

## THE POST-LITERACY PERCEPTIONS OF NEWLY LITERATE ADULT LEARNERS AT A RURAL COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE

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*Literature suggests that post-literacy (PL) is a seriously under-researched field in most African countries including South Africa. Various authors emphasise the importance of PL to prevent relapsing into illiteracy, the applicability of PL in enhancing everyday private and occupational life, as well as the potential contribution of PL to poverty reduction, social, economic and political development and in sustaining communities. However, PL is often not viewed as a government priority. Consequently a gap exists between what PL programmes offer, and what the newly literate adults may need. The aim of this study was to identify the PL perceptions of newly literate adults in a PL programme at a Community Learning Centre in the Western Cape of South Africa. A small scale study collected qualitative data through ten semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that a learner-centred PL programme may be required which focuses mainly on non-formal and vocational programmes for developing individual literacy and sustaining the community and its economic development.*

### INTRODUCTION

According to the White Paper on Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) of 2000 (Act 52) (Department of Education, 2000), the main purpose of public service providers such as community learning centres (CLCs), is to focus on basic reading, writing and numeric skills. But policies such as these often do not address adult learners' needs after mastery of initial literacy skills, a phase commonly referred to as post-literacy (PL) (Rogers, 2002). PL is a seriously under-researched field in most African countries including South Africa (Aitchison & Alidou, 2009: 54). Baatjes and Mathe (2004: 402) argue that although PL was subsumed into the Department of Education's definition of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) (DoE, 1997), it is not a government priority. The recently published White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (Department of Higher Education & Training, 2014: 10,20), however, does highlight the need for a more coherent system with opportunities for continued education for adults who cannot be accommodated within formal education systems such as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and universities. An investigation into the post-literacy needs of newly literate adults is therefore timely and warranted to inform the practices and approaches of future Community Colleges that the White Paper envisions will address these needs.

Literature suggests that Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in South Africa focus too much on the standard basic literacy programme (generally called ABET) and not enough on addressing the PL needs of newly literate adults (Baatjes & Mathe, 2004: 402). If PL is not viewed as a government priority, a gap may develop between what PL programmes offer, and what the newly literate adults may need (Rogers, 2002: 165). Aitchison and Alidou (2009: 19) suggest that in South Africa, the drop-out rates of newly literate adults are high because PL

programmes, consisting mainly of basic literacy and numeracy programmes, do not address these learners' needs and social challenges. However, limited information on the needs of newly literate adults themselves exists, which makes it difficult to address possible gaps in existing programmes, or plan for future initiatives.

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of a selected group of rurally based newly literate adults in order to highlight where such gaps may possibly exist in the PL programme. For the five-year period 2006-2010 there was a gradual decrease in the enrolment of newly literate adults in the PL programme at the CLC where this study was situated (in the Western Cape province of South Africa). The basic literacy (ABET) programme did not seem to meet the PL perceptions of newly literate learners after they had completed this programme, which warranted further investigation. The following main research question therefore guided the study:

*What are the perceptions of newly literate adults in the PL programme at the rural CLC?*

The sub-questions that followed included:

- What are the characteristics of PL participants at the CLC?
- What are the PL perceptions of these participants about the PL programme at the CLC?
- How can programmes at CLCs be planned to address the identified issues better?

The above-mentioned questions are addressed by firstly considering the relevant literature and then describing the methodology used in investigating these questions. The results suggest that the perceptions of PL programme participants are key to understanding their needs. The data presented in this paper highlight the importance of PL in the lives of these newly literate adults, and the challenges they face in securing employment as well as their employment circumstances. The data also shed light on changes to the existing PL programme that may be necessary to meet the respondents' needs.

## **LITERATURE**

The concept of post-literacy (PL) is used to describe the follow-up and sustaining of the initial acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills (UNESCO, 2000:43). Post-literacy enables newly literate individuals to retain, improve and apply their basic knowledge, skills and attitudes for satisfaction of their needs and to permit them to continue through a self-directed process of improvement of quality of life (UNESCO, 2000: 43). It is not only the basic literacy skills that will ensure the success of the PL programme, but also the applicability of PL in everyday private and occupational life. Few people have benefitted from learning basic literacy skills only; instead people benefit from using their PL skills to achieve some purpose after they have become literate. As such, PL serves a variety of purposes that are crucial for economic development and sustaining communities (Rogers, 2002: 162).

PL serves an important function to prevent relapsing into illiteracy (Rogers, Maddox, Millican, Newell Jones, Pagen & Robinson-Pant, 1999: 7). Rogers (2002: 162) adds that it is not only the basic literacy skills that will ensure the success of the PL programme, but also the applicability of PL in everyday private and occupational life. Basic literacy instruction alone cannot improve the livelihoods of participants – it should be accompanied by PL, income-generating activities and skills-training programmes (Oluoch, 2005: 4). Oxenham (2004: 5) adds that appropriately implemented PL programmes can contribute to reducing poverty,

provided that all the necessary supporting conditions are satisfied. Torres (2004: 21) emphasises the social imperative of PL. PL could thus expand the basic learning needs required for human satisfaction and for personal, family and community development. She subsequently argues that the goal of PL continues to be human development and not merely poverty alleviation. Both the economic and socio-societal imperatives of initial and post-literacy are highlighted in the White Paper on Post-school Education and Training (DHET, 2014) as important drivers of a healthy, sustainable and democratic society.

PL is not only in need of attention in South Africa where there is evidently a lack of attention to PL-related issues in research and practice; authors worldwide have reported on PL-related issues. Torres (2004: 16) indicates that PL is practised mainly in the 'South', which includes developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Drawing on the findings of a study based on PL in Latin America and the Caribbean, Torres (2008: 557-558) states that PL programmes are generally organised for women causing men to feel marginalised. There also seems to be a continued lack of articulation between child literacy and adult literacy, and an increased reliance on technology (such as computers and televisions) with less face-to-face interaction by facilitators in the particular context. Despite these reported systemic deficiencies, the picture is not that bleak everywhere. Thompson (2001: 16) points out that major achievements were realised with the development of PL in Kenya, because an integrated approach was adopted to meet the PL needs of newly literate adults and out-of-school youth. This approach followed in Kenya is supported by Torres (2008: 543) who argues that PL programmes should be flexible to adapt, not only to the concrete needs of newly literate adults, but also to those of out-of-school youth in different contexts and changing realities. She subsequently argues that both inside and outside the school system, out-of-school youth are often labelled as 'dropouts' and 'failures' and denied the right to educational opportunities throughout their lives.

Beyond the generic South, other countries such as China and India have also focused on PL-programmes. China has achieved considerable success in its efforts to raise PL levels, but is still experiencing problems such as delays in the implementation of PL policies, low quality of PL education, poor facilities, relapse into illiteracy, rural poverty and high population growth rates (Guodong & Zhupeng, 2003: 623). Rogers (2002: 176) emphasises several reasons why the implementation of PL in India is experiencing difficulties. He argues that PL is seen as a time-bound stage of literacy and not as an ongoing programme, and that there are no real attempts to encourage the use of literacy outside the classroom in daily life.

Rogers *et al.* (1999: 21) argue that most scholars and planners see the progression from illiterate to literate as being linear, a series of phases similar to learning in primary school. They view PL as part of a lifelong learning (LLL) continuum from basic literacy, to PL and to continuing education (CE). Omolewa (1998: 2), however, finds that basic literacy and PL overlap, culminating in CE for literacy permanence – as it is understood in the Nigerian context. According to Rogers (2001: 19), the traditional approach currently adopted in many programmes views PL as a second-stage activity, something that comes after the basic literacy. He views PL as some further period of teaching or guided learning building up to full literacy. Rogers *et al.* (1999) subsequently proposes a variety of ways in which PL may be facilitated in more successful and sustainable ways, including:

- using real materials in the local language;
- focusing on functional literacy for economic, social and welfare benefits;
- promotion of independent learning; and

- the development of continuing education through a non-formal (life-related) and an alternative adult education curriculum linking education and action.

Fiedrich (1996: 7) argues that the concept of PL is based on the assumption that newly literate adults quickly relapse into illiteracy if they do not have any meaningful ways of using their skills. He indicates that even though the empirical evidence on the relapse of PL is at best incomplete, the position that PL is crucial to the success of a literacy programme has become commonplace among literacy practitioners. According to Guodong and Zhupeng (2003: 626), PL serves the needs of newly literate adults by consolidating the gains of basic literacy and promoting economic and social development so as to meet the challenges of present and future societies, especially in rural areas. However, literacy as such is not a prerequisite for learning (Lynch, 1997: 190), a notion which also became evident in this study. Rogers (2001: 10) calls this a 'literacy-comes-second' approach whereby adults are able to start with sustainable developmental activities aimed at income-generation, environmental enhancement, farming or fishing practices, and improving health without first learning basic literacy skills. The latter approach is an example of functional literacy which is literacy for economic, political and social empowerment for individuals and communities as a whole (Obanya, 2003: 4).

Appelquist and Björkman (2010: 6) argue that these different ways of viewing literacy is important for research, because it makes the concept abstract and questionable. They are of the opinion that a more concrete view is needed. Recent literature suggests that it is possible to provide at least two different viewpoints to substantiate the call for a more concrete definition of the term. Kachala (2007: 6) argues that a reading culture is the base to greater passion of every individual's inner self and that literacy is the key to development (Kachala, 2007: 8). He asserts that those who are literate are more likely to use modern farming methods, follow family planning methods and become active in community development. This argument points to the importance of literacy in initiating development within communities. Street (2001: 291), on the other hand, argues that literacy is not the key to development, as Kachala puts it, but rather a part of the development. He argues that there has been too much focus on literacy as empowering, meaning that participants of different literacy projects might become literate but not empowered. Street (2001: 296) expresses the complexity of literacy by stating:

*You may learn to read the high literacy texts of a culture or you may learn to read the functional texts in which agency messages are inscribed, but in both cases the reading alone and the knowledge associated with that reading do not lead to empowerment, unless one also has the ability to transform that knowledge into a currency that is powerful in that social context.*

Thus while PL may serve a variety of purposes that are important in facilitating economic development and sustaining communities, it remains a problematic and often neglected area of adult education. The reported literature indicates that PL is an important issue in adult education that warrants further investigation. The debates reported here formed the theoretical backdrop to making sense of PL within the study context, where the perceptions of newly literate adults in a rural context provide a rare insight into the lived experience of literacy in adulthood.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used an interpretive approach that elicited respondent accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions through close interviews with a small, purposive sample. The researcher was particularly interested in the respondents' beliefs and values that underlie the phenomenon being studied (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2005: 74). The findings from the study represented the collective experience of newly literate adult learners enrolled in the PL programme at a particular CLC. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted, using semi-structured questions from an interview schedule which was developed for the purpose of this study and which allowed the respondents to express themselves freely to describe their perceptions regarding the PL programme at the CLC. Although all interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, all transcriptions of the interviews were translated into English to facilitate the data analysis which is reported in English. Each interview began with the following questions:

1. How would you describe the influence of the PL programme on your life?
2. How would you describe the influence of the PL programme on your family?
3. How would you describe the influence of the PL programme on your community?
4. Why is PL important to you?
5. Which challenges have you experienced since you became involved in the PL programme?
6. How would you describe the influence of PL on your employment circumstances?
7. What would you like to change in the PL programme?

Prompts such as, 'Can you give an example of that?' and 'Can you tell me more about that?' were used in order to elicit rich descriptions of experiences. The respondents' own interpretations of these questions dictated the shape, course and content of the interviews.

All interviews were recorded on digital tape and transcribed verbatim. Ten respondents were purposively selected in that they represented the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the studied population (De Vos *et al.*, 2005: 202). The selected respondents needed to be adult learners (thus beyond the compulsory school going age of 16) of the CLC who completed the ABET programme and who were registered for, or had completed, the PL programme prescribed by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) at the centre during the period of 2006-2010 (more details follow below). Ten respondents represented a sufficient number as they reflected the range of potential respondents that made up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experience of those in it (De Vos *et al.*, 2005: 294).

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data. The major benefit of content analysis is that it is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing a substantial amount of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Stemler, 2002: 5). In this study data were grouped according to five categories, from which themes could be identified (see results and discussion section below). These categories covered the respondents' views relating to their perceptions of the PL programme. The method of analysis was based on a description of data analysis by Miles and Huberman (1994: 11), who suggest that following the process of the data generation, the analysis process consists of three activities, namely data reduction, data display, and data verification. In this study data reduction involved the transcription of the interviews, whereafter patterns of experiences related to the research question were identified. According to Engelbrecht, Swart and Eloff (2001: 258), these

patterns allow the researcher to identify categories within broader patterns. A process of clustering allows themes to emerge. The data display phase of the data analysis process was also aided by using a qualitative data analysis computer programme called HyperQual to identify, retrieve, isolate and regroup data according to the analytical process of content analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Data verification was done through projecting the data against existing theoretical perspectives obtained from the literature as cited above. Respondents were furthermore allowed to revise and edit their interviews on an individual basis.

In this study, the following steps were taken to ensure internal trustworthiness:

- Fieldwork was carried out over three months.
- The interview schedule was presented to an expert in the field, before the actual interviews, for possible comments in order to improve it.
- Immediately after recording the interviews on tape, the interviewer provided an opportunity for each respondent to revise or edit his or her interview.

External trustworthiness was obtained through sufficient and conclusive descriptions of data within a certain context as provided below, which enables the reader to determine to what extent the results of the study may be applicable to other participants in another context.

Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews and respondents were briefed about the range and variety of questions that would be set to them. Since participation was voluntary, respondents had the right to decline to participate after the study had commenced. Individual confidentiality was maintained using unmarked interview schedules and codes and by referring in reports to respondents by way of pseudonyms (A-J). As the CLC is registered with the WCED, written consent was obtained from the WCED and the governing body of the CLC. The interviewer's role as primary data collection instrument necessitated the identification of possible biases at the outset of the study (Creswell, 2009: 196). In the case of the interviews, one possible source of bias was the asymmetrical relationship between the interviewer and the respondents. In this relationship the interviewer potentially has more power than the respondents (Creswell, 2009: 197). The interviewer's position as centre manager of the CLC may have been perceived by the adult respondents as one of authority and power. Care was taken to create a neutral setting for the interviews and an atmosphere of trust. Although every effort was made to ensure that bias did not influence the study results, it could have shaped the way the data were construed and interpreted. The notion of intersubjectivity (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 121) was useful in addressing possible biases, as the interviewer needed to be sensitive to his insider-outsider status as researcher and the possible asymmetrical relationship between himself and the respondents.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Characteristics of PL respondents in the PL programme**

The curriculum at the CLC addresses the educational needs of adult learners from a rural, farming community by offering formal education such as the basic literacy (ABET) programme and a post-literacy programme. The basic literacy programme consists of learning areas such as Afrikaans Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC) and Numeracy at ABET Level 1, which is equivalent to Grades R-1 in primary school terms. On the other hand, the PL programme consists of learning areas such as Afrikaans Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC) and Numeracy at ABET Level 2, which is equivalent to Grades 2-3 in

primary school terms (WCED, 2006a; 2006b). These learning areas, which are similar to that in the basic literacy programme, aim at strengthening the gains from the basic literacy programme. A closer look at the ABET curriculum (Table 1) shows that it is reproducing the curriculum categories of schooling and this is done through the delivery of a national curriculum consisting mainly of school subjects (learning areas) from Grade R to Grade 9 (Nzimande, 2003: 407).

**TABLE 1: The structure of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in relation to ABET levels (adapted from RSA, DoE, 2006:2)**

NQF training band	School grades (phases)	ABET levels
General Education and Training (GET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Phase (Grades 7-9)</li> <li>• Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6)</li> <li>• Reception year for Foundation Phase (Grades 2-3)</li> <li>• Provision for children from 2-6 years old (Grades R-1)</li> </ul>	ABET Level 4 ABET Level 3 ABET Level 2  ABET Level 1

According to Nzimande (2003: 407), CLCs in South Africa are modelled on the NQF levels which assume that adults' learning and educational needs are similar to that of children, as can be seen in Table 1. Such an assumption usually leads to a teacher-centred approach where teachers (through a pre-determined curriculum) assume responsibility for making decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, and when it will be learned (Conner, 2004). In contrast, Knowles (1984: 56) and Conner (2004: 2) argue that adult learners have a variety of life experiences, therefore, they are ready to learn those things that they need to know in order to cope effectively with life and work situations. The demographic data in this study showed that the respondents in this study were aged between 25 and 60 years, employed, and married – thus seen as adults in legal, economic and social terms. They were furthermore Afrikaans-speaking and equally distributed in terms of gender. The respondents all resided in the area of the CLC as recorded on their registration forms and could all be classified as coloured under South African race classification systems (even though not specifically asked in the interviews). They attended the PL programmes offered at the CLC on a voluntary basis. All the respondents had attended some form of formal schooling in their childhood, but none of them had completed school or emerged functionally literate from their limited schooling. All of the respondents had first completed the formal basic literacy programme at the CLC before continuing to the PL programme.

Five categories of description reflecting key variations of meaning emerged from the data, including:

- perceptions of PL respondents in the PL programme;
- importance of PL;
- challenges of PL securing employment;
- employment circumstances; and
- changes to existing PL programme.

These aspects will now be described in greater detail.

### **Perceptions of PL respondents in the PL programme**

The perceptions of the PL respondents related to issues such as life changes, interactions with family members and involvement in the community since their enrolment in the PL programme. All respondents responded positively to an enquiry whether their lives had changed since their enrolment in the PL programme, although the type of reported life changes experienced since enrolment in the PL programme differed. They perceived that the PL programme helped them to develop self-confidence, which enabled them to improve their daily interaction with others, as highlighted in the following response:

*...my self-image and self-confidence improved and it enabled me to stand in front of a group of people and talk to them in meetings (Respondent E)*

Other respondents (Respondents C, H and I) claimed that their self-confidence helped them during interviews to secure employment, whereas others (Respondents A, D, F and J) declared that they had more confidence to study further. One respondent, who was involved in a partnership with a friend, mentioned that

*...my knowledge about numbers became very important for me. I used it to work out the income and expenditure of our business (Respondent B)*

One respondent (G), who had the opportunity to attend an entrepreneurial course, mentioned that

*...I learnt a lot about how a person can start his own business.*

It seems that the PL programme enabled both social and financial empowerment, which corresponds with the findings of Stromquist (2009) and Evans, Waite and Admasachew (2009). Stromquist (2009) found that the most common type of empowerment manifests in feelings of improved self-esteem and self-confidence, which indicates that literacy often leads to psychological empowerment. Evans, Waite and Admasachew (2009) add that high levels of self-confidence play an important role in achieving literacy programme outcomes relating to the acquisition of employment skills in developing countries.

How the PL programme changed the way respondents interacted with family members at home elicited varied responses. The PL programme enabled some respondents to help their children with their schoolwork as highlighted below:

*It enabled me to assist my children with their homework and school projects ... (Respondent A)*

*I was also able to help my grandchildren with their homework (Respondent F)*

Respondents indicated that the PL programme resulted in making their family and friends proud of them because of their involvement in the PL programme, as highlighted in the following statements:

*My wife was very proud of me and my children looked at me differently because I was studying further (Respondent E)*

*My girlfriend was very proud of me, as I was trying to improve my education (Respondent B)*

*My children was very happy because their father was now able to read and write (Respondent I)*

The PL programme assisted with the development of good understanding and support among family members to share domestic responsibilities as stated below:



*Our family had to learn to work together so that all domestic issues such as making supper and bathing my two children ... to enable me to attend night classes (Respondent C)*

*The understanding between all family members was such that everyone supported me (Respondent J)*

It seems that the PL programme assisted respondents to develop a sense of mutual support, pride, caring and understanding among family members to enable them to continue with their studies. One respondent (H), however, also commented that his family found it strange to see the male head of the household studying further. In order to curb such possible unease Oxenham (2004: 17) proposes family literacy programmes in addition to the PL programme to enable parents, especially mothers, to take a more supportive role in their children's schooling. Torres (2004: 16), adds to this the importance of learning in the family, in the community, at work, with friends, through the mass media, learning by observing, by doing, by teaching and participating.

All respondents agreed that the PL programme did have an influence on their different communities. The PL programme enabled some to talk to the youth in their communities about issues such as teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse and unemployment as noted below:

*I warned young people about the dangers of unprotected sex which leads to teenage pregnancies (Respondent A)*

*It gave me the confidence to talk to the young boys in the neighbourhood about the danger of alcohol abuse ... (Respondent B)*

*I talked to the youth about many issues ... and unemployment (Respondent J)*

The PL programme enabled some to educate the youth about voting procedures as noted in the following statement:

*I became involved in the municipal elections as a presiding officer and could use my reading and writing skills to explain the voting procedures to my community members (Respondent A)*

It seems that by continually using their literacy skills in a functional manner, the respondents did not only benefit themselves, but also their community as a whole, which underscores the claim in a UNESCO report (2005: 151) that a functionally literate person is someone who continues to use reading, writing and calculation for his own development, as well as that of the community. Such community development includes a focus on issues like teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse and unemployment. Leowarin (2010: 7) adds that PL programmes should be integrated with other development programmes - such as agriculture, community development, health and HIV/Aids-into the teaching-learning process.

### **Importance of PL**

In response to an enquiry about the importance of PL to the respondents since their enrolment in the programme, some said they realised that other skills besides reading and writing are needed to achieve personal goals, as is illustrated by the following statements:

*A person must for example be able to fill in an application for housing, drawing up their home budgets and making sure that they get the correct change (Respondent D)*

*A person must be able to read and write so that you can use an ATM to withdraw money (Respondent E)*

*A person must be able to fill in an application form when he applies for an ID [identity document] (Respondent I)*

*With language you are able to read the traffic signs (Respondent F)*

*... if you cannot read or write, you will not be able to read your Bible (Respondent G)*

It seems that the respondents viewed PL as enabling functional literacy as it helped them to learn new skills in addition to their basic literacy skills and to use it confidently in their daily lives in order to meet present and future challenges. This finding supports the work of Guodong and Zhupeng (2003: 626), who found that PL serves the needs of newly literate adults by consolidating the gains of basic literacy, promoting economic and social development in order to meet the challenges of present and future societies, especially in rural areas (such as the study site).

### **Challenges experienced**

In response to an enquiry about the respondents' challenges since becoming involved in the PL programme, they declared that they experienced certain transport, family, working schedule and financial difficulties which are highlighted below:

*...transport to and from the centre was a challenge (Respondent A)*

*I had to make certain sacrifices ... leaving my two boys with my mother (Respondent C)*

*I had to speak to my husband and children ... the different duties at home, such as making supper and washing of dishes needed to be divided between them (Respondent G)*

*I could not pay my school fees and I reached out to others ... to assist me financially (Respondent D)*

*I had to rearrange my work schedule... to get to classes on time (Respondent F)*

This finding is in accord with Oxenham (2005: 14) who states that one of the major factors for the high attrition rates of faltering adult learners can largely be ascribed to transport problems and inadequate budgets. In addition, literature suggests that despite the positive impact that literacy and skills training programmes have had, their success continues to be marred primarily by lack of adequate funding (UNESCO, 2008: 9). To counter the latter concern, Oluoch (2005: 5), proposes that where possible, communities, aid agencies, NGOs and government be approached to fund the CLCs so as to ensure that PL programmes are sustainable in meeting learners' needs and thereby empowering them holistically.

### **Employment circumstances**

Employed respondents reported a positive influence on their employment circumstances in terms of their dedication to work, how they were able to communicate, handle administrative tasks, and inspire others to learn.

*I became more dedicated in my work and I could do more (Respondent G)*

*I was able to manage the money better ... and it also enabled me to communicate better with our clients (Respondent B)*

*I was able to communicate better with my fellow workers (Respondent E)*

*I could plan my work better and do tasks much faster (Respondent D)*

*I became more effective in my job as an administrative assistant (Respondent I)*

*... through my studies I served as a role model for the cleaning staff at school ...*

*I inspired some of them also to register as students at the centre (Respondent H)*

The PL programme had a perceived positive influence on the majority of the respondents' jobs. This finding agrees with Rogers (2002: 162), who is of the opinion that it is not only the basic literacy skills that will ensure the success of a PL programme, but also the applicability of PL in everyday and occupational life.

### **Changes to existing PL programme**

In response to how the respondents would change the existing PL programme, they focused on obtaining access to a variety of PL programmes not currently available, including programmes focused on computer literacy, health care, environmental studies, agriculture and food security, and entrepreneurship.

*I would like to see that computer literacy programs are included, because without knowledge of computers it is difficult to get a job today (Respondent A)*

*Computer literacy ... will enable learners to secure better employment (Respondent C)*

*Computer literacy is basically a prerequisite for any job today (Respondent J)*

*I would like to see that programmes such as First Aid and Primary Health Care are introduced to enable learners to care for sick elderly people (Respondent D)*

*I want to see that a programme about global warming is included ... to make learners aware of ... climate changes (Respondent E)*

*I would like to see that agriculture is introduced ... it will empower people with knowledge to produce their own fruit and vegetables ... to generate an income (Respondent F)*

*I would like to see that programmes such as ... entrepreneurship is introduced ...it will enable students to start their own businesses (Respondent H)*

Even though the programmes currently offered at the CLC are all formal programmes that adhere to the UNESCO (2000: 6) definition of *formal education* as educational programmes offered by educational institutions that award certificates of attainment according to standards and grades, the respondents seemed to indicate a need for more non-formal PL initiatives that do not require certification, do not necessarily provide entry into formal education programmes, and are more needs-based. Such non-formal education programmes could facilitate sustaining their community and lead to economic development. UNESCO (2008: 2) suggests that CLCs should also include non-formal education programmes, similar to that of the Adult Literature and Skills Training Programme (ALSTP), into their PL programmes, such as income-generation, human rights, gender relations, conflict management and resolution. According to UNESCO (2008: 4), the ALSTP endeavours to address learners' needs and thereby empowering themselves cognitively, socially, economically and politically. A finding from a study conducted by Kell (1996) in the Western Cape of South Africa, shows that the curriculum for newly literate adult learners at CLCs should include non-formal education programmes to assist those wishing to obtain a driver's license, learn book-keeping for small business and managing a bank account.

According to Aitchison and Alidou (2009: 19), non-formal education is a particularly slippery term as it can mean any education carried on outside the formal school and higher education system, except vocational training, or any other any other education that is not certified. Non-formal systems cater for adults who have not previously attended any formal education programmes, or who have prematurely dropped out of such programmes – such as the respondents in this study. According to UNESCO (2000: 7) these non-formal programmes can be thought of as providing 'catching up' opportunities for adults and usually include literacy training for re-entering the formal educational system. Non-formal education

encompasses a variety of programmes that promote basic literacy and basic non-formal education.

## **CONCLUSION**

The main research question investigated in this study was: What are the perceptions of newly literate adults in the PL programme at a rural community learning centre? The respondents perceived the influence of the PL programme as positive in terms of their personal, family and community lives, and their employment circumstances. Their involvement in the PL programme enabled respondents to use their literacy, numeracy and life skills in combination with work and management skills to improve their efficiency during the execution of everyday and work tasks. This also led the respondents to inspire fellow workers to become involved in the PL programme. The PL programme made respondents realise the importance of numeracy skills in managing financial matters in business and the application thereof in their daily lives. It further assisted with the development of self-confidence, which empowered them to achieve personal goals and resulted in family members sharing domestic duties at home. Being literate enabled them to help their children with schoolwork, fostered pride and understanding, and improve their communication skills. Such awareness of the importance of PL within the family context is important because it not only enabled respondents to continue their involvement in the PL programme, but it also led to supportive and caring relationships between all family members which may be conducive to a culture of teaching and learning in a family context. By continually using their reading, writing and numeracy skills in their daily lives, the respondents did not only benefit themselves, but also other members in the community. It also motivated them to address socio-economic issues such as teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse and unemployment. In terms of the themes that emerged from this study, the findings largely confirm PL plays an important role in the community and thus should be continued, albeit on a more needs-focused and non-formal basis. The respondents furthermore experienced transport and financial problems and had to adapt their working schedules and family responsibilities to enable them to attend evening classes at the CLC.

The respondents suggested a variety of changes to the PL programme. Some wanted the introduction of non-formal education programmes focused on computer literacy, health care, environmental studies, agriculture and food security, and entrepreneurship. It seems that the current PL programme at the CLC, consisting of learning areas such as Afrikaans LLC and Numeracy in ABET Level 2 (Grades 2-3), do not meet the needs of the PL participants. This is in line with Nzimande's (2003: 407), suggestion that many CLCs in South Africa are modelled on the NQF levels, which assume that adult learning and educational needs are similar to that of children. A more adult-centred approach is necessary based on adult learners' need to know why they should learn something, and how it will benefit them; their self-concept (which may need to be shifted from conditioned dependence to independent learning); their real-life experience as a learning resource; their readiness to learn based on real life tasks and problems; their orientation to learning rooted in application to real-life problems; and their internal motivation to learn (rather than on external reward systems). These internal motivators can come in the form of increased job satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life (Yannacci, Kristin & Ganju, 2006: 6). However, Baatjes and Mathe (2004) argue that PL is not viewed as a government priority and a gap continues to exist between what PL programmes offer and what newly literate adults may need. The new White Paper on Post-school Education and Training (2014) may pave the way for such an approach

nationally. Locally, the implication of the aforementioned discussion is that the PL programme at the specific CLC should include other learning programmes beside the basic literacy programme.

Since only one CLC participated in the study, perceptions and points of view with regard to the PL needs of newly literate adult learners involved in the PL programme to a wider group of CLCs could not be taken into account. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to a greater population. Future research is needed within a broader spectrum of communities where PL interventions are necessary. Even though this was a small-scale study with limited generalisability, the results provided valuable insights into the lived experience of literacy of a group of rural adult learners. These learners' perceptions of the current PL programme are key to understanding their needs, the importance of PL in the lives of newly literate adults, and the role of PL in social and economic development. The data also shed light on changes to the existing PL programme that may be necessary to meet the respondents' needs. The findings of this study contribute towards understanding the need for a more learner-centred, non-formal PL programme that addresses the perceptions of newly literate adult learners at the particular CLC, and provide evidence on which future initiatives may draw within the envisioned Community College system envisioned in the White Paper (DHET, 2014). More research is necessary among a wider group of CLCs to address the possible need for non-formal and vocational programmes as integrated PL initiatives.

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