

Open and Lifelong Learning as a Formula for Capacity Building of Men on the Side of the Road

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research was to investigate the harsh economic realities that faced adult and out-of-school youth on the side of the road in Windhoek, with the aim of establishing the skills needed for enabling the men on the side of the road to compete in the labour market. A qualitative research methodology was used, carried out by a case study empirical investigation. The research sampled men on the side of the road, at the major road intersections in Windhoek. The data was collected with document analysis and focus group interviews. The data was analysed by establishing themes and discussed narratively. The research found out that men on the side of the road were faced by economic hardships characterised by hunger, poverty and unemployment, born out of their skills deficiency as required for paid employment or self-employment. The hardships prompted the men to stand alongside road intersections waiting for anyone who can offer them odd jobs for a living.

The men possessed skills related to lifting heavy objects, digging and cleaning yards. The possessed skills were not in demand for employment, as most employment opportunities required certified personnel. The men expressed their willingness to be trained in a variety of preferred technical and vocational education fields. The study concluded that men on the side of the road were facing severe economic hardships, for which urgent intervention was needed to enable the men to live productive lives. Given their advanced age and salient institutional admission criteria, the study recommended the Directorate of Adult Education, within the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture to develop a targeted open and lifelong learning training programme, to capacitate the men on the side of the road with the skills of their preferences. The training will help the men acquire skills for competitiveness in the labour market either for paid employment or self-employment. As an outcome of the training interventions, unemployment rate and the begging of odd jobs by men on the side of the road would be significantly reduced.

Keywords: Open and lifelong learning, Lifelong learning, Capacity building, Men on the side of the road, Out-of-school youth

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Despite Namibia's political stability, economic growth has declined over the past years resulting in high unemployment rate which stood at 36.9 % as of the 2011 Namibian Population and Housing Census (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2011). The unemployment rate resulted in high migration patterns of Namibia's unemployed, under-employed adult and out-of-school youth moving to Namibia's capital city, Windhoek, in search for employment opportunities. In addressing the ever-growing unemployment rate, the government of the Republic of Namibia has implemented entrepreneurial programmes such as the Equipment Aid Scheme, Income Generating Activity Fund and the Namibia Youth Credit Scheme.

While the programmes seems helpful in rescuing the populace from unemployment, the programmes were not fully accessible to everyone fitting to be a beneficial due to criteria and requirements that were selective and not open to ordinary people with no prior skill set or collateral as security for funding. Therefore, the programmes were not helpful to unskilled adult and out-of-school youth who did not possess the prerequisites required prior to funding and getting assistance from such programmes.

The Directorate of Adult Education within the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, is mandated to help adult and out-of-school youth to develop skills that will help them secure employment and increase their income through the Skills Training and Micro Enterprise Development programme (MEC, 1993). In executing its mandate, the Directorate is currently managing an Adult Skills Development for Self-Employment (ASDSE) project. The project is aimed at alleviating unemployment through the expansions of private small businesses using two major tools, namely; Micro Credit and Training (Tonin, Ricoveri & Zaire, 1997).

Although the current ASDSE programme focuses on entrepreneurial skills development and offers micro credit to prospective entrepreneurs, the project does not have the financial capacity to absorb all unemployed adult and out-of-school youth into the mainstreams of employment. As a result, a high number of adult and out-of-school youth are seen on a daily basis, moving about and around street corners and major road intersections of Windhoek in search for job opportunities. One of the groups that wonders around is the group named as 'men on the side of the road'. Men on the side of the road refers to a group of men who wake up early in the morning to go and stand at the traffic lights of different road intersections, waiting for anybody to pick them up for menial jobs. The jobs they were hired for includes weeding, pruning, loading and offloading of materials, and other similar manual works. Once the men were picked up and completed the job for which they were hired, they were to be returned to the traffic light intersections to wait for anyone who would hire them for any manual job. The research investigated the plight of the men that stood at the various roads intersections in Windhoek, waiting for anybody to pick them up for odd jobs. These men were the adult and out-of-school youth who were struggling to make a living.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The political independence of any given country should culminate in better living conditions of its citizens. Better living conditions are characterised by low unemployment rates, skilled workforce and sufficient provisions of social services, as indicators of better living conditions. However, the indicators of better living conditions were failing to manifest in some countries, of which Namibia is one of them. Windhoek, which is the capital city of Namibia is home to an army of unemployed and out-of-school youth, shaping the streets and major road intersections of the capital city. The skills required by the unemployed youth sitting and standing at the road intersection of Windhoek have not been established, to determine appropriate interventions and help them secure employment opportunities. Hence, the following questions; how can the men on the side of the road be capacitated? In addressing the plight of the men on the side of the road, this research intended to investigate the realities that faced adult and out-of-school youth on the side of the road in Windhoek, with the aim of establishing the skill needed for enabling them to compete in the labour market.

III. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The research was set out to investigate the economic hardships that faced men on the side of the road, at major road intersections in Windhoek, with the aim of establishing a model for addressing the plight of the men on the side of the road.

The research purpose was addressed by the following objectives:

- Describe the types of skills possessed by the men on the side of the road.
- Explain the training opportunities attended by the men on the side of the road.
- Establish the training needs of men on the side of the road.
- Suggest a framework for improving the skills of the men on the side of the road.

The above objectives were addressed by the following methodology.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The research employed the methodology as described below.

Research approach

A qualitative research approach was used as a framework for the research. Qualitative studies are both constructive and relative in nature, placing emphasis on the active interaction between researchers and the researched. This is because qualitative studies serves to describe, interpret, verify and evaluate particular actions and practices for the sake of increased understanding of what is going on (Leedy & Omrod 2005). Therefore, the qualitative research approach was the most suitable research approach for understanding the circumstances that men on the side of the roads were going through and how best they were to be helped from the participants' own views. Qualitative approach enabled the researchers to actively engage with the participants and discuss their skill sets, skills requirements and the realities they were going through.

Research design

The application of a qualitative research approach was carried out through a case study design, as an investigation in which an event is studied in depth for a defined period of time (Leedy & Omrod, 2005). A case study focuses in-depth on a phenomenon in its real-life context to reflect the perspectives of the participants involved in the phenomenon (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). Using a case study helped the researchers to answer the research question by discovering the types of skills the men on the side of the roads possessed, the skills they required and the challenges that men on the side of the road were going through from their own perspectives in their own social environment.

Sampling

Participants were simple randomly selected at the road intersection in Windhoek. Simple random sampling implies that the researchers selected the participants on an equal and independent basis, whereby one participant does not affect in any way the selection of the other participant in the population (Chiromo, 2009). The researchers has written even and odd numbers on pieces of papers, and placed the papers in a hat and allowed each of the participants to pick up one paper. Those who took papers with even numbers were to form the sample for the research. Eventually, the sample consisted of eleven participants.

Data collection techniques

The data was collected using document analysis and interviews. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed or electronic materials related to the subject being studied (Bowen, 2009). The researchers reviewed the relevant printed materials in the Directorate of Adult Education, to establish policies and programmes that were in place to build the capacity of adult and out-of-school youth, and how effective the programmes were to the plight of the unemployed youth. Documentary analysis was carried out first, and the findings of the analysis informed the questions that were discussed during focus group interviewing.

Two focus group interviews were conducted with the participants, as complementary data gathering techniques. The focus group interviews were conducted at road intersection where men were standing waiting to be picked up by anyone for odd works. The focus group interviews made the collection of meaningful data possible due to the prompt of informal social interactions between the researchers and the participants. Focus group interview was an ideal technique for examining collective experiences, different points of view and mutual concerns held by different individuals as members of the sample (Masadeh, 2012).

Focus group interviewing enabled researchers to gain access to diverse understandings of the different aspects related to standing and sitting at the road intersections. Participants were also able to confirm knowledge and lack of knowledge of the programmes as gathered from the document analysis. Hence, focus group served as a validation technique to the data collected with documentary analysis, as it provided rich information to support what was established with document analysis for increased understanding of the realities that faced the men on the side of the road. It would have been difficult to collect the same kind of data and acquire the same rich understanding by means of surveys involving structured questionnaires which would have yielded limited responses from the sample (Hancock 2002).

Data analysis

The collected data was analysed by means of thematic analysis, where the data was examined in view of the research question and grouped based on emergent patterns and similarities (Rule & John, 2011). Braun and Clarke (2006) explains thematic analysis as a method of analysing qualitative data by identifying, analysing and reporting emerging patterns as themes, within the data set. The theme is a word or phrase that captures an important aspect in the data in relation to the research question, and reveals a level of understanding about the subject being studied. The themes were generated as key research findings, interpreted and discussed to answer the research question.

Trustworthiness of findings

The findings were validated by means of member checking and by ensuring honest participation in the study. Member checking seeks to establish whether the participants agree with what the researchers have reported about their contribution to the research (Ary, Jacob, Sorensen & Razavieh, 2010). Member checking requires the data analysis and interpretations to be continuously tested with their sources. The aim of testing the findings with the informants was to enable the researchers to solicit feedback and share their interpretations of the data with the participants, which practice was useful for clearing up miscommunication between the researchers and the participants, identify factual inaccuracies in the findings and help obtain additional useful data for answering the research question.

In ensuring honest participation in the research, participants were given an opportunities to refuse to participate in the study or withdraw from the study at any time they felt like they were no longer interested in the study. The practice was meant to ensure that the data collection involved only those participants who were genuinely willing to take part and were prepared to offer data freely and willingly (Shenton, 2004). Willing participants contribute ideas confidently and present their lived experiences without fear of losing credibility in view of their social environment. The researchers provided sufficient information about the research prior to focus group interviewing. This was made to ensure that participants were given sufficient information about the research in order to make a conscious and voluntary decision as to whether to participate or not to participate in the study. It was clear that those who participated, did so willingly and consciously, and provided credible data.

Ethical considerations

The researchers complied with ethical principles in the conduct of the research such as obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality of the data and assuring anonymity of the participants. The researchers complied with the ethical principles in order to protect the welfare of the research participants before, during and after the research (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009; Wassenaar, 2007). The researchers have explained all the background information and purpose to the prospective participants before they were given an opportunity to express their willingness to participate in the research. Participants were informed that the data they were to provide was going to be used for the purpose of the research and will not be divulged to thirty parties. In addition, their identities were not going to be captured with the data, and the data was going to be presented in a way that it was unlikely to be related to the identities of any of the participants. The researchers used pseudonyms M1, M2, and so on, to denote Man 1, Man 2, and so on. These pseudonyms ensured that the data presented was in no way relative to any of the participants.

In view of the above ethical descriptions, an ethical empirical research was conducted and yielded the findings as discussed next.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The next section presents the discussions of the findings that were established.

The profile of the participants

As revealed previously, data was collected from men on the side of the road. The men were aged between the age of twenty four and forty two years old. The participants hailed from different regions, although a high number of participants hailed from one northern region. Most of the participants have very low academic backgrounds, as their last grades attended ranged from grade one, grade eight and grade ten respectively, with the exception of one participant who indicated having completed training at a vocational training centre but failed to secure employment.

The data that was collected from the participants, analysed thematically and yielded the themes as answers that the research sought. The themes are discussed in the next section.

Thematic areas as key research findings

The themes that were established are discussed next.

Types of skills

The research established that the men on the side of the road have very low skills due to their low academic backgrounds. The participants boasted being capable of work that do not necessarily require established academic competencies and intensive professional training. Some participants cited being competent in washing cars and walls. Other participants boasted areas of competencies such as *"I can clean the yard and lift things from vehicles"* (M1 & M6), while another participant emphasised that *"I can carry heavy things for you"* (M2). In addition, *"we can dig holes, say you want to put something in the ground"* (M5). It was evident that the men on the side of the road were unskilled in relative to employment opportunities that were available on the labour markets, which then made it difficult for them to secure employment as most employment opportunities required certified personnel. The type of skills the men were armed with, were those one for which there was no real demand for them to enable the men to sustain themselves financially and earn a proper living. Given their skills shortages, the men on the side of the road required upskilling through existing programmes meant to support such categories of people or establishing targeted programmes for improving their skills and employment capabilities.

Training opportunities

The research found out that most of the men on the side of the road in Windhoek have not received any basic skills training courses. Most of the men have also not completed the basic education curriculum as previously outlined in the participants' profile above.

Some of the participants chorused that *"we did not get any training"* (M3, M5 & M6). One of the participants revealed that *"I did welding at VTC, but I did not get a job"* (M8). Available evidence reveals that most men on the side of the road did not get exposed to training opportunities that would have capacitated them for employment opportunities, leaving them at the mercy of Good Samaritans to provide them with any available odd jobs to make a living. Standing on the side of the road was also worsened by graduates who did not find employment, as was the case with one of the participants who endured life for less than a year after graduating without getting employed. Generally, the majority of the men on the side of the road did not have the required training for securing employment opportunities available on the labour market.

Skills Requirements

Participants expressed willingness to participate in any available training opportunities if sponsored to participate in such programmes. Given their willingness to be trained, it was necessary for relevant directorates to devise measures for addressing the training deficit of men on the side of the road. The skills required by the men on the side of the road related to gaining skills such as building, painting, welding and related vocational and technical works. The skills revelation were evident in the expressions of the participants that *"we also want to learn to do plumbing and everything that has to do with a building"* (M7). One participant added that *"I want to learn to put in Aluminium doors and windows"* (M3), with another participant expressing a will to *"learn welding and making cupboards"* (M3). From the accounts of the participants, it becomes evident that men on the side of the road were interested in training related to the construction industry or related fields requiring manual labour.

Not even the young member of the sample expressed a willingness for schooling, as he remarked *"I want to learn to drive so that I can drive a taxi"* (M10), which expression was not far from M2 who *"wants to learn to fix cars"*. The type of skills required by men on the side of the road relates to technical and vocational education fields and not academic fields. This preference of vocational education was confirmed by one of the participants who stated that *"I want to learn things that I can do with my hands"* (M1). Hence, there was a need to design a targeted model to equip men on the side of the road with the required technical and vocational skills to enable them to sustain their life.

VI. CAPACITY-BUILDING INTERVENTIONS

In view of the willingness of the men on the side of the road to be trained in technical areas of their interest, it was important that stakeholders pool resources together to spearhead the training provisions for the men on the side of the road. The Directorate of Adult Education in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, should be capacitated to render effective the required assistance to the adult and out-of-school youth skills development interventions. Even though it was mostly men who stood at the side of the roads, the training provisions should target inclusively, both men and women in need of economic assistance. The Directorate of Adult Education should develop a targeted open lifelong learning framework to train unemployed youth and capacitate them with the required technical skills to sustain themselves economically. Open and lifelong learning is the ideal formula for carrying out the capacity building of men on the side of the road, as this category of people may not meet the established requirements for admission to tertiary institutions.

The Directorate of Adult Education should identify the youth with feasible and viable business opportunities and support their entrepreneurial ideas by training them, through which training the youth will be equipped with the required skills to manage their entrepreneurial ideas. The directorate should further source financial resources to fund such entrepreneurial ambitions. As open and lifelong learning graduates, the trained youth will realise in practice their entrepreneurial skills in the labour market, by excelling in their paid employment or by establishing own viable business ventures, all of which are essential ingredients for the growth of the economy (Shikalepo, 2019). This is the required type of transformation of citizens from being unemployed individuals to active role players in the national economy. Ordinary schooling and normal university entry systems may no longer work for the adult and unemployed youth, given their advanced age and salient institutional admission criteria, but open and lifelong learning grounded on the principles of entrepreneurial training and mentorship, would best serve their training needs and turn them into productive citizens.

VII. DELIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research dealt with the men on the side of the road in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. The research engaged the men who stood at the road intersections on the western side of Windhoek. The participants were sampled randomly as they were sharing the same lived experiences. The empirical investigation was carried by means of a case study design, using data collection techniques that involved active human interactions. The data analysis was delineated to the establishments of themes and narrative presentations of findings.

VIII. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Given the case study design used for the research, the trustworthiness of the findings is confined to the participants who took part in the study and their immediate social settings. The research engaged male participants as they were the one found standing on the side of the road by the researchers. As such, the data provided may not be reflective of the female adult and out-of-school female youth who may share the same economic hardships as the men who were engaged. The female could have narrated a different versions of hardships and skill sets, making the findings of this research not representative of the female adult and unemployed youth. It is possible that the random sampling technique used might have provided participants who were not typical of the challenges facing men on the side of the road, the skills possessed and skills required. A purposive sampling technique could have yielded an informed sample for a richer understanding of the realities facing the men on the side of the road. Hence, researchers do not claim pure completeness of the data that was obtained from the random sample.

IX. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to unmask the realities facing adult and out-of-school youth in the Namibian society. The research brings to the fore evidences that men on the side of the roads were faced with economic hardships, due to their limited exposure to education and training opportunities. Their skills deficiency has landed them on the side of the road to beg for odd jobs for a living. This was an unwelcome gesture in a country such as Namibia that proud itself of political independence. However, political independency means nothing in the absence of economic independence. It was not civilised to claim political independency when the citizens were languishing under the yoke of poverty, hunger and unemployment. The political independence should have been exploited to provide opportunities for emancipating citizens from economic hardships.

This paper argues that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, through the Directorate of Adult Education should prioritise investing in skills development to empower the unemployed adult and youth. By doing so, the Directorate can enable the adult and youth to compete in the labour market for paid employment, as well as for creating income generating projects and thus actively participate in the economic development of the country. Providing men on the side of the road with skills training would elevate their living standards. In this regard, skills training should be part of an open and lifelong learning programmes of the Directorate of Adult Education, which lifelong programmes will ensure that unemployed adult are capacitated to remain competitive and active role players in the local, national and international economies.

In view of the above concluding remarks, the following recommendations were made.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

The research has advanced the following proposals, whose implementation could realise a capacitated adult and out-of-school youth:

- The Directorate of Adult Education should invest in prioritising skills development for adult and out-of-school youth. A special targeted open and lifelong learning programme should be developed to admit the adult and out-of-school youth for training in their preferred skills areas.
- The Adult Skills Development for Self-Employment project should include in its training programmes of adult and the youth, a component of training the adult and the youth on writing Business Proposals, to enable prospective entrepreneurs secure funds from creditors.
- The Directorate of Adult Education should consider the promotion of entrepreneurial activities by trained adult and youth. The Directorate should source financial assistance to assist entrepreneurial ambitions of trained adult and the youth. This will avoid trained graduates standing at the road intersections, as was the case with one participant as observed during the research.

The researchers believe that implementing the above recommendations would help minimising the rate of unemployment in Namibia, as citizens would be armed with the requisite skill set required to propel the national economy in both paid employment and self-employment set up.

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