

**EXPLORING FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GOOD ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF AET LEVEL 4 AT FOURWAYS
COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE IN GAUTENG**

By

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Graduate Programme in Adult Education

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DECLARATION

I, **Zandile T. M. Mkhize**, declare that this study: **EXPLORING FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GOOD ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF AET LEVEL 4 AT FOURWAYS COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE IN GAUTENG** is my own work, both in conception and execution.

This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in italics, inside quotation marks, and referenced. This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged.

All sources that I have used or quoted in the text of this research article have been acknowledged by means of complete references according to APA 6th edition- method.

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Dr. Zamokwakhe Hlela
(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late parents Rittah Nikeziwe Mkhize and Innocent Gcwabe Mkhize who worked tirelessly to ensure that I went to the University for my junior Degree. It is your memories that keep me going every day.

I would also like to extend my thankfulness to my late friend Zelda Baloyi whom we started this journey together.

Although you are no longer with us, your eagerness continues to inspire me.

May your souls rest in eternal peace.

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Proverbs 19: 21

“Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails”

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ABSTRACT

The South African government made a remarkable effort by ensuring that all South African citizens regardless of their oldness attain education. Adult Education and Training (AET) is an important feature that measures the achievement of educational ends. Therefore, the successful completion of AET Level 4 together with the attainment of AET Level 4 qualification can help adults and out of school youth to set their goals and eradicate poverty. It should be understood that the main aim of education is to lead people into brightness, regardless of their age. Therefore, the issue of good academic performance cannot be belittled, if students are not performing well, they lose hope, become incompetent and are more vulnerable to the economic change.

The study investigated factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. Literature engaged have found that teamwork, respect for adult learners, teacher commitment and good support structure are contributory to students' success.

In order to address the research questions, the study adopted qualitative and interpretivists' inquiry paradigm. It employed systems theoretical framework which put forward an emphasis of seeing reality more holistically. Data were gathered through the use of three sources; document analysis, focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews. Data were thematically analysed. The study findings revealed many overarching factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. The study recommends AET Level 4 academic performance to be spotlighted and become a standing item in the academic board meeting.

KEYWORDS

Adult education, Good academic performance, Factors, AET Level 4, Community Education and Training.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AET	Adult Education and Training
ANC	African National Congress
CETC's	Community Education and Training Colleges
CLC	Community Learning Centre
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
GCETC	Gauteng Community Education and Training College
GETC: ABET	General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training
IFE	International perspective in adult education
LGSETA	Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority
NDP	National Development Plan
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PALC	Public Adult Learning Centre
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training

CHAPTER ONE: THE INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one gives an introduction to the study, it highlights how the researcher realized the problem, places the problem into perspective, states the importance of this specific study and gives an overview of the study background. It provides a summary of the methodological design used to answer the research questions and the chapter concludes with the organisation of dissertation.

The South African education department has been successful in deracialising the education system of the country as well as unifying the nineteen departments of education into one education system (DOE, 2014; SAIRR, 2012). Despite this success story, however, reflections on academic performances of Adult Education and Training (AET) Level 4 students, have not been given adequate exploration in South Africa and this leaves a gap both in literature and in policy which should no longer be ignored. Considering that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) seeks to “improve the capacity of the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system to meet the skills needs and development of the country” (DHET, 2013, p.2), the Community Education and Training (CET) sector still remains marginalized compared to the mainstream education (DHET, 2013). This is an implication that while the mainstream shows great improvement of matric results in 2017 with 75.1% nationally, 85.1% Gauteng province and 89.1% Ekurhuleni District (City of Ekurhuleni, 2015), very little is mentioned on CET’s academic performance. Consequently, very little academic research has been conducted on the academic performances of AET level 4 students in CET sector in Johannesburg East District in Gauteng province.

The vision of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, on one hand, is “to be Smart, Creative and Developmental City” (City of Ekurhuleni, 2015, p.8). However, it becomes paramount to promote a strong educational background and improve performance rates of AET Level 4 students as they are on the exit level with a possibility to be employed within the municipality and work towards achieving such a vision. With reference to the above, this has created a gap both in literature and in policy, and thereby, leaving many unanswered questions in relation to the status quo of academic performance at AET Level 4. This then provides a unique

opportunity for a study that seeks to explore good academic performance of students at AET Level 4.

1.2 FOCUS AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study focused on student academic performance at AET Level 4 and the purpose sought to establish factors contributing to good academic performance in the accomplishment of AET Level 4, the successful establishment of these factors can therefore assist the Gauteng college and its community learning centres to map a way forward in ensuring good performances of AET Level 4 students. It should be noted that, students who perform well and complete their qualifications are better able to accomplish individual freedom and economic success.

Academic performance is a multifaceted problem which does not affect only students and lecturers. The interaction and interdependence in this context include students, lecturers, centre manager, centre management team, community, business people, Government sectors and more to turn poor performance to good performance, which is why Grobler and Myburgh (2001) warn that Colleges should assist students in the attainment of high academic performance, for the entire institution to get its educational goal achieved. It therefore became imperative to proactively identify factors contributing to good academic performance of students at AET Level 4 as they are at the exit level, with a possibility of embarking on a pathway for continuing learning and development.

The National Policy on Community Education and Training Colleges (DHET, 2015a) indicates that only few number of candidates successfully obtain full qualification at AET Level 4 and lot of students get learning area certificates. Noteworthy, these learning area certificates demotivate our students and lessen their courage to persist with studies. The National Development Plan (NDP, 2017) acknowledges underperformance by GCET College. To a larger extent, GCET College is classified as an underperforming province. GCET's poor performance as stated in the NDP document is in contrast to the intentions of the CET sector (NDP, 2017). In other words, if students are continuously underperforming, CET's will not assist out-of-school youth who should be ushered into Technical and Vocational Education and

Training (TVET) Colleges to be trained for skills to positively contribute to society. Notably, education is one of the utmost influences that give people opportunities to combat poverty.

Despite the number of efforts that have been implemented by Gauteng College to improve AET Level 4 performances, such as the establishment of the College Support and Intervention Programme (CSIP), the recognition of teaching competence and performance as well as the enforcement of training and capacity building programmes to ensure good quality provision of lecturers. AET Level 4 certification gradually and continuously deteriorates, and the money pumped into the sector does not yield the same or even better corresponding outcomes. The strategic vision for the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) has identified a number of outcomes that need to be achieved, but this remains a pie in the sky and has hardly scratched the surface in as far as achieving or improving the results is concerned (DHET, 2016a).

The following table revealed the seriousness of the phenomenon in Gauteng Province over a period of five years (2015-2019).

Table 1.1: The high dropout and failure rate of AET level 4 students at GCET College

Year	Entries	Retained	Dropped out	Throughput	Pass %
2015	15 883	12 295	3 588	4 305	35.0%
2016	14 392	10 792	3 600	3 381	31.3%
2017	14 437	10 810	3 627	4 202	38.9%
2018	16 191	11 449	4 742	3 725	32.6%
2019	12 742	7 022	5 720	5 170	73.6%

Source: Statistics on Post-Education and Training (DHET, 2015b/2016b/2017/2018b/2019)

The above table reveals an unsatisfactory condition in terms of certification at exit level (AET Level 4), and this situation has a serious implication on the students' output and success as it prohibits students from shaping their career prospects. However, there was a tremendous improvement in 2019 which requires recognition as it can assist in improving the academic performance in Gauteng province.

In order to address the purpose of the study and intensify what transpired in 2019 in terms of the performances, the researcher has identified a centre within the Province which has been producing good AET Level 4 results in the past five years. I therefore decided to explore factors they have applied in the past five years (2015-2019) with a view to improve the performance rate in Gauteng CET sector.

The table below reflects the above stated reality in the chosen centre for the study.

Table 1.2: AET Level 4 GETC results analysis at the selected CLC

Year	Entries	Retention	Dropout	Pass rate %
2015	396	318	78	78%
2016	324	244	80	54%
2017	294	207	87	73%
2018	304	228	76	69%
2019	250	143	107	67%

Source: (Centre compilation)

The insertion of the above table, presented consistency in terms of good academic performance in a chosen community learning centre, it revealed the signs of promising outcome in relation to the CET College’s objectives. Fraser and Killen (2003, p.254) caution that, it is absolutely necessary for academic institutions “to be concerned about the success rates of students” and should discover College problems that hinder student success.

Noteworthy, the study sought to explore factors contributing to good academic performance, I wanted to understand what is it that the centre is doing exceedingly well in the completion of AET Level 4. Bell (2018) posits that areas of achievement and failure need to be checked for further improvement of the situation because in reality knowing how things are done in one centre regarding high performances might help another centre to improve.

1.3 STUDY RATIONALE

The reasoning for conducting this study was to explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. Often, by improving academic performances it simply means our students will not only be able to acquire their qualifications and achieve their desired goals but will be better human beings and possibly lifelong learners. The NDP puts emphasis on education as the priority for all citizens. It sets out a vision to eradicate poverty, growing the economy and cutting the unemployment rate by 2030 (NDP, 2017). Along similar lines, the GCET College Principal in his forewords expressed their broader vision of prioritizing and providing access for adults and post- school youth to ultimately become active citizens (DHET, 2018c). For those visions to be realised, it becomes paramount to promote a strong educational background and improve performance rate of AET Level 4 students as they are at the exit level with a high possibility of being employed, furthering their studies and starting their businesses.

The rationale as it relates to other scholarly shows that post-literacy is “an under-researched field in many African countries including South Africa” (van Wyk, 2012, p.4), However, several researches have been conducted within former AET and CET sectors with different focuses. I am referring to the work of Mkhwanazi (2001) who conducted a mixed research approach study which sought to establish problems which impair adult learners in Adult Basic Education programmes.

Once again, the LGSETA (2017) the study concludes that some learners opt out of AET programmes when they are unable to cope with the huge amount of school work.

Again Mutula (2016:5) who conducted a qualitative case study research, reveals that the contributing factors to success of a centre she was studying are “teamwork, respect for adult learners, teacher commitment and good support structure”.

Green (2015) in her quantitative study concluded that within KZN province, a very small portion of the adults who registered for GETC: ABET qualification met the requirements for the full GETC qualification each year. This then translates that there is slight progress to further learning.

And finally Thurlow (2007) who investigated the reasons why some learners are successful than others in the completion of an ABET course, the major findings from this study was that learner failure and success are at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels. This means factors contributing to academic success can arise from within or the influence can come from outside an individual's context.

1.3.1 The knowledge void

In the South African context, writers have not specifically conducted research with the current study's topic. Factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 have never been dealt with especially in Johannesburg. Although one major qualitative study was conducted in 2007 by J.D.B. Thurlow, the central focus was not at the exit point (AET Level 4) but it was placed in the entire ABET programme. The existing gap provides a significant opportunity for this study.

I have been employed at Gauteng CET College as an AET Level 4 lecturer for the past 9 years. I have also been voluntarily offering career guidance counselling for students at an exit level (AET Level 4). In this position, I am expected to assist in making and implement informed educational and career choices. Serving in these different portfolios and interacting with AET Level 4 students led me to realise how underperformance implicates everyone in the institution, particularly the students' ambitions, their identity as well as person's growth. It literally locks them in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) 'prison'. Noteworthy, the presence of these students in an AET environment indicates that the education system at a point in time has failed them. Therefore, identifying factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 might make an impactful contribution to the field in terms of strategic planning and further extend research. It may provide valuable information that can be used to enhance academic performance at AET Level 4 which will benefit our students to realise their full potential.

1.4 THE STUDY BACKGROUND

With a growing number of unemployed and out-of- school youth, the need for capacity building and training in South Africa has been so pressing and desperate (Land & Aitchison, 2017). As a response, the country has recently renewed its adult education system provision to include

training. The purpose was to address the challenges of provision of AET such as the education system which was in favour of academic education, depriving learners who needed vocational focus, which in turn led to a “number of young people who were not in education, employment or training” (Land & Aitchison, 2017, p.7). As a result, there was a compelling need to make the sector more responsive to the social needs and assist the needy individuals.

According to DHET (2015), the Continuing Education and Training Act, 2006 (Act No.16 of 2006) as amended, formulated the Community and Training (CET’s) and Community Learning Centres (CLC’s): (the learning sites) as part of the third pillar/branch of an institutional model in the country. Land and Aitchison (2017); DHET (2013, p.6) state that, implementation of CET’s is thus expected to assist adult learners who were previously disadvantaged as they were “not accommodated by TVET colleges and universities” due to their incapability to meet the educational needs for these institutions.

CET sector was previously known as Adult [Basic]¹ Education and Training sector. The AET sector was moved from the Provincial Departments of Education (PED’s) to the National Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) on the 01 April 2015 (DHET, 2015a).

CET Colleges are meant to offer the qualifications listed below:

- General Education and Training Certificate (GETC);
- Senior Certificate (SC);
- National Senior Certificate (NSC); and
- National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA).

1.5 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following section presents the overarching questions guiding the current study.

1.5.1 The primary research question of the study

The key research questions the study sought to find answers were the following:

¹ The “Basic” was later on removed and the sector renamed the Adult Education and Training (AET).

- What are the factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 and how do these factors inform the centre performance?

1.5.2 The sub-questions of the study

- Who are key education stakeholders in shaping academic performance at AET level 4?
- What is the role of each of these stakeholders in student academic performance at AET Level 4?

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was summarised in this section despite Chapter Three of the dissertation which outlined the methodology further.

To address the research questions, the study adopted for a qualitative approach. I have decided to conduct qualitative research as it enables for in –depth and further probing questioning of participants, resulting in more detailed information gathered, as the study focused on how “individuals and groups” constructs meaning out of their experience for students’ academic performance (Maree, 2007, p.50). The study adopted for a case study as an appropriate research design to “gain greater insight and in-depth understanding” of contributory factors to good students’ academic performance (Maree, 2007, p.76). Case study involves intensive enquiry, “reflecting a rich and lively reality” of students’ academic performance from different but relevant delivery arrangement sources (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008, p.185). The approach enabled me to collect in- depth data which assisted me to address the study research questions successfully.

The research study was located within the bounds of an interpretive paradigm. In line with Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p.26) assumption that, the goal is “to develop a greater understanding of how people make sense of contexts in which they live and work”. The purpose of the study thereof was to gain a comprehensive understanding of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

Data generation took a period of one month, where the study drew on three sources of data collection namely; document analysis, focus group interviews with former AET Level 4

students who are high performers and have progressed to Level 5 (Grade 12) and semi-structured interviews with AET Level 4 lecturers who have been producing good results for a minimum of three years consecutively, the centre supervising lecturer and the provincial official from academic support. Document analysis included information retrieved through the existing sources such as AET Level 4 examination results analyses for over a period of five years (2015-2019). I compared AET Level 4 examination results from all three levels of the system (national, provincial and centre levels). I also viewed the national and provincial strategic plans. However, the initial plan was to also get centre's strategic plan and records of minutes from Learning Area Committee (LAC) meeting. Unfortunately, those two documents were not made available at the centre. Nonetheless, with the acquired documents, I managed to obtain enough data that gave me a lot of information to discover factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

1.7 RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

This research study was conducted in one of 47 community learning centres contained by Gauteng CET College (see Chapter 3 and 4). This College is a public CET College registered and operating under the CET Act, Act 16 of 2006 and reporting directly to DHET. The study participants included men and women, black adults above twenty-one (21) years old. The sample size consisted of eight participants: four former AET Level 4 students and currently registered for Grade 12 in the centre, two AET Level 4 lecturers, one Centre supervising lecturer and one provincial official. These participants represented the urban and semi-urban population (see Chapter 4).

1.8 STUDY LIMITATION

The main limitation for this study was the sample size, which was limited to eight research participants. The research study was heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected the sample of the study, data collection as well as planned writing retreats with my supervisor. To compensate for this shortcoming this study used a case study. The case study allowed me to delve more factors contributing to good academic performance from the sampled research participants.

1.9 DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this study, *good academic performance* means the totality of AET Level 4 students to do better academically.

For the study purpose, *factors* refer to any fact contributing to good results.

1.10 THE ORGANISATION OF DISSERTATION

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to the study

Chapter one introduced the study, which sought to explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. The chapter defined the study focus, the purpose and the importance of the study. It highlighted the research questions guiding the study. The chapter outlined the study background and gave a brief methodology employed in the study. The chapter concluded with the study limitation and the organisation of dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature review

The chapter covered the key concepts, gave a historical background of ABET. It concluded with a deliberation of the review of related studies and theoretical framework which informed this research study.

The related studies presented here include the works of South African scholars such as Mkhwanazi (2001), Thurlow (2007), Green (2015), Mutula (2016), Dhlamini and Heeralal (2014), LGSETA (2017), Rule (2006). The African writers such as Moola (2015), Mbozi (2008), and Ndlovu and Moyo (2013). International scholars such as Goto and Martin (2009), Jayanthi, Balakrishnan, Lim, Ching, Latiff and Nasirudeen (2014) and the work from the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verand (DVV) International Perspective in Adult Education (IPE, 2017).

The final part of Chapter 2 presented a theoretical overview underpinning the study. The theory allowed me to evaluate this study holistically in order to comprehend the interactions among key education stakeholders for good academic performance.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

The chapter presented research methods. It outlined and discussed in details the methodological paradigm, research style, the sample and sampling procedure, data collection strategies and instruments that were implemented to collect data. The chapter concluded with the clarification of ethical matters in line with the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: Data presentations and discussions

In this chapter I presented the findings emerged from document analysis and views of the research participants (the focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews). The study sought to address the main research question posed as follows: What are the factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 and how do these factors inform the centre performance? Chapter 4 discussed findings and perceptions of the participants relating to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and recommendations

This is the final chapter of the study, it gave the conclusion emanating from the research findings. The chapter responded to the research questions and presented the discussion with an intention of demonstrating how the systems theory informed the interpretations and findings of the study. The chapter established the study limitations and presented recommendations and suggestions for future work in response to the research findings. It then concluded with personal reflection and closing remarks.

1.11 1.8 CONCLUSION

Chapter one served as the introduction and outlined what the study was all about. It discussed the key research questions, this led to the introduction of research design, methodology and the selection of the research participants was highlighted. The chapter concluded with a brief summary of the chapters in this study.

The following chapter provided a general review of literature relating to the study and a theoretical framework underpinning this research project.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter was to give a general review of other studies in relation to factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

The first section of the chapter commences with a definition of two major concepts this research study is grounded on, namely; *adult education and academic performance*. The following section presents a historical background of adult basic education in South Africa. The chapter continues and demonstrates how international (macro), the African (exo) and South African (micro) contexts perceive the significance of AET Level 4 qualification. The discussion on literature review preceded the final section presenting Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory supporting the study. It is a standard practice for all research studies to be informed by foreknowledge in a certain field of study (Rowley & Slack, 2004) to get an understanding of what has been happening in that particular area, as it keeps the researcher well updated of the previous findings discovered by other scholars (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2012). This also helps the researcher to make an informed decision whether the topic is worth studying or not (Creswell, 2009). Noteworthy, the main objective of literature review was to identify gaps that exist in the previous studies and so to address such gaps.

2.2 DEFINITION OF THE BASIC CONCEPTS

In this section, two major concepts adult education and academic performance are defined. It was my view that fully comprehending these two concepts would help to balance the focus of the study which was on good academic performance of students at AET Level 4.

2.2.1 Definition of adult education

The terminology of adult education has been defined in various ways by different scholars. According to Baatjes and Baatjes (2008, p.8) adult education is a "broad field that includes basic and continuing education, vocational and technical education, higher education and professional development offered through *formal*, *non-formal* and *informal* education means and by a variety of actors – the State, civil society organisations (CSOs), business and industry and private

providers”. Further to the on-going definition, Merriam and Brockett (2011, p.9) shed more light and add that adult education is a “process whereby a person undertakes learning in order to achieve knowledge and skills”. With an intention of this study, adult education is defined as an education which is meant to impart knowledge to adults and youths who for different reasons did not finish their schooling. These individuals are taught proficiencies and academic knowledge just to make a leaving.

2.2.2 Definition of academic performance

Bell (2018) from the international context defines academic performance as the manner in which learner meets requirements set out by the institution. Similarly, Clarke and Dawson (1999) from the same context state that, academic performance involves aspects which determine what has been achieved and measures the quality of an institution or particular learner’s achievement. Comparatively, from the African perspective, Makola (2007) defines academic performance as the success or lack thereof in academic responsibilities by a particular student at the year end.

From my point of view and for what the current study is intended at, academic performance is an evaluation of how a student has executed studies and is articulated through grades in a final examination.

2.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ABET IN SOUTH AFRICA

It was observed as significant to place the research within its correct context by giving a brief history of ABET in the country. The purpose was not to duplicate the previous works but to draw attention to developments of ABE from 1950’s prior 1994 to 2015 during the time when there was a transition from DBE to DHET and when CET’s finally came into existence.

2.3.1 Adult Basic Education (ABE) before 1994

During the apartheid era, South Africa was a country of inequalities and there was no evident policy guiding adult education in South Africa (Chisholm & Fine, 1994). Education was designed to enhance ethnic division in a country. The apartheid system was customized to ensure that Blacks in South Africa received poor education (Mckay, 2007). However, there was a contemporary non-formal education (NFE) which laid a groundwork opposing a system of

apartheid in South Africa. NFE prepared people for democracy, what formal education never did. Preceding the democratic regime in 1994, NFE was led by various groups such as religious groups, NGOs/CBOs, civic associations, workers' organisations, political parties and social movements (McKay, 2007; Aitchison, 2003).

According to Aitchison (2003, p.130) "In 1953, the Bantu Education Act had made it an illegal activity with legal punishment to provide any education to black people unless it was in a government registered school". In the same year, African National Congress (ANC) called the national convention and proposed a formulation of Freedom Charter, which laid down the basic principles of education in South Africa. The intention was to facilitate an access to education for all (DOE, 2005). The Freedom Charter was adopted in 1955, it kept the vision of a free, non-racial South Africa alive (DOE, 2005). The major improvements in education took place during the 1990's.

2.3.2 Adult Based Education after 1994

South Africa had a huge number of illiteracy among its people. As a result, most people were unemployable, as they lacked the necessary skills (McKay, 2007). Mayombe (2017) concurs and states that many adults lacked marketable expertise and were therefore unemployed. As a response to that, the country had to come up with strategies to improve that situation, by means of imparting knowledge to the individuals and ensure that unemployment rate is reduced. The ANC which took charge after democratic elections in 1994 put focus mostly on social development (McKay, 2007). The government had good objectives to safeguard permanent learning opportunities for all South African citizens. A number of policies and legislative frameworks were put in place to support ABE.

Since 1994 the country transitioned from the apartheid system to democracy. The following are some of big changes that took place in South Africa: A national ABET framework was adopted, the South African Qualifications Authority (Act No 58 of 1995) was established in 1995, a policy which helped the formalization of ABET (Baatjes, 2008). Ithuteng campaign was launched in 1996 as the pilot ABET programme nationwide (McKay, 2007). The policy document on ABET which was introduced in 1998 (Baatjes, 2008). The practice of adult education was vindicated and recognized as a basic human right, and expressed in the South

African Constitution. The Department of Education released the ABET Act, Act 52 of 2000 on 15 December 2000. The implementation of the ABET Act in 2000 allowed the establishment of Public and Private Adult Learning Centres, reshaping the night schools that had existed under apartheid period (RSA, 2000). The main objective of an act was to regulate ABET.

McKay in Mutula (2012, p. 16) presents other formulated policies as follow:

- *Skills Development Act (1998) and its Amendment Act (37 of 2008).*
- *Skills Development Levy Act (1999).*
- *The Community Education Training (CET) Act 16 of 2006.*
- *New Institutional Landscape National plan for FET colleges in South Africa (2008).*
- *Further Education and Training Amendment Act (1 of 2013).*

The birth of democracy in South Africa made the country realised that ABET is a human development that will root out illiteracy, hence the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) came into existence in 1999-2003, the initiative was targeting adult learners with low literacy skills, unfortunately UNISA ABET academy proclaimed discontinuation due to financial constraints (Baatjes, 2008). The Masifunde Sonke which was launched in 2001 was also caught short and reduced to awareness later that year (Baatjes, 2008). Remarkably, the South African education department has been victorious in deracialising the education system of the country (DOE, 2014; SAIRR, 2012). Adult illiteracy has been gradually reduced since the end of the apartheid segregation (Aitchison, 2006; Baatjes, 2008; Aitchison & Harley, 2006; Rule, 2006).

2.3.3 The transition from AET to CET in South Africa

The CET sector was previously known as Adult Basic Education and Training sector. In 2005 the then Minister of Education Naledi Pandor stated that there was a need to “turn around the co-ordination framework” for literacy and ABET and to make it more responsive to social needs (Land & Aitchison, 2017, p.18).

The Community Education Training (CET) Act 16 of 2006 was implemented. On the 1st April 2015, there was a function shift of AET sector from the Provincial Departments of Education

(PED's) to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), where all the PALC's were absorbed into Community Learning Centre's (CLC's). Nine colleges were established to cater for each province of the Republic of South Africa in terms of the CET Act of 2006. The implications of the CET Act, 2006 were to rescind the ABET Act, 2000 (DHET, 2015a). As stated in the White Paper for Post-School and Training, the main objective for the implementation of CET Act was to introduce another institutional type that can offer different opportunities to individuals for whom vocational and technical colleges and universities are unattainable (DHET, 2015a).

CET institutions specialise mostly with AET educational programme and they offer AET Level 4 certificate, which is achievable as a sign of completion by a successful student at AET Level. The insertion of the following table describes AET educational programme accessible at CETs.

Table 2.1: Adult Educational programme acquired in CET Colleges

Old qualification	New qualification
ABET Level 1	AET 1
ABET Level 2	AET 2
ABET Level 3	AET 3
ABET Level 4: GETC ABET qualification	GETCA Qualification: AET Level 4 qualification

Source: (Umalusi, 2013, p.10)

2.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE AET LEVEL 4 QUALIFICATION

After the accomplishment of AET Level 4 students receive AET Level 4 certificate, which is a qualification registered at NQF Level 1 and quality controlled by Umalusi (Umalusi, 2013). AET Level 4 qualification is nearly comparable to matric in terms of the attention given to student performance and results. The aim of this qualification is to assist adult learners to respond positively to the demands of the country. Upon successful completion of AET Level 4, students can advance their studies to matric, others can further their studies to NQF Level 2 with TVET Colleges and to some it provides the necessary skills to start their own businesses.

AET Level 4 certificate is a credit-based certificate, which is obtainable when a student has achieved a minimum of 120 credits (SAQA, 2008; Umalusi, 2013). Where a student has not met the minimum requirements for AET Level 4 certificate but has passed certain learning areas, Umalusi issues a learning area certificate (Umalusi, 2013). These are the very same learning area certificates which to me discourage other students to continue with their studies and accomplish their goals, hence the issue of good academic performance is more emphasized.

2.4.1 The learning areas applicable to AET Level 4

According to DHET (2012, p. 15-16) student is compelled to cover three components as a rule of combination for AET Level 4 qualification, as discussed below:

- (i) *A fundamental component such as any Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC), Mathematical Literacy or Mathematical Sciences. A learner must choose Mathematical Literacy or Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences and not a combination of both.*
- (ii) *The Core component which is compulsory consists of Life Orientation.*
- (iii) *The Elective component consists of an Academic Learning Area (Human and Social Sciences Natural Sciences Economic and Management Sciences Arts and Culture Technology Additional Language) and Vocational Specialisations such as (Applied Agriculture and Agricultural Technology Ancillary Health Care Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises Travel and Tourism Information Communication Technology).*

2.4.2 Assessment criteria and procedure for AET Level 4

This section deliberates on the assessment requirements for AET Level 4 qualification. According to DHET (2012) the assessment structure consists of two major constituents as discussed in the following section.

2.4.2.1 Formative or Continuous Assessment (CASS)

Formative assessments are used to support the learner development and to feedback in teaching and learning (DHET, 2012). However, at AET Level 4, fifty percent of these assessments are performed as standardized Site-Based Assessment tasks (SBA's), in line with the National Policy on the conduct of ABET Level 4 examination published in Government Gazette No. 23590 of July 2002 (DHET, 2012). These assessments are set and moderated by accredited

assessment bodies at cluster, district and provincial level. In a nutshell, this type of assessment takes place continuously to uplift the understanding of a learner in a specific outcome of a unit standard.

2.4.2.2 Summative Assessment or Final Examination

This assessment takes place “at the end of a particular learning period to determine learner’s achievement, it is done through a national examination set by the DHET and marked at provincial level, these national examinations are externally moderated by Umalusi” (DHET, 2012, p8). This final examination constitutes 50% of the final pass mark for the awarding of the GETCA: AET Level 4 qualification (DHET, 2012).

According to DHET (2012, p. 15) the GETC: AET Level 4 qualification “must be issued to a candidate who has complied with the following requirements: a) Completed the Site Based Assessment requirements per learning area and b) Fulfilled the requirements of an external examination in the fundamental, core and elective learning areas” as stated in 2.4.1 above.

The next section compares the value of adult education qualification worldwide:

2.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AET LEVEL 4 IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

The following section could help reveal different approaches and outcomes towards adult qualification in the world.

2.5.1 AET Level 4 qualification in the South African context

The AET Level 4 qualification offered in South Africa closely matches the qualification offered in ABE globally. The comparability is based on the aim of a qualification, the quantity and credit value. In South Africa it was acknowledged in a statement from a ruling party that there is no doubt that AET Level 4 qualification has a significant role in the redevelopment of the economy (ANC, 1995) as it enables students to either find employment, further their studies or starts their own enterprises.

2.5.2 ABET in the African context

In Mozambique, the strategy of adult education and training which was implemented in 2001-2005, the goal of a strategy was to “increase learning opportunities for young people and adults

in order to improve their living conditions and the communities where they live” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p.15) in (Manuel, Buque & Quive, 2017, p.587). Therefore, in the context of Mozambique, ABET is viewed as important for advancement of youth and adults expertise to enable their participation in the wider social life (Manuel et al., 2017).

In Zimbabwe the qualification is granted after the successful completion of ABET course at an exit point, the qualification is called the Zimbabwean Adult basic education course (ZABEC). The qualification offers a chance to those adults who want to chase their educational dreams with secondary, tertiary education or to get promotions at workplaces (Zimbabwe, Ministry of Education: Annual report, 1998).

2.5.3 ABET in the International context

In the context of European countries, recognition of the crucial role of Adult Education certificate has improved. Out of the twenty-seven plus European Union Member states, seventeen countries have adopted Adult Continuing Education (ACE) strategies (Ouane, 2009). Asian countries have set up CLC’s “to provide various learning opportunities for community development and improvement of people’s quality” (Literacy Watch Committee, 1999, p.2).

China has been constantly increasing its financial spending on ACE Programmes to assist adult learners improve their skills to make a successful transition into labour market or to progress to higher level of education (UNESCO, 2008).

Adult education in Georgia (Europe) has positively influenced the country as a whole, “there is a highest number of adult learners who complete their qualifications and have found employment, became self- employed and were promoted or kept their jobs” (IPE, 2017, p.39). Reiger (2011) concurs with the above statement and adds that adults in USA who are academically successful have more career chances and are unlikely to take part in illegal doings than those who are less educated.

It can therefore be concluded with the view from the micro (South Africa), the exo (African) and macro (International) contexts that, adult education is seen as one of the ways in which many adults and out-of- school youth can use to improve their skills and knowledge and to enhance career prospects.

2.6 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following section review literature relevant to the current study, the goal is to get an understanding of an existing study research relevant to this current study. In this context I argue that five more related concepts *poor and good academic performances, dropout rate, retention and throughput, student success and key education stakeholders* informed my study. The following section discusses adult education and academic performance as well other emerged key aspects of the study as they together play a major role and influence each other on good academic performance.

2.6.1 Adult education

The role of adult education is to produce citizens that will themselves be implement change and development. Mutula (2016) advocates that challenges within the CET appear to be on the rise but the resolution may lie within adult education. Adult education should be utilised as a vehicle to transform adult learners and help them to keep up with change or even influence it.

Adult education can be “formal, such as what happens in Public Adult Learning Centre’s (PALC) or non-formal, such as when a group gets together and organises a learning event outside of a formal space” (Baatjes & Baatjes, 2008, p.8). Noteworthy, adult education is separated from a child’s education, even though the intention is the same. However, in both generations, education is perceived to instil change in a person’s lives.

Table 2.2: The difference between formal and non-formal adult education

Formal	Non-formal
This type of education is strongly organised and selecting the few to continue their studies further.	Programmes have no clear pattern.
It prepares individuals for future purposes.	Tends to be for immediate application in day-to-day life.
Validated by external standards.	Usually validated by the learner’s experience of success.

Source: (Baatjes & Baatjes, 2008, p.9)

2.6.2 Academic performance

As previously stated, academic performance is a multifaceted concept. It needs to be understood in its holism, it is determined from registration of the learner in an institution to the exit point when a student has achieved an anticipated qualification. In this view academic performance is informed by far more factors than learning, teaching and assessments. In line with Neary's argument that effective curriculum comprises several components. The author mentions that in order to better understand curriculum, the following components should be incorporated; aims and objectives, content and subject knowledge, methods and learning experiences, assessment and evaluation as well as structure and organisation Neary (2012) and the combination of these elements could yield good academic performance.

From my standpoint there could be two types of academic performance those are *poor* and *good* performances. Good academic performance by logic should lead to retention, high pass rates and student success. Bad academic performance on the other hand leads to student drop outs and or increase student failure rate.

2.6.2.1 Poor academic performance

This section presents poor academic performance and its effects on students' dreams. Noteworthy, poor academic performance is below the expected performance, resulting in to failure for the entire education system to reach its goal.

Okoye (1982) defines poor academic performance of the candidate in a learning situation who is unable to achieve a desired standard of performance in a given assessment exercise such as a series of continuous assessments. Asikhia (2010) views poor academic performance as a performance that is lower than a set standard.

In relation to the present study, it is not only students who suffer the consequences of poor performance, the academic institution may also be damaged if the CLC is continuously underperforming. This supports the point made by Fusch (2011) that an institution might taint its reputation if student academic performances deteriorate every year. Poor academic performance also impacts negatively on a student's self-esteem leading to student drop-out. Bell (2018) suggests that areas of achievement and failure need to be checked for further improvement of

the situation, because in reality knowing how things are done in one school might help another school to improve. For an institution to produce good results, a number of aspects are considered by different scholars, as discussed in the next section.

2.6.2.2 The causes of poor academic performance

In my view, poor academic performance can be influenced by external factors, including school environment while internal causes may involve students' attendance and self-determination. Similarly, Earthman (2002) from the international perspective, highlights that academic performance is not only affected by learning, teaching and assessments. School facility and its conditions have an impact on students' performance. The author further argues that, studies conducted consistently prove that students attending schools in better condition outpace students in below average buildings (Earthman, 2002). This explains that, the centre building and all other constituents have major influence on how students learn.

Thurlow (2007) states that factors contributing to learner failure and success are at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels. He sheds more light and clarifies that extrinsic factors are "ABET stakeholders that impact on the ABET learning" such as learning sites, AET facilitators and government, service providers and SETA's while intrinsic factor "operates at the level of the learner", (Thurlow, 2007, p.96) which involve commitment among other things. If all these are in a poor state, they could contribute negatively to the performance of the students and could lead to student dropout rates.

The next section shows a direct link between poor academic performance and student dropout rates.

2.6.3 Student dropout rates

In the international contexts, Garrison (1987) defines student dropout as an intent withdrawal from attending a certain course resulting in a failure to meet the course objectives. Bell (2018) from the same context, extends definition and points out that dropout rate refers to a student who register in an institution with an intention to acquire a qualification but did not complete due to different reasons. For the context of this study, dropout rate refers to a certain number of students leaving educational system before the completion of an intended course.

In the African context, dropout is viewed as a main signal of poor performance (Sondlo, 2013). Poor performance makes student feel demotivated and opt out of programme. Lan and Lanthier (2003) from the international perspective, also share the similar sentiments and state that the first possible signal of dropout status is poor academic achievement. Contrary to the above, Tinto (1975, p.98) argue that “student may perform satisfactorily in the academic domain and still drop out because of inadequate integration into the social life of the institution”. Students may feel not confident enough to deal with the University life, it makes them feel they do not belong and inferior amongst other students, resulting to envy and loss of connection with others. They begin to disregard school activities and eventually drop-out. This is to say, there are many contributory factors to poor performance.

In the African context, our education system at any level of education is characterised by dropouts. There is a high proportion of registered students who do not write final examination (DOE, 2001). A large quantity of adult learners’ registers in CLC’s at the beginning of each academic year with a passion to study but as time goes on, the attendance declines giving rise to a huge number of student drop-out rate.

2.6.3.1 The causes of students’ dropout

In the African context, Mutula (2016) in her qualitative study advocates that, the key cause to student drop outs is caused commonly by failure for students to attend lectures as they should do, as a result they do not perform well academically and choose to leave centres. On contrary, Ramrathan (2013) argues that, it is not only poor performance that demotivates students persisting with their studies but there are other factors contributing to this phenomenon, according to the author, students’ negative experiences during their studies are the root causes of dropout. Nkontwana (2014, p.13) concurs and states that “when a student is satisfied with almost everything, his/her life proceeds smoothly and is not easily affected by things such as dropping out”.

According to Aitchison and Alidou (2009), South Africa has a high dropout rates that is due to programmes which do not address the learners’ requirements and social changes. Similarly, Dhlamini (2012, p.6), ABET learning programmes that are provided “at Ekurhuleni” do not inspire “adult learners” resulting to student dropout. In the same vein, Park and Choi (2009,

p.215) from the international context reveal that, there is a lower probability for students to quit their studies when “they are satisfied with the courses, and when the courses are relevant to their own lives”. In my opinion, most CET Colleges offer programmes that are unable to meet students’ expectations resulting in negative attitude of students towards such learning areas which in turn contribute to poor academic performance and dropout rate. This then asserts the contrary of the Government Gazette (RSA, 2015) which highlights that CET programmes must be flexible to address community needs and ensure improved completion rates. The majority of students need an educational system that speaks to their needs to enable them to complete their studies and reach their desired objective. It is therefore crucial that our education system, particularly CETs give students a context within which they can develop into motivated learners, provide skills that will retain students, ensure employability and ultimately promote the economic growth of the nation.

Modipane (2011) within the South African and College contexts states that studies conducted in South Africa reveal that College students come across with challenges leading to drop out. Dhlamini and Heeralal (2014) warn that, there might be a number of reasons towards adult learner dropout that need an urgent attention to prevent this occurrence in adult education system. Nkotchwana (2014, p.28) adds to the above and concludes that a lot number of “internal and external factors that contribute to students drop-outs have been established and amongst those are health-related issues, loneliness, prior schooling and under preparedness and so on”.

2.6.3.2 How to curb student dropout

Bailey (2016, p.11) emphasises that a “Community College completion rate requires comprehensive institutional reform with a focus on measurable student success”. Nkotchwana (2014) adds that, government and institutions of higher level globally to establish a policy on student dropouts, in an attempt to improve students’ academic performance. In my personal opinion, the challenges that contribute to student dropping out are often systematic and will take a coalition of lecturers, students, community members, leadership and more to tackle as this imposes an enormous negative impact on the output and students’ performance and implicates the entire system. It is therefore important for the College to introduce a comprehensive plan, such as undertaking a rapid trace on student dropout to find out why students lose interest before the completion of their studies.

The next section discusses good academic performance, which is attained through working consistently leading to the accomplishment of educational ends. Good academic performance should be given more importance, as it generally encourages retention rate of students. A student who performs well gets courage to persist, acquire knowledge and explore academic adventures.

2.6.4 Good academic performance

Good academic performance is about the totality of the students to do better academically. In line with this current research study, good academic performance of student may depend on many internal and external factors and this kind of performance is necessary for student success.

2.6.4.1 The significance of good academic performance

One of the most interesting findings from the international context reveal “student academic success as the key outcome envisioned by different parties involved in higher education” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006, p.2). According to Bell (2018) also from the international context, the community and all stakeholders within the educational system expect good performance which they believe it will make available of lot of career choices for students. I therefore, encourage people to break boundaries of what communities expect of them through education because the more educated a person is, the better choices and opportunities at hand for self- development and growth.

In contrast, one may argue that good academic performance is not the only vehicle to financial freedom. But it is worthy to note that good academic performance produces educated people and our changing society demands people who will contribute to economic growth. An educated individual is not only capable to realise his objectives but is also able to provide an effective input towards the success of the community.

2.6.5 Retention and through-put rates of students

Bell (2018) defines student retention as the proportion of students who carry on with their studies until they acquire a qualification. According to Berger and Lyon (2005, p.7) retention is, “the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission” until certification. Hagedern (2005) further defines student retention as an ability to retain a student from admission until the completion of a qualification within an institution. On the other hand, throughput is defined

from the African context as “the number of first-time entry students of a particular cohort who graduate within the minimum time or up to two years beyond the minimum time” (Nkontwana, 2016, p.5). For the purpose of the study, throughput is defined as the number of pass rate of students an institution is able to produce each year.

I noted a direct link between throughput and retention, both concepts speak about the completion of one’s studies at the same educational institution. Students’ completion spells out the future of students. Nonetheless, it should be noted that when a student carries on with studies and persevere, the institution gets a chance to retain such student. However, in the CET sector, there is a constant reality of student dropout (DHET, 2019). The following scholars share the similar sentiments and state that, student retention and through put are a global phenomenon facing not only CET sector but higher education in general (Reason, 2003; Tinto, 2006). Additionally, Sondlo (2013, p.32) reveals that, “in South Africa there is an urgent need to address student retention and throughput as it impacts negatively on economic growth and human resources development in the context of lifelong learning”. Students are to be motivated to finish instead of being demotivated. They need to be continuously reminded the importance of education.

2.6.5.1 Factors influencing student retention and through put

To assist me form a concept idea of both student retention and throughput on an international level, I brought in Professor Tinto’s work, whose research studies focused on issues of student retention, throughput rates and attrition. In his study, where he identifies factors leading to students’ completion in USA, he attests that effective learning happens in conducive learning environments. And further states that, in order to retain our students, we need to improve their learning environments this will positively influence students’ academic performance and automatically contribute to student through-put (Tinto, 2006). In support of the above, one of the conclusions made by LGSETA from the African context discloses that some challenges are institutional to an extent that some conditions of facilities may be regarded not conducive to learning situation (LGSETA, 2017), resulting to low retention of students.

Taking into account that motivation contributes positively to student throughput and retention rates. Among other factors identified from the relevant literature, it is emphasized that if

students are happy with the curriculum offerings and are motivated to learn, they are likely to persist and complete their qualification. If the centre is known for good performance and programme relevance, the increase in terms of throughput becomes evident and if the performance is unsatisfactory, the college will be affected in terms of the numbers.

2.6.6 Student success

From the international perspective, Dean (2015, p. 27) makes a remarkable suggestion when he reveals that student success is defined by “retention, graduation then career attainment”. As previously indicated the three concepts are complimentary to each. Student academic success is a crucial outcome anticipated by the different stakeholders of higher education institutions and it is a route that many fund rewarding. Therefore, quick recognition of students who might be presumed to be unproductive, along with preventive measures, can help improve their success (Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020). Early problem detection, may allow more effective improvement before the problem worsens.

2.6.7 Key education stakeholders

Education stakeholder refers to *anyone who is invested in the success of a school and its students, including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councillors, and state representatives* (Study.com, 2016). For the purpose of the study, education stakeholders refer to any internal or external structures joined up to delineate the future of the school and help with good academic performance.

The purpose of academic performance is to achieve an educational goal through collective work, where the whole education system plays a part. It is paramount to note that, good academic performance is achieved through hard working and requires all education stakeholders to work together towards a common goal.

The following table demonstrates the major role players in education, particularly at CET sector. The researcher maintains that academic success implicates everyone who is involved in the institution. The intention of this insertion thereof is to deepen our understanding of the current

context and help the reader to understand the responsibility each education stakeholder carries in an institution.

Table 2.3: Key educational components

Constituent groups	Projections
Students	Personal success throughout school, future opportunities
Parents	Success and opportunity for students they care about
School staff	Job satisfaction and professional efficacy
School and District staff	Adequate yearly progress
School board	Accountability and fulfilling the district's mission
Taxpayers	Getting a good return on their tax investment in schools
Business Community	Ability to hire students with skills needed, community economic
Other community members	Community pride

Source: (First, 2009, p.5).

2.7 RELATED STUDIES

The AET sector is marked by many challenges such as student poor performance, student dropout rate, student throughput and retention (DOE, 2001). This adversely results in lack of success and implicates everyone who is involved in the sector. However, the common consent amongst scholars is that adult education is descending and it needs to be moved up to the right direction.

There is literature that provide considerable evidence that are essential components to the significance of AET Level 4 completion and how the qualification can help improve employment rates in the country. Pertinent works include the works of African scholars in the South African context like Green (2015), Mutula (2016), Mkhwanazi (2012), Dhlamini and Heeralal (2014), LGSETA (2017) and Rule (2006). The African writers from the neighbouring countries, such as Moola (2015), Mbozi (2008), Wanyama (2014) and Ndlovu & Moyo (2010). And the international scholars such as Goto and Martin (2009), Jayanthi, Balakrishnan, Lim, Ching, Latiff and Nasirudeen (2014) and the work from the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verand (DVV) International Perspective in Adult Education (IPE, 2017). The review of literature gave

me a synopsis of what the above scholars have discovered in relation to academic performance, particularly at AET Level 4.

According to Green (2015, p.22) in the quantitative study conducted in Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), an author advocates that poor academic performance of AET Level 4 seems to prevail in other CLC's nationally. She further states that, the output in terms of GETC: ABET certificate is extremely low and reveals that within KZN province, a very small portion of the adults who registered for GETC: ABET qualification met the requirements for the full GETC qualification each year. Green (2015, p.22) concludes that, the results have repeatedly found that "a learner's socio-economic background affects their performance in terms of examination and test scores". This then translates that there is slight progress to further learning in the province due to GETC: AET Level 4 underperformance.

In a qualitative study conducted in KZN at Endleleni AET centre, Mutula reveals the positive side and concludes that, the centre has succeeded in dealing with students' academic problem. The literature points out that "the centre has been performing well in the GETC exams since 2009 to date". The contributing factors put forward to the success of the centre are "teamwork, respect for adult learners, teacher commitment and good support structure" (Mutula, 2016, p.5). It is evident that adult students learn better when the environment is conducive to learning.

Mkhwanazi (2001, p.132-143), conducted a mixed methods study and concludes that ABE learners are influenced by factors such as "affective problems, cognitive problems, problems related to the learning content, physical problems and problems related to family and friends".

Dhlamini and Heeralal (2014, p.458) in a qualitative research study conclude that for good performance "a wider and diversity curriculum should be made available to cater different needs of adult learners". Quietness over such issues impact negatively to student performance and that also results in negative attitude of students towards certain learning areas which in turn contribute to poor academic performance and dropout rate of students. If learning areas are not relevant to the students' expectations and not adding value to their day to day life, students would lose interest in the education program.

Rule (2006) makes key suggestions and has indicated that ABE should provide an integrated education that will help adult learners acquire other skills such as meeting, organisational, discussion and analytical, which he viewed helpful. He further suggests an approach that will lessen poverty within the community.

In a study conducted by Wanyama (2014, p.165) in one of the neighbouring countries in Kenya concludes that, “Adult and Continuing Education is a key component of educational practice of any community. However, it faces many challenges that have hampered its progress and once the challenges are addressed, adults will produce the goals of education for all”, which eliminates poverty by means of producing skilful individuals whom themselves will create employment to make a living.

Moola (2015) acknowledges that little research exists in Zambian context to show key contributors to poor academic performance of learners in continuing education schools and to flatten the curve. To that effect learners are underperforming but factors causing poor performance of learners are not yet known. Mbozi (2017) in his study also conducted in Zambia, found that limited textbooks are one of the factors affecting academic performance of learners. As a result, negative academic performances may be yielded because of poor teaching.

According to Ndlovu and Moyo in a study conducted in Zimbabwe (2010, p.2490 - 2504) “attendance and academic self-concept have a strong positive correlation with performance”, their research findings also reveal that “learning styles and age” affect performance of adult learners. This is to say student’s age should be taken into consideration and the learning style should differ on how it is done in schools.

From the international context, Oxenham (2005, p.13) emphasises that, the key to a successful adult learning group is a facilitator who can involve the learners to safeguard their proficiency “of the skills and knowledge in the curriculum”. He further argues that “the ideal facilitator would combine the following qualities: reliability, competence in the subject matter, methods and skills, rapport with learners, and the ability to sustain interest and engagement” (Oxenham, 2005, p.13).

The above scholars have a general accord that AET has a pivotal responsibility in helping millions of people, therefore, AET Level 4 qualification has a significant responsibility in the rebuilding the economy globally and students should be encouraged to attain it. I, too, believe that good academic performance at AET Level 4 can encourage learning behaviour and motivate people to further their learning and change their lives.

The following section discusses the theoretical framework that may provide a solid bridge between analysing and interpreting the findings of data gathered to explain the study.

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

According to Henning (2004, p.26) theoretical framework is a structure leading “the dialogue between the literature and the research study”. Theoretical framework helped me to intertwine different components within the system in order to explore their interaction in relation to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

According to Ndaruhutse, Jones and Riggall (2019, p.13) a system refers to components “that work together to accomplish a shared objective”. Similarly, Czarnecki (2012, p.22) defines systems theory as “a process of understanding how a group of interacting, interrelating, interdependent components influence each other within a whole, rather than viewing each problem as an independent entity”. Again, Germain (2015); Gupta and Gupta (2013) attest that systems theory is about seeing reality more holistically and the approach allowed for all aspects of the organization to be examined for a total picture to emerge. Given the complexity of academic performance in the education system, the application of systems theory to guide research was regarded important as it allowed me to explore factors contributing to good academic performance in a holistic fashion.

2.8.1 The history of systems theory

Systems theory originates from the biological sciences (DuBois & Miley, 2002). The idea was to build a unifying theory that is able to speak to the complexity of systems in different domains (Chen & Stroup, 1993). Ludwig recognised a compelling need for a unified understanding of complexities, his assumption was that, the interaction between all components should be investigated in order to get the whole and complete picture of the phenomenon (Ludwig, 1968).

According to Laszlo and Krippner (1996, p.5), Ludwig first presented his idea of “a General System Theory in a philosophy seminar at the University of Chicago in 1937”. By the 1960’s, systems thinking began to be recognized (Chen & Stroup, 1993). The philosophical aspects of general system theory were taken up by Laszlo (1972), who also advocated "seeing things whole". Systems theory was further advanced by Ross Ashby who died in 1972. Bronfenbrenner (1979) introduced ecological systems in the 1970’s, later called the bio-ecological systems theory. The theory explains how structures are built to upkeep the human development. Bronfenbrenner’s theory identified four systems that would combine to have an impact on how children grow and develop. In his argument, the terms: micro-system, meso-system, exo-system and macro-system are used as exemplified in the next figure (Bronfenbrenner, 1979):

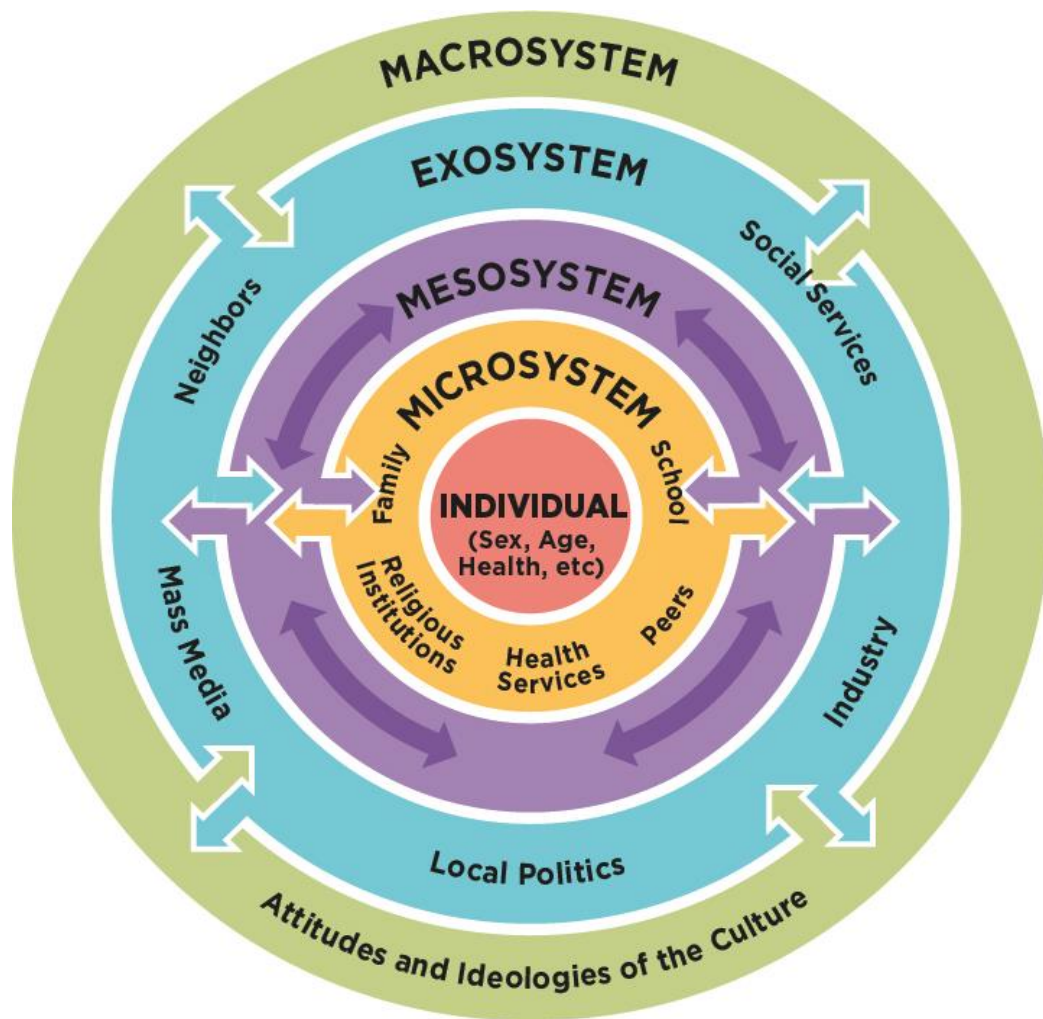


Figure 2.1: Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological systems theory

2.8.2 The relevance of the ecological systems theory in the current study

The purpose of this study was to explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. McNamara (1999) highlights that systems thinking enables the viewing of the world from a broad perspective than concentrating on one event. This research study was supported by three layers of understanding, micro, exo and macro layers. The use of systems theory helped me to get a comprehensive picture of student academic performance and perceive how these layers interact and work together for good academic performance to be accomplished. Data were collected through document analysis, focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews from three contexts (micro, exo and macro) with role players who work together with the centre; at micro (the centre level), exo-level (the provincial office: Gauteng CET College) and macro-level (DHET). All these layers were synchronised to see how they interact with each other and work together to produce good academic performance.

2.8.2.1 The micro layer

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994) a small layer of the circle is called the micro- system. For the purpose of this study, this layer represents the setting of the research site. This layer includes the documents retrieved from at the centre level for analysis, former AET Level 4 students for focus group discussions, AET Level 4 lecturers and Centre supervising lecturer for semi-structured interviews. This is the most powerful component of the system where teaching and learning take place for good academic performance to be achieved.

2.8.2.2 The exo system

The second level of Bronfenbrenner's theory is the meso-system. In the current context, the exo layer represents the Gauteng CET College, including all documents that were accessed at the College. It also represents the provincial official for semi-structured interviews. The officials' responsibilities involve giving support to the centres. They go to centres, monitor, pick up the problems and strategize to address such challenges. These officials report directly to DHET.

2.8.2.3 The macro system

The biggest layer in the circle is called the macro system (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In this context, it represents the Department of Higher Education and Training consisting of the

documents retrieved from the department for analysis. This is the highest structure where policies guiding the functioning of the CET sector are formulated.

In line with Gupta and Gupta (2013, p.53) “a system cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts, since the latter do not have the same significance when studied in isolation as when seen as contributing to the whole”. There was a need to collaborate all three layers from a systematic education perspective in order to get a holistic understanding of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. Monat and Gannon (2018) support systems-thinking because it contemplates the functions of a system’s parts, based on their relations with one another and within the system’s larger context. It was for that reason that systems thinking was deemed as a great explanatory to give me an appropriate lens to explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

2.9 CRITIQUE OF SYSTEMS THEORY

When a single element is detached from the whole, it cannot function on its own (Laszlo & Krippner, 1996). In this study situation, the whole system is dysfunctional without students. The centre’s existence depends largely on the availability of students. These shortcomings have given me an urge in the selection of participants to choose credible sources, especially the dominant constituents to represent the Gauteng CET College system and help me to address the research questions successfully.

2.9.1 Studies used systems theory

In the African context, there are quite a lot of scholars who have employed the systems theory in adult education, it includes Green (2015) who conducted a quantitative research, the assumption was on the performance of adult learning centres in the General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET) qualification in KwaZulu-Natal and the contextual factors informing this performance. The next scholar is Mutula (2016) who applied a qualitative methodology and adopted the system’s theory to highlight how the micro, meso and macro levels of the system are interrelated in order to provide an understanding of how Endleleni AET centre relates to the school and the wider community. The third study was conducted this year by Sosibo and Joubert (2020), the aim of the study was

to identify and describe interrelated AET system components that support the performance results of learning organisation.

From the global perspective, I have Leonard (2011) who adopted systems approach to gather information from different role players to understand community partnerships.

The above studies are significant and mostly relevant to the present study which adopted systems theory to ascertain connected CET system components that support good academic performance at AET Level 4. Similarly, to the above scholars, they all applied systems theory to view how certain layers interrelate in an organisation for a common goal to be realised.

2.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter commenced with a definition of the key concepts related to the research study. History of ABET prior 1994 leading to latest developments occurred in 2015 in CET sector was discussed. Literature relevant the research study was discussed. The scholar's insights on literature were reviewed and gave me valuable information to answer the research questions successfully. The chapter concluded with a deliberation on a theoretical framework underpinning the current study.

In the next chapter I presented the research methodology employed in this research project.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The central focus for the preceding chapter was on literature pertinent to the study, to get a greater understanding of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. The review of literature was done in line with the key concepts that assisted me to address the study's research questions effectively.

This chapter outlines interpretivism as a research philosophy that underpinned this research project. Qualitative methodology and other methods pertinent to this research project are presented, the methods include sampling procedures, data collection strategies and instruments, data analysis techniques, ethical matters, trustworthiness and limitation of this research study. The following section deliberates on the purpose of the chapter as indicated above.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p.40), a research design is “a plan of how the researcher will systematically collect and analyse the data that is needed to answer the research question”. This means that good research has to be done in a systematic and consistent manner.

3.2.1 Research paradigm

According to Mutula (2016, p.35) a paradigm is “a lens through which people view the world which influences the purpose of inquiry”. In this context, it is basically a set of principles guiding the research on how the problem under investigation should be addressed and understood.

Guba (1990) states that disciplines are likely to be governed by the following: positivism, interpretivism and critical paradigms. A paradigm can be characterised through three assumptions, namely: ontology (the variety of things that occur in the real world), epistemology (ways of knowing and learning about social fact) and methodology (how to go about acquiring the knowledge) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research project is guided by the assumptions of the chosen paradigm.

True to the statement as alluded by Bertram and Christiansen (2014), there are a number of conscious decisions a researcher must make when undertaking a social sciences studies. In relation to Bertram and Christiansen's view, research does not occur in a vacuum, it requires a proper planning after a problem has been identified. The most central thing is for a researcher to thoroughly decide how the truth will be learned. Hence, the application of the research paradigms which help researchers to tell a logical and consistent stories. Therefore, in shaping this study different assumption, beliefs and values were reviewed and compared. As a result, interpretive paradigm was chosen as the best approach for this study.

3.2.1.1 Interpretive paradigm

Brink, van der Walt and van Rensburg (2012, p.25) define interpretivism as “an approach to social science that emphasises the importance of insider's viewpoints to understanding social reality”. The main purpose for the application of the interpretive paradigm thereof was to get the research participants' views and opinions in order to explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

Interpretivist's paradigm stress that knowledge is constructed by self-understanding of the phenomenon. Henning (2004:20) sheds more light and states that “knowledge is constructed by self-understanding” of the phenomenon, hence the study depended on subjective experiences of the selected key participants. Therefore, I sought to get an understanding, experiences, opinions and perceptions from former AET Level 4 students, AET Level 4 lecturers, the centre supervising lecturer and provincial official to explain factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 in-depth. I selected these participants in compliance with Gray (2014) idea that interpretivism perceives academic performance as multifaceted and requires multiple views from individual's insights and experiences to get an understanding of the phenomenon.

3.2.2 Qualitative design

The current study was located within the qualitative research design, the researcher adopted this approach in order to acquire new knowledge based on the research participants' experiences regarding students' academic performance at AET Level 4. Qualitative research approach is defined as “an inquiry process of understanding where a researcher develops a complex, holistic

picture, detailed views of participants and conduct a study in a natural setting” Creswell as cited in (Maree, 2007, p.265).

3.2.2.1 Benefits and shortcomings of a qualitative design

- According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche’ and Delpont (2012) qualitative design is used because it does not detach the researcher from the participants, therefore it enabled me to connect with the participants at a personal level and helped me to acquire insights and understand factors contributing to good student academic performance from different perspectives, as how the research participants experience it. It should be noted that qualitative research design involves asking participants about their experiences and they give their opinions about how things occurred in their lives. Moreover, participants in this procedure had a liberty to give their own responses rather than picking from limited, given answers as in quantitative research.
- The approach enabled me to further probe questioning through focus group and semi-structured interviews (Gilbert, 2011).

The above advantages allowed me to come up with rich and extensive descriptions of contributory factors to good student academic performance at AET Level 4. Nevertheless, Grays (2014, p.247) warns that “qualitative researchers should guard against being overwhelmed by data”, by making sure that the sources of data are focused in a limited setting. For the purpose study, my data sources were limited to AET stakeholders namely: students, lecturers, centre manager and Department officials who through their experiences in education were capable to give rich and in-depth descriptions of contributory strategies to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

3.2.3 Case study design

Rule and John (2011, p.4) define a case study as “a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge”. I have adopted a case study because my goal was to explore the phenomenon in depth and to “gain greater insight and in-depth understanding” of contributors to good students’ academic performance (Maree, 2007, p.76). This type of design permitted me to conduct intensive enquiry through documentation and open-ended responses “reflecting a rich and lively reality” of students’ academic

performance from different but relevant delivery arrangement sources in education (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008, p.185). Case study design enabled me to gain a deep understanding of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 through documentation and interviews with the research participants.

3.2.3.1 Types of case study design

There are numerous types of case studies that can be useful in a research, namely: explanatory, exploratory and descriptive case studies. The current project was an explanatory case study as it strove to explain “what” influences to good students’ academic performance are and “why” students are performing the way they are performing (Rule & John, 2011, p.8).

3.2.3.2 Advantages and limitations of a case study design

- Case study design allows interaction with the people being studied on their own turf (Burns & Grove, 2011). The current study was conducted at the places most familiar to the respondents. At the chosen centre, is where students are attending and where lecturers and centre supervising lecturer report for duty.
- According to Yin (2009) case studies, study real world situations and address important research questions. During data collection I was involved with real people in real situations. The research participants for the study were also given a chance to express themselves in relation to student academic performance and their ideas were valued in this procedure as they assisted me to respond to the research questions successfully.
- Furthermore, case study allowed me to use various sources of data collection, namely: document analysis, focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews (Okeke & van Wyk, 2015; Maree, 2007; Yin, 2009).

However, case study design has been criticized for not allowing generalizability of the results (Maree, 2007). Nevertheless, this study was not aimed at generalizing its findings, but to get a greater understanding of the contributory factors to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

3.3 RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

The next paragraph presents the research sites, the study participants, sampling method and informed consent forms.

3.3.1 The research sites

This research project was conducted in Community Learning Centre's (CLC) within Gauteng CET College. The selection of the research site was based on good academic performance of the centre at AET Level.

In an attempt to observe ethical principles and to protect the identity of the research site, I used pseudo label to refer to the research venue. The label and explanation are presented in the table below:

Table 3.1: Labels used for the research site

Meaning	Label
Fourways CLC Venue	FCVA

3.3.2 The study participants and sampling procedure

My sample size was made up of eight research participants.

For the success of the research, there was a need to find participants who would provide the study with relevant information to answer the research question. I pulled in participants who would represent key education stakeholders of Gauteng CET College. I could not cast my net beyond Gauteng college due to Covid-19 pandemic and financial constraints. However, the provincial official was sampled for the study to establish a holistic understanding of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

It was deemed necessary to describe and explain the inclusion of the chosen research participants. I had eight research participants as it was mentioned above, four students for focus group discussion who are high performers, have passed AET Level 4 with good results and have progressed to matric were sampled from FCVA. The centre manager together with the supervising lecturer helped me to choose the required participants. Not all students had the same

chance of being selected. The identification of these participants was done through centre records, where the information regarding these selected students' performance were carefully considered. The sampling included two males and two females, who are black adults and above twenty-one (21).

Two lecturers (two females) who have more than five years' experience teaching AET Level 4 and are top performers were selected, the results analysis and the centre manager together with the supervising lecturer helped in the selection of those lecturers since they had all the relevant information about lecturers in the centre.

A centre manager was also sampled to participate in the study as he is the manager at the selected centre and is also an anchor of education, unfortunately he could not participate due to other commitments. He requested the centre supervising lecturer who has a massive experience regarding AET Level 4 and also has a responsibility to manage learning satellites to replace him during the interviews.

The eighth participant for semi-structured interviews was sampled from Gauteng College; the inclusion of that participant was based on his experience in the sector and his position as student and academic support official. He was sampled as a Gauteng College representative. His selection was my strategy to observe how different layers work together within a system for good academic performance to be achieved, he therefore represented the exo layer of the system. Further to the mentioned, he had more than five years' experience working at the College. I had initially sampled two provincial officials. The intention was to conduct interviews with both of them. Unfortunately, the second participant had other commitments at the time and decided to withdraw. The decision to withdraw was fully supported as Maree (2007) states that a participant can decide not to participate at any given time.

The inclusion of these research participants was once again determined by the research question and the participants' understanding of the problem under study. I noted that the sample size was too small. In qualitative research small samples are acceptable as numbers are of little importance in the sampling strategy (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Therefore, the number of the research participants was not a disadvantage to my study as I conducted a case study which

allowed me ample time during the interviews to get in-depth data. As a result, I managed to acquire enough data to address the research question.

The following table presents the summary of the research participants for the study:

Table 3.2: Summary of the research participants

#	Type of participant	Number of participants	Gender	Race
1.	Students	Four	2 Males and 2 females	Black Africans
2.	Lecturers	Two	2 Females	Black Africans
3.	Supervising lecturer	One	1 Male	Black African
4.	Department official	One	1 Male	Black African
	Total	8	4 Males and 4 Females	

Once again, in an attempt to observe ethical claims and to protect the identity of the research participants, I used pseudo labels. The labels and explanations are presented in the table below:

Table 3.3: Labels used for focus group discussions participants

Focus group discussion	
Meaning	Label
Student A from the Focus group discussion	FGDSA
Student B from the Focus group discussion	FGDSB
Student C from the Focus group discussion	FGDSC
Student D from the Focus group discussion	FGDSD

Participants from the semi-structured interviews were given the following labels:

Table 3.4: Labels used for semi-structured interviews participants

Labels for semi-structured interviews	
Meaning	Label
Semi-structured interviews with Lecturer A	SILA
Semi-structured interviews with Lecturer B	SILB
Semi-structured interviews with Centre Supervising Lecturer	SICSL
Semi-structured interviews with a Provincial Official A	SIPOA

3.3.3 Sampling technique

I adopted purposive sampling technique, a feature of non-probability sampling and qualitative research (De Vos et al., 2012). Purposive sampling was considered as the best technique to select participants suitable to the research questions. These participants were regarded as important and purposively chosen based on their “suitability in advancing the purpose of the research, relevant knowledge, interests and experience of the case” (Rule & John, 2011, p.64).

3.3.4 Pilot study

De Vos et al. (2012, p.383), define a pilot study as a process whereby research tools are used on a trial basis. The ‘rehearsal ’was done in this research project to identify problems and to minimise ambiguity of questions I planned to use for my study. The piloting of the study was done with four lecturers in a centre where I am stationed and these lecturers provided valuable feedback before the full setting out of the research schedules.

3.3.5 Informed consent form

The current study involved human participants. As a result, I was obliged to provide informed consent forms before data was collected. I explained to the research participants what it meant to take part in the study, their rights were also discussed.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Through a case study, I employed three techniques to generate data, namely: document analysis which included perusal of AET Level 4 examination results for a five-year period 2015-2019,

from all layers of education (micro: the centre, exo: the Gauteng college and macro: CET sector) to make comparison possible. Document analysis also involved perusal of the national and provincial strategic plans. I also conducted focus group interviews with former AET Level 4 students who have progressed to Grade 12 and have achieved good results at AET Level 4 and lastly semi-structured face- to- face interviews were conducted with AET Level 4 lecturers, centre supervising lecturer and the provincial official (Creswell, 2003). The combination of these three tools produced thick data to explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 (Rule & John, 2011) and helped me to reduce of the possible biasness of data.

3.4.1 Phase one: Document analysis

Bowen (2009, p.27) defines document study as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic”. Worthy to note that, document analysis provides a rich source of data as documents provide a lot of printed information.

The first phase of data collection was done through document analysis. This type of data collection was executed at an initial phase as it was perceived that documents could reveal lot of data and “questions that needed to be asked” in the research proceedings (Bowen, 2009, p.30).

In the academic research there is a difference between primary and secondary sources of data. My emphasis was on the secondary data. Secondary data refer to “any materials (books, articles, etc.) that are based on previously published works” (Maree, 2007, p.83). For this study, the researcher reviewed documents that speak to the responsibilities of Gauteng CET Colleges. Documents included the National strategic plan and Gauteng CET College 2016-2020 strategic plan, AET Level 4 examination results for a period of five years (2015-2019), pairing the CET sector, college and the centre. I initially made a request of centre strategic plan, minutes from learning area committees and AET Level 4 results analysis at the centre level. However, I only received examination results analysis for a period of five years’ other documents were not obtainable from the centre. Therefore, document analysis at the centre was limited to documents that were made available. Nevertheless, the documents I accessed from the province and

national levels were necessary in this research project and provided me with in-depth understanding of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

All accessed documents were carefully scrutinised. I employed thematic analysis by coding contents into themes. I used superlatives analysis to see the differences in terms of students' performances over the five- year period (2015 to 2019). I analysed AET Level 4 examination results together with other documents and discovered overarching themes, namely: throughput rate of students, student retention, student dropout rate and key education stakeholders.

I was conscious of the critiques associated with the application of secondary data, such as the concern regarding the authenticity of analysed documents. However, the interviews the research participants helped me to explore the contents of the results analyses (Bowen, 2009). Another critique was the difficulty of accessing and retrieving documents and bias (Yin, 2009). To deal with that challenge, I had an approval letter from Gauteng College which endorsed the study to be conducted (see Appendix C), an approval letter assisted me to access AET Level 4 results analysis at centre level.

Apart from the known challenges there were several benefits in the use of secondary data, for instance “its cost –effectiveness and less time consuming”, (Bowen, 2009, p.30-31), as data collection is time consuming and costly (Grays, 2014). The main advantage of using secondary data is that “researcher do not have to collect their own data, the researcher gathers the documents in need and get started on the analysis process” (Bertrams & Christiansen, 2014, p.98). The following table is a brief overview of documents analysis.

Table 3.5: An overview of document study

Document Analysis	
Purpose	To speak and give meaning of the written documents.
Type of data	Secondary data
Forms of documents	2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 AET Level 4 results examination results accessed from the CET sector, the Gauteng college and the centre under study. National and provincial strategic plans

3.4.2 Phase two: Focus group discussion

During the second phase, data gathering was collected through focus group interviews. Okeke and van Wyk (2015, p.336) refer to focus group as “a data gathering method in which a group of participants is involved in a discussion, where the researcher moderates the discussion”.

Four retained students (two males and two females), students who are former AET Level 4 students, were high performers and have progressed to Grade 12 participated in the study. Through the small size of focus group 1 got “more information from each participant” and every participant contributed in the discussions (Fern, 2001, p.18; Greenbaum, 1998, p.3). The small number of the sample allowed all participants to express their ideas freely, as most people are scared to express themselves within a large number of people. If more people were included, for example twelve participants “the average individual would have been granted only 10 minutes to participate” but as with the “small group, the time per participant was three times” enabling me to have more time and dig” more information” (Fern, 2001, p.18; Greenbaum, 1998, p.3).

Focus group interviews are “useful for gaining a sense of the range and diversity of views”, add (Rule & John, 2011, p.66). This method therefore provided a bigger picture of the past, present and future, resulting in “a very rich data generated” and participants were given enough time to share their thoughts with one another (Laws, Harper, Jones & Marcus, 2003, p.130). However, there are also limitations to the use of focus group, it can “exclude people who are quiet and scared to discuss issues in public” (Laws et al., 2003, p.131). Nonetheless, accommodating setting and few participants gave me an advantage in making everyone to speak. I consistently reminded them that their knowledge had a value in a given context, and so every individual’s participation was highly motivated to participate.

Focus group interviews were conducted in English, as participants found the use of the language suitable for them. These discussions were spread into two levels and were conducted in two different days, meaning that the interviews were conducted twice in a space of two weeks to preserve credibility of the study. The first level took 61:41 minutes while the second level lasted for 68:45 minutes in a carefully controlled classroom. During the first phase, all four students were present and participated in the study. However, during the second phase one male was not available due to unforeseen circumstances and I could not replace him as I received an apology

few minutes before the start of the session. During interviewing processes, I used interview schedules (see Appendix E) for quality purposes (Rule & John, 2011), where the discussions were recorder and the permission to do the audio-recording was granted by the focus group participants before the interviews commenced. The research participants were allowed some time to engage with the consent forms after it was deliberated on. The research participants voluntarily agreed to participate and signed the consent forms. Short notes were taken concurrently with the audio-recorder to capture non-verbal communications that could not be captured with audio-recorder. Audio-recording assisted me to report accurately, to avoid misinterpretation and missing essential data, and to correctly transcribe the interviews later as the tape recorder allowed me to listen time and again. The following table summarises focus group interview proceedings.

Table 3.6: Summary of focus group discussions

Item	Explanation
Participants	The inclusion of the following participants was determined by the purpose of the research study. These students assisted me to find significant data to good student academic performance at AET Level 4, as they are high performers and have massive experience on academic performance of students at AET Level 4.
Facilitator	Mkhize ZTM.
Setting	It was formal, accommodating, in a classroom and circle seating, Covid-19 protocols were observed. A discussion was nearly 70 minutes and probing questions were used.
Data collected	More in-depth qualitative data.
Data collection tools	I had an interview schedule, interviews were audio- recorded and short notes were taken (Rule & John, 2011).
Data Analysis	Thematic analysis

Source: (Author's compilation)

3.4.3 Phase three: Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the final phase with two AET Level 4 lecturers, one centre supervising lecturer and one provincial official. I conducted four semi-structured interviews in total. Semi-structured interviews are described as a “conversation where the researcher has in mind particular information that he or she wants from the respondent and has designed particular questions to be answered” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p.80).

Interview schedules were developed and pre-tested to minimise ambiguity. These interviews took about 35 to 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in a carefully controlled area, on different times and days. The duration of these interviews took four weeks, each interview was conducted twice for trustworthiness. During interviewing processes, I used audio- recorders, short notes and interview schedules (see Appendix E) for quality purposes (Rule & John, 2011), where permission to do the recording was granted by the research participants before the interviews commenced. Short notes were taken concurrently with the audio-recording to capture non-verbal communications that could not be captured with the audio recorder. Audio-recording assisted me to report accurately, to avoid misinterpretation and missing essential data and to correctly transcribe the interviews later as the tape recorder allowed me to listen time and again.

Semi-structured interviews are advantageous as they allow for questions to be rephrased if the participant is unclear of the question, helping to provide meaningful rich data. In this manner “concentrated time was spent on each question with participants” (Okeke & van Wyk, 2015, p.301; Greenbaum, 1998, p.5). Therefore, semi-structured interviews permitted the research participants to discuss in detail their experiences thereby enabling the researcher to acquire rich data. One on one interviews allowed participants to express themselves freely not under the control of another.

There are limitations to the application of semi-structured interviews such as other interviewees who might feel intimidated by the presence of the interviewer, however the research participants were permitted to make informed decisions before the interviews began and were made aware of their right to withdraw.

3.4.4 Data collection procedure

Both focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were carried out in two phases which occurred on two different days. The purpose was to cross-check the reliability of data given by the participants. The first phase started on the 8 March to 30 March 2021 and the second phase from 30 March to 30 April 2021. I personally went to the research sites to conduct focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews with the research participants. Noteworthy, the study was conducted through the peak of Covid- 19 pandemic in South Africa and beyond. However, I could not lend the study to online data collection, as some participants were not reachable via such means due to data costs and online accessibility. To comply with the national and UKZN guidelines, the following processes were observed during both interviews to limit the transmission of the virus.

Covid-19 precautionary measures observed

- Wearing of mask was mandatory, everyone in the interview rooms was wearing a mask throughout processes.
- The researcher and the participants were constantly reminded to sanitise their hands.
- Social distancing was observed, there was a space of approximately 2metres in between the research participants.
- Gloves were utilised during the signing of consent forms, as it is known that the paper transmits the risk of contagion.

3.5 ANALYSIS OF THE COLLECTED DATA

Data analysis is the most significant aspect to the research project, it makes sense of the raw data. Patton and Cochran (2002, p.433) warns the uniqueness of the qualitative study requires “the analytical approach to be unique”, the author further states that because “qualitative inquiry depends on the analytical intellect and style of the analyst”. In an interpretive research, qualitative data analysis requires the reduction of data into controllable units (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

3.5.1 Analysing documents reviewed, focus group and semi-structured interviews

I chose thematic analysis to analyse collected qualitative data and sorted data into themes (Maree, 2007). Thematic analysis is “the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p.2). The aim of thematic analysis was to inductively discover common themes across the data set (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The first step thereof was to listen to the audio-recording several times and read the short notes containing data collected. Thereafter, I converted that data into transcripts, it was a demanding activity but the process helped me to produce a constricted data that was easy to analyse. Noteworthy, transcripts were taken back to the research participants to validate if what I documented was what they have said.

Qualitative data were analysed following six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke in Maguire and Delahunt (2017, p.4) for thematic analysis:

- *Become familiar with the data*, I carefully read the transcripts and documents to get a clear picture of what the data entails.
- *Generate initial codes*, I then organised data and sorted it into codes. Coding helped me to reduce lots of data into small chunks of meaning (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).
- *Search for themes*, I inductively looked for the significant patterns between these categories, in order to identify common themes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Chetty, 2015; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017, p.5) “a theme is a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question”.
- *Review themes*, the next step was to double check the identified themes and institute change where needed.
- *Define themes*, I gave a sense of what each theme meant in the context, Clark and Braun (2013, p.92) caution that it is most essential to “identify the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about” and if there are subthemes to check if they interact and relate to the main theme.
- *Write-up*, I then started writing my report.

Noteworthy, the study followed both inductive and deductive reasoning in order to get rid of the preconception of data and get a thorough understanding of factors contributing to good academic performance. However, I have largely followed deductive reasoning to check how systems theory (a theoretical framework informing the study) has helped me to answer the research questions effectively.

The following is a summary of data collection grid relevant to the research questions:

Table 3.7: A summary of data collection grid

Research questions	Approach	Data source	Instrument to generate data	Method of analysis
Question one (1)	Qualitative approach	Centre Manager	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic
		AET Level 4 Lecturers	Semi-structured interview	
		Department official	Semi-structured interview	
		Documentation	Document analysis	
		AET Level 4 students	Focus group discussions	
Question two (2)	Qualitative approach	Centre Manager	Semi- structured interviews	Thematic
		AET Level 4 Lecturers		
		AET Level 4 students	Focus group discussions	
		Documentation	Document analysis	
Question three (3)	Qualitative approach	Centre Manager	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic
		AET Level 4 Lecturers		
		AET Level 4 students	Focus group discussions	
		Department official		

Source: (Author's compilation).

3.6 ETHICAL ISSUES

Research ethics refer to a system of principles guiding the research process (Brink et al., 2012), it involves getting informed consent of the participants. Maree (2007, p.301) adds that “it is important that all the way through the research process, the researcher stands by ethical guiding principles”. I therefore abided by such agreements.

According to Duurheim and Wassenaar (2002); Brink et al. (2012), three ethical principles guide the research process: autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence. In this research project, I acted in accordance with the following fundamental ethical principles:

- **Access from gate-keepers**

I made a formal request for ethical clearance at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal research office (Appendix A). I then requested an approval to conduct research from the GCET College that enabled me to approach research participants effectively (Appendix C). Upon receipt of ethical clearance, prior arrangements were made with the Centre Manager from the sampled centre to visit at the convenient times, to avoid disruption of teaching and learning.

- **Autonomy**

The aims of the study were explained to the research participants, and they were allowed some time to make informed decisions about their participation. I continued to ask participants to sign an informed consent, the signing of informed consent showed that the subject understood their role in the study and that their participation was voluntarily with no monetary compensation. I further emphasised the research participants’ right to avoid answering questions they were not comfortable with and expressed there was no “coercion or penalty” to research participants (Brink et al., 2012, p.35).

- **Non-maleficence**

Every effort was made to minimise any risk or harm to the research participants “or any other people” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p.67). Every information given by the research participants was held confidentially, their names were protected and the name of the CLC was not disclosed throughout the study. Pseudonym were used to safeguard everyone (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p.67).

- **Beneficence**

Importantly, research participants were guaranteed that they would not be subjected to unnecessary investigation. Consequently, to persuade participation in the study, I explained the aim of the study was to bring forth factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 which could assist the entire education system to meet its objective and adult students to fulfil their long desired goals.

3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The term validity refers to accuracy of the research findings. Guba in Rule and John (2011, p.107) “offered the concept of trustworthiness as an alternative to reliability and validity”. Guba further indicates that “trustworthiness of qualitative studies is achieved by giving attention to the study’s transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability” (Rule & John, 2011, p.107).

To strive for **transferability**, I supplied a highly detailed background of my subject, for example location where the research study took place, research methods and all processes that occurred throughout the study were detailed in the study.

To strengthen the **credibility**, I used three methods to gather data; document analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. After data was collected and transcribed, I took it back to the research participants for validation and to ensure that data collected through qualitative data is correct and dependable (Creswell, 2003). Member- checking curbed me from fabricating or falsifying information given by the research participants and allowed the participants to evaluate their data and make alterations where they consider needed. This simply means that qualitative data was inspected by each participant, to ensure that facts were not misinterpreted.

To establish **dependability**, I used audio-recording through the permission of the research participants to record the interviews. The method is more precise than taking notes. However, short notes were also taken to capture what audio-recording cannot capture. All research processes were detailed and documented for audit trail to allow an outside researcher to examine

conclusions and interpretations, to determine whether conclusions are supported by data itself and for the reader gain trust in the report (Okeke & van Wyk, 2015).

To guarantee **confirmability**, I acknowledged my positionality as one of the Gauteng College employee the process assisted me to address the issue of biasness and to promote trustworthiness. Kanuha (2000) suggests that insider researchers are capable of conducting research with communities of which they affiliate to, that being the case, However, to avoid feeling torn between two situations, the research study was not conducted in CLC where I am located. I further bracketed my preconceptions about the topic and positioned my status as neutral, allowing myself to treat my close relationship from a ‘bird’s eye view’ (Kerstetter, 2012). I totally relied on my research participants’ validation to minimise any biasness that might be caused by my position and also to improve rigour of the study. According to Guba in Rule and John (2011) researcher’s positionality helps to ensure the confirmability of the case. I continued to draw inferences from the data collected and never allowed my experiences or preconceived assumptions to manipulate an inquiry.

3.8 CONCLUSION

I view this chapter as a cornerstone of this research project. The chapter gave a detailed explanation of the research design employed in the research process and a description of data analysis process.

The next chapter presented data interpretation and findings.

CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter one I stated that the academic performance at AET Level 4 is an important aspect that measures the accomplishment of educational ends. It is worth mentioning that, students who perform well are better able to attain individual freedom, empowerment and economic success.

This qualitative case study sought to answer the following main research question: What are the factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 and how do these factors inform the centre performance?

The following secondary questions were applied to address the main research question:

- Who are key education stakeholders in shaping academic performance at AET Level 4?
- What is the role of each of these stakeholders in student academic performance at AET Level 4?

Chapter 4 presents and discusses data analysis and interpretation from data collected through three methods; documentation, focus group interviews (with former AET Level 4 students) and semi-structured interviews (with AET Level 4 lecturers, centre supervising lecturer and the provincial official). Documents reviewed were accessed from the CET sector, the College and the centre under study as I could not look at the centre in isolation of other components of the CET education system.

The first section of this chapter presents comprehensive context of the research sites, it gives a description of biographical information of the research participants and engages the perceptions of the research participants under the emerged themes; student throughput rate, student retention rate, student dropout rate and the role of key education stakeholders. The chapter gives a clear description of what the emerged themes mean to the study and provides examples from three sources of data collection as evidence. The chapter concludes with a description of the main takeaways, the factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

4.2 RESEARCH SITE AND STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this section is to describe the context of the research site where the research was conducted. It stands repeating that, data was collected at one community learning centre intertwining different layers (micro, exo and macro) as the ecological systems theory suggests. The aim was to look at all elements that constitute the centre, how they interact to produce good academic performance at AET Level 4 in a holistic fashion.

4.2.1 The Gauteng CET College

According to DHET (2021) the college came into existence on the 1 April 2015 under the auspices of the DHET in terms of the Continuing Education and Training Act, Act 16 of 2006, as amended. The college is situated in the South of Johannesburg, approximately 8 km from Johannesburg CBD.

There are many factors that made Gauteng College distinctive to other locations of CET sector nationally. The first would be that it is located in Gauteng province, a community that is seen as the place full of job opportunities. This College has a long history of educating communities in the province, long before the transition from AET sector to DHET. Gauteng CET College consists of students, who have a wide-ranging income levels, with many living on or below the poverty level. Issues of unemployment and other social problems are prevalent in their communities. Statistics South Africa points out “a population of 18.8 million South Africans over the age of 20 years who for various reasons have been excluded from Education and Training opportunities in the country” (DHET, 2016a, p.14). The big numbers of these people are located in Gauteng and are desperate to pull through the economic downfall.

Another factor which makes Gauteng CET College unique is that the college is the biggest in the CET sector, it has 47 Community learning centres (CLC's) and further 267 learning sites attached to CLC's with 47 centre managers, 213 administration support staff at centre level and 2050 lecturers (DHET, 2016a). A final factor of uniqueness is that, the Gauteng College consists of people who are racially and culturally diverse. The college does not discriminate against other nations it has got a biggest enrolment percentage of foreign nationals.

The challenge thereof is the underperformance of students at AET Level 4 (DOE, 2001), which then worsens the unemployment rate in the province. In consideration of the challenges, the Gauteng College has a major obligation to lessen the effects of unemployment. The Gauteng College is therefore targeting a 50% of pass rate over the duration of five years and has “to align its programmes to support human developments and respond to poverty, unemployment and inequality” (DHET, 2016a, p.15). Therefore, the success of the study can assist the college to enhance its academic performance and attain its strategic objective.

4.2.1.1 Vision of Gauteng CET College

The GCET College’s vision involves “prioritising and providing access for adults and out-of-school youth to become active citizens through relevant community education and training programmes” (DHET, 2016c, p.1). However, I realised that the college’s vision is constricted to providing education and developing skills, it does not necessary address academic performance which could in turn hamper its vision. My standing point is, I do not just want students to learn and pass but they should be academically successful. Noteworthy, people who are academically successful have high opportunities of furthering their studies through bursaries which limits its criteria within good academic history of the applicants. Therefore, the college’s vision should not be bracketed in teaching and learning and throughput as a positive result, how the students perform should be of concern, as it is strongly linked to advanced outcomes. Again, the fact that recent times need a post-secondary study to find a job should not be overlooked.

4.2.2 Background of the selected centre

This section presents the findings on the background of the chosen community learning centre. Fourways CLC is one of the forty-seven (47) centres affiliated to Gauteng CET College. It is located in the northern Sandton, in the interior of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality of Gauteng Province. This centre is a cluster of commercial business, it represents the semi-urban population as the community is not a wholly characteristic of urban areas.

- **Facilities and administrative components**

The centre is without its own building and it is functioning at host schools, causing an impediment to skills offerings as the centre is unable to operate for 8 hours a day. This then

results to a centre working reduced hours from 15h: 00 to 19h: 00. The assertion was validated below:

“Considering our current situation at the centre we lack infrastructure. We only operate in the evenings, during the day the mainstream school is using its building” (SILA).

The above challenge is within the strategic objective of the Gauteng College. The college is aware of 21 community learning centres relying on host schools for accommodation, which means that the college is on the verge of addressing that problem (DHET, 2016c).

The centre offers numerous qualifications, namely: “Post- literacy programmes (Level 1, 2 and 3), academic qualifications including AET Level 4 certificate equal to (NQF Level 1), Amended Senior Certificate and National Senior certificate (NSC) re-writes” (DHET, 2021, p.6). The learning site is one of the biggest centres in view of learner enrolment in Gauteng province, with 423 NSC, 705 ASC and 104 AET Level 4 registered students. The centre consists has employed twenty-eight lectures. It had seven learning sites but currently only four learning sites are functional, three sites were reportedly closed since the start of Covid-19 pandemic.

The main centre of the Fourways Community Learning centre is hosted at Witkoppen Primary school, which is where all administrative work for the centre occurs. The main centre is also a learning site because of the advantageous facilities. There are many classrooms to accommodate quite a number of students and the centre is located near the local police station which to me guarantees students and lecturers’ safety as they attend in the evening. This is where data was collected. I noted a good working relationship between the host school and the centre, we were able to use the school’s boardrooms to conduct the study’s interviews.

The following diagram depicts the school where the main centre functions.



Figure 4.1: The structure of the centre

- **Success of the centre**

Regardless of the centre's impediment which is a restriction in terms of the reduced teaching and learning hours. I indicated that, the centre does not have its own building making curriculum delivery impossible from 08h00 to 15h00, as a result the centre only operates from 15h00 to 19h00 (four hours) when classrooms are not in use at host schools. SILB has confirmed:

“The centre operates from 15h00 to 20h00 when facilities are not in use by host schools” (SILB).

Regardless of the circumstances, the centre is one of the centres with a good record of AET Level 4 academic performance. In two consecutive years 2017/2018, the centre was sitting on number two in terms of academic performance in Gauteng province, amongst 47 centres. The case can help the Gauteng College to derive useful lesson and provide a remedy on good academic performance at AET Level 4, which in turn will secure economic well-being of the country.

4.3 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This section presents a brief biographical characteristic of the research participants respectively. It was regarded necessary to acquire this information because in academic research there should be a compliant with a person's age if one has to interview a child. The information helped me

to determine the age group of the research participants. It also helped me to compare the sentiments of different ages and gender. All research participants were given labels in order to protect their identities (see Chapter 3).

The following table is inserted to present a list of participants demographic for the study.

Table 4.1: Participants’ demographics for the study

Pseudonyms/ Codes	Age group	Gender	Ethnicity	Marriage status	Years in the sector
FGDSA	30-35	Male	African Black	Married	3 years
FGDSB	30-35	Female	African Black	Married	3years
FGDSC	35-40	Male	African Black	Married	4 years
FGDSD	25-30	Female	African Black	Never married	3 years
SILA	35-40	Female	African Black	Married	6 years
SILB	65+	Female	African Black	Divorced	9 years
SICSL	35-40	Male	African Black	Married	9 years
SIPOA	60-65	Male	African Black	Married	9 years

Source: (Author’s compilation)

4.3.1 Biographical information of the research participants

The study participants were four former AET Level 4 students, two AET Level 4 lecturers, one centre supervising lecturer and a provincial official. These participants were selected to give a complete picture of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. The selection of students was based on their record of performance; they did not just pass AET Level 4 but their academic performance was very good (see Appendix D). Their statements of results were presented as evidence and to help me to respond to the research questions successfully. However, their personal details on the statement of results were purposefully concealed as an ethical principle. AET Level 4 lecturers were selected because they are top performing lecturers with a track of producing good results at AET Level 4. The centre supervising lecturer stood in for a centre manager who withdrew due to other commitments and the provincial official was

relevant because he is at the academic support services and is expected to offer quality learning support programmes.

The biographic information of the research participants indicated that the students had more than three years in the centre and the lecturers have more than five years in the sector, which then says they were in a good position to provide me with crucial and in-depth data in relation to academic performance based on their experiences. Their age group ranged between 25 and 70 years and six of them are married. The research participants for focus group interviews reside in township and semi-structured interview participants live in urban formal communities. The sample was equally distributed in terms of gender as indicated in Chapter 3.

The next section presents the thematic findings of the study, the views of the research participants were presented in conjunction with the documents reviewed.

4.4 THEMATIC FINDINGS

Through a case study, there were four crystal clear themes that emerged. Namely: throughput (pass) rate of students, student retention rate, student drop-out rate and the role of key education stakeholders. These themes yielded a number of factors contributing to good academic performance.

The table below demonstrates the emerged themes:

Table 4.2: Thematic Findings for the research study

EMERGED THEMES	
1.	Throughput rate of students
2.	Retention rate of students
3.	Dropout rate of students
4.	The role of key education stakeholders at CET

Source: (Author compilation)

This was a qualitative case study which involved three sources of data collection namely: document analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to acquire a

comprehensive understanding of factors contributing to good academic performance and how these factors inform the centre's performance. As a result thereof, all records from macro (national), exo (provincial college) and micro (centre) levels, were carefully scrutinised to ascertain the emerged themes. The records included strategic plans, AET Level 4 examination results for a five-year period (2015-2019) and government gazettes. AET Level 4 examination results documents portray the number of students, who registered, wrote, passed and failed during the respective years intertwining all layers of CET education system (see Chapter 3). Percentages were included in these groupings. Noteworthy, AET Level 4 completion requires students to obtain 120 credits in order to pass AET Level 4 and get a qualification at NQF Level 1 (Umalusi, 2013).

Tables and figures were used to intensify the discussions and give a detailed presentation in relation to throughput rate of students, retention rate of students, dropout rate of students and the role of key education stakeholders at CET. It remained significant to look at all components involved in the Gauteng College to give a complete picture of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

Table 4.3: AET Level 4 examination results at national level over a period of five years (2015-2019)

Year	Entries	Retained	Dropout	Throughput	Percentage
2015	117 224	91 603	25 621	34 125	37.3%
2016	100 490	78 105	22 385	28 024	35.9%
2017	85 136	65 225	19 911	24 757	38%
2018	89 644	64 700	24 944	28 154	43.7%
2019	75 980	53 945	21 995	41 638	77.2%

Source: (DHET, 2019, p.3).

Table 4.4: AET Level 4 examination results at the provincial level over a period of five year period (2015-2019)

Year	Entries	Retained	Dropout	Throughput	Percentage
2015	15 883	12 295	3 588	4 305	35,0%
2016	14 392	10 792	3 600	3 381	31,3%
2017	14 437	10 810	3 627	4 202	38,9%
2018	16 191	11 449	4 742	3 725	32,6%
2019	12 722	7 022	5 720	5 170	73,6%

Source: (DHET, 2015b, 2016b, 2017, 2018a, 2019).

Table 4.5: AET Level 4 examination results at the centre level over five year period (2015-2019)

Year	Entries	Retained	Dropout	Drop out %	Throughput	% Passed	# Failed	% Failed
2015	396	318	78	80%	249	78%	69	22%
2016	324	244	80	75%	131	54%	113	46%
2017	295	221	74	75%	162	73%	59	27%
2018	304	228	76	68%	121	69%	107	31%
2019	250	143	107	57%	96	67%	47	33%

Source: (Centre compilation)

The next section presents the findings and discusses of the emerged themes from data collected:

4.4.1 THEME 1: THROUGHPUT (PASS) RATE

Throughput rate is defined as the rate at which a group of students successfully complete a qualification within the specified period (DHET, 2021). Similarly, Sondlo (2013, p.33) defines throughput rate as “the number of students who are enrolled in a programme and are actively engaged in teaching and learning activities and complete the course within a minimum or maximum time”. For the purpose of this study, student throughput rate is defined as the percentage of students who are able to succeed in the final examination.

a) The Strategic plan

The Department pledges to “provide leadership required for the implementation of corrective measures in areas of under-performance or any other deficiency identified within the system” (DHET, 2016a, p.4), therefore the Department has agreed to improve condition for a situation that might hinder CET College’s goal. Similarly, the Gauteng College has an obligation to “increase student performance to 50% for full GETC qualifications by March 2020” (DHET, 2016c, p.21). The set target would mean the college understands that a student who has acquired AET Level 4 stands a good chance to support himself or herself in the skills demanding society.

b) Throughput of CET sector in AET Level 4 examinations

As seen in table 1, data involves the percentages of students who passed AET Level 4 over a period of five years. The CET sector was on muddy road in terms of pass rate for the years (2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018). AET Level 4 throughput rate was sitting below 40%. However, there was a slight change of 43.7% pass rate in 2018. In 2019, the findings showed signs of positive improvements and high opportunities of meeting the national strategic plan, where 77, 2% of students completed AET Level 4.

c) Throughput of Gauteng college in AET Level 4 examinations

Student throughput rate has been very low in the province. The percentage in terms of pass rate has been below 50% in 2015, 2016 and 2017. This is quite relevant to ETDP SETA Report (2013) an African literature study which suggested that, the throughput rate of those achieving the GETC qualification is extremely low in the entire province. Similarly, DHET (2014) the national ABET provision data showed very few adults acquire the full GETC qualification. Subsequently, the findings revealed a turnaround of 73.6% pass rate in the Gauteng province in 2019. The province achieved the greatest pass rate, which was viewed as a striking development after a four year of poor performance (2015-2018). It is worthy to note that, in 2019 AET Level 4 examination results surpassed the projection of 50% pass rate made in Gauteng CET College strategic objective (DHET, 2016c, p.21).

d) Throughput of the centre in AET Level 4 examinations

The findings revealed the centre performance which is viewed as consistency, except for 2016, where there was a remarkably decline to 54% (Table 4.5). However, in 2015 and 2017, the centre had its best performance.

Drawing from the international perspective, Tinto (2006) in Sondlo (2013, p.36) sustains that “to improve student throughput as educators or policy makers, we need to ask the question how should we help students learn instead of how should we teach student?”. It should be noted that, the College has implemented a number of efforts to improve GETCA performance in the Province, such as the establishment of the College Support and Intervention Programme (CSIP) and the recognition of teaching competence and performance which has recently made a slight improvement, it was prevalent in 2019 results analysis. However, underperformance is still prevailing in certain learning areas. Dean (2015) makes a remarkable suggestion when he reveals that students’ completion rates are a major factor to performance rates as it spells out the future of students. The study thus concludes that the centre should determine centre strategies to increase student throughput.

4.4.2 THEME 2: RETENTION RATE OF STUDENTS

According to Sondlo (2013, p.33) “student retention rate is defined as the number of students who enrol in the programme in a particular year and are actively in teaching and learning without discontinuing their studies in that year and proceed in the following year in the same institution”. Likewise, Hagedern (2005) defines student retention as a student ability to enrol in one institution in subsequent terms and complete a program of study. For the study objective, student retention refers to a percentage of students who are able to register and continue studying in one institution until they complete a qualification.

a) Retention rate of students in the CET sector

According DHET (2019), overall results examinations proved that student retention rate has not been satisfactory in CET colleges across. Regardless of the provincial outstanding performance achieved in 2019, AET Level 4 students are not persistent with their studies. The research findings proved that students register in numbers but seventy-five percent of these students sit for examination every year. The CET sector loses numbers making it difficult to reach its educational objective.

b) Retention rate of students at provincial level

The largest percentage of students was retained in 2015 in Gauteng province (DHET, 2015b). The trend was also seen in 2017 and 2018, but this does not necessarily mean that the retention rate was high. The retention rate of students passes dismay when it is compared to the number of entries each year. However, data does not reveal how many of these students were doing AET Level 4 for the first time, it could happen that the data included students who only registered to complete certain learning areas.

c) Retention rate of students at the centre level

The research findings recorded high retention rate in 2015. There was uniformity recorded between 2016/ 2017 and 2018, which was followed by a major decline in 2019. However, these numbers were not too bad when the comparison was made with the CET sector (national level) and Gauteng College (provincial level). It literally means that the centre has an ability to keep AET Level students until completion of their studies. The above statement was validated by SICSL from the semi-structured interviews. He had the following to say:

“Yeah, as I gave you a practical example before. I had 65 learners who registered for Maths Lit in 2018, 63 learners sat for the final examination and 58 passed and only 5 learners did not pass because they did not complete their SBA’s otherwise I was going to get 100% pass and retention rate, yeah. That is the evidence I have, I can even pull out the file and show you” (SICSL).

Significantly, in South Africa there is “an urgent need to address student retention as it impacts negatively on economic growth and human resources development in the context of lifelong learning” (Sondlo, 2013, p.32). According to Brown in Anderson (2011, p.14) suggested that to “retain adult learners an institution must focus on retention and offer quality programs, provide excellent support services, set realistic completion expectations, and build a sense of community and loyalty among the students”. Therefore, student retention should be made a priority, a person with a qualification or skill has a greater opportunity to improve in life than someone who is without any qualification.

4.4.3 THEME 3: DROP-OUT RATE OF STUDENTS

According to Nkontwana (2014, p.4) student drop-out rate is defined as “the total number of drop-outs in a given year divided by the total number of headcount enrolments in that year”. For the purpose of this study, student drop-out can be defined as the student’s decision to pull out from studying before the completion of his or her studies.

a) Strategic plan

Student dropout rate is seen as a challenge in the CET sector (DHET, 2016a). According to the Gauteng strategic plan (DHET, 2016c), the college is experiencing high dropout rate of students. This is complemented by AET Level 4 examination results between 2016 and 2019, documents reveal a status quo of high drop-out rate at AET Level 4 nationally (DHET, 2019). The report of the task team on CET centres (DHET, 2021) pointed out high drop-out rate of students as one of the challenges facing CET sector. This concern leads to an outcry across the CET sector and incurred discontentment of the situation, the question is why the sector has high rate of students drop-out and what solutions can be provided to resolve the situation. It is my conviction that, there could be external and internal influences to student drop-out rate. This urges redesigning preventive strategies to address student dropout. More importantly, I believe that delving in the causes of student drop-out could yield valuable results and curb the challenge faced with the CET sector.

b) Student drop-out rate indicators in the CET sector

According to Table 4.3, the total number of 25 621 candidates dropped out in 2015. However, it was viewed as better than other years, especially when the comparison was made with 2019. In 2019 the CET sector recorded the highest number of student dropout, taking into consideration that the sector did not receive volumes of registrations as compared to 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 (DHET, 2019). The CET sector nationally showed a number of 114 856 students who dropped out over five-year period. The sector needs to pay attention to detail and look into the fundamental causes of students’ dropout rate.

c) Student drop-out rate indicators in Gauteng College

Data on AET Level 4 examination results reveals that 2019 was the worst year in terms of student drop-out. Accordingly, an unusual variation was prominent in 2019 where the Gauteng College experienced a decrease in terms of student entries and extreme number of dropouts regardless of the performance which was good. Considering the number of entries that year (2019) there was a decline when the comparison was made again with 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. The college had 12 742 students registered in 2019 and 5 720 chose to leave the college before completion (DHET, 2019). The overall drop-out rates experienced by Gauteng College over a period of five years was 21 277 student dropout rate.

d) Student drop-out rate indicators at the centre

Again at centre level, high student dropout rate prevailed in 2019. The findings revealed 250 registered students and 107 students from 250 did not persist with their studies. This is an indication that, there are lot of underlying factors leading to student drop out and this situation has a serious implication on the students' success as it prohibits them from shaping their career prospects.

The research study has found that an overall estimation of about 415 students have dropped out of the centre in the past five years, which is close to 100 dropout rate yearly. However, these indicators do not necessarily declare the centre as worst in terms of student dropout rate in the province. The CET sector has no system in place to lessen student drop out hence Nkontwana (2014) suggests government and institutions of higher level globally to establish a policy on student dropouts.

4.4.4 THEME 4: THE ROLE OF KEY EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS AT CET

Education stakeholder refers to *anyone who is invested in the success of a school and its students including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councillors, and state representatives* (Study.com, 2016). For the purpose of the study, education stakeholders refer to any internal or external structures joined up to delineate the future of the school.

a) Strategic partnership and their roles

In relation to the National Youth Policy 2020, CET colleges are encouraged to work in partnership with other stakeholders. These stakeholders will help where the colleges are unable to provide a relevant service (DHET, 2021, p.25). National Policy on Community Colleges in the Service delivery framework for CET (DHET, 2015a, p.20) states that “the CET Colleges must form close partnership with local communities, including local government, civil society organisations, employers’ and workers’ organisations to enhance the implementation of government’s community development projects”. According to Rule, Chatty, Baloyi and Daniels (2016, p.26) centres have some “networking opportunities available to create progression pathways for their learners”.

A lot of work needs to be done, a strong networking should be enforced between centres and its education stakeholders. These stakeholders should be directly involved and be made aware of their responsibilities in the CET sector. The responses from the research participants revealed that they know nothing about other stakeholders. Hence the study urges direct involvement of the education stakeholders in the centres’ activities.

What stood out from the focus group and semi-structured interviews was that, participants are less informed of the key education stakeholders. Most of the research participants only perceived lecturers, students and the college, and the rest are not known as key as discussed in the next section:

b) Lecturers as perceived key education stakeholders

I observed uncertainty in the discussion about who the education stakeholders are. I then saw it imperative to allow participants to describe who they thought are key education stakeholders in the CET sector. The responses are presented as follows:

Yeah, as for me educators were always there to guide us and make us understand. Even the center manager played his role by ensuring that teachers attend to us and are at school in time and every day (FGDSA).

We take teachers as our walking stick, you hold on to them because they have been through this journey (FGDSB).

The teachers help us a lot in the centre but in the end as a student you are the one who can work hard to achieve your goal (FGDSC).

The above quotes from focus group discussion clearly indicate that the onus is placed on a single component, which is the lecturer to strengthen the curriculum operations and to help students produce good results. These participants are less informed of other people and what their involvement would mean to ensure that good academic performance is attained.

c) The college as the perceived education stakeholders

One participant from the semi-structured interviews had a thought that the college is the main stakeholder. The following were her remarks:

“Previously, when we spoke about this I said the college itself, it is the main stakeholder” (SILA).

d) The whole community as key education stakeholders

I interpreted that two participants from the semi-structured discussions have a massive understanding of the education stakeholders. From the discussions, it became clear that these participants understand that everyone has to contribute equally to the success of students. Following were their remarks:

“Everybody like from the family, the local community, the local government, the police, the nurse, ministry everybody is a stakeholder” (SIPOA).

“People who are part of what is happening at CET are learners, community, lecturers and the management” (SICSL).

4.4.4.1 The role of stakeholders in curriculum implementation and academic performance

According to DHET (2016c) community learning centres are being vandalized and burglarized. The findings revealed a number of challenges to stakeholders’ participation in the curriculum execution. The communities show no interest in centers’ operations instead they are targeting centres and waiting for an opportunity to steal centres’ resources. The following were the statements representing the participants’ insights:

“I think there is also lack of support from communities because when the Department is trying to introduce computer classes which is part of the skills that the AET Level 4 would need, crime becomes an impact, few schools that we have are targets for burglaries. So, yeah, I think those are the most evident hindrances” (SIPOA).

The department official is highlighting three critical points (1) the negative role of community in the rollout of adult education (2) inability to provide innovative technology to advance learning and teaching due thuggery and (3) how crime can possibly hamper the learning objectives and prolong an opportunity to a better life for students. From the discussion I interpreted that SIPOA is knowledgeable and understands that, the success of students should be a collective effort and is lying in both hands of the centres and communities.

Lecturers in SILA, SILB and SICSL supported SIPOA’s opinion as indicated below:

“No, they are not working together. So far we do not have enough structures, like I have said we meet within Learning areas and share ideas that is what made us sustain so far” (SILA).

SILA went on and mentioned an interesting fact, which places an emphasis on the role of the high structures in the functionality of the centre:

“We lack support from the top management. We need teacher training and development workshops, where challenges will be shared and discussed and after the workshop you will know strategies to use to deal with a certain topic” (SILA).

In support of the above opinion, another lecturer remarked:

“They do not do anything, the lecturers are the ones doing everything” (SILB).

The above sentiments clearly indicate that there is disunity among the stakeholders. This becomes a major barrier to good academic performance as everyone should play a part and come up with a shared vision to address the complexity of good or bad academic performance faced by centres.

The following diagram portrays the chain of key stakeholders that should take part in the CET sector (Rule et al., 2016, p.26).

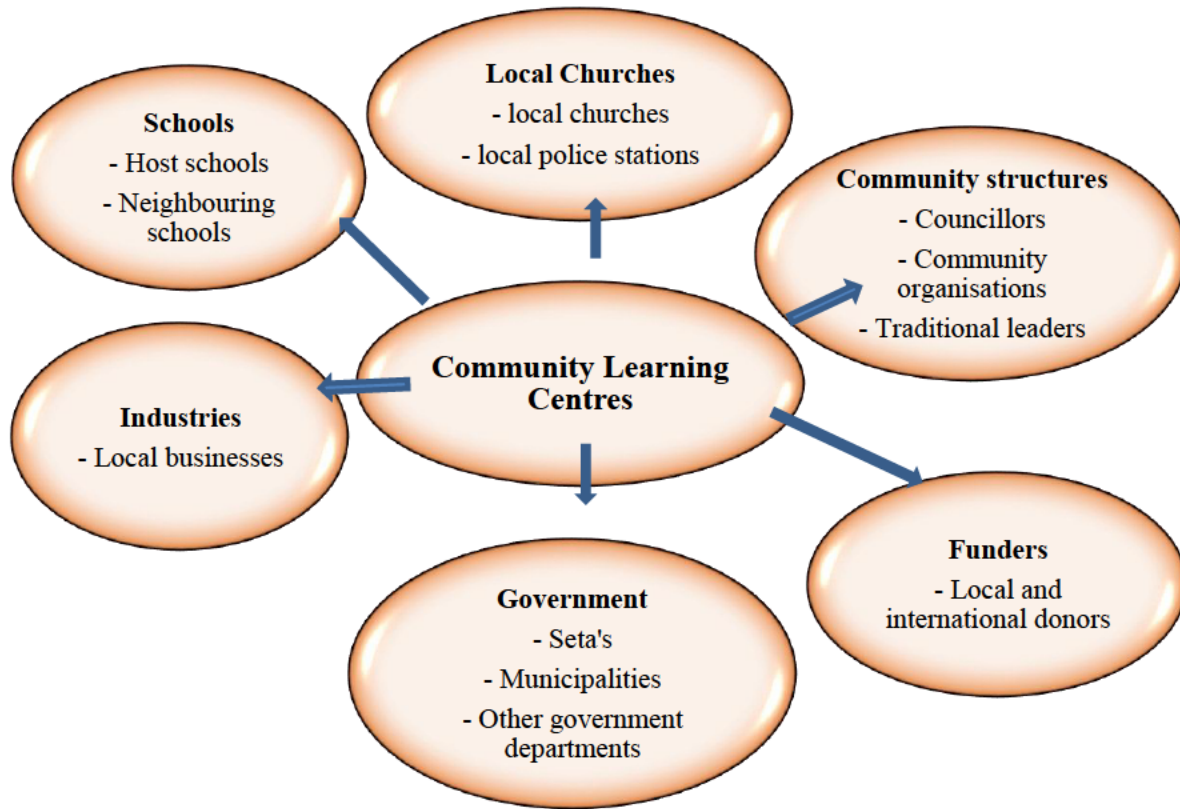


Figure 4.2: Key education stakeholders at CET sector

The overarching themes were discussed in a holistic approach to give a complete picture of the academic performance in the centre. The next section presents the factors contributing to good academic performance as cited by the research participants.

4.5 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GOOD ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Through a qualitative case study, there were a number of factors expressed as contributory to good academic performance at AET Level 4, those factors are presented in the table below:

Table 4.6: Factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4

FACTORS AS CONTRIBUTORY TO GOOD ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	
AET Level 4 as an enabler	-Making skills visible -Encourage educational goals
Conducive learning environment	-Centre -Home -Community
Willingness to go an extra mile	
The role of continuous assessment	
Cordial relationships	
Motivation	-Intrinsic -Extrinsic
Support from the environment	-Centre -Home -Community
Sense of belonging	

Source: (Author's compilation)

Of crucial importance, these research findings were drawn from three sources; document analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to acquire a comprehensive understanding of factors contributory to good academic performance at AET Level 4. These factors are presented in the next section:

4.5.1 AET Level 4 as an enabler

The research findings reveal that AET Level 4 certificate empowers young adult and adult students, who for different reasons did not finish their schooling. The certificate helps them to learn skills and enables them to start their small businesses, it also helps students to further their studies and acquire employment.

a) Makes skills visible

Through the analysis of Gauteng College documents, it is clearly stated that, the purpose of AET Level 4 qualification is to equip learners “with foundational learning by acquiring knowledge, skills and values in specified learning areas” (SAQA, 1995, p.6). According to the document the AET qualification helps students to attain the necessary knowledge and skills to improve their lives for better.

Participants from both focus group and semi-structured interviews used phrases such as, “*general knowledge*”, “*communication skills*”, “*equip learners*” and “*bridging the gap*” to describe the significance of this breakthrough. The following were the sentiments shared by the research participants:

“The purpose of AET education is to produce a skilled person and bridge a gap. Our emphasis however, should be on promoting a skill instead of advocating a qualification (SIPOA).

“We equip these learners with skills so that they able to improve their lives” (SICSL).

“It gives you general knowledge ...”. She later added that, “It also helps us with communication skills” (FGDSB).

“AET Level 4 teaches us a lot of things, the skill to read, to write and to communicate” (FGDSA).

It goes without saying that, there is an enormous relationship between acquiring skills and self-employment if students choose that path.

The Gauteng CET College annual performance plan highlights that, the college pledges to offer vocational and occupational skills programmes, so that people can use the acquired skills to get some money and provide for basic needs (DHET, 2017a).

Data from the interviewees also showed that successful completion of AET Level 4 gives them skills as discussed above which then lead to self-employment and importantly stimulates good self-esteem for these students to realise their full potential.

“I have passed it and I have started my small business and at the same time I am doing matric this year” (FGDSC).

“You can be trained to do some handy jobs and you can be a qualified electrician or a plumber, such skills can help you to live a better life, one can decide to start a business” (FGDSA).

“They acquire skills because these are adults, most of them do not want to go to university, and they want to compete in the job market” (SIPOA).

The role of developing self-employment cannot be over emphasized particularly in the context where the successful students almost missed that opportunity. The evidence demonstrates the importance of having a qualification as it gives people an opportunity to make their skills visible.

b) Encourages an educational goal

Data generated demonstrated that undertaking AET Level 4 is very important and significant for those students who successfully completed it. The AET act points out that this AET Level 4 qualification is a milestone to adults and out- of- school youth as it provides the right of entry to NQF level 2 and further (DHET, 2012).

Both lecturers and students agreed that completion of this milestone is a breakthrough to further educational opportunities. As validated below:

“I take it as a golden opportunity. One can decide to further his studies, our educators have encouraged us to study further and enlightened us about some FET Colleges that can provide us with a variety of trainings” (FGDSA).

The sentiments were collaborated by FGDSC who stated that:

“Yeah, passing AET Level 4 is a first start of life” (FGDSC).

Contrary to the above, FGSDS had a slight different view and stated that:

“For me the certificate on its own cannot take me anywhere. Yes, it gives me the basic knowledge but I have decided to do matric to further its quality” (FGSDS).

It remains to be seen that, the significance of successfully completing AET Level 4 is clear from the students’ point of view. Most of these successful students further their studies at TVET Colleges or register for grade 12 which is a gateway to further educational opportunities. This was also validated by a reality that all focus group participants were doing Grade 12 at the time of the interviews and shared their plans for furthering studies with higher institutions.

The students’ views were shared by lecturers as well as the provisional official, as indicated below:

“AET Level 4 helps those learners who for different reasons did not get to finish their schooling; we give them an opportunity to further their studies” (SILA).

“... a learner gets two options after completion of AET Level 4 they can either go to TVET college, or go for matric and most of our learners opt for matric. They pass their matric and go to tertiary level” (SICSL).

“The purpose is to bridge the gap for out of school learners more special the youth and those adults who are illiterate, to familiarize them with what schooling is all about. AET Level 4 is aiming at that” (SIPO).

It can therefore be concluded that, the significance of successfully completing AET Level 4 gives the successful student yet another chance at an educational endeavour. An opportunity that was almost lost. All four students from the focus group discussions are currently doing grade 12 and have revealed their intentions of furthering their studies with higher institutions.

4.5.2 Conducive learning environment

Subsequently, the research participants through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews acknowledged conducive learning environment as another factor contributing to good academic performance.

Khalid in Madu and Obiozor (2012, p.3) defines conducive learning environment as “the environment that satisfies the needs of its participants, not only in the acquisition of numeracy and literacy skills, but is also able to link the economic and occupational needs of the group to literacy with their learning activities”. Madu and Obiozor (2012, p.1) state that “conducive environment of the adult learners can be viewed from two important perspectives, the learning environment and the learning interaction”.

For the purpose of this study, learning environment should be dominant in all aspects; at the centre where a student is studying, at home where a student stays and the community where a student lives in. Clearly conducive environment is critical to the improvement of attention of students and the findings reveal that conducive environment promotes learning. As a result, students are more likely to acquire more enthusiasm when the environment condones studying, leading to good academic performance.

a) Learning environment at the centre

The following sentiments expressed support for a helpful learning environment in the centre where students attend:

“a good relationship between students and lecturers makes students to be free in class and give them a courage to learn, it makes it possible for learners to speak and ask questions without a fear” (SICSL).

“... if I want to learn the environment must be conducive to learning. So I think the centre design has an influence, being surrounded by people who are on the same mission as you are, it makes you focus because it reminds you why are you there” (FGDSB).

“... power outage when we are in the middle of a lesson concentrating and electricity just goes off” (FGDSA).

Clearly, positive management of learning environment is critical to the improvement of attention and students in such environments are more likely to acquire higher enthusiasms leading to good academic performance. It can be concluded that the environment can ascertain the end result of learning.

b) Learning environment at home

Successful learning happens only when the environment allows it. It could be very difficult for a student to concentrate on studying where there are many distractions. The responses from the focus group discussions with students confirmed the above reality:

“You need also to have a good environment, when you are to study at home. You must have time for your kids since we are our parents. You must allocate enough time for your studies and also for kids, which is not an easy routine” (FGDSA).

“At home it might be difficult for them to understand that you are now going to school, maybe your spouse or kids might not understand that thing of you always going to school. It may seem like you are rejecting other things but you just tell yourself that I have to multi-task. Sit them down, make them realize what you want” (FGDSB).

“Yeah for me it was easy to study in class and at home it was difficult because of other responsibilities” (FGDSC).

The above sentiments revealed that students have challenges studying at home. They have other responsibilities and there are too many interruptions, diverting students' focus and leading to difficulty in concentration. It can be concluded that, as much as they understand how home environment should be favourable to learning, it becomes a little impossible for them to do their school work at home and as the results the findings revealed that, these students find the school more conducive to learning school.

c) Learning environment in the community

It transpired during the interviews with both students and lecturers that, the community does not promote learning, there is fear or concern for one's life. As FGDSA reveals:

“The environment is not safe there but teachers put their lives at risk trying to reach out to us” (FGDSA).

The above quote clearly states that, lectures and students are attending evening classes at their own risks, there is no protection from the community.

FGDSA's sentiments were validated by SIPOA who indicated the following:

“Our environment is not conducive to learning, there is a lot of criminal activities. Apart from that with the level of noise and other activities, the arrangement that we have more especially as black people in our residential, it becomes impossible to learn”. He made an important point when he indicated that, “the college is prepared to touch every square meter of the province to ensure that the environment is conducive to teaching and learning” (SIPOA).

What emerged from the findings is that all these components of learning environment should be beneficial to students learning?

4.5.3 Willingness to go an extra mile

Four participants indicated that, lecturers in the centre are going an extra mile and putting forth an extra effort to ensure that students do not just pass AET Level 4 but get good results. They identified extra lessons as a contributory factor to good academic performance. The findings were confirmed by the views from the focus group, who then decided to exhibit their statement of results and I got to understand why they performed exceptionally well at AET Level 4 (see Appendix D).

“My teachers always go an extra mile and offer lessons even on weekends. (FGDSB).

“Teachers always encourage us to see them during their spare time and they will explain things further anything you are struggling with” (FGDSC).

“Teachers who are willing to go an extra mile and are available anytime when we need them make learning easy and manageable” (FGDSD).

“I mean as you saw our certificates, some teachers would come on weekends for us to catch up. The results speak for themselves, sometimes I ask myself if they are paid for extra time or what” (FGDSA).

The above sentiments were shared by the semi-structured interview participants who stated the following:

“Extra classes also contribute to good academic performance, at the centre we have decided to take that route whereby we arrange with learners, we meet on weekend. We have decided to go an extra mile. The main drive is that, we want to help them get them out of their current situation by giving them education” (SICSL).

“Going an extra mile does improve our students’ performance rates” (SILB).

The significant role of the lecturer clearly goes beyond academic capacity of the individual not only based on training but positive attitude to help make students interested in learning.

4.5.4 The role of continuous assessments

According to (DHET, 2012, p.7), continuous assessment is defined as “a component of assessment which is on-going, it is used to determine a learner's achievement during the course of a particular level, it integrates assessment into teaching and development of learners through on going feedback”. It should be noted that, there are two types of assessments, namely: *continuous or formative assessment* which is a strategy used to intensify the learners understanding throughout the course and the *summative assessment* which comes at the end of the course to determine how much a learner has learned up to that point of time.

Continuous assessment assists “the learner's development and improve the process of learning and teaching” (DHET, 2012, p.10). According to the national improvement plan (DHET, 2017a, p.10) a proper implementation of continuous assessment is encouraged as it “determines students’ cognitive level”. The interpretation I got is that, student progress is evaluated through continuous assessment and this type of assessment is regarded as an important layer through which good academic performance can be achieved. The research participants support the above findings and view continuous assessment as a key factor contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. This is what the research participants suggested in common:

“If you regularly assess learners you concretizing every small information that the learner might have, that would be able to show as a teacher you the strengths and the weaknesses of that learner. In that if you continuously assess a learner and you realised that in a term a learner has not passed a single assessment or not done well. It automatically says this learner will not be able to do it. You need to give this learner serious attention to see if they can improve. If you can see the improvement, the momentum might pick up in the second, the third and final terms. The results might be good in the final assessment” (SIPOA).

“You cannot teach learners without assessing them. An educator teaches, at the end of the day, you need to assess learners. You can give them a class activity or a test, by so doing you will be able to know whether learners have achieved the lesson objective. So this kind of assessment from my point of view, is the most important component of learning which yields good results at AET Level 4” (SILA).

“Yeah. I believe in assessing learners. Every time when you teach a learner it's always important to assess them to see if they understood what they were taught. Those assessments are helpful as they also prepare our students for summative assessment. So by the time they write their final exams, a teacher will be confident that learners are going to pass because they are well

prepared for the exam. It is through these continuous assessments that we are able to produce the good results at the centre” (SICSL).

“Without a test or assignment we were not going to see where we needed to improve. So I think to a better extent, they are helpful” (FGDSD).

“For me these small assessments prepare us for the final exam. Those are like the foundation for you to understand the subject better. So they really help you push through the syllabus. Those kind of assessments will help you to get good result” (FGDSA).

Participants are in accord that continuous assessment plays an integral part in teaching and learning. The findings stress that formative assessment helps in the identification of strengths and weaknesses and enhance student performance. Therefore, students who are regularly assessed perform exceedingly better at the end of the year.

4.5.5 Cordial relationships

Data presents evidence to the significance of good cordial relationships amongst students themselves as well as between lecturers and students. Data revealed that strong but professional relationships between lecturers and students are important constituents to good academic performance. Participants gave valuable insight to demonstrate the above finding:

“In our level 4 class we were like a family and not like students and the teachers were like friends to us” (FGDSA).

The above view from the focus group discussions proves that, students need lecturers who believe in them, value them and understand their needs completely. The above view was also supported by semi-structured interviews participants, who indicated the following:

“Right, there are those learners who left school a while ago and these learners experience challenges in class, especially when it comes to reading and writing. As an educator you need to give yourself time to attend to them individually, bearing in mind that they are not the same. We have got learners who are quick to understand and also the slow learners. Our learners need to

be given full attention. If they feel are not well taken care of that is when they disappear and as results the aims and objectives will not be met” (SILA).

“... one may not see this as related to the question but from my observation it plays a role, a good relationship between students and lecturers, makes students to be free in class and give them courage to learn, it makes it possible for learners to speak and ask questions without a fear” (SICSL).

“You do not have to judge learners because you do not know their background, right. The more they are motivated, it gives them a hope and they carry on with their studies until they finish” (SILA).

In the above discussions between SILA and SICSL, it emerged that cordial relationships have profound effects on good academic performance and was strongly validated by the discussions with focus group participants:

“... remember when people make you feel like a reject, that would lead to many things like failure or even drop out. Fair treatment is the main thing that made us feel welcomed at the centre, and we felt the need to excel in our studies” (FGDSA).

“I will say teachers because in class they treated us equally” (FGDSC).

The general findings reveal that, for adults being in the classroom environment can be a little daunting, they have to balance family life and work, as a result cordial relationships and fair treatment in the classroom and at school can be a driving force to their learning goal.

4.5.6 Motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic drives)

The research participants revealed that motivation works for both lecturers and students through positive motivational approaches.

a) Intrinsic motivation

The findings reveal that if a student has a clear vision of his goals and is motivated from within, that person can persevere and study against all odds. This was validated by the participants from semi-structured interviews who stated that:

“Any student who comes to class, if they do not have a vision of where they are going, that will stall their learning” (SIPOA).

“Motivate students when they come to class, give them hope. You do not have to judge them because you do not know their background, right. The more they are motivated, it gives them a hope and they carry on with their studies until they finish” (SILA).

“... when it comes to motivating learners in general this is what we do. We organize a day and invite motivational speakers to come and talk to them. We invite people from TVET Colleges and former students who have performed well and are in higher institutions furthering their studies. We normally do that at the beginning of the year before our lessons commence and thereafter learners will start attending. In class again we motivate them, what we have realised as the centre is that learners are motivated mostly by teachers who are always in class as per the timetable” (SICSL).

It is clear from the discussions that, students in the centre are motivated to excel in their studies. The lecturers from the centre also respect their students, they do not display negative attitudes towards them and they do not judge them but they motivate students and direct them to the right channels.

b) Extrinsic motivation

There are also external factors driving motivation. The findings confirmed that rewards motivate the good behaviour, as cited below:

“Before we used to get trophies but not now, it has been four years since it stopped. I am telling you that activity was a driving force to our learners and educators because of the recognition they got as top producers” (SILB).

“I have been to many academic award ceremonies where learners who excelled were identified. Then I asked myself if all learners when they started were made aware that if you reach a certain target there is a reward. I think if we do it at the beginning and we emphasize and amplify the targets then they will be motivated to perform” (SIPOA).

“As I said we used to give awards out, the recognition was given to the best performing lecturers and also best performing students in that particular year based on the results analysis. That activity used to motivate both students and lecturers because we would call all of them and put them in a hall so that they see when others are awarded. So by the end of the year, everyone will be motivated to perform well” (SICSL).

“Right ... previously at this centre it was there but now, I do not know what happened. We used to have some prize giving ceremonies where top achievers would receive something to motivate them and I am telling you there was a competition because everyone wanted to get something but that does not stop us or demotivate us, at the end we maintain that good standard the centre is known of, which is good academic performance” (SILA).

The findings also prove the importance of extrinsic motivation, the above views conclude that rewards and working with a price in mind can play a role in motivating and encourage people to push themselves to the limits.

When I interpreted the above participants’ views, I perceived that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation reinforce optimistic attitude and willingness to complete their tasks successfully. Students need positive reinforcement from lecturers and lecturers also need some incentives from higher authorities to push even more and produce good results.

4.5.7 Sense of belonging

The evidence provided indicates that belongingness plays a vital role in defining the future of students, students need to be accepted with their imperfections. From the findings I interpreted that, the reasons why adult students did not finish their schooling before are not known. As a result thereof, the focus should be on assisting them achieve their goals. The following were statements representing the interviewee's perceptions:

“Every student who comes to class, and they do not feel like they belong will feel demotivated” (SIPO).

“In our level 4 class we were like a family and not like students and the teachers were like friends to us. They really opened our eyes and there was a time when the teacher teaches and would give us life experience examples that also make us visualize the future without undermining anyone without taking sides or anything we were like one family, regardless of age, regardless of the community background that we come from” (FGDSA).

The evidence provided indicates that lecturers have a critical role to play to develop a sense of belonging amongst students as it increases students' enthusiasm to study.

4.5.8 Support from the environment

Participants were asked to give their insight and explain what makes the learning easy and manageable in class, at home and at the centre. The following is what they revealed:

a) Support in the classroom

“So we are supposed to give support to AET Level 4 learners and teachers. Support to learners to me means give me direction, show me set goals that I need to achieve, encourage me, monitor the progress that I am making and evaluate. You need to understand my context, because no student is the same even if they come from the same environment they have different challenges. So if you come with support you need to understand their context. And I am

not sure if the support that we give is enough. Remember you cannot go to a dentist for your eyes” (SIPOA).

“... Yes the teachers are there but classmates are of great influence. I remember there was a time where we did not have a Tourism teacher but that did not stop us from studying it on our own and we passed the subject through the support we gave each other, we pushed each other until the end. So I would say the classmates are the best structure” (FGDSB).

“We had formulated groups at school, we encourage each other. The teachers as well encourage me to come and study” (FGDSC).

The above participants look at support as an important aspect to success. Learners differ in their needs, they dropped out from school for different reasons and have different life experiences. Therefore, students need lot of support and reassurance that they can still succeed. That kind of support can also be achieved by giving constructive feedback to students’ formal and informal assessments.

b) Support from home

“Having a strong support structure makes learning easy. You can be determined but if you do not have the support structure you will collapse somewhere” (FGDSD).

From the above statements, it was quite evident that apart from the lecturer support which is obvious, students need each other, they need support from their family and the environment at large should be supportive for a learning objective to be met. Students need to be supported even beyond the formal learning context.

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discussed the research data that were delved from three sources of data collection namely; document analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. The study depended on documents such as National and Gauteng province strategic plans, AET Level 4 examination results from all layers of the system: the CET sector, Gauteng College and

centre under study as well as the information from the Government gazettes. The study presented four major themes, namely throughput (pass) rate of students, student retention rate, student dropout rate and key education stakeholders at CET Colleges and their impact to good academic performance in a holistic way. Tables and figures were used to portray meaningful findings.

Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions of the study in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4, the findings on factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 were presented. The following processes were followed on data analysis:

- All records of AET Level 4 examination results analysis from macro (national), exo (provincial) and micro (centre) levels were carefully scrutinised to identify patterns of good and bad academic performance over a period of five years (2015 to 2019).
- Other documents such as the national and the Gauteng province strategic plans were also studied to get enough data in order to address the research questions of the study successfully.
- Document analysis was the initial method of data gathering, followed by focus group discussions at the end I conducted semi-structured interviews.
- Audio-recording that were taken during interviews were converted into text and I coded the contents of the research findings into themes.

This study sought to explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. Chapter five presents an overview of the results in order to put the findings in to perspective. The study findings encapsulate the most important insights of the study and these findings are linked to the study' literature review and theoretical framework, which provided lens to address the research questions as presented below:

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What are the factors contributing to good academic performance of AET Level 4 students and how do these factors inform the centre performance?

Through a qualitative case study, there were a number of factors analysed through documentation and articulated by key research participants as contributory factors to good academic performance at AET Level 4, those factors are presented below:

5.1.1 AET Level 4 as an enabler

The study findings from the records and interviews were consistent to the work of Mogotsi (2005) the results from the study show how AET programmes have played an important role to change the lives of the participants.

In line with the above literature, the findings show that the completion of AET Level 4, helps learners to acquire new skill, to others it is a foundational to further educational opportunities and self- employment, the qualification gives students yet another chance to accomplish their goals which for different reasons were almost missed (DHET, 2016). Participants saw how the AET Level 4 could benefit adults and out -of- youth who could not get a chance to finish their schooling. This explains why the CET colleges both nationally and provincially have sustained respectable record of registered students every year. The numbers prove that there are lot of people in the country who see the significance of the certificate and are in need of this breakthrough.

5.1.2 Conducive learning environment

Participants made it clear that conducive environment has a great influence to learning, the findings show that students find more enthusiasm to learn when they perceive an atmosphere encouraging to learning. One participant highlighted that:

“If I want to learn the environment must be conducive to learning at home and at school”.

In line with Tinto’s idea (2006) which stipulates that in order to retain our students we need to improve their learning environments as this positively influences students’ academic performance. The study found that the learning environment must be free from interruptions to improve concentration and productivity. The study proved that, students who are exposed to such environments ultimately excel in their studies.

5.1.3 The role of continuous assessments

All participants referred to this factor as crucial to teaching and learning. The study found continuous assessment as the best mechanism which yields good results for the CET sector.

From the international perspectives, Walde (2016:535) states that “the teaching learning process requires continuous follow up and the educational progress of the learners need frequent assessment”. This type of assessment provides educators with a “systematic way of evaluating how well students are progressing” in a certain learning area (DHET, 2013b) and it also makes a lecturer aware of those students who are struggling on certain topics. Hence, Alyahyan and Düştegör (2020) advocate that early detection of students at risk, along with preventive measures, can help improve their success.

This study has proven that, continuous assessment is not only concerned with allocating some marks to students but the aim is to help lecturers identify the areas where students need to improve and decide on the type of remedial to put in place to assist struggling students. Thus, continuous assessment is required as an obligation to concretize every information a student gets in class.

5.1.4 Cordial relationships

The third contributory factor to good results revealed by the findings was good cordial relationships. Students made it clear that when they are ill-treated in class, they feel demotivated and discouraged to an extent that they can even dropout of school. Newberry (2010) asserts that teachers need to understand that in many schools, students come from different backgrounds and their needs differ from one another. In line with the literature above, research proved that lecturers have a major role to play in centres that is to treat their students equally and with dignity which in turn puts into operation prescribed human rights law of this country. The findings conclude that warm rapport between students and lecturers improves their willingness to learn.

5.1.5 Willingness to go an extra mile

The findings asserted that lectures in the centre use their full range of experiences to maximize learning, lecturers are skilful, enthusiastic and are committed to help their students succeed, to an extent that they even arrange to meet up with students on weekends with an intention of increasing the quality of students’ understanding in order to attain the excellence in their studies. It can therefore be argued that students who attend extra lessons are more likely to perform better in all subjects than those who do not. The students participated in the interviews

confirmed they were attending extra lessons, this is what helped them excel in their studies, the statement was also supported by the students' testimonials when they voluntarily decided to show off their statement of results (see Appendix D).

5.1.6 Motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic influences)

The study found motivation as an important aspect and the role it can play to improve student retention and throughput. The following was highlighted:

I remember there was a teacher who gave us her real life experience, she told us she worked as a house maid for 13 years but today she is a teacher. I then asked myself what would stop me.

Bandura (1994); Schunk (1995) brought in a key aspect of self-efficacy to improve learner performance, they state that self-efficacy is linked to academic achievement and the ability to overcome fears. They point out that an individual's potential to achieve a goal or complete a task depends on a positive mind set and reassurance that you can do it (Bandura, 1994). I therefore assert that students who every so often receive positive feedback from the lecturers or get positive encouragement from those close to them gain confidence in what they are doing and are capable of accomplishing their task successfully. The study also revealed rewards as an external force which could also motivate the behaviour.

5.1.7 Support from the environment

The study discovered that student support, lengthens outside the institution, it is expected to come from all directions (at the centre, at home and within the community students live) and is a critical component of an effective learning. Gibson (2002, p.3) asserted that although "neighbourhoods do influence academic outcomes, neighbourhoods determine only a small portion of the variation in individual outcomes, and that family background matters more". In line with the researchers' view, Mkhwanazi (2001) asserts that the role of family is a major factor in adult learning and has both positive and negative aspects.

I therefore argue that, the issue of support inside and outside the institution is worth being overemphasized as it has a direct impact on learning, other problems may be beyond the

lecturer's remit, for example, most adult students are married and some are staying with partners, therefore the decisions to go back to school should be taken collaboratively. Partners should enforce mutual understanding to expand consensus and support. This urges the importance of support that should come from home.

Another reality with adult students relating to the current research is that most of the students are renting flats and sharing spaces with the acquaintances. These students are exposed to an environment that hampers learning process, a student will face a difficulty when he/she has to study late at night when the arrangement clashes with those of his counterpart, who by that time may be playing music or want to sleep. The level of noise around that shared space may be detrimental to student's schedule and concentration leading to failure and it is always a challenge to circumvent such situations. Hence the study found support from all angles as crucial to learning.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: Who are key stakeholders in shaping good student academic performance at AET Level 4?

The study revealed that some education stakeholders and their roles were not known to the centre. The following quote is in agreement with the stated view:

“To be honest I do not want to mention things that we do not have. Lecturers are there to help learners achieve their goals”.

According to Rule, Chatty, Baloyi and Daniels (2016) suggest reinforcement of networking between the adult learning centres and communities to benefit learners in various ways. The integrated stakeholders could be the local police stations as the centres need protection against criminal activities, “local churches, community structures, further education including FET Colleges, funders, government service providers, businesses and neighbouring schools” (Rule et al., 2016, p.26). The most detrimental factor from the community is ignorance to such an extent that they even fail to embrace change. The findings found that centres are broken into and are vandalised by the community members, forgetting that these schools are part of the opportunity to get the very same community out of poverty.

When the success in CET sector is considered necessary, there is an urgent need to facilitate a strong stakeholder network and reinforce bonds within these communities. The centre should have good relationships with every stakeholder because some of these people are on the ground and they know the ins and outs within the community. Without working together, strong relationships could not be built. If both internal and external environment are directly involved, the strategy could benefit centres in many ways; it could increase interaction, improve mutual relationships and limit crimes that are committed in to our centres.

According to First (2009, p.3) from the international perspective, “schools need advocates for improved program outcomes outside the immediate organization” and further states the constituents should consist of individuals who understand “the mission of the school, who share the champions’ vision and passion for student success, and who have a personal stake in the performance of the school and its students”. Ngidi and Qwabe (2006) assert that school-community partnership can help create a culture of learning and teaching in schools.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What is the role of each of these stakeholders in student academic performance at AET Level 4?

The study found that there is no collaboration among the education stakeholders. There are limited structures to help with academic performance at the centre. The interviewees mentioned that centre is literally relying on the internal structure, learning area committees and lecturers for support and good academic performance.

As it stands the lecturers are at the forefront and seen as the only component responsible for the achievement of learning outcomes. The study discovered that there is little support from the top management, officials are not consistent with their visiting therefore it becomes impossible to get sufficient support as they are not aware of what is happening weekly if not monthly on the ground.

In line with the study which investigated efficacy in adult learning centres by Rule et al. (2016, p.4), it was suggested in the literature that “good centres used various channels to raise community awareness about literacy and adult education”. The authors further emphasised that “developing relationships with the local circuit and/or district office of the Education

Department helps with creating, advertising and filling educator posts, obtaining what resources were available to centres and running efficient exams. Relations with other government departments and programmes, such as the Expanded Public Works Programme, might create work opportunities for learners. Developing relations with local businesses such as supermarkets helped with sponsorships and donations with recruiting their workers as learners and with creating placement opportunities for graduated learners” (Rule et al., 2016, p.25). Results of academic performance may depend on stakeholder involvement in schools and the ability of the leaders to influence the stakeholders (Gichohi, 2015). Therefore, a skilled centre manager looks for ways in which the interests and ability of each individual can contribute to the good of the whole.

5.2 SYSTEMS THEORY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE STUDY

The “core concept of a system is one of relationship between components, which together comprise a whole” (Watson & Watson, 2011, p.65). Therefore, this theory made it possible to take all the elements of a system into consideration including documents from the macro, exo and micro levels (see chapter 4), for a total picture to emerge and the exploration of better understanding of the problem rather than focusing solely on one side. This research study fits well into the systems theory.

Gauteng CET College is an organisation that is made up of different layers that interact within as well outside. The interactions within these layers are dependent on each other for good academic performance to be accomplished.

As shown in figure 5.1, the community learning centre under study and students are represented in the micro layer of the system, this is where teaching and learning take place. The second (exo) layer represents all stakeholders, the student and the Gauteng College which have direct relationships with the centre. It is responsible for management and control of Community Learning Centres within the province. DHET and CET sector are found in the outside (macro) layer. DHET is the larger system that is in authority for formulating policies which impact on the functioning of the CET colleges. The interrelatedness shown in the figure through the use of interweaving circles, it portrays communication between the micro, exo and macro links which is important for good academic performance of students.

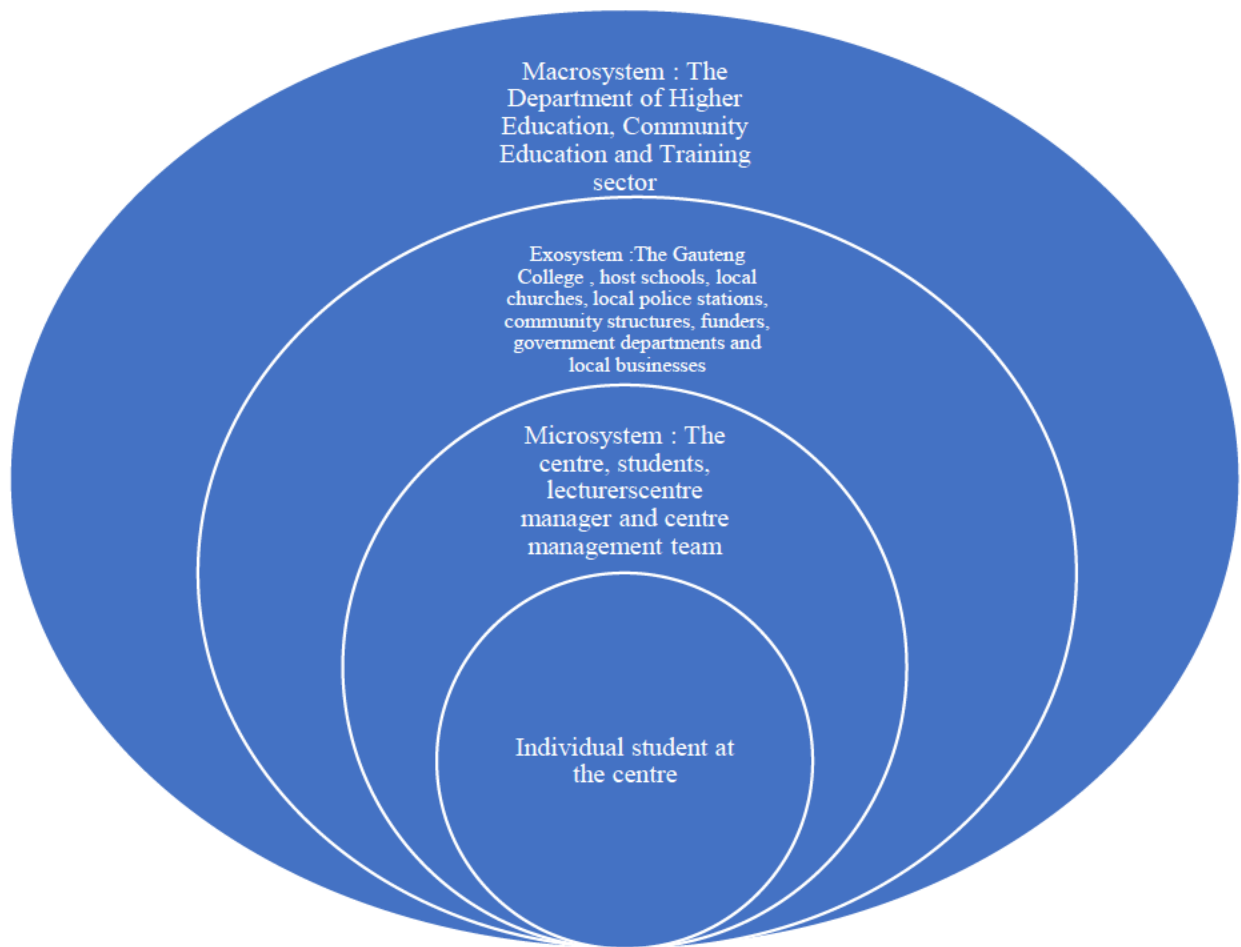


Figure 5.1: The interactions surrounding the centre

The next section describes relationships and how the interactions surrounding the sector work to ensure that the centre produces good results.

5.2.1 Microsystem level: Community Learning Centre and students

This is where teaching and learning takes place. The community learning centre involves students, lecturers, centre management team and centre manager. The findings of the study prove that there is a cordial relationship between lecturers and students, the relationship makes students feel important and motivates them to do well academically. There is also team spirit among lecturers, they help each other through learning area committees to deliver curriculum effectively and they work together to produce good results.

5.2.2 The exo system level: The Gauteng college and education stakeholders

The Gauteng College controls and manages the functioning of all community learning centres in Gauteng province. Exo layer oversees the way centres operate. The findings reveal there is a shortage of supporting officials academically, they are only 37 personnel and are expected to visit 200 plus satellites regularly. With less numbers, it becomes impossible to execute their duties with success. The findings also revealed there is less relationship between the centre and the community, three learning satellites were closed. That alone proved that the centre and the community are not working together as they should. Adult education needs to be supported and prioritized by all members, as it is for the community. Therefore, the CET sector should not be deprived access to community buildings for community development. Stakeholder relationship needs to be enhanced, centres need to remove individualistic and look at a bigger picture.

5.2.3 The macro system level: Department of Higher Education and Community Education and Training sector

This is a larger layer, it formulates policies that are executed within the exo system and microsystem levels. The DHET authorises budget to CET sector, the sector distributes funds to the Colleges for a specific purpose, such as buying teaching and learning materials. The Department is also responsible for management and pays CET employees.

5.3 STUDY LIMITATION

The following were acknowledged as limitations of the study:

The research study was heavily impacted by the Covid- 19 pandemic. The pandemic affected the sample of the study, data collection as well as planned writing retreats with my supervisor. The study focussed at only one community learning centre which was identified based on its good academic performance. This led to a small sample size. To compensate for this shortcoming this study used a case study. The case study allowed me to delve more to understand factors contributing to good academic performance.

The centre strategic plan was not accessible from the centre. However, national together with provincial strategic plans gave me enough information to arrive to the research findings.

One subject withdrew from participating in the study due to work commitments and the decision was supported as I was observing one of the principles of ethical code. Nonetheless, the application of case study again gave me in depth insights of the study findings.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the study are presented below:

The research study found and highlighted that throughput rate and good academic performance are different concepts. The through put rate is about the number of passes each year while good academic performance is about the totality of the students to do better academically. The study found that given the four hours that students and lecturer have each day and the fact that the learning and teaching happens after work when most students are tired the - teach to test approach- dominates. The centre manager, lecturers and the college focus on throughput rate not academic performance. This study recommends that academic performance must be spotlighted otherwise rote learning will continue. The study further recommends that good academic performance become a standing item in the academic board meeting.

The researcher recommends a similar study to be conducted involving all community learning centres in the province and have all education stakeholders represented in the study. The strategy could bring different views and paint a more holistic picture of factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

The study found that stakeholders are not participating in centre's activities and there are few structures helping with good academic performance. Thus, there is an urgent need to facilitate a strong stakeholder networks, formulate functional academic structures and strengthen bonds between centres and communities to help with good academic performance.

All CLC's to review curriculum offerings and align their streams to TVET courses and University diplomas or Degrees to accommodate students who want to advance their educational goals. Centres to put forward the needs of the community and offer programmes that speak to individuals' area of interest. Therefore, students who are in for self-employment must be equipped with prominent skills they need to contribute positively towards society.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following were the suggestions put forward, to ensure that AET Level 4 brings meaning to millions of people in need:

More research with a larger sample which could include comparison of AET Level 4 performances across the province. The approach might ascertain more factors contributing to both good and poor academic performance of students and extends deeper understanding of the problem.

Further research, to measure the effectiveness of AET Level 4 qualification and how it has assisted students to transform their lives.

5.6 PERSONAL REFLECTION

The following section is a reflection of the experiences I have gained during my research journey:

a) Interpersonal and communication skills

The journey has taught me that communication is key and plays a vital role if a person wants to prosper in both personal and professional lives. I have also learnt to consider my supervisor's advices, it helped me to increase the quality of my research report and grow as a person.

b) Development of competency

The study improved the level of my professional competency in many ways. It enriched my communication and writing skills. The presentation experience for academics such as proposal defence increased my confidence. I have also learnt to work against tight deadlines.

c) Ethical norms

I have learnt the importance of adhering to ethical norms of the research to promote the truth. The study has taught me to apply principles in all domains of life.

5.7 CLOSING REMARKS

The aim of the study was to explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4. The positive findings showed that, there are many overarching factors that contribute

to good academic performance at AET Level 4. However, the study also discovered negative findings which could be significant in progressing knowledge in the CET sector. The study results indicated that, Gauteng CET college is faced with a critical challenge of high dropout rate and low retention rate of students. The research findings translate that if these challenges are ignored, the country is far from meeting the expectations of the National Development Plan: vision 2030 of improving peoples' quality of life (NDP, 2011). Quietness over the issues of dropout and retention rate of students will increase the national crisis rate of 38,2% unemployment in South African population. The findings together with the recommendations of the study are therefore exceedingly pertinent in the national context to improve academic performance of our students, so that they are well developed to achieve the economic prosperity.

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APPENDICES

7.1 APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



04 May 2021

Miss Zandile Teresa Mbalenhle Mkhize (218080390)
School of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Miss Mkhize,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002664/2021

Project title: Exploring student academic performance: A case study of Adult Education and Training Level 4 at Fourways Community Learning Centre in Gauteng.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 26 March 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 04 May 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

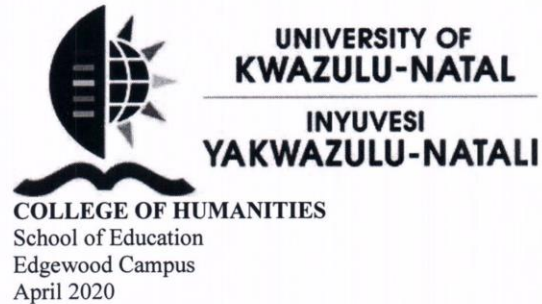
Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

7.2 APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER TO GAUTENG CET COLLEGE



The Principal : Gauteng CET College

Dear Mr. Wee

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT FOURWAYS COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE (CLC), JOHANNESBURG NORTH

My name is Zandile Teressa Mbalenhle Mkhize (218080390), I am a Masters student at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), Edgewood campus. I kindly seek your permission to undertake research in Fourways CLC , Johannesburg North Cluster.

I have submitted and defended my research proposal to the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal and have been accepted. Recommendations made by the panel have been attended to, to the satisfaction of my research supervisor.

The research I wish to conduct for my Masters dissertation involves: **Exploring factors contributing to good academic performance: A case study of AET Level 4 at Fourways CLC.** The general focus of this study is at AET Level 4 academic performances at Fourways CLC.

Fourways CLC has been identified as a possible site that might assist me to determine factors contributing to good academic performance. The results analysis reveals that there is consistency in terms of GETC exams in this CLC, they show the signs of possible outcome in relation to the College's objective. However, GET Certificate is perceived as the vehicle that would promote lifelong learning by empowering our students to continue with further

learning and to prepare students to function better in society and the workplace. South Africa calls for educated and skilled individuals to meet the needs of a changing nation.

A detailed report of the findings will be submitted to Gauteng CET College and I am hoping to obtain the most valuable data to the specific issue of student academic performance that will benefit the CLC's, College and the entire community in understanding and identifying ways in which AET Level 4 performance rates can be enhanced.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at:

E-mail: zandym78@yahoo.com

Cell Number : 071 765 5004

Work Number : (011) 614 0551

You may also contact my research supervisor:

Dr. Z Hlela, E- mail: hlelaz@ukzn.ac.za

Cell Number : 082 522 9150

Office Number: (033) 260 5849

You may also contact the UKZN HSSREC, at:

Human & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag x 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax 27 31 260 4609

Email : HSSREC @ ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Mkhize ZTM (Miss)



7.3 APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER FROM GAUTENG CET COLLEGE



higher education
& training
Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



GAUTENG
Community Education and Training
CET COLLEGE

To: Zandile T.M Mkhize **Lecturer:** Denver CLC
From: Mr Clifford Wee **Principal:** Gauteng CET College
Date: 01 September 2020
SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR EXPLORING STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF AET LEVEL 4 AT FOURWAYS CLC

Dear Zandile T.M Mkhize

The above matter and your Letter dated 01 September 2020 refers.

We wish to indicate as follows:

1. The request to conduct research in our institution of learning is hereby granted.
2. We hope and trust that your efforts would contribute towards the development of our sector.
3. You are requested to liaise with Ms Mathodi Lebodi on 010 900 1159 regarding the Community Learning Centre to be visited and the date, in order to notify the Centre Manager of your intention to visit the institution as well as the purpose thereof.

We trust that you will find the above in order. However, should you wish to discuss anything further to do with this matter please feel free to contact us.

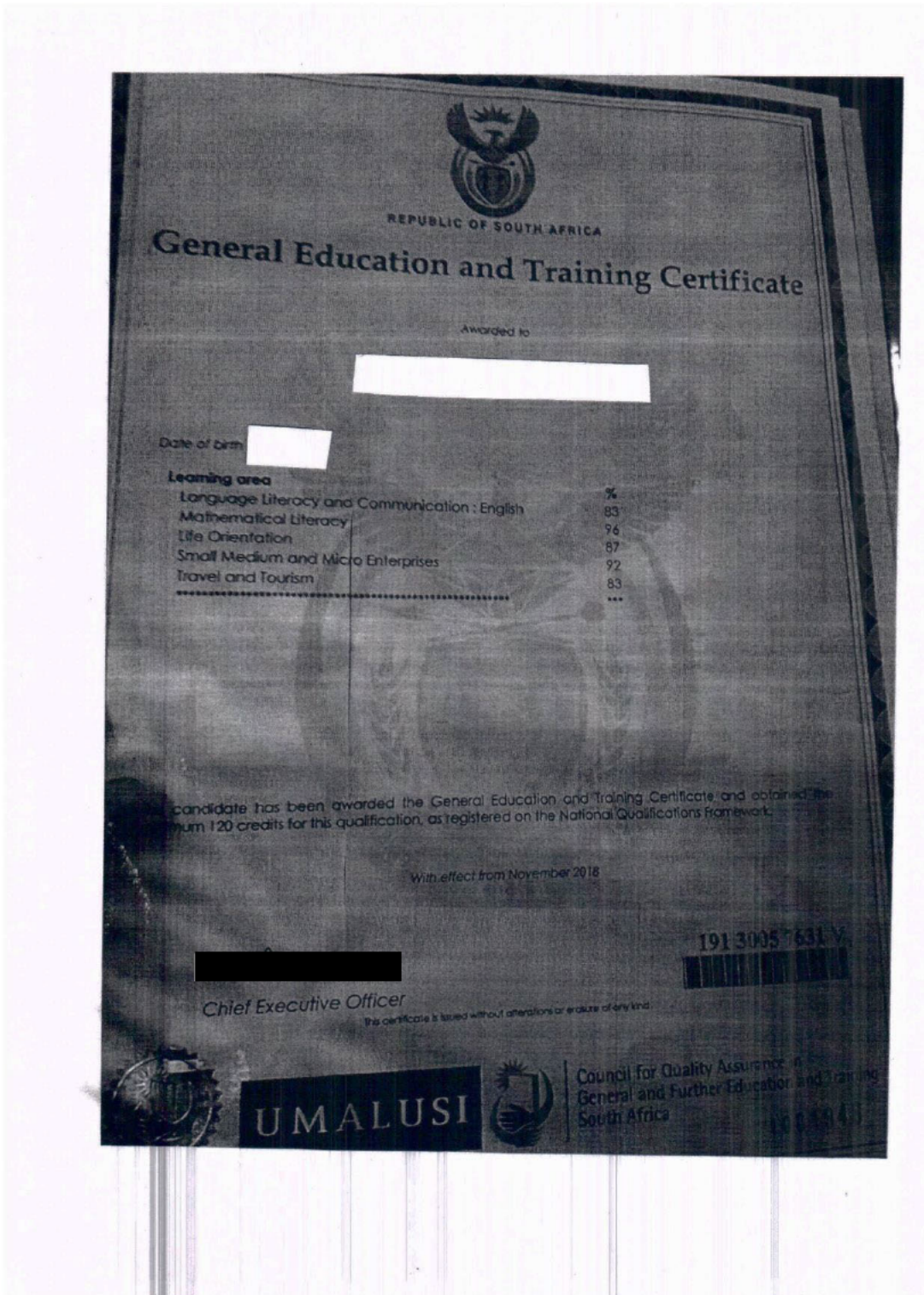
Warm regards,



Mr Clifford Wee
Principal

Gauteng Community Education and Training College
Head Office: Block D, 2nd Floor Crown wood Office Park, 120 Marlham Parkway Ormonde 209
Tel: 010 900 1159

7.4 APPENDIX D: STATEMENT OF RESULTS FOR STUDENTS





REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

General Education and Training Certificate

Awarded to

[Redacted Name]

Date of birth [Redacted]

Learning area

Language Literacy and Communication : English	76
Mathematical Literacy	74
Life Orientation	97
Small Medium and Micro Enterprises	83
Travel and Tourism	91
.....	79

This candidate has been awarded the General Education and Training Certificate and obtained the minimum 120 credits for this qualification, as registered on the National Qualifications Framework.

With effect from November 2018

[Redacted Signature]

Chief Executive Officer

The certificate is valid when it displays a signature of origin

19 7005 75



UMALUSI



Council for Quality Assurance
General and Further Education
South Africa



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

General Education and Training Certificate

Awarded to



Identity number [redacted]

Learning area	%
Language Literacy and Communication - English	74
Mathematical Literacy	86
Life Orientation	84
Small Medium and Micro Enterprises	83
Travel and Tourism	78
.....	

The candidate has been awarded the General Education and Training Certificate and obtained the minimum 120 credits for this qualification, as registered on the National Qualifications Framework.

With effect from November 2018



Chief Executive Officer

The certificate is issued without obligation or warranty of any kind.

191 5985 7561 K



UMALUSI



Council for Quality Assurance in
General and Further Education and Training
South Africa

1001908

See website for more information

7.5 APPENDIX E: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Appendix E : Data collection instruments

Main question: Explore factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4.

1. What are the factors contributing to good academic performance at AET Level 4 and how are these factors inform centre's performance?
2. Who are key education stakeholders in shaping academic performance at AET Level 4?
3. What is the role of each of these education stakeholders to student academic performance at AET Level 4?

Phase 1: Documents reviewed for the study

Type of document	Source (s)	Year	The importance of the document	Main points expressed in the document	Findings
AET Level 4 examination results	CET sector :nationally GCET College : provincially and CLC under study	Five year period (2015-2019)			
National Improvement plan	DHET	2017a			
Gauteng College strategic plan	DHET	2016 a			
Government gazette	DHET	2012			

Phase 2: Focus group questions with former AET Level 4 students

1. What motivated you to enrol in this Community Learning Centre?
2. What makes learning easy and manageable at AET Level 4, in class, at home and at the centre?
3. From your experience, what are other factors that contribute to good academic performance?
4. What were your best learning experiences last year?
5. Why were these best for you?

6. What is the bad learning experience that you have ever come across within the centre and how did you deal with it?
7. How do lecturers, centre manager, your home environment, the centre and DHET help you succeed academically?
8. From your own perspective, what do you think are the aims and objectives of undertaking AET Level 4, your family perspectives, lecturer perspectives, DHET perspectives.
9. Do you always think that these stakeholders work together in ensuring that these aims and objectives are met? Please elaborate.
10. Do you think the centre building, its design features and components have a measurable influence upon your learning, briefly justify your answer?
11. To what extent do you think assessment for learning assists you to improve your academic performance?
12. Which method of assessment best prepares you for a final assessment, is it a homework, project work, in class activities or a formal test and why does it work for you?
13. How often would you prefer to be assessed?
14. Any final comment?

Phase 3: Semi-structured questions with AET Level 4 lecturers

1. From your own perspective, what do you think are the aims and objectives of AET Level 4?
2. What are the hindrances in achieving these aims and objectives?
3. What opportunities does AET Level 4 create for students?
4. What in your view is good academic performance?
5. How does this centre go about in achieving good academic performance?
6. What is the role of formative and summative assessments at AET Level 4 in good academic performance?
7. What is the role of evaluation of AET Level 4 in good academic performance?

9. How is the centre motivated to produce good results?
10. From your experience, what are other factors that could be taken into account in measuring good academic performance?
11. Do you get any functional academic support at centre levels, to help with good academic performance? Please justify your response.
12. How does the centre assist you to improve your content/subject knowledge?
13. Do you get involved in the curriculum development processes and how does it benefit you as a lecturer?
14. What are the factors that affect curriculum implementation and how should this be avoided?
15. How would you define retention and throughput?
16. What in your view are contributing factors to high retention and throughput rate?
17. What is your sense of retention and throughput rate of AET Level 4 at this centre, what evidence can you provide to substantiate your above claims?
18. From your perspective, what causes the rise and fall in terms of student retention and throughput rate?
19. What can you do to improve retention and throughput rate of AET Level 4 students?
20. In your view, who are the key education stakeholders in the centre?
21. Do you think these education stakeholders work together in ensuring that aims and objectives of AET Level 4 are met, briefly justify your answer?
22. What structures do you have in the centre to help with good academic performance?
23. Do you get invited to participate in setting up the choice of curriculum organisation in the centre?
24. Any final comments?

Semi-structured questions with Centre supervising lecturer

1. From your own perspective, what do you think are the aims and objectives of AET Level 4?
2. What are the hindrances in achieving these aims and objectives?

3. What opportunities does AET Level 4 create for students?
4. What in your view is good academic performance?
5. How does this centre go about in achieving good academic performance?
6. What is the role of formative and summative assessments at AET Level 4 in good academic performance?
7. What is the role of evaluation of AET Level 4 in good academic performance?
8. What is the role of the Centre Manager in good academic performance of AET Level 4?
9. How is the centre motivated to produce good results?
10. From your experience, what are other factors that could be taken into account in measuring good academic performance?
11. Do you get any functional academic support at the regional and district levels, to help with good academic performance? Please justify your response.
12. How do you assist AET Level 4 lecturers to improve their subject knowledge?
13. Do lecturers get involved in curriculum development processes and what value does it add to good academic performance?
14. What are the factors that affect curriculum implementation and how should this be avoided?
15. How would you define retention and throughput?
16. What in your view are contributing factors to high retention and throughput rate?
18. What is your sense of retention and throughput rate of AET Level 4 at this centre, what evidence can you provide to substantiate your above claims?
19. From your perspective, what causes the rise and fall in terms of student retention and throughput rate?
20. What can the centre do to improve retention and throughput rate of AET Level 4 students?
21. In your view, who are the key education stakeholders at CET sector?

22. Do you think these education stakeholders work together in ensuring that aims and objectives of AET Level 4 are met, briefly justify your answer?

23. What structures do you have in the centre to help with good academic performance?

24. Do you always invite all relevant stakeholders to participate in setting up the choice of curriculum organisation or streams offered in the centre so that it responds to community needs?

25. Any final comments?

Semi-structured questions with the Provincial official

1. From your own perspective, what do you think are the aims and objectives of AET Level 4?

2. What are the hindrances in achieving these aims and objectives?

3. What opportunities do AET Level 4 create for students?

4. What in your view is good academic performance?

5. How does the province go about in achieving good academic performance?

6. What is the role of formative and summative assessments at AET Level 4 in good academic performance?

7. What is the role of evaluation of AET Level 4 in good academic performance?

8. What is the role of the provincial officials for in good academic performance of AET Level 4?

9. How are centres motivated to produce good results?

10. From your experience, what are other factors that could be taken into account in measuring good academic performance?

11. Do you offer any functional academic support at the centre levels, to help with good academic performance? Please justify your response.

12. How do you assist lecturers to improve their content/subject knowledge?

13. Do you involve lecturers in curriculum development processes and what value does it add to academic performance rates?

14. What are the factors that affect curriculum implementation and how should this be avoided?

15. How would you define retention and throughput?
16. What in your view are contributing factors to high retention and throughput rate?
17. What is your sense of retention and throughput rate of AET Level 4 at the college, what evidence can you provide to substantiate your above claims?
18. From your perspective, what causes the rise and fall in terms of student retention and throughput rate?
19. What can DHET do to improve retention and throughput rate of AET Level 4 students
20. In your view, who are the key education stakeholders at CET sector?
21. Do you think these education stakeholders work together in ensuring that aims and objectives of AET Level 4 are met, briefly justify your answer?
22. What structures do you have to help with good academic performance?
23. What plan do you have to ensure that skills are offered in all centres?
24. Any final comments?