market. This includes ensuring formal education and training opportunities provided to people with barriers to learning (disabilities) in order to minimise the current pervasiveness of unemployment and underemployment (Ferguson, 2008:112; CSDA 2014:18). Among the OECD member countries in the 2000s, 40% of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) were unemployed, compared to the 75% of people without disabilities who were employed. It was further found that those people with barriers to learning (disabilities) who had a tertiary education were earning up to 20% more than their nondisabled peers. This is a clear indication of the value of a post-school qualification in ensuring the economic sustainability of people with disabilities.

As a final point, the study identified a significant educational gap between disabled and nondisabled people, more prevalent in the age group 20 to 34. “Highly developed countries have highly literate citizens even if they are disabled” (Erikson, 2006: 1). Therefore, one of the key active labour market policies adopted is an increased focus on providing equal opportunities for the achievement of education and qualifications for the labour market, using lifelong learning provision as a central tool for realising such a policy (Ferguson, 2008:114). In addition, this education and training must be responsive to the needs of the economy and the labour market (Clemens, 1998:5). The importance of education and training as a key strategy in breaking the cycle of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment is evident.

Accordingly, there is a clear economic imperative in ensuring the education and training of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) which is recognised globally and is reflected in the active labour market policies that promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities. This strategy reduces the burden on the public purse, but it also improves the financial sustainability of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) by reducing their dependence on social grants and relegating them to a life of poverty (CSDA, 2014:18).

D. SOCIAL IMPERATIVES – PSET AS A STRATEGY FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH BARRIERS TO LEARNING

The Department of Higher Education and Training (RSA, DHET, 2013:44) reports the following: “There has been increasing acceptance that people with learning disabilities can play active roles in transforming their lives and can contribute to society. Access to proper education and training opportunities is fundamental to this.”

d.1. Prevalence of disability in PSETIs in South Africa

Census 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2014: v; see Table 3.3) suggests that approximately 2.87 million South Africans (7.5%) live with a disability. The statistics available suggest that only a limited number of eligible learners (i.e. those who meet the minimum entry requirements for the programme) are enrolled in PSET programmes.

In the PSET environment, excluding higher education, enrolment of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) has seen a gradual increase from 2011 to 2015.

2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
850	609	612	757	1050	1216	1489	1395	1611	1438
1459		1369		2266		2884		3049	

Figure 3.2: Enrolment of learners with barriers to learning (sensory and learning disabilities) in PSET institutions (DHET, 2017)

Whilst there is a clear increase in the enrolment of learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) into the PSET environment, it is only 0.1% of the total population of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) (Census, 2011). The data made available by DHET further identified the types of disabilities with which these learners have been diagnosed. They include sensory disabilities (vision; hearing), physical disabilities, specific learning disabilities (although no definition is provided for this, and therefore there is no way of telling what these disabilities are), intellectual disabilities and psychiatric disorders.

There is recognition that if adult learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) are to benefit from the limited PSET opportunities that do exist, a review of the curricula and policies for integrating adult learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) into our existing PSET institutions (i.e. to enable inclusion/inclusive education), is essential.

The rationale for educating and training people with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) is not confined to the economic imperatives discussed above. There is much to be said for the social benefits that education and training bring to persons with disabilities. "They want to go to school. They want to develop skills. They want jobs. They want homes. They want family and friends. They do not want to be separated, segregated or isolated from others. They do not want others to decide whether and where they will go for training and what career path they should take" (Sayce, 2011:4). The above articulates clearly that people with barriers to learning (disabilities) want to live meaningful and fulfilling lives.

The question is: how does post school education and training achieve that goal? The primary reason cited for accessing post school education and training is the link between higher education qualifications, better paying jobs, and a better quality of life (Hart, Grigal & Weir, 2010: 141). Hart, Grigal & Weir (2010:145), in their study noted that a small number of learners diagnosed with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), when supported in post-school education and training programmes, were able to access placement in mainstream employment and were able to secure remuneration higher than those who did not have post-school educational and training opportunities.

Some of the key benefits of post school education and training (higher education) to the lives of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) include, the value of the social experience and the opportunity to interact with non-disabled learners in such an environment. The benefits of participating in higher education also ensures personal growth, including the building of solid academic skills essential to lifelong learning and personal independence, and most importantly, self-advocacy and self-confidence (Hart, Grigal & Weir, 2010:145; Matsedisho, 2010:731) as well as the ability of the educational institution to facilitate a relationship between people with barriers to learning (disabilities) and prospective employers. It is further suggested that this educational environment can provide an age-appropriate context in which learners with barriers to learning can practise their social skills, build their self-confidence, and

find their voices, which will contribute to self-advocacy and a sense of agency (Couzens, 2015:29; Fuller et al. 2004;316).

A critical aspect that has emerged from the literature is the silence of the voice of persons with barriers to learning. Policies, programmes, and support systems are designed for them but not by them and not with them. Self-advocacy is an essential skill that will enable them to articulate their needs. The more people with barriers to learning are able to voice their needs, the more likely we will be to move the inclusion debate forward. The more likely we are to move it away from formal rights to real rights (OECD, 2010;23; Matshediso, 2010:734; Couzens 2015:29). The principle of self-advocacy or self-representation is acknowledged as key to improving the experience of people with barriers to learning in post school education and training. Howell refers to it as “collective determination”. She suggests that this collective determination should be used to inform government strategies (Howell, 2005:13), and by extension the policies, procedures, programmes, and initiatives of higher and post-school education and training institutions.

Fuller et al. (2004:303) expand this view by suggesting that people with barriers to learning (disabilities) entering post school education and training are in fact taking up an opportunity to not only expand their knowledge but to develop their social skills, to acquire sought after qualifications, and to expose themselves to debate and discussion. The authors suggest that this is an important experience for empowerment. The Centre for Literacy and Disability Studies (<https://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds>) expresses the rationale for the education and training of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) as follows: A positive correlation between development and literacy, the ability to communicate, the social acceptance by peers, the perceived higher competency rates that are a corollary of higher literacy levels, the impact of literacy on the healthcare of the individual, from explaining symptoms to a healthcare practitioner to understanding how to take medication. Couzens is in agreement with Fuller’s view, suggesting further that education is a means of enhancing the overall quality of people’s lives. It does so through improved personal relationships, encouraging autonomy and allowing for self-determination (Couzens et al. 2015;30; Hart, Grigal and Weir, 2010;145).

This view of education as a leveller in society is reiterated in the various policy and statutory documents issued by the South African government in expressing its view of

the role that education (i.e. basic, further education and training, vocational education and training, and higher education and training) must play in post-apartheid South Africa.

The White Paper on PSET further reflects society's increasing acceptance that people with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are able to play an active role in transforming their lives, and in this transformation contribute positively to society. Fundamental to playing such an active role, is access to education and training opportunities. Part of this process includes the transformation of education policy and educational institutions in order to achieve the goal of equity, specifically for people with barriers to learning (disabilities) (RSA, 2013:44).

e. Disability and social justice in education

The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013) declares that in order to fight poverty and inequality in South African society, education and training in a post-school context must be a significant driver for change (RSA, 2013: ix). It further indicates that the post-school system must build a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic South Africa (RSA, 2013: xii). The paper also establishes a fundamental link between education and social justice in its statement that the goal of social justice is dependent on ensuring that all sectors of the South African population have equal access to quality education and training (RSA, 2013:5). The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013) establishes the fundamental link between social justice and education: "Social justice is central to the pursuit of education – if you are pursuing education, you are pursuing social justice" (Beets & Van Louw, 2011:1).

The Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997) as a precursor to the White Paper (2013) already had in mind the potential of people with barriers to learning to contribute positively to society. Post-school rehabilitation should be targeted at learners with barriers to learning, specifically those learners who show the likelihood that finding and maintaining employment is compromised as a result of their disabilities. However, they still show every promise that they can find and maintain satisfactory employment (RSA, 2013:32). The clear correlation between access to education and its ability to improve the quality of life for all South Africans, in particular people living with disabilities, is well established in the above.

Social justice is fundamentally concerned with goods that are valued in society and the extent to which these goods are shaped and allocated among all in society – “the idea that rights, benefits and burdens in the economic, political and social spheres could be allocated fairly” (raith.org.za, 2013:5). Beets and Louw (2011:4) explain it as follows: a socially just society is one that affords everyone equal opportunities and resources are readily accessible to all to ensure that everyone thrives and succeeds, despite disadvantages that may occur as a result of gender, race, socio-economic status, language or disability. Social justice, while it focuses on the state in which people are free, equal, and independent, also recognises that “economic scarcity necessitates social choices” (McArthur, 2015:11). This intimates that social justice takes place in the context of a society that is already marred by a myriad inequalities and injustices (Van der Walt, Potgieter, Wolhuter, 2013:49).

Enslin and Pendelbury (2004: 44) summarise the focus of South Africa’s educational policy and statute agenda. They assert that South Africa has a set of social justice goals with education acting as a vehicle for the achievement of these goals. However, an examination of South Africa’s educational policy framework clearly demonstrates the injustice that persists in education. Enslin and Pendelbury (2004:42) see social justice as distributive justice, i.e. the distribution of educational resources. This implies the distribution of educational resources that include effective and well-resourced schools, good teachers, recognition and respect for cultural differences and participation (Beets & Van Louw, 2011:310).

Enslin and Pendelbury view a socially just education system as one that enables self-development and self-determination, one that provides opportunity for children, and by extension adults, to develop to their “mature adult capabilities” (Enslin & Pendlebury, 2004:40). It is a system that reduces the oppression created through structural forms which have the effect of restricting access to opportunities for development. No child should be excluded from school or learning. This view of education as a vehicle for social justice is reiterated by Van Jaarsveld and Van der Walt (in Van der Walt, Potgieter, Wolhuter, 2013:52) who stress the importance of eradicating social injustices by providing “sustainable educational environments”. A sustainable educational environment is described as an environment that display characteristics of (Van der Walt, Potgieter, Wolhuter, 2013:57) effective governance, structures that manage education against defined goals. It boasts appropriately

developed strategic plans and the necessary funding to implement these strategies. In addition, it requires the existence of suitable infrastructure to support the learning processes envisioned and an appropriate curriculum with supporting and accessible learning materials to meet the needs of all learners together with well-trained teachers and an effective management structure. Finally, it must have appropriate assessment practices that are implemented with parent and community involvement that is constructive and encouraged. The view expressed here is one that suggests that South Africa's failure to achieve the required levels of social justice is a consequence of the failure to establish sustainable learning environments.

According to Adams et al. (2007:12), this description of a sustainable educational environment suggests that education that is socially just, foresees a society where individuals are self-directed and self-determined whilst able to interact democratically with fellow citizens, thus building interdependence. Adams et al. (2007:12) suggest further that social justice involves a number of stakeholders or social actors who bring to the education context a sense of agency and receptiveness towards and for others. In the context of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), this injustice is experienced as marginalisation and exclusion.

However, research into how adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) experience post-school education and training, are limited and it is not known if we are making inroads into ensuring that this vulnerable group is moving towards living a socially just life with noticeable improvements in their standards of living. This is a key objective of this study to fill this knowledge gap. What is known, is that, as a society we have recognised the marginalised and disempowering status of people with barriers to learning (disabilities) in all aspects of our society. Through the human rights framework of our policy and statute and in the adoption of a social model on disability, government aims to correct this reality (INDS, 1997; White Paper on Higher Education, 2001; White Paper 6, 2001; White Paper on the rights of persons with disabilities, 2015). However, learners with barriers to learning (disabilities), specifically black learners with barriers to learning (disabilities), have been the most marginalised and powerless group in the context of higher education (INDS, 1997).

In addition to the inequality that comes from disability and race, there is the further inequality created by socio-economic backgrounds. The combination of disability and poverty, ethnicity and geography (intersectionality), all contribute to adult learners with

barriers to learning (disabilities) failing to optimise the use of education and training opportunities. This failure to use these opportunities has the further effect of failing to improve their socio-economic position in South African society. This marginalisation and powerlessness have the effect of creating, “Structural forms of oppression – resulting from institutional relations that constrain people’s material lives by restricting their access to resources and to create opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities” (Enslin & Pendlebury, 2004:36).

The failure of our policy and statute to begin reversing the process of social injustice experienced by adults with disabilities is evident in our fundamental failure to increase access for adult learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) into PSET. The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013) sets the following as targets to 2030 for learners in post-school education and training opportunities:

- 1.6 million in HEIs.
- 2.5 million in TVETIs
- 1 million in PALCs (Public adult learning centres).
- 500 000 in private FETIs and HETIs.

No targets have been set for learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) in the post-school education and training sector. The sector education and training authorities (SETAs) have set a target of 4%, i.e. 4% of all learners who embark on learnerships and skills programme funded by SETAs must be learners with a disability. This target is an all-inclusive target for disability as a broad category. There is no specific reference made to adult learners with learning difficulties. Equally, in post-school education and training within the TVETIs no targets have been set.

3.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter, like chapter 2, I focussed on answering the following research question: What assessment practices reported in the literature inhibit/support adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from reflecting their competences measured against the learning outcomes of the programme? Specifically, in this chapter I concentrated on the extrinsic barriers to learning that adult learners with barriers to

learning (learning disabilities) experience. That is, specifically those factors within the institutional environment and the broader context within which the institution exists, have an effect on assessment practices within PSET institutions. This chapter focussed on exposing the fact that assessment practices do not exist in isolation of the broader institutional practices and are in fact influenced by these broader institutional and societal practices.

The following key conclusions have emerged, i.e. that PSET institutions implement assessment practices that inhibit adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from reflecting their competence by failing to constructively align and implement teaching and learning best practices in the learning programmes offered and by further failing to align the nature of the disability to the overall programme design and assessment tasks. The lack of a universally accepted definition of learning disability in South Africa and across our PSET institutions has the effect of limiting identification and diagnosis of this cohort of learners thus impacting disclosure. This in turn limits PSET institutions from responding adequately to the needs of this cohort of learners.

In addition, the chapter identified that institutions fail to provide the necessary implementation of policy into practice, including the provision of adequate human, financial and infrastructure resources needed to realise the policy as well as dedicated disability support structures. Finally, I found that in failing to identify and address practically the barriers to learning experienced by adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), including disclosure of the disability, the attitude of fellow learners and staff to learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) and the inconsistent assessment practices identified and discussed, these extrinsic barriers continued to inhibit adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from reflecting their competence against minimum standards.

In reviewing the literature on the above aspects, I further found the following areas as areas for further research given the paucity of information currently available. Specifically, I found a lack of information around issues of attitudes toward learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), including fellow disabled students, nondisabled students, and faculty. In addition, there is little evidence of the effect of accommodations on learner performance. Indeed, do learner assessment concessions provided within institutions influence the academic performance of the

student, and to what extent? Furthermore, there is little monitoring and evaluation of practices and programmes implemented to support learners with barriers to learning (disabilities) in order to determine their effectiveness and, by definition, to review and adjust such programmes to ensure maximum effectiveness. This includes the effect of disclosure or nondisclosure on learner achievement. Finally, the least researched population are those with intellectual and mental disorders, despite the proven reality that this population appears to be the most vulnerable in the context of society at large, and certainly within the labour market.

In chapter 4, I will focus on the research design of the study including a discussion of the research problem, and the research questions that the study proposes to find answers to, and therefore the aims and objectives of the study as well as the research design including the data collection strategies proposed for the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

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4.1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

As I indicated in Chapter 1, I embarked on this study in order to explore how adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning experience and/or perceive current PSET assessment practices. More specifically I wanted to establish whether or not these practices are appropriate to the abilities and needs of learners like these. Finally, assuming that this might not be the case, I wanted to determine whether or not it was possible to assess their academic progress and performance, and whether it could be assessed in alternative, equitable ways.

In Chapter 1, informed by these aims, I provided a brief overview of the research problem and purpose as well as the methods I planned to use in the collection and analysis of data which would enable me to answer the research questions directing my study and, should the need for this emerge from the analysis of collected data, to design an assessment model which would support rather than undermine the learning of adults with learning disabilities. In Chapter 2, in order to ensure that my interpretation of the analysed data and the conclusions I reached in this regard would be theoretically sound, I conducted a comprehensive review of literature on the assessment of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or other barriers to learning. The insights I gained from this review are described and discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively.

In this chapter, Chapter 4, following Mertens' (2005:2) definition of research as a "process of systematic inquiry that is designed to collect, analyse, interpret and use data to understand, describe, predict or control an education or psychological phenomenon or empower individuals in such contexts". It is my intention to use the results of this research study, i.e. the envisaged framework for assessing adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in PSET programmes, in order to empower adult learners with learning disabilities and their facilitators/instructors/lecturers to develop and implement assessment practices (including assessment accommodations and concessions, if possible). These

implemented assessment practices should be sufficiently aligned to the barriers to learning (learning disabilities) experienced by their learners, and that will empower these learners to achieve the learning outcomes against the set standards (Ashworth, Bloxham & Pearce, 2010:211; Diez, Lopez & Molina, 2015:156).

To this purpose, I describe and justify the choices I made regarding my research design. Included in this description are not only the plans and procedures I intended to use in the selection of research participants and the collection and analysis of data but also the theoretical and research paradigms and assumptions informing my decisions regarding these. Moreover, due to the various obstructions and challenges I experienced during the actual collection of data, which are described in this chapter, I also indicate the ways in which the research design I finally adopted and procedures I finally used differed from those described in Chapter 1. Figure 4.1, which follows, graphically illustrates the layout of this chapter.

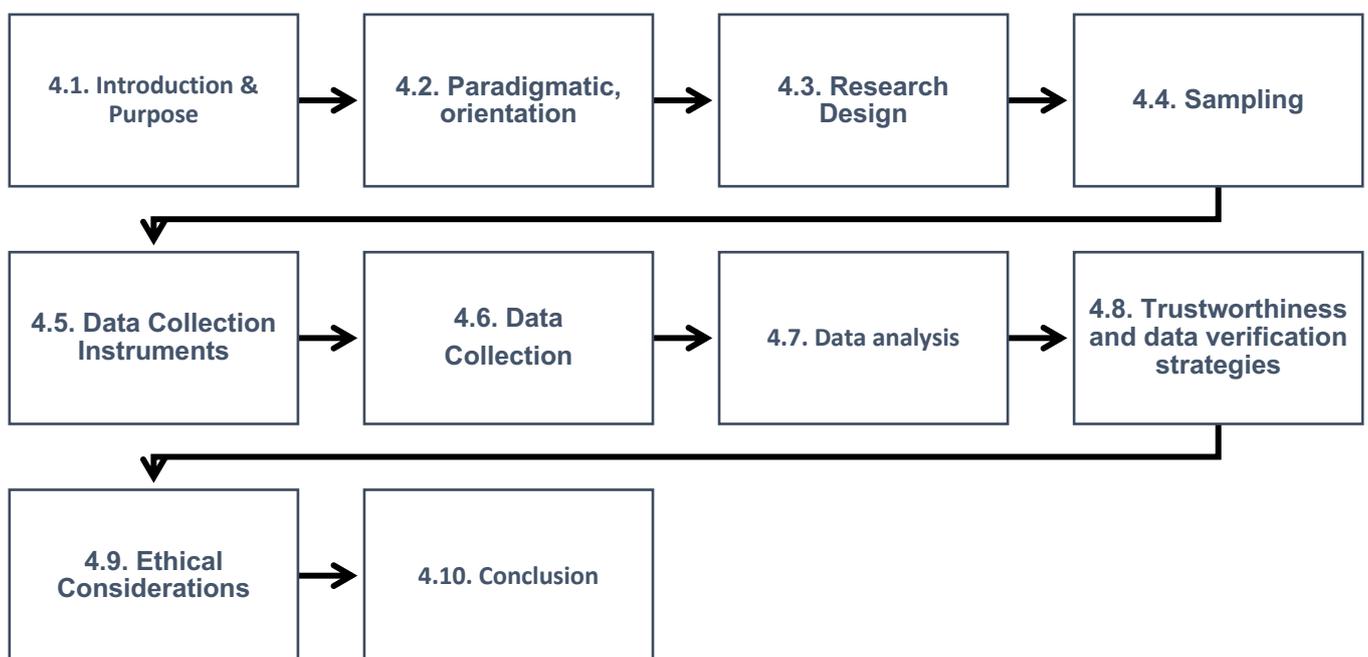


Figure 4.1. Layout of Chapter 4

4.2 PARADIGMATIC ORIENTATIONS

Paradigms are representations of the ways in which people view life and the world/s in which they and others live (Mertens, 2010:7). Put differently, paradigms determine and/or direct not only the way people behave but also how they think about life, themselves and others. Because they are essentially philosophical constructs, paradigms differ from one another in terms of the philosophical assumptions on which they rest, specifically views on the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and values (axiology). It follows that, regardless of their personal views on reality, the nature of knowledge, and the role of values, researchers have to ensure that the research paradigm/s they choose are compatible with the theoretical paradigms within which they plan to locate their studies. Put differently, they should ensure that the assumptions informing both their theoretical and their research paradigms are similar in terms of the ontological, epistemological and axiological views they reflect (Lincoln & Guba in Maree, 2007:48). It goes without saying that, since the credibility and/or validity of an inquiry and its results could be compromised if a researcher's understanding of the paradigm being used is flawed or incomplete, it is therefore imperative that s/he should ensure, prior to embarking on the inquiry, that s/he clearly understands the underpinning philosophical assumptions and key concepts of the paradigms s/he intends using.

4.2.1 Theoretical paradigm

Social Science researchers, as a rule, explicitly declare both the theoretical and the research paradigm/s informing their inquiries (Lincoln & Guba in Maree 2007:48). In choosing a theoretical paradigm appropriate to my own inquiry, I was influenced by my experiences as a practitioner in the field of post-school education and training. Working with adult learners whose learning is, in many cases, inhibited by some or other learning disability (as a barrier to learning), I have come to realize that the assessment practices to which these learners are subjected often do not support or promote their learning. Realising that my views might well be subjective, and that subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically" (Cresswell 2007:20), I wanted to determine whether or not my views reflected or differed from those of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or other barriers to learning. Because constructivist paradigms acknowledge the fact that people's ontological and epistemological views are axiologically coloured by their unique cultures, histories and

experiences - political, social, and/or economic (Creswell, 2013: 34;36), I initially deemed Social Constructivism to be the most suitable paradigm for my research study. More specifically, so I believed, it would facilitate the accommodation of adult learners' multiple realities in my inquiry.

However, since the primary purpose of my study was not simply to determine the views of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning on current assessment practice but to use these views as basis for the development of a more appropriate assessment model, I eventually decided to frame my research study in a pragmatic paradigm. My decision was informed by the fact that this paradigm (a) has the generation of 'practical' knowledge as purpose; (b) focuses on the outcome/product of research; (c) supports communicative research processes aimed at the discovery/uncovering of shared meaning, and (d) produces/leads to practical solutions to the research problem (Eaton & Ihuah, 2013:936; Shannon-Baker, 2016:322). In addition to this, pragmatist and social constructivist axiology are similar in that both paradigms regard the values of all parties involved in an inquiry as integral to the inquiry as such. In the pragmatist paradigm, however, the researcher is expected to be 'intersubjective' rather than completely subjective or objective (Shannon-Baker, 2016:325). In other words, the existence of researcher subjectivity as well as objectivity at different stages of the research study is accepted as a 'research reality'. Informing the inter-subjective principle is the pragmatist contention that research problems cannot be solved by scientific methods alone (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014:14) because, so pragmatists argue, the generation of knowledge requires the removal of distinctions between the world of our minds and the independent world of our experiences born from human action. As indicated in Table 4.1, which serves as a summary of the pragmatic paradigm, the mind and the environment which serves as its context are, according to pragmatists, engaged in a continuous, interactive relationship (Pratt, 2016:521), with knowledge being generated through an ever-evolving cycle of reflection and action (Eaton and Ihuah, 2013:938).

Table 4.1: Pragmatist knowledge generation

Pragmatism	
Ontology	Which view best answers the question? The researcher is seen as external and there are multiple views.
Epistemology	Whether meaning is subjective or objective, it can nonetheless provide factual answers to the questions being asked in a research study, the focus of knowledge generation being its eventual practical application.
Axiology	The values which underpin the research influence the interpretation of the data collected.
Research method	Use of qualitative and quantitative tools for data collection.
Methodology	Mixed methods approach

(Eaton and Ihuah, 2013:938)

Unlike positivist and constructivist researchers, researchers who frame their inquiries in a pragmatic paradigm are expected to disrupt the extreme poles of absolute objectivity and absolute subjectivity (Shannon-Baker, 2016:325). Informing this expectation is the pragmatic acknowledgement of co-existing multiple realities, the role that cultural, historical and experiential differences play in forming these, and the possibility that different perceptions of reality, regardless of whether or not they conflict with or complement one another, could change during the course of people's interactions with one another (Creswell, 2013: 34;36). Pragmatist verbalise this position as follows:

“Much of our work like that of other authors focusses on the multiplicity and pluralism of the ‘real world’ which is occupied by ‘real problems’ that are possessed by ‘real people’ in ‘real situations’, and we contend that it is impossible to separate our lives as researchers into neat partitions that cannot be crossed in fear of being reprimanded by those who occupy the esteemed high ground of the research undertaking” (Armitage, 2007:6).

Another reason for my decision to follow the pragmatic route is that the pragmatist view of the nature of knowledge (epistemology) seems to be more extensive than those of their social constructivist counterparts: not only does it provide theoretical

answers to research questions or problems but also practical solutions to problems occurring in real world situations (Pratt, 2016:513). To pragmatists, to whom theories are merely instruments driven by problems that need to be solved (Armitage, 2007), the focus of research should not be on the generation of knowledge per se but on the generation of knowledge that is “useful” (Pratt, 2016:513) and practical, generated during an ever-involving cycle of reflection and action. The means and methods employed to find useful/practical solutions to a problem should therefore, so pragmatists argue, be dictated by the problem concerned (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014:14) – the inappropriateness of current assessment practices for adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning in the case of my study - rather than by theoretical deliberations on these. According to Morgan (2014:1047), Dewey’s well-known five-step inquiry approach, in which researchers have to ask themselves the five problem-focused questions, is a good example of the pragmatic approach to problem-solving. These five questions are:

1. What is the problem?
2. If I define the problem like this, what difference does it make to the way in which the problem is seen?
3. What actions can I take/should I take, to respond to the problem?
4. What are the potential consequences of my anticipated actions?
5. How do I implement the actions that are likely to address the problem?

It was the similarity of the questions to be answered in this five-step process and the ones I asked myself regarding the practices currently used to assess the progress and/or performance of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, which finally convinced me that the pragmatic paradigm was the most appropriate one in which to frame my study.

4.2.2. Research paradigm

The term, ‘research paradigm’, is used to refer to the broad approach which researchers use in the design of their research study, that is the choices they make regarding the instruments and procedures to be used in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data related to the phenomenon they plan to investigate. Informed by my initial inclination to frame my study in the social constructivist paradigm, I intended to use only qualitative research methods to this purpose. Also, having taken cognizance of O’Day’s and Killeen’s (2002:9) observation that, in disability research,

qualitative methods have emerged as “important tools in understanding the complexities of disability in its social context” because of “their power to describe and clarify the interdependence of human interaction, cultural attitudes, institutional processes and public policies”, I believed that this was the most appropriate research paradigm for my research.

Having decided to rather locate my study in Pragmatism, I also had to reconsider my choice of a research paradigm. As indicated in Table 4.1, it is the problem being investigated, rather than the theory to which a researcher subscribes, that dictates pragmatic research inquiries, hence a mix of methods and procedures rather than a single method is the norm rather than the exception amongst pragmatist researchers. The thought that my adoption of a pragmatist paradigm by implication required me to use a mix of qualitative and quantitative procedures was, however, a frightening one. Having used only qualitative methods in the completion of my Master’s dissertation, my mind-set was entirely qualitative. My knowledge of the quantitative paradigm and the research approaches and methods used by quantitative researchers was minimal. Realising that my ignorance of and incompetence in the use of mixed methods could compromise the quality and credibility not only of the research processes I used but also the outcomes of these (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014; Shannon-Baker, 2015; Denscombe, 2008), I made every effort possible to gain a better understanding not only of quantitative research but also of the use of mixed methods in research enquiries. What I realized during the course of this journey was that quantitative and qualitative research differ in just about every respect – the nature and purpose of research, the research methodology, the assumptions informing these, and, most importantly to me, being used to conducting qualitative research, the role of the researcher. Differences pertinent to my study which emerged during my comparison of these two paradigms, and the ways in which I could merge these into a mixed method research paradigm are briefly described in sub-section 4.2.2.1, which follows.

4.2.2.1 Research paradigms compared

Qualitative researchers are interested in the lived experiences of their research participants, the ways in which they interpret those experiences, the manner in and the extent to which their interpretations of these experiences could influence the outcomes of their inquiry (Mertens, 2010:2). Put somewhat differently, researchers who use qualitative research methods do so in order to examine and understand the

meaning that groups and individuals assign to social or human problems. To this purpose they describe, analyse and interpret individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions, (McMillan & Schumacher 2001:395; 2014:20; Creswell, 2009:3), constantly asking themselves what meaning people assign to the phenomenon which is the focus of their inquiry. The value of qualitative research, according to those who subscribe to its use, lies in its ability to generate theory, develop policies, improve educational practices, and expose social conditions and actions needed to improve these. It follows that qualitative researchers do not assume to have any answers, solutions or explanations prior to embarking on their inquiries: all they have are questions (about a phenomenon in which they have an interest or a stake), the sole purpose of their research being to answer these

The purpose of quantitative research, however, is to advance or test a theory (Creswell, 2014). It is to this purpose alone that they collect, analyse and interpret data. Since quantitative research is aimed at the determination of hypothetical validity or accuracy, researchers typically start their inquiries with the formulation of a hypothesis (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher 2014; Neuman, 2000), a statement which could be seen as constituting a possible explanation of, or reason for, a particular phenomenon. Having done so, they identify the variables and the measuring instruments that will be used in the collection of data, and use “objective measurements and statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis to analyse the data collected”.

Since the purpose of quantitative research is to explain a phenomenon and/or to determine whether or not its findings can be generalized across populations, the sample of research subjects must not only be large enough to ensure that the conclusions drawn from the research could be regarded as representative of the population itself but also that the research subjects should be representative of the population/s targeted. To this purpose, quantitative researchers use random and/or stratified probability sampling in the identification of their research subjects. While qualitative researchers collect verbal and/or visual data, quantitative researchers focus on the collection of numerical data”, using polls, questionnaires, surveys, or computational techniques which enable them to manipulate pre-existing statistical data (<http://www.libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/quantitative>). Informing the collection, use and analysis of numerical data in quantitative research is the assumption that,

numbers are objective and value-free, hence their use not only ensures researcher objectivity and/or neutrality but also contributes to the validity and reliability of the study and its findings as a whole.

The analysis of data in qualitative and quantitative research is also different: in the former it is an inductive, continuous process; in the latter it is deductive and summative. Whereas qualitative researchers attempt to identify 'subjective' patterns and themes through the analysis of verbal and non-verbal data collected during their interaction with research participants, quantitative researchers use standardised statistical processes and procedures to analyse the numerical data they collected by means of the instruments mentioned earlier, thus ensuring adherence to the quantitative principle of objectivity. Whereas data collected and inductively analysed during the course of qualitative research could, and often do, result in adaptations to the research methods, foci and even initial research designs, this is not the case in quantitative research: quantitative data, being analysed only on completion of the data collection process, have no influence whatsoever on either the research methods or the research design. Thus, quantitative designs serve as blueprints for the entire research process while qualitative designs are more like a tentative 'road map' which could, if necessary, be adapted during the course of the research 'journey'.

Implied in all of the above are differences in the roles that quantitative and qualitative researchers play in the course of their research inquiries. There is relative consensus amongst leading research experts (Merriam, 2009; Maree, 2007; Mertens 2010,2015; Akinyoade, 2012; McMillan and Schumacher, 2014) that qualitative researchers have to play at least four roles in any qualitative research endeavour. In the first instance, the researcher is the primary research instrument: while observing and interacting with research participants s/he becomes a 'participant observer (Mertens, 2005) who, implicitly and explicitly collects and interprets data throughout the entire research process. The possibility that her/his own thoughts and actions, values, views, opinions, and even prejudices could affect her/his response to and/or interpretation of the data being collected is thus very real.

Because qualitative researchers' biases could undermine the trustworthiness of their findings and conclusions they are, in the first instance required not only to declare their potential biases in their research reports but also to engage in "rigorous self-monitoring, continuous self-questioning and re-evaluation of all phases of the research process" (Akinyoade, 2012:36 of 42). In the second instance, they are expected to

continuously use insights gained during the course of their investigations to make important decisions about the continued progress of the study, the order and manner in which data collection instruments should be used and, should gaps or weaknesses emerge during the course of the data collection process, whether or not these should be addressed in subsequent data gathering phases/stages. In the third instance, qualitative researchers not only have to accept ambiguities experienced in the data collected but they should also be flexible enough to change their attitudes, approaches and/or strategies regarding data collection and analysis as and when this seems necessary. Put differently, they should allow the results of their ongoing data analysis, not their original research plan, assumptions and/or time schedules to decide whether or not the data collected at any particular time are relevant and/or sufficient. As Merriam (2009: 9:16) puts it, the data, rather than the researcher, must guide the ongoing collection and analysis process. In the final instance, it is the qualitative researcher's prerogative and responsibility to decide not only what should be captured, documented and analysed in order to solve the research problem but also how this should be done.

The mixed methods approach, in which quantitative as well as qualitative methods and instruments are used to collect, analyse and interpret data of greater depth and breadth (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014), enables researchers to look at complex social phenomena from different perspectives (including those of the inquirer and the inquired), giving them a broader, more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated than they would have gained had they used a single approach (Shannon-Baker, 2016:321; Eaton & Ihuah, 2013:938; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Moreover, the triangulation of data, typical of mixed method research, enhances the credibility of the research findings, thus ensuring that the perspectives of both the inquirer and the inquired are considered. Its use also enables researchers to identify and fill gaps that may not have been detected had they relied on a single overriding method (Shannon-Baker, 2016:321; Eaton & Ihuah, 2013:938; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Finally, and importantly, it allows researchers to study various aspects of the phenomenon being investigated whilst addressing the matter of generalisability (Bryman, 2004 in Armitage 2007:5; McMillan & Schumacher 2014). My study, aimed as it is at uncovering the ways in which adult learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning (learning disabilities) experience and/or perceive current assessment practices at PSET institutions, had to be framed in a research paradigm

which gives research participants the opportunity to tell their assessment stories from their own perspectives. This is particularly important in educational research, in which, according to Merriam (2009:1), because practitioners in these fields deal with the everyday concerns of people's lives. Having an interest in knowing more about one's practice, and indeed in improving one's practice, leads to asking researchable questions, some of which are best approached through the analysis of the perspectives of those being studied, these being post-school adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning in the case of my research study.

Having familiarised myself with qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches to research, I concluded that it was the mixed methods approach which would best be able to do so. Adopting a mixed methods approach would ensure that I did not rely on a single method of data collection which could open the study up to the biases and weaknesses inherent in single data collection methods. Moreover, in that the mixed methods approach allowed for the use of different data collection methods and instruments it would open up opportunities for me to obtain information from several sources. This, in turn, would provide me with a more comprehensive picture of different participant groupings' views on the extent to which current assessment practices inhibit or support the learning and performance of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning. Finally, by opting for the mixed methods approach, I would be able to sequentially collect and analyse data in ways that would enable me to use the findings emerging from each analysis as a basis for the next data collection phase, something which would create the kind of links necessary for a holistic depiction of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

As I indicated in Chapter 1, my inquiry is informed and directed by the main research question, *'How do the assessment practices currently used in PSET programmes support adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) to demonstrate their competence as measured against the learning outcomes of the programme?'* Embedded as it is in actual practice - how practitioners can resolve problems in education (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:14) – my research was aimed at determining real/actual problems currently experienced by adult learners with learning disabilities and/or with barriers to learning, thus placing my inquiry in the domain of inclusive education. More specifically, I wanted to determine the extent to which

assessment practices currently used in PSET training programmes support/enable or inhibit adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from demonstrating their competence against existing identified minimum standards.

It follows that, since the way these learners experience current assessments of their learning would be different, my research design not only had to enable me to collect, analyse and interpret data from multiple perspectives but also to find practical solutions to the problems experienced by these students. One of the advantages of my decision to frame my research in a pragmatic paradigm was that I could use more than one research instrument and different data collection procedures to collect quantitative and qualitative data to help me answer my primary research question. Informed by this realization, I wanted to use a research design in which quantitative and qualitative methods could be combined in such a way that it would generate complementary answers to my research questions and, by implication, complementary solutions to the practical problem which was the focus of my research.

Having compared various research designs I opted to design my study as a survey because surveys can be used to elicit different kinds of information – facts, attitudes, or opinions held at the time the survey is conducted (Johnson, 1994:13). My survey questionnaire was aimed at determining the “attitudes, beliefs, values, demographics, behaviours, opinions, habits, desires and ideas” of prospective research participants on current assessment practices at PSET institutions. Although these are subjective expressions of the participants’ views of their experiences, I regarded them as intrinsic to my understanding and interpretation of the meaning that they assign to their experiences, meanings that are at the heart of what I wished to understand (McMillan and Schumacher (2006:233). Given the purpose of a survey which, according to Johnson (1994:14), is to provide the researcher with a basis for “collated description or comparison”, the same/equivalent kind of information has to be sought from all respondents. I intended to gather as much rich data from as many respondents at two PSET institutions – one public and one private – as possible, something which, according to me, could best be achieved by means of a survey questionnaire. I believed that key perceptions elicited from respondents would provide me baseline information on population sample’s beliefs and perceptions about current assessment practices: specifically, did they perceive the PSET programmes to be supportive or

inhibitive with regard to the demonstration of learning-disabled adult learners' competence against identified minimum standards.

In deciding on the actual design of my survey I was informed by what Subedi (2016:573) refers to as an “explanatory sequential mixed method design”. In terms of this design, the researcher first uses quantitative data collection methods, analyses the results, and uses these to design the qualitative data collection stage. This done, s/he designs the qualitative data collection tools required to extract, refine, and confirm further information that would provide solutions to the research problem. The design is considered explanatory because the quantitative data is further explained in the qualitative data collection phase.



Figure 4.2. Explanatory sequential mixed method design (Subedi, 2016:573)

In order to collect data in accordance with my survey design, I planned to first identify what theorists commonly refer to as cases - sites and groups of people that were to serve as data sources. Cases are particularly useful in empirical enquiries aimed at the investigation of a specific phenomenon because they lend themselves to the unfolding of phenomena in real-life contexts. Not only does the collection of data in natural settings provide researchers with a comprehensive and deep understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Andrade, 2009), but it also minimises the potential influence of the researcher's presence and/or subjective views on the data being collected (Yin, 2003:13; Andrade, 2009; Trellis, 1997; Yazan, 2015). Being an experienced adult educator, manager of a private further education and training college and the parent of a profoundly disabled adult daughter the possibility that I would view the collected data through one or more of these lenses could not be ignored, hence the imperative to conduct my data collection from research participants in their natural setting/s.

Another advantage of the case study approach is that it facilitates triangulation, a research technique regarded as critical to the assurance of trustworthiness in a qualitative and/or mixed methods study. Since I planned to collect data from more than one site, providing explanations of what I was doing and what I found, and explicitly declaring the insights I gained during the course of my inductive data collection and analysis processes, a case study approach seemed the ideal choice. Not only would it enable me to explore identified research participants' views on the extent to which current assessment practices at PSET institutions affect the learning progress and performance of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning but I, as the key research instrument, would be at liberty to participate in the research process as such, interacting with other participants in different ways and at different levels, thus gaining profound insights into the phenomenon being studied (Andrade, 2009; Trellis, 1997). Finally, given the collective, instrumental and explanatory nature of my case study approach, it would facilitate the effective triangulation of multiple data, collected through multiple instruments, from multiple sources (Trellis 1997; Yazan 2015). In the end, although I was therefore still guided by Subedi's sequential survey design (Figure 4.4), my actual design differed from his in a number of ways (see Figure 4.5).

More specifically, my initial research design evolved into a concurrent triangulation design, one in which the survey questionnaire, aimed at the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data would be used twice – first to get a 'sense' of the phenomenon being investigated, and then to collect data on the phenomenon in identified natural settings. This would then be followed by subsequent qualitative and quantitative data collection from different participant's groupings.

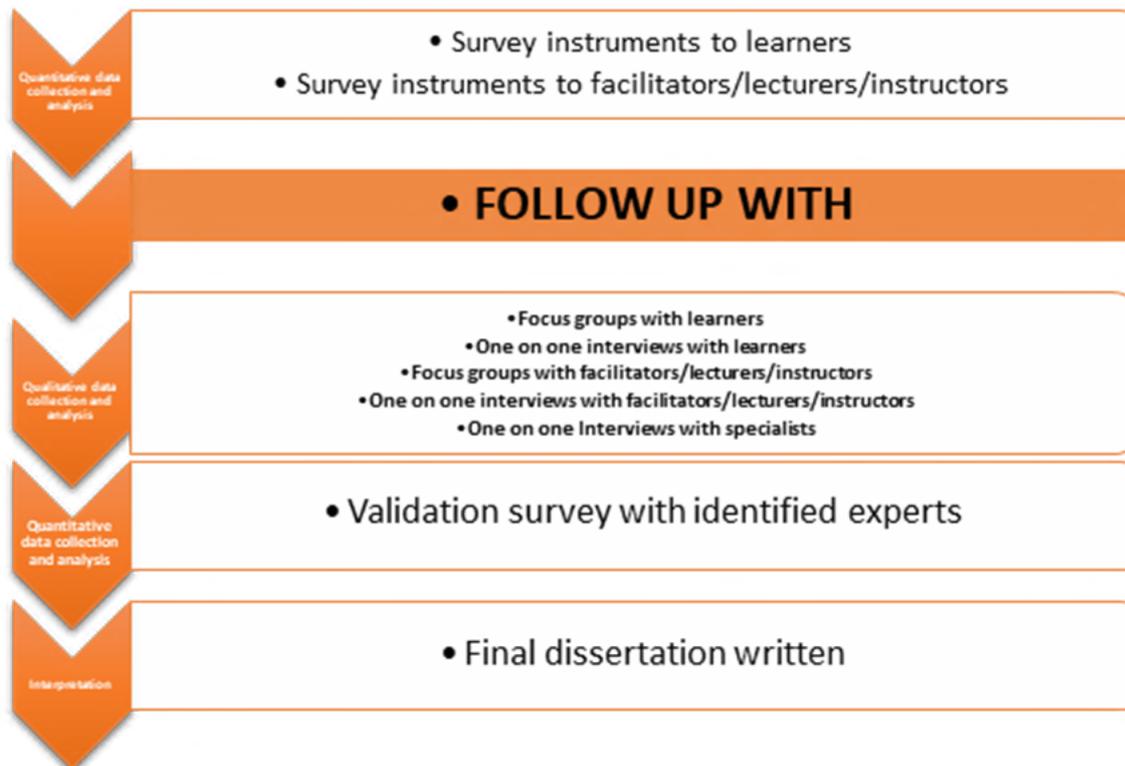


Figure 4.3. Actual data collection process – Amended Subedi approach

I first used a survey questionnaire to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the targeted population - adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning at PSET environments. Following this, I conducted qualitative focus group and/or one-on-one interviews with a sample of learners and lecturers at these institutions to further and deepen insights already gained (Creswell, 2014). Finally, I collected quantitative and qualitative evaluation data from a group of disability experts whom I approached to assess and, so I hoped, validate the alternative assessment framework I developed.

4.4 SAMPLING

The selection of individuals or groups from a broader population for data collection purposes is referred to as 'sampling' in research discourse. Whereas quantitative researchers typically use random, probability or stratified sampling, qualitative researchers tend to make use of convenience, purposive and/or snowball sampling (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014:6). Given my decision to conduct my research in the pragmatic paradigm, which lends itself to the use of mixed methods, following Merriam (2009) and Johnson (1994), I combined purposive snowball sampling (two qualitative sampling techniques) and stratified probability sampling (quantitative sampling

techniques) to identify PSET institutions, learners, lecturers and specialist as potential research participants.

On paper, although this seemed like a sound and manageable process it, like the data collection process described in the next section, was riddled with so many unexpected challenges that I often felt like giving up. The only way in which I could realize this goal was to continually adjust my plans in ways that would not compromise my integrity as a researcher, the credibility of my research process or the validity of my research findings. Fortunately, as indicated earlier, the flexibility accorded to qualitative researchers and, by implication for researchers using mixed method designs enabled this.

As indicated earlier, the focus of the study was to investigate the extent to which assessment practices currently used in PSET training programmes, enable or disable adult learners with barriers to learning to demonstrate their competence as measured against existing identified minimum standards. The first step towards the achievement of this purpose was to identify PSET institutions which could serve as my research sites. More specifically, I had to identify PSET institutions whose learner populations included adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning. While this sounded easy enough, it was apparent very early on that gaining access to these institutions would be fraught with difficulties.

The first challenge I had to overcome was the seeming reluctance of post-school 'gatekeepers' – the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) – 'expose' the institutions in the education and training sectors for which they were responsible to my – or any other researcher's - 'scrutiny'. With two exceptions, the SETAs I approached did not even bother to respond to my requests for assistance. The DHET categorically stated that it would only support and/or facilitate research endeavours within the PSET sector if the study included more than ten institutions. Although they did not explicitly forbid me to conduct my research in their institutions, it was abundantly clear to me that I should not expect any support from them in this regard. It was therefore up to me to contact identified institutions in order to determine whether or not they would be inclined to participate in my study. This proved to be extremely difficult due to the lack of centralized information on (a) the learner profiles of PSET institutions in general, and (b) PSET institutions that offer support services to learners with barriers to

learning (learning disabilities) in particular. I was therefore able to approach only those PSET institutions of whose existence I was aware in the hope that they would agree to 'open up their doors' to me so that I could interact with learners and lecturers who could provide me with the requisite information I needed to answer my research questions and design an alternate, more supportive assessment framework for adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning. which become part of my research project.

Establishing e-mail or telephonic contact with the institutions of whose existence I was aware was my next challenge. Due to the fact that I was either unable to establish any contact with them or that the institution could or would not identify the correct person to whom I could speak, I had to exclude 80% of the public PSET institutions on my list. Three of the institutions with which I did manage to establish contact indicated that none of the learners at their institution who were studying towards an NQF Level 5 qualification had learning disabilities, hence they too, had to be removed from my 'list'. and/or that they were - (e-mails from these institutions in which information in this regard are communicated are available on request). I therefore excluded them from my potential list of cases as well. That left me with four institutions which could potentially serve as sites, or cases, for my study. Having considered the time and costs involved in travelling to these four institutions, which were spread across the country, I eventually chose two institutions who were willing to participate and whose learners fitted the profile of learners who are the focus of my study.

My next step was the purposive identification of potential research participants, that is, learning-disabled adult learners at these institutions who would be willing to participate in the piloting of my survey questionnaire and lecturers with experience in the teaching of such learners. To this purpose, I contacted the disability units of the two institutions who had responded to my request. Having first informed them of the nature and purpose of my study, and the reasons for my having to pilot my survey questionnaire, I then asked them to provide me with the name of a person or persons in their disability units who could serve as my contact during the course of my research. Once these persons had been identified and I had established contact with them, I provided them the profile of learner participants (purposive sampling) that I needed as data sources for my study. More specifically, I asked them to (a) identify adult learners with one or more learning disability who were studying towards the completion of an

NQF Level 5 or higher qualification, and (b) a cohort of lecturers who were engaged in the teaching, learning and assessment of adult learners like these. These purposively sampled range of research participants would, so I believed, ensure maximum data variation, bringing the widest possible range of characteristics of interest to the study in terms of age, race, gender, and level of education (Merriam 2009:78). Moreover, the ‘probability’ being that they would be knowledgeable about the phenomenon I planned to investigate, I regarded them as potentially “information-rich” data sources (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006:319; 2014:152).

In that I did not myself identify either the learner or lecturer participants but had devolved the responsibility to do so to staff members of institutional disability units, I was doing convenience sampling (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009:170; 171). Doing so, I believed, would save me time and money while at the same time ensuring that the selection of participants would not be influenced by potential bias or subjectivity from my side. The elimination or, at least, minimizing of potential researcher bias was further enhanced by the fact that the participating institutions intimated that all interactions with their students and lecturers should be conducted via the disability support unit (where such existed) or the individual tasked with this responsibility.

The majority of the learners approached at private PSET institution 2 opted not to participate. For this college I received a database of 20 learners. Five of these learners agreed to participate in the survey questionnaire and only one (1) was willing to be interviewed. For participant group 3 (learners who had already completed their qualification), private PSET institution 2 provided a database of 20 learners who had completed their qualification. My attempt to contact them via the email and telephone contact information provided, proved unsuccessful. I was able to contact only one (1) learner who then participated only in the survey questionnaire. In addition, one of the SETAs contacted for participation provided a database of 30 learners who had completed an NQF 5 qualification via a learnership. Unfortunately, my experience with contacting them was equally unsuccessful, as a result of outdated contact information. My study promoter and I decided to remove this participant group from the investigation and focus only on learners currently studying, and on the lecturers and facilitators who support the teaching, learning and assessment processes of these learners.

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling was also used for the identification of lecturers. More specifically, they were selected by their institutions because they were involved in the facilitation of learning and the management of assessment processes for adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning in PSET programmes. As with currently enrolled learners, as much variation as possible in age, gender, educational background, and/or teaching experience.

One of the private adult education and training institutions whose lecturers and learners had participated in the pilot survey (current learners and lecturers) withdrew from participation in the focus group sessions. They were unwilling to provide reasons for their decision despite assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. They indicated that I was free to use the data gathered in the pilot survey questionnaire.

In addition to learners and lecturers, I managed to identify, through purposive sampling, three specialists at the participating institutions who had experience in the integration of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) into PSET institutions. They were initially identified on the basis of their contribution to the body of knowledge as evident from the publication of their research in academic journals and/or papers delivered at conferences. Additionally, I had considered the roles they played in the integration of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning into PSET programmes and institutions. Additional experts to be included in the panel who would be asked to evaluate the alternative assessment model I wanted to design were identified by means of snowball sampling, having been recommended for inclusion in the final panel of experts by the institutional experts who had been purposively sampled by me (Lewis-Beck, 2004:1043).

4.5 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

As indicated in the description of my research design, I planned to use multiple research instruments and methods in the collection of data, thus aligning my data collection methods to the requirements of the pragmatic paradigm in which I had decided to frame my study. It follows that the collection of different types of data, coupled with the use of multiple sources, instruments and methods facilitated the eventual triangulation of data, which is one of the requirements in mixed methods research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:245). In doing so, I was ensuring the credibility and/or trustworthiness of my study and its findings.

I had initially planned to use three data collection instruments: (a) an open-ended survey questionnaire, aimed at the collection of quantitative demographic data as well as qualitative data on the ways in which learners and their lecturers experienced current assessment practices at their institutions; (b) focus group interviews, aimed at the collection of qualitative data which would confirm, negate, or expand on the data collected by means of the survey questionnaire, and (c) a questionnaire for the experts who would assess and evaluate the new assessment framework which I planned to design should the data indicate that the progress and performance of learners were inhibited by current assessment practices. However, due to the challenges described in preceding sections, I eventually had to add one-on-one interviews to my list of data collection instruments.

4.5.1 Survey questionnaires

I used three survey questionnaires – one for learners, one for lecturers and one for disability experts – as data collection instruments. My decision to use survey questionnaires was informed by my intention to collect rich data from as many participants as possible on their experience of and perceptions on current assessment practices at their respective institutions. Another reason was that questionnaires like these were cost effective and easy to distribute, specifically since I planned to conduct it online. The questions included in the learner and lecturers survey questionnaires were aligned to the secondary research questions provided in Chapter 1 of the research report.

In addition to the learner and lecturer survey questionnaires, I also designed a quantitative survey questionnaire (see Annexure 8) which I wanted to distribute among the panel of experts who had been identified as potential evaluators of an alternate, more supportive assessment framework for adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, once I had identified from data collected and analysed, those factors which either inhibit or support their learning and academic performance in current assessment practices.

4.5.2 Focus group interviews

Williams and Katz (2001:2) describe a focus group as a small group of individuals who are assembled by a moderator because (a) they are bound by a common interest or characteristic, and (b) s/he can use the group and its interactions with her/him as a

means of obtaining information about a particular phenomenon. Informing this argument are three inter-related assumptions, namely that, because the use of a group interaction approach was likely to appear less threatening to research participants, and because it was a time-efficient data collection method, the researcher was more likely to not only gather the maximum amount of rich, descriptive data in the minimum amount of time but also to determine which topical areas necessitated the extraction of additional information. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:360; 2014:389), it is the sense of comfort which participants experience in a social setting where they can interact with their peers **which** stimulates their thinking and encourages them to share their perceptions and ideas with one another. Not only, according to McMillan and Schumacher (ibid) does such interaction have the potential to advance discussions, but also to provide researchers with a “rich description” of the phenomenon or issue under consideration. The purpose of a focus group discussion/interview, according to Merriam (2009:90), is to obtain data of a high quality in a social context, the generation of which depends on the extent to which focus group participants are exposed not only to views similar to their own but also to ones that are different, thus challenging them to clarify and/or review their initial perceptions and/or to challenge the views expressed by their fellow participants.

4.5.3 One-on-one interviews

As indicated in 4.5.2, the use of one-on-one interviews was an emergency measure, resulting from the fact that lecturers were unable to participate in focus group interview due to logistical reasons (time and/or location) or specific circumstances prevailing at their institutions at times scheduled for the focus group discussions. The interview guide I prepared for the focus groups was adapted to suit the one-on-one interview format.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

In accordance with my research design, data collection had to be sequential, i.e. first the completion of the questionnaire, then the focus group discussions/interviews and finally, the disability expert questionnaires. This was not always the case, though. In most instances, the completion of the final survey questionnaire and the focus groups/interviews were conducted in tandem. Also, I had to add one-on-one interviews

due to various challenges experienced during the actual data collection process. These challenges, and what I did to overcome them, are described hereafter.

My intention with the piloting of the tentative survey questionnaire (see Annexure 6), was to ensure (a) that its language usage was both accurate and appropriate to the English proficiency levels of potential research participants (adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning and their lecturers), and (b) that it contained no ambiguous questions. I therefore planned to pilot it amongst the lecturers and adult learners identified by disability unit personnel of the PSET institutions identified as potential research sites. To this purpose, I sent a comprehensive email invitation to all the learners who had been identified by my contact person in the disability units of institution, which had indicated their willingness to serve as cases for my study. Included in the e-mail invitation was the link to the online survey, as well as a notification that hard copies could be completed should this be preferred. These were made available to the disability support unit or the identified contact person. Also included in the e-mail were the instructions on how participants should go about completing the questionnaire, the time-lines concerned – seven days - and the manner in which these could be returned to me.

The survey questionnaire was initially intended to be conducted online, where respondents would be provided with a hyperlink that would direct them to the survey questionnaire. Although I had put everything in place for research participants to receive and complete the questionnaire electronically, most of them indicated that they could only do so manually. Once completed, it would be redirected to the researcher. However, there were a number of issues that I did not anticipate in this approach including that the IT protocols within the private PSET providers did not allow for this and therefore respondents had to complete the survey manually. What I discovered was that computers were not easily accessible to learners at the public PSET sector colleges. Therefore, they could not complete the survey online, even though they had e-mail addresses and access to the internet. I therefore had to send hard copies to the relevant contact person for distribution to learners. Once completed, the hard copies had to be handed to my contact person who would then send it to me; electronic questionnaires would be automatically rerouted to me. In addition, I sent out two e-mail reminders (where I had access to these) to all participants regarding the

completion and submission of the survey questionnaire, while my contact person at each institution reminded participants who did not have access to e-mails of the same. Although the cost increased when I also had to provide it in hard copy, due to the internet challenges indicated earlier, it was still the most cost-effective data collection instrument for my study and, in the end, enabled me to collect data from a wider geographical area than would have been possible if I had resorted to the use of interviews only.

Since there was no indication in the responses of those who had participated in the piloting of the questionnaire that they had misunderstood or misinterpreted any of the questions, there was no need to change their wording prior to using it for actual data collection purposes. There were, however, indications that there were respondents who were not familiar with some of the words or phrases used in the questionnaire because they were too 'high-brow'. These were therefore rephrased in simpler English to ensure that participants involved in the completion of the finalised questionnaire would not experience any language difficulties.

I had not intended to use any of the data generated in the piloted questionnaire as part of my data basis. I had, however, planned to use the qualitative data emerging from the piloted survey questionnaire as basis for the design of a focus group interview schedule (see Annexure 7) which I planned to use during my interaction with the adult learners and lecturers who had been selected as my research participant samples. However, due to various challenges, explained hereafter, I had to include the data collected in the piloted questionnaire into my final database even though the results of pilot studies are rarely integrated into the final report of a research study.

One of the reasons for excluding pilot study data is that pilot studies are used to test the data collection instrument /or justify the research methods adopted for the study. Therefore, its primary use is to achieve this outcome (Ismail, N; Kinchin, G & Edwards, J, 2018). The fact that the pilot application of the data collection instrument can provide valuable data is overlooked. Put differently, participant responses to questions and/or statements in a pilot questionnaire would not, in ordinary circumstances, be regarded as data; only responses in the final questionnaire would, therefore, qualify for analysis. Given the extraordinary circumstances prevailing in my study – the withdrawal of some institutions and participants after the piloting of the questionnaire, the fact that I was

given permission by institutions at which the questionnaire was piloted to incorporate the data into my study, and the fact that, although it is not common to do so in survey research, it is not prohibited (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001), I decided to include the data collected during the piloting of the questionnaire in my study. According to Teijlingen and Hundley (2001,4 of 5), the inclusion of data collected during the piloting phase of survey research could be used in cases where the sample completing the actual/final version of the questionnaire is so small that the data collected might not be sufficient to draw valid conclusions about the phenomenon being investigated. This was the case in my study, not only because of the challenges I mentioned in 4.5.2 but also because (a) the terms, 'barriers to learning' and/or 'learning disabilities' were defined differently in South African PSET institutions; (b) there was no formal process by means of which such learners could be diagnosed/identified, and (c) learners with barriers like these did not disclose them to the institutions at which they were studying. These three factors in particular made it extremely difficult for PSET institutions to determine which learners should be considered for participation in my study.

In circumstances like these, according to Teijlingen and Hundley (ibid), the use of pilot data as part of the main study was permissible, especially the use of questionnaires is complemented by the use of other, qualitative data collection instruments in subsequent phases of the data collection process.

In my study, focus group interviews/discussions were meant to constitute the second phase of my data collection process, the first being the completion of the survey questionnaire, the data generated by this questionnaire serving as basis for the focus group interview schedule. Data generated in the piloting of the questionnaire was not initially considered since its piloting was regarded not as a data collection exercise but an editing one, aimed at ensuring the clarity and accuracy of questions and language usage (see 4.6). The questions likely to be asked in the focus groups would only be determined after the online and manual data of the final questionnaire had been collected and an interim analysis had been conducted (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:366). Focus group discussions, which would be guided by the interview schedule (see appendix 7) I designed on the basis of the interim analysis, were meant to serve a fourfold purpose: (a) validate the data generated by the survey questionnaire; (b) identify additional information in areas where insufficient information emerged in the

survey; (c) obtain clarity on certain which surfaced in the survey, and (d) explore any contrary views that might have emerged.

I had planned to use a minimum of four focus group sessions (two sessions per participant group – i.e., adult learners with barriers to learning, and facilitators/instructors/lecturers of such learners respectively). To ensure that the information collected from participants fulfilled the “rich description” criterion I intended to organize participants into four groups, each comprising 6 to 8 participants. The total number of focus group participants, so I anticipated, would therefore be anything between 24 and 32. Once again, my plans were deranged by circumstances beyond my control. My actual focus groups consisted of two to six persons only and, contrary to what I had planned, I managed to conduct only 3 instead of the intended four focus group interviews, the reasons for this adjustment being provided in the paragraph which follows.

One of the private adult education and training institutions whose lecturers and learners had participated in the pilot survey (current learners and lecturers) withdrew from participation in the focus group sessions. The institution was unwilling to provide reasons for its decision despite my assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. They indicated, however, that I was free to use the data gathered in the pilot survey questionnaire as research data.

Learners and lecturers identified as focus group participants by the co-ordinator allocated to my research by the participating institutions were, as McMillan and Schumacher (2006:315; 2014:389) point out, supposed to be released from their work or study environment on the day that the focus group interview would take place. In my case did not happen. Upon my arrival at the first public sector education and training (PSET) institution, I was informed that the lecturers had been on strike for the past three weeks and, since things had only just returned to normal the management of the college was unwilling to allow them to leave their classrooms in order to participate in my planned focus group discussions. The alternative they offered was the opportunity to conduct one-on-one interviews with the lecturers during their free period. I accepted this approach as I had travelled across the country to collect this data, using the questions in the focus group interview schedule to this purpose. At the

second public PSET College, I was not even given that option: I was simply told that the lecturers simply did not have the time to participate in interviews of any kind.

Using the same, adapted interview schedule, I also conducted one-on-one interviews – an emergency measure – with two/three purposively selected specialists in the field of barriers to learning (learning disability) in post-school education and training. All of them were actively involved in the disability support units of their institutions. One of them continues to do significant research in this field through publications and ongoing professional development. I therefore believed that they would be able to contribute valuably to the discussions, given their role in the sector and their practical experience with integrating adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in a PSET environment. Informed by this view, I subsequently used them to evaluate the validity and practicability of the new framework I designed (see Chapter 6) for the assessment of adult learners with learning disabilities.

In the end, therefore, my actual data collection process, illustrated in Figure 4.6 below, was markedly different from the one I envisaged in my original research design.

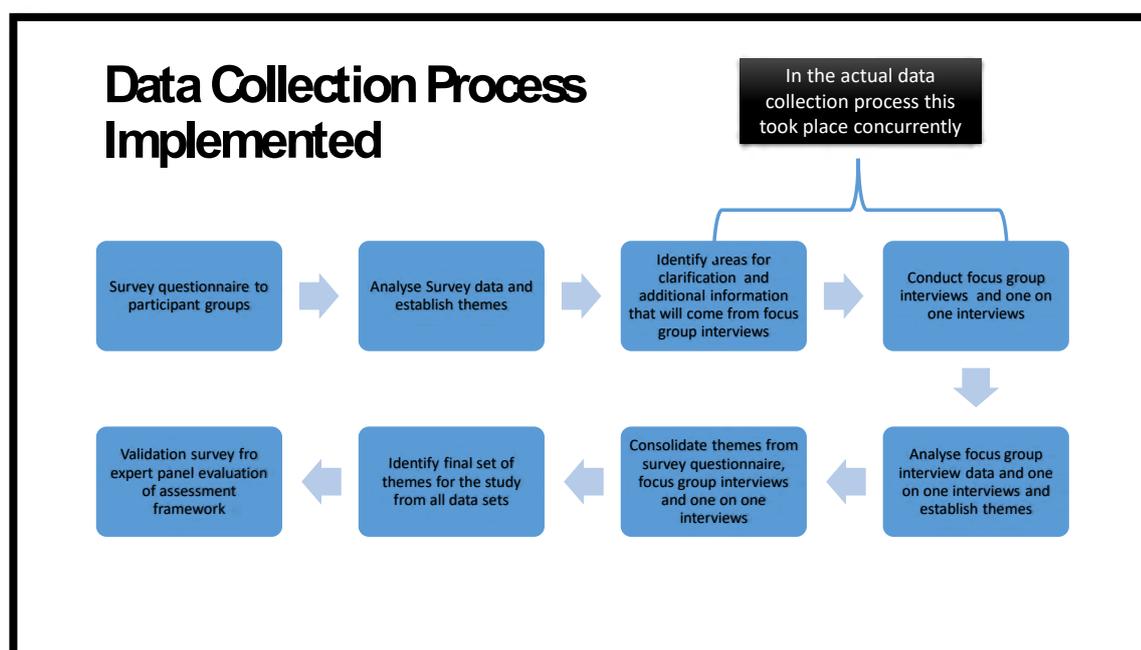


Figure 4.4 Actual data collection process followed

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Because I wanted to identify emergent patterns from the raw data I collected from specific participant groups so as to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by research participants (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018), and to answer the research questions which directed my study, I decided to analyse all my data, irrespective of the instruments by means of which it was collected, thematically (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turuen & Snelgrove, 2016; Elo & Kyngash, 2008; Castleberry & Nolan, 2018; Bengtsson, 2016; Kaarianen, Kanst, Utrianinen & Kyngas, 2014). Furthermore, thematic analysis has proven itself as an approach to data analysis capable of handling large volumes of textual data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) and, since my transcripts of data collected through focus group and individual interviews ran into hundreds of pages of text, I deemed thematic analysis to be the approach most likely to enable me to effectively analyse such a large amount of data.

Much has been written on thematic analysis in qualitative research studies (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turuen, & Snelgrove, 2016; Elo & Kyngash, 2008; Castleberry & Nolan, 2018; Bengtsson, 2016; Elo, Kaariainen, Kanst, Polkki, Utrianinen, & Kyngas, 2014). While their views on the processes to be followed in conducting thematic analysis differ in some respects, they agree in general on the key principles that should inform this process, namely that researchers have to (a) familiarise themselves with the data collected through a process of immersion by reading and rereading the data; (b) identify commonly occurring concepts (ideas), labelling these as themes; (c) define and describe the themes in order to establish thematic parameters, and (d) using these in the construction of a research narrative.

According to Mertens (2005:424), qualitative data analysis is fundamentally about the researchers' thinking about the data that they have collected and considering the various relationships and meaning that are evident in the data. The primary purpose of data analysis, according to Castleberry and Nolan (2018), is to provide the researcher with a better understanding of a particular phenomenon through the analysis of research participants' lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation, hence enabling her/him to answer the research questions directing the study. In order to do so, according to McMillan & Schumacher (2006:17; 2014:347) and Merriam (2009:14), qualitative researchers have to adopt an intuitive and flexible stance towards data analysis, allowing the data itself to lead her/him to the

identification of emergent themes rather than imposing predetermined categories and patterns on the data. A prerequisite for the use of this inductive process of analysis and interpretation is researcher flexibility since the emergence of unexpected patterns/themes may require her/him to change the direction of the research study and/or to collect additional data using the same or different instruments, processes or procedures (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:17; 2014:347; Merriam, 2009:14).

Having considered various theorists' views on the way to approach thematic analysis, I decided to use the six-step process suggested by the Psychology Department of the Auckland University (www.psych.auckland.ac.za/en/about/our-research/research-groups/thematic-analysis/about-thematic-analysis-html.) (see Figure 4.7), because it was the one which resonated most strongly with me as a researcher. Moreover, it is not informed by a specific theoretical framework, thus offering me the flexibility typifying inductive qualitative data analysis: there are no systematic rules for analysing data (Elo, S & Kyngas, H;2008:109). Finally, thematic analysis facilitates the analysis of large volumes of textual data like mine, in which focus group and individual interview transcripts ran into hundreds of pages of text. Therefore, thematic analysis proved to be the most effective method for data analysis.

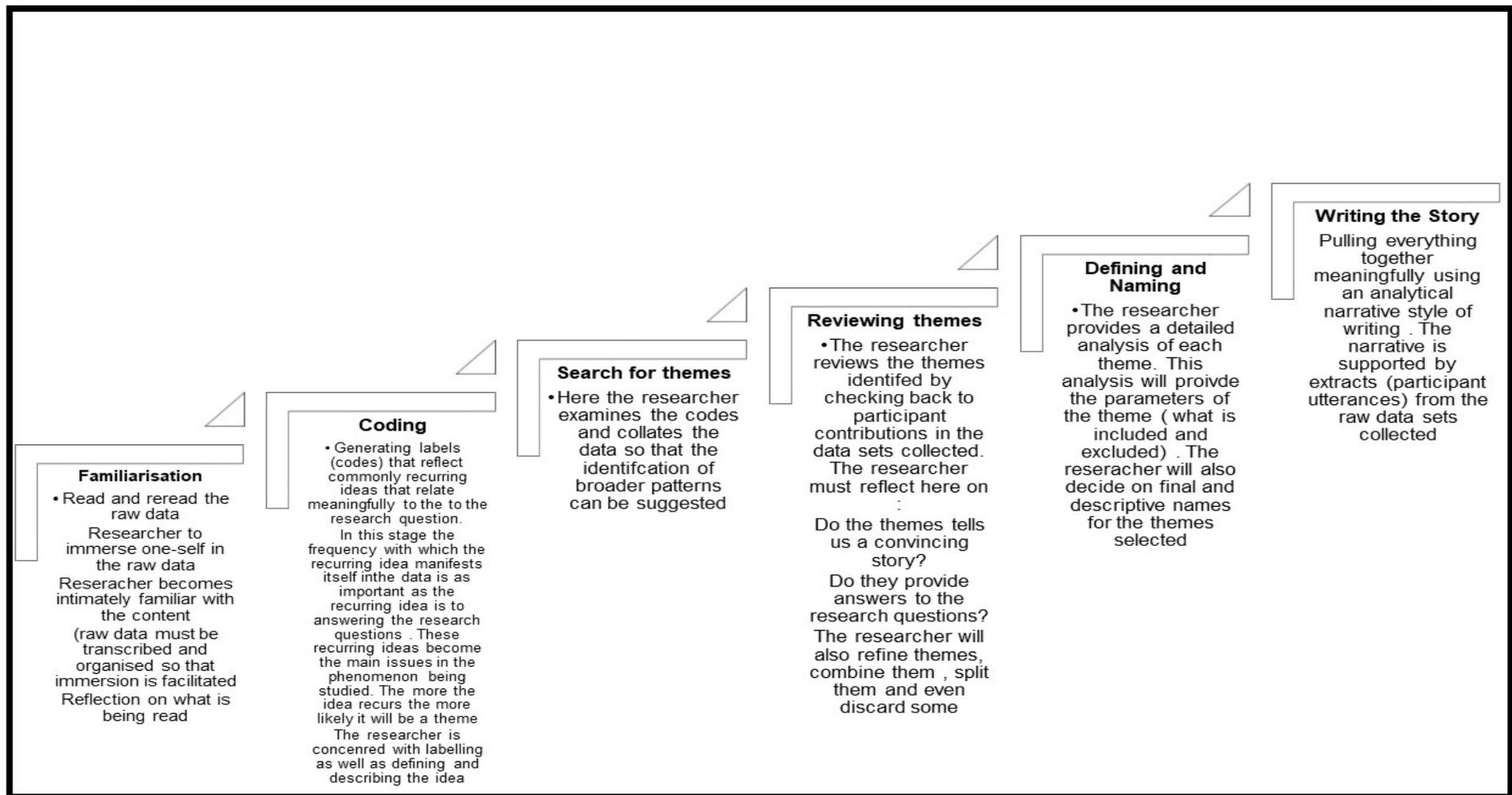


Figure 4.5. Thematic analysis process - Psychology Department of the Auckland University

In adopting the Auckland University's data analysis process, I was also informed by Suter's (2012:351) definition of qualitative research as an iterative and ongoing process, one in which the researcher repeatedly moves back and forth between the raw data, the themes, and her/his explanations of these. This on-going, iterative process would, I believed, enable me, in my research capacity, to identify weaknesses and gaps in the data collected, thus providing me with the opportunity to address these in subsequent data collection stages/phases (Mertens, 2005:424). Given the symbiotic nature of this ongoing, iterative process, the analysis of my data became more intense at each stage (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:17; 2014:395).

4.7.1 Analysis of survey data

As I indicated in the preceding section, I had no choice but to also include the data collected by means of the piloted survey questionnaire into my final data base. A number of theorists (Prescott & Soeken in Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001:5; Nunes et al. 2010; Sampson, 2004; Janghorban et al. 2014) argue that pilot study data is "under discussed, under used and under reported". Informed by this argument, Teijlingen and Hundley (2001:5) have, since the 2000s, been advocating for the inclusion of pilot study data in research reports provided that the emphasis should be on both the process and outcomes of these. According to them, researchers have an ethical obligation (2000:293) to make all aspects of their research available, including the data generated by pilot studies. Sampson (2004: 399-400), agreeing with this view, argues strongly that preliminary data generated during pilot studies could, and should, be used to design subsequent data collection instruments because it contributes to the creation of an audit trail which, according to Nunes et al. (2010:75), is a necessary part of rigorous research (Nunes et al. 2010:75).

Informed by these arguments, I therefore decided to analyse my pilot data in exactly the same way as that in which I analysed the data in the final questionnaire and to include these in my research report. In doing so, I believe, I managed to provide a more comprehensive picture of participants' experiences of and perspectives on the effect of current assessment practices on their ability to demonstrate their competence in terms of specified learning outcomes. I therefore decide to first analyse the data generated in the pilot study, then data collected by means of the final questionnaires – one completed by participating learners and one by lecturers who taught them –

before I attempted to combine them into what would hopefully be a credible picture of participants' views on current assessment practices.

The first step in this process was to capture and collate the quantitative data. I did this electronically, using google forms, capturing raw data collected from learners and lecturers alike on Excel spreadsheets.

The literature study in Chapters 2 and 3 provided the initial categories which directed the open-ended questions to be asked in the open-ended survey questionnaire. The questionnaire data was then analysed, and a baseline level of information created. It was based on the experiences of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) and their facilitators/instructors/lecturers in terms of current assessment practices implemented within PSET programmes. Furthermore, I focused on the extent to which the relevant assessment practices were found to support or inhibit adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from demonstrating their competence against identified minimum standards.

Following the data analysis process illustrated in Figure 4.7, I familiarised myself with the information by reading and rereading the responses of the participants in each participant group. In the course of doing so, I began to identify commonly recurring ideas (frequency of idea) to which I then applied labels. At the same time, I was looking for potential questions emerging from the analysis of the survey questionnaires that lent themselves to inclusion in the interview schedule I wanted to use during focus group interview sessions.

The next step was to manually develop mind maps (pictorial representations or emerging themes) which reflected the labels (codes) emerging from each data set - the pilot and implemented surveys respectively conducted amongst currently enrolled learners and their lecturers. Having done so, I had to consolidate the identified themes into an overall set of themes that reflected the experiences of and perspectives on current assessment practices of participating learners and their lecturers. Informing this step was the need to limit the number of categories to essentials because, the fewer the categories that emerge from the data, the greater the level of abstraction (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and the easier it is to communicate the findings of the study (Merriam, 2009:224, and Cresswell, 2009:199).

The "reduction" of data (Miles and Huberman, 2004), which strengthens its credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, simultaneously enhances the overall

trustworthiness of a study. I therefore had to rationalise themes by eliminating duplication, merging sub-themes that seemed similar in nature into a single theme and and/or incorporating them into another theme already identified. Emerging from this process were three mind maps (see Figures 4.8; 4.9; 4.10), each reflecting the views of learner and the facilitators/lecturers/instructors and the specialists respectively.

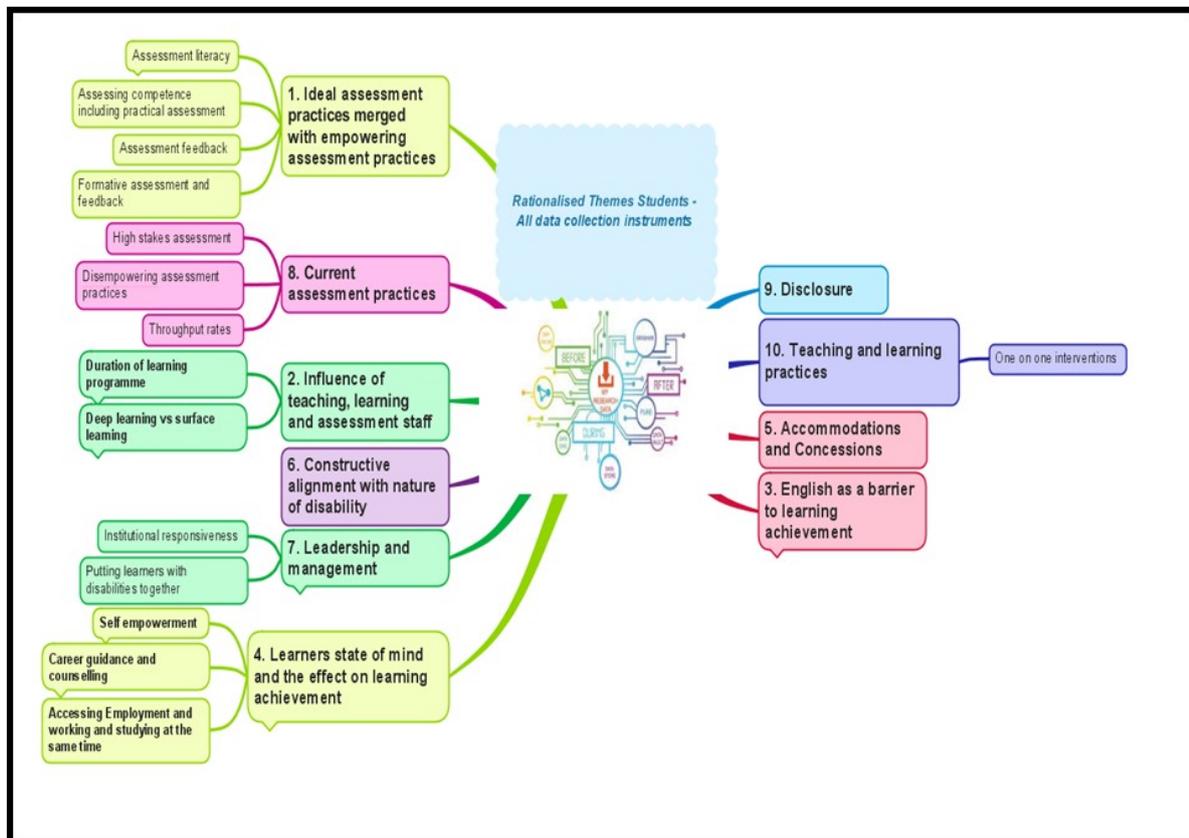


Figure 4.6 Rationalised themes across all data sets for currently enrolled learners

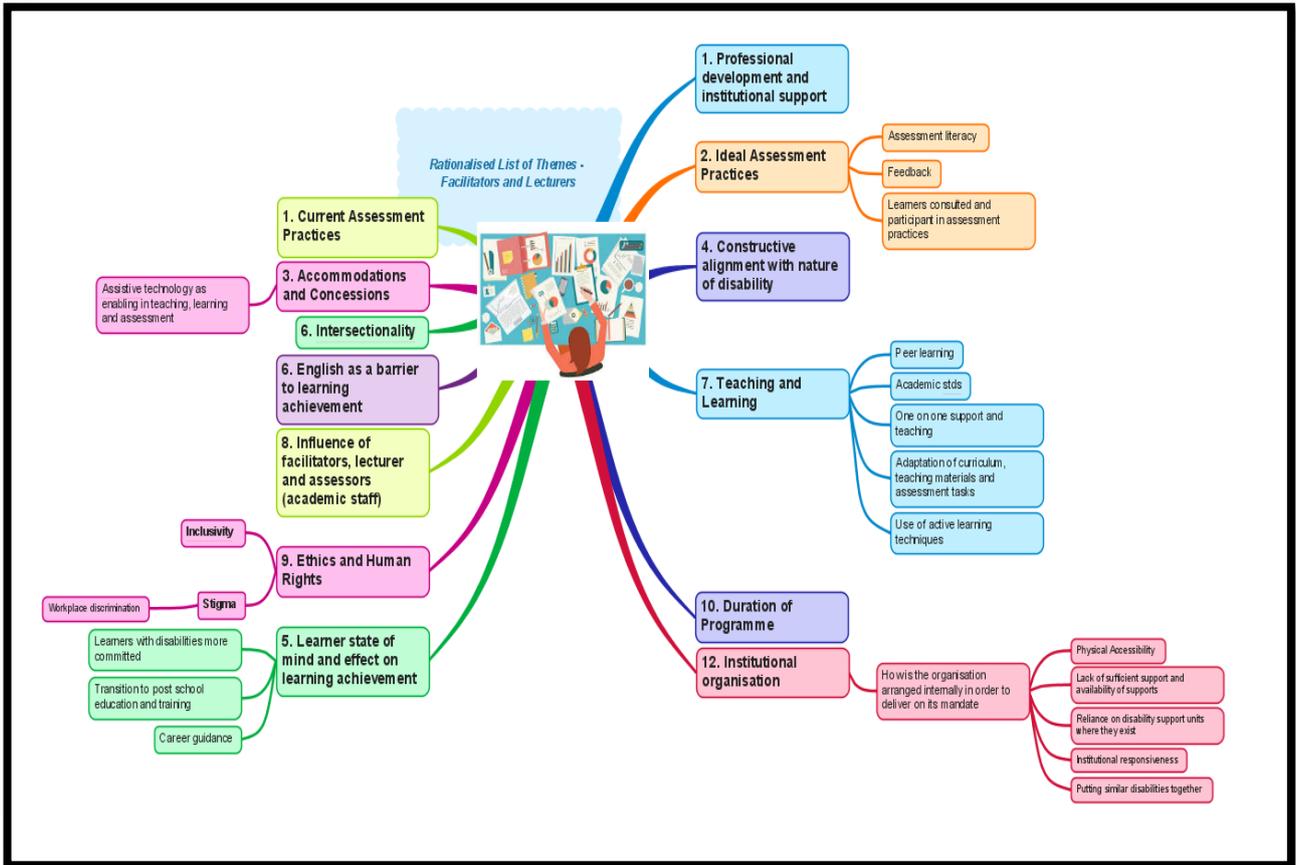


Figure 4.7 Rationalised themes across all datasets – facilitators/lecturers/instructors

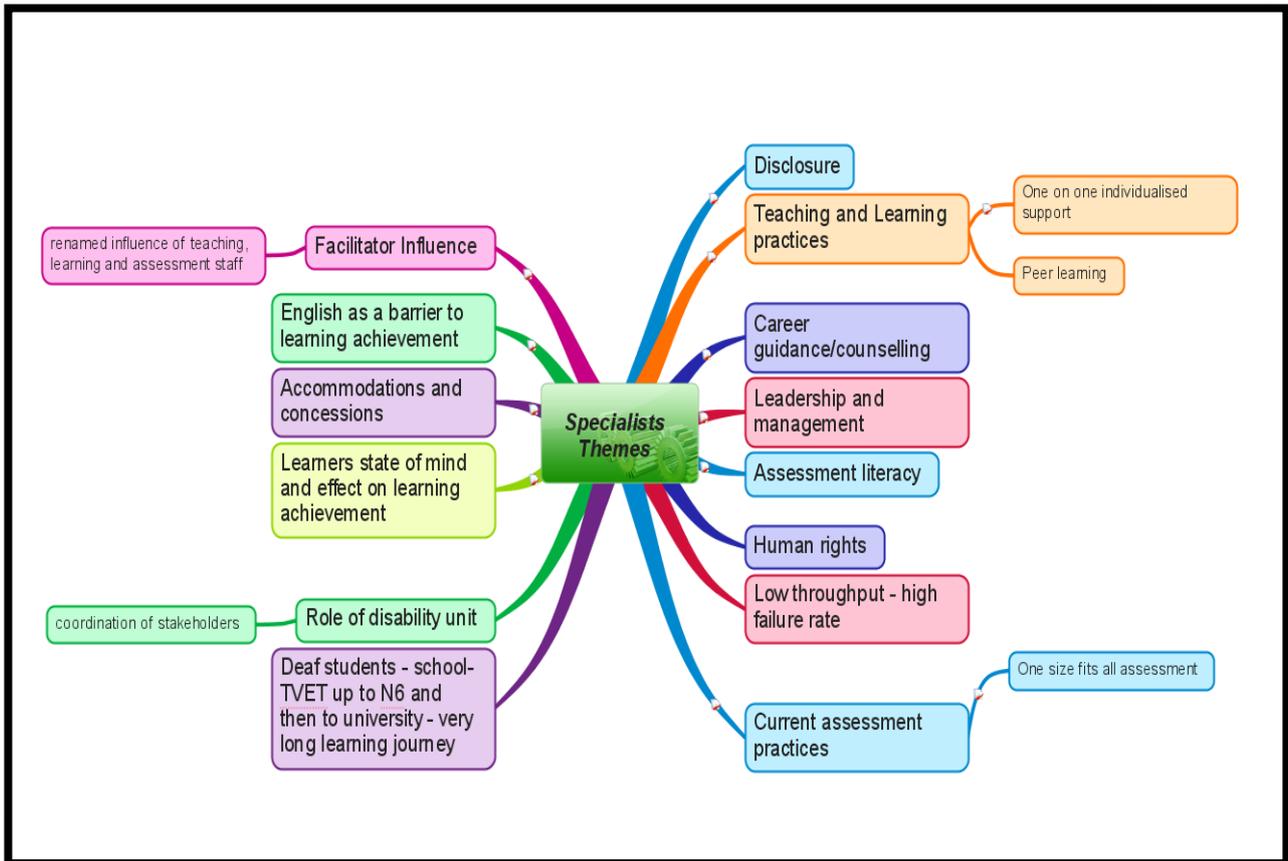


Figure 4.8 Specialist themes

4.7.2 Analysis of Interview data

As indicated earlier, I conducted two types of interviews – focus group and individual ones. The focus group interview sessions were used to address weaknesses and gaps identified in the analysis of the questionnaire survey data. In addition, the focus groups were used to delve deeper into the specific issues that emerged in the survey analysis, or which I intuitively felt should be discussed, based on my reflections on the analysis of the survey data. The focus groups were analysed for three key elements, namely (Maree, 2007:90): Individual participant responses; Group responses; Group dynamics observed. The focus groups were especially used to confirm categories, refute them, or find additional ones.

The one-on-one interview sessions were used in lieu of the focus group interview sessions where these could not be conducted. As with the focus group sessions, the one-on-one interviews were used to address weaknesses and gaps identified in the analysis of the survey questionnaire data, as well as delve deeper into the specific issues that emerged in the survey analysis, or which I intuitively felt should be

discussed based, on my reflections on the analysis of the survey data. The analysis of the one-on-one interview data focused on the individual participant responses. It must be noted that the one-on-one interviews produced a wealth of data with transcription of these interviews running in excess of one hundred pages. It also produced thick, rich descriptions, considered essential in qualitative research.

The first step in this process was to transcribe each interview, starting with the analysis of focus group interviews and following it with the analysis of individual (one-on-one) interviews. In order to do this, I had to enlist the assistance of a professional transcription service as I found the verbatim transcription of the data, time consuming. This was done by transcribing the focus group interviews as well as the one on one interviews. Furthermore, the transcription services company was able to provide specialist technology needed to handle the interference of background noise, which had the effect of making what participant was saying difficult to hear.

Once the transcription and organising processes were completed, I once again I immersed myself in the data, identifying commonly recurring ideas which could become themes, applying labels to each of them. I also began to define and describe the ideas that were emerging. In identifying and labelling these ideas, I specifically looked for the frequency of occurrence (how many times they surfaced) as well as the extent to which they provided answers to the research questions. Once I had a core group of labels, I looked for opportunities to merge labels, split labels or discard them all together.

In the sense that my data analysis process was sequential in nature - starting with the analysis of survey questionnaires, followed by the analysis of focus group interviews, and concluding with the analysis of one-on-one interviews – it reflected Subedi's sequential survey design even though the collection of my quantitative and qualitative data took place simultaneously rather than sequentially, for reasons already provided.

4.8. Trustworthiness and data verification strategies

Merriam and Tisdell (2015;237) caution that it is of paramount importance that one must be able to trust research results, particularly given that professionals working in applied fields intervene in people's lives during their practice. They must be concerned with producing research knowledge that is valid and reliable, in the context of ethical research practices.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:296) refer to the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study as its “truth value” and offer four pillars - dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability - against which researchers can measure the “truth value” of their research.

Trustworthy research is firstly assured by constructing a research study that meets the six norms of scientific research (Mertens, 2010:4). Adherence to these norms ensures the construction of a scientific research study that can be deemed trustworthy and therefore valid. These six norms are (Merriam, 2010:4; also see 4.12):

1. Using a valid research design.
2. The researcher must be competent to conduct the research.
3. The researcher must identify consequences of the research and ensure that informed consent is in place; and that mitigation strategies are planned in the event of negative consequences. In addition, all confidentiality and all ethical considerations as applicable to the research study must be observed.
4. The researcher should select suitable sampling strategies.
5. The participants involved must do so on a voluntary, informed consent basis.
6. The researcher should inform participants whether they should be compensated in the event of harm, psychological or otherwise, directly due to their participation in the study.

In the case of this research study, all of these criteria have been complied with. The research study in its various stages continues to uphold these norms as an acid test to ensure that it is a trustworthy study that offers valid data to the research community. This is specifically necessary given that the nature of the study focuses on participants who are adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) and who are already considered disadvantaged and vulnerable. These individuals have been marginalised in terms of access to education and training opportunities.

4.8.1 Dependability

Dependability relates to reliability and consistency (as in qualitative research), and is the extent to which the researcher accounts for changes in the research design, as well as changes in the understanding of the phenomenon that has developed during the course of the research study (Merriam, 2009:223; Mertens, 2010:259). The

dependability of the study also reflects the extent to which the results of the research are consistent with the data collected. This is achieved by providing a detailed account of how the study was conducted and the data analysed. It must include an audit trail, i.e. a description with supporting documentation on how the data was collected and categories were derived at, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry process (McMillan and Schumacher 2006:327; 2014: 399,405). A valuable tool in this process is a research journal in which the researcher is able to capture thoughts, reflections, and decisions made about the research design and challenges encountered during the process (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014:356). This can be used as additional evidence to verify the processes and procedures followed, together with the raw data.

In this research study, I have ensured the dependability of the study by ensuring that I used a research journal to document my thoughts and perceptions as the study unfolded. This journal will be available as an audit trail, on request. The video recordings of the focus group and one-on-one interview sessions were transcribed verbatim in order to confirm that the data collected had been accurately transcribed and reflected. In addition, I consulted with my study promoter regularly, and documented these discussions and decisions in writing via email. And finally, I kept copies of the completed questionnaires and captured field notes/analysis documents which emanated from the focus group interview sessions and one-on-one interviews.

4.8.2 Credibility

Credibility relates to internal validity in qualitative research and is defined as “the correspondence between the way respondents perceive social constructs and the way researchers present their points of view” (Mertens, 2005:254).

In order to ensure credibility in this research study, I focused on the following aspects, since they had been built into the design phase at the outset. Triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:245) was ensured using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, and involving two categories of participants. I conducted a literature study and used an open-ended survey questionnaire, focus group interview sessions and one-on-one interviews as the various means of accessing data from more than one source. Finally, a validation survey was conducted among a panel of relevant experts, requiring their input into the assessment framework that I compiled and proposed. In

addition, saturation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:199) was achieved by reading and re-reading the data to ensure that no new information had been overlooked and that no new themes were emerging.

4.8.3 Transferability

Transferability relates to external validity/generalisability in qualitative research and signifies the extent to which the research results can be transferred to other situations. However, it is important to note that the burden of transferability is placed at the door of the reader or practitioner who uses the results to impact practice. The reader of the study will therefore need to determine the degree of similarity between the study context and the application context (Mertens, 2005:256). Nevertheless, it was my responsibility to ensure that sufficient detail would be provided in the thesis to enable the reader to make such a judgement (Mertens, 2005:309).

The transferability of the findings of this research study was strengthened by following the three strategies that are also suggested by Merriam (2009:225). The use of thick description. I ensured that there are detailed descriptions of the settings and the participants of the study, and of the findings. These were supported by additional evidence presented in the form of direct quotes from participants, reviews, interviews, and field notes. I ensured maximum variation in the sample selection. Maximum variation in the samples was achieved by ensuring that the widest possible range of characteristics of interest to the study (Merriam, 2009:78) had been included, namely age, race, gender, educational level and experience (as applicable). And finally, I conducted a validation survey among a panel of relevant experts.

4.8.4. Confirmability

Confirmability relates to objectivity in quantitative research as the counterpart of subjectivity as found in qualitative research. Confirmability involves the extent to which the findings of the research study can be confirmed by tracing the data used to its original source. Further Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the researcher must be explicit about what is being used to interpret the data.

What is needed for confirmability to be assured is that the researcher must behave like an auditor and ensure that all data is accurately captured and stored appropriately. The researcher must leave an audit trail of such a nature that if it is audited, the same conclusions can be reached (Mertens, 2015:272). I indeed ensured the confirmability

of this study by seeing to it that all iterations of the data analysis are appropriately stored and can be accessible if required. I also documented my reflections on the research study in a journal. All raw data has been saved together with the video recordings of the focus group interview sessions and the one-on-one interviews, as well as the verbatim transcriptions of these. The data analyses have all been documented and the initial analyses, including the initial categories, have been documented and are included in the raw data pack.

Whereas the trustworthiness of qualitative research studies is determined by the principles of dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability, quantitative studies rely on the principles of validity and reliability to determine its credibility. In quantitative studies validity is concerned with the extent to which the study measures what it intended to measure, while reliability is focussed on the repeatability of the study i.e., if the study was conducted again, using the same data collection methods would it deliver the same results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Litoselli, 2010; Drost, 2011; Healey & Twycross, 2015). Furthermore, external validity is concerned with the generalisability of the results of the research study to other contexts and other populations. Scholars in quantitative research all agree that absolute validity is impossible to achieve but suggests measures that researchers can take to ensure the best possible validity of the study (Neuman, 2000), thus enhancing the study's credibility.

Because I was using a mixed-methods approach I also had to ensure the reliability and validity – quantitative requirements – of my study and its findings. To this purpose, I took the steps described below.

4.8.5 Validity

Validity, specifically face validity and content validity were applied as mechanisms for ensuring validity. In the case of face validity, this was ensured by applying the survey tool that was developed for adult learners with learning disabilities, to only this participant group identified against the specified criteria. Therefore, at face value the survey appeared relevant to the participant group that needed to provide responses. Furthermore, the survey questionnaire was piloted to ensure feasibility of the questions, readability and clarity in language usage. Content validity was ensured

through a thorough literature review of the construct of assessment practices and the survey questionnaire was extracted from this literature review.

Additionally, the assessment framework that was generated from this thorough literature review and the empirical study, was further validated through a survey questionnaire submitted to identified experts in the field for them to rate. Once again complying with the content validity criterion.

However external validity, i.e. the generalisability of the study, was compromised by the limited sample that the researcher was able to access during the empirical stage of the research study.

4.8.6 Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which the measuring tools used in the empirical study are repeatable and if conducted again would produce the same results over a period of time (Drost, 2011; Heale & Twycross, 2015; Litoselli, 2010; Neuman, 2000; Creswell, 2014).

Specifically, equivalence reliability is applicable. Equivalence reliability looks at the number of items in the survey questionnaire that deals with the construct. In the case of this research study, the survey questionnaire was made up of 23 questions. 9 of the 23 questions were questions based upon participant information (age, gender, qualification being studied, duration of qualification and duration of enrolment). The remainder 14 questions (61%) were focussed entirely on the construct being examined i.e. experiences of assessment practices by adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities).

One of the critical aspects of reliability is having an audit trail including ensuring that all data collected is available for scrutiny. I captured the survey questionnaire data on an excel spreadsheet and captured my analysis of the survey data in writing. All data collected using video and audio tools in the qualitative phase of the data collection, was transcribed using a professional transcribing service. The transcriptions were provided in word documents. I documented decisions I made during the research study in a journal and shared these decisions with my study leader some of which we took jointly. An example of this joint decision making was the decision to drop the third participant group i.e. learners with learning disabilities who had completed their

qualification. I documented the data analysis process through each stage of the process from raw data to the final consolidated themes presented in chapter 5 of this dissertation using mind maps. I drew these mind maps manually and then captured them onto a mind mapping software for inclusion in the final dissertation.

I further ensured the trustworthiness of my study by using cross referencing techniques throughout my dissertation where appropriate and required.

The mixed methods approach is a practical, applied philosophical approach to research. Researchers who conduct mixed method research typically use both qualitative and quantitative methods and instruments to collect, analyse and interpret data in an attempt to ensure greater depth and breadth (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014). The mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods, which enables researchers to look at complex social phenomena from different perspectives (including those of the inquirer and the inquired), gives them a broader, more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated than they would have gained had they used a single approach (Shannon-Baker, 2016:321; Eaton & Ihuah, 2013:938; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The triangulation of data, typical of mixed method research, enhances the credibility of the research findings, ensuring not only that the perspectives of the inquirer and the inquired alike are considered, thus enabling researchers to identify and fill gaps that may not have been detected had they relied on a single overriding method (Shannon-Baker, 2016:321; Eaton & Ihuah, 2013:938; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Finally, and importantly, it allows researchers to study various aspects of the phenomenon being investigated whilst addressing the matter of generalisability (Bryman, 2004 in Armitage 2007:5; McMillan & Schumacher 2014).

4.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics in research is fundamentally about the values of the researcher, to which I am unreservedly committed. Since there are strategies that can be built into the research design to embed ethics into the study, the extent to which it will be adhered to still remains within the personal choice of the researcher (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015:260).

The Belmont Report (in Mertens 2005:33) identifies three major principles of ethics in research:

- **Beneficence:** The commitment to ensure that the outcomes of the research are for the good of science, humanity, and the individual.
- **Respect for the participant.**
- **Justice:** Those who may take risks in participating in the study must be benefitted in some way.

These principles were applied within the study as discussed below.

4.9.1. Respect of participant

The principle of respect for the participant was ensured in the following ways:

4.9.1.1 Written informed consent

All participants in the survey phase as well as the focus group interviews and one on one interview phases, were required to complete written informed consent. In the survey phase the written informed consent was integrated into the survey tool together with detailed information on the study being conducted, including the purpose of the study, how participants would be able to access the results and contact information for both myself and my study leader.

In the focus group interview sessions and one on one interview sessions, participants were exposed to a detailed presentation that once again covered key aspects of the study. Written informed consent forms were then provided to the participants for completion and signature. It was only once this was complete that the focus group interviews were commenced. (Mertens & Ginsberg,2009:12).

4.9.1.2 Voluntary participation

Throughout the data gathering process participants were reminded that participation was purely voluntary. This was expressed in the general information provided on the research study in the survey and was further expressed in the introductory presentation to the focus group interviews and the one on one interviews. One participant group exercised their right and withdrew their further participation after the pilot survey questionnaire was completed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011,48).

4.9.1.3 Beneficence

This refers to the commitment of the researcher to ensure that the outcomes of the research are for the good of science, humanity, and the individual. The results of the research can be used to improve existing practices, thus empowering candidates in future. This was ensured through obtaining permission from institutions which were sites for data collection.

The institutions that finally participated in the research study, each required that I submit an application for permission to collect data from within that site (see appendix 4). The application form was provided by the institution. This was then tabled at an executive management meeting where authorisation for the study to proceed was received. Only once permission was received did the study proceed. In addition, in all institutions a designated person from within the disability support unit/institution was constantly available for assistance and support in terms of the participants' needs (i.e. protection of the participant) (Marshall & Rossman, 2011,48).

4.9.1.4. Respect for the participant/protection of the participant and Justice.

This was ensured through the confirmation of anonymity. In both the survey phase, the focus group interviews and the one on one interviews, participants had the option of remaining anonymous. In the case of the survey, a hard copy of the survey questionnaire was provided to some candidates so that their anonymity could be protected. In the focus group interviews and one on one interviews participants could reveal their identities, use an alternative name or provide no identification at all (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009:301). This anonymity was also offered to expert panel participants

Furthermore, I ensured the safekeeping of data in a locked safe and through password protection. I, together with the transcriber, have been the only people to have had access to and insight into of the data. In addition, all information is stored in a locked cupboard and all the information on my computer including transcriptions are password protected (Kaspar & Müller-Böker,2006:128).

4.10. CONCLUSION

This study is aimed at understanding the experiences and perceptions of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning current assessment practices at the PSET institutions to which they are attached. In this chapter, I described the theoretical and research paradigms which determined how I went about the identification of potential research participants, the design of my study, the construction of research instruments, the sampling processes I used, the collection and analysis of my data, and the steps I took to ensure the trustworthiness of my study.

All of these were not only described in detail in this chapter but also justified in terms of their research authenticity and relevance to my study. A key part of this description was my detailed narrative of the challenges I had to overcome in gaining access to research sites, motivating participants to enter and remain in the study, and collecting data.

The presentation of data collected through the use of my research instruments (survey questionnaires, focus group and one-on-one interviews), the themes emerging from the analysis of data thus collected, my interpretation of the themes and the implications they have for the design of an alternative assessment model are dealt with in Chapter 5, which follows this one.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

In Chapter 4, I described in some detail the theoretical and research paradigms in which I opted to frame my study, citing from a review of research literature and my own experiences of the challenges that adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning have to face in the course of their journey towards the achievement of a post-school qualification. Also described in Chapter 4, with reference to relevant literature, were the instruments, methods, processes and procedures I used to select my research sites and subjects, to collect and analyse data, and to ensure the ethical nature and trustworthiness of my study and its outcomes.

In Chapter 5, I present the findings of my study as well as my interpretations of these. In order to do so, as I indicated and justified in Chapter 4, the data I collected from both versions of my survey questionnaires – the original ones I piloted to ensure their quality and language appropriateness as well as the fine-tuned one which would originally have been used to collect data – was merged into a single data set. This combined set, in turn, was merged with the data sets generated by my focus group and one-on-one interviews with learners, lecturers and disability specialists. The findings presented in this chapter emerged from the analysis of my merged data.

I present my findings in this chapter in the form of seven stories (institutional stories; participant stories; disability specialist stories; teaching and learning stories; alignment stories; assessment stories and mind-set stories), each of which contributes to the telling of my composite research story, that is, the story of how current assessment practices at three PSET institutions (2 public and 1 private) inhibit or support the learning progress and academic performance of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning. represent my research findings. While the composite story is mine, the stories which constitute it are not: they represent the lived experiences of those who tell them – the adult learners who are the main characters in my composite story, the lecturers whose approaches to teaching,

learning and assessment support or inhibit these learners' progress and performance, and the disability specialists whose function it is to support and guide learners and lecturers alike in their attempts to ensure that the learners involved reach their final destination – a qualification which will open up the gainful employment opportunities they hoped it would when they embarked on this journey.

Included in these stories, which unfold in the context of post-school education and training institutions in South Africa, are the profiles of the narrators and the institutions to which they are attached, the ways in which each group of narrators experiences and/or views their institutions, the programs offered at these institutions, the teaching, learning and assessment practices which are the norm at the different institutions, the ways in which people attached to a specific institution relate to and/or interact with one another, and the extent to which all these either support or inhibit the learning, progress and academic performance of enrolled adult learners with learning disabilities and/or other barriers to learning.

The story told in this chapter concludes with a summary of the lessons I, as the researcher, learnt during the course of my research journey into the post-school world of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning. How I used the insights I gained to try and make the future journeys of learners like these somewhat easier and more enjoyable is the thrust of the next chapter, Chapter 6, in which I present an alternative model/framework for the assessment of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

In South Africa, the education and training system is a three-tier structure – general/school education, further/college education and training and higher/university and Technikon education and training. In my story, I do not distinguish between further and higher education; instead, I combine them in the use of the term, 'post-school education and training'. I therefore refer to the institutions at which the stories of my character unfold, as post-school education and training institutions (PSET). The only distinction I draw in this story is between public and private sector PSETs, three of which served as my research sites. I specifically chose one institution from each of these sectors because a comparison of the ways in which a public and private sector

institution approached the teaching, learning and assessment of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning would add an additional perspective to the study.

Data collected at or through these institutional research sites did not include the analysis of any documentation or my observation of any teaching, learning or assessment practices. The profiles of the institutions as described here are based solely on the data provided by my research participants – their ‘institutional stories’. Using only participants’ perspectives on their institutional experiences was one of the methods I used to minimize the possibility of my own subjective experience of adult education and training distorting or contaminating the data and/or influencing the findings emerging from these. The functions served by the institutions in my study were thus twofold: (a) to identify, on my behalf, information-rich research participants, and (b) give me access to their premises and staff for data collection purposes.

As indicated in Chapter 4, of the ten (10) PSET institutions I approached to serve as research sites (1) participated in the piloting of my survey questionnaires; only three – two a public sector PSET college and the other a private sector one – served as research sites for the subsequent collection of data duration of my study. The stories narrated in Chapter 5, as well as the conclusions drawn from them are therefore representative only of what happens at these institutions: it cannot be generalized to any other institutions in the public or private sector.

5.2 INSTITUTIONAL STORIES

The institutions which served as my research sites enrolled post-school learners with and without disabilities and/or barriers to learning. Learner data collected by means of the survey questionnaires indicate that, while learners wanting to enrol at private PSET institutions have to provide medical documentation specifying the nature and extent of their disability, the disclosure of a learner’s disability is not mandatory at public PSET institutions. Many learners at these institutions therefore do not disclose their disabilities and, by implication, are not at the receiving end of the accommodations and concessions that their institutions offer to learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

According to the lecturers and specialists who participated in my study, one of the reasons why adult learners who enrol at public sector institutions do not declare their

learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning might be the unfamiliarity of the processes required to do so. Indications from the literature I reviewed are that most adult learners with learning disabilities find the transition from school to post-school education and training challenging, especially if they come from special needs school environments where their specific disabilities were known and the requisite support structures were readily available. This is not necessarily the case at public Post-School Education and Training (PSET) institutions, where the disclosure of disabilities, special needs and/or learning support needed is the responsibility of the learners themselves. According to the learners, lecturers and disability specialists who participated in my study, the length, complexity, and unfamiliarity of the processes and procedures at the post-school education and training institutions (PSET) in general, including the ones to which they were attached, tend to completely “overwhelm” and/or disorientate potential adult learners with disabilities. The anxiety caused by such disorientation, according to them, tends to be worse at institutions which do not have disability units whose staff members could guide and support learners through these processes and/or procedures. Consequently, prospective learners might do one of two things: (a) decide not to enrol, telling themselves, as one of the learner participants in my study initially indicated, that “tertiary education is not for me”, or (b) enrol without declaring their disability.

Another reason, emerging from learner data was learners’ fear of stigmatization.

“You know what I’m not a bragger. I know what my capabilities are. And you know what all I’m asking is you must just give me an opportunity, I will surprise you. But what I find interesting is when people brand you or label you as something. What they’re telling me is you are actually the one with the disability. You’ve got a mental disability that’s what you’ve got. I’ve got different abilities.”

Others felt that they had already been ‘branded’.

“Okay but now I must add, the schooling system now, if the exam paper was read out to you and you answer it, from next year they’re printing it on your matric certificate.”

One of the lecturers, who is disabled – having only one hand – emphasized the negative effect of such ‘branding’.

Do you want me to give you an example? I mean mentally there’s nothing wrong with it but the employer won’t employ him. Because they don’t know how to cope. Somebody asked me would you be able to answer the phone and still work on a computer. Really? Really? (facilitator is disabled – has one hand). Yes. I identify strongly with them.”

Another lecturer, although not personally disabled, argued that learners might be afraid that the disability stigma/brand might affect their chances of being employed as well as their eventual treatment in the workplace.

“I’m going to cut in. so what also happens is because everyone focuses on the knowledge, what happens when that learner is placed in a work environment, they’re put in the back office so typically filing, copying, reception so they are not exposed even though they gain the knowledge, they were like you know what guys you’ve got some disease let me put you in the back office.”

Yet other lecturers, realizing that they, themselves, might be subjectively inclined to labelling, or ‘branding’ learners with diagnosed disabilities, admitted that they were very careful not to project these in/during their interactions with learners like these.

“So she comes to class every time and she sits there in front of me and I just go on and on and sometimes I just ask – sometimes they don’t like, I mustn’t ask the whole time are you okay because then they feel stupid”

“You mentioned that the success rate is extremely low with some of these learners. So now as a facilitator you stand there and you immediately brand this person as aggressive, they’re obstructive they don’t want to, lack of information and lack of knowledge because we don’t

know what's happening. You just sit there, sign the register and rather focus on the guys that can"

Data collected from disability specialists at the same public institution reflect their conviction that not declaring their disabilities is a 'two-edged sword' – the declaration of disabilities might result in stigmatization but not declaring it will deprive these learners of the opportunity to make use of the concessions, accommodations and support structures available at their institutions. Because, according to one of the interviewed specialists, learners at the public institution to which she was attached did not declare their learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, none of those who could render the requisite assistance and/or support do not know *"if there are learners with disabilities, any kind of disabilities in the first place...and disclosure only comes later when the learner is experiencing academic difficulty"*. It was only when lecturers notice and inform the disability unit at their institutions of the situation that the *"well-documented institutional procedures"* for the determination of a specific learning disability could be instituted.

According to this specialist, the first step in the procedure is to determine whether or not the learner concerned has seen a doctor, a counsellor or a psychologist who could prescribe the necessary medication and/or render the requisite psychological assistance. If not, the learner is referred to the counselling and development services unit on campus, which is *"free of charge"* to enrolled learners.

More detail on the identification of academic difficulties was provided by one of the lecturers during their focus group discussion. She was emphatic that, although the diagnosis of learning disabilities was *"outside her professional scope"*, that *"only a psychiatrist or educational psychologist can do so"*, she and other teachers were able to identify certain learning difficulties by observing learners' attempts to make sense of content, do assignments, answer questions, or participate in discussions, a key signal of learning disability being a learner's inability to obtain pass marks in tests and/or examinations. They could not, however, refer learners identified with such difficulties to outside experts for diagnostic purpose because their learners could not afford *"professional services ... an appointment with one of them costs in excess of R6000"*, that there was *"practically no access to such professionals via the state system"*, that *"the diagnosis of learner disabilities by means of formal standardised tests was excessively expensive and often quoted for in US dollars"*, that the institution

at which she was employed was *“unlikely to lay out this money”*, and that *“the testing is also very time-consuming”*, often taking *“more than one day”*. They would therefore inform the disability unit at their institution of their suspicion that, based on the academic under-performance of a learner, s/he might have a learning disability. The disability unit would then, at no cost to the learner, take the following steps:

- Use a structured interviewing (assessment form) to determine the general history of the learner’s concerned.
- Seek further information from the student/s parents and teachers.
- If professional support had been provided earlier, also request feedback from these sources.
- Administer a short, basic cognitive assessment that draws on the Cognitive Assessment of Minnesota and the Lowenstein Occupational Therapy Cognitive Assessment.
- Use the Mini Mental State Exam to determine the learners’ reading and writing skills and/or, if any of these learners had been diagnosed as having language processing disabilities – dyslexia, for example – assist them to orally do the online assessment.
- If required, referral for further assessment was provided. Learners with signs of dyslexia, ADHD or traumatic brain injuries would be sent to a tertiary hospital’s neurology department with a referral note.
- The evidence that a learner suffers from disabilities gathered by means of this process would then ensure that her/his application for institutional accommodations and concessions be approved while the application of learners who are not formally diagnosed would be rejected.

Learners enrolled at private sector PSET institutions indicated that they were “not aware” of any concessions or accommodations for learners with disabilities or barriers to learning at their institution. According to them, *“the same rules apply to all learners”*. irrespective of whether or not they have any form of disability. In addition to these concessions, learners at public sector institutions have access to assistive technologies, including software that improves learner accessibility. Concessions include, amongst others, extra time to complete examination papers, - 15 minutes extra to completed examination papers for every hour it is supposed to take, 25% in effect, and access to a scribe or an interpreter during examinations. One of the

specialist participants, however, implied that this might not be enough, rhetorically asking, *“How much extra time is enough?”*. The other specialist indicated that concessions level the playing fields and increases the learners’ chances of success.

“Accommodations and concessions we are using the same ones. We are not giving learners choices- there is no flexibility in the format of the assessment and the medium of the assessment.”

Lecturers at the private sector institution, at which learners are not given extra time, indicated, however, that they

“... do have an arrangement with our invigilators, if there’s a learner that gets anxiety that they should stop the clock and just give the learner a chance to take a deep breath and walk out, come back and continue.”

All the learners who participated in the focus group discussions – those from both institutions (public and private) - felt strongly that there should be concessions for those with learning disabilities and other barriers to learning. Unless this was the case, they argued, the chances that they would be able to successfully complete their studies were slim. Those at public institutions, while acknowledging that concessions were available, indicated that the procedures involved in being granted concessions were lengthy and complicated. Often, according to them, learners who applied for concessions often received them very late, usually at the end of the first semester only. However, once these concessions were in place, according to a learner who found herself in exactly this situation, they made a *“tremendous difference”*. According to this learner, the concessions s/he received enhanced not only her/his confidence but also enabled her/him to successfully complete assessment tasks and improve her/his personal *“pass rates”*.

“And I am now that I’ve got the concession form, I now [able] to complete the exam in which do. So now the, what I myself have to work on is to work on understanding the work better and make sure that I push myself.”

Indications from lecturer data indicate that they, too, agreed that accommodations and concessions were necessary and valuable for adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, with those attached to the public sector institution indicating that, in addition to the concessions and accommodations already mentioned, they used a range of other strategies to accommodate these learners. Included in these were:

“Breaks to rest. Spelling. Extra time. Practical assistance. Handwriting concessions”

“Regular breaks due to high severity of disability and medical requirements, i.e., the taking of medication. The contact time was doubled which allowed for shorter training session. Discussion session and quizzes were used to ensure that learning happened.”

“I allow for extra time in both the facilitation as well as provide simulation for them to practice in a safe and controlled environment.”

Provide sound recorded learning material.”

“I sit one-on-one with the learners and after facilitation hours.”

“Learners had time to process difficult concepts, were able to ask questions and practices the application thereof with the necessary guidance.”

“Oral completion instead of written, interpreters, and time concessions.”

“Allow oral testing. Allow more time for contact sessions. Learning designed for each special need.

Some of these lecturers were convinced that accommodations like these had the required effect on their learners.

“It provided them with ease of reference and enabled improved participation and focus on more important areas of learning.”

“They have allowed them to work without pressure.”

“They are tremendous and they fare better and are competent much quicker less drop outs and less frustration on all parties.”

Others disagreed:

“There has been a little impact considering the time allocated for the module and the expertise (limited) that one has on training learners with such disabilities.”

Even where these concessions and accommodations were in place, the throughput rates of students were as poor as in the institution where they were not, especially among learners with disabilities and/or other barriers to learning. One of the reasons for this, according to learner participants at both institutions was the duration of their programmes which, at public institutions were offered as six-month semester courses and as year-long learnership courses at private sector institutions. Regardless of the difference in the duration of their programmes all the learners who participated in my study felt that there was a serious disjuncture between the duration of the programme and the volume of content that has to be covered. They also felt that the current practice of expecting learners with disabilities to complete the learning programme in the same timeframe as those without such without disabilities, puts enormous pressure on them, inhibiting their learning progress and achievement.

Noting that learners with disabilities fail at least one semester a year, they argued that such learners should be given more time to master the learning content and to demonstrate their competence during assessments.

“I would say from my side that at least it should be a year, because in that time you don’t have stress, yes you have to push yourself so that within that year you must know that I know all these modules, I understand. Not just to do just because for the sake of finishing. But also have the understanding of the work”.

“Why is the duration of the programme for learners with diagnosed disabilities not extended?” “In the context of public PSET colleges, all learners, irrespective of

disability, are expected to complete four subjects per module”.

Learners at the private section institution, being enrolled in learnership programmes, indicated moreover that the fact that they had to work and study at the same time made it even more difficult for them to complete the programme in the stipulated timeframe.

Moreover, according to the learners, none of those who do manage to successfully complete the programme, thus obtaining a post-school education, have thus far attempted to continue their studies at post-graduate level.

“They dropped out because, ja I think mainly we’ve got very few, probably even at this university, if we think about the number of learners who graduate, I mean learners with disabilities who graduate, now we don’t see them in a post grad.”

All the learners participating in my study indicated that they had enrolled for post-school education because they believed that their qualifications would make them eligible for employment.

That is, you learning to be able to go to the outside world and be able to do what you have learned now you are not going to be able to go to a working environment, without being well equipped, to be able to be where you’re supposed to be, to do the work because the six months for me I really feel that it is.”

Fifteen (15) of the twenty-seven (27) learners who completed the survey questionnaire, all of whom had been identified as having learning disabilities, indicated that the primary reason they had enrolled in a post-school program was because they believed that its completion would result in their employment. Given what to them was too short a time-span to complete the programmes for which they enrolled, they said that they were afraid that they would not have gained the skills they required for such employment. In the case of learners enrolled in learnership programmes at the private sector institution, the fact that they were working and studying at the same time made it even more difficult to complete the programme in

the stipulated timeframe. According to them, having to maintain a balance between their combined learning and working roles and obligations was extremely stressful, adding to their already existing feelings of anxiety and increasing their sense of being “*overwhelmed*”. Adding to their anxiety, was their perception that the duration of the programme was inadequate for the volume of content that had to be covered.

Since the completion of their programmes was critical to what they envisaged as their future employment opportunities, the possibility that they would not be able to successfully complete the programmes for which they were enrolled made them very anxious. Some of them complained that they did not have enough time to “*read*”, “*understand*”, and/or “*grasp difficult concepts*”. Others complained that the inadequacy of the allocated time resulted in sub-standard teaching which, in turn, undermined effective learning.

“... sometimes it’s the volume of work it’s a lot and like the lecturers, it’s like goes through the work in a hurry for you and you’re still but I don’t still understand this module so how can I go on so it’s a little bit difficult for us.”

Although these complaints and concerns were raised by participating learners with learning disabilities and/or other barriers to learning, they admitted that anxiety about the duration of programmes was common to all learners irrespective of whether they had learning disabilities or not.

“That the learners who don’t have disabilities are also struggling with the volume of work that needs to be done and the timeframe that they have in which to do it. I agree.”

“Because I remember I thought there was something wrong with us but I went to my fellow colleagues who are normal, they said they are going through the very same thing. This thing is affecting all of us but then what must we do.”

“I think because when I speak to my fellow learners, the class mates, I find that they also, when it comes to the time, allocation, they also experience the same problems because most of the learners don’t, they’re also

complaining about the time is not enough. As for the course itself I would also really say it also the course like the time that we are given and the work that we have to do is so much which makes it difficult even if a person is able to complete the course within that particular time that is given you find that you have problems, there are things that are holding you back like the failing because of the time that you have to finish a certain assessment or a certain work, you can't really finish it at that time because there is just so much and there is so little time."

Another reason for the poor throughput rate, according to participating lecturers and specialists was that learners enrolled for the wrong programme, one which they did not really want to do, about which they were not passionate and/or which they would be incapable of completing.

"And they must know, I feel sometimes they must know, they want to do marketing, they enrol – you know when you are doing a course and you're not sure what it's about really, then they enrol and they don't really have the – what's the word, they did not get the background on the subject or on the course so they just enrol for it and there you go."

One of the specialists expressed her concerns about this phenomenon as follows:

"You sometimes wonder. You do wonder, because I mean one, you will find that okay he's doing teaching and you can see that he's passionate about it but as soon as you go to a more general degree like B. Admin then you're wondering okay are you just here to get a degree. Because B. Admin for example is not a degree that I would have necessarily chosen if I wanted to do political science, that I'd rather focus into that, not B. Admin so ja there are sometimes that you wonder"

This, according to participating lecturers could be ascribed to the lack of career guidance or counselling at their institutions. In the case of learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning, moreover, their choice was often determined by whether

or not the programme in which they considered enrolling had the requisite support mechanisms in place to accommodate their disabilities. An example of how this could affect the career prospects of learners with disabilities, mentioned by lecturers during their focus group discussion, was that of a deaf learner who enrolled in an office assistant programme. However, since office assistants would, in the actual workplace, be required to interact with customers and telephone systems, something even a qualified deaf office assistant would not be able to do, their chance of being employed in such a position was nil. Yet, according to this lecturer, it is one of the programmes with the highest enrolment.

Regardless of the accommodations, concessions and support available to them at the public sector institution where they were enrolled, adult learners at this institution, like their counterparts at the private institution felt that the responsiveness of their institution to their disability needs were insufficient. Many of them complained that some of the available institutions refused to enrol them because they would not be able to provide them with the support they needed while those who were enrolled at the private sector institution complained that it provided them with no support at all. In the latter case, learners indicated, they often did not know where to go when they needed support.

“I have a month to read the whole book on my own and do 3 (three) assignments during that period. A facilitator comes only once to give us an understanding of how we should approach the learning material. If we were to face a challenge, we should call the institution and ask for help over the phone.”

“They have their own understanding of where all learners should all be at the same level of understanding without making the provision of learners who need help to be in that level.”

Some of the learners enrolled at private PSET institutions, indicating that support is available via email and telephone only, voiced their frustrations with the ineffectiveness of this system as follows:

“You have their email address. So I called they didn’t answer, so I – I don’t like emails because I think they have less of urgency,

so I preferred calling a person so I called, they didn't answer. I called – the lady who was assigned to help us. I said I can't reach this person so what must I do, I wrote an email. That's when the email came and said out of those 8 [I'm only going to help you with two.]

"That time I remember I send an email back and forth. I was explaining to her that I don't know what you want me to write now. And then she said I promise you she will call. She didn't call. I escalated the matter to my mentor. That's when my mentor was giving the answer of she knows what to do. So I was like I've exhausted all the resources that are at my disposal. I don't know what to do next."

"So the guy said email me when you are submitting your assignment and if you feel that the assessor was being unreasonable that, I never emailed because through the first steps that I experienced, it was like even if I email him, he's not coming back to me with the feedback I need. Let me just find my way through this and just carry on with the material."

Some of the lecturers attached to the public sector indicated that the perceived lack of institutional responsiveness to student needs could be ascribed to poor management and/or administration. Examples of ineffective and inefficient management and/or administrative processes and procedures, according to these lecturers, included:

- Lengthy procurement processes that specifically impact on learners' access to assistive devices and technology.
- Lack of staff resulting from the lengthy mandatory human resource and recruitment procedures, which include long waiting periods for staff to be appointed at lecturer level, as well as the appointment of support staff such as scribes and interpreters.
- Poor and infrequent payment of interpreters, resulting in infrequent attendance and eventually high staff turnover because of the uncertain context within which they work.

- Lack of resources, including access to technology, teaching and learning support and aids, which makes the teaching and learning of learners with disabilities difficult and time-consuming.
- The seemingly dysfunctional admission process in which learners who do not have the required level of capability to engage in the learning programme are being admitted due to nepotism and favouritism.

“So I started asking – then it came out that her aunt was working here at the college. XXX, she’s still here and then I called XXX and XXX told me that YYY is, she honestly has a learning disability. She’s been like that all her years and they thought it would be good to get her into college”.

- The under-resourced disability support units, both from a human resources perspective and the perspective of technology, teaching and learning, and financial resources, as indicated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Resources available to PSET institutions in respect of Inclusivity

Public PSET 1	1 staff member in disability unit
Public PSET 2	2 staff members in disability unit
Specialist 1 at public PSET institution (university)	8 staff members servicing 220 learners
Private PSET 1 & 2	No disability unit to service needs of learners

“But I mean our sign language interpreters are worked too much because they are only three and they are working constantly and they have to rotate between the campuses and they don’t have any of our advantages that we have in terms of their contracts etc. For example, they – the IQMS that you complete for your paper and so on they don’t know whether they fall within the lecturing area or the support or admin area and these people are throwing them around. One day they must come and sign here and next week here. I think they are also very frustrated so I can understand.”

“Definitely, specially of there’s no interpreter. I feel like screaming when I see that poor child come in here and there’s nobody – and she’s lost. The one I have now in N6, it’s the second time that she’s doing it so I’m so worried about her. I’m extremely worried.”

“Another thing I don’t think providers always trust the SMEs they have available to them. So for example like XXX said he told them what mistakes they made. I just don’t think providers are always open for discussion or open for critique and that’s the problem. I mean I have friends, we were facilitating disabled learners now, the focus of the learners and she was specific we need to break every 10 – 15 minutes. She suggested why don’t we use a cheaper venue and pay them a higher stipend and they’re not open to suggestions, they don’t want – they’re driven by money so the cheaper we can do that, the more money at the end of the day. It’s amazing.”

“I’ve asked on numerous occasions to have the post advertised but now that we with DHET there are processes to follow. You need to do a submission; you need to identify the need. The post must be a fully funded post. We are now falling under DHET and then the advertisement goes out. It must run for whatever time. Then there’s application. Long listing shortlisting interviews.”

Associated with these frustrations was the perception of lecturers who participated in focus groups discussions that enrolling learners with learning difficulties and/or barriers to learning and then not providing them with the requisite support not only undermined the human rights of these learners but was also extremely unethical.

“If you enrol a disability learner you must make sure that he can get where he wants to get and even if that means have another disability unit here in this spot – but as I say it’s a money thing.”

“And if you open your organisation for disability learners everything must be in place. Like again like we’ve talked about

interpreters, I don't think everybody realizes how important it is for an interpreter to be there every day."

"Ethically you are doing the right thing because it is the truth and the honest truth that you are saying you don't have the necessary resources but the time. As a wakeup call, what is it that you are doing towards improving the position. Because then you are chasing them away, are you saying giving them an option saying try us in the next month."

"We have a bit issue with interpreters in this college in terms of the quality and in terms of the amount of lecturers. I think we are abusing the human rights of the learners. And stealing their money. And the reason is that the college has been advertising for a very long time that we are this main centre for learners with disabilities and as far as my recollection goes it is a human right for each learner to have a shadow, to have an interpreter that will shadow the learner full time which we don't have. So a lot of times the learners will sit without an interpreter and they don't know what's going on. I can see they're agitated and frustrated. In our faculty we try to accommodate them but I feel from an organizational sense the college is really not up to scratch...."

"I think as an individual yes I do. But I almost want to say all the good work that has been done is can be very quickly destroyed because often they're purveyed these learners as a bunch of show horses until I took offence to it. It's a complex situation and you build a relationship and you try and school get the job done but then you've got all these guys quickly come here, we want to introduce you, these are our disabled learners, come guys let's quickly take a photo and you know what "(exhibits expression of anger).

The only reason why public institutions were enrolling learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, according to these lecturers, was to access the additional funding for learners with disabilities made available by the DHET.

“But that’s the only reason why they do it. I don’t think they really worry about the student’s wellbeing and that makes me that is really making me livid.”

What was especially unethical, according to focus group participants, was the fact that their institutions were not ‘delivering’ the ‘product’ they had sold to learners and their parents. In this regard, one of the lecturers at the public sector PSET College, mentioned that the Human Rights Commission had brought her institution to court because it had failed to timeously provide the learner with the requisite assistive technology.

Those teaching at private PSET institutions, which do not receive public funding, agreed that money was the driving force behind the enrolment of learners with disabilities. More specifically, according to these participants in this sector, the training of learners with disabilities is driven by BBBEE as well as pure monetary goals, providing learning opportunities to learners with disabilities for the wrong reasons.

“It’s not just about the word. There’s the criteria, it is the selection, it is we’ve got our own agenda, do you know that our agenda carries more weight than that person’s life so you know what, you’ve got a disability, great sign it, off you go, lekker. There you go. Then – I, we mess up that person’s experience with our agenda. What is the agenda? Do we really want to upskill or are we in it for the money? I’m talking companies. I want a tax rebate. That’s what I want.”

One of the reasons for this situation, according to the two participating specialists, could be related to institutional leadership and management. According to them, visionary leadership and effective management were critical to an institution's ability to respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). Both of them emphasized the need for buy-in and accountability at the executive and leadership levels of the institution.

"Where the other faculty where the dean was open, he invited me to come and address lecturers in a faculty board. That is very important. The support from authorities."

"Ja, because I was invited to the faculty board meeting. This year. So and that at least I've had one school where I had to present a workshop. So at least things are happening but gradually but so the support is critical. It's critical and until I – until every department within the institution realizes how important this is, and that it is everybody's business. Everybody's responsibility. It cannot be a responsibility. It cannot succeed if it's a responsibility of one individual or one unit. Or one department."

"A lot of our deaf learners are actually candidates for the University of Technology. And the unit there are not set up in such a way to actually accommodate them. They're not willing, according to their policies and procedures they are not forced to appoint a sign language interpreter and so then the deaf learners come here because they know they will have the access and I'm concerned because for how long will we be able to continue with the service, in terms of the amount of sign language interpreters that we need..."

"Critical success factor is executive leadership, a commitment at executive level to seeing the process through is critical if we are going to change mind-sets. We have not succeeded here. We are a "lone voice in the wilderness""

One area in which, according to them, effective leadership and management are absent is policy development and implementation.

“Let me talk about the policies quickly. Now what, there’s not a policy on – for disability at the university at the moment. There’s a draft policy that’s been rewritten and rewritten for years now but you’re not allowed to say that. I think it’s the processes involved and how you have to get to approve it and people to consult with etcetera. The previous head of the unit started the process. I started the process that’s now stopped again.”

5.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS’ STORIES

The profiles of research participants presented in Section 5.3 emerged from the amalgamation of data collected by means of the survey questionnaires, focus group and one-on-one interviews described in Chapter 4. Quantitative profile data, which paints a demographic picture of learners and lecturers respectively, are supplemented with qualitative data collected not only by means of the survey questionnaires but also by means of focus group and one-on-one interviews. The profiles of the two purposively selected disability specialists are, however, based on data collected by means of one-on-one interviews only.

5.3.1 Learner Profile

Ten learners – 5 women and 5 men, who were enrolled students at Further/Post-school Education and Training institutions at the time of my study, participated in the completion of the piloted survey questionnaire/s. Their ages, as indicated in Figure 5.1, fell within the 20 to 47 age range.

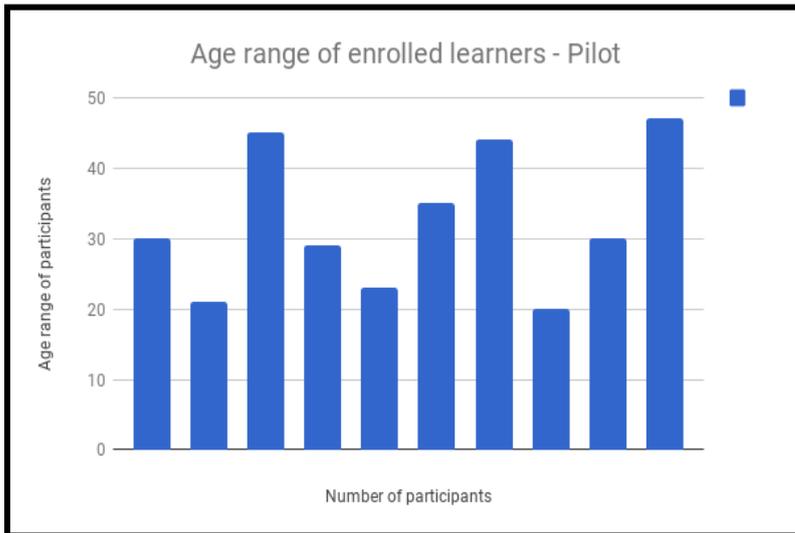


Figure 5.1: Age range of enrolled learners

Data on their diagnosed learning disabilities (see Figure 5.2), collected by means of the survey questionnaires, reflects a mix of intellectual, emotional and physical disturbances, all of which could potentially impede their learning progress and academic performance.

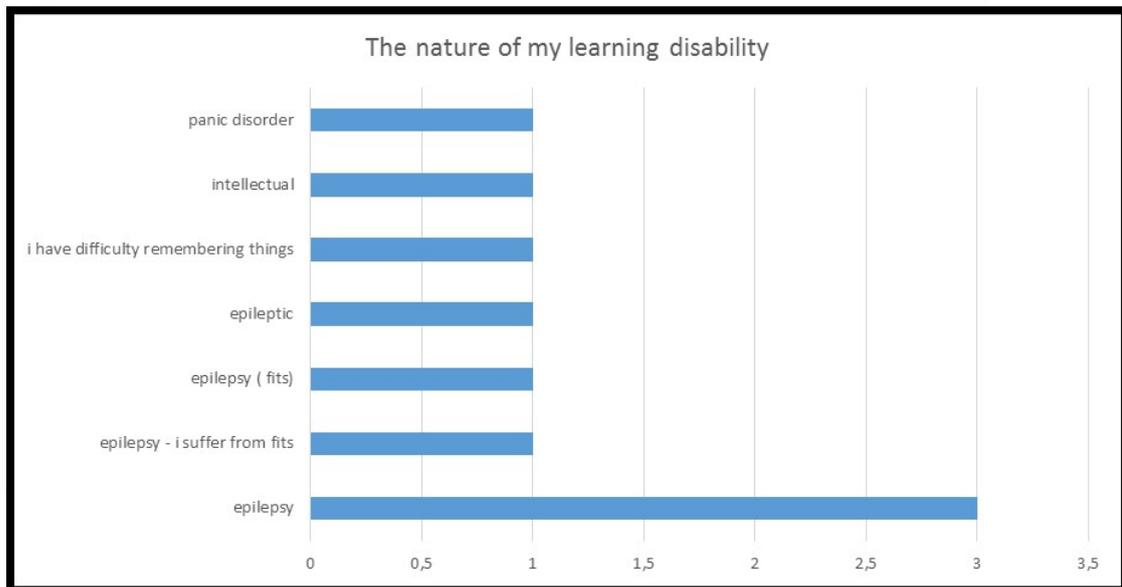


Figure 5.2: Nature of disability with which learners are diagnosed

Data collected from lecturers indicated that the range of disabilities with which they were confronted in their classes on a daily basis (see Figure 5.3) was much wider than the range of disabilities declared by the adult learners who participated in my study.

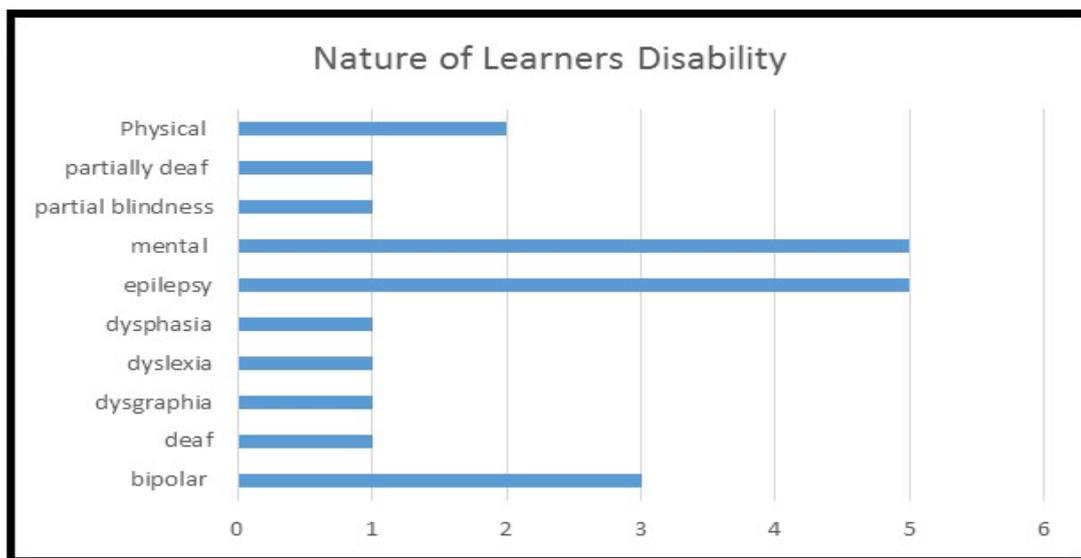


Figure 5.3: Nature of the learner disability that facilitators were facilitating at the time of this research

Interviewed lecturers indicated, moreover, that the medication prescribed for learners with diagnosed learning disabilities often had a negative effect on their behaviour, sometimes making them “extremely aggressive”. These behavioural changes, according to the lecturers were especially noticeable when it was changed during their regular check-ups, which were mandatory in State institutions. One of the lecturers who were interviewed described the effects as follows:

My personal experience where someone’s medication was changed and it was the scariest thing I have experienced. From someone that you met and on medication and it’s like it’s a normal person. Normal people. There’s nothing wrong. Changing medication to that person flipping out and you know what they will need help here. We seriously need help and it started off the other learners mentioned to me that they changed the lady’s medication. She was sitting in the classroom and she was complaining about breeze, constantly, the aircon was turned off. The windows were shut. Then it’s the breeze and she’s looking at the desk, says there’s a breeze. Then eventually this thing escalated where she started taking off her clothes because. It was the scariest thing ever I promise you and then I realised you know what, you’ve

got people that change medication and they say we're changing medication, we will come back in 10 days and whatever time. In the meantime, what happens to that learning process? It has a huge impact. A huge impact."

Apart from their diagnosed disabilities, the learning progress and academic performance of learners are, according to the learners, their lecturers and the disability specialists who participated in my study, negatively affected by their proficiency in the language of teaching, learning and assessment – English, in this case. Some of the learners claimed that their inadequate command of English reading and writing skills impeded not only their learning but also their performance during assessments because they *"don't understand the question"* or *"the exam paper. The "structures it's difficult for us to understand"*, *"we need an interpreter during the exam"*.

What also emerged from the written comments of participants who completed the survey questionnaire were not only the difficulties posed by their inadequate English proficiency levels but also the effect that this had on their emotional states of mind and their academic progress.

"I have no confidence because I am misunderstood deep the assessment. I don't feel comfortable this course because it is difficult to understand."

"When I do not understand the question and can't spell words I am writing down in my exam - taking alot of time writing." (Note English proficiency).

"I failed three times because I misunderstood English structure and jargon in the textbook and exam questions."

Comments made by learners who participated in the focus group discussions further emphasize the effect which their inadequate English language proficiency levels have on their ability to understand the instructions and questions included in examination papers and the anxieties they experience as a result of such inability.

D

"I don't understand the vocabulary of the question."

“Say the question if I read it, there will be one word that sparks my mind, okay they’re talking about this piece of work so you have to chart down that piece of work but sometimes I would read a question and I would read a question and I would think are they asking this or what are they really asking and I would read again and again and sometimes it doesn’t make sense. Some questions just don’t make sense. And then you ask yourself why they put a question that doesn’t make sense.”

“Some of the other questions they are difficult, maybe you are studying the books and then when you come to the paper it’s changing, it’s not the same that are...”

“You find that there are words that, you find this word I don’t understand, of which that one word makes you to lose the questions – the question in which how they want, if you don’t understand a word in the question, then you’re not sure of the question itself – I might not be answering this question the right way, because you might think you know what is being asked of you. Your answer is I think different from what you want...”

“I personally feel because of the way, like every time when I have to write an exam, I don’t feel like I don’t have that – I don’t have that spirit like you know, like I am positive but I don’t feel most of the time, I feel that I don’t understand everything, I don’t understand everything that is in the text book or everything that we’ve learned so far and I feel that I’m not sure about what they’re going to ask, how they are going to ask the questions and then I’m also worried about will I then be able to answer in a way that will be clear to the marker – because sometimes you find that for externals.”

“So that we are writing in a way in which that person will be able to understand what you are saying. So that worries me a lot because I know that my English is not that good and also the work I don’t have – I don’t have that much understanding.”

This theme also emerged consistently in lecturers' focus groups and one-on-one interviews. They ascribed learners' poor language proficiency to the use of their mother tongues as instructional medium at schools.

“Unfortunately, and I know I will not be very popular for saying this but most of our learners did not get high enough scores to go to the university or to the CUT. So there, not only the educational level but I also think to a certain extent the intellectual level may not be as good as the next person however the fact that the language is also making it more difficult is really hampering these guys. I can see when I'm caring the national papers, you can see some of them just don't have the grasp of language. How they got through Gr 12 I sometimes wonder and that bothers me. But I'm a stickler for language. That is my passion. I get angry to see how these guys, what they are doing.”

“Language is disabling the learning process”.

The two institutional disability specialists, while agreeing that learners' English literacy skills constituted a major learning barrier, ascribed it to the environments in which learners had grown up.

“Their academic literacy is very poor and those learners coming from rural communities are unable to write academically.”

Their concerns about this learning barrier were so strong that they had convinced the institutions to which they were attached to set up language development units whose primary role was to develop learners' English writing ability to a suitably appropriate academic level.

The unit for language development has been set up and we have requested assistance for establishing a model for deaf learners in assisting them with academic writing. At schools for the deaf teachers don't do sign language. For the deaf their first language is sign language.”

In this regard, one of the interesting pieces of advice these specialists had, according to one of them, given to learners without an identified learning disability but with poor language proficiency was to record their thoughts on a specific topic on their cell phones and then to transcribe the recording in writing. Lecturers, focusing on the effect that learners' poor language proficiency had on teaching, learning and assessment, argued that the time allocated to these was insufficient. They therefore suggested an increase in the time allocated to teaching, learning and assessment to make provision for the lack of language proficiency, not only among learners with disabilities but also among those whose mother tongue was not English (Kaur et al. 2016).

Closely related to participating learners' low English proficiency levels, so it seems from some of the learner comments already cited, is their assessment illiteracy as illustrated in learner comments on the difficulties they experience in trying to 'decode' the meaning of assessment questions, is the suggestion that they do not understand 'assessment jargon' – what they are required to do when they are asked to 'compare', 'contrast', 'analyse', 'apply, 'illustrate' or 'justify' something, for example.

Last, but not least, according to the lecturers were external factors which hampered learner progress and performance. Included in these, according to lecturers who participated in the focus group discussions, was the impact of gender, race, socio-economic background/status, and perceived discriminatory attitudes or practices.

“More than two weeks ago she (referring to one of the learners) called me one day and said the landlord where Joy and those were staying had apparently an issue with the electricity provider and they didn't have warm water for two or three weeks, whatever, they can't cook. They received those food parcels but they couldn't cook them so it was about more than two weeks ago me and Adele, we went to Checkers and bought a few of those meals of the day and we heated it here and gave it to them”

“One person has to support a whole family, that's a stipend, let's call them serial learners. We're finishing at 4 or 5 in the afternoon, what time do they get home and thy still need to do assignments and study.”

“I did find that some of the girls in particular were at least in the community where they worked sell their bodies or cigarettes or drugs or even – so that would impact – on the environment. And is there – they had to go and get their grants.”

One of the learners had this to say about the intersectionality of his disability, his race, gender and language.

“Let me make a comment. It’s difficult for me to find a position. If you go and you analyze that. I didn’t get this disability two years ago. I was born with it. So okay yes there’s been discrimination since – all my life. But as one of the legislations written currently white Afrikaans male, irrespective whether I’ve got a disability or not. I’ve suffered since birth because I’ve got a disability I was discriminated against but no one accommodates me in this process. I’m still classified as a white Afrikaans male irrespective, so you know what I’m screwed either way. That’s the reality.”

5.3.2 Lecturer profile

The age range of the eleven (11 lecturers) who completed the pilot questionnaire (hereafter referred to as Participant Group 2) is not as wide, most of them either being, or fast approaching, 40 years of age (see Figure 5.4).

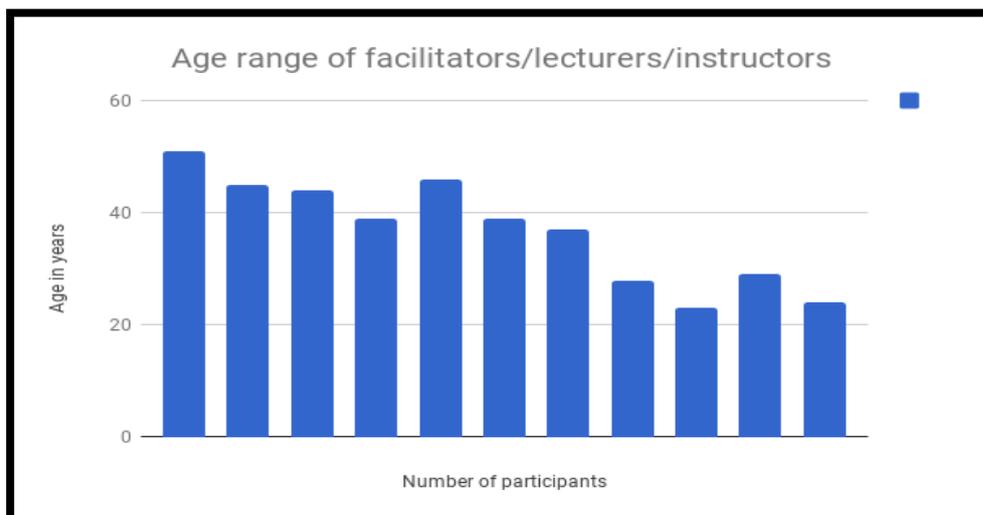


Figure 5.4: Age range of facilitators/lecturers/instructors in pilot survey

The gender ratio of participating lecturers who were identified by their institutions as working with learning-disabled adults (Figure 5.5) indicates that most of the lecturers are female. This could simply be because more women than men enter the teaching profession – the determination of which could not form part of this study, or that women are more effective in the facilitation and/or support of learning-disabled adults' efforts to produce the prescribed programme outcomes.

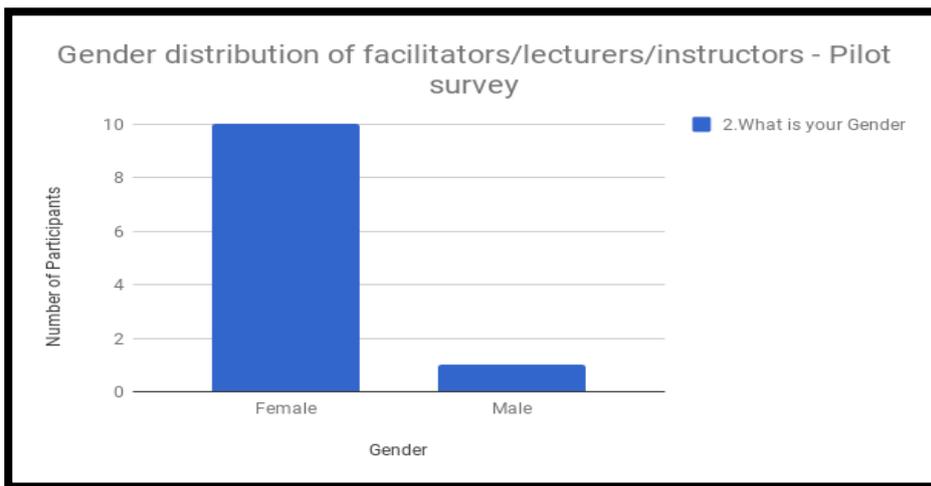


Figure 5.5: Gender distribution of facilitators

Given that most of these lecturers are between twenty and forty, it could be assumed that most of them are experienced teachers. However, when one compares their general teaching experience with the specific experience that they have of teaching adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), their experience is in fact limited, with a maximum experience of five years (Figure 5.6).

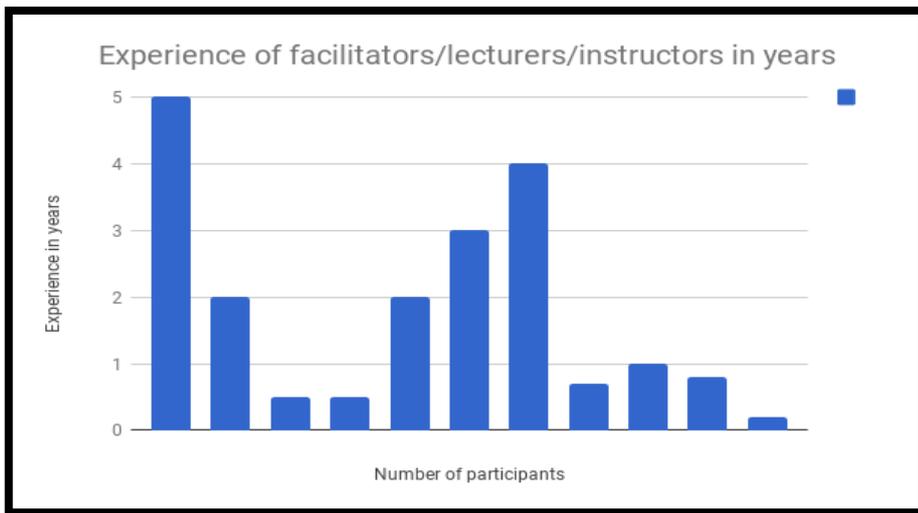


Figure 5.6: Experience of facilitators with learners with barriers to learning (learning disability) among pilot participants

Also, indications from their responses to the survey questionnaires and the views they expressed during focus group discussions indicate that not all of them have the requisite knowledge, understanding or skills to effectively facilitate the learning of adults with learning difficulties. Survey questionnaire data indicate that none of the lecturers who participated in my study had either an academic or a professional qualification related to the teaching of persons with learning abilities. One of the participants indicated that she had done a “*Facilitator, Assessor & Moderators Courses. No disability training*”; another indicated that he had “*set out to become an artist*”.

So we started all of us that start here at the visual arts and design faculty doesn't necessarily have teaching backgrounds, specifically because it is a specialized field but as the PSET sector.”

Some of the participants did, however, have Post-Graduate Certificates in Education (PGCE), a qualification which prepared them to enter the teaching profession but not necessarily to work with special needs learners.

“At one point there was a lot of guys enrolling for the PGCE”.

“We teach our teachers how to teach but we don’t teach them how to deal with disability, we don’t teach them how to deal with ADHD, bipolar or depression or anything of that kind.”

Only two of the participating lecturers, one whose “1st degree included psychology”, and another who had “studied Occupational Therapy before entering the teaching profession”, indicated that they had some knowledge and understanding of disabled learners’ needs and the challenges associated with their teaching and learning. The latter indicated, moreover, that she still tried to attend as many SAOU workshops as she could to improve her facilitation of such learners, “e.g. application for concessions, ADHD”. Yet another participant indicated that, in addition to her “PGCE via Unisa”, she has done “the SETA courses that are part of the OD ETDP qualification” which she is “still busy completing”. Adding to this, she said:

“I always read up the various conditions and inform myself prior to a session to make certain that I am empathetic towards the learners and how far I can push their limits. I don’t want to “coddle” them either. I want to give them a fair chance of success without feeling that I am “mothering or feeling sorry for them””

Some of the participating lecturers indicated that much of what they knew about the teaching and learning of persons with learning barriers/disabilities had been “self-taught”, that their teaching approach was informed by their personal experience of disability or that it was their personalities which enabled them to teach adults with learning difficulties as is obvious in the comments below.

“I haven’t received any preparation. My advantage was that I have a disability and hence could relate to the learners and the challenges they face.”

“Honestly speaking I haven’t gone through any developmental stage. I just am the kind of person I am, who is passionate about the work that she does and also I think a patience that I – sympathizing.”

Others indicated that they had received on-site support and guidance.

“Received a brief background from the training provider on the types of disabilities to expect, nothing else.”

“I have received the training before I started my class and before I facilitate I have to do a preparation before I go to class.”

“Before I facilitate I get preparation of the unit standard that I will be facilitating on that day.”

“None, apart from one-on-one coaching. No sensitisation at the time, had to learner to accommodate needs and slow down the programme.”

Unfortunately, according to them, the support they received from the institution was not sufficient.

“But for everybody in the line I feel the field is foreign. It’s still foreign. You don’t know who to speak to, what to ask. Always how to engage this topic. So I think the whole thing of starting a dialog becomes a challenge but I feel that there’s, I get more support from google and YouTube than I get from the college.”

“We have very few software, I know that the disability unit have some kind of software to support the learner but like for any normal lecturer I feel you should have the kind of software that actually help you create for example subtitles for videos when you watch videos.”

A number of the participants indicated, moreover, that their lack of knowledge undermined their confidence and/or made them feel inadequate and/or insecure, hence they were in need of training.

“Me myself I can’t give them any support. I don’t have the knowhow. It would have been much easier if I had that background. But yes I think it is negative, if you look at assessment from a lecturer’s view point, we are really – but we don’t have the knowledge or the “know how” or any additional resources that we can use for them.”

“.... if a lecturer is not even experienced with the very same learners, you find that the very learners will fail, because you don’t even understand them. That’s why most of the time we believe that in the tertiary institutions lecturers should be trained to accommodate the very same learners.”

Such training, according to them, should serve a dual purpose, namely to develop them professionally and to keep them abreast of the latest development in the field of disability teaching and learning. As to specific aspects on which they needed training, participants mentioned ways of adapting curriculum and assessment tasks to learning disabilities of adult learners and ensuring that learning materials/resources were suitable for and accessible to learners like these. They argued, moreover, that the kind of training they needed could only be offered by means of formal education and training programmes. However, according to them, their attempts to engage their institutions in discussions around such development, specifically the PGCE route, as a means of improving their current skills level, have failed.

5.3.3 Disability specialists’ profile

The three specialists with whom I conducted one-on-one interviews were both attached to the public sector institution. Two of them are in charge of the disability support unit at the institution and is therefore intimately involved in the integration and support of adult learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning into the institution as well as in the assistance of lecturers by whom these learners are taught. The other one is herself a lecturer but also attached to the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the institution, which provides the disability unit with support, trains lecturers in the adaptation of their teaching practice to the needs of learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

All these specialists contribute to the raising of greater awareness for learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning through their own research and the publication of articles on inclusive and special needs education in academic journals.

5.4 TEACHING/LEARNING STORIES

The focus group interviews I conducted with learners significantly enhanced my understanding of the ways in which those learners with disabilities experience the teaching and learning practices to which they are exposed. According to them, the lecturers “*just talk*”, suggesting that traditional approaches to teaching and learning – oral transmission of knowledge coupled with the reading of textbooks - are still the norm in most classes. According to learners who participated in the focus group discussions, concepts are neither explained nor illustrated by means of examples, thus making it very difficult for them, as learners, to develop the requisite conceptual understanding. Consequently, they feel “*overwhelmed*” by the amount of theoretical content they are expected to assimilate, a feeling that is exacerbated by what they perceive as “*limited contact time*”.

There was a strong sense amongst these focus group participants that these traditional approaches should be replaced with or supplemented by the use of alternative and more flexible teaching and active learning techniques.

“The person that’s explaining the work the lecturer or whoever must be asked to explain, you don’t understand them because they’re not explaining in a way that is, they’re not breaking it down properly for you to be able to understand. Because the way of which I understand things is different. She understands things in her own way. I understand in my own way.”

Their belief that these alternate teaching/learning approaches would work seem to be informed by their own experience of or exposure to such approaches. In the words of some of the learners:

“I have a problem lack of concentration if I study too much and I read I lose concentration so like I remember that – when we were doing our assignment they were interacting and they came up with ways that we don’t forget what we were taught. I remember there was an exercise that we did. Ma’am used speech bubbles, visuals with colours so that it’s embedded in your mind.”

“...they knew that I didn’t like maths because it was difficult but they unpacked it to a point that I understand that I had to move forward because I was a bit behind. But they made a point that I catch up with my colleagues, everything was on point.”

Indications from their questionnaire responses and the interviews I conducted with some of the learners are that demonstrations and/or active learning activities would not only improve their ability to cope with the volume of content but also help them to better understand and more confidently respond to assessment tasks. Also included as alternative methods were visual presentations and representations, peer learning, working through past examination papers, using mnemonics to help learners to remember concepts, grouping learners with similar abilities and/or disabilities together, creating collaborative learning opportunities, helping learners to identify their learning styles so that they could adjust their study behaviour and habits to these, and aligning teaching and learning methods to the needs and disabilities of learners. Specific examples of active teaching and learning suggested by learners include:

“breaking down information in ways that take into account individual learning needs; recapping and/or revising learning content prior to the examinations”; questioning techniques aimed at gauging learner understanding and progress; providing them with suitable accommodations in the classroom, and adjusting the pace of teaching and learning such that the individual needs of the learner is accommodated - “no child left behind”.

“Now when you find yourself in this situation you get lost, you don’t know where to start and how to go about sometimes approaching the material.”

“I agree and I would also think that for me as a person I understand something much, when I, when you make an example like as you are teaching, you make an example, that is easier for me to remember, even I might not understand everything but I will know that mam spoke about something

that's got to do, because she made an example, for me I slowly try to remember what you are saying."

"I might not remember word for word but at least I do understand that we spoke about that topic and it included, she made an example of this so it's going to be easy for me to put together the puzzle, and when I get to the exam then I'm like this I cannot forget because mam made an example of this. Examples for me work easier."

Some of the comments made during learners' focus group discussions seem to suggest that they are discouraged from asking questions during contact sessions/lessons:

“. of which I'm not sure if I understand it right, because I find that other lecturers they get quickly upset[ted] when you ask too many questions."

"You have to have the time to give your learners the time to ask questions. If they still don't understand, try to be understanding and explaining so that you know everyone in class is in the same place so that whenever you go you are moving forward with the rest of the class."

"Like ask questions if you start with model (module) A, you feel okay I'm going to ask, we did this model, now I'm going to ask them questions. I will see if they were taking note or they're focusing when I was busy talking to them and giving some pointers of the model. And from there you can – you can see okay but they don't understand because I'm asking them and they're giving me stuff that's not related to the model. Some lecturers don't ask questions, they just go on with the work, like you know the work they go on."

"We all have our own interpretation of the material, but being told to copy and paste the information from the material is so limiting that you don't have the power the challenge your own understanding of the material at all times."

What emerged during lecturers' focus group discussions were the opportunities and challenges related to the inclusion of learners with and without disabilities, all of whom have to be prepared for their examinations.

"You had a mixture of both learners with disabilities and without. So what was nice and they were all youngsters so they were all under the age of 25 in the session and the abled learners, what was nice for me as a facilitator I was able to break them into groups and your abled person would take control of that group and as they grouped together they know each other so the abled learners knows the background of the special needs learner and how they explained it – would be totally different to how I would have explained it. So if you were abled bodied how we explain it and they would then in their way explain it to the special needs person, so that was nice, and mine was very successful in that sense. I haven't seen a lot of it that's my experience."

They indicated, however, that they did not have access to a range of resources and support structures that would enable them to provide teaching and facilitate learning that are fully inclusive. In addition to this, according to them, their institution did not seem committed to the ongoing professional development of lecturers to ensure that the methods and procedures they use to facilitate learning and conduct assessment are fully inclusive in nature and purpose.

One of the lecturers interviewed, referring to the changes that learner medication has on the behaviour of learners with disabilities described one of the strategies she used to try and manage the disruption this causes in the classroom.

"I quickly learned I think it's after the third or fourth week, you walk in and have a general conversation. Before we talk let's quickly talk to one another. How was your week, what has happened, how is your business going, anything changed and then as the facilitator you – you know what I've been to the doctor. Yes. Medication still the same? General conversation, they changed okay mental note to self, watch out."

Indications from data collected during my focus group and one-on-one interviews with lecturers suggest that their views on current and ideal teaching and learning practices are very similar to those of the learners who participated in my study. Like the learners, they regard current teaching and learning practices as inadequate.

“Definitely we have to work in a different way with our disability learners so although they – if we really wanted to meet their needs, we need to slow down, we need to do it in a different way. That is why I see my N6 learners having to do it twice.”

“So that’s a difficult thing for me because I want to give them more, I want to stand still a moment at this specific and then explain it again but there’s no time, we have to just go on because of the whole class sitting in front.”

“...they come and do their assessment tasks here in the unit where they use the special equipment and then if there’s something they don’t understand, so for example they cannot do an organogram then they will instruct me how to draw it or else we will just list the different levels and then I will also write the report saying the learner due to his or her disability could not draw the structure so therefore we just listed it.”

“Individual differences among learners- each one needs different attention- I have to find ways that can help them to understand.”

According to them, ideal teaching and learning practices would include one-on-one teaching, peer learning, peer assistance and support, and alternative teaching methods such as the inclusion of video and more visual representations of materials.

Some of the focus group participants believed that the most effective way to facilitate the learning of adults with learning disabilities and/or barriers was one-on-one teaching. Others, pointing out how time-consuming such an approach is, and that it might make it even more difficult for the learners to complete the programme in the stipulated time-frame, favoured peer teaching and learning, an approach in which a learner with learning disabilities and/or barriers could be supported and/or coached by another learner without learning disabilities or barriers.

“I also found, but that was last semester, that there are some of the learners that are sharing the class with them that do know a little bit of sign language and then they are very keen to help them or if I really get stuck and I know there’s something that I need to tell this child then one of the others will assist. You can see they are not fluent in it or anything but they will assist or they will try and that is to me is always a good thing, to see that sense of community.”

“I was lucky in the sense that I had 27 and two were normal non-special needs learners and they played a very big role in the success of the situation. You had a mixture of both learners with disabilities and without. So what was nice and [unclear] they were all youngsters so they were all under the age of 25 in the session and the abled learners, what was nice for me as a facilitator I was able to break them into groups and your abled person would take control of that group and as they grouped together they know each other so the abled learners knows the background of the special needs learner and how they explained it – would be totally different to how I would have explained it. So if you were abled bodied how we to explain it and they would then in their way explain it to the special needs person just to so that was nice, and mine was very successful in that sense. I haven’t seen a lot of it that’s my experience.”

They argued, moreover, that the use of peers to tutor or coach fellow learners with learning disabilities or barriers, as tutors or coaches, peer learning could be used not only for the transfer of knowledge but also to give lecturers more insight into a particular learner’s state of mind, thus enabling them to establish whether or not particular emotional or intersectional issues might be inhibiting her/his learning.

Regardless of which teaching-learning approach was adopted, lecturers participating in focus group discussions emphasized the need for repetition which, they argued, *“ensures the integration of new knowledge into a learners’ existing pool of knowledge”*. They realized, however, that repetition was time-consuming and could thus make it even more difficult for them and the learners to complete the programme in the stipulated timeframe. One way of overcoming the time problem, according to them,

would be to reconfigure the curriculum as a series of stand-alone modules, each of which could be further broken down into smaller teaching/learning units/components. These units should then be taught and assessed separately in order not to overwhelm learners with the amount of content to be covered prior to an assessment. This, they argued, would enable all learners, but especially those with learning disabilities, to more effectively cope with the volume of work to be covered and to better work their way through the course as a whole.

In addition to the suggested modular restructuring of the programme, focus group participants suggested that the curriculum as well as teaching, learning and assessment practices should be adapted to meet the actual needs of adult learners – those with and without learning disabilities and/or barriers. Currently, according to them, this is not the case.

“Now we are doing an activity, she just sits there and she’s reading in the books and then I don’t know, I’m not really sure how to help her to also do the activities.”

“The same for the person who suffers from depression or something like that. If they get all this masses of information they withdraw because then they can’t cope. They don’t have the coping skill. How do I cope with all this information, where do I store all this information? So I would typically say right guys maybe smaller handouts. Here’s a pack we can work through this pack so it becomes a manageable chunk “

“And you realise you know what I’ve lost this person and go back and now what do you do with the other learners. Now they’re sitting.”

An interesting view which emerged during the course of the focus group discussions was that an increase in the number of enrolled adult learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning might actually precipitate more extensive adaptations to PSET curricula, teaching, learning and assessment.

“...but if the curriculum is adapted and better adapted then I think it might make it easier but what do you take out and what do you keep? That is the, is it fair to change a whole curriculum for the limited number of learners that we have. But that is actually I think

where the problem comes in, we need more disabled learners educated or to get further training.”

5.5 ASSESSMENT STORIES

Questionnaire data on current assessment practices indicate that learner competence, at the public institutions which participated in my study is primarily assessed by means of summative, time-based, written examinations aimed at determining whether or not learners are sufficiently competent to progress to the next level of learning or professional practice. Moreover, 60% of the mark achieved in the final examination is used to determine learners' final year mark. By implication, they have only one assessment opportunity in which to prove whether or not they should be deemed competent. Their performance in the final examination therefore effectively determines whether or not they will be awarded the qualification towards which their studies are directed. Even practical assessments and portfolios have to provide written evidence of their competence, with presentations and oral assessments being occasional exceptions. In some instances, visual arts being an example, handmade products are, however, assessed to determine the extent and quality of learners' 'practical competence'.

Learner data indicate, moreover, that the assessment practices to which they are currently subjected are aimed at determining the extent to which they have memorised and are able to regurgitate theoretical/textbook knowledge. Critical and/or original thinking is not encouraged: according to learners they are penalised if their answers or responses to questions in examination papers reflect their own views or particular understandings.

“You don't have the chance to express yourself in the work, because there's by sales management you all like put your own understanding on that paper, you must give it as the book so for me it's difficult to put it just as the book gives me. I struggle a lot to remember the work that the book gives me where I would – I would get a similar meaning in my own understanding what the book is then the teacher will mark it wrong because it's not what the book says. And that for me is also a problem.”

“...when I study then I would like read through a piece of work and then I will try to interpret it in my own way..... I’m using my own understanding so as to understand what is being said and then I would go back to the lecturer and show them this is, okay this is, I was practicing this work that you are teaching us and when I got home I changed, I did it my own way, this is how I did it so she would see okay it’s not exactly – it’s not exactly the way how she was saying but at least I do understand in a way like what she was saying because I’m using my own way but I’m then also like educating her that this is the way in which I learn best.”

“They said no guys take the information from the book as it is, don’t change it. So we were like you are limiting us. They said if you don’t do that you are going to fail.”

The “backwash effect” which this kind of assessment has on lecturers’ attempts to prepare learners for examinations, and on learners themselves, is evident in the following comments by learner participants:

“...the lecturer maybe says she will give you study pointers, and she will say just study the headings, now you just go back, where she says study the headings and then you go and then you find in the test it’s not just the headings. The stuff below the headings also comes in and then you didn’t study that. For me that’s a problem because you can’t give me that, tell me that and then I do it and then it’s not like that then I fail.”

The experiences of learners attending private PSET colleges, while somewhat different, seem to be equally dissatisfactory. Enrolled as they are in learnerships, they have to work (to obtain workplace experience) and study simultaneously, hence their assessment usually requires the submission of portfolios, mostly written, as learning evidence. In order to prepare their portfolios, they have to work through the learning materials on their own, having only one contact session per month, after which they are required to complete all assessments for that module. Support is offered via email and telephone. Unlike their counterparts at public institutions, who have only one chance to prove their competence – in the final summative examination – learners at

private institutions are given three opportunities to submit their portfolios, the third one at their own cost.

Also evident in data collected from learners at private institutions is their perception of assessment as a 'high stakes', 'make or break' activity/event.

"My future depends on this. I have to get this qualification and then for me to succeed and to be where I want to be so if this thing keeps happening (failing) am I ever going to graduate and am I going to be at the level that they want me to be at and if not what's next for me? Because time is not on my side age wise. I need to be independent and I need to discover my true potential so if these things keep happening where am I going to now, future wise, career wise?"

Reflected in these citations is learners' perception that current assessment practices inhibit not only their learning but also their academic performance and progress. This perception is particularly evident in learner comments on the manner in which their assessment tasks are marked and graded.

"I don't understand the marking method"

"The way she is marking I don't understand because it's just scratched with red pen, blue pen so I don't know which one is right, like the other subjects, I know that the ticks, just tick with red pen, like it's scratched so I don't understand the way they are marking our IP."

"I don't understand why my mark is so low"

The effect that learners' perceptions of assessment tasks and the marking and grading of these has on their confidence, self-esteem, and general state of mind is best illustrated in their own words, as is evident from the following citation.

“. like every time when I have to write an exam, I don't feel like I don't have that – I don't have that spirit like you know, like I am positive but I don't feel most of the time, I feel that I don't understand everything, I don't understand everything that is in the text book or everything that we've learned so far and I feel that I'm not sure about

what they're going to ask, how they are going to ask the questions..."

Emotional states like the one illustrated in the preceding quotation inevitably affect their academic performance and, by implication, the throughput rate of the institutions to which they are attached.

"Each and every semester I repeat IP." (Information processing).

"...2015. And then I was failing N4 and N5 and then the only thing that is being difficult is IP because I can't continue to write the IP 6 if I must still write the IP 5."

"...it's a bit difficult for me because now I'm not so far as the other children (learners), I'm a bit slow and now it takes time on a certain section of the test and I don't get to finish my other part of my test and then I lose out on that mark. Then I fail so I'm doing N4 CP computers over again this semester."

"I'm going to fail it by two marks and I don't want to do it over because then I have to pay again for that subject. That's how hard it's for me, because my typing skills and my focus is a little bit too slow."

"...say it also the course like the time that we are given and the work that we have to do is so much which makes it difficult even if a person is able to complete the course within that particular time that is given you find that you have problems, there are things that are holding you back like the failing because of the time that you have to finish a certain assessment or a certain work, you can't really finish it at that time because there is just so much and there is so little time."

Questionnaire data collected from lecturers indicated that assessment practices current at the time of my study consisted mostly of written assessment tasks. Public PSET institutions' assessment practices reflected an overreliance on traditional assessment practices, that is, they adopted a one-size-fits-all assessment approach in which a single, summative, time-based examination, conducted at the end of each semester, was used to determine learner progression or the conferral of a qualification. According to participating lecturers, these practices further disable learners who have

already been diagnosed with learning disabilities, a good example being that the competence of a learner with dyslexia would be determined by means of a written test although her/his disability signifies that he has problems writing. By implication, it is not his ability but her/his disability that determines whether or not s/he will pass.

“Paper based assessments inhibited the learning process. Their attention span was short and it made it difficult to complete the assessment process without regular breaks.”

“It has inhibited them because at first they did not understand given tasks and how they should complete them but now it’s easier to work hand in hand with them because what they write about in their books they instil in themselves”

Both specialists indicated that the same old traditional methods of assessment continue to be used in post-school education and training.

“We are still heavily reliant on the traditional assessment methods of exam based written assessments that strict time allowances are applied to.

Informing this decision, according to them was that lecturers set the examinations with what they regard as the “so-called average student” in mind. Consequently, there was little, if any flexibility in the format of the assessment or the medium of the response for the assessment.

“At the moment I would say they are rigid. The methods that are being used are rigid. There’s no flexibility of any kind and I don’t think the majority of the lecturers even think about the learners with disabilities even if they do have them in their classes. I’m saying so because there have been complaints sometimes from learners, I’m getting from some teaching and learning managers, complaints from learners that okay I would like – the learner would say I’d like to get a retest because I could not answer a certain question. Let’s say for instance a blind learner would say there was a graph there, or there was some kind of image so I didn’t know that was there so now I was not able to answer that question and I have lost marks

there, is it possible that I get a different question on that aspect that would not have the image.

According to them, the use of assessment practices like these had a negative effect on learner performance.

What is the effect of this? We are denying our learners with disabilities the opportunity to learn. We are not levelling the playing fields and it is negatively impacting learning and learning achievement.

Another learner complaint was about the emphasis which assessors place on theoretical rather than practical knowledge which, according to them, is the main reason why they fail.

"I didn't get my certificate because I couldn't do the practical side of it." Therefore, the certificate was not awarded.

Lecturers participating in focus groups agreed with learners that the assessments were too theoretical and that the exclusion of practical examinations resulted in learners being awarded qualifications which assume their competence – i.e., their ability to apply their knowledge *and* skills in workplace situations - while this was, in fact, not the case. Put differently, learners are awarded a qualification without having provided evidence that they have achieved the exit level outcomes of the qualification concerned. In doing so, the standards intrinsic to the qualification were, in fact, compromised. Their qualification and, by implication, the learners themselves, are therefore branded as 'inferior'.

Lecturers participating in focus group discussions blamed the DHET for this, claiming that the subject and assessment guidelines for public PSET colleges, including the lesson plans, assessment rubrics and study guides were dictated by the DHET. Moreover, according to them, the setting of the examination at national level created unnecessary barriers to learning, specifically with regard to those learners diagnosed as having a learning disability. PSET institutions and their lecturers therefore have no say in what is assessed and how this is done. In other words, they are not allowed to adjust or adapt assessment tasks to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.

Because private PSET colleges in particular do not adapt their assessment instruments in ways that would accommodate the needs of adult learners with learning

disabilities and/or barriers, learners are in some instances not awarded the qualification towards which they were studying because are unable to perform the required assessment tasks. Lecturers' comments on this practice clearly reveal their feelings about the maintenance of standards, some being in favour of current practice, some against it.

“Ja they're not looking at the requirement of the qualification. Then they said to the provider you know what this tool is not working for us change it and what happened, they took out all the workplace components. They just gave them knowledge questions so on the NQF Level 5 qualification they were just testing the knowledge, they weren't testing, so from a moderator perspective when I came as moderator I said guys you're testing knowledge which is fine...

...Because the majority are in any case copying from the knowledge material directly. They're not understanding the concept for application and then you took away the application. It's not special need if I take from the space, she may not be able to not cope with the knowledge but she would be excellent with the application.”

“So for example the good one would be your computer [stats] so that the type of questions they ask in the assignment deals with the knowledge so I award a qualification and I say to an employer this person can work Excel because they've done the unit standard in excel and when they sit in front of a computer they can't use a computer.”

“We're saying because you've got a disability, it doesn't matter what disability, I'm only testing your knowledge but I'm saying to an able-bodied person you have to jump through three or four hoops to get exactly the same qualification and to me I don't know if they'll jump but to me I'm not going to give a qualification away free to this person with the special needs want to earn the exactly the same as this person. That's my point.”

“It's dropping the standard. There's not going to be trust number one in the qualifications we're offering because we can't guarantee

quality between the different providers and that's why we – that's because we have a SETA system to make sure the quality across all the providers is exactly the same. Because we are assessing, we're measuring against the unit standard which is the criteria..."

"Just a thought on that. In my view we don't need to drop the standard. Because by saying the standard has dropped what you're saying is the disabled learner is inferior.

Learners' poor performance in written assessment, according to participating lecturers could, however, also be ascribed to what they refer to as assessment illiteracy. Lecturers who completed the survey questionnaires indicated that the academic performance of learners across the board, that is, those with or without learning disabilities, do not know what exactly they are required to do during an assessment in order to demonstrate their competence because they do not know what the assessment criteria are. The lecturers who completed the survey questionnaires, suggested that assessors should therefore ask themselves the following questions – listed here in the participants' own words - when they design assessment tasks:

"What does the assessment require from the learner, to be deemed competent?"

"Is the assessment criteria explained?"

"Are exemplars used to enable learners to understand what the requirements of the assessment are and what the end product should look like?"

Neither do they seem to understand what the roles are of those who are supposed to support them during assessments, as is evident from one of the learner comments in the survey questionnaire, who complained that, "The scribe is there but can't help me with anything if I ask for something to be explained they will say they can't."

They suggested, moreover, that interpreters should be trained in the assessment processes being used so that they could "*assist with guiding the learner to reach their highest potential*".

According to learner participants, the blame for their poor performance in examinations and the resultant poor throughput at their institutions cannot be laid on learners alone.

“...but the only thing I can say is if the subject, assessment is maybe difficult and the rest of the class is failing then the head of the college is supposed to be changing and must know why most of the rest of the class is failing so he must find out and then change that assessment to another one. Because maybe there is a problem, there’s the rest of learners fail that subject

“No help - assessor provides her opinion but does not understand my point of view”

Meeting the marking standard required for me to pass the modules, at the end I’m required to rewrite and resubmit to the extent that I had to start paying to rewrite.”

Emerging from these comments is learners’ need for effective feedback from lecturers on the mistakes that learners make during assessments and the suggestions they offer on ways in which these could be avoided in future. Only then, according to participating learners, would the academic performance of learners and the throughput rate of institutions improve. Such feedback, according to them, was currently lacking due to what they perceive to be a disjuncture between the expectations of assessors and learners and/or the nature of feedback itself. According to learner participants attached to private PSET institutions, which use constituent assessors, the feedback they receive results in learners being even more confused than they had been prior to receiving feedback. Some pertinent comments on this aspect, in learners’ own words, are cited below.

“Lack of constructive feedback, causes confusion”

“Everyone was supposed to be on the same level of understanding the learning material, while the assessor gave contradicting feedback causing more confusion.

“So in that period if now the second assignment I failed, that’s when the assessor has to step in and try to get me where I need to be but

unfortunately during that process it didn't work for me, we were going back and forth me with the assessor and then I remember my mentor had to step in and say this person is getting frustrated, what can I do. The response was that she knows what to do. That's why I just – sorry.”

“So the feedback will be like go through your study material thoroughly. Refer to your material. I did refer, I wrote what I wrote. They weren't giving me much to go on. Where would I, how was I supposed to go through. That time I remember I send an email back and forth. I was explaining to her that I don't know what you want me to write now.”

“More relevant feedback. So instead of saying to me elaborate, be more specific about where I have fallen short.”

“And the feedback from the assessors should be clear instead of saying elaborate more, refer to the book, what exactly are you needing from me that it is not that I didn't put there. That will save us more time and money because we will be knowing what to do

There were, however, some positive views on the feedback issue, like the ones below:

“In Office Practice you are given an assignment to do and then we had to complete the assignment within one week and then the lecturer said that the assignment had to be done within that week. It must be - you must research and you must type the work and give it to her so if you can see if you're still on the right point and if you are you can be ready to hand it in.

“If you're not then she'll tell you okay you're not at the right point now. This is what you should do in order to rectify what is missing.”

Indications from participant data are that there is very little effective feedback on assessment at the public sector PSET. In the private PSET sector, assessment feedback is generally provided by the manager to the learner. In this case the manager would be the manager in a workplace context where the learner is obtaining workplace experience whilst learning towards a qualification usually as part of a learnership.

Unfortunately, this seems to create confusion. Ideally it should be provided by the assessor.

“They have got feedback, two months later the manager in the working environment and the manager in the working environment would discuss it so again the different party or a third party in and not necessarily something with an education information background. To understand and interpret.”

“Negative. Because immediately if it’s a not yet competent, a failed outcome they (the learner) don’t understand why. They can’t explain it so they’re negatively motivated. So they’re not going to carry over – they don’t participate in the discussions when they come back into the training sessions – so it’s better.”

“If you look at that process, failure that person not yet competent, what now, then as the facilitator or the assessor you meet up with that learner much later on in the process. Now typically remediation and you sit down and you explain this is what you need to do. They say oh was that it? Why do they have to put you through all the trauma– you know what it’s yes you are 100% on track you just need to add this or tweak it and then you meet the criteria.”

When lecturers were asked whether or not they give learners feedback on the tasks they did or the tests and examination papers they had written, one of the lecturers had this to say:

“I only assess the formative that they do in class. When I realise I mark, I mark, but before marking while they do on scribbler, I also let them see where they made their mistakes and correct them and after that I also mark the formative, still I write in the assessment itself let’s say he or she didn’t get it right, I indicate where they went wrong and also explain to them what they should have done and also.”

Another one added:

“They will usually give them some remedial where there’s a need they’ll call them and let them correct where they made mistakes,

obviously through the feedback that they would, or maybe the way the summative was written, or that the assessor would – help them to see where they went wrong with the summative.”

Some facilitators/lecturers/instructors suggested that feedback be provided on a face-to-face basis.

“...it’s the assessor who should schedule the feedback – Yes. And it should be in a face to face environment.”

However, according to learners, there were inconsistencies in the way assessors mark. This becomes evident when learners compare their work and the outcomes of their assessment.

“...personally I think all assessors should mark us the same way. Because we will be helping each other, my peer will pass and I will fail... How is that possible because we are helping each other? I don’t know which merits they are marking our work based on. If we were to understand that maybe, we will be able to meet each other half way.”

Exacerbating the frustration of learners at the private sector institution is learners’ inability to engage with constituent assessors in order to gain more clarity. They tend to be futile, or have to be done via telephone, e-mail or a third party.

In response to questions on what they would regard as ideal and/or supportive assessment practices, learner participants described as ideal those assessment practices with which they felt most comfortable and/or in which they felt confident that they were capable of performing the task required. Differentiating between ideal and supportive assessments, they considered the latter as practices which helped them to complete the assessment task successfully, mentioning demonstrations, collaborative group activities, role play, visuals and colour, oral assessments, and one-on-one interactions (in which a lecturer would adapt assessment tasks to the individual learner’s’ needs, taking his/her disability into consideration) as examples.

There seemed to be a general consensus amongst learners who answered the survey questionnaires that it is the focus of assessment – on knowledge or competence – which could, in the long run determine whether or not assessment is supportive or inhibitive. They were adamant that the focus should be on learners’ ability to practically

apply their knowledge – their competence, in other words. This, according to participating learners is only possible if assessors create opportunities for learners to ‘practically’ demonstrate their performance and if computer-based assessments are included as an alternative to paper-based assessments. Examples of alternatives like these mentioned by participating learners are listed below:

“I can work with my hands like rollers setting.”

“When we have to do a role play in class on different adverts and say what they mean to us and our understanding of the content.”

“When you have to be in the kitchen and to cook.”

“Baking and cooking in exams – showing.”

“Information processing.”

“When presenting a person shows qualities, knowledge and a clear understanding of what he/she is presenting and whilst at the same time demonstrate the ability to get his communication across to those who are listening and in which it also builds his leadership skills.”

“By doing the test on the computer because it makes feel very happy”

Learners enrolled in learnerships, i.e. those at private PSET institutions, indicated that they would like practical workplace assessments to be included as a means of determining their competence.

“To learn and have the experience to work in the, so that when we go out we take what we’ve learned here at the college and be able to do it.”

“So it is important for me to take note of everything that is done and then understand and learn so that when I go out and leave college and finish everything that I had to do at college, it’s easier for me to.”

Only one of the learners specifically referred to the use of formative assessment, defining it in a manner that reflects textbook descriptions of formative assessment.

“The experience is of formative assessment, i.e. the learner responds to a formative assessment task, the lecturer provides detailed and immediate feedback and the learner has the

opportunity to amend the submission based on the feedback received and resubmit (assessment as learning)”.

This is the only description or example of formative assessment identified during the data collection process. This appears to be an isolated incident and clearly driven by the lecturer.

Indications from lecturer responses in the survey questionnaires are that the ideal assessment practices would by definition be aligned to the individual needs of the learner and the nature of her/his disability. Ideally, according to them, the learner’s competence should not be assessed by means of a once-off summative assessment; instead, assessment should be continuous, including as varied a range of assessment tasks/instruments. Included in these could be one-on-one oral assessments; workplace, experiential, practical based assessment; collaborative (group based) assessment; remedial opportunities during the assessment process; more than one assessment opportunity, and modular or programme based assessments.

During their focus group discussion, lecturers indicated that, according to them, assessment practices like the following could have an overall motivational effect on all learners, not only on those with learning disabilities:

“Simulations and industrial theatre”

“Classroom activities, group workshops and demonstration / observations”

“Workplace assessments”

“I believe that a video recorded activity is good to make sure learners get the most of being assessed immediately without the stress. POE based assessments work well for most learners. “

“It is to do more of practical because they understand the assessment better when they are actually doing what is required of them.”

“We discuss the activities together and make scenarios for them to have a clear understanding. We also group tasks which in most cases help them because they work best when they in groups.”

“Learners had time to process difficult concepts, were able to ask questions and practice the application thereof with the necessary guidance?”

“Specialisation of the assessments in accordance with learners' disabilities.

The content should also be designed in such a way that it meets their special requirements, too much information for people who can't read properly nor comprehend with ease becomes a futile exercise.”

“Fairness - you need to take into account where the learners come from, what their background is and experience they have. Validity and current application of evidence is always a challenge seeing that many of the learners have not had an opportunity to gain any work experience and thus often struggle to present evidence in a P.O.E. as many of the material is based on workplace application.”

“Time - you need to take into account that with certain disabilities the learning can be effected by the medication they receive e.g. many times doctors change their prescriptions and the medication in some stage have adverse effects.”

5.6 ALIGNMENT STORIES

The main reason for learners' and lecturers' frustration with current teaching, learning and assessment practices could be, as suggested by participating specialists, the absence of constructive alignment between these and the nature of a learner's disability.

“... complaints from learners that okay I would like – the learner would say I'd like to get a retest because I could not answer a certain question. Let's say for instance a blind learner would say there was a graph there, or there was some kind of image so I didn't know that was there so now I was not able to answer that question and I have lost marks there, is it possible that I get a different question on that aspect that would not have the image.”

Indications are that this is also the view of participating learners who, responding to questions on the alignment or not of teaching, learning and assessment to their disabilities, indicated that they understood the alignment of these to their disabilities as the accommodation of the individualised needs of learners, specifically in terms of the nature of the disability with which they have been diagnosed. Clearly evident from the preceding description/narration of learner participants' experiences of current teaching, learning and assessment practices as well as in the following comments is their perception that these are not aligned to their disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

One of the suggestions learners offered to address this misalignment is that teaching, learning and assessment practices should focus more on practical examples and demonstrations and that these too, should be aligned to the individual needs of the learner. One of the learners, trying to explain why this is may not be the case, said:

"I tasks didn't get my certificate because I couldn't do the practical side of it," (assessment)

"Because they don't understand our different disabilities and challenges and because of their status it seems as if not trained enough."

Another suggestion was that learners with the same learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning should be grouped together. Some of the reasons they gave for this separation are that it would (a) enable learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning to work together and support one another; (b) would make it easier for lecturers to cope with learners like these because it would allow them to adapt the pace at which teaching and learning took place to their needs, and (c) create opportunities for one-on-one interventions, teaching and learning.

"So I would say that if let's say the learners are assessed and then they are found that there are learners who've got learning disabilities and they can be perhaps placed together, so that even if like we are working the three of us, I don't have the fear of I'm the only one in the class that's you know, at least I know that we are working like

she's got her areas, I've got mine, she's got hers, I might be slow in this, she's slow in that but we are all having the same."

Another suggestion was that more opportunities should be created for one-on-one interventions and interactions since this would enable lecturers to address the individual needs of learner. The perceived benefits of such an approach seemed to be based on instances when facilitators had resorted to one-on-one teaching/tutoring.

"So it was on a weekly basis that we would meet with them one on one."

"...it's different in a way she's a little slower but we don't understand things the same way which is also another thing." "The spirit level was high and for that that time I even forgot that I had a learning disability because everything was on point at that time. Everything was on point. Because I remember everything, most of the challenges, they knew that I didn't like maths because it was difficult but they unpacked it to a point that I understand that I had to move forward because I was a bit behind."

Lecturers who completed the survey questionnaires also repeatedly referred to the need to align teaching, learning, assessment and the individual needs and disabilities of learners. They acknowledged that their current assessment practices were in fact unfair and disabling to learners with disabilities or barriers to learning.

"Yes aligned to criteria and without compromising the set standard (outcomes) to be achieved. Ensures qualification, development and growth for the individual and organisation."

"Yes, during the design process a proper needs analysis must be conducted taking different disabilities and environments into account. Currently assessments are designed according to outcomes but not taking abilities and disabilities into account. Upskilling the design and assessment teams to understand the minimum requirements of disabled learners."

“Yes, because the nature of the disability that the learner has can hinder the appropriateness or relevance of the responses that they can give to assessments given.

This can also lead into a learner to be found incompetent whereas the nature of the assessment itself did not consider his disability, meaning that the assessment design was not fair.”

“Yes this will ensure a more valid assessment.”

As regards the alignment or not of teaching and learning to the learners' disabilities, one of the specialists indicated that the approach at the institution to which she is attached is individualised in the sense that time is taken to understand and address each individual learner's needs because it imperative to the successful integration of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning into the institution. The institution therefore provides learners with one-on-one tutoring on a subject-by-subject basis.

“So we arrange a one-on-one tutor session and the tutor rushed through the study material or the study guide and the text book even to explain the module more, and we even had beautiful thing that happened was one of our deaf learners, Maths is actually very visual so when you're in a class as a deaf learner there's a sign language interpreter and trying to make out symbols and all of that, survives the class but then the tutor session is the most important but then what happened with the learner session, we arranged the sign language interpreter but the deaf learner eventually said no, this is not working. Leave it to the tutor to try to explain it to me, because then everything happened visually on the paper, instead of having an interpreter and not coping.”

Staff members who serve as tutors are allocated to learners based on the nature of their particular disabilities, a practice which is possible because the disability unit at the institution groups learners together in terms of their specific disabilities. How this is done, is best illustrated in the specialist's own words.

“It came about where we realized that each of our staff members work with quite a lot of learners individually because they need that individual attention as well. So what happened eventually is that now for example we used to group them randomly. Say 30 learners each staff member but we have now found that because of work, specialized work environments or offices we group the learners per category per staff member.”

In addition to their having to act as tutors, lecturers at this institution is constantly reminded to adapt their teaching and assessment practices to the specific needs of learners with disabilities or barriers to learning.

“You have to realise as a lecturer is that you are responsible for every learner in your class including those ones that are disabled,” (hence the need for adaptations to accommodate the learner with learning disabilities)

To support lecturing staff to do so, the disability support unit provides them with the requisite training. Evidence of the changes brought about by such training is many lecturers’ use of Excel electronic answer sheets rather than traditional paper-based answer sheets in assessments. Other examples include the use of graphics and videos for teaching, learning and assessment purposes. Unfortunately, according to the interviewed specialist, is that *“sometimes lecturers don’t come for training”*.

Whereas the use of new approaches to assessment tend to “level the playing field”, their design and application are both time-consuming as indicated in her verbatim comments in this regard.

“... for that question that has got graphics they need to have a long description of the graphic ... to level the playing field.”

“If you put a video, if you put an image then you have to give a description. With a video it must have sub titles. This is where the captioning goes and this is where the long description is supposed to be, there.”

5.7 MIND-SET STORIES

That human beings and the way they behave have an effect on the way others react to them is commonly accepted. It is also commonly accepted that educators' attitudes and the way they interact with their learners could have either a positive or a negative effect on their learners' behaviour as well as their academic performance. When my research participants were asked about the effect that lecturers had on learners' performance, those learners who responded agreed that lecturers' attitudes towards them and their disabilities in particular had a big influence on their performance. According to them, they perceived lecturers who encouraged surface learning through their overreliance on traditional teaching methods and who failed to provide them with positive feedback as unsupportive while those who were willing to accommodate and or make concessions related to learners' disabilities were regarded as supportive.

"The facilitator has a big influence in encouraging me to stay focussed until I finish the course. Because it is going to improve my knowledge."

"Friendly, respectful and give everyone a chance to speak."

"No child left behind."

"When lecturing take note of the learners being left behind."

"Good influence - she is doing her best to make us understand and achieve our goals."

Unsupportive attitudes mentioned include:

"They are unfair to people with disabilities."

"They get angry when you ask them questions."

"If learners get help we can reduce the failure rate."

Some of the participating lecturers also acknowledged the critical role they play in the learning achievement of all learners, adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning), in particular. The personal qualities which lecturers who are involved in the facilitation of learning to adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, according to these lecturers could be summarized as passion, sympathy, patience, empathy, and tolerance.

“For the facilitators it should be a calling – don’t be driven by money; be driven by a higher order purpose.”

“From the kind of facilitators that I have interviewed or seen working on the same, you know, sphere, I have realised that they are patient, empathetic, and determined. They are also, you know, with them, because if you don’t have such, it’s not easy to work with these kinds of learners. Because they really need you to, they demand that from you as a facilitator to have that.”

As to what they could do to support the learning of these adults, participating lecturers mentioned the importance of first taking note of learners’ needs and then adapting teaching, learning and assessment approaches accordingly.

“It’s test, assignments and also the examination. Because remember something we are guided by the subject guidelines so there’s no other way that we can try to - So DHET dictates the subject guidelines.”

“Let me start by saying this to you, everything is described by DHET.”

According to participating specialists, disability support processes and procedures at their institution focus very strongly on the establishment and maintenance of positive relations between lecturers and their learners. How they go about doing this is best captured in their own words.

“However I do indicate that the student, if the learner doesn’t feel comfortable indicating in the questionnaire what the disability is then I invite the learner to respond via email which they know it comes to me directly. Or to come and visit me in my office by appointment, just like anybody does. And then they will explain and tell you what it is.”

“The report that I got from one teaching and learning manager is that once the teaching and learning manager explains to the lecturer, the lecturers are usually happy to do that for the student, but some lecturers will say okay now this learner wants to be special.”

“We need to consult with lecturers to play their part as well, in the classrooms for example, like the learner that I told you about, the Asperger, if the lecturers weren’t accommodating of him and didn’t understand his background, they wouldn’t have understood him saying remove your – they would have thought he was very rude and so forth. But eventually just because they knew about him, they were informed we encourage the learners to meet with the lecturers as well. So that they can get to know them. That’s the first step. And to understand their needs in the class room as well and then the eventually this lecturer with the earrings, she became the haven.”

“So it’s to get the lecturers to understand so it’s a relationship that we build with them, but also with the learner in terms of needs.”

“Part of the process includes consultation of lecturers in an ongoing and constant basis. A disability support process and procedure has been adopted and part of it focuses on building a relationship between the lecturer and the student.”

Learner participants indicated, however, that it was not only lecturers’ attitudes and mind-sets that had an effect on their academic progress and performance but also their own. A number of learners indicated that for them the learning and assessment processes are fraught with fear and anxiety, that they find the volume of work overwhelming, and that this contributes to their anxiety and desperation. They felt that they had to work harder because they struggled to juggle multiple tasks and remain focused.

“And these four modules you still don’t understand them that well because your mind, my mind is focused on the assignment that I was currently busy with so I’m not sure if it’s me or because I can’t be focused on this.”

Some learners referred specifically to the effect of examination anxiety.

“I don’t enter the exam situation confidently. I lack confidence.”

Having acknowledged the effect that their own mind-sets could have on their performance, they espoused the view that they had to be ‘self-advocates’, taking

whatever steps are necessary to ensure that their mind-sets do not inhibit their academic performance.

Because of all their frustrations regarding current assessment practices, learners have been forced to become what I would refer to as 'self-enablers'. This was one of the most interesting themes emerging from the analysis of questionnaire data, with learners indicating that they had become "self-reliant", having to be their "own advocates" because they had to "fight for themselves". This spirit of self-enablement is particularly evident in the learner comments which follow.

"I have to keep asking for help until I get."

"Write tests, read. I have learnt how to do it on my own. God help me."

"You can overcome when you are really interested in something."

"To ask for help and keep asking for help until a solution is found."

"At school teachers think children with this problem don't learn but that is not true - you must ask for help. When I was at school I struggled and was tested. I got help at high school and I got concessions. Someone wrote for me and read for me so that today I can manage on my own. God helped me to overcome – hoef nie staat te maak op ander mense nie."

"I'm just studying the textbook and then after I took all the past papers and then I checked all the questions they repeat for the years and then I took paper exercise and then I write, I just write and close my book. I then took the paper and write down because most of the time they just read..."

"... everything but no explanation so I just decide myself what I must do to prepare for the examination."

"... what I myself have to work on is to work on understanding the work better and make sure that I push myself. "

"I would say that for me, being a slow learner, does not make me – does not mean that I am stupid or I am not like other kids. Or other learners, it's just that I take longer to understand the work so I would also say to the lecturers that when they are giving a lecture they

should take note of the children, the learners that are not really following.”

“Okay let me go back to the notes. I go back to the notes and then I read, I read it’s easy for me to make a song out that, so that a song I will remember so that when I do that piece of work I just sing that song because it’s me recording notes and then I go to an exam, I flow. I flow.... so if I can continue doing things like studying like this it will work for me because I’ve seen it before. It works.”

Also mentioned were ‘working through past papers as preparation for assessment’, ‘identifying your own learning styles and adapting these to the ways in which you engage with the learning content’, ‘using some of the techniques which lecturers taught you to help you remember or apply knowledge’. *The two excerpts which follow are beautiful examples of the inherent strength and determination of so many of these learners; an underlying strength that is not asking for anything special other than a fair chance to live a normal, prosperous and meaningful life:*

“When you are hungry for success and no one is hearing that hunger that is brewing in you and no one is having their time to give to those – what can I do to get you there, so I was like but God works in mysterious ways. Here is someone who wants to know what I’m going through and it’s not about me only. If people are not brave enough to say guys I am drowning, I’m going to tell people I’m drowning, personally and I need help due to the passion that I have for success. The passion that I have for me believing with my condition that we will not be exceptions, we will not – we are destined for greater things given the resources that we had...”

“So I need them to come to the party also and find ways that will both, not change the criteria of their marking standard, not treat us like we are special. We don’t want that. Just find a way that will be able for us to have the same level of understanding, for us to be on the same page with everybody that will relieve us from anything.”

Lecturers, commenting on the effect that learners’ mind-sets could have on their performance, emphasized commitment and dedication to the learning journey and the

completion of the qualification. According to these lecturers, their observation of these in learners has convinced them that adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning work harder and are more committed than their nondisabled counterparts.

“...it’s not like some of the other learners are just there to be there but those ones really want to make an effort. Specially when the interpreter was there.”

Both specialists also agreed that a learner’s state of mind affected her/his learning and performance. Therefore, according to them, assessors should, in cases where they notice that a learner exhibits behaviour that reflects anxiety, stress, or other emotional states of mind that could impeded the learner’s performance, step in to calm the learner down. In most cases, according to them, the learner just needs a “person to talk to”, someone who can “create a space” where the learner can “unwind”, by expressing how s/he “feels”. To justify her stance on this, one of the specialists recalled the specific incident related below.

“I remember the one day he wrote his first exam and he was terribly nervous and very anxious and he had a blanky that he used to write with. So you allow them to sit with the blanky and try to be calm and how he was anxious in any way, come to my office, he’s sweating he’s that anxious and I said to him okay let’s just go outside.”

All this requires, according to the specialists is “human understanding” – understanding that the learner is probably anxious about her/his ability to “get through the paper”. It is then up to the assessor to “pull” the learner out of the situation – telling her/him to “take a deep breath, go drink some water, walk outside, come back and start with your paper again”. The assessor should, moreover, “stop the clock, sort of thing so that their time is not affected”.

5.8 THEMES THAT EMERGED

The part of my research story captured in this chapter consists of six stories as narrated by my research participant, namely (a) the story of the two PSET institutions which served as my research sites; (b) the story of the narrators themselves; the teaching-learning stories/experiences of these characters; (d) their assessment

stories; (e) their stories about the alignment of teaching, learning, assessment to the needs of learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, and (f) their stories of the mind-sets that influence these learners' academic progress and performance.

The major themes emerging from these stories relate to inclusivity, barriers to learning and performance, and ideal alignment strategies. These themes, and the sub-themes constituting each of these represent the lessons I learnt during the analysis of my data and the presentation of my findings in the form of my composite story, are described in this section.

5.8.1. Institutional stories

The comparison between public and private PSET institutions reflected the strong variances of practices in regard to adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning. Specifically, it was clear that private institutions provide little if any support to adult learners with learning disabilities. These institutions displayed no evidence of disability support units, with participants (learners and lecturers) indicating that no accommodations or concessions were provided. In the case of public PSET institutions there appears to be support for adult learners with learning disabilities, however when one digs deeper it becomes apparent that this support is varied depending on the resources the institution has at its disposal. In addition, the process for accessing concessions and accommodations is tedious and these concessions and accommodations often come too late. The commitment of the executive and leadership of the institution to the integration of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) into the PSET institutions was questioned repeatedly by all participant groups. It was expressed that this commitment will define the manner in which the institution is organised so that it is able to respond to the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), how it supports its lecturers and facilitators who provide teaching, learning and assessment activities to all learners and the approach it takes to addressing such issues as throughput rates.

In the context of the research findings, ethics refers to the extent to which institutions are acting in a morally acceptable framework in terms of their ongoing interaction with

adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) and with learners with disabilities generally. Are we doing what is right and fair?

In the context of the human rights framework (RSA, 2006; RSA, 1997; RSA, 2001; RSA, 2015), our inclusive education philosophy is anchored within this framework which promotes respect and equality to ensure that all learners, irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic standing or disability can actively engage in the learning environment.

5.8.2. Participant stories

Disclosure is the requirement to declare one's disability using a medical model approach, i.e. documentary confirmation from a medical professional confirming the nature of the disability. The data collected indicated that learners don't declare their disability because of the complex processes associated with declaration as well as the stigma attached to it. This has serious implications for the learner in terms of accessing accommodations and concessions. Thus the data indicates strongly that PSET institutions must have some way of identifying the learners' disability and that the institution should not be entirely reliant on the learner to disclose the disability.

Lecturers are ill equipped to provide teaching, learning and assessment to adult learners with learning disabilities and are ignorant of the statutory context within which they operate in so far as it relates to the rights of adult learners with disabilities. They do not have the skills required provide services to these learners effectively. Once again resources are a challenge in providing these much needed skills. Many don't have the required teaching skills and the institutions do not have the resources or the commitment to address this skills deficit. However, indications from the stories told here, indicate that lecturers in institutions studied also go out of their way to accommodate these learners – resorting to one-on-one teaching, peer teaching and learning, accommodating their mood swings after changed medication, and teaching them various strategies which could improve their ability to remember and apply what they have learnt.

This varying access to resources is felt as acutely by the disability support units where such exist, as it is felt by the lecturers and the specialists.

5.8.3. Assessment stories

Current assessment practices were also described as inhibiting/disabling assessment practices. The current system of assessment is characterised by an overreliance on traditional assessment, i.e. a summative examination that is strictly time-based and administered at the end of the semester. Given this, current assessment is high-stakes assessment because the outcome of the assessment either progresses learners to the next level of learning or to award of qualification and hopefully employment. There are no adaptations to the assessment task given to learners, given their learning disability and individual needs. There is a strong focus on testing knowledge and not enough attention given to assessing practical application or workplace competence. Thus a one-size-fits-all assessment approach exists. These practices inhibit learning progress and learning achievement, especially amongst adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). Under current assessment practices the inconsistency experienced among the assessors came out very strongly. There is further inconsistency experienced in the use of accommodations and concessions across PSET colleges. Finally, there is limited evidence of feedback in public PSET colleges. Where it does exist, it appears to be at the behest of the lecturer rather than a standard approach. While private PSET colleges do provide feedback, learners receive this too late for it to make any difference to the learning. In many instances they do not understand the feedback received.

Ideal assessment practices were practices described as assessing knowledge, practical application and workplace competence. This was particularly relevant in the context of future employment prospects. Ideal assessment practices suggested a programme of assessments approach that would allow adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) to be assessed more frequently but against smaller units of learning. Finally, the use of exemplars was suggested as a means of providing learners with a sense of what the final assessment submission should entail. From an assessment process perspective, ideal assessment practices included developing assessment literacy among learners and providing relevant, timely and face-to-face feedback to the learner, as well as the consultation of learners in the assessment decisions made.

5.8.4 Teaching and learning stories

Current teaching and learning practices inhibits learning and learning progress. Learners went so far as to suggest that learners with similar disabilities be grouped together so as to make teaching and learning easier. This is however contrary to the inclusivity policy.

Teaching and learning practices reflected the ideal teaching and learning practices needed in a classroom environment to ensure learner progress and learning achievement among adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities). This included alternative methods of teaching, one-on-one learning interventions, active learning techniques, adaptation of teaching and learning to meet the needs of the adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), peer learning and peer support, as well as presenting learning units in smaller sections to ensure that learners can integrate the new concepts to which they are being exposed.

5.8.5. Mind-set stories

This refers to the multitude of issues that learners are coping with and the impact of these issues on their ability to progress and achieve in the learning programs for which they are enrolled. These issues include, (a) enrolling in qualifications for which they are unsuitable, (b) having to work harder than their nondisabled counterparts and complete the same number of subjects in the same timeframe, (c) having to be self-advocates for the supports they require and finally (d) making the transition from school to post-school education and training and the effect of this transition. Learners acknowledged that they are a great contributor to their own state of mind. The anxiety they experience and the extent to which they must rely on themselves for accessing supports (self-advocacy) are all factors that contribute to a negative mind-set. Having said that many participants indicated a series of strategies that they have adopted to improve their situation including accessing additional notes from friends, working through past examination papers in preparation for assessment and even understanding their individual learning style and adapting their approach to learning accordingly.

In addition to the individual issues that learners are coping with, comes the added complexity of the role that lecturers play in teaching, learning and assessment as well

as the influence they have on these processes. The attitudes of lecturers are individualised with some being sympathetic and willing to accommodate learners and adapt where necessary while others are simply unwilling to do so.

5.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter focussed on presenting the findings of the data collected. I chose to present the information as stories. In telling these stories I drew three key conclusions, i.e that there is insufficient constructive alignment in teaching, learning and assessment, that English language proficiency is a barrier to learning and finally disability cannot be seen in isolation of race, gender or socio-economic status.

Constructive alignment is generally understood as the alignment of teaching, learning and assessment activities (TLAs) and assessment tasks with the intended learning outcomes (ILOs). In the context of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities), the empirical study suggested an additional element of alignment, i.e. alignment of the TLAs and ATs with the nature of the learner's disability and individual learning needs.

There was general agreement that English proficiency was a barrier to learning progress and learning achievement. This manifested itself in poor performance in all assessment submissions, which is exacerbated by an overreliance on the written form of assessment. This too impacts the pace of learning, the learner's ability to cope with the curriculum, and the sense that there is too much content to be covered in the allocated time. In order to progress, facilitators/lecturers/instructors resort to providing explanations in the mother tongue and this creates a vicious cycle of poor language proficiency.

Intersectionality refers to the need to understand disability in conjunction with race, socio-economic factors and gender, together with the comprehensive effect of all such factors on the learner's progress and learning achievement. The teaching and learning context sees the convergence of these realities in the classroom, resulting in the classroom becoming a complex teaching and learning environment.

These three factors must be top of mind when considering the learning progress and learning achievement of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

Chapter 6 will continue to focus on answering the primary research question, more specifically through answering the secondary research question 4. The compiled assessment framework will be presented. The assessment framework represents the culmination of results of the literature reviewed and the results of the empirical study, specifically categories and subcategories of the themes identified (see annexure 11 for categories and subcategories) as well as the feedback from a validation panel in the second round of data collection who evaluated and provided feedback on the semi-final proposed assessment framework.

CHAPTER 6

PROPOSED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

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PROPOSED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

6.1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The primary aim of this research study was to determine which assessment practices currently used in PSET institutions support adult learners with learning disabilities and/or inhibit them from demonstrating their competence measured against identified minimum standards. As indicated in Chapter 5, the adult learners like these who participated in my study as well as the lecturers responsible for teaching and assessing them agree that, on the whole, current assessment practices are more likely to inhibit than support their ability to demonstrate their competence.

Based on the findings presented in Chapter 5, coupled with the insights I gained from my literature review, I designed an alternate assessment framework which, I believe, could be more supportive of the needs of post-school adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, thus making it more likely that they would be able to demonstrate the competence required for them to obtain the qualifications resulting from their enrolment in specific programmes. Having designed the framework, I approached eleven experts on the teaching, learning, assessment and support of adults with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning field to evaluate my proposed assessment framework. It is the description of this framework and the results of the experts' evaluation which are the foci of this chapter.

The first part of the chapter provides a profile of the expert validation panel, the second the background to the design of my proposed assessment framework, the third a description of the proposed framework, and the fourth, the results of its evaluation by the panel of experts, interspersed with relevant insights I gained from my literature review. The chapter closes with the conclusions I reached regarding the nature and structure of the final framework, which is described in Chapter 7.

6.2. PROFILE OF THE FRAMEWORK EVALUATION PANEL

As indicated in Chapter 4, which dealt with my research methodology, I designed a survey questionnaire specifically aimed at the evaluation of the framework which I hoped to be able to design once I had a sound empirical basis for its design. Given the limited number of experts in this field in South Africa, the identification of suitable research participants was difficult (Crous, 2004:247), hence I used purposive snowball sampling for their selection. More specifically, I asked the lecturers who participated in my study and the staff members of disability units at institutions which had these, to refer me to people with the necessary expertise to evaluate my proposed assessment framework. The expert panel thus constituted then used the survey questionnaire I had designed for this purpose as basis for their evaluation.

All the panel members who were involved in the evaluation of my framework were experts in the field of teaching, learning, assessment and support of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning and/or had been involved in research on the teaching, support and assessment of learners like these: some of them were lecturers, some assessors and some attached to disability units at post-school education and training institutions. Most of them had also published academic articles on disability teaching, learning and support. In forming the panel, I had selected experts with varied teaching, research, publication and disability support experience. Of particular importance in their selection was their experience in post-school education and training environments.

Nine of the eleven experts I had approached were willing to participate. Of the two who did not participate, one was a representative of a disability organisation operating in the post-school education and training environment, the other a lecturer and head of the disability support unit at a post-school education and training institution. The former indicated that his excessive workload made it impossible for him to participate;

the latter simply did not respond to my invitation. Amongst those who did participate, were:

- A universal design specialist and researcher at a centre for teaching and learning at a post-school education and training institution.
- Three disability support staff members working directly with adult learners who had learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, assisting them in their integration into post-school education and training institutions.
- Two lecturers and researchers who lecture and conduct research on adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in post-school education and training at PSET institutions.
- One international and one local participant at executive management levels of institutions where adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning are enrolled.

The participants included in the evaluation panel were regarded as suitable based on their years of experience and their respective areas of expertise in the integration of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) into post-school education and training environments.

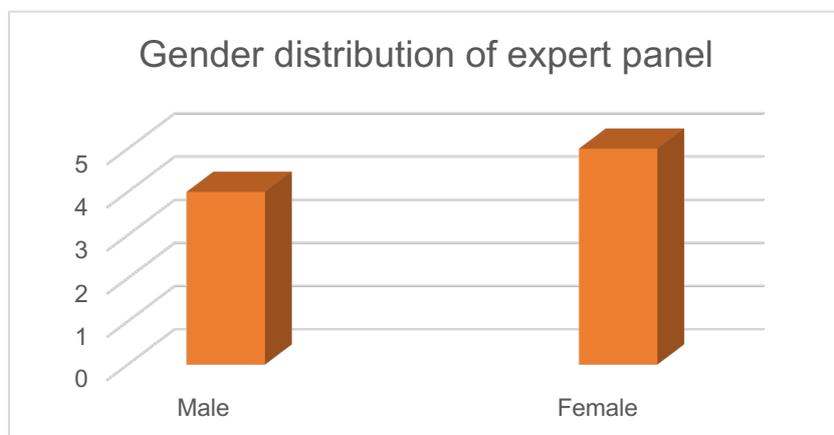


Figure 6.1: Gender distribution of expert panel

As indicated in Figure 6.1, the majority of the eventual participants was female, mirroring the gender distribution of lecturers involved in the teaching, learning and assessment of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning in PSET programmes.

Their experience, as declared in the questionnaire, ranged from four to twenty years, with most of them having on average of ten years' experience. One of the participants did not provide details of his/her years of experience and did not answer all the questions in the questionnaire, confining her/his responses to questions on leadership and management, which was his/her specific experience in this field. What I found particularly interesting were indications that, while those with teaching, learning and assessment experience were also involved in the formal rendering of learner support, those in official disability support roles did not automatically form part of the teaching, learning and assessment cohort.

6.3 BACKGROUND TO THE DESIGN OF THE PROPOSED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The essential elements of the proposed assessment framework which was submitted to the panel of experts for evaluation were derived from the intersection of themes which emerged from both my literature review and my empirical study. Information on best assessment practices (that is, practices which include assessment as and for learning) as well as the institutional benchmarks deemed necessary to render the support which adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning needed in order to progress and perform academically were derived from my literature review as well as from the findings of my empirical study. The obligations (see chapter 3) of post-school education and training institutions and the effect that the general experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning at higher and post-school education and training institutions has on their learning progress and learning achievement were highlighted in the literature I reviewed (Raskind et al. 2003:249) (see 3.2.1). Indications from this review indicate that, since these experiences affect the overall academic performance of learners like these (Borland & James, 1999; Fuller et al. 2004; Madriaga, 2010; Couzens 2015; Morina Diez et al. 2014) they can and should not be ignored (see 3.2.1).

Whilst the focus of my research was on the determination of supportive and inhibitive factors in assessment, I soon realised that the leadership, management, teaching and learning at institutions are either explicitly or implicitly related to the assessment experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning (Raskind et al. 2003:249) (see 3.2.1). These influences were therefore also

incorporated in the proposed assessment framework which I submitted to the panel of experts for evaluation.

6.4 THE TENTATIVELY PROPOSED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The assessment framework which I asked the panel of experts to evaluate rests on seven pillars. The definition and description of these pillars, each of which comprises a number of components, are the foci of this section (Section 6.4).

Pillar 1: Leadership and management

The term, 'executive leadership and management', as used here refers to the executive leadership and management team at institutions. In terms of this pillar, it is imperative not only that such a team must be in place at post-school institutions but also that it should be committed to the integration into the institution of learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning. By implication, it is the responsibility of this team to ensure that the resources and support structures necessary to the learning progress and performance of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are in place and operational (see chapter 3 & 5).

Pillar 2: Analysis and support of learner needs

A learner needs analysis in this context refers to the obligation of the institution to conduct a full and comprehensive analysis of the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning in order to ensure that these are understood by all parties concerned and that the support they require for their learning progress and achievement are available and accessible (see chapter 3 & 5) as soon as possible after their enrolment. It follows that the needs analysis should ideally be done during enrolment and shared with the relevant stakeholders immediately thereafter.

Pillar 3: Teaching and learning activities

Teaching and learning activities as they relate to this pillar refer to those teaching and learning activities to which adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning must be exposed if their learning progress and achievement are to be ensured. Implied in this definition is the imperative to amend or adapt teaching and learning teaching activities, the curriculum and the learning materials/resources to the needs of learners like these. Teaching and learning activities must also be constructively aligned with the ILOs and assessment tasks (ATs) (see chapter 2).

Deep learning should be facilitated by means of sound teaching and learning approaches (see chapter 2,3&5), the selection of appropriate teaching and learning activities (see 2, 3 &5), and the alignment of the pre-determined learning outcomes with assessment methods and tasks (see chapter 2 & 5).

Pillar 4 – Assessment processes

Assessment processes are defined in this pillar as actions taken to ensure the effective completion of assessment tasks. Included in these actions are the development and enhancement of learners' assessment literacy (see chapter 2&5) - ensuring also that they understand and can execute the assessment appeals procedure, and that learners are involved in all aspects and facets of the assessment process and the development of assessment tasks (see chapter 2 &5).

Pillar 5 – Assessment tasks (ATs)

Assessment tasks in the context of this pillar refer to the activities that an assessor uses to determine learner competence (i.e. the tasks that the assessor expects the learners to complete) (see chapter 2) - types of questions, tests, examinations, essays, assignments, portfolios of evidence, and products developed by the learner, for example.

Pillar 6: Accommodations and concessions

Accommodations and concessions within classroom and assessment contexts respectively, are critical to the support of learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning since their presence could potentially eliminate existing learning barriers amongst learners like these. Implicit in this definition is the notion that if accommodations and concessions are not provided, learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning are forced to learn and perform academically on a field that is uneven from the start (the classroom context/environment) to the finish (the assessment context and environment) (see chapter 3).

Pillar 7: Assessment feedback

The pillar on assessment feedback is informed by the Nicol-McFarlane-Dick (2006) model on assessment feedback (see chapter 2 & 5). In terms of this model, assessment feedback is a two-way process, a dialogue between the lecturer and the learner which is informed by the seven principles listed hereafter (also see chapter 6):

Principle 1: Before feedback can be given there must be clarity on what constitutes good performance for the adult learner with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

Principle 2: Feedback facilitates self-assessment.

Principle 3: The lecturer must deliver high quality feedback to the adult learner with learning disabilities.

Principle 4: The feedback process must encourage lecturer and peer dialogue.

Principle 5: The feedback process must encourage positive motivation and self-esteem for the adult learner with learning disabilities.

Principle 6: The feedback process must provide opportunities to close the gap for the adult learner with learning disabilities.

Principle 7: Feedback must be used to improve teaching.

Each of the pillars discussed here were identified in the literature review and confirmed in the results of my empirical research as being essential to good assessment practice, that is, assessment which ensures the learning progress and learning achievement of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

6.5 EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

This section of Chapter 6 focuses on the evaluation of the framework I proposed and presented to the panel of experts tasked with its evaluation. In Sub-section 6.5.1, I describe the process which the selected panel of experts were required to follow in the evaluation of the framework. This is followed, in Sub-section 6.5.2, by the presentation and discussion of the evaluation results/outcomes, and by a description of the changes effected to the proposed framework in Sub-section 6.5.3.

6.5.1 Evaluation process

As indicated in Chapter 4, I had designed a survey questionnaire specifically aimed at the evaluation of my proposed framework. Panel members selected for the evaluation of my proposed framework were therefore required to individually respond to the statements in this questionnaire (see Appendix 8). More specifically, they were asked to (a) first indicate, in accordance with a three-tier rating scale (see Table 6.1), which elements of the framework (i.e. the pillars and/or components constituting these) they

thought should be retained and which should be eliminated; (b) then to verbally provide the reasons for their decisions, and finally, (c) to make any suggestions regarding the further improvement and/or strengthening of the proposed framework. Informing this procedure was my assumption that, given the panel members' experience and expertise in the field, they would identify the strengths and weaknesses in the framework and provide me with recommendations regarding its improvement.

Table 6.1. Assessment Framework – rating criteria

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK RATING CRITERIA	
Essential feature	E
Useful feature	U
Not necessary	N

6.5.2 Evaluation outcomes/results

Although all the panel members rated the elements in accordance with the rating scale, indicating which features they regarded as essential, useful or not necessary, very few of them provided any comments on the reasons why these should be retained or eliminated. It was therefore up to me to interpret panel members' understanding and application of the terms, 'essential', 'useful' and 'not necessary'. I assumed that their indication that an element or pillar was "essential" meant that they regarded it as critical to the existence and/or functioning/operationalization of the framework, hence it had to form part of the final framework. I assumed that what they regarded as "useful" would be those pillars/elements which would be "nice to have" but were not absolutely necessary to the functioning and/or operationalization of the framework. By implication, they left it up to me to decide whether or not these elements should be included in the final framework. I summarily removed from my proposed framework and, by implication from its finalized version, those pillars or components of these which were rated by the majority of panel members as "not necessary".

The focus of this sub-section is the presentation and discussion of the panel's evaluation of my proposed framework. More specifically, each element of the framework is presented in terms of (a) panel members' responses and (evaluation) decisions, and (b) the verbatim feedback and/or recommendations of members who

went beyond the rating of elements, followed by a discussion of these, and (c) a summary, with reasons, of the changes I subsequently effected to the initial framework.

Pillar 1: Leadership and management
There is clear evidence of commitment from executive leadership and management of the institution to integrating learners with learning disabilities into the institution and providing the necessary supports in order to ensure their learning progress and learning achievement. This will be made possible by the following:
Policies and Procedures
1.1. Policies are in place to support the learner and the academic staff to ensure academic success. This includes:
1.1. a. A policy on the admission of learners with learning disabilities has been adopted
1.1. b. A policy on assessment of learners with learning disabilities has been adopted
1.1. c. A policy on accommodations (classroom) for learners with learning disabilities has been adopted
1.1. d. A policy on concessions (assessment context) for learners with learning disabilities has been adopted
1.1. e. A universal learning design policy has been adopted
1.2. Policy on disclosure of information about learners
1.2.1. A policy on disclosure of learning disabilities is in place
1.2.2. A policy on documents to be provided for confirmation of the learning disability is in place

Seven of the nine participants rated this pillar as essential to the integration, accommodation and support of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning at PSET institutions. The critical role that policies play in this regard is captured in the verbatim comment of two of the panel members, who categorically stated that

“Policies are essential and there is no two ways about it”.

“Well planned policies serve as critical guidelines for any successful implementation.”

Only one of the panel members felt that all the policies stipulated in my proposed framework were, in fact essential to effective leadership and management.

“The above-mentioned policies are very essential documents that should be in place before learners with learning disabilities can be enrolled. Students are enrolled without having the necessary policies in place and then the staff (only me) has to deal with all the necessary assessment and accommodation challenges that both the student and the lecturers have to face. If the above policies are not in place, it creates problems in all the areas from admission

through to assessment and accommodation especially disclosure of learning disability by the student him/herself and providing the necessary documentation as proof of the disability. In 2014 we had a student that claimed he has dyslexia but could provide no documentation as proof of his disability and the DU could not assist him. We did not have the necessary tests available to test for his disability.”

“It is difficult and almost impossible to ensure equitable academic services for students with disabilities in the absence of a policy that commits the university/PSET institution to provide such services. Many staff members always hide behind this, saying there is no policy, therefore no guidance. It is not their responsibility to give support to students with disabilities, but the responsibility of the Unit for Disability.”

All the panel members agreed that the adoption of an assessment policy for learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning was *“an important equity arrangement that may positively impact on enhancing access, participation and the retention of students with learning disabilities”*, eight agreed that a policy on the disclosure of learning abilities was essential and only 6 that there was a need for a policy on the need to confirm learners’ declared disabilities.

Differences of opinion on the critical/essential nature of some of the policies on which Pillar 1 rested, were verbalised as follows:

“Not necessary to have a policy on the admission of students with learning disabilities as the PSET admission policy must be all inclusive so as not to exclude marginalised groups.”

“There should be one policy for students with learning disabilities that must encompass all of the above. Furthermore, this policy must be informed by students with learning disabilities (must include the voices of students with learning disabilities).

A pertinent point raised by one of the participants regarding the effect that policies would have on the leadership and management of PSET institutions was that

“All of the above are essential, but it is important that it is incorporated and integrated with current policies and procedures and not as separate documents.”

What is very clear from the comments is that the panel members who evaluated my proposed framework agree that policies and procedures guide practitioners within institutions on how best to accompany learners with learning disabilities through the various processes within the institution – from enrolment to teaching, learning and assessment, advocacy, classroom accommodations and assessment concessions. Without policies like these there would be no standardisation, resulting in learners being subjected to inconsistent practices and, by implication, inconsistent experiences.

I have already presented that the institutional obligations and practices have as much impact on learner progress and learning achievement as the actual assessment tasks that the learner must complete (see chapter 3). Of interest was the suggestion by some panel members that adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning should be included in the process of determining policy that will affect them, a practice confirmed in the literature I reviewed (see chapter 2 & 3). However, there is caution that emerged from the empirical study (see 5.1; 5.2) that policies should be integrated into the broader institutional policies, thus ensuring inclusivity rather than perpetuating the marginalisation of adult learners with learning disabilities. It is important to note that all the sub-elements of this section of the framework were deemed essential by the validation panel.

Pillar 1: Disability support unit financial resources /Analysis and support of learner needs

Support services
The following support services are in place to support adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) at an institutional level in a PSET environment (1.3 – 1.5.3.):
1.3. Disability support unit
1.3.1 A disability support unit is in place
1.3.2 The disability support unit is part of a broader strategy
1.3.3 The disability support unit has time lines identified for implementation
1.3.4 The disability support unit has adopted a definition of learning disability
1.3.5 The disability support unit has adopted a definition for learning disability which enables it to identify learners with this condition
1.3.6 The disability support unit differentiates between the supports needed for learning disabilities and supports needed for other disabilities through the adoption of pertinent definitions
1.4. Financial resources – There is a confirmed, ring-fenced budget allocated for the following:
1.4.1 Amendments are made to the curriculum for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)

1.4.1 Amendments are made to the assessment tasks for adult learners with learning disabilities,
1.4.3 Interventions are in place to build the capacity of lecturers to effectively deliver teaching, learning and assessment to adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)
1.5 Physical Infrastructure adjustments are in place, and include the following:
1.5.1 Amendments are made to the classroom environment for adults with learning disabilities
1.5.2 Curriculum amendments are made to accommodate adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)
1.5.3 Amendments are made to the assessment environment (i.e. venues) for adult learners with learning disabilities

Panel members' responses related to the existence, accessibility and operation of a disability unit varied. Eight of the nine panel members regarded its existence as essential and one as useful; seven were of the opinion that what was essential was that its establishment should form part of a broader strategy; one panellist indicated that it would be useful while another one indicated that it did not necessarily be part of a broader strategy. Six panel members indicated that there has to be timelines for its implementation, two, that these would be useful and one did not respond to this statement. Seven of them agreed that it was essential for disability units to have a definition of learning disability in place, one which lends itself to the identification of learners with this condition; two members agreed that the adoption of a definition was essential, one that its ability to identify learners with particular conditions would be useful, and one that it was not necessary. The same pattern was reflected in panel members' responses to the need for a disability support unit to differentiate between the support needed for learning disabilities and the support needed for other disabilities through the adoption of pertinent definitions – seven regarded this as essential, one as useful, and one as unnecessary.

Nine of the panel members indicated, moreover, that the need for a confirmed ring-fenced budget for teacher development was essential. Eight of them indicated that such a budget was also essential, and one that it would be useful in effecting amendments to assessment practices and/or tasks, while seven of them regarded it as essential – two as useful – for necessary amendments to the curriculum.

As to adjustments that might have to be made to accommodate adults with learning difficulties and/or barriers to learning, changes to the classroom environment and the curriculum were regarded as essential by six of the panel members, and useful by

three, while changes to assessment environments/ venues were regarded as essential by seven of the participants and useful by two.

Discussion

What emerges from these ratings is that there is evident support for the establishment of disability support units at PSET institutions. There is an equally strong call for these units to be integrated into the broader management of the institution, representing a fundamental role of any PSET institution rather than have them operate as silos – entities isolated from teaching, learning and assessment. This view is in keeping with the literature review (see chapter 2 &3) as well as the findings of the empirical study (see chapter 5).

The following verbatim comments by panel members on the need for a disability support unit within PSET institutions and the ways in which they could contribute to the design of an assessment framework for adult learners with learning disabilities give some indication of the reasons for their support of this component. The comments also as the specific role that such a unit can play in a PSET institution. It is very clear that the validation panel saw a need for disability support units in PSET institutions. The comments also reflect their views on the role/s that such units should play.

“A disability unit should exist to support all students with disabilities. The function of identifying students with disabilities should not be the responsibility of the Unit for Disability. Students should approach the unit with their needs. Those who are not certain or have not been diagnosed should be referred to experts within the campus or externally if such services are not available on campus. The DUs are usually inundated with support work that has to be executed within timeframes of a semester. Amendments of the curriculum are essential, it cannot be ‘business as usual’ or teaching and assessment as usual when we have a diverse student population, including disability in its characteristics”.

“All of the above are essential, but it is important to note that Disability Units should be solely responsible to play a supportive role and not be the sole custodian for accommodations of learners with learning difficulties (i.e. serving as a university on its own). A properly transformed institution, will not have

exclusionary practices, curriculums, etc., but rather an integrated inclusionary approach and accommodative of all learners no matter their learning preferences”.

It is important to note the call of the panellist cited here for the integration of disability support units into a broader strategic approach to the integration of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) into PSET institutions, thus ensuring the realisation of inclusion beyond just policy levels (see chapter 3 & 5).

The comments which follow, on the other hand, are specifically related to elements of the proposed framework which focus on the need or not to amend the curriculum, assessment processes and assessment tasks to accommodate adult learners with learning disabilities:

“In the current TVET sector, it is difficult to make amendments to the curriculum as well as the assessment tasks, because the curriculum and assessment tasks are National documents and implemented by all the Colleges whether public or private in order to comply and be able to achieve the qualifications. It is very important for Disability units to have a time frame of implementation to avoid students being enrolled without the necessary support structures in place to assist the student.

Amendments to the assessment environment seem to be regarded as very important, especially in cases where a reader is needed to assist the student with her/his assessment tasks. It is also difficult to make concessions related to extra time being given to learners who sit for the examination with the mainstream learners. Invigilators do not know who the learners with disabilities are and are therefore not be able to give them the extra time or support needed to complete their assessment tasks”.

6.5.2.1 Continuous professional development

Continuous Professional Development
It is necessary to provide continuous professional development of lecturers/facilitators/instructors to enable support for adult learners with learning disabilities. This includes the following:
A skills audit of lecturers and facilitators is in place to determine their current skills levels versus required skills levels

A year planner for continuous professional development initiatives for lecturers and facilitators is in place to ensure effective teaching, learning and assessment is provided to adult learners with learning disabilities

In responding to the need for the continuous professional development of lecturers to ensure that they would be able to support adult learners with learning disabilities, four panel members indicated that it was essential that a skills audit of lecturers should be in place to determine the extent to which their current skills levels were in line with the required skills levels, three indicated that it would be useful, and one that it was unnecessary. Five of them also indicated that the existence of a year plan for continuous professional development initiatives for lecturers should be in place to ensure the effective teaching, learning and assessment of adult learners with learning disabilities; three regarded this as useful and one as unnecessary.

Discussion

The continuous professional development of all staff providing support to adult learners with learning disabilities, both from a teaching, learning and assessment perspective as well as from a support beyond the classroom perspective, was a call made loudly by all participant groups in the previous research phases, including learners (see chapter 5). Once again there is a call for the integration of developing the capacity of all staff to support learners with learning disabilities, alongside a broader call for continuous professional development of staff generally (see chapter 2). That our institutions are doing very little, if anything at all, around the continuous professional development of academic and support staff. is supported in the literature review (see chapter 2) as well as in the empirical study (see chapter 5).

Some of the panel members' verbatim comments on the need for the continuous professional development of staff directly involved with learners with learning disabilities reflect their strong support of this pillar.

"I believe all lecturers need to take part – irrespective of their skills levels."

"This is the area most neglected in the TVET sector and this is the first excuse lecturers' use when they have a student(s) with disabilities in their classes. Currently I attend workshops organised by SAOU, but these workshop are more focused on Basic Education and therefore not always relevant to adult learners"

with disabilities. There should be Educational Specialists from DHET/identified professionals to give continuous professional develop to lectures and facilitators. These sessions should be very practical and not just theoretical information.”

“Most of my ticks are describing an ideal institution, not necessarily my institution or not. But the above section on lecturer CPD is beyond ideal, I cannot imagine that such an extreme level of lecturer support is in place anywhere in SA (happy to be corrected)”.

“Yes, these measures are necessary because more often than not academic staff will not bother about anything that is not linked to their performance management or promotion. Therefore, professional development in this regard should be fully integrated in the annual programme and be measured.”

“Centres for Teaching and Learning plays a vital role in this regard.”

“Disability unit staff must be engaged in continuous professional development on learning disabilities to enhance appropriate support for students with learning disabilities.”

6.5.2.2 Advocacy and awareness; career development; testing protocols and support programmes

Policies and procedures
The following measures are in place to ensure the development of a PSET environment that is sensitive to the rights of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) and that implements practices that support and entrench these rights (1.7 – 1.12.)
1.4. Advocacy and awareness of disability rights programmes are conducted among all stakeholders. This includes the following:
Conduct advocacy and awareness workshops for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) during orientation
Conduct advocacy and awareness workshops for current non-disabled learners on the rights of learners with learning disabilities

Conduct advocacy and awareness workshops for lecturers/facilitators/instructors on the rights of adult learners with learning disabilities
Conduct advocacy and awareness workshops for administration staff on the rights of adult learners with learning disabilities
Career development and counselling services are in place for adult learners with learning disabilities
A standard diagnostic testing protocol is in place for diagnosing learning disabilities among learners
Bridging programmes are in place for adult learners with learning disabilities
Extended programmes are in place for adult learners with learning disabilities
Language support programmes are in place for adult learners with learning disabilities

As to the measures that should be in place to ensure the development of a PSET environment that is sensitive to the rights of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) and an institution which implements policies that support and entrench these rights were regarded as critical by all the panel members. Seven of them regarded advocacy and awareness workshops for adult learners with learning disabilities as essential and one as useful, while six of them regarded awareness workshops on the rights of learners with learning disabilities to current learners, lecturers and administrative staff members, as essential for learners, eight as essential for lecturers and six as essential for administrative staff members. Two of them regarded awareness workshops on the rights of learners with disabilities and/or barriers to learning for current learners as useful, one as useful to lecturers and three as useful to administrative staff members. None of the panel members indicated that workshops like these were unnecessary.

In addition to this, five panel members regarded it as essential that career development and counselling services should be in place for adult learners with learning disabilities, while one of them regarded it as useful only. The existence and use of a standard diagnostic testing protocol for diagnosing learning disabilities among learners was regarded as essential by five panel members, useful by three, and unnecessary by one. All nine the panel members regarded it as essential, however, that there should be bridging, extended and language support programmes in place

to enhance the learning and performance of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

Discussion

There is a strong call in particular for advocacy workshops among lecturers with each sub-feature obtaining a rating of 8 to 9 (see chapter 2,3 &5). This correlates well with the call for continuous professional development on how to engage adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in the classroom and in assessment practices (see chapter 2 & 5). In addition, there was resounding support for the following three elements, with all participants in the validation panel rating them as essential:

- Bridging programmes for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2)
- Extended programmes for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2)
- Language support programmes for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 5)

The need for language support resonates strongly with the findings of my empirical study and the barrier to learning presented by the English language, specifically where English is not a first language for the learner (see chapter 5):

“The above-mentioned programmes are essential in order to level the playing field of students with disabilities. I strongly believe that 1.12 is especially critical for deaf students”. (1.12 refers to language support programmes).

Panellists’ verbal comments on advocacy and awareness; career and counselling services, diagnostic testing protocols and support programmes for adult learners with learning disabilities reflect their strong support for these.

“Advocacy and awareness workshop must in addition include presentations on living and learning experiences, possible challenges that students with learning disabilities may encounter, academic support intervention strategies to promote the retention and success outcomes of students with learning disabilities, advocacy and awareness must all promote the assistive specialised technology required by students with learning disabilities.”

Some of the panellists made the following strong remarks about advocacy with PSET institutions. Again, it reflects the strong call for real inclusiveness within this environment.

“I would find it extremely inappropriate and discriminatory to call all the SWD into a special workshop. Any guidance needed on rights awareness would be done as part of the individual support they receive or else in the company of the entire student body.”

“Orientation should be given for all first-year students regardless of disability and present on disability issues to the classes as a whole. What is the point of inclusion if you are going to present to SWD and non-SWD separately?”

“All students need this and it should be an inclusive service. When I say inclusive here I mean considering all possible exclusionary factors from disability to gender age race and social background.”

“No this is inappropriate as it blurs the lines between education and health. There should rather be a functional relationship between the educational institution and local health services. I have even seen a suggestion (from a White Paper Committee!) that educational institutions should have their own on-site audiologists and hearing testing rooms: a ridiculous and expensive duplication rather than a healthy partnership with appropriate experts.”

“These (1.10 to 1.12) are critical and so beneficial, but in my opinion they should start as facilities for SWD, and be designed to grow rapidly to also include students facing other forms of challenges, and be truly inclusive. Think about the average young person who will be showing up at university now that “free higher education” has been announced. Bridging programmes, extended programmes and language support are desperately needed but not just for the 3 to 5% of the population that is SWD – they are needed for the majority!”

The final comment cited here refers specifically to issues that institutions face around the disclosure of disability or the lack of it and the implications these have for the learner and the institution. Implied in these comments is the conviction that, unless institutions ensure that learners are aware that proper disclosure is imperative to their being able to access and/or receive the support necessary to their learning progress and achievement they will continue to struggle academically:

“Students do not want to disclose their disability until they experience learning difficulties and then expect the Disability Unit to give them the necessary support, although the Unit might not be prepared to give the necessary support.

Everybody – lecturers, administrative staff even the support staff should be aware of the rights of students with disabilities, because these rights are currently disrespected.

A career development and counselling service are of outmost importance, because the student comes with an idea of what he wants to study but through career development it might turn out that his/her choice is not the best choice.

As previously indicated, some students claim they have a learning disability but without any documentation to proof. A standard diagnostic test available will be of great help to determine if the student has a learning disability. Point 1.10 – 1.12 will be the ideal, but in reality this is going to be difficult to implement unless DHET change the curriculums and assessment tasks specifically to accommodate students with learning disabilities. Currently college are restricted to the National curriculums and assessments.”

6.5.2.3 Monitoring and evaluation processes

Policies and procedures
The following measures are in place to ensure the monitoring and evaluation of practices implemented to support the learning progress and learning achievement of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (1.13-1.13.1.5)
1.13. Monitoring and evaluation processes are in place. This includes the following:
1.13.1. Statistics are available per semester on:
1.13.1.1 Enrolment data across all programmes for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)
1.13.1.2. Throughput statistics per semester for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) across all programmes
1.13.1.3. Data on the nature of disability supported at the institution for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (i.e. what is the nature of the learning disability)
1.13.1.4. Data on the outcomes of programmes implemented to ensure academic success for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) is available.

1.13.1.5. Data that tracks on a per semester basis the enrolment rates versus throughput rates to determine whether the measures put in place are promoting enrolment and ensuring success for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are available

Responding to statements in the questionnaire on the measures which should be in place to ensure the monitoring and evaluation of implemented practices aimed at supporting the learning progress and achievement of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning, seven of the panel members indicated that the availability of statistics on the enrolment and throughput of adult learners with barriers to learning across programmes should be made available each semester while two panellists regarded this as useful only. Data on the nature of disability supported at the institution for adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning were also regarded as essential by six panel members and as useful by two. Seven of them also regarded the collection and availability of data on the outcomes of programmes implemented to ensure academic success for these learners, as well as comparative semester data on enrolment versus throughput rates as essential since, according to them, it would indicate whether or not measures put in place to promote enrolment and ensure success for adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning were effective. One of the panel members was, however, of the opinion that, while such data might well be useful, it was not essential.

Discussion

It is evident from these ratings that the majority of the panellists strongly support the need for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, specifically the need for statistics, validated as essential by six or seven of the nine participants. The need for accurate and current statistics, or the lack of it, in the PSET sector was raised as a shortcoming by the HED monitor study in 2005 (see chapter 3).

Panellists verbal comments on the monitoring and evaluation of programmes intended to support adult learners with learning disabilities reflect the value they see in having information of this nature and the effect that such information could have.

“The above mentioned statistics and data is very essential, because it will help with future planning as to what support these students need, what adaptations must be made to teaching and learning, assessment task and to be able make

the necessary recommendations not only to the management of the College but also to DHET. Currently there are no such statistics or data available. I have to keep record of all the students with disabilities who successfully completed their studies as well as those who dropped out and the reason for drop out. Currently no statistics are also available of successful employment of the students with disabilities in order to determine whether the study courses are suitable not only for the student but for the corporate market”.

“A proper IT supportive system is necessary here. Transformation of systems to be inclusive as well.”

“Specific monitoring and evaluation procedures must be in place to ensure appropriate support towards retention and graduation outcomes of students with learning disabilities who are at risk of failure; drop out or academic exclusions.”

“The tracking should be automated or done by admin staff. Systems where lecturers and health professionals have to do it and often on a monthly not even semester basis actually takes away from effectiveness in core service delivery to SWD and can cause lecturers to feel negative toward inclusion.”

“This research is critical in evaluating the success of interventions and making recommendations for improvements or changes where and when necessary.”

6.5.3 Learner needs analysis and support

2. Learner needs analysis and support
An analysis of learner needs must be completed for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) at enrolment to ensure that the required supports for learning progress and learning achievement are understood and the institution is able to ensure that these supports are implemented as soon after enrolment as possible.
The following measures are in place to ensure that the student has sufficient support measures in place to support the learning progress and learning achievement of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)(1.1-2.2.7.2.):
2.1. Information about the learner that needs to be disclosed involves the following:
Learners’ disability is disclosed

Supporting documentation provided by medical professional for learners with learning disabilities
Anecdotal evidence provided by family/educational institution for learners with learning disabilities
Psychological report is available for the adult learner with learner disabilities in order to identify any additional conditions that exist as a result of the learning disability that can impact self-regulation
2.2. The learner's choice of programme/course of study should be known.
The learner's choice of programme for study is interrogated in line with his/her learning disability
The learner's choice of programme for study is interrogated in line with his/her learning disability and employment opportunities
Determine if there is a need for academic advice or career counselling in terms of the programme selected by the learner
2.2.1. A needs analysis is conducted among adult learners with learning disability. This involves the following:
Conduct a standardised assessment protocol to confirm the diagnosis
Determine accommodations that will be required in the classroom for effective learning
Determine concessions that will be required in the assessment context
Determine the technology supports that are required to ensure accessibility to curriculum for the adult learner with learning disabilities
Determine the technology supports that are required to ensure accessibility to assessment tasks for the adult learner with learning disabilities
Communicate the findings of the needs analysis to academic staff
2.2.2. Implement the learners' support requirements as identified in the needs analysis. This includes the following:
Identify and provide alternative study materials for adult learners with learning disabilities
Provide interpreter/scribe services for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)
Provide assistive technology for adult learners with learning disabilities
Provide alternative assessment arrangements for adult learners with learning disabilities
2.2.2.1. Provide orientation into the institution for adult learners with learning disabilities
2.2.3. Social Support must be provided for adult learners with learning disabilities. This should include:

Identify a peer/buddy to mentor the adult learner with learning disability
Identify the sport and recreational needs of adult learners with learning disability

Panel members' responses to the statement that an analysis of the learning needs of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning must be conducted at enrolment to ensure that the required support for their learning progress and learning achievement was understood and that the institution is able to ensure that these supports were implemented as soon after enrolment as possible indicate that five of them regarded the disclosure of learners' disabilities as essential while three regarded it as useful only. Six of them, however, regarded supporting documentation provided by medical doctors or psychologists as essential: two regarded these as useful, and one regarded reports from psychologists as unnecessary. Anecdotal evidence provided by family members and/or previously attended educational institutions were regarded as essential by three panel members, as useful by four, and as unnecessary by one.

What also emerged from panel members' responses to the statements in the questionnaire was that a learner's choice of programme/course of study might significantly affect her/his progress and achievement. Seven of them therefore regarded it as essential and one as unnecessary that learners' programme choices should be considered in terms with their learning disabilities and employment opportunities. Six of those who considered the alignment of programme choice and learning disability as essential, indicated that determining alignment or not would make it easier to decide whether or not the learners concerned were in need of academic advice or career counselling. Two of them, while regarding this as useful, did not think it was essential.

If such a needs analysis were to be conducted, five of the panel members indicated that it was essential, and three as useful, for a standardised assessment protocol to be used to confirm a diagnosis, while eight of them regarded it as essential the need to determine the accommodations that will be required for effective classroom learning, the concessions required in the assessment context, the technology supports required to ensure curriculum accessibility as well as accessibility to assessment tasks for those learners who have been identified as having learning disabilities. Six of these panellists felt that it was also essential to communicate the

outcome of the 'needs analysis' to academic staff; one regarded it as useful but not essential.

As to the nature of the requisite support mechanisms, eight panellists indicated that the identification and provision of alternative study materials and assessment arrangements, as well as the services of interpreters/scribes were essential. Seven of them also regarded the provision of assistive technology and the orientation of adult learners with learning disabilities as essential, with one regarding these as useful only.

As to the kind of social support that should be provided to adult learners with learning disabilities, five of the panel members regarded the identification of a peer mentor as essential, two regarded it as useful and one as unnecessary. Four of them regarded the identification of these learners' sport and recreational needs as essential, two as useful and one as unnecessary.

Discussion

There was overwhelming support for the pillar, learner needs analysis and support. In this context, learner needs analysis is specifically aimed at understanding the learner's learning disability, and therefore their learning needs as well as the support that they would require in the classroom and in the assessment context in order to ensure their learning progress and learning achievement. The elements that were particularly well supported are listed below (eight out of nine participants identified these elements as essential):

- Determine concessions that will be required in the assessment context (see chapter 2,3, & 5).
- Identify and provide alternative study materials for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 5).
- Provide interpreter/scribe services for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 5).
- Provide alternative assessment arrangements for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 5).

This is a clear indication that concessions are deemed particularly important in the assessment context for adult learners with learning disabilities. There is also a strong emphasis on the value of technology support and, finally, the need for alternative approaches to curriculum design, and the accessibility of learning materials and

assessment arrangements for adult learners with learning disabilities. The role that accommodations and concessions play in the improvement of learners' chances at success is reinforced by Koretz (2003:6), who suggests that accommodations and concessions are in fact a means of ensuring a valid view of the performance of the learner with learning disabilities (see chapter 2).

The element dealing with the disclosure of the nature of learning disabilities was not as well subscribed to as I expected it to be, specifically in terms of documentation required to confirm the learning disability (see chapter 2 & 5). This is interesting, given that without such disclosure it becomes difficult to identify the learning needs of the adult learner with learning disabilities and difficult to provide the necessary supports.

"It is very important that the students disclose his/her disability before enrolment in order for the Disability Unit to either indicate that support for the specific disability is not available or prepare in time for the necessary support needed by the student e.g. reader & scribe. The same applies to the programme of study in order to make sure the lecturers will be capable of teaching the student e.g. Maths Literacy for student with dyscalculia.

Students can be requested to apply for enrolment during the previous semester so that the Disability Unit is aware of the student and can therefore get the necessary support needed by the student in place before the arrival of the student e.g. technological support such as recorder that the student can use in class to record the lessons, reading pen, software such as Dragon that reads text and has voice recognition to type what the students is saying.

It is very difficult to get the necessary support in place without prior knowledge of the disability of the student.

As indicated before, currently I have to read and record the student with dyslexia's textbooks, be her reader and scribe above my lecturing and other administrative duties. This place unnecessary workload and stress on the staff of the Disability Unit".

The following comment was made specifically in respect of disclosure:

"Bearing in mind that the student is provided with information on the benefits of disability disclosure and that disability disclose is voluntary."

However, interrogation of learning programmes selected by learners was well subscribed to, with seven out of nine panellists identifying this feature as essential. These panellists believed that it was necessary to interrogate the choice of the learning programme as well as its alignment with the nature of the disability and employment prospects (see chapter 3 & 5).

“Communicate the findings of the needs analysis to academic staff, this must be done with the permission of the student.”

The following comment was made specifically in the context of doing a learner needs analysis (see chapter 2 ,3 & 5):

“But it does not need to be a long or complex document”

Finally, it was believed that all the elements of this pillar were valuable:

“All the above are necessary in order to provide the learner with the relevant /appropriate support for their effective learning.”

6.5.4 Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

3. Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)
Teaching and learning activities to which the learners must be exposed must ensure learner progress and learning achievement. This includes the amendment of learning and teaching activities, amendment of the curriculum as well as the adaptation of the learning materials provided to the learner. Teaching and learning activities must also be constructively aligned with the ILOs and ATs, as well as be aligned to the nature of the learner’s disability. In addition, deep learning can be encouraged by a sound teaching and learning approach, the selection of appropriate teaching and learning activities, and the alignment of the intended learning outcomes with assessment methods and tasks (Biggs & Tang, 2007:54).
The following measures are in place to ensure that teaching and learning activities within a PSET environment are aligned to the learners’ learning disabilities and aligned to their learning needs (3.1. – 3.2.):
3.1. The teaching and learning activities are aligned with the learner’s learning disabilities
3.2. The teaching and learning activities are aligned with the learning needs of adult learners with learning disabilities

3.3. Active learning techniques are used in the teaching and learning environment for adult learners with learning disabilities, including the following teaching and learning activities:
3.3.1. Real life activities (i.e. authentic learning activities)
3.3.2. Interactive learning, including peer-peer activities
3.3.3. Interactive learning, including group activities
3.3.4. Role plays
3.3.5. Demonstrations
3.3.6. Simulations
3.3.7. Objects used to simulate the learning concepts
3.3.8. Visuals, including diagrams, process flows, collages, video, multimedia inputs
3.3.9. Multisensory learning materials and learning activities that meet the needs of the adult learner with learning disability
3.3.10. Games and exercises built around the concept to be learnt and taking into account the adult learner with learning disability
3.3.11. Suitable information and communication technologies are used to enhance teaching and learning activities
3.3.12. Interviews as a method of assisting adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) to master concepts
3.3.13. Opportunities for one-on-one teacher student interactions are provided.
3.3.14. Peer learning is actively used as a TLA in class
3.3.15. Ensure that enough time is allocated to the task to be learnt (Time on task: Sambell, 2016)
3.3.16. The above TLAs encourage deep approaches to learning

Six of the panel members regarded the alignment of teaching and learning activities to adult learners' disabilities as essential, two as useful and one as not necessary. Four panel members respectively regarded as essential or useful authentic/real life activities, interactive activities (like peer and group work), visuals (including diagrams, process flows, collages, videos and multimedia inputs as essential while four others regarded them as useful; role play, demonstrations, simulations and the use of objects to stimulate learning concepts were regarded as essential by three and as useful by the remaining four; five of them regarded the use of multisensory learning materials and learning activities as well as the use of suitable information and communication technologies essential to the enhancement of teaching and learning activities, while

three regarded them as useful. None of them regarded any of these activities as unnecessary. Games and exercises built around the concept to be learnt were also regarded as essential by four and useful by three panel members but in this case, one of the panel members indicated that s/he did not think that this was necessary.

In addition to the use of active learning techniques, visual stimulation and the use of suitable technologies, six panel members indicated that the use of interviews was an essential tool in efforts to help these learners to master concepts; one member each respectively felt that its use was useful and not necessary. Ensuring that sufficient time is allocated for the completion of tasks was regarded as essential by five panel members, the creation of opportunities for one-on-one teaching by four and peer teaching by three. Each of these was respectively regarded as useful by three, five and three panel members. Panel members also acknowledged that teaching and learning activities which encouraged deep learning was important, with five of them regarding these as essential to the teaching and learning of adult learners with learning disabilities and three regarding them as useful.

Discussion

Whilst I retained most of the elements of this pillar within the framework, I expected more of the active learning techniques to be identified as essential features. They have been retained because they were also deemed useful. The seemingly lukewarm attitude of panel members to the inclusion of active learning techniques is contrary to the research findings reported in the literature I reviewed as well as the data collected in my empirical study (see chapter 2 & 5). In the literature review, authentic learning activities or interactive learning include peer-to-peer activities, group learning as well as simulations and the use of more visual learning materials, including objects (see chapter 2, 3 & 5) were all identified as valuable methods to be used in teaching and learning activities among adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 3). The value of authentic learning activities was echoed in the empirical study (see chapter 5).

The following verbatim comments were shared by participants about the effect of teaching and learning on learner progress and learner achievement among adult learners with learning disabilities. In particular, this pillar focused on the type of teaching and learning activities to which adult learners with barriers to learning

(learning disabilities) need to be exposed to improve their learning progress and learning achievement (see chapter 2 & 5). This pillar also focused on teaching and learning methodologies that were deemed suitable within the literature study and the empirical study (see chapter 2, 3 & 5).

“All the tertiary institutions in SA lack the ability to accommodate students with learning disabilities and/or any other disability successfully. The majority are able to accommodate students with more common physical disabilities such as partially sighted, blind, deaf, wheelchair. At Universities and Universities of Technology, the learning activities can be aligned with the learner’s learning abilities. Due to a national curriculum for TVET college the learning activities cannot be aligned with the learner’s learning disabilities.”

The following verbatim comments refer specifically to the extent to which teaching and learning activities should be, but are currently not, aligned to the learning needs and learning disability of the learner.

“Again this would be the ideal, but lecturers at colleges do not necessarily have formal training in Education. They might come from the corporate sector doing a PGCE certificate. Academic time is very restricted due to a National Final examination and National curriculum that must be completed. Lecturers are therefore pressured to complete the curriculum and at this point leave the responsibility for any additional assistance to the staff (only me) of the Disability Unit.”

“Again the whole structure of the curriculum and assessment should be changed by DHET in order to accommodate students with disabilities successfully.”

In the context of requirements for the alignment of teaching and learning with the learning needs of adult learners with learning disabilities, it is interesting to note the emergence of the theme around universal design as a means of addressing the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 3).

“The use of UDL principles as an integral part of teaching and learning makes this possible without the need for accommodations when the student shows up in the classroom, with a very few exceptional occasions.”

These are essential for meaningful learning experience of every student. Each student should be granted the opportunity to participate in their own way in order to achieve the learning outcomes.”

It is interesting to note the emergence of a theme on the measures which are regarded as being as beneficial to non-disabled learners as they are to learners with disabilities. This, too, is in keeping with the literature review and the empirical study (see chapter 3 and 5)

“The above are useful for all learners not just SWD. This approach to learning should be in place regardless of SWD enrolment.”

All elements of this sub-component have been retained for the final assessment framework.

6.5.5 Assessment processes – assessment literacy and assessment appeal procedures

4. Assessment processes
The following definition of assessment was adopted in this study:
<p>“1. The planned process of gathering and synthesising information relevant to the purpose of a) discovering and documenting student strengths and weaknesses, b) planning and enhancing instruction and c) evaluating progress and making decisions about students. 2. The processes, instruments, methods used to gather information.” Baartman et al. (2007:117)</p>
The following measures are in place to ensure that learners develop assessment literacy within a PSET environment (4.1. – 4.2.):
4.1. Learner’s assessment literacy should be developed by means of the following:
4.2. Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are supported in understanding the purpose and utility of assessment rubrics
4.3. Specific assessment rubrics are developed for learners with learning disabilities
4.4. Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are supported in understanding assessment language (e.g. how to properly interpret assessment questions)

4.5.	The assessment language used in the assessment task is simplified to meet the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)
4.6.	Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are supported through examination technique workshops/programmes
4.7.	Learners with learning disabilities are provided with academic writing skill development opportunities
4.8.	Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are consulted in the development of assessment tasks
4.9.	Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are consulted in the development of assessment processes
4.10.	Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are aware of and know how to appeal their assessment outcomes

The panel of experts' responses to statements in the questionnaire on measures that should be in place to ensure the development of these learners' assessment literacy indicate that supporting them to understand the purpose and utility of assessment rubrics, as well as how to interpret assessment questions (i.e. assessment jargon) with five panel members regarding these as essential and three regarding them as useful). The second-most important measure in this regard, according to the panel members seemed to be the simplification of assessment jargon and the need for learners to be familiar with appeal processes (four panel members regarding each of these as essential and four as useful).

Following these in importance, according to the panel, was the provision of opportunities for learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning opportunities to develop their academic writing skills (three of them regarding this as essential and five as useful), the development of specific assessment rubrics for these learners and the need to consult them in the development of tasks and processes (three each regarding these as essential and useful). These three conditions also seem to be the only controversial ones, with two panel members indicating that they were unnecessary.

Discussion

Based on the responses of the expert panel to the assessment processes pillar, the following must be noted. As with the teaching and learning pillar, the elements that were not completely validated by the expert panel were the following (i.e. according to the rating scale that I set earlier in this chapter for inclusion or exclusion from the assessment framework):

The response by the expert panel to these elements were in complete contradiction to both the literature review and Phases 1 and 2 of the empirical study. Specifically, the literature review suggests the modification of the assessment tasks to meet the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) to ensure that the assessment instrument is valid, i.e. that the assessment instrument assesses the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and not the extent of the learners learning disability (see chapter 2 & 3). This need for modification or adjustment of the assessment task to meet the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) emerged in the empirical study too (see chapter 5). The validation panel therefore did not sufficiently believe that specific assessment rubrics should be developed for adult learners with learning disabilities. This may link back to the whole argument around modification of assessment tasks and the extent to which this modification may compromise academic standards (see chapter 2).

This pillar included the development of the assessment literacy of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2,3, & 5) as well as the extent to which they should be involved in the development of the institution's assessment framework and assessment tasks (see chapter 2 & 3)., both of which are in keeping with best practices described in literature (see chapter 2 & 3) and which were highlighted in my empirical study as a method of improving learner progress and achievement (see chapter 5).

In respect of the requirement that adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) should be consulted on the development of assessment tasks, the ratings of the evaluation panel are again contrary to what is reported in the literature I reviewed. The literature review identified the consultation of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in the development of assessment tasks as best

practice (see chapter 2 & 3). However, no specific reference was made to this in Phases 1 or 2 of the empirical study.

The need for additional guidance and support of facilitators/lecturers/instructors in the assessment process is evident in the following:

“Educational Specialists from Basic Education can be used to give guidance and training to staff of PSET regarding assessment tasks and processes. Basic Education has more experience with learners with learning disabilities and has done thorough research into assessment tasks, processes etc.”

Whilst there is a need for assessment literacy and specifically for the use of simpler language, there is a caution evident below, suggesting that one must not lose sight of the world of work in which these learners must eventually be able to function effectively (see chapter 2 & 5):

“English is the official language for assessment, but is not the home language of the learners. It was found that even learners without any learning disability have difficulty understanding assessment language. Adult learners must be exposed to the language used in the corporate world where language will not be simplified to meet their needs.”

Interestingly, universal learning design principles are starting to emerge as a strategy for ensuring inclusivity and accessibility (see chapter 2 & 3).

“An integrated approach is necessary and the application of UDL principles. Different options available to choose the best approach for the individual.”

It is interesting to note once again the emergence of the theme that the measures described here are as beneficial to non-disabled learners as they are to learners with disabilities. This is in keeping with the literature review and the empirical study (see chapter 3 & 5):

“Again this should not be seen as a “disability thing”. The above are useful for all learners not just SWD. This approach to learning should be in place regardless of SWD enrolment.”

6.5.6 Assessment Tasks/Instruments

5. Assessment Tasks/Instruments

Assessment tasks are the activities that an assessor uses to determine learner competence (i.e. the tasks that the assessor expects the learners to undertake). For example, assessment tasks are types of questions, tests, examinations, essays, assignments, portfolios of evidence, and products developed by the learner.

6.5.6.1 Assessment tasks (general)

Assessment Tasks/Instruments

6.1. Assessment tasks are constructively aligned with the teaching and learning activities

6.2. Assessment tasks are constructively aligned with the intended learning outcomes (ILOs)

6.3. Assessment task outcome must mirror ILOs of the learning programme

6.4. Assessment tasks are aligned with the adult learner's individual learning disability

6.5. Blooms taxonomy is integrated into the development of the assessment tasks

6.6. Assessment tasks are amended to meet the needs of the learner. This is done as follows:

6.6.1. Learning materials provided in alternative format and aligned to adult learners' learning disability, e.g. written; audio; visual (PowerPoint slides; graphical representations)

6.6.2. Assessment tasks are modified. (This refers to an adjustment of the actual assessment task in order to accommodate the needs of the learner (Alant and Casey) so that it is aligned with the adult learner's learning disability)

6.7. Assessment tasks used:

6.7.1. Assessment tasks used, offer the adult learner with learning disabilities a variety of options for response to the assessment task, i.e. to show learning progress (written; oral; video: development and production of a product)

6.7.2. Assessment tasks used, offer the adult learner with learning disabilities a variety of options for response to the assessment task, i.e. to show learning achievement (i.e. written; oral; video: development and production of a product)

6.7.3. Assessment tasks used are fit for purpose

Six of the panel members indicated as essential that assessment tasks should be constructively aligned to the teaching and learning activities, intended learning outcomes, and that the task outcome must mirror the ILOs of the programme. One of the panel members thought that all of these would be useful but were not essential. Four of them regarded it as essential that assessment tasks should be aligned to the adult learner's individual learning disability and that Bloom's taxonomy should be integrated into the development of the assessment tasks, while three of them regarded these as useful only.

As to how assessment tasks should be amended to the needs of the learner, seven of the panel members regarded the provision of materials in alternative format and aligned to adult learners' learning disability (e.g. written; audio; visual: PowerPoint slides; graphical representations) as essential, while one regarded it as useful. The modification of assessment tasks to align these to the adult learner's learning disability was also regarded as essential by seven of the panel members; the other two did not respond to this statement.

Six panel members regarded it as essential that assessment tasks should offer the adult learner with learning disabilities a variety of response options (written; oral; video: development and production of a product while two regarded it as useful. Six of them also indicated that it was essential that assessment tasks were fit for purpose; one regarded it as useful.

Discussion

This pillar formed the most extensive aspect of the framework, given that its focus was on the identification of assessment practices that inhibit/enable adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2,3 & 5). Given this focus, the assessment tasks are critical to learner progress and learner achievement, hence the significant focus on it (see chapter 2,3 & 5).

The importance of this pillar was evident in the responses received from the validation panel, which is evident in the results reflected in the table above. Once again, I will focus in this discussion on the elements that were eliminated and how these were viewed in the literature review and where appropriate in the empirical study.

This pillar focused particularly on the type of assessment tasks that are best suited for adult learners with learning disabilities, which when they are exposed to such, would

improve their learning progress and learning achievement (see chapter 2, & 5). This pillar included constructive alignment as suggested by Biggs and Tang (see chapter 2,3, & 5) as well as alignment of teaching, learning and assessment practices with the nature of the learner's disability (see chapter 2,3, & 5). This is in keeping with best practice identified in the literature study and which also emerged in the empirical study (see chapter 5) as a method of improving learner progress and learner achievement for adult learners with learning disabilities.

“Currently common assessment tasks are compiled. Lecturers from other campuses might compile the assessment task. These lecturers might not be aware/or have knowledge/or have students with disabilities. To date formative assessment tasks have been adjusted where necessary by me, but summative assessment tasks cannot be adjusted, because it is compiled nationally and these examiners do not have to take any disability into account. The method of response lies with the Disability Unit and in our case, I have to make sure the end result of the task is in the format as required by DHET – written.”

Interestingly, universal learning design principles are starting to emerge as a strategy for ensuring inclusivity and accessibility (see chapter 2).

“The application of UDL principles could address all these. When UDL is part of one's teaching repertoire, then these activities are not perceived as burdensome.”

The following participant made the most significant amount of comment in this section. I have opted to present the information exactly as it was relayed so as not to lose any of it through interpretation. The interpretation of it is covered in the discussion section below.

The above comments are interesting from the perspective that this panellist saw these aspects as standard practice. The reality, however, is that it is not standard practice in the classroom context (see chapter 2,3 & 5).

“Assessment tasks should be modified to the extent to possible while meeting course outcomes.”

It is interesting to note once again the emergence of the theme that the measures described here are as beneficial to non-disabled learners as they are to learners with

disabilities. This is in keeping with the literature review and the empirical study (see chapter 3 & 5):

“I found this section confusing. Many items above appeared to me to be features that should be in place regardless of SWD enrolment. They would be supportive to all students. And they would make T&L valid and meet DHET requirements. It seems to me if these are not in place then lack of support for SWD is not that institution’s biggest problem.”

6.5.6.2 Formative assessment

The following measures are in place to ensure that formative assessment is used as assessment for learning opportunities (5.7. – 5.7.12.):
Formative assessment (i.e. assessment <i>for</i> learning) is applied as follows:
Formative assessment tasks are used as a means of ensuring assessment <i>for</i> learning
Formative assessment opportunities are frequently provided to adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)
Peer assessment is actively used in the classroom
Self-assessment is actively used in the classroom
Continuous assessment events (i.e. low stakes assessment) are used to monitor the progress of the adult learner with learning disabilities
Multiple assessment events (i.e. low stakes assessment) are used to monitor the progress of the adult learner with learning disabilities
Formative assessment tasks cover each of the relevant individual ILOs
In order to entrench the concept of assessment <i>for</i> learning, some formative assessment tasks should not carry a mark allocation
In order to entrench the concept of assessment <i>for</i> learning, some formative assessment tasks may carry marks and thus contribute to preparing learners for summative assessment
Formative assessment results are used by facilitators/lecturers/instructors to adapt their own teaching practices so that the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) can be met
Formative assessment is used as a tool to determine the readiness of the adult learner with learning disabilities for summative assessment

With regard to the need for formative assessment seven panel members rated as essential and one as useful its use *for* learning as well as its results as basis for the adaptation of teaching approaches. Also rated as essential – by six panel members

and as useful by two – was the imperative to ensure that formative assessment tasks covered each of the relevant individual ILOs and that it is as a tool to determine the readiness of the adult learner with learning disabilities for summative assessment. Continuous assessment events and multiple assessment events (i.e. low stakes assessment) used to monitor the progress of the adult learner with learning disabilities, were regarded as essential by six of the panel members and as useful by three and two members respectively. One of the members regarded the provision of multiple assessment events as unnecessary, though.

In order to entrench the concept of assessment *for* learning, it was, according to five of the panel members as essential that some formative assessment tasks should not carry a mark allocation; three of the panel members indicated that while this was not essential it would be useful. Four of them also regarded it as essential for some formative assessment tasks to carry marks since this would entrench the concept of assessment *for* learning, while four of them regarded it as essential that formative assessment tasks should carry marks since it would prepare for summative assessment. Three of the members regarded it as useful but not essential to grade formative assessments and to actively use self-assessment in the classroom. Five of them regarded self-and peer assessment as useful while three and two of them respectively regarded these as essential and one as unnecessary.

Discussion

This pillar focused in particular on the type of formative assessment tasks that are best suited to adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 5), the frequency of formative assessment tasks (see chapter 2 & 5) and the reasons for this, as well as the use of self and peer assessment as part of the planned formative assessment strategy for a learning programme (s see chapter 2, 3 & 5). This is in keeping with best practice identified in the literature study around formative assessment (see chapter 2) and also emerged in the empirical study as a method of improving learner progress and learner achievement for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 5). The following elements were particularly well subscribed to, i.e. a response rate of seven out of eight participants selected them as essential:

- Formative assessment tasks are used as a means of ensuring assessment for learning.
- Formative assessment opportunities are frequently provided to adult learners with learning disabilities.
- Formative assessment results are used by facilitators/lecturers/instructors to adapt their own teaching practices so that the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) can be met.

The following verbatim comment stresses the importance of the above-mentioned practices:

“All these are best practices in assessment, therefore they are essential for academic success of all students.”

The comment below stresses the importance of lecturer/facilitator attitude to the use of formative assessments if learners are to obtain the value that formative assessments can afford them in their learning progress and learning achievement (see chapter 2):

“NATED courses are only six months and academic time is very limited – sometimes 12-15 weeks which includes 3 weeks of formative assessment. Some lecturers do use continuous and multiple assessment tasks for the purposes as stated above, but they are very few. The attitude of lecturers would have to change towards students with disabilities in general and also towards learners with learning disabilities in particular e.g. the Educare lecturers themselves do not know how to deal with the dyslexia student, but as part of the curriculum they are teaching the Educare students about learning disabilities. In other words, they cannot practice what they teach.

The NCV courses are 1 year and the lecturers do have more time available for extra formative assessments. But again the attitude of the lecturers needs to be changed. They consider any extra tasks as the responsibility of the Disability Unit staff (me).”

It is interesting to note once again the emergence of the theme that the measures described here are as beneficial to non-disabled learners as they are to learners with disabilities. This is in keeping with the literature review and the empirical study (see chapter 3 &5):

“Once again I really feel the above are appropriate for ALL learners and don’t understand why this would be seen as disability-specific.”

6.5.6.3 Summative Assessment

The following measures are in place to ensure that summative assessment practices support established assessment good practice (5.8. – 5.9.3):
Summative assessments are implemented as follows:
Summative assessments are part of a broader programme of assessments for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)(see glossary of terms for programme of assessments)
Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)have more than one (1) opportunity at each scheduled summative assessment
Adult learners have a variety of assessment tasks to choose from in the summative assessment
Adult learners have a variety of assessment presentation options to choose from when responding to the summative assessment task
Summative assessment and formative assessment are balanced in a programme of assessments
Multiple formative assessment events without mark allocations are offered to the adult learner with learning disabilities
Multiple formative assessment events with mark allocations are offered to the adult learner with learning disabilities
More than one (1) summative assessment event is offered to the adult learner with learning disabilities

Seven panel members indicated that it was essential and one as useful that summative assessments should form part of a broader programme of assessments for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see glossary of terms for programme of assessments). That adult learners should have a variety of assessment presentation options to choose from when responding to the summative assessment task, and that multiple formative assessment events without mark allocations should be offered to the adult learner with learning disabilities were regarded as essential by six of the panel members and as useful by two. The use of multiple formative assessment events with mark allocations and more than one (1)

opportunity at each scheduled summative assessment were regarded as essential by five panel members, as useful by two, and as unnecessary by one. The same pattern was evident in panel members' responses to the statement that more than one summative assessment event should be offered to the adult learner with learning disabilities and that these learners should be allowed to choose from a variety of summative assessment tasks, except that none of them regarded this as unnecessary. Five of them also regarded it as essential that summative and formative assessment are balanced in a programme of assessments; the other four did not respond to this question.

Discussion

This pillar focused in particular on the type of summative assessment tasks that are best suited to adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 5), the frequency of summative assessment tasks (see chapter 2 & 5) and the use of this form of assessment within a programme of assessments (see chapter 2 & 5). This is in keeping with best practice identified in the literature study around summative assessment (see chapter 2) and also emerged in the empirical study as a method of improving learner progress and learner achievement for adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 5).

Summative assessment as a programme of assessments was identified by seven out of eight panellists as essential, thus indicating a strong move away from the once-off summative assessment at the end of a learning programme to a more balanced approach to assessment and multiple assessment opportunities (see chapter 2 & 5).

The following verbatim comments were shared by participants about the effect of summative tasks on learner progress and learner achievement among adult learners with learning disabilities:

“Currently only 1 summative assessment event is offered for NATED courses to students with/without any disability and 3 formative assessments – T1 (assignment, 20%), T2 (formal test – usually written first, 30%), T3 (mini exam, 50%). The formative assessments count 40% of the final mark and the summative assessment 60%. After three unsuccessful attempts to pass a subject, the student cannot continue with the course and are blocked by DHET.”

“The NCV courses have about 5-7 formative assessments and only 1 summative assessment. The exit level – Level 4 – has a supplementary assessment if the student obtained a certain percentage in the summative assessment.”

“Formative and summative assessments are restricted by the policies of DHET and do not yet make provision for students with learning or any other disability.”

This indicates the strong reliance on traditional assessment by DHET at PSET institutions that fall within its mandate:

“Is useful but could be difficult to incorporate into the existing NATED study programme given that each level is only 6 months.”

6.5.6.4 Authentic assessment

The following measures are in place to ensure that authentic assessment practices are in place (5.11. – 5.11.9):
Authentic assessment is used, i.e. assessment tasks are relevant and meaningful and involve the following:
Assessment in a simulated context
Role plays are used as an assessment task
Practicals are used as assessment tasks
Demonstrations are used as assessment tasks
Alternative options to respond to the assessment task are offered to the learner, in line with his/her learning needs (and learning disability); for example, instead of the response of the assessment task being in the written format, the assessment task is presented in alternative response forms
Innovative assessment tasks are used, e.g. use of video as a means of collecting evidence
The adult learner with learning disabilities has the opportunity to produce a piece of work that is authentically his own and developed independently

The adult learner with learning disabilities has the opportunity to produce a piece of work in an authentic environment (i.e. an environment where the learning outcome is likely to be performed in the real world of work)
--

Assessment tasks provided to the learner to do, assess the learner's competence appropriately

Responding to the use of authentic assessment, that is, assessment tasks which are relevant and meaningful, four panel members regarded assessment in a simulated context and demonstrations as assessment tasks as essential; four of them indicated that it would be useful to do so in simulated contexts while three regarded demonstrations as a useful means of assessment. Practical assessment tasks were regarded as essential by three of them and role play by two. Five members regarded practical assessment tasks and roleplay as useful, with one regarding the latter as unnecessary.

All of them seemed to feel that alternative options to respond to the assessment task should be offered to the learners in line with their learning needs and disabilities. In this regard, six of them regarded opportunities to produce a piece of work that is authentically their own and developed independently as essential, one as useful and one as unnecessary, five the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in forms other than in writing as essential and three as useful. Five members indicated, moreover, that it was essential and three that it would be useful to use assessment tasks aimed at assessing learners' competence rather than only their theoretical knowledge. Four of them regarded it as essential and four as useful to use videos as a means of collecting evidence and/or to require learners to produce a piece of work in an authentic environment (i.e. an environment where the learning outcome is likely to be performed in the real world of work).

Discussion

I found the responses of the validation panel surprising in so far as this element of the pillar on assessment tasks goes. Specifically, I expected to see a greater response rate of "essential" on the aspect of authentic assessment. Instead, these elements remained in the framework as a result of the combination of essential and useful ratings. Had I relied exclusively on essential features as the criteria for determining the

retention of an element in the framework, this entire section would have been eliminated. This is a contradiction to the literature study, where there was a strong focus on developing and using authentic assessment tasks, specifically in assessing adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 3). The need to integrate more authentic assessment tasks was also evident in the results of the empirical study (see chapter 5) and ties in strongly with assessment of competence found in the literature review (see chapter 2 & 3) and the results of the empirical study (see chapter 5).

The verbatim comment below expresses the effect which a lack of authentic assessment currently experienced in PSET institutions has on learner progress and achievement:

“Formative assessment tasks can have the above mentioned elements to ensure authentic assessment takes place. Due to the requirement of DHET of only written assessment, authentic assessment cannot be ensured – scribe/reader can assist student if they have knowledge about the subjects.

The formative and summative assessments at present does not asses the learner’s competency appropriately, because the assessment task is compiled Nationally and does not cater for students with disabilities.”

It is interesting to note once again the emergence of the theme that measures described here are as beneficial to non-disabled learners as they are to learners with disabilities. This is in keeping with the literature review and the empirical study (see chapter 3 & 5):

“Still feeling that most of this is needed for all students not just SWD. Of course we want to develop inclusive environments for learning but why are the above considered disability-specific supports? Why would you ever NOT do the above, even if you believed you had NO learners with disabilities?”

6.5.6.5 Principles of good assessment

The following measures are in place to ensure that assessment tasks meet the criteria of reliability, validity, fairness and practicability (5.12 – 5.12.5.)
Assessment tasks are:
Reliable
a. There is no assessor bias
b. Assessors are consistent in their application of the standards and marking
c. Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are supported before, during and after the assessment process
d. The assessor is aware of the adult learner's learning disability
e. Similar results are achieved when the assessment is administered under similar contexts
f. Assessment administration is consistent
Valid
The assessment task is aligned to the adult learners' learning disabilities
The assessment task gives the learner flexibility of response (and thus accommodates the learning disability)
The assessment task includes accommodations and concessions available to the learner as part of the development of the assessment task
The assessment task is based on what has been covered in the curriculum
Fair, inclusive and non-biased
All learners are given equal opportunity to show their learning progress and achievement
All learners are given equal access to the necessary resources to show their learning progress and achievement
There is no bias in terms of gender, race, ethnicity or disability
Learners understand what is being assessed
Learners understand their right to appeal
Learners can apply the appeal process
Practicable i.e. the <u>resources</u> needed to administer the assessment are:

Cost effective without compromising the learner's ability to display learning progress and learning achievement
Time effective without compromising the learner's ability to display learning progress and learning achievement
Human resource usage is efficient and effective without compromising the learner's ability to display learning progress and learning achievement.
Assessors' workload must be of such a nature as to avoid compromising marking standards
Learners' assessment workload must be of such a nature as to avoid over assessment
The assessment is transparent , i.e. the assessment task and its processes are clearly understood by all stakeholders
Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) understand the assessment process
Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) trust the assessment process
Adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) are provided with clear instructions about the assessment, including venue, time, duration and assessment rubrics prior to the assessment being conducted
The assessment task is underpinned by the principles of integrity
The assessment task is based on what has been covered in the curriculum
The assessment submission is fairly graded by taking into account the learning disability
Feedback is provided to the learner after the assessment process
The assessment task is underpinned by accountability among stakeholders
All role-players are identified in the assessment process, for example, assessors, moderators, learners, certifying body
All role-players understand their role in the assessment process
All role-players take responsibility for their roles in the assessment process
The assessment task takes into consideration language sensitivity

Language used in teaching, learning and assessment is accessible
Language used in the assessment task is free of ambiguity and jargon
If the assessment task is translated into another official language, the assessment remains consistent and comparable to the initial version of the assessment instrument
The full range of competencies required for the relevant qualification is assessed. This includes:
Assessment of foundational competence
Assessment of practical competence
Assessment of reflexive competence

According to the panel of experts, the following principles, aimed at ensuring the reliability, validity, fairness and practicability of assessment tasks were regarded as essential, useful or unnecessary.

Reliability

Assessor consistency in the application of standards and marking were essential (8 panel members), absence of assessor bias (7 members), achievement of similar results in similar contexts (7). Six of them regarded the need for support to learners with disabilities prior to, during and after assessments, as well as consistency in the administration of assessment as essential. Four panel members regarded it as essential and four as useful for the assessor to be aware of learners' disabilities. One panel member indicated that the absence of assessor bias and the achievement of similar results being achieved when assessments take place in similar contexts, while not essential, were useful. Two of them regarded the need for support to learners with disabilities prior to, during and after assessments as useful and one the consistency of assessment administration.

Validity

Six of the panel members respectively regarded as essential and two as useful the alignment of the assessment task to adult learners' learning disabilities, the flexibility of learner response it allowed, and the provision made for accommodations and concessions in the completion of the assessment task. Five of them regarded the fact

that the assessment task should be based on what was covered in the curriculum as essential and two as useful.

Fair, inclusive and non-biased

Each of the following was regarded as essential by seven of the participants and as useful by one: (a) all the learners should be given equal opportunities to show their learning progress and achievement and (b) have equal access to the necessary resources to show their learning progress and achievement ; (c) there should be no bias in terms of gender, race, ethnicity or disability; (d) learners should understand what is being assessed, (e) their right to appeal, and (f) be able to use the appeal process.

Practicable

The resources needed to administer the assessment are cost effective without compromising the learner's ability to demonstrate learning progress and learning achievement as well as the allocation of sufficient time to assessment tasks (i.e. time allocated should not compromise a learner's ability to effectively demonstrate her/his ability) were regarded as essential by five panel members and as useful by three and two members respectively. The effective and efficient use of human resources and assessor workloads which do not compromise marking standards or learners' ability to display learning progress and learning achievement, and the avoidance of over-assessment were regarded as essential by six panel members and as useful by two.

Transparency

All of the following were regarded as essential by seven panel members and as useful by one, namely that all the stakeholders should have clear understanding of the assessment task and its processes, and that adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) understand and trust the assessment process, and are provided with clear instructions about the assessment, including venue, time, duration and assessment rubrics prior to the assessment being conducted.

Integrity

Seven panel members agreed that this was an essential principle, six of them regarding the fact that the assessment task is based on what has been covered in the curriculum and that feedback is provided to learners after the assessment

process as essential to the integrity of assessment while one regarded these as useful but not necessarily essential. Five of them regarded the fair grading of assessment, taking into account the learning disability as essential while one each regarded this as useful and unnecessary.

Accountability

Seven panel members regarded as essential and one as useful to ensuring assessment accountability, that (a) the assessment task should be underpinned by accountability among stakeholders, (b) all the role-players understand, and (c) accept responsibility for their role in the assessment process; (d) all the role-players (assessors, moderators, learners, and certifying bodies) are identified in the assessment process. One panel member, however, regarded the identification of role players as unnecessary.

Language sensitivity

Eight panel members regarded it as essential to ensure that assessment remains consistent and comparable to the initial version of the assessment instrument even if the task is translated into another official language. Seven of them indicated that it was essential and one that it would be useful if the language used in teaching, learning and assessment were accessible, that the language used in the assessment task was free of ambiguity (one regarded this as useful but not essential) and jargon. Six of them regarded the consideration of language sensitivity in assessment tasks as essential while one regarded it as useful.

That the full range of competencies (foundational, practical and reflective) required for the relevant qualification should be assessed was regarded as essential by seven panel members, evoking no response from the remaining two.

Discussion

SAQA (2001) indicated that in order for assessment to be considered credible, it must be valid, reliable, fair and practicable. The reliability, validity, fairness, inclusivity and practicability of assessments are clearly very important to the panel as is evident in the number of elements they rated as essential. Of particular interest is the need for consistent marking by assessors, the absence of which in current PSET assessment practice is an issue that emerged in the literature review (see chapter 2 & 3), and as a concern in my empirical study (see chapter 5).

5.12.1.d. The assessor is aware of the adult learner's learning disability

X – Not always necessary

The validation panel did express the view that it was not always essential to take into account the nature of the learning disability to ensure that the marking process will be fair. In theory, I believe that if the assessment task is sufficiently aligned to the intended learning outcomes, the teaching, learning and assessment activities and the nature of the disability in the development phase, the marking process should be fair enough, given that all aspects were considered in the development phase.

The verbatim comments cited below were shared by participants and present the importance of assessment reliability, validity, fairness and inclusivity of assessment tasks. They reflect what current assessment practices are like, demonstrating their inconsistency, which can only have a negative effect on adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) (see chapter 2 & 5).

“Different text books used to compile the assessment tasks – not necessarily cover the curriculum. Examiners, colleges use different textbooks. Some text books have additional information which is not necessarily part of the curriculum. Depending on the textbook the examiner is using, questions can be included that is not part of the curriculum.

Instructions not always clear – individual time tables for summative assessment with only date and time, but no venue. We have arrangement that all students with disabilities, who registered through the Disability Unit, can write their assessment tasks in the exam venue at the Unit. Students need to make the invigilator (me) aware of their disability, their specific needs and subjects to be written in order to make the necessary arrangements and preparations with the exam department and other staff needed during the assessment period.

Summative assessments are marked externally and therefore it cannot be determined whether the markers were consistent in applying standard marking.

Again not all role-players take responsibility for their role in the assessment process and dump their responsibility unto the Disability Unit (me) – getting the question paper, preparing or giving the necessary assistance to the students, deliver the assessment task back to the lecturer.”

The next set of comments reflects the absence of and imperative for an assessment approach that considers the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in totality (see chapter 2,3, & 5):

“It is essential to assess the totality of competences to give a fair chance to everyone to succeed”

“Adult learner with a learning disability must be engaged on suitable assessment procedures to support the challenges that may emerge from the learning disability.”

The theme that some of the measures described here are as beneficial to non-disabled learners as they are to learners with disabilities surfaces again, and is in keeping with the literature review and the empirical study (see chapter 3 & 5).

“Still feeling that most of this is needed for all students not just SWD. Of course we want to develop inclusive environments for learning but why are the above considered disability-specific supports? Why would you ever NOT do the above, even if you believed you had NO learners with disabilities?”

The only element removed from this pillar was 5.12.6.2, because the evaluation validation panel did not sufficiently categorise it as an essential feature, i.e. it did not meet the set norm of 75%. I would have expected this to have been categorised as essential given the requirement to align all aspects of the assessment process, including the nature of the learning disability being considered during grading. Such an approach is considered good practice and is in line with the view reflected in the literature study (see chapter 2 & 3) and the empirical study (see chapter 5).

6.5.7 Accommodations and concessions

5. Accommodations and Concessions
Accommodation and concessions within a classroom and assessment context respectively, are those supports provided to learners with learning disabilities in order to eliminate any barriers to learning, which if not provided, would not allow the learner to participate on an even playing field. <i>Accommodations</i> are relevant to the <i>classroom environment</i> whereas <i>concessions</i> are specific to the <i>assessment context and environment</i> .
The following measures are in place to ensure that the learner has been provided with accommodations and concessions based on the learner's learning disability (6.1. – 6.3.):
An analysis of learner needs is conducted at enrolment to identify the accommodations and concessions that will be required in teaching, learning and assessment activities for the adult learner with learning disabilities.
Accommodations are made within the classroom for the learners, as follows:
The presentation of assessment task is changed to meet learners' needs and learning disability (i.e. written; oral)
The technological supports required by the adult learner with learning disabilities to complete the assessment task are available
Concessions have been made for the learner in the assessment context, as follows:
The assessment task is modified to meet learners' needs and learning disability (i.e. written; oral)
The technological supports required by the adult learner with learning disabilities to complete the assessment task are available
Low noise examination rooms are available for adult learners with learning disabilities
The adult learner is allowed flexibility of response mode, e.g. oral response to an AT that would normally require a written response to the AT in order to accommodate the learning disability
Alternative venues are available if required

Human resource supports are available and may include scribes or additional people to read the question paper to the learner
The adult learner with learning disability has the option of more time allowed
The adult learner with learning disability has been provided with a scribe if required to accommodate his/her learning disability (i.e. amanuensis)
The adult learner with learning disability has been provided with the option of alternative mediums, e.g. dictation, using software that captures a written response, to accommodate learning disability
The adult learner with learning disability is supported with reading instructions
The adult learner with learning disability is provided with the option of dividing the assessment task into shorter segments
The language used in the assessment task has been simplified to meet the needs of the learner with a learning disability
The adult learner with learning disability has the option of assessment tasks being modified in line with the learning disability (i.e. the assessment task is modified by the lecturer)
Concessions offered during assessment are also offered in the classroom context as accommodations when formative assessment is conducted in order to accommodate the learning disability

Panel members' view on the need for measures that ought to be in place to ensure that learners' disabilities are considered include its being essential that an analysis of learner needs should be conducted at enrolment to identify the accommodations and concessions that will be required in teaching, learning and assessment activities for the adult learner with learning disabilities (8 panellists). Regarding accommodations to be made within the classroom, seven of them regarded as essential, and one as useful, changes in the presentation of assessment tasks (written and/or oral) to meet learners' needs and learning disabilities. As to assessment accommodations, the availability of technological support needed by the adult learner with learning disabilities to complete the assessment task were regarded as essential concessions by seven panel members and as useful by one, as were the need to modify assessment tasks to meet learners' needs and learning disabilities. The availability of low noise examination rooms, flexibility of response mode (e.g. oral response to an

AT that would normally require a written response), and alternative venues were regarded as essential by six and as useful by two of the panel members. Allowing more time for the completion of tasks were regarded as essential by eight of the panel members, the provision of a scribe, if required, to accommodate specific learning disabilities (i.e. amanuensis) were regarded as essential by seven and as useful by one of them, while seven of them also indicated the availability of additional people to read the question paper to the learner essential concessions. Six panel members regarded as essential and two as useful the following concessions to adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning: (a) the option to use alternative mediums (e.g. dictation, and software that captures a written response); (b) support in the reading of instructions, and (c) also including concessions offered during formal assessment in formative assessments taking place in classroom contexts. Five panellists indicated that it was essential and two that it would be useful to simplify the language used in assessment tasks to the proficiency levels of those with language disabilities and/or barriers while four of them regarded giving learners with learning disabilities the option of having their assessment tasks divided into shorter segments. Two of the panel members indicated that this would be useful but not necessarily essential while one regarded it as unnecessary.

Discussion

The 'accommodations and concessions' pillar was very well rated by the expert panel. In fact, most of the elements of the pillar were deemed essential by the majority of panellists, as is evident from their ratings. Concessions offered during assessment are also offered in the classroom context as accommodations when formative assessment is conducted in order to accommodate the learning disability – this is absolutely critical (see chapter 2, 3 & 5).

Whilst accommodations and concessions were viewed by the majority of the panellist as an essential feature, two provisos emerged. The first of these is that accommodations and concessions would have to be provided in the context of current policy.

“However as per Inclusive Education principles: degree of accommodation and concessions needed by the individual learner will inform placement in a full-service or inclusive or mainstream environment respectively”.

The second proviso that emerged is the need to bear in mind that learners must be competent for the world of work and therefore the manner in which they are assessed and in which accommodations and concessions are granted should not inhibit learners from demonstrating this real-world competence.

Giving adult learners with learning disabilities the option to have their assessment tasks divided into shorter segments raised the question of whether or not the accommodation of disability undermined the standards, resulting in the task no longer truly assessing competence. Learners need to be competent for real – world work placement. The tension between these two positions was evident from panel members' ratings.

Panel members' rating of this pillar in the questionnaire reinforced the imperative for a learner needs analysis at enrolment in order to identify the learner's needs in respect of accommodations and concessions.

“A learner needs analysis during enrolment is very important. Currently a student with dyslexia is enrolled without any assistive devices and/or the availability of a reader & scribe to assist not only with assessment tasks, but also in the classroom. Ordering of the necessary assistive devices can take very long which leaves the student without any support for a certain period of time. Colleges do not have policies in place regarding the remuneration of readers & scribe. A reader that was used 2 years ago, has still not been paid.”

There was also agreement that the accommodations were as necessary in the classroom context as they were in the actual assessment context. This is in keeping with the literature review (see chapter 2).

The following verbatim comment suggests the need for a more comprehensive set of policies in terms of accommodations and concessions that is in line with current academic thinking:

“DHET should adapt or use the policies of Basic Education on concessions as guidelines to compile their policy. The policy regarding concessions is very limited and makes only provision for 15min/h extra time. The policy of Basic Education is far more comprehensive regarding concessions and the procedures applied for each type of learning disability.”

The following element of the framework was eliminated, given that the validation panel responses did not satisfy my inclusion/exclusion norms for this element to be included in the assessment framework. The above-mentioned element was not deemed essential enough by the validation panel (less than 75% rated it as essential or useful). However, the literature reviewed suggested that assessments should be programme-based, i.e. they should consist of a variety of assessment tasks spread out over the length of the learning programme, including smaller, self-contained tasks as well as a balance between formative and summative assessments (see chapter 2,3 & 5). This appears to contradict the literature reviewed (see chapter 2) as well as the results of the empirical study, where the call for more modular assessments was echoed (see chapter 5).

The following verbatim comments were shared by participants on the importance of accommodations and concessions and their effect on learner progress and learner achievement among adult learners with learning disabilities, a view that is in keeping with best practice identified in the literature study around accommodation and concessions (see chapter 2) and as essential to the improvement of learner progress and achievement by adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in my empirical study (see chapter 5).

“Currently we have only one venue available for examinations for students with disabilities. The venue is not low noise – close to street – which influence the concentration ability of the students with disabilities. Sometimes 2-3 readers are in the same venue which also causes a disturbance to the other students.

As mentioned earlier, no alternative methods are available or allowed for assessment tasks. At the Disability Unit we try to accommodate the students to best of our abilities with limited resources. In the case of the student with dyslexia, I have targeted 1-2 lecturers who are willing to act as reader & scribe for the student during the summative assessment.

At XXX TVET college, I have designed stickers to place on the scripts of the students to make the markers aware that this is a student with a certain disability. Red sticker with white text e.g. Blind. If language is a barrier, I include a report to indicate the barrier and request that language should not be taken

into consideration. This report is signed by the Assistant Campus Manager: Academic Affairs.”

6.5.8 Feedback

6. Assessment Feedback
The Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick model (2006) on feedback is discussed in the literature review. It has been widely adopted as best practice for learner feedback and has been included in this assessment framework for the key principles that should underpin feedback during assessment. Here feedback is a two-way dialogue, i.e. learners and lecturers receive and give feedback (see 2.10.2.3)
The following principles /measures are in place to optimise the value of feedback:
Key principles of assessment feedback (see 2.10.2.3)
Before feedback can be given there must be clarity on what is good performance for the adult learner with learning disabilities
Feedback facilitates self-assessment
The lecturer must deliver high quality feedback to the adult learner with learning disabilities
The feedback process must encourage lecturer/facilitator and peer dialogue
The feedback process must encourage positive motivation and self-esteem for the adult learner with learning disabilities
The feedback process must provide opportunities to close the gap for the adult learner with learning disabilities
Feedback is used to improve teaching
The adult learner with learning disabilities is provided with feedback that is prompt. This means that feedback is provided:
a. Within 1 week?
b. Within 2 weeks?
c. Within 3 weeks?
d. Within more than 1 month?
Feedback is provided through:
Feedback is provided face to face

Feedback is provided in writing (formal)
Feedback is provided in general class discussions
Feedback is provided via electronic means, e.g. an e-learning platform
Feedback is done by making the memo available for the AT
Feedback is turned into “feed forward” by providing adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in advance with the assessment rubric/tool that will be used for marking purposes
Feedback is relevant to the subject matter
Feedback is provided that is of high quality
Feedback is informal and includes feedback from tutors
Feedback is informal and includes feedback from peers
Feedback is provided to the adult learner with learning disabilities on summative assessment results for the following purpose:
Providing learners with final feedback on learning achieved
Providing the learner with feedback on how to improve in the context of lifelong learning (i.e. the next level of learning)
Eliciting feedback from the learner on how the learning programme could be improved to enhance learner progress and achievement
Eliciting feedback from the learner on how the learning programme could be improved to enhance teaching and learning
Using the assessment results and feedback from adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) to reflect on course amendments for future
The adult learner with learning disabilities is able to question the feedback provided in a dialogue with the lecturer
The adult learner with learning disabilities understands the feedback received
The adult learner with learning disabilities can explain what needs to be done to the subsequent submission of the assessment task in order to meet the assessment criteria and standards (i.e. opportunities to close the gap)
Feedback is provided for formative assessment
Feedback is provided for summative assessment
The adult learner with learning disabilities is provided with opportunities for reflection throughout the learning programme

The adult learner with learning disabilities develops self-sufficiency, self-determination and self-regulation through reflection

Feedback is used to inform the lecturer/facilitator/instructor/assessor on the pertinent issues around teaching, learning and assessment that require amendment

7. ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK

Indications from panel members' rating of feedback principles /measures which should be in place to optimise the value of feedback are that (a) before feedback can be given there must be clarity on what constitutes good performance for the adult learner with learning disabilities; (b) feedback should be of a high quality; (c) the feedback process must encourage positive motivation and self-esteem for the adult learner with learning disabilities (6 regarded these as essential and two as useful). Five of them indicated as essential and three as useful the need for feedback to facilitate self-assessment while four believed that it was essential and two that it would be useful if feedback was used to improve teaching.

As to the promptness with which adult learners with learning disabilities are provided with feedback, three panel members indicated that it was essential that feedback be given within three weeks, three within two weeks, one within a week and one within a month. One participant indicated that the stipulation of feedback time-frames was unnecessary.

Two of the panel members indicated that face-to-face feedback was essential, and five that it was useful. Three each felt that feedback as part of general class discussions and/or via electronic means (e.g. e-learning platforms) were essential and useful while one regarded it as unnecessary. Two of them regarded written feedback (making the memo available on the assessment task) as essential, three as useful, and two as unnecessary.

Feedback being turned into "feed forward" by providing adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in advance with the assessment rubric/tool that will be used for marking purposes were regarded as essential by five of the panel members, and as useful by three, but seven of the nine agreed that feedback should be relevant to the subject matter, six that it was essential and one that it would be useful for the feedback to be of a high quality. Three of them indicated that it was essential, and five

that it would be useful if feedback from tutors were included while three each regarded informal feedback from peers as essential and useful.

Moreover, five panel members regarded the eliciting of feedback from learners on how the learning programme could be improved to enhance teaching and learning as well as their own progress and achievement as essential while three of them regarded it as useful.

With regard to the purposes served by feedback on summative assessments, six panel members indicated that it was essential and two that it was useful if it enabled learners to progress to the next level of learning while five and two respectively regarded it as essential and useful only in terms of giving learners final feedback on learning which has been mastered or taken place. Five of them indicated that it was essential to use such feedback to reflect on future course amendments three regarded it as useful if used for this purpose. Five of them also indicated that it was essential that feedback on summative assessments should stimulate or facilitate learner-lecturer dialogue while two regarded it as useful and one as unnecessary. Seven of them indicated that it was essential and one that it was useful to ensure that adult learners with learning disabilities understood the feedback received, while six regarded it as essential for them to explain what needs to be done prior to the resubmission of the assessment task in order to meet the assessment criteria and standards (i.e. opportunities to close the gap). Two panel members regarded this as useful only.

Seven of the panel members indicated that it was essential and one that it would be useful to also give feedback on formative assessment. Six of them indicated, however, that it was essential that such feedback should provide adult learners with learning disabilities with opportunities for reflection throughout the learning programme, thus helping them to develop self-sufficiency, self-determination and self-regulation. Two of the panel members, though not regarding this as essential, indicated that it might be useful. Five of them indicated that an essential purpose served by formative assessment feedback was that it sensitized lecturers on pertinent teaching, learning and assessment issues that required amendment. Three of the participants indicated that this might be useful.

Discussion

The panellists were asked to rate the principles of feedback based upon the Nicol and McFarlane-Dick (2006) assessment feedback model (see 7.1; key principles of assessment feedback), which were integrated into the proposed assessment framework as best practice. It is interesting to note that the following principles (McFarlane-Dick, 2006) of assessment would have been eliminated from the proposed assessment framework had they not been identified as a useful feature.

While this element was rated as essential by only five of the panellists, none of them rated it as not necessary.

Self-assessment was once again deemed as good practice and intimately connected to assessment literacy in the literature reviewed (see chapter 2). Assessment literacy is specifically referred to as the ability of learners to understand the assessment standards against which they are required to perform, and their ability to take responsibility for their own learning and regulate their performance through an understanding of assessment standards (see chapter 2 & 5). Thus, a lack of understanding of assessment standards and what constitutes an assessment submission that meets the required assessment standards, will then result in learners failing at self-assessment. Self-assessment is the learner's ability to realistically assess his or her own progress and ability against assessment standards (see chapter 2,5, &6). This requires learners to understand the assessment standards and for opportunities to be created for learners to apply these standards and thus develop their assessment literacy (see chapter 2 & 5). The relatively poor validation of self-assessment by the panel contradicts the view evident in the literature review (see chapter 2 & 5).

This element was rated as essential by only four of the panellists, with one panellist not responding at all. The possible exclusion of this element is also contradictory to the literature reviewed (see chapter 2), in which feedback was deemed to be the means by which lecturers/facilitators are able to assess the effectiveness of their teaching, learning and assessment practices (see chapter 2). Feedback is supposed to provide insight into how these practices can be redeveloped to obtain a better result (see chapter 2). If we do not see feedback as valuable to this process, then how do we continuously improve the practice of teaching, learning and assessing?

The feedback pillar also revealed some surprising responses from the validation panel. This pillar was made up of two components, i.e. the seven key principles of feedback which the validation panel had to rate and which was based on the Nicol & McFarlane-Dick (2006) model on feedback. The second component focused on when feedback should be given, how feedback should be given and what the nature of the feedback should be in order to foster deep approaches to learning. Only one element of the seven key principles of feedback (Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006) was deemed essential. Feature 7.1.6. is in keeping with the literature reviewed, i.e. that feedback must enable the learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to better understand assessment standards and, through dialogue, to be able to challenge the feedback received. This process should allow the learner to integrate the assessment standards to the extent that he or she will be able to resubmit the assessment at the required standard (see chapter 2).

The remaining six elements were retained in the framework because they met the 75% norm through the collective rating of essential and useful.

The next component within the feedback feature focused on the frequency of the assessment feedback, i.e. how soon after assessment should the learner be given feedback. It also focused on how feedback should be provided, i.e. face to face, in writing, and finally, whether the purpose of providing feedback at both a formative and summative level was to encourage deep approaches to learning.

The second component of the feedback feature in the assessment framework focused on when feedback should be given to learners, how learners should be given feedback, and finally, what the nature of the feedback should be in order to foster deep approaches to learning.

The following elements were eliminated from the proposed framework because the validation panel failed to identify them as essential or useful:

The above options were given for “when” feedback should be given. None of these options were deemed essential or useful enough and some were seen as unnecessary. This contradicts the literature reviewed, which suggests that the timing of assessment feedback is important (see chapter 2). The literature reviewed also suggests that feedback should be given prior to summative assessment in order to ensure that learners are able to adapt and improve their development through new

understanding and new knowledge facilitated through such feedback (see chapter 2). Timing of the feedback is also important to ensure that there is enough time for the learner to integrate the feedback and, in so doing, facilitate a “feedforward” opportunity, i.e. provide feedback before the final submission of the assessment task so that the feedback can be used by the learner to inform, adapt and amend the final submission (see chapter 2 & 5). The need for feedback at regular intervals is supported by Sambell (2013) (see chapter 2).

The next aspect of the framework that was eventually eliminated was the section that focused on “how” feedback should be given. Specifically, the following elements for the feedback feature were eliminated, i.e. that feedback is provided by making the marking memo for the assessment task available to the learner (feature 7.2.2.5), providing feedback face to face (feature 7.2.2.1), feedback is provided in general class discussions (feature 7.2.2.3) and feedback is provided via electronic means (feature 7.2.2.4.) There were no additional comments provided by the validation panel for this view.

The most highly rated form of assessment feedback according to the panellists is formal feedback provided in writing. However, face to face and general class discussion methods of providing feedback allow for dialogue among learners and between learners and lecturers, and are to be encouraged according to my literature review (see chapter 2) and are considered good practice. This dialogic approach is intended to close the feedback loop by providing the learner with the opportunity to engage with the feedback provided and challenge it if necessary. In so doing the assessment standards are understood and internalised. It is possible that simply providing the marking memo does not encourage such a dialogue and is unlikely to ensure an understanding of the assessment standards being applied. Therefore, by itself it is meaningless in enabling the learner to understand and integrate the assessment standards. However, it must be noted that a marking memo can have value if the learner was part of the development process of the assessment task and the assessment rubric at the outset. In this context, where the marking memo was part of a multipronged approach, it can have the effect of ensuring that feedback provided is done so by a variety of means, including dialogue between learners and lecturers as well as among learners themselves (see chapter 2, 3 & 5).

The next feature that received an essential rating by the majority of the panellists focuses on the need for the learner with learning disabilities to understand the assessment feedback given. Current assessment practices indicate that the biggest challenge experienced by adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) is that they do not understand the feedback that they receive. If learners don't understand the feedback on their assessment submission, they will be unable to interpret it and unable to use it to enhance their understanding of the subject matter and of assessment processes generally (feedforward). This in turn has the effect of preventing learners from integrating the feedback received and thus coming to a better understanding of the assessment standards. Once again, this will prevent learners from improving their future learning endeavours.

Panellist were asked to rate whether learners should be provided with feedback on summative assessments. In terms of the rationale for providing learners with feedback on summative assessment, good practice suggested the following reasons for taking such action (see 7.3.1-7.3.6 above). These elements remained in the framework because of the culmination of essential and useful ratings with a frequency of 7 or 8.

Finally, feedback provided for formative assessment is deemed an essential element for the majority of panellists. This is in keeping with the literature reviewed where formative assessment feedback is deemed critical to ensuring a refocus of assessment on assessment *as* learning and assessment *for* learning (see chapter 2). Feedback should not only provide valuable and relevant information about the learner's performance in the assessment task against the criteria and standards; it should also be communicated in such a manner that it engenders an affirmative attitude towards learning in future (see chapter 2). The feedback should provide information of such a nature that it enables learners to improve the quality of their future submissions as well as the approach they take to their learning in future (see chapter 2). Formative assessment is the ideal context in which the above can be achieved. The following verbatim comment reflects the current challenges with formative assessment and summative assessment feedback in a PSET environment:

“Formative assessment feedback are given by lecturers, but because summative assessments are externally marked, feedback cannot be given unless the lecturer is provided with the memorandum. The current policy of DHET prohibit the circulation of summative assessment memos. Markers

must hand in their marking guidelines at the end of the external marking session.”

The least supported element of this component of the feedback pillar was the informal feedback from peers, which was also deemed best practice in the literature reviewed (see chapter 2). Therefore, the feature’s failure to meet the 75% norm, resulting in it being eliminated as a feature of the framework, contradicts the literature reviewed.

The quote below emphasises the need for fit-for-purpose feedback, i.e. providing feedback that is context relevant and recognising that feedback can take different forms.

“Here are different types of feedback for different contexts. Effective teachers use the relevant feedback aligned with the situation. Otherwise, the list above has elements of best practices.”

Whilst feature 7.2.2.4 (feedback via electronic means) was eliminated because it did not meet the 75% norm, it is interesting to note that this panellist saw value in it as a form of feedback. The panellist’s responses clearly show the need for a variety of means of providing feedback to learners on assessment outcomes. Having a variety of options would also ensure that the feedback provided suits the learner and the practical realities of the PSET institution.

In summary, the following nine (9) elements of the framework were eliminated completely as a result of the evaluation and validation process:

1.8. Career development and counselling services are in place for adult learners with learning disabilities.	5	1	0
4.1.7. Adult learners with learning disabilities are consulted in the development of assessment tasks	3	3	2
4.1.8. Adult learners with learning disabilities are consulted in the development of assessment processes	3	3	2
5.12.6.2. The assessment submission is fairly graded by taking into account the learning disability	5	1	1

7.2.1.a Within 1 week?	1	0	1
7.2.1.b. Within 2 weeks?	3	0	1
7.2.1.c. Within 3 weeks?	1	0	1
7.2.1. d. Within more than 1 month?	1	0	1

7.2.2.5. Feedback is done by making the memo available for the AT	2	3	2
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6.3.10. The adult learner with learning disability is provided with the option of dividing the assessment task into shorter segments	4	2	1
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7.2.6. Feedback is informal and includes feedback from peers	3	3	0
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I further used the following criteria to retain those elements of the framework based on the participants' rating. I selected 75% as the cut-off for essential and useful items, i.e. 75% of the participants (7/9 participants) needed to rate an element as "essential" or "useful" for it to be retained in the assessment framework, and between 33% and 40% (3/9 participants) as "not necessary" to eliminate an element from the framework.

In sections 6.4.1 to 6.4.7 the various elements that comprise each pillar is presented. In addition, the total number of participants that rated each element is reflected together with the relevant verbatim comments made by each participant. It must be noted that some participants may not have rated an element within a pillar. However, it is important to note that all participants did not rate all elements of a pillar. Therefore, some responses are reflected as 6 or 7 participants.

All results as discussed in each section and any adaptations made to the elements of the pillar are reported. In addition, one of the participants at executive leadership and

management level had the following to say about the elements of the assessment framework:

“The answers are too obviously biased in the direction of the optimal situation; hence all my responses are ‘essential’; subtler discrimination needed in the rating items.”

In light of the above comment, it must be noted that all the options were based on best practices revealed in the literature review as well as on the findings of the first and second round of data collection during the empirical study. I concede that the framework is looking for an “ideal”, i.e. to present a best practice assessment framework.

At the outset, the most common criticism of the proposed assessment framework was its length. Many of the participants took a long time to complete it, thus sighting its lengthiness for the delay in returning the questionnaire against the identified time-frame.

“I do not have time to complete such a LONG questionnaire. Make it much shorter for better results”

“I am still willing to participate. However, your deadline (during teaching term) is unrealistic for a 30-page document. I can only exert myself over the weekend and send comments to you on 14 March.”

The final framework is presented in Chapter 7, together with my concluding remarks, implications of the study, as well as its limitations and a suggestion of areas requiring further research.

8. CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the proposed assessment framework, the process for the compilation of the framework, and the criteria used to retain or eliminate an element of the proposed assessment framework. In it I also reported the responses of the validation panel together with the discussion of how these responses related to the literature reviewed, as well as the results of the empirical study in Phases 1 and 2.

The proposed assessment framework was compiled using best practices described in the literature I reviewed, as well as participant views emerging from my empirical study

(Phases 1 and 2). The validation panel evaluated the elements of the proposed framework and provided information through the rating process, as well as by commenting on various elements of the proposed assessment framework. As a result of this process, I have come to a more refined understanding of the elements of the assessment framework that must be included in the final validated assessment framework for adult learners with learning disabilities.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS,
SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE
STUDY

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

7.1. INTRODUCTION

As indicated in chapter 1, the problem being researched in this study is concerned with how PSET institutions deal with the assessment of adult learners with learning disabilities and how these processes could be enhanced. In order to empirically investigate this problem, I asked myself the following primary question:

How do the assessment practices currently used in PSET programmes support adult learners with learning disabilities in demonstrating their competence as measured against the learning outcomes of the programme?

From this primary question, the following four secondary questions emanated:

1. What assessment practices reported in literature support, or inhibit adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) from reflecting their competence as measured against the learning outcomes of the programme?
2. How do current assessment practices that adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in a PSET programme experience, influence their learning progress and learning achievement?
3. How do current assessment practices used by the facilitators/lecturers/instructors of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in PSET programmes, effect learners' learning progress and learning achievement?
4. How could current assessment practices in PSET programmes be adapted to cater optimally for the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities)?

In order to answer these questions, I established the following aims and objectives for the study.

The primary aim of the research study is to investigate which assessment practices currently used in PSET institutions support adult learners with learning disabilities and which inhibit them from demonstrating their competence measured against identified minimum standards.

This primary research aim includes the following research objectives:

1. To investigate the positive and negative effects of assessment practices and concessions reported in literature on the ability of adult learners with learning disabilities to demonstrate their competence against the learning outcomes of the programme.
2. To investigate how adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET experience the current assessment practices, and how these practices influence their learning progress and learning achievement.
3. To determine how the facilitators/lecturers/instructors of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET perceive the assessment practices they use to assess their learners with learning disabilities, including the effect that they believe their practices might have on these learners' learning progress and learning achievement.
4. To compile and validate an assessment framework that will optimally cater for the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in PSETIs.

In chapter 2 and 3, I reviewed the literature on assessment practices including intrinsic barriers to learning and extrinsic barriers to learning respectively. Chapter 4 detailed the research methodology I intended to use in this study and Chapter 5 presented the findings of the empirical research. In Chapter 6 I presented the proposed assessment framework and the outcomes of the expert panel's evaluation of the proposed assessment framework.

This chapter addresses the final research objective, i.e. to compile and validate an assessment framework that will optimally cater for the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET and therefore presents the final assessment framework as amended according to the feedback obtained from the expert panel. The chapter concludes by presenting the significance of the study, its limitations and the

implications thereof for further research, as well as my concluding remarks as the researcher.

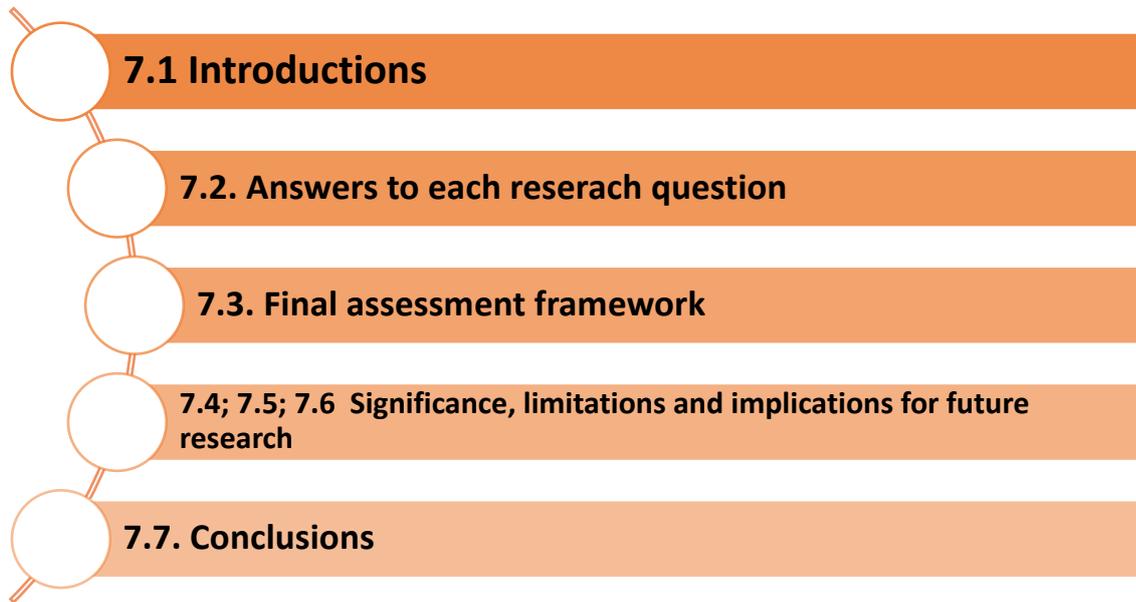


Figure 7.1: Layout of Chapter 7

7.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this section of the final chapter I provide answers to each of the research questions based on the insights gained from the literature review and the findings emerging from my empirical study.

7.2.1. Research question 1

What assessment practices reported in literature may inhibit adult learners with learning disabilities from reflecting their competence against minimum standards, and what reported practices and concessions may support them in this regard?

- The literature study highlighted assessment practices that inhibit and support adult learners with learning disabilities from displaying their competence against minimum standards. Inhibiting practices assessment practices were identified as, (a) traditional examination-based assessment that is managed by strict time constraints, (b) an overreliance on the written form of assessment tasks and once off summative assessment at the end of the learning programme, (c) assessment of the knowledge component only of the learning programme, (d) a one size fits all

assessment, (e) assessor inconsistency in the marking as well as failure to provide feedback on assessment with immediacy and face to face, (f) Insufficient formative assessment opportunities, (g) a lack of alignment of assessment tasks with the nature of the learners disability and finally (h) Insufficient access to supportive and enabling technology

Additionally, the lack of concessions for adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning was seen as a further inhibiting assessment practice.

Supporting assessment practices were identified as, (a) Alternative and innovative assessment tasks including role-plays, demonstrations, oral, verbal and video options; simulated environments and venues, assessment of practical skills and competence , (b) frequent formative assessment opportunities with immediate, face-to-face feedback, (c) assessment literacy built among learners to ensure the proper understanding of the assessments requirements. This includes the use of exemplars.

Supporting concessions were identified as the following, extra time, scribes, interpreters, alternative assessment venues, alternative assessment questions aligned to learner's disability and the use of technology to support learner in assessment.

Furthermore supportive assessment practices included such things as (a) consultation with learners on all aspects of assessment that influence assessment experience and learning achievement, (b) the practice of a programme of assessments and (c) using a multitude of assessment practices and tasks to ensure that learners have as many opportunities as possible to show competence against minimum standards.

7.2.2. Research question 2

How do adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET environments experience and perceive the assessment practices to which they are currently subjected, and how do these practices influence their learning and ultimate achievement?

Adult learners with learning disabilities articulated their perceptions and experience of the assessment practices to which they are currently exposed as inhibiting (see 5.5). Learners feel at the mercy of the assessment because they have no control over it, i.e. they are not consulted on the process or the format that the assessment will take. In addition, there is very little feedback on their performance (see 2.4; 2.5.2; 3.2.1; 5.5). So, for learners who have failed a subject more than once, there is very little to no guidance on what they are doing wrong; thus assessment feedback that creates opportunities for “feedforward” is lost (see 2.7.1; 5.5). Consequently, chances are that they may well make the same mistakes in their next attempt.

Of significance is their view that the assessment practices should take into consideration their learning disability and their individual learning needs stemming from the learning disability (see 2.5.2; 3.2.1; 5.3.1; 5.4;5.6). The emotions expressed are captured in the following words: inhibiting, anxiety, stressed, uncertainty, lack of confidence (see 3.2.1; 5.7; 5.8.5).

In addition, current assessment practices to which they are exposed constitute high stakes assessment because progress into the next level of learning or into employment is determined by a single summative assessment at the end of the learning programme (see 2.5.4; 5.5). They expressed concerns that their assessment tasks were largely knowledge-based rather than inclusive of practical and workplace application assessment tasks (see 2.6; 5.5). This is specifically relevant in the context of needing to seek employment post the qualification, and being able to prove competence.

The adult learners’ lack of proficiency in English (see 2.5.1; 2.5.4; 3.2.1b; 5.3.1; 5.9), coupled with reliance on the written form of assessment, results in a double-edged sword. Learners are well aware of their lack of language proficiency and recognise that this (see 5.5; 5.7), together with the volume of the curriculum to be completed, impacts their learning progress and achievement negatively (see 5.2; 5.4; 5.7).

Finally, the volume of content to be completed in the curriculum, together with their slow pace of learning, is believed to compound their inability to progress or reach the qualification award in the allocated time frame. They stressed the view that the volume of content in the curriculum was overwhelming and the duration of the learning programme should be reconsidered (see 5.2; 5.7). An alternative could be to allow

learners with learning disabilities the opportunity to complete the qualification over a longer period of time, thus allowing them the extra time they need to integrate the concepts being taught (see 2.4.1; 2.8; 5.2). In general, they believe that these assessment practices limit their progress and their learning achievement.

7.2.3. Research question 3

How do the facilitators/lecturers/instructors of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET environments experience and/or perceive the assessment practices they use to assess their adult learners with learning disabilities, and what effect does their own assessment practices have on these learners' learning and ultimate achievement?

Facilitators/lecturers/instructor participants recognised that the current assessment practices used in their classrooms had a limiting effect on the learners' progress and learner achievement. Their view is consistent with that of learners, i.e. that there is no alignment between the assessment task and the nature of the learners' disability; that traditional assessment tasks which are heavily weighted in the written form, specifically in the public sector, largely take the form of time-based examinations (see 2.5.5; 2.7.5; 5.5; 5.7; 5.8.5). The traditional assessment tasks fail to support learners with learning disabilities from progressing or achieving their qualifications (see 2.2; 2.4.3.1; 5.5; 5.7; 5.8.5)

Facilitators/lecturers/instructor participants also agreed that the time frame allocated to the programmes is too short, specifically given that learners with learning disabilities require learning at a different pace, that they require that sections be repeatedly recapped and that they process information at a slower pace (see 3.1; 5.6). It is interesting to note that whilst there is this agreement, there was little evidence among facilitators/lecturers/instructors of using assessment tasks that are more learner friendly, or of them adapting assessment tasks to the nature of the learner's disability (see 2.4.2; 2.6.1; 5.3.1; 5.5; 5.8.4).

It is equally interesting to note that whilst the facilitators/lecturers/instructors may not have had any control over the assessment process or assessment tasks to which learners were exposed, they did have control over the manner in which the curriculum was delivered, i.e. over the teaching and learning practices. The learners in this study

identified a wealth of preferred teaching and learning practices which in their opinion, if applied, would make a profound difference to the learning progress and learning achievement of all learners (see 5.8.3).

However, there is very little evidence of these teaching and learning practices being implemented at a classroom level, a level over which facilitators and lecturers have complete control. There was more evidence in the private PSET sector of assessment flexibility and adaptability than in the public sector (see 2.4.2; 2.6.1; 5.3.2; 5.4; 5.5) but not enough to change the learner's assessment experience to an enabling one.

7.2.4. Research question 4

How might the current assessment practices in PSET environments be adapted to optimally cater for the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities?

In order to optimally cater for the needs of learners with learning disabilities, we have to accept the inextricable link between teaching, learning and assessment (see 2.3; 2.4; 3.2.1; 5.4; 5.6). Additionally, learning progress and learning achievement can be improved by considering adaptation to both the teaching and learning practices, as well as the actual assessment methods and assessment processes adopted (see 2.4.2; 2.6.3; 5.4; 5.5).

If we consider teaching and learning practices, then learners with learning disabilities are clear that more active learning techniques need to be applied in the classroom. These include (a) the creation of a constructivist classroom environment characterised by reflection, flexibility, collaboration and community engagement (see 2.4.2); (b) active learning techniques applied in the classroom (see 2.4.1; 5.4; 5.8.4) (questioning; teaching learners to summarise their notes; co-operative and collaborative learning opportunities; peer learning and peer tutoring; self and peer assessment; learning through association; mnemonics as a memory tool); (c) One-on-one interactions and interventions as needed (see 2.4.2; 5.3.1; 5.8.4).

Underpinning these ideal teaching and learning practices according to the literature review and research participants are ideal assessment practices (assessment tasks and assessment processes). These include (a) aligning and adapting assessment tasks with the nature of the learning disability; (b) providing alternative forms and

methods of assessment, including orals, demonstrations, the design and manufacture of end products and using video (see 2.6; 5.3.1; 5.4; 5.5); (c) assessing for knowledge, practical application and competence (see 2.3.1; 3.2.1.b); (d) using simulations as alternative and innovative assessment tasks (2.6; 3.2.1.c; 5.5; 5.8.3).

Ideal Assessment processes include (a) involving learners in the process of designing assessment and providing them with insights into how to respond to assessments (assessment literacy) (see 2.3; 2.4.1; 5.8.3); (b) providing relevant, face to face and timeous feedback (see 2.7.1; 5.5; 5.7); (c) offering learners a programme of assessments (see 2.3.1.5; 5.8.3) – a multitude of assessment opportunities using a variety of assessment tasks to enable learners to display their competence against minimum standards.

The table below suggests some of the adaptations that could be made to current assessment practices to optimally cater for the assessment needs of adult learners with learning disabilities.

Table: 7.1 Adapted assessment practices and their possible effects

Current assessment practice	Adapted assessment practice	Effect
One size fits all assessment (same assessment task applied to all learners) (see 5.6)	Align assessment to learner disability. Provide a variety of modes for assessment response (see 5.6)	Assessment task has the effect of assessing learning progress rather than the extent of the learners disability
Written assessments	Align assessment to learner disability. Provide a variety of modes for assessment response (see 5.6)	Flexible assessment practice. Learner able to reflect what has been learnt rather than language proficiency or the ability to work with speed
Once off summative examination at end of learning programme (traditional assessment)	Programme of assessments, including formative and summative assessments that contribute to final determination on learner progress, and frequent formative assessments with face-to-face feedback to ensure assessment for learning (see 2.3.1.5). Alternative and innovative assessment practices (see 2.6; 5.8.3)	Learners have more than one opportunity to show competence.

Current assessment practice	Adapted assessment practice	Effect
Lack of feedback (see 2.3.1.6; 5.5)	Provide feedback to learners timeously and face to face (see 2.3.1.6; 5.5)	Enhances opportunities to use assessment as a learning opportunity (assessment as learning)
Assessment literacy (see 2.3.1.8; 5.5; 5.8.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with learners on all aspects of assessment and thus build their assessment literacy so that they understand the requirements of the assessment task and can respond confidently (see 2.3.1.8; 5.5) Use of assessment exemplars (see 2.3.1.6; 5.8.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds learners' confidence in their ability to respond appropriately to the assessment task Learners have a sense of the end product of assessment.

7.2.5. Primary research question

What assessment practices currently used in PSET environments support adult learners with learning disabilities in, or inhibit them from, demonstrating their competence against identified minimum standards?

In responding to the *primary research question* above, the practices that were identified as providing support to adult learners with learning disabilities were also referred to as ideal assessment practices (see 2.6; 5.5; 5.8.3). Ideal assessment practices were described as assessment practices aligned to the individual needs of the learner and the nature of the learner's disability (see 3.2.1.d.4; 5.6). The ideal assessment practices described were not confined to the assessment task but covered a wide range of assessment issues, which if addressed, would contribute to ideal assessment practices (see 2.6; 5.5; 5.8.3). Specifically, the following examples of ideal assessment practices were identified and are in line with what the literature study defines as alternative/innovative assessment practices (see 2.6; 5.5; 5.8.3), (a) demonstrations; (b) oral assessments; (c) one-on-one interactions/ one-on-one coaching. Learners intimated on this practice that one-on-one interactions were seen as the lecturer/facilitator/instructor adapting assessment tasks to meet the individual learning needs, and which took into consideration the nature of the disability experienced by the learner; (d) role plays; (e) the use of visuals and colour; (f) workplace, experiential, practical based assessment; (g) collaborative assessment

(group based); (h) remedial opportunities during the assessment process and more than one assessment opportunity and finally, (i) modular assessment or a programme of assessments.

The assessment practices that inhibited adult learners with learning disabilities from demonstrating competence against minimum standards were referred to as disabling assessment practices. These practices were described as assessment practices that left the learner feeling anxious, uncertain and not confident that they would successfully complete the assessment (see 3.2.1; 5.5; 5.7). These inhibiting practices cover a range of issues from the lack of constructive feedback through to the overreliance on written examinations (see 2.5.3; 5.1; 5.5). The following practices were specifically deemed inhibiting/disabling assessment practices, (a) perceived inconsistent marking by the assessors (see 2.3.1.9; 5.3; 5.5; 5.6); (b) the lack of practical aspects integrated into the assessment task, i.e. assessment of competence and assessment that is focused on practical application of skills.

Specific references were made to assessment that is wholly knowledge based (theory) with little or no focus on the practical or workplace based component (see 2.6.3; 3.2.1.d.4; 5.3; 5.5). Learners were specific about the lack of workplace exposure offered during their training and the impact they felt that this would have on their eventual employment prospects (see 2.6.3; 3.2.1.d; 5.1; 5.2). The learners felt that they had no control over the assessment processes, including lack of engagement and interaction with the assessors. This becomes particularly difficult in the context of public PSET colleges where the examinations are assessed by external assessors (see 2.5.2; 2.5.3).

Ultimately, the arguments posited in this section are also infused in the assessment framework proposed in section 7.2.6.

7.3. FINAL ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The final proposed framework presented in the figures and pillar by pillar discussion which follows, reflects changes made to the tentative proposed framework evaluated by a panel of experts. Its design is a response to the following research objective: To compile and validate an assessment framework that will optimally cater for the needs of adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) in PSETIs. The final

assessment framework is made up of seven pillars. These seven pillars emerged from the best practices identified in the literature review in chapters 2 and 3, as well as the findings of the empirical study, chapter 5. disabilities. The final framework which consists of seven pillars is illustrated in figure 7.1.

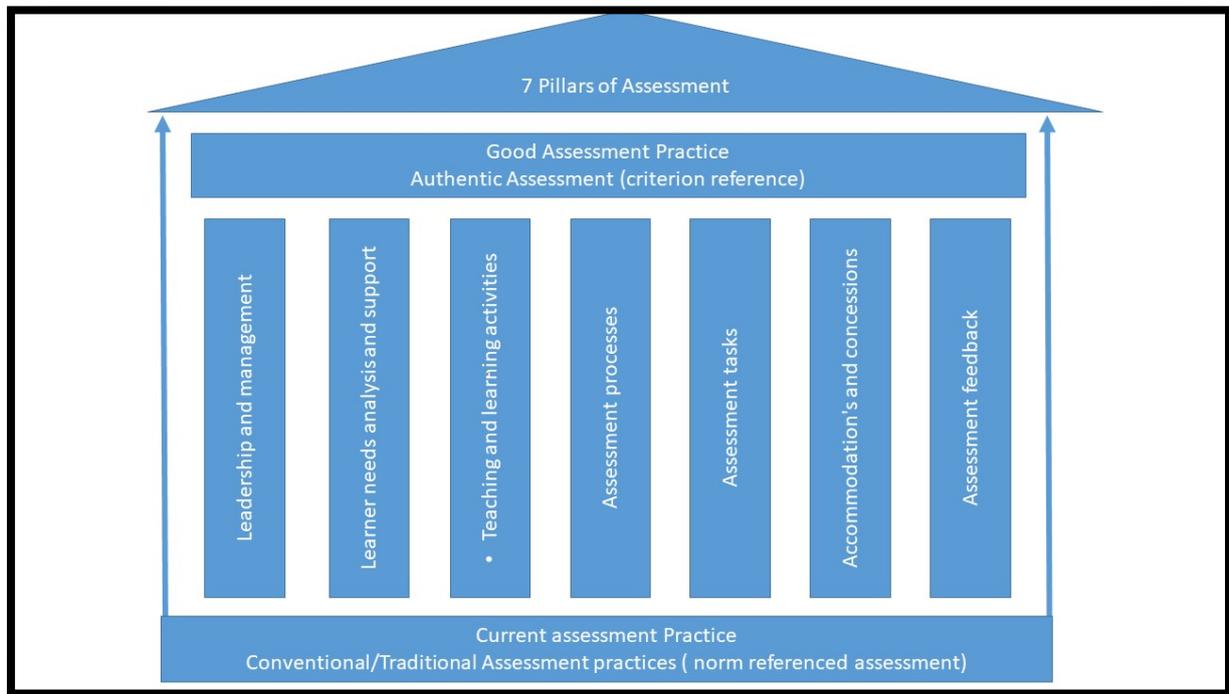


Figure 7.2. Proposed assessment framework

Pillar 1 – Leadership and Management. Effective leadership and management is essential to any process that is directing change. Integrating adult learners with barriers to learning (learning disabilities) is ensuring implementation of new

policy, i.e. inclusive education and new practices to ensure the success of learners with barriers to learning.

Pillar 2- learner needs analysis and support. This pillar places the learner at the core of the system and stresses the importance of knowing learners and being able to meet their specific needs.

Pillar 3 – teaching and learning activities. This pillar makes clear the critical role that teaching and learning plays in ensuring learner achievement and learner progress.

Pillar 4 – assessment process. This pillar is concerned with ensuring that the assessment processes followed has the learner at the centre of the process including the inclusion of the learner in determining assessment processes, assessment tasks and assessment criteria.

Pillar 5 – assessment task. This pillar is focussed at ensuring that the assessment task is fit for purpose and assessing what it intends to assess.

Pillar 6 – accommodations and concessions. This pillar acknowledges the importance of accommodations and concessions in the learning and assessment context. These accommodations and concessions enable the learner with barriers to learning to participate on an even playing field.

Pillar 7 – Feedback. This pillar is essential to formative assessment and therefore critical to providing learners with guidance on their current performance and how to improve future performance. It is also a process that is dialogic in nature and therefore essential to improving teaching, learning and assessment.

The framework presented below reflects the elements that were deemed essential by the validation panel (see 6.4; 6.4.1). In finalising the framework, I took note of the evaluation and comments by the expert panel regarding what they deemed “essential”, “useful” and “unnecessary”. Informed by the best practise highlighted in the literature review, I removed from the original framework, which was presented to the expert panel for evaluation, I removed only those elements of the framework that the majority of the panellist deemed “unnecessary” (see 6.5). The rationale for retaining those elements regarded as “essential” and “useful” is based on the findings of the empirical study, i.e. data collected from research participants in phases 1 and 2 of the empirical study

(see 6.3). I did not merge any of the elements either, largely because I felt that each element is a discrete aspect of the framework.

A leadership and management pillar is regarded as essential in the literature I reviewed, in the comments of the evaluation panel and in the data collected from research participants.

7.3.1 Pillar 1 – Leadership and management

There is clear evidence of commitment from executive leadership and management of the institution to integrating learners with learning disabilities into the institution and providing the necessary supports to ensure their learning progress and learning achievement. This will be made possible by:

Policies and Procedures

1. Policies are in place to support the learner and the academic staff to ensure academic success. This includes:

1.1.a. A policy on the admission of learners with learning disabilities has been adopted

1.1.b. A policy on assessment of learners with learning disabilities has been adopted

1.1.c. A policy on accommodations (classroom) for learners with learning disabilities has been adopted

1.1.d. A policy on concessions (assessment context) for learners with learning disabilities has been adopted

1.1.e. A universal learning design policy has been adopted

1.2. Policy on disclosure of information about learners

1.2.1. A policy on disclosure of learning disabilities is in place

1.2.2. A policy on documents to be provided for confirmation of the learning disability is in place

1.3. Disability support unit

1.3.1. A disability support unit is in place

1.3.2. The disability support unit is part of a broader strategy

1.3.3. The disability support unit has time lines identified for implementation

1.3.4. The disability support unit has adopted a definition of learning disability

1.3.5. The disability support unit has adopted a definition for learning disability, which enables it to identify learners with this condition

1.3.6. The disability support unit differentiates between the supports needed for learning disabilities and supports needed for other disabilities by adopting pertinent definitions

1.4. Financial resources – there is a confirmed, ring-fenced budget allocated for the following:

1.4.1. Amendments are made to the curriculum for adult learners with learning disabilities

1.4.2. Amendments are made to the assessment processes for adult learners with learning disabilities

1.4.3. Amendments are made to the assessment tasks for adult learners with learning disabilities

1.4.4. Interventions are in place to build the capacity of lecturers to effectively deliver teaching, learning and assessment to adult learners with learning disabilities

1.5. Physical infrastructure adjustments are in place and include:

1.5.1. The amendments are made to the classroom environment for adults with learning disabilities

1.5.2. Curriculum amendments are made to accommodate adult learners with learning disabilities

1.5.3. Amendments are made to the assessment environment (i.e. venues) for adults learners with learning disabilities

Continuous professional development

1.6. It is necessary to provide continuous professional development of lecturers/facilitators/instructors to enable support for adult learners with learning disabilities. This includes:

1.6.1. A skills audit of lecturers and facilitators is in place to determine their current skills levels versus required skills levels

1.6.2. A year planner for continuous professional development initiatives for lecturers and facilitators is in place to ensure that effective teaching, learning and assessment is provided to adult learners with learning disabilities

1.7. Advocacy and awareness of disability rights is conducted among all stakeholders: This includes the following:

1.7.1. Conduct advocacy and awareness workshops for adult learners with learning disabilities during orientation

1.7.2. Conduct advocacy and awareness workshops for current non-disabled learners on the rights of learners with learning disabilities

1.7.3. Conduct advocacy and awareness workshops for lecturers/facilitators/instructors on the rights of adult learners with learning disabilities

1.8. A standard diagnostic testing protocol is in place for diagnosing learning disabilities among learners

1.9. Bridging programmes are in place for adult learners with learning disabilities

1.10. Extended programmes are in place for adult learners with learning disabilities

1.11. Language support programmes are in place for adult learners with learning disabilities

1.12. Monitoring and evaluation processes are in place. This includes the following:

1.12.1. Statistics are available per semester on:

1.12.1.1. Enrolment data across all programmes for adult learners with learning disabilities

1.12.1.2. Throughput statistics per semester for adult learners with learning disabilities across all programmes

1.12.1.3. Data on the nature of disability supported at the institution for adult learners with learning disabilities (what is the nature of the learning disability)

1.12.1.4. Data on the outcomes of programmes implemented to ensure academic success for adult learners with learning disabilities is available

1.12.1.5. Data that tracks on a per-semester basis the enrolment rates versus throughput rates is available to determine whether the measures put in place are promoting enrolment and ensuring success for adult learners with learning disabilities

7.3.2 Pillar 2 – Learner needs analysis and support

This pillar was strongly supported by the validation panel (see 6.3; 6.4.2; 6.4.6) and expresses the importance of having access to learner information in order to ensure that the needs of the adult learner with learning disabilities are met at an individual level. One of the most important elements highlighted in this pillar was the need for proper disclosure of the learning disability so that supports needed by the learner to ensure success is identified and in place, preferably prior to the learning programme beginning (see 6.4.1.1; 6.4.2).

2. Learner needs analysis and support	
A learner needs analysis has to be completed for adult learners with learning disabilities at enrolment to ensure that the required supports to facilitate learning progress and learning achievement are understood and the institution is able to ensure that these supports are implemented as soon after enrolment as possible.	
2.1. Information about the learner that should be disclosed is	
2.1.1.	Learner's disability is disclosed
2.1.2.	Supporting documentation provided by medical professional for learners with learning disabilities
2.1.3.	Anecdotal evidence provided by family/educational institution for learners with learning disabilities
2.1.4.	Psychological report is available for the adult learner with learner disabilities in order to identify any additional conditions that exist as a result of the learning disability that can impact self-regulation
2.2. The learner's choice of programme/course of study should be known	
2.2.1.	The learner's choice of programme for study is interrogated in line with his/her learning disability
2.2.2.	The learner's choice of programme for study is interrogated in line with his/her learning disability and employment opportunities
2.2.3.	Determine if there is a need for academic advice or career counselling in terms of the programme selected by the learner
2.2.4.	A needs analysis is conducted among adult learners with learning disability. This involves the following:
2.2.4.1.	Conduct a standardised assessment protocol to confirm the diagnosis
2.2.4.2.	Determine accommodations that will be required in the classroom for effective learning
2.2.4.3.	Determine concessions that will be required in the assessment context
2.2.4.4.	Determine the technology supports that are required to ensure accessibility to curriculum for the adult learner with learning disabilities
2.2.4.5.	Determine the technology supports that are required to ensure accessibility to assessment tasks for the adult learner with learning disabilities

2.2.5.	Communicate the findings of the needs analysis to academic staff
2.2.6.	Implement the learners' support requirements as identified in the needs analysis. This includes the following:
2.2.6.1.	Identify and provide alternative study materials for adult learners with learning disabilities
2.2.6.2.	Provide interpreter/scribe services for adult learners with learning disabilities
2.2.6.3.	Provide assistive technology for adult learners with learning disabilities
2.2.6.4.	Provide alternative assessment arrangements for adult learners with learning disabilities
2.2.6.5.	Provide orientation into the institution for adult learners with learning disabilities
2.2.7.	Social support must be provided for adult learners with learning disabilities. This should include:
2.2.7.1.	Identify a peer/buddy to mentor the adult learner with learning disability
2.2.7.2.	Identify the sport and recreational needs of adult learners with learning disability

7.3.3 Pillar 3 – Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

This pillar cemented the inextricable link between the teaching, learning and assessment activities, alignment with ILOs and TLAs and alignment with the nature of the learning disability (see 6.3; 6.4.3). One cannot consider assessment practices and the amendment of assessment practices without considering teaching and learning practices. This is reinforced in the literature review (see 5.3.1; 5.4; 5.8.4) and the empirical study (see 6.4.3; 6.4.1.3; 6.4.4; 6.4.5.1).

3. Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

Teaching and learning activities that the learners must be exposed to must ensure learner progress and learning achievement. This includes the amendment of learning and teaching activities, amendment of the curriculum as well as the adaptation of the learning materials provided to the learner. Teaching and learning activities must also be constructively aligned with the ILOs and ATs as well as be aligned to the nature of the learner's disability. In addition deep learning can be encouraged by a sound teaching and learning approach, the selection of appropriate teaching and learning activities, and the alignment of the intended learning outcomes with assessment methods and tasks (Biggs & Tang, 2007:54).

3.1. The teaching and learning activities are aligned with the learner's learning disabilities

3.2. The teaching and learning activities are aligned with the learning needs of adult learners with learning disabilities

3.3. Active learning techniques are used in the teaching and learning environment for adult learners with learning disabilities including the following teaching – learning activities:

3.3.1. Real life activities (i.e. authentic learning activities)

3.3.2. Interactive learning, including peer-peer activities

3.3.3. Interactive learning, including group activities

3.3.4. Role plays

3.3.5. Demonstrations

3.3.6. Simulations

3.3.7. Objects used to simulate the learning concepts

3.3.8. Visuals including diagrams, process flows, collages, video, multimedia inputs

3.3.9. Multisensory learning materials and learning activities that meet the needs of the adult learner with learning disability

3.3.10. Games and exercises built around the concept to be learnt and taking into account the adult learner with learning disability

3.3.11. Suitable information and communication technologies are used to enhance teaching and learning activities.

3.3.12. Interviews as a method of assisting adult learners with learning disabilities to master concepts

3.3.13. Opportunities for one on one teacher learner interactions are provided.

3.3.14. Peer learning is actively used as a TLA in class

3.3.15. Ensure that enough time is allocated to the task to be learnt (Time on task: Sambell, 2016)

3.3.16. The above TLAs encourage deep approaches to learning

7.3.4 Pillar 4 – assessment processes

Assessment literacy featured prominently in this pillar (see 6.4.7). It expressed the importance of ensuring that learners understand assessment standards and know how to apply them. In this pillar assessment literacy included understanding assessment language, understanding assessment standards as well as academic writing skills and knowing how to appeal assessment outcomes. This is in keeping with the literature reviewed (see 2.3.1.8) and the results of the empirical study (see 5.5; 5.8.3).

4. Assessment processes

The following definition of assessment was adopted in this study:

- “1. The planned process of gathering and synthesizing information relevant to the purpose of a) discovering and documenting learner strengths and weaknesses, b) planning and enhancing instruction and c) evaluating progress and making decisions about learners.
2. The processes, instruments, methods used to gather information.” Baartman et al. (2007:117)

4.1. Learners’ assessment literacy should be developed by means of the following:

4.1.1. Adult learners with learning disabilities are supported in understanding the purpose and utility of assessment rubrics

4.1.2. Adult learners with learning disabilities are supported in understanding assessment language (e.g. how to properly interpret assessment questions)

4.1.3. The assessment language used in the assessment task is simplified to meet the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities

4.1.4. Adult learners with learning disabilities are supported through examination technique workshops/programmes

4.1.5. Learners with learning disabilities are provided with academic writing skill development opportunities

4.2. Adult learners with learning disabilities are aware of and know how to appeal their assessment outcomes

7.3.5 Pillar 5 – assessment tasks/instruments

The pillar was the most extensive pillar in the assessment framework with a series of elements ranging from type of assessment tasks all the way through to ensuring that the assessment tasks meet the criteria of reliability, validity, fairness, inclusiveness and practicability (see 6.4.5.5). This pillar further made the distinction between formative (see 2.4.3; 5.5) and summative assessment tasks (see 6.4.5.1; 6.4.5.2; 6.4.5.3; 6.4.6; 6.4.7). The bulk of this pillar was rated as essential or useful (see 6.3; 6.4.1.2; 6.4.1.4; 6.4.4; 6.4.5; 6.4.5.1; 6.4.5.2; 6.4.5.4; 6.4.5.5) thus indicating the critical need for guidance needed by practitioners about the manner in which assessment tasks for adult learners with learning disabilities are developed and implemented.

5. Assessment tasks/instruments	
Assessment tasks are the activities that an assessor uses and engages to determine learner competence (i.e. the tasks that the assessor expects the learners to undertake). For example, assessment tasks are types of questions, tests, examinations, essays, assignments, portfolios of evidence, and products developed by the learner.	
5.1. Assessment tasks are constructively aligned with the teaching and learning activities	
5.2. Assessment tasks are constructively aligned with the intended learning outcomes (ILOs)	
5.3. Assessment task outcome must mirror ILOs of the learning programme	
5.4. Assessment tasks are aligned with the adult learner's individual learning disability	
5.5. Blooms taxonomy is integrated into the development of the assessment tasks	
5.6. Assessment tasks are amended to meet the needs of the learner. This is done as follows:	
5.6.1.	Learning materials provided in alternative format and aligned to adult learners' learning disabilities, e.g. written; audio; visual (PowerPoint slides; graphical representations)
5.7. Assessment tasks used are:	
5.7.1.	Assessment tasks used offer the adult learner with learning disabilities a variety of options for response to the assessment task, i.e. to show learning progress (written; oral; video: development and production of a product)
5.7.2.	Assessment tasks used offer the adult learner with learning disabilities a variety of options for response to the assessment task, i.e. to show learning achievement (written; oral; video: development and production of a product)
5.7.3.	Assessment tasks used are fit for purpose
5.8. Formative assessment (i.e. assessment <i>for</i> learning) is applied as follows:	

5.8.1.	Formative assessment tasks are used as a means of ensuring assessment <i>for learning</i>
5.8.2.	Formative assessment opportunities are frequently provided to adult learners with learning disabilities
5.8.3.	Peer assessment is actively used in the classroom
5.8.4.	Self-assessment is actively used in the classroom
5.8.5.	Continuous assessment events (i.e. low stakes assessment) are used to monitor the progress of the adult learner with learning disabilities
5.8.6.	Multiple assessment events (i.e. low stakes assessment) are used to monitor the progress of the adult learner with learning disabilities
5.8.7.	Formative assessment tasks cover each of the relevant individual ILOs
5.8.8.	In order to entrench the concept of assessment <i>for learning</i> , some formative assessment tasks should not carry a mark allocation
5.8.9.	In order to entrench the concept of assessment <i>for learning</i> , some formative assessment tasks may carry marks and thus contribute to preparing learners for summative assessment
5.8.10.	Formative assessment results are used by facilitators/lecturers/instructors to adapt their own teaching practices so that the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities can be met
5.8.11.	Formative assessment is used as a tool to determine the readiness of the adult learner with learning disabilities for summative assessment
5.9.	Summative assessments are implemented as follows:
5.9.1.	Summative assessments are part of a broader programme of assessments for adult learners with learning disabilities (see glossary of terms for programme of assessments)
5.9.2.	Adult learners with learning disabilities have more than one (1) opportunity at each scheduled summative assessment
5.9.3.	Adult learners have a variety of assessment tasks to choose from in the summative assessment
5.9.4.	Adult learners have a variety of assessment presentation options to choose from when responding to the summative assessment task
5.10.	Summative assessment and formative assessment are balanced in a programme of assessments
5.10.1.	Multiple formative assessment events without mark allocations are offered to the adult learner with learning disabilities
5.10.2.	Multiple formative assessment events with mark allocations are offered to the adult learner with learning disabilities
5.10.3.	More than one (1) summative assessment event is offered to the adult learner with learning disabilities
5.11.	Authentic assessment is used, i.e. assessment tasks are relevant and meaningful and involve the following:
5.11.1.	Assessment in a simulated context
5.11.2.	Role plays are used as an assessment task
5.11.3.	Practicals are used as assessment tasks
5.11.4.	Demonstrations are used as assessment tasks

5.11.5.	Alternative options to respond to the assessment task are offered to the learner, in line with his/her learning needs (and learning disability); for example, instead of the response of the assessment task being in the written format, the assessment task is presented in alternative response forms
5.11.6.	Innovative assessment tasks are used, e.g. use of video as a means of collecting evidence
5.11.7.	The adult learner with learning disabilities has the opportunity to produce a piece of work that is authentically his own and developed independently
5.11.8.	The adult learner with learning disabilities has the opportunity to produce a piece of work in an authentic environment (i.e. an environment where the learning outcome is likely to be performed in the real world of work)
5.11.9.	Assessment tasks given to the learner assess his or her competence appropriately
5.12. Assessment tasks are:	
5.12.1.	Reliable
a.	There is no assessor bias
b.	Assessors are consistent in their application of the standards and marking
c.	Adult learners with learning disabilities are supported before, during and after the assessment process
d.	The assessor is aware of the adult learner's learning disability
e.	Similar results are achieved when the assessment is administered under similar contexts
f.	Assessment administration is consistent
5.12.2.	Valid
a.	The assessment task is aligned to the adult learners' learning disabilities
b.	The assessment task gives the learner flexibility of response (and thus accommodates the learning disability)
c.	The assessment task includes accommodations and concessions available to the learner as part of the development of the assessment task
d.	The assessment task is based on what has been covered in the curriculum
5.12.3.	Fair, inclusive and non-biased
a.	All learners are given equal opportunity to show their learning progress and achievement
b.	All learners are given equal access to the necessary resources to show their learning progress and achievement
c.	There is no bias in terms of gender, race, ethnicity or disability
d.	Learners understand what is being assessed
e.	Learners understand their right to appeal
f.	Learners can apply the appeal process

5.12.4.	Practicable, i. e. the <u>resources</u> needed to administer the assessment are:
a.	Cost effective without compromising the learner's ability to display learning progress and learning achievement
b.	Time effective without compromising the learner's ability to display learning progress and learning achievement
c.	Human resource usage is efficient and effective without compromising the learner's ability to display learning progress and learning achievement
i.	Assessors' workload must be of such a nature as to avoid compromising marking standards
ii.	Learners' assessment workload must be of such a nature as to avoid over assessment
5.12.5.	The assessment is transparent, i.e. the assessment task and its processes are clearly understood by all stakeholders
5.12.5.1.	Adult learners with learning disabilities understand the assessment process
5.12.5.2.	Adult learners with learning disabilities trust the assessment process
5.12.5.3.	Adult learners with learning disabilities are provided with clear instructions about the assessment, including venue, time, duration and assessment rubrics prior to the assessment being conducted
5.12.6.	The assessment task is underpinned by the principles of integrity
5.12.6.1.	The assessment task is based on what has been covered in the curriculum
5.12.6.2.	Feedback is provided to the learner after the assessment process
5.12.7.	The assessment task is underpinned by accountability among stakeholders
5.12.7.1.	All role-players are identified in the assessment process, for example, assessors, moderators, learners, certifying body
5.12.7.2.	All role-players understand their role in the assessment process
5.12.7.3.	All role-players take responsibility for their roles in the assessment process
5.12.8.	The assessment task takes into consideration language sensitivity
5.12.8.1.	Language used in teaching, learning and assessment is accessible
5.12.8.2.	Language used in the assessment task is free of ambiguity and jargon
5.12.8.3.	If the assessment task is translated into another official language, the assessment remains consistent and comparable to the initial version of the assessment instrument
5.12.9.	The full range of competencies required for the relevant qualification is assessed. This includes:
5.12.9.1.	Assessment of foundational competence
5.12.9.2.	Assessment of practical competence
5.12.9.3.	Assessment of reflexive competence

7.3.6 Pillar 6 – accommodations and concessions

This pillar focused on accommodations (classroom) and concessions (assessment context) (see 6.3; 6.4.6). There was consensus among the panellists that these measures are critical to levelling the playing field for adult learners with learning disabilities (see 6.4.6). This pillar once again reinforced the critical role that a thorough learner-needs analysis (see 3.2.1.e) plays in making sure that the supports that adult learners with learning disabilities need in order to ensure their learning progress and learning achievement, are available.

6. Accommodations and concessions	
Accommodation and concessions within a classroom and assessment context respectively, are those supports provided to learners with learning disabilities in order to eliminate any barriers to learning, which if not provided, would not allow the learner to participate on an even playing field. <i>Accommodations</i> are relevant to the <i>classroom environment</i> whereas <i>concessions</i> are specific to the <i>assessment context and environment</i> .	
6.1.	A learner needs analysis is conducted at enrolment to identify the accommodations and concessions that will be required in teaching, learning and assessment activities for the adult learner with learning disabilities.
6.2.	Accommodations are made within the classroom for the learners as follows:
6.2.1.	The presentation of the assessment task is adjusted to meet learners' needs and learning disability (i.e. written; oral)
6.2.2.	The technological supports required by the adult learner with learning disabilities to complete the assessment task are available
6.2.3.	Concessions have been made for the learner in the assessment context as follows:
6.2.3.1.	The assessment task is modified to meet learners' needs and learning disability (i.e. written; oral)
6.2.3.2.	The technological supports required by the adult learner with learning disabilities to complete the assessment task are available
6.2.3.3.	Low noise examination rooms are available for adult learners with learning disabilities
6.2.4.	The adult learner is allowed flexibility of response mode, e.g. oral response to an AT that would normally require a written response in order to accommodate the learning disability
6.2.5.	Alternative venues are available if required
6.2.6.	Human resource supports are available and may include scribes, additional people to read the question paper to the learner
6.2.7.	The adult learner with learning disability has the option of more time allowed
6.2.8.	The adult learner with learning disability has been provided with a scribe if required to accommodate his/her learning disability (i.e. amanuensis)
6.2.9.	The adult learner with learning disability has been provided with the option of alternative mediums, e.g. dictation, using software that captures a written response, to accommodate learning disability
6.2.10.	The adult learner with learning disability is supported with reading instructions
6.2.11.	The language used in the assessment task has been simplified to meet the needs of the learner with a learning disability

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|---------|--|
| 6.2.12. | The adult learner with learning disability has the option of assessment tasks being modified in line with the learning disability (i.e. the assessment task is modified by the lecturer) |
| 6.2.13. | Concessions offered during assessment are also offered in the classroom context as accommodations when formative assessment is conducted in order to accommodate the learning disability |

7.3.7 Pillar 7 – Assessment feedback

This pillar was based on the Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick assessment feedback model (2006) (see 6.3; 6.4.7). In addition, it incorporated further best practices suggested by thought leaders in assessment, i.e. Boud and Associates (2010); Geysler (2004); Sambell (2013); Price et al. (2010) (see 2.3.1; 5.5; 6.4.7). Feedback in this context was not confined to feedback to the learner on assessment outcomes, but included feedback about teaching and learning practices and the effectiveness of such, with a view to adapting teaching and learning practices in order to improve assessment outcomes (see 6.4.7). Feedback was identified as a critical aspect of assessment in that it contributes to a range of associated issues, including lifelong learning, professional certification, the ability to continue to improve one’s learning attempts and even improve subsequent assessment submissions (see 6.4.7).

7. Assessment feedback

The Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick model (2006) on feedback is discussed in the literature review. It has been widely adopted as best practice for learner feedback and has been included in this assessment framework for the key principles that should underpin feedback during assessment. Here feedback is a two-way dialogue, i.e. learners and lecturers receive and give feedback.

7.1. Key principles of assessment feedback

7.1.1. Before feedback can be given there must be clarity on what is good performance for the adult learner with learning disabilities

7.1.2. Feedback facilitates self-assessment

7.1.3. The lecturer must deliver high quality feedback to the adult learner with learning disabilities

7.1.4. The feedback process must encourage lecturer/facilitator and peer dialogue

7.1.5. The feedback process must encourage positive motivation and self-esteem for the adult learner with learning disabilities

7.1.6. The feedback process must provide opportunities to close the gap for the adult learner with learning disabilities

7.1.7. Feedback is used to improve teaching

7.2. Feedback is provided as follows:

7.2.2.1 Feedback is provided face to face

7.2.2.2. Feedback is provided in writing (formal)

7.2.2.3.	Feedback is provided in general class discussions
7.2.2.4.	Feedback is provided via electronic means, e.g. an e-learning platform
7.2.2.5.	Feedback is turned into “feed forward” by providing adult learners in advance with learning disabilities with the assessment rubric/tool that will be used for marking purposes
7.2.3.	Feedback is relevant to the subject matter
7.2.4.	Feedback is provided that is of high quality
7.2.5.	Feedback is informal and includes feedback from tutors
7.3.	Feedback is provided to the adult learner with learning disabilities on summative assessment results for the following purpose:
7.3.2.	Providing learners with final feedback on learning achieved
7.3.3.	Providing the learner with feedback on how to improve in the context of lifelong learning (i.e. the next level of learning)
7.3.4.	Eliciting feedback from the learner on how the learning programme could be improved to enhance learner progress and achievement
7.3.5.	Eliciting feedback from the learner on how the learning programme could be improved to enhance teaching and learning
7.3.6.	Using the assessment results and feedback from adult learners with learning disabilities to reflect on-course amendments for future implementation
7.3.7.	The adult learner with learning disabilities is able to question the feedback provided in a dialogue with the lecturer
7.4.	The adult learner with learning disabilities understands the feedback received
7.5.	The adult Learner with learning disabilities can explain what needs to be done to the subsequent submission of the assessment task in order to meet the assessment criteria and standards (i.e. opportunities to close the gap)
7.6.	Feedback is provided for formative assessment
7.7.	Feedback is provided for summative assessment
7.8.	The adult learner with learning disabilities is provided with opportunities for reflection throughout the learning programme
7.9.	The adult learner with learning disabilities develops self-sufficiency, self-determination and self-regulation through reflection
7.10.	Feedback is used to inform the lecturer/facilitator/instructor/assessor on the pertinent issues around teaching, learning and assessment that require amendment

The final framework as it is, is a practical solution to the research problem investigated in this study, hence it reflects the theoretical assumptions underpinning the pragmatic framework in which my study was anchored. Institutions can select a pillar at a time for implementation and within that pillar identify elements to be prioritised. Thus, it makes the process a cumulative one. The starting point may be to development and/or adoption and implementation of suitable policies, procedures and practices aimed at the integration of adult

learners with learning disabilities and /or barriers to learning within PSET institutions. The fact that this assessment framework has been broken down into singular elements, is one of the strengths of this making implementation more achievable

7.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In reflecting on the significance of this study in this section of this chapter I am led by my personal experiences and the pragmatic framework within which I anchored my study.

As the mother of a child who is disabled, and whose disability exists on multiple levels (sensory and intellectual), my daily challenge includes how to ensure her independence beyond the life expectancy of my husband and me who are her primary caregivers and entirely responsible for her financial wellbeing. The independence we seek for her is personal, social and ideally economic (financial independence). However, her profound disabilities are of such a nature that it is unlikely that she will ever be able to take care of herself financially through economic activity. Whilst this may be her fate, it does not have to be the fate of other young adults who have learning disabilities, but who have at the same time, the ability to learn, the ability to achieve economic independence and therefore the ability to live healthy, productive lives in society.

In chapter 3 I focused extensively on the rationale for integrating people with disabilities into education and training and specifically learners with learning disabilities. I focused on the economic and social imperatives for the integration of people with disabilities, specifically learning disabilities, into education and training initiatives. In summary, the reasons provided for this integration included the economic and social imperative.

- Economic imperatives considered included (a) higher employment rates and the social inclusion that comes with the integration of people with disabilities into the world of work (see 3.2.2.1; 5.1; 5.2; 5.8.3); (b) reduced risk of poverty (see 3.2.2.1); (c) the contribution to improved mental health and lower public spending on disability, thus allowing this spend to be allocated into more prioritised areas of public spending (see 3.2.2.1) and finally (e) enabling learners with learning disabilities may secure labour supply and can ensure long-term economic output, thus reducing the risk of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty among people with disabilities (3.2.2.1; 5.8.3).

- Social imperatives considered included, (a) the value of the social experience (see 3.2.1.d; 5.8.5); (b) the opportunity for adult learners with learning disabilities to interact with non-disabled learners in such an environment. Furthermore, the educational institution may be able to facilitate a relationship between people with disabilities and prospective employers. The benefits of participating in higher education also ensure personal growth, including the building of solid academic skills essential to lifelong learning and personal independence, and most importantly self-advocacy and self-confidence (see 3.2.1.d; 5.2; 5.3; 5.5). A PSET environment can provide an age-appropriate context in which learners with learning disabilities can practise their social skills, build their self-confidence, and find their voices, which will ultimately enable them to become self-advocates (see 3.2.1.d; 5.2; 5.3; 5.5).

- Human Rights imperative

As a country we are committed to integrating people with disabilities into all spheres of society. We have recognised that in order for people with disabilities to realise this integration, education has to be the bedrock of this process, specifically the ability for people with disabilities to access education and training opportunities. However, to ensure the achievement of these goals, the lived experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities from a learning, teaching, and assessment perspective must be reengineered, even though it may require special intervention. This is reflected in the following: “The interventions must understand disability discrimination within the spectrum of barriers to learning and as a creative and sustainable effort to improve the social and academic experiences of learners” (Matshediso, 2010:741). To that end, we have successfully passed a plethora of legislation intended to integrate people with disabilities into society through education and training, specifically the adoption of a policy on inclusivity and our general human rights framework that is at the foundation of all policies and statutes as they apply to people with disabilities (see 3.2.2). Furthermore, in the private PSET environment where many of the education and training initiatives are SETA funded, 4% of all beneficiaries who enrol in these programs must have a disability, which must be confirmed through medical diagnosis (see 3.1.1; 3.1.2). As a

practitioner in a PSET context, faced with learners with learning disabilities, I see the opportunity that exists for learners with learning disabilities to acquire education and training that can lead to employment and economic sustainability. Adults with learning disabilities are capable of engaging in education and training and therefore capable of learning achievement that may contribute to personal and financial independence.

Accordingly, in respect of learners with learning disabilities the requirement to really look at teaching, learning and assessment practices becomes far more necessary (see 3.2.1.b&c; 5.2; 5.3.2; 5.4; 5.6).

The study has significance in its ability to optimise the manner in which adult learners with learning disabilities are assessed in PSET environments through the compilation of a best practice assessment framework.

The assessment framework that emerged from this study is anchored in literature reviewed that explores the current debates on assessment as and for learning in terms of adult learners with learning disabilities (chapter 2). It is also based upon literature that explores the context within which adult learners with learning disabilities currently operate and the effect that this environment has on their learning progress and learning achievement (chapter 3). The best practices that emerged in these two literature review chapters were further explored in the empirical study through the exploration and analysis of the real life experiences of participants (chapter 5), and finally these two streams were brought together in the proposed assessment framework (chapter 6). The validation panel's ratification provides a practical yet thoroughly researched assessment framework anchored in best practices that can be applied in any PSET institution.

For me as an applied researcher, the value of the study lies in the practical aspect that the framework offers, i.e. the opportunity to use it to improve the assessment experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities by providing practitioners and policy makers with practical tools to realise their inclusion agenda. In offering the framework as a practical solution to the problems experienced by adult learners with learning disabilities, my study has added to current pragmatic views on the nature and purpose of research as a means of

finding practical solutions to existing problems. The proposed assessment framework is simple and user friendly, yet practical and therefore applicable to most PSET environments. In addition to this, my research is significant in that its key outcome – the assessment framework- provides learners, policymakers/legislators, government, and the education and training sector with a practical tool to improve the teaching, learning, and assessment experience of current learners with learning disabilities in PSET programmes. More specifically, the use of the framework could eventually (a) improving, albeit indirectly, the experience of adult learners with learning disabilities in a PSET environment, (b) (i.e., indirectly) increasing the participation and throughput rates of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET programmes and (c) provide facilitators/lecturers/instructors of adult learners with learning disabilities in PSET environments with an assessment framework that enables the realisation of equitable inclusion of learning-disabled learners in a mainstream PSET environment, including guidelines on adaptations and concessions that need to be made to assessment practices in order to improve the experience of the adult learners with learning disabilities, (d) provide policymakers within government and relevant PSET providers with guidelines for effective, inclusive assessment practices.

7.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In using the only four institutions as cases for this study, coupled with the fact that two (2) of them were based in Gauteng, one (1) in the Free State and one (1) in Cape Town, the findings reported in this study are applicable only to those institutions. What was found in them may not be representative of other PSET institutions across the country. Should other researchers wish to replicate this study at other institutions in other provinces, generalisation may become possible.

7.6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study will be made available to a range of readers in order to ensure that it has the greatest range of application. This will include the publication of (an) article(s) in a peer review journal(s), the circulation of the study's findings to the relevant bodies, including the SETAs, DHET, Private PSET institutions and HEDSA, the representative body for disability in the post-school education and training sector, as well as presentations at relevant conferences.

The availability of existing research on the assessment experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities in a South African context is a further limitation of the study. The literature reviewed showed a paucity of research into learners with learning disabilities in general, and specifically a lack of research on the assessment experiences of adult learners with learning disabilities. To further research in this area, it is recommended that practitioners in PSET institutions test the final proposed framework within their institutions to determine the extent of its effectiveness. The results of their action research could also be published or conveyed to the Department of Higher education and training as a means of serving the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning.

In addition to this, other researchers could replicate the study in order to enhance its generalisability. Alternatively, they could conduct research on one of the aspects identified in chapter 2 and 3 of my study as lacking sufficient research. These areas include:

- The impact of assessment concessions. Do learners with learning disabilities who are provided with assessment concessions show higher rates of participation and/or improved performance? Koretz (2003:25) specifically identifies the need for research on the degree to which learner assessment support influences their academic performance and learning achievement.
- The effect of disclosure of a learning disability on learner performance, i.e., do learners who disclose their learning disability perform better than those who do not? It must be remembered that when learners do not disclose their learning disability, it might be assumed that no concessions are being provided.
- The impact of specific amendments, i.e. modifications to, and the resultant effect on, the reliability and validity of the assessment task.
- Information around issues of attitudes toward learners with disabilities, including fellow disabled learners, non-disabled learners, and faculty.
- The effect of concessions on learner performance. Do the learner assessment concessions provided within institutions influence the academic performance of the learner, and to what extent?
- Monitoring and evaluation of practices and programmes implemented to support learners with disabilities in order to determine their effectiveness and, by definition, to review and adjust such programmes to ensure maximum effectiveness.

- The least researched population are those with intellectual and mental disorders, despite the proven reality that this population appears to be the most vulnerable in the context of society at large, and certainly within the labour market. In addition, it is also the population that has seen a large growth in PSET institutions.

7.7. CONCLUSION

The problem investigated in this study was discussed in chapter 1. To find solutions to this problem I reviewed literature pertaining to intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect adult learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning from displaying their competence against minimum standards specifically in the context of assessment practices.

Data was collected from lecturers, learners and specialists within existing PSET institutions. The data collected coupled with the insights I gained from the literature review were used as the basis for the development of a tentative assessment framework aimed at minimising the barriers that adult learners with learning disabilities experience in teaching, learning and assessment at PSET institutions.

The framework developed was then evaluated by a panel of experts who indicated which elements of the framework were essential and which was useful or unnecessary. Based on their evaluations the tentative framework was revised and finally presented as a framework that could be implemented at PSET institutions across the country.