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# Efficacy of learnership programmes : an exploratory investigation of learner perceptions in the Cape Peninsula

Lynette Angela De Louw  
*Cape Peninsula University of Technology*

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**Efficacy of learnership programmes:  
An exploratory investigation of learner perceptions in  
the Cape Peninsula**

**By  
Lynette Angela de Louw**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Master of Technology:  
Human Resource Management  
in the Faculty of Business  
at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology**

**Supervisor: Prof. C O K Allen-Ille  
Co-supervisor: Ms D Bell**

**Bellville Campus  
Date submitted: November 2009**

## DECLARATION

I, Lynette Angela de Louw, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

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**Signed**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

I wish to pay homage to the special people in my life:

- My parents and parents in-law, living and in the beyond, for their support, guidance and examples throughout my life;
- My husband Edmund for his understanding, patience and love;
- My children and their spouses; Quinten, Nicki, Michelle and Herman for their support and love; and last but by no means least,
- My special grandchildren Jade, Jordan and Caitlin for bringing so much joy and purpose to my life.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**All praise and honour goes to our Heavenly Father through whom all things are made possible.**

I wish to thank:

- Retired Prof. Sonia Bendix, who set me on this arduous journey, for her encouragement and support;
- My supervisor, Prof. Allen-Ile and my co-supervisor, Ms Diane Bell, for their patience, generosity, guidance, encouragement and support;
- Ms Shamila Sulayman for painstakingly editing my report;
- My current and retired colleagues in the Faculty of Business at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology for their encouragement;
- Librarians at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology Library for their unstinting help; and especially
- My husband, children, their spouses, grandchildren and the rest of my family for their love and patience.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CTFL SETA	Clothing, Textiles, Footwear and Leather Sector Education and Training Authority
DOL	Department of Labour
DOE	Department of Education
ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
FASSET SETA	Financial and Accounting Services SETA
HRD	Human Resource Development
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
INSETA	Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority
ISETT SETA	Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunications Technologies SETA
MAPPP SETA	Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging SETA
MTA	Manpower Training Act (No. 56 of 1981)
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NSF	National Skills Fund
NSA	National Skills Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAMDI	South African Management Development Institute
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDA	Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998)
SDL	Skills Development Levies Act (1999)
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
WR&H SETA	Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority

## ABSTRACT

Learnerships, which are embedded in the skills development strategy for South Africa, have been heralded as the panacea for all shortcomings experienced in the labour market and poverty alleviation in society. Learnerships are vocational education and training programmes, and are purported to fast track acquisition of qualifications for predominantly lower and unskilled workers, equipping them with knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience. At the same time learnerships afford learners an opportunity to enhance their individual employability potential by obtaining a qualification on successful completion of a learnership programme.

Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that learnerships have not been able to deliver on some of its main objectives such as improved employability and living standards of learners. The Department of Labour has placed prominence on quantities and focus on meeting targeted quotas, while insufficient emphasis is placed on efficacy of learnership programmes in terms of its benefits for individual learners.

This study investigates opinions of learners who are enrolled in a learnership programme in order to examine their perceptions of a learnership qualification as an enabler for personally enhanced employability and consequent improved living standards.

A mixed methods approach was used for the research study in the form of a quantitative survey questionnaire, followed by a qualitative study which used focus group interviews.

The findings argue that the concept of learnerships and its concomitant qualification could serve as an enabler to enhance learners' confidence and self esteem. These values may increase the possibility for learners to improve their potential for success in the workplace. A myriad of other factors should, however, be taken into account when applying benefits of a learnership qualification to enhancement of individual employability. These include factors in the macro environment such as economic market conditions, while a micro perspective such as individual learner abilities could all have an impact on the success of learnership programmes.

Notwithstanding these factors, the study found that learners were not perceptually more employable owing to the following factors:

- from an administrative perspective, learners were not more employable as they had, in most instances, not received any tangible evidence of completing a learnership programme (certificate not issued upon completion);
- most learners were still seeking employment some three to six months after completion of the learnership;
- some learners perceived the workplace as a racial divide and blamed employers' attitudes for their unemployed status; and

- some learners did not regard the learnership as a means of enhancing employment, since, according to them, most employers are not interested in investing in the learnership process.

In order to advance the efficacy of learnership programmes, service delivery needs to be improved. Stakeholders should be held accountable for their contribution to the process. Learners should be recruited into programmes that are meaningful to them as individuals while at the same time contribute towards enhancing the individuals' personal skills and interests.

By including the opinions and perspectives of the learners themselves, the efficacy of learnerships will improve and consequently enable the realisation of attaining the strategic imperatives for skills development in South Africa.



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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OUTLINE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

### 1. Introduction

This research explores perceptions of learners who attended and completed a learnership programme during 2007 – 2008 in the Cape Peninsula. The aim of the study is to establish learners' perceptions of benefits of attending and completing a learnership programme with particular regard to their enhanced levels of employability and consequential improved living standards.

It is important at this stage to note that this study was carried out, prior to changes implemented during 2009, when workplace training and education was managed under the auspices and collaboration of both the departments of labour and education. Since then legislative structural changes in the skills development regime have subsequently been placed under the statute of the Department of Higher Education and Training in the form of the National Qualifications Framework Act (NQF) which has established sub-frameworks as well as quality councils to oversee quality assurance of national education and training qualifications in South Africa (Isaacs 2009:2).

According to Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk and Schenk (2003:445), millions of South African adults have been disadvantaged owing to a lack of education. This lack of education is perpetuated in that individuals, as a result, lack employability skills which in turn impacts directly on their living standards (Hillage & Pollard, 1998:1). Greenhalgh (1999:98) maintains that provision of training for adult workers can only result in positive benefits for multiple stakeholders, namely employees, employers and society in general, since a skilled workforce will ensure an enabled labour market, which is capable of meeting global and national industry needs.



Lategan (2005:15) states that South Africa's poor rating in terms of human resource development, when compared to other emerging economies, as well as challenges that stem from historical, societal and political policy inadequacies, has compelled the implementation of an evolutionary skills development strategy. Lategan (2005:14-15) also claims that a myriad of problems such as poorly aligned training programmes, a decline in artisan training through the apprenticeship system, as well as a general decline in the quality of training, amongst others, has obligated a need for a skills development strategy, which places emphasis on vocational training and education, which is structured to benefit both societal and economic needs.

According to Raddon and Sung (2006:3), vibrant economies have a crucial need for an inclusive skills policy framework as it "entails meeting the skills requirements of industry and the labour market, whilst simultaneously enhancing social participation, inclusion and employability...". One such initiative which was designed to implement structured vocational education and training is the concept of learnership programmes (Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005:537).

Learnerships are a contemporary adaptation of the old apprenticeship system. In South Africa learnerships have been proclaimed as a pioneering method of overcoming skills shortage, as its design obliges a number of stakeholders to coordinate both theoretical and practical vocational education and training.

Learnership programmes offer a dual learning experience, where theory is learnt in a classroom environment, and is then supplemented by application and practice of skills in a real work environment (Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005:537; Department of Labour, NSDS 01-002, Learnerships). This implies that learners are enrolled for theoretical learning with a training provider and with an employer for practical training (NSDS 01-002, Learnerships).

The purpose of a learnership, as a means of obtaining education and training within a workplace, has been suggested as one of the most progressive developmental programmes implemented by the Department of Labour and has received much positive acclaim from policy makers and government. The

learnership programme is intended to act as a vehicle to speedily address inequalities of the past as a means to accelerate acquisition of workplace skills.

Successful completion of a learnership will translate into a nationally recognised academic qualification, combined with relevant workplace experience. The Department of Labour has been appointed as custodian for skills development in South Africa. The Minister of Labour, Mr. Mdadlana, during a speech in January 2004, reported ongoing success of learnership programmes since its inception in 2001 through its skills development strategy (Labour Market Review 2005:39). This two-fold learning programme is intended to accelerate learners' level of work preparedness and, thereby, increases learners' employability potential, which results in an improvement in learners' living standards (National Skills Development Strategy, NSDS 01-001; Skills Development Act 97 of 1998).

Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that learnerships have not been able to deliver on some of its main objectives such as improved employability and learners' living standards. The Department of Labour has placed prominence on quantities and has focused on meeting targeted quotas, while insufficient emphasis has been placed on the efficacy of learnership programmes in terms of its benefits for individual learners (Labour Market Review 2005:39; Anon, 2004:1).

Given the potential impact of learnership programmes on the lives of learners and its prospective ability to enhance employability and life styles of such learners, this study aimed to explore perceptions of learners who enrolled and completed a learnership programme during 2007 - 2008; seeking to understand their experiences during and after the learning encounter; and examining their perceptions in terms of employability levels and consequent improvement in living standards.

In order to contextualise the main aim of the study, this chapter focuses on the nature of learnerships by offering a global and national perspective on workplace education and training. It presents an introduction to the National

Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and offers an overview of the concept of learnerships as a vehicle for accelerated skills development. The chapter concludes with an outline of the research objectives, analysis and layout of the study.

## **1.1 Background to the research**

One of the primary aims of a progressive government is that of optimizing economic activity in order to ensure a more prosperous life for all its citizens. Within the context of globalisation, it is essential for any country to achieve competitive advantage. Since capital and knowledge are generally accessible, the most important competitive advantage is found in the skills levels of its citizens (Brown, Green & Lauder, 2001:1). In the context of South Africa, one of the major reasons for its high levels of unemployment is reported to be a lack of skills, which is aggravated by a poor educational system (Pauw, Borat, Goga, Ncube & van der Westhuizen, 2006:1). Mayer and Altman (2005:33) confirm the importance for South African policy makers to link skills development to political and economic imperatives. They consider this dual purpose strategy as essential for 'reducing unemployment and poverty, whilst fostering growth and international competitiveness.'

As the world evolves and as constant change is accelerated through a perpetual revolution in technological advancement, a country's workforce should be able to adapt to these changes (Kraak, 2005:429). According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, 1998), international trends are constantly seeking to find new and improved methods for educating and developing human resources so as to improve their competitive edge and ensure that their abilities meet the requirements of the market (Saunders, Skinner, Beresford, 2005:369). South Africa's survival and success within this global environment is crucial and hinges, to a large degree, on its ability to equip and update its workforce with the necessary skills.

South Africa's legacy of inequality in education and training has necessitated an inclusive and ambitious policy, which is aimed at accelerating the process of

skills acquisition, with concomitantly positive results through enhanced living standards and employability for its workforce (NSDS, SDA, in Kraak, 2001:120-121). In order to address this legacy of inequality, a skills development policy proposed the concept of learnerships as a method of vocational workplace training. This policy was promulgated in the form of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), and was legislated in the Skills Development Act (97 of 1998), which was formally introduced in 2001 (NSDS, SDA, in Kraak, 2001:120 - 121).

The Skills Development Act (97 of 1998) (SDA) subsequently proposed training and development programmes such as learnerships to afford opportunities to previously excluded workers to engage in learning through education and training, which translates into a recognised qualification.

Application of learnerships as a contemporary method of workplace learning has seen an increase in its use in both private and public sector training programmes (Davies & Farquharson, 2004:1), as demand for higher levels of workplace skills proliferates in an ever challenging and unbalanced relationship between labour demand and supply (Daniels, 2007:1), together with a need for workplace learning programmes, which are linked to national curriculum that offers “portability through acquisition of qualifications and credits”, resulting in a culmination of a nationally recognised qualification (Department of Labour 1997:3 in Kraak, 2001:121).

### **1.1.1 Skills development: national and global perspectives**

The relatively recent implementation of learnerships, as a method of making education and training available to the broader working population, is a contemporary issue and a novel concept in the South Africa human development arena. The first learnership programmes were introduced during June 2001 by the Department of Labour (Potgieter, 2003: 167). At a national level therefore, it seems that a limited body of research has been conducted and subsequently published on the topic within South Africa.

The South African system of learnerships has drawn much of its structure and framework from the German dual system of vocational training, which can be traced back to the traditional apprenticeship system, which qualified young people, by way of acquiring a trade, for the world of work. (Deissinger, 1997: 297). Raggart, in Deissinger (1997: 297), contends that the German dual system of vocational training is often held up as a “centrepiece of vocational education and training”. Deissinger, however, argues that adapting this system is not as uncomplicated as policy purports. This system has also contributed much of its strengths to British and French systems of vocational training, and even though the system of dualism may have its strengths, it is not likely to be successful if it were totally emulated in the South African context (Karlsson & Berger, 2006:53).

South Africa would do well if it should adopt best practice based on this system as it constantly seeks to keep abreast of global and technological transformation and evolution. The German dual system has been in operation since the 1960s and has seen recurrent renewal of policy and requests for flexibility in order to remain in line with the changing nature of work (Deissinger & Silke, 2005:312; Kutscha, 2000:4). Deissinger (2001:364) confirms that the German system of Vocational Education and Training has had to continually adjust curricula and policies in order to maintain a competitive and skilled labour force. A similar situation exists in other European systems such as the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) programme of vocational training in the United Kingdom (Purcell, 2001:30).

Alternately, Wheelahan and Carter (2001:303), describe the Australian system of vocational education and training (VET) as being underpinned by a composition of ‘training packages’, which ‘have become the mandated framework for course delivery...’. Each training package contains qualifications that can be issued, industry-derived competencies, and assessment guidelines. All public and private vocational education and training providers should use training packages, or industry endorsed competencies in cases where they do not exist, should they receive public funding for their programs (Wheelahan & Carter, 2001:303). Whilst in Britain, a similar system of National Vocational

Qualifications (NVQ) is also underpinned by a system of competence-based education and training (Kosbab, 2003: 526).

“Similar to South Africa, the British skills levy-grant system during the 1960s and 1970s managed workplace training via state driven, industrial training authorities ...” (Esland, 1991: 196-206 in Bisschoff & Govender, 2004:70). However, the system failed to improve skills development owing to several shortcomings. A significant reason for failure stemmed from neglected, complacent training providers who failed to encourage and empower managers to plan and sustain workplace skills development (Bisschoff & Govender, 2004:70).

Esland (1991: 314-315, in Bisschoff & Govender, 2004: 70) found that German management were offered a three year management skills course as a norm. Comparative training and education at management levels compared favourably when measured against South African counterparts. Whereas managers in West Germany, for example, receive formal training, which equips them with skills to face challenges of a dynamic 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, South African managers and training providers seem to be neglected in this regard (Esland, 1991: 314-315, in Bisschoff & Govender, 2004: 70).

International training and development programmes are found to be far more progressive than national vocational training where “... trends favour employers and managers to become empowered; to create a culture of learning within their organisations; and to transform into learning organisations” (Pont, 1995:19 in Bisschoff & Govender, 2004:70). Managers should be competent to deal with action learning, mentoring, self-development, counselling, coaching and developing skills. Employees should be competent at learning to learn and be more committed to life-long learning (Bisschoff & Govender, 2004:70).

The renewal and reinvention of the traditional apprenticeship system has, of necessity, owing to dynamic industrial advancement and rapid technological innovation, been restructured and renamed as Modern Apprenticeships (MAs)

in countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, amongst others (Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005:538).

Literature reviews related to MAs have been sceptical regarding success of these programmes, stating one of their major shortcomings as having “failed to provide integrated training models and thereby [impacting on the] complementarity of on-and off-job training” (Fuller & Unwin, 2003 in Smith *et al.*, 2005:539) and are criticised for having “not as yet achieved dramatically increased levels of graduate output” (Kraak, in Smith *et al.*, 2005:538, Kraak 2000:124).

### **1.1.2 Apprenticeships versus Learnerships**

Before introduction of the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) (SDA) in South Africa the only statutory workplace learning programme in place was governed by the Manpower Training Act (No. 56 of 1981) (MTA), which provided, *inter alia*, for an apprenticeship system. The MTA regulated the system of apprenticeship training through establishment of Training Boards and Regional Training Centres in specific industry sectors. These Training Boards were accredited bodies, which framed conditions and formalisation of apprenticeships (MTA Section 12d). In 2002 the Manpower Training Act was superseded by the SDA and, accordingly, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were established as legal successors to Training Boards.

Apprenticeship training was specific to technical artisan training (blue-collar trades), which will still form part of the learnership system. However, whereas apprenticeships catered only for traditional trades, and were offered by one employer for one specific qualification, learnerships offer skills development programmes, which cover a wide spectrum of work. The dynamic nature of a highly technical and computerised workplace means that it is subject to change and will continually challenge workers to upgrade their skills and abilities in a wide range of competencies; hence the requirement for a more congruous link between workplace prerequisites and structured training programmes.

Bellis (2000:218) contends that learnerships are similar to apprenticeships, since both are “a work based route to learning and gaining qualifications”. Apprenticeships required that a specific employer permanently employ aspirant artisans, whereas the learnership system is aimed at catering for employed, as well as unemployed, people, with the latter entering into a temporary contractual agreement with an employer. Learnerships, according to Hattingh (2004:6), have “replaced the apprenticeship system”. They “build on the strengths of this system through the integration of workplace and institutional learning. Thus learnerships will enrich the learning as well as the range of application”. Whether learnerships will prove to be a more effective route to skills acquisition, remains to be proved.

### **1.1.3 National Skills Development Strategy**

In South Africa, human capital has been underutilised owing to a historical system of highly segregated education and training resulting in a nation where a majority of its workforce is largely under-educated and under-skilled, and therefore, not capable of meeting stringent demands of the workplace and ‘new world’ technology. They (the workforce) are consequently unable to competitively join the international global market on an equal footing. This contention is supported in the International Labour Organisation Review 1996 (in Barker, 2003:3), which reports, *inter alia*, that problems such as poverty, income inequality, unemployment and high labour costs versus low productivity costs, are amongst challenges that face the South African labour market. Babb and Meyer (2005:2) confirm that unemployment and unemployability is an ongoing challenge in South Africa, despite millions of rands that are collected from private business under the skills levy tax rules.

In order to address the problem of an under-educated and under-skilled workforce, the South African government, during 1997, proposed implementation of a social development policy in the form of a Human Resource Development framework, which culminated in the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS, 1997), which was aimed at transforming the entire education and training sector.



The National Skills Development Strategy is aimed at including economic, as well as social challenges faced by South Africa and seeks to address problems of economic growth, while simultaneously addressing social problems of a high level of unemployment, which are directly related to a workforce, which is largely under skilled or poorly skilled (Department of Labour, NSDS, 2003:9 in Raddon & Sung, 2006: 3).

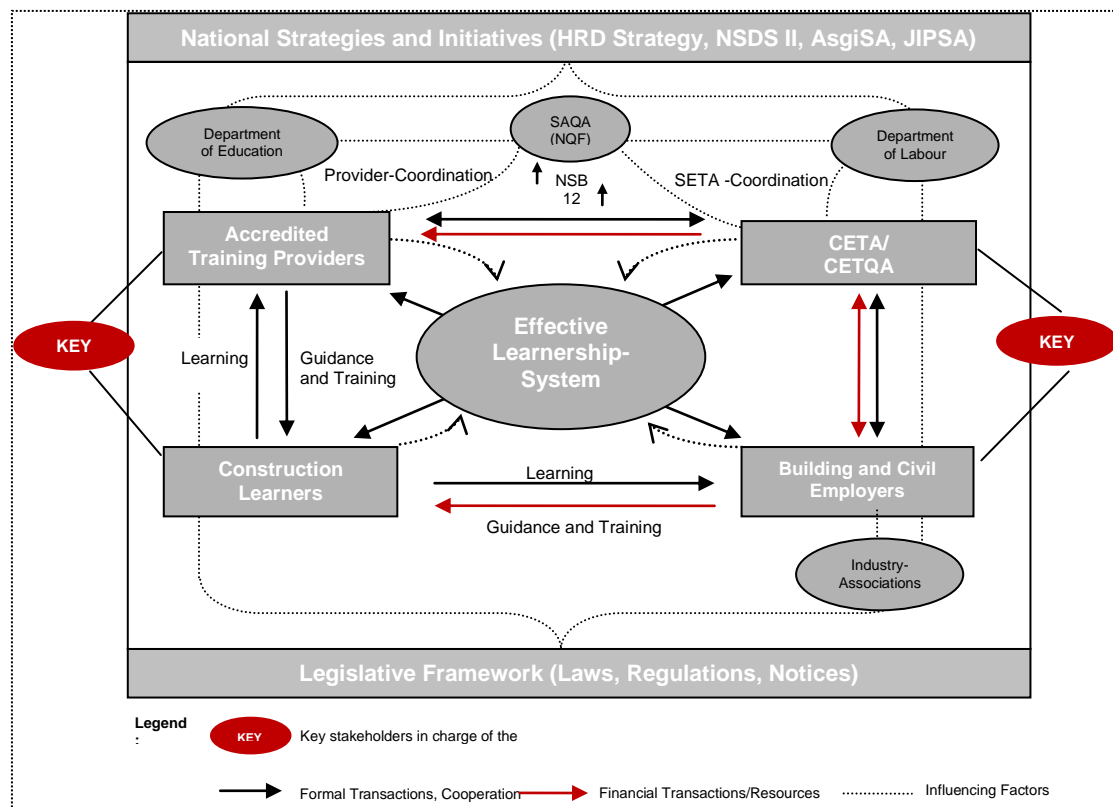
At the launch of the NSDS and the concurrent institutional framework in the form of the National Skills Authority (NSA), the Minister of Labour, Membathisi Mdladlana, commended the new strategy as “a truly national priority amongst the political, business and civil leaders of the country” (Department of Labour, April 1999). Mdladlana emphasized the importance of creating a learning culture, which would result in improved quality of life for individual citizens and consequential economic prosperity in the form of increased investment and subsequent profits for private business and the nation as a whole, thereby articulating some of the most important objectives of the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa, namely “... the belief that enhancing the general and specific abilities of all citizens is a necessary response to our current situation. To realize their potential, citizens need knowledge, skills and democratic values, and they also need opportunities in which to apply them” (HRD Strategy, 2001:5).

Legislation pertaining to implementation of the strategy was promulgated and consequently legislated in the form of the Skills Development Act (SDA, No. 97 of 1998), the Skills Development Levies Act (SDL, No. 9 of 1999) and operationalized through the Labour Market Skills Development Programme (Labour Market Review 2005:41). Major objectives of the SDA are to improve levels of education and competence of all workers, promote workplace learning as an imperative to all employers, and to assist the large number of unemployed and under-skilled work seekers to become more employable. It was expected that this would lead to improvement in quality of life; improved employability; increased labour mobility (Skills Development Act, (No. 97 of

1998) Section 2.1 (a) (i)) and, as a consequence, achieve much needed poverty reduction.

Since its implementation, a second phase of the strategy has been proposed, and an example is displayed in Figure 1.1 below for the construction and building sector. This schematic diagram offers a typical framework around which learnership programmes have been proposed and implemented.

**Figure 1.1: Key Stakeholders in the learnership programme**



Source: Mummmenthey, 2008:29

One of the key principles that support the strategy is the concept of work, which implies “the full range of activities that underpin human dignity by achieving self-sufficiency, freedom from hunger and poverty, self expression and full citizenship” (National Qualifications Framework (NQF), Consultative Document: 5).

#### **1.1.4 Learnerships as catalyst for accelerated skills development**

The NSDS proposed, at its core, implementation of a “demand-led skills development system, which is flexible and responsive to the economic and social needs of the country at the same time as it promotes development of new skills demands” (National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), 1997:4.2).

The human resource development strategy aims to create an enabling environment for expanded strategic investment in education and training. Key elements include promoting partnerships to enable efficient design and implementation; strategic planning linked to labour market requirements; linking structured learning and work experience through learnership programmes; and establishing a skills fund, which could be applied for training, which is focused on training the poor and unemployed (Department of Labour, April 2001).

In the introductory document to the NSDS (1997:4) reference was made to previous attempts at training, and the historical context of education within the workplace. Among these were problems of non-aligned work-related training programmes that are offered on an ad-hoc, short-term basis in industry, as well as education and training, which were not linked to current needs in the workplace.

In order to promote meaningful learning that is relevant to the needs of the ever-changing and dynamic world of work, the Skills Development Strategy proposed a system of learnerships. As Kraak (2001:150) states:

“The 1997 Green Paper and 1998 Skills Development Act proposed a very ambitious new framework aimed at impacting on each of [the] learner constituencies through the creation of a new institutional regime with strong links forged between learners, employers, government and the new intermediary training bodies, SETAs. This new institutional mechanism for delivering training has been termed learnerships.”

Vorwerk (2002:1) confirms importance of learnerships by stating that “learnerships form one of the cornerstones of the Skills Development legislation introduced by the Department of Labour, and SETAs [newly formed Sector Education and Training Authorities] will be measured on their success in

transforming the skills base in their respective sectors through the implementation of targeted learnerships”.

A learnership is a nationally recognized qualification. According to the NQF Consultative Document (2003:5), learnerships are paraprofessional and vocational education and training programmes, which combine theory with practice and should lead to a qualification that is registered on the NQF. On successful completion of a learnership, a learner should receive certification, which confirms the learner’s occupational competence and, which is recognised on a national level (NQF Consultative Document, 2003:5).

Despite the overall optimism reported by stakeholders who are accountable for the success of learnerships, media reports and independent researchers have been critical of their success, citing high drop out rates and blaming poor recruitment techniques and poor ‘support mechanisms’ as some of the main reasons for learnership failure (Letsoala, 2007:1 & Butcher, 2007:1).

The remainder of this chapter offers a synopsis of the research problem, the objectives of the study, the proposed hypothesis, methodology and layout for the rest of the study.

## **1.2 Statement of the research problem**

Contradictory claims exist with regard to the efficacy of learnerships relating to one of their socio-economic objectives, namely to serve as a means to improve employability and living standards of learners. Furthermore, it is evident that stakeholders and policy-makers’ attention has been focused primarily on meeting targeted quotas and completion rates, while scant consideration has been given to learners’ actual perceptions and experiences.

The problem statement hence reads as follows:

Learners do not perceive enrolment in a learnership programme as an enhancer or enabler for improved employability and living standards.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The study investigates perceptions of learners who were enrolled in a learnership programme in order to establish whether the acquisition of skills training, workplace experience and subsequent certification, has served as a catalyst to positively enhance the employability and life styles of these learners.

Section 1.2 (a) (i) of the SDA lays specific emphasis on the key purpose of the Act with reference to its intended benefits for employed and unemployed individuals who have not been afforded an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills, and hence are not able to enjoy associated benefits of an enhanced life style and employability. These benefits could be achieved by acquiring new skills or competences or by improving on existing skills. The learnership programme is one of the methods identified for attaining an educational qualification, and is specifically aimed at equipping people with workplace skills, knowledge and experience. In order to be effective, it is essential that the overall training intervention offered through learnership programmes, at both the theoretical (classroom) and practical (workplace) levels, can provide learners with such skills, knowledge and experience.

Specific objectives of the study are, therefore, as follows:

- To investigate the perceptions of learners with regard to the classroom and workplace learning experiences;
- To investigate the extent to which the learnership programme is perceived to have met expectations of learners while attending the learnership programme; and
- To investigate the status of learners after completing the learnership programme and consequently receiving a qualification; to enquire as to whether the learnership has served as an enhancer to the learners' lives in terms of improved employability and enhanced living standards.

### **1.4 Research question**

The question that the study sought to explore was:

Do theoretical and workplace experience and its consequent learnership qualification afford learners an opportunity to become more employable, as proposed in the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and articulated in the Skills Development Act (SDA) (No. 97 of 1998)?

**Research sub-questions:**

- What are learners' perceptions of the relevance of training and education that they experience **in the classroom** during the learnership?
- What are learners' perceptions of the relevance of training and education that they experience **at the workplace** during the learnership?
- To what extent has the learnership qualification contributed towards learners' **improved level of employability**?
- To what extent has the learnership qualification contributed towards **positively impacting on learners' standards of living**?
- Has the learnership experience **met learners' expectations** of the learnership programme?

**1.5 Significance of the research and research delimitations**

This study articulates perceptions of learners who enrolled in learnership programmes, with a view to building an increased understanding of learners' needs and, subsequently, applying such requirements to improving efficacy of learnership programmes with regard to quality and relevance for all stakeholders, and with specific reference to learners who enrolled in learnership programmes.

At a macro level, identification of shortfalls and possible improvement strategies, will assure learners of quality training which in turn will lead to development of an appropriately skilled and experienced workforce. At a micro level, learners who are appropriately skilled with knowledge and experience will improve their employability skills, and hence be able to find employment, which should enhance their standard of living.

Due to the vast number of learners enrolled in learnership programmes in the Cape Peninsula; the dynamic nature of learner enrolment in entering and exiting learnership programmes on a continuous basis; accessibility to these learners; time constraints; and budgetary considerations, the research was limited to a number of available learners (one hundred and twenty three) who attended a learnership across seven different SETAs in the Cape Peninsula situated in the Western Cape.

## **1.6 Theoretical framework**

The Department of Labour (NSDS 2005-2010), as well as published statistics on programme evaluation (South African Management Development Institute, (SAMDI) 2005), have hailed the learnership initiative as a resounding success. A total of 97% for an overall rate of learner placement post learnership programmes (NSDS 2005-2010) reflect a huge accomplishment for custodians of skills development in this country. This was reported for both employed and unemployed learners (Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005:537).

This optimistic perspective, however, published by the state and its allied stakeholders, contradicts media reports, which expound on the huge dropout rate of learners who enter learnership programmes (Daniels, G., & McFarlane, D, 2001; Anon, 2004a; Letsoala, 2007; & Butcher, 2007).

Media reports (Letsoalo, 2007:3) quoted statistics with regard to completion rates of learnerships as low as 19%, citing governments' enormous investment, in the form of billions of rands, as a 'major blow' to its endeavours to increase the skills shortage in the country. The report further cites Lundall (an independent researcher) amongst others, with regard to major reasons for learners not completing learnership programmes as; poor recruitment and selection criteria; and poor 'support mechanism' in the learnership programmes (Letsoalo, 2007:3).

While this study does not focus on completion rates and reasons why learners abandon the programme, attention is drawn to poor completion rates as it is

indicative of problems experienced by those enrolled in the learnership programme. Lundall (in Letsoalo, 2007:3), believes that the learnership system 'is working inefficiently' and that the 'notion of excellence and learning progression', which is the pivotal role of learnership programmes, is not able to serve as a catalyst to advance learner employability and, consequently, improve their living standards.

### **1.7 Research constructs**

Learnerships are proposed as means to acquire knowledge, skills and experience in order to improve employability of employed and unemployed workers, as well as work seekers. Benefits of learnerships are said to impact on the lives of workers in a positive manner. Learners' perceptions regarding benefits derived from qualifications that are received via learnership programmes, is a major focus of this study and, therefore, serves as the primary variable of interest. This study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, and uses methodological triangulation to ensure reliability and validity of data analysis and interpretation.

The study initially used a quantitative data collection and analysis via a survey questionnaire and concludes with qualitative analysis where data was collected from focus group interviews.

The objective of the study aims to prove that learner perceptions with regard to benefits of learnerships will determine whether learners are more employable or not.

Table 1.1 below offers a tabular outline of variables which were measured during this study and methodological measurement that was applied.



**Table 1.1 Research constructs and measuring instruments**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Measurement component</b>	<b>Measuring instrument</b>
Classroom experience	Knowledge obtained during theoretical classroom teaching.	Quantitative method via survey questionnaire and qualitative method via focus group interviews.
Workplace experience	Skills obtained while attending a structured learning component at a workplace provider.	Quantitative method via survey questionnaire and qualitative method via focus group interviews.
Expectations met	The value of the learnership, which learners look forward to once learnership is completed. Related synonyms are: expectation; optimism; anticipation; faith; hopefulness.	Quantitative method via survey questionnaire and qualitative method via focus group interviews.
Expectations not met	Feelings learners experience when their expectations are not met as anticipated: despair; dejection; hopelessness; desolation; misery.	Quantitative method via survey questionnaire and qualitative method via focus group interviews.
Employability	Being equipped with necessary knowledge, skills and experience required to perform a certain job.	Qualitative method via focus group interviews.
Improved living standards	A consequence, which follows from obtaining gainful employment and earning an income.	Qualitative method via focus group interviews.

## **1.8 Research design and methodology**

As the concept of learnerships were considered to be fairly novel at the time of the study, this method was found to be more usable, taking into consideration convenience and accessibility of learners who attended learnership programmes in close enough proximity to the researcher (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002:279; Mantzopolous, 1995:168-169).

A mixed method approach was used to gain information from learners during their enrolment in a learnership. Participants were requested to complete a

questionnaire which assessed their experiences while attending theoretical learning in a classroom environment as well as their experiences while attending a workplace learning component. Once the learnership had been completed, available learners were interviewed using the focus group technique to obtain further in-depth knowledge of learners' experiences and perceptions.

### **1.8.1 Research design**

In order to gain an insight into perceptions of individual learners, a descriptive study by way of a questionnaire was undertaken during the learnership experience. The study was completed after a period of six to twelve months after learners completed the programme. Focus group interviews were conducted with a selected number of available learners.

Due to the nature of the study, methodological triangulation was employed using quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Mouton and Marais (1991:91) affirm that triangulation has been accepted as a method, which increases reliability of data while, simultaneously, compensating for any possible limitations that are experienced when applying a single methodology for data collection. Quantitative data was collected by means of questionnaires and qualitative data was obtained from focus group interviews.

### **1.8.2 Population**

Out of a total of 23 nationally registered SETAs, nine SETAs were approached to participate in this study. SETAs were randomly contacted and chosen based on availability and proximity. Only SETA who were currently offering learnership programmes were considered for participating in the study. After contacting nine SETAs, seven suitable SETAs were identified. These seven SETAs were requested to provide a list of contact details for training providers who had registered learnership programmes on offer at the time of the study. The training providers were contacted and initial meetings were scheduled. The meetings were arranged with learnership programme managers so as to explain the objectives and purpose of the research and to obtain permission to

administer the questionnaire to learners who were currently attending a learnership programme.

### **1.8.3 Sample Size**

Non-probability convenience sampling was applied to seven different SETAs resulting in eight learnership groups of learners enrolled in learnership programmes at the time of the study.

Resulting from the contacts made with the training providers supplied by the seven SETAs, a total on 124 learners were accessible and available for the study.

### **1.8.4 Data collection methods**

Questionnaires were administered to the 124 learners. The study was conducted over a period of approximately ten months.

In order to enable pre-evaluation and post-evaluation of the participants and to gain further insight into learner experiences, after having completed the learnership, three focus groups were selected from the original sample group.

The text data collected at the focus group interviews were thematically analysed so as to identify key themes in employee perceptions regarding enhanced employability of learners.

### **1.8.5 Ethical considerations**

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002:384) caution against ensuring that the ethics of 'informed consent' is negotiated with all research participants and is also clearly understood by individual participants. According to Neuman (1994: 428), ethical concerns are principles, which guide field research and, which should be followed according to proper prescribed ethical standards.

For this study the researcher ensured that essential protocol was observed throughout the process of data collection, while precautions were taken to ensure integrity and confidentiality of all survey participants.

Each survey group received a detailed briefing prior to questionnaire completion. All participants were afforded a comprehensible and unambiguous explanation of the purpose and objectives of the research, methods that were used for the study and, importantly, participants were given assurance of anonymity and confidentiality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002:384; Powell & Single, 1996:502).

Focus group sessions commenced with a full explanation of reasons for the further study and assurance of privacy and discretion was given to each participant. Sekaran (2003:72) confirms that the undertaking to assure participants of confidentiality and anonymity ensures greater cooperation.

#### **1.8.6 Data analysis and procedure**

Quantitative data that was collected via questionnaires were analysed by using descriptive statistical methods. Data was presented in tabular and graphic format. Qualitative data collected via focus group interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Detailed findings are discussed in Chapter Four of the research study.

#### **1.9 Definitions of terms and concepts**

Terms and concepts that were used for this study are clarified by means of definitions, which are presented in Table 1.2 below.

**Table 1.2: Terms and definitions**

<b>TERM</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
Employability	According to Hillage and Pollard (1998:1), 'employability refers to a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required.'
Improved living standards	Learners enter a learnership programme in order to improve the possibility of obtaining employment, or if already employed, being promoted and, consequently, earning a higher salary. People are only able to improve their living standards when they are gainfully employed and are able to pay for their living expenses.
Learnership	A learnership is a learning programme, which offers a qualification and where learners are equipped with necessary skills, knowledge and experience that are required to obtain gainful employment or improve their current employment status.
Learners	Learners are people who enter into a learnership programme with the intention of improving their employability status through acquisition of a learnership qualification.
National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act	The Act ensures the recognition and quality assurance of national education and training qualifications in South Africa.
National Skills Development Strategy	The strategy implemented by the South African government, which includes a policy that is committed to improving skills of the labour market.
Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998)	Legislation promulgated in order to implement the National Skills Development Strategy in South Africa.
Skills Development Levies Act (of 1999)	The legislation that requires certain employers to pay a tax in the form of a levy into a skills fund. This fund is then redistributed to relevant parties involved in developing skills within the South African workforce.

### **1.10 Organisation and layout of research study**

The study comprises six chapters. The following is a layout of the chapters and a brief description of each section.

Chapter One presents an introductory background; rationale for the study and formulation of the problem statement by way of an overview of the concept of

learnerships within the context of current challenges that are experienced by learners.

In Chapter Two a more detailed discussion offers an overview of the Skills Development Strategy, and introduces a literature review, which examines and presents related literature findings with reference to learnership programmes as a method of workplace training and education.

Chapter Three continues with a literature review, which focuses on current issues that are experienced with learnership programmes, and lays specific emphasis on learners' challenges and perceptions while enrolled in these programmes.

Chapter Four deals with research methodology that was applied in the study. The chapter includes an overview of sampling procedures, questionnaire design, methods of data collection and procedures for processing data.

Chapter Five discusses results of the data analysis and offers explanations by way of interpretation of these results.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, offers an overview of the findings of the study and concludes the study by offering recommendations for stakeholders who are involved in learnership programmes.

### **1.11 Concluding remarks**

The chapter serves as an introductory framework for the explanatory study of learnerships by way of a contextual introduction to the study, and offers an outline of the research methodology.

The chapter also offers an overview of the learnership process, which was implemented as a strategic means for training and development of employed and unemployed people who lack necessary skills that are urgently needed to empower them to attain enhanced employability and, consequently, uplift their standards of livelihood.

The following chapter, Chapter Two, outlines the requirements for and the perspectives of the various stakeholders in the skills development regime and expounds on the concept of learnerships, its implementation process and its successes, failures and challenges.

## CHAPTER TWO

# LEARNERSHIPS: A CONCEPT FOR NATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the framework for learnership programmes. In order to contextualise the study, this chapter presents an overview of the background and perspective of industry related training authorities; it deals with the concept of learnerships by explaining the structure and framework of learnership programmes; the collaborative process and the relationship between various stakeholders; their respective roles; and vested interest that they have in learnership programmes.

### 2.2 Development of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)

Globalisation, technological advancement, structural changes and the demands for higher skills are among some of the primary reasons why countries ensure that their workforce are equipped and updated to meet the needs of a dynamic market. South Africa is no different and, as an aggravating factor, has had to contend with the ravages left by a historical legacy of inequality and economic isolation through international sanctions. To this end, the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS, 1997:01-001) implemented a radical approach in an attempt to remedy the legacy of skills shortfall while at the same time offering the South African economy an opportunity to become part of the global marketplace.

The custodians to the strategy are the National Skills Authority, which has the following goals:

**“Their mission statement is:** to equip South Africa with the skills to succeed in the global market and to offer opportunities to individuals and communities for self-advancement to enable them to play a productive role in society. **In a nutshell, the strategy is designed to support economic and employment growth and social development”** (NSDS, 1997:01-001).



In order to translate these goals into action, while at the same time managing a large number of possible skills programmes at vastly differing levels of learning, a statutory body comprising 23 SETAs, and regulated by the Skills Development Act (No. 97 Of 1998), was established by the Department of Labour under the auspices of the National Skills Authority. These SETA bodies, which were established by the Minister of Labour during March 2000, have the task of coordinating skills training and education on a national level for a host of differing industries throughout the country (NSDS, 1997:02-001). Each industry sector comprises of industries, which are related through similar work processes and economic activities. Whereas the previous Industry Training Boards only represented a number of sectors, SETAs are representative of all industries. This will ensure that education and training is available in all sectors and industries. Hence, SETAs are responsible for the establishment and management of learnership programmes.

### **2.3 Framework for learnership programmes**

As previously mentioned, learnerships are learning programmes which have been established and are administered by SETAs and which demand the collaboration and cooperation of government in the form of the Department of Labour, employers and training providers. Learnership are formal learning programmes, which include theoretical and practical components that are obtained through classroom attendance offered by a training provider and workplace training offered by an employer, respectively (NSDS, 1997:02-001). Examples of partnership roles for these two sites of learning are offered by the NSDS as follows:

“A person who completes a learnership will be able to demonstrate the practical application of skills and will also have learnt *the why* of doing things. An electrician must be able to wire a plug. S/he should also know why it is vital to place wires at the appropriate terminal and the consequences of getting this wrong. A community health worker should be able to turn a bed-ridden patient but also understand why this is necessary and that, unless it is done, the patient might develop bed sores” (Department of Labour, NSDS, 1997:02-001).

The framework and structure of learners are best described by Jacklin (2003:3) when he explains a learnership as:

- “a professional planned combination of classroom and workplace learning;
- an additional person with set skills acquisition opportunities in the workplace;
- a means of fostering employability;
- a means to acquire a National Qualification, recognised on the South African Qualifications Framework;
- an opportunity for practical hands on learning to complement the theoretical learning;
- a contractual relationship between the learner, the employer and the training provider (the tri-partite agreement); and
- a means of educating future and existing employees for succession planning purposes”.

This implies that all stakeholders involved in learnership programmes will have a contractual obligation as the outcomes of the learning will culminate in an officially recognised qualification which can be accumulated towards a diploma or degree once the required unit standards have been passed. For the employee who had previously not been able to afford to obtain education through the traditional training institutions, this programme will offer an opportunity to improve their level of skills, knowledge and experience and ultimately their employability levels.

The Fasset Learnership Guide (2003:3-4) explains the objectives of learnerships as follows:

Learnerships are intended to address the gap between current education and training provision and the needs of the labour market. Some labour market issues that learnerships seek to address are:

- a decline in levels of unemployment in South Africa;
- an unequal distribution of income,
- unequal access to education and training, and employment opportunities;
- effects of race, gender and geographical location on advancement; and
- skills shortage amongst the labour force.

## **2.4 Tripartite Collaboration**

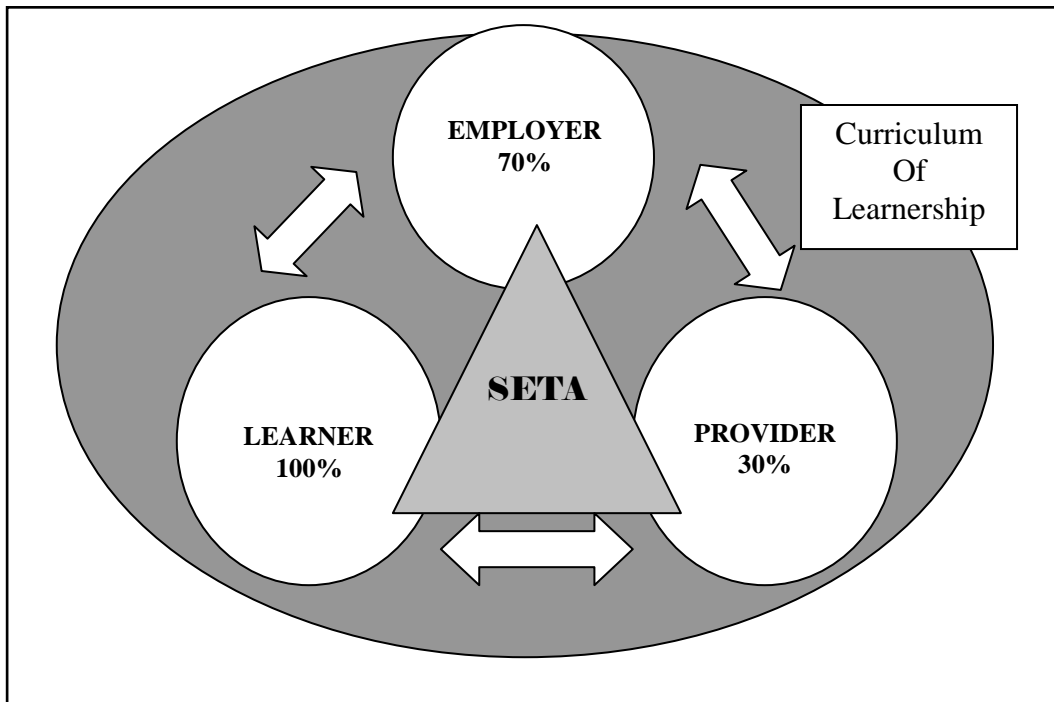
It is important to note that the success of learnerships is highly dependant on coordination between various stakeholders, namely government, employers and training providers, while SETAs also play a pivotal role in coordinating the process (Kraak, 2001:117).

The system of learnerships, as regulated by the SDA (No. 97 of 1998) (Chapter 4, Sections 16-21), seeks to develop co-operative learning programmes in which a learner enters into a contract with an employer for a specified period. The contract, in the form of a 'Learnership Agreement', is made between the learner, an employer and a training provider. The learner is offered an opportunity to learn in the workplace and also to acquire the theoretical component of the learning through a training provider. Further prescriptions stated by the SDA are that learnership programmes should consist of a structured learning component, which includes practical work experience of a specific nature and duration and, which will lead to attainment of credits towards a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

All learnerships should also be registered with the Department of Labour. The importance of these learning programmes is that they are linked to various levels and unit standards as set out in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In order to ensure consistent, standardised and quality learning, all learning programmes, as well as training providers that offer these programmes, should be accredited by the Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQA), which, in turn, is linked to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

As previously stated, a learnership agreement should be entered into between a learner, an employer, or group of employers, and a training provider, which is accredited by the relevant ETQA, while the SETA acts as the custodian to ensure that all stakeholders form part of a cooperative in the relationship.

**Figure 2.1: Relationship between stakeholders**



Source: Du Toit, Serfontein and Dealers. Evaluation of the Learnership Academy (2005:15)

Figure 2.1 above depicts the relationship between various stakeholders, and expresses the importance of collaboration and involvement on the part of various stakeholders (Du Toit, Serfontein & Dealers, 2005:15).

#### **2.4.1 Government departments' role and perspective**

Erasmus and van Dyk (2003:3) confirm that formal education in South Africa is largely the responsibility of the state. Embedded in the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS 2005-2010), the South African government, under the auspices of the Department of Labour, has committed itself to making substantial contributions to skilling and training under-developed, unemployed and under-skilled workers in all spheres of the economy. Not least amongst these targets are initial quotas to have registered at least 70,000 learners into a learnership programme by 2005. One of the leading principles of the NSDS is to “advance the culture of excellence in skills development and life long learning” (NSDS, 2005-2010).

From a macro perspective, however, Daniels (2007:32) argues that “the lack of co-ordination between the government departments (predominantly DoL and DoE) as the policy drivers in skills development is a major issue at this point.” They maintain that the “organs of state are simply not doing enough to integrate the learnerships with the NQF, and without doing this; the system becomes highly sub-optimal.”

Further criticism against the skills legislation extends to its lack of real substance (Phillips, 1997:35-43 in Bisschoff & Govender, 2004:70). Claims launched by critics include the fact that the “national skills strategy was designed to revolutionise skills development by promoting competitiveness, yet it lacked in content and mechanics for setting standards.” The process of accrediting training providers (and other stakeholders), they contend is ridiculed for being complex, lacking in clear direction and open to abuse and corruption (Bisschoff & Govender, 2004:70).

From an individual learner perspective, anecdotal evidence suggests that several learners have been enrolled onto the learnership programme with little or no knowledge regarding personal benefits and values of learnerships for their own future development. However, owing to the ‘novelty ‘ of the learnership concept in the South African Education and Training system, supporting empirical research has not as yet been sufficiently developed with specific focus on perceptions of learners with regard to benefits of learnerships. Stakeholder providers (employers and training providers) have increasingly enrolled learners into learnership programmes in order to meet their own (providers) respective objectives in terms of benefits of running learnership programmes.

Critical reflection of the state of skills report issued by the Department of Labour cites a list of problems from provider capacity, to linkages, governance and operational problems between providers (DoL State of Skills in SA, 2006/07:49). The report comments on the absence of measuring learnership success in terms of learner throughput. Important data related to the condition of learners, informing on their placement status, after exiting the learnership

programme, are said to be unavailable (DoL State of Skills in SA, 2006/07:49). Most importantly, the absence of and an urgent need for an information system at a national level, which tracks a range of skills development initiatives in a systematic and organized manner, renders it impossible to engage in any meaningful programme of monitoring and evaluation (DoL State of Skills in SA, 2006/07:49).

#### **2.4.2 SETAs' role and perspective**

The most significant structure for attainment of the Skills Development Act and its concomitant Skills Development Levies Act of 1999 is the SETA. The principle of learnerships relies heavily on the cooperation between employers, training providers and SETAs, which are responsible for skills development in a particular industry.

SETAs are intended to function as operational mechanisms of the SDA. They have been designated according to primary industrial focus points, which range from Accounting and other Financial Services; Chemical and Allied Industries to the Wholesale and Retail sectors. Since concluding this study major changes to the custodianship of learnerships have been implemented. As a result, learnerships have been placed under the management of a new Ministry under the Department of Higher Education and Training implemented during 2009.

As Vorwerk (2002:1) affirms: "Learnerships form one of the cornerstones of the Skills Development legislation introduced by the Department of Labour, and SETAs will be measured on their success in transforming the skills base in their respective sectors through the implementation of targeted learnerships" .

Regulations pertaining to the rights and obligations under learnership agreements are stipulated in the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998), under Section 36 and received detailed attention in the Government Gazette (Vol. 415. No. 20831, Jan. 2000) which prescribes the rights and obligations of the stakeholders that enter into a learnership agreement as follows:

The SETA has the right to act as the enforcing agent in regulating the relationship between the parties to the learnership agreement. The relevant SETA functions as an overarching body and is obliged, in terms of Section 36 of the SDA, Sub Sections 2(4) and 4, to keep administrative records of all registered learnership agreements; to oversee implementation of learnerships; to monitor and evaluate the performance, procedures, quality and relevance of all training, which takes place; and to establish procedures and mechanisms for disputes and/or terminations related to learnership agreements.

Grawitzky (2006:50 in DoL, NSDS, State of Skills in SA, 2006/07:50-51) “highlights several weaknesses ..., which include problems to do with learnerships” he contends that “ ... stakeholders represented on many of the SETA boards have failed to give strategic direction ...” with regard to matters impacting on the efficacy of learnership programmes. Another aggravating factor could be that SETAs have experienced high staff turnover resulting in a negative effect on staff morale and capacity; and citing learnerships as being resource intensive with long waiting periods for training provider accreditation, are among some of the problems.

### **2.4.3 Employers’ perspective of their role in skills development**

Historically the domain of teaching, learning and assessment was the sole domain of higher and further education institutions. These institutions held the responsibility for equipping their learners with the necessary and relevant knowledge and skills which enabled learners to perform effectively at their specific occupations once employed at a workplace. With the implementation of the NSDS and its subsequent legislation, this responsibility has been shifted to a shared liability between business and education. Businesses are more and more required to develop the workplace into a place of learning and in so doing adopt a ‘learning organisation’ approach.

The proponents of a workplace designed as a learning environment and the concept of a ‘learning organisation’, contend that “workplace learning is experience-based learning in complex, authentic environments” which goes

beyond the concept of a traditional classroom and teacher environment and fosters the use of on the job training through coaching and mentoring (Bauer, Festner, Gruber, Harteis & Heid, 2004:284; Du Toit, Serfontein & Dealers, 2005:17). Levine (1997, in Benson & Dresdow 1998:301-307) states that a 'learning organisation' can be cultivated by ensuring that all workers are equipped with the knowledge and skills which enable individual workers to function effectively in the workplace.

Further arguments which favour the case for employer investment in human resource development are the proponents of intellectual and human capital accumulation, which proposes that investing in such human capital will enable a retention of these resources for the present and the future (Garavan, Morley, Gunnigle & Collins, 2001:48) hence ensuring the optimal supply of skilled labour to the business in the short and long term.

In South Africa the need for organisations to meet the requirements of the NSDS has a legal, moral and business imperative (Bellis 2002:6). Businesses should see their role in human resource development as a benefit to the organisation, while at the same time, realise that skills development will not be a success if they (private and public enterprises) do not commit to these imperatives.

The National Skills Fund (NSF), through an employer levy system, which is managed by respective SETAs, funds learnerships. Employers are taxed on a percentage of their payroll. The NSF, when entering learners into a learnership programme, reimburses funds to employers. Other incentives in the form of tax rebates are also offered to persuade employers to implement learnership programmes at their workplace.

The Department of Labour and the various SETAs have marketed learnerships by expounding on their benefits in terms of their positive gains for business imperatives. Employer incentives range from tax benefits to possible acquisition of a skilled labour pool through offering workplace learning to learners who are



enrolled in learnership programmes that are directly linked to requirements for such an employer (Daniels & McFarlane, 2001:1).

“For the employer, the following advantages have been advocated as benefits, which could be derived from engaging in learnership programmes:

- Well and appropriately skilled employment pool (existing employers and new entrants);
- Turnover increase because of productive learners at lower than normal costs;
- Productivity increase because of higher skilled workers;
- Ensure recruitment success, as the employer will be able to retain performing new entrants;
- Creative and innovative workforce because of the attainment of the compulsory critical skills and attitudes required by every qualification;
- An increase in market share because of a skilled and competitive workforce;
- A satisfied workforce and subsequent labour peace;
- A highly motivated workforce because of higher levels of participation in the success of the company.”

(Extract taken from Department of Labour, Learnership Implementation Guideline, in Financial and Accounting Services SETA (FASSET) Learnership Information 2003:4-5).

According to Hattingh, however, several employers continue to find the concept of learnerships to be a burden in terms of time and money (Hattingh, 2003:3; Singh, 2002:4) and, from a moral perspective, where the free-market economy is dictated by the profit motive, the concept of social responsibility is also not a priority (Jacklin, 2003:47). Senneck (2005) believes that employers view learnership programmes as a money making scheme and only enter into learnership agreements for their own benefit. Besides the absence of a guarantee in the return on investment when investing time and money in

human capital as opposed to physical capital, as well as the risk of training and up-skilling employees, there is a possibility that they leave once they acquire higher levels of skills. Bearing in mind that exorbitant resources have been expended on programmes, which are largely funded by the employer levy system. Employers seem scantily committed to the idea of learnerships in spite of the incentives flaunted by the Department of Labour and the subsequent 'warning' uttered by the Minister (DoL, 2008).

Critical analysis shows evidence that employers have relied too heavily on the state (government) to initiate training (Hattingh, 2003:3; Jacklin, 2003:47). While at the same time, government has urged employers to "open their doors to young prospective employees for learnership programmes" (Department of Labour, in Mokopanele 2004). Keep, (in Smith *et al.*, 2005:539) strongly argues that the lack of commitment by business, as well as the negative perception and "...deep seated prejudice regarding vocational qualifications" demonstrates a deficiency in allegiance on the part of business to commit to the whole concept of vocational education and training (Jordan & Jackson, in Smith *et al.*, 2005:539). Further criticisms regarding the fact that "the state is more interested in outputs ... than the outcomes of these programmes" lays additional emphasis on importance and complexity of collaborative mechanisms in cases where government and private enterprise should work closely within a legislative framework (Canning & Lang, 2004:164-165; Fuller & Unwin, 2003; Harris *et al.*, 2003:83; Hyland, 2002:288; Keep, 2000) in Smith *et al.*, 2005:539).

Findings by Borat and Lundall (2002:20, in Daniels, 2007:21) as reported in The World Bank Report, argues that South African business, in general, does not invest in training in the workplace to a degree that it compliments the level of skills shortage in the labour market. Their survey found, amongst others, that "a one percent increase in training expenditure leads to a sixteen percent increase in output". They also maintain that no significant evidence exists, which supports the fact that employees, once trained, will be more inclined to seek other employment, since they have acquired more skills. Companies often cite this as a reason for reluctance to invest in training.

Research that was conducted in the United Kingdom, specifically in England during 2004 (Kenyon, 2005:366), set out to convince the business community of benefits for business imperatives, of recruiting and training apprentices (implementing learnerships), which found “compelling evidence that [learnerships] add value to business performance”. A survey conducted with large and smaller businesses found that apprentices “deliver strong business benefits such as increased productivity and staff retention, reduced costs and a more diverse workforce”.

This ethos of deliberating the business case for recruiting and training learners in a learnership programme has yet to be rewarded with necessary buy in from businesses in South Africa. Singh (2002:1) found that more than half of the companies that were surveyed, had not listed any interest in implementing learnerships, while a majority were unaware of learnership programmes, and cited a “lack of awareness by organisations of the system of learnerships, coupled with the perception held by them (the companies surveyed) of this system...” of learnerships, which will continue to impact negatively on the objectives of learnership programmes as a vehicle to overcome a lack of skills in the labour market (Singh, 2002:1).

Further evidence suggests that learnership programmes are established for the wrong reasons. Jacklin (2003:47) cautions that companies perceive learnership programmes as an advantage, which is based on benefits that are afforded the organisation and offers the following advice from lessons learnt:

“A learnership is NOT:

- an free extra pair of hands or another labourer in the workplace;
- merely formal classroom based (theoretical) learning;
- merely work-based (experiential) learning;
- an informal ad hoc relationship between the learner and the employer;
- an informal training programme offered by an accredited provider; and
- a regurgitated apprenticeship” (Jacklin, 2003:48).

Boud and Garrick (1999:6 in Louw, 2006:12) claim that “the workplace has become a site of learning associated with two quite different purposes. The first is the development of the enterprise through contributing to production,

effectiveness and innovation; the second is the development of individuals through contributing to knowledge, skills and the capacity to further their own learning both as employees and citizens in wider society.”

Employers largely see learnerships as a social responsibility and an added burden which is placed on them by government (Grawitzky, 2007:20, Singh, 2002:101). Private enterprises perceive their role according to the economic principle of supplying goods and services to communities and the role of government to ensure that society is skilled and able to meet demands of the world of work (Cronje *et al.*, 2005:21). Employers are, therefore, accused of displaying a lack of commitment towards strategic objectives of skilling the nation and, consequently, impact directly on implementation and success of learnership programmes (Duvenhage, 2007).

Singh (2002:101) confirms negative perceptions that are held by employers towards learnerships and maintains that there is a general lack of learnership implementation within organisations. He cites possible reasons as those related to the novelty factor; a need for additional internal resources for employers; an organisation and management structure which is conducive to workplace learning; and most importantly, the motivation and eagerness to form partnerships with educational institutions to jointly implement vocational learning programmes.

This raises the question of economic motive where private business and private training providers are concerned. Is it the agenda of private businesses and, consequently, training providers to recover as much of the statutory levy as possible? The concern is, therefore, that quotas and quantity will be sacrificed at the expense of quality and, therefore, portability of qualifications and skills. Singh (2002:97) argues for more structured and concrete efforts on the part of the Department of Labour to increase awareness and commitment of employers with regard to learnership implementation.

Where employers have such negative attitudes towards learnerships, anecdotal evidence suggests that learners, who are enrolled in learnerships, are often

relegated to menial and unrelated tasks in the workplace, which, consequently, impacts on learners' motivation to complete the learnership programme.

## **2.5 Training providers as operational custodians of learnership programmes**

Meyer, Opperman and Dyrbye (2003:32-33) contends that the face of training in the workplace has radically evolved from traditional short courses that are offered on an often ad hoc basis to a structured formal learning programme that is aligned to SAQA unit standards; outcomes based; and, amongst others, shows evidence of being assessable. Trainers can no longer merely produce a satisfactory evaluation form in order to justify their contribution to adding value in the organisation. Presently training managers should to be able to provide tangible evidence of their contribution to the 'bottom line' when designing and offering training interventions in the workplace (Meyer *et al.*, 2003:33; Badroodien, 2005:85).

The new breed of training provider has been catapulted from a position of human resource officer in a corporate environment, accountable only to the management hierarchy within the organisation, to also being an accredited educator who is accountable to several regulations, policies and legislation, which are prescribed by the Education Training and Development regime (Coetzee, 2002:xiii). Among the many new tasks and responsibilities required, training providers have to prove competent in leadership; management; facilitation; programme design; learning material design; administration; needs analysis; and be able to strategise, to name but a few (Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk & Schenk, 2003:444).

This sudden transition has given rise to its own problems as training providers are found to be unprepared for a myriad of responsibilities and accountabilities both in and outside of the organisation. Added to this, employers are none the wiser and look to these training providers who are often not experienced to offer qualified advice and assistance regarding the dynamic shift in human resource development within the organisation.

Employers would do well to evaluate training providers, especially those who present themselves as expert consultants. Coetzee (2002:48) offers the following checklist to evaluate quality of training providers and their human resource development practices:

- Training providers are registered in terms of applicable legislation.
- Quality management policies, procedures and review mechanisms are in place.
- Learning programmes are developed, delivered and evaluated and subsequently culminate in a specified registered standard or qualification, which are in line with ETQA requirements.
- Policies are in place for learner entry, guidance and support systems.
- Policies are in place with regard to managing assessment.

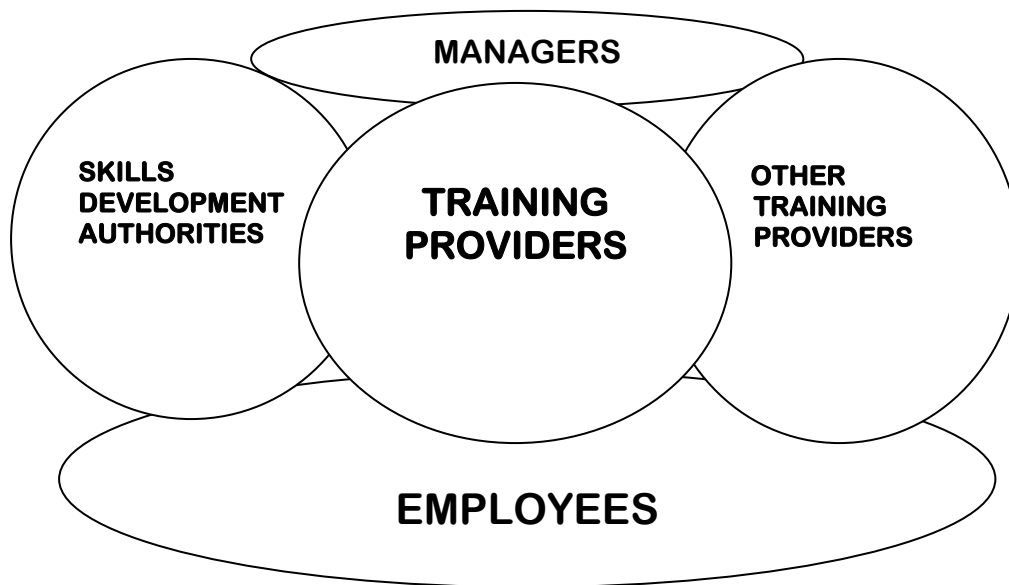
Another challenge for training providers and other role players is the concept of managing multiple stakeholders in order to coordinate and offer a successful skills development programme. Figure 2.2 provides a representation of key role players in the management of the skills development regime and clearly depicts training providers as an important component in the collaborative scheme of training and skilling the workforce.

According to Meyer *et al.*, (2003:4), one of the most important measures of success for the training provider is to ensure that training is measurable to its composite return on investment (ROI). Training can only be said to be a success if it can be aligned to the organisation's needs. Therefore, training should be related to the organisation's strategic plan and should be translated into a workplace skills plan (WSP).

According to Meyer *et al.*, (2003:62):

“The WSP is the formal document that is used to report on the training needs that were identified, the employee profile and the annual skills priorities, and how these are aligned to the skills needs for the [organisation], the sector and the national skills needs” .

**Figure 2.2 Role players that manage skills development**



Source: Bisschoff & Govender (2006:77)

Added to this, training interventions should be designed so that one can assess learners' levels of competence. Competence is defined, in terms of the Skills Development Act (1997), as follows:

“Applied competence, which includes practical competence; demonstrates the ability to perform a set of tasks; foundational competence, which demonstrates ability to understand what and why we do things; and reflexive competence, which demonstrates the ability to integrate or connect performance with understanding; learning from ones actions and adapting to changes and unforeseen circumstances” (SDA in Bellis, 2000:59).

Considering all the challenges faced by training providers, they have largely been unable to place their role and position in the large arena of skills training and learnerships. Bisschoff and Govender (2006:71-75) argue that training providers lack a management framework, criticising training providers for not being effective and for lacking in their ability to implement effective training programmes, while they argue that they should improve in order to have a meaningful impact on skills development and, subsequently, learnership programmes in the workplace.

## 2.6 Learnership successes and failures

Reports by the Department of Labour (DoL, NSDS, State of Skills, 2006/2007) elucidate the success of learnership enrolment, but do not report throughput rates and success rates of learners in terms of the real aims of the NSDS. One of the most important features of learnerships is to enable learners to achieve a recognized qualification which serves as a motivating catalyst for further learning and qualification attainment. By giving recognition to learners for their achievement a sense of life long learning is encouraged and promoted. This is especially important for a workforce who had in the past not been offered an opportunity for education, and subsequent lifestyle improvement (Davies *et al.*, 2004:339).

A major challenge experienced in learnership implementation and success lies in collaborative partnerships, which are required from all its stakeholders (Singh, 2002:1). Lundall (2003:1) maintains that the learnership process is fraught with inefficiency and has a long way to prove itself in terms of teaching and learning excellence and quality.

According to the NSDS (1997:4.2), some underlying principles of learnerships include the following:

- co-operation and partnerships between government and social partners;
- quality learning programmes, which are continuously evaluated and subsequently improved and updated;
- efficient and sustainable learning programmes, which are cost effective; and
- learning programmes offered by qualified and accredited training providers that have clearly articulated performance indicators.

These collaborations are seen, in theory, as the framework for a successful and sustainable relationship between employers, employees and training providers, while the underlying concept is to ensure integration between the workplace, which offers practical training, and a training provider that offers the theoretical underpinning of such practical aspects in the workplace (SAMDI, 2005: viii).



This concept is in itself problematic, since role players involved in the learnership programme have vastly divergent reasons for participating and their interests are largely prioritized by their individual objectives.

- Sector Education & Training Authorities (SETAs) have been mandated by government (through the Skills Development Act of 1998) to coordinate the process of learnerships (amongst others) and to ensure its success;
- private business, which has been conscripted to promote learning in the workplace, has its primary objective in the form of the profit motive (Cronje, du Toit, Marais, Motlatla (2003:21). and, therefore, does not consider training through learnerships as a major priority;
- training providers, depending on whether they are externally or internally placed in the workplace have, in most cases, similar objectives, namely to operate as a sustainable business entity and are, therefore, also mainly profit driven (Cronje *et al*, 2003:21); and
- individual learners, however, are in most instances motivated by an urgent need for skills acquisition in order to be empowered through training and education and, consequently, become more employable.

Linked to the issue of certificates is the relevance and quality of assessment, which is conducted by respective providers of workplace training and education. A case in point relates to research, initiated by SAQA, and presented at a Q-Africa conference during September 2004, (Marroch & Harrison-Train, 2004:2), which described the Forestry Industry sector administered by the same SETA (FIETA), and found that even though assessment was conducted by accredited assessors, several role players had no guidelines or information related to requirements for workplace training or for learnerships. Despite these shortcomings, some workplaces had been registered as levy-payers. Among the main findings during monitoring and evaluation, was the fact that workplaces do not always understand current practices with regard to education and training and assessment; and workplaces are unclear on roles and responsibilities as a workplace hosting a learnership; and workplaces view learnerships as a way to access additional

labour, while others view learnerships as a burden and drain on human resources owing to the need for continuous coaching and mentoring (Schonborn, 2005:1).

Of greatest concern is the long term effect of poor quality assessment and token qualification certificates as related to learners' capabilities, considering that learners will have acquired, at least on paper, a credit or qualification, which is portable and for all intents and purposes recognized at least on a national, if not international, level. Consequently, use of poor assessment practice will have an impact on the credibility of quality and assurance, as dictated by SAQA and associated Quality Assurance Bodies.

Learners attend a learnership programme free of charge and are further incentivised by receiving an allowance, referred to as a stipend, which is intended to cover basic travel and lunch costs. The learnership agreement does not prescribe that learners are penalized for non-completion (DoL), which results in several learners leaving the programme prematurely (Mokopanele, 2004). Some of the reasons, stems from mismatched learners in terms of individual characteristics that are not identified during the recruitment and selection process and related to; their qualification status; the degree to which they receive recognition for prior learning (RPL).

Lundall (2003:3) confirms that the embryonic stage of the skills development strategy implementation and, consequently, learnership programmes, offers a limited amount of relevant and applicable research on the topic and, therefore, still requires critical evaluation and documentation concerning its efficacy. He cites several teething problems, which relate to the overall implementation of learnership programmes (Lundall, 2003:2). In terms of the objectives set by the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), Lundall contends that learnerships represent the most complicated and difficult of these strategic objectives to attain (Lundall, 2003:3). Although he states that "while learnerships constitute the most important pivot on which the Skills Development Act is premised ...", evidence presented in his research shows a likely shortcoming in achievements of the objectives of learnerships' efficacy.

The report argues that “ostensibly informed projections” for learnership enrolment, were published in terms of required targets for learnership registration and throughput (Lundall, 2003:5).

As previously discussed, Keep (in Smith *et al.*, 2005:539) maintains that most employers are not sufficiently committed to the process of vocational training and education as a means to acquiring a skills workforce. This leaves much of the policy initiation and implementation to government departments. Policy implementers, however, set targets and quotas as a means of reporting success figures to the public. These figures could in turn offer an unrealistic view of the actual success being experienced by the end user, who in this case is the learner obtaining a learnership qualification (Harris et al 2003:83, Fuller & Unwin 2003, Keep, 2000, Hyland 2002:288, Canning & Lang 2004: 164-165) in Smith *et al.*, 2005:539).

The National Skills Authority (NSA) published details of completion rates, which show a throughput rate of a meagre 14% during 2004 and that reached 15% during 2005. Research figures cite reasons for poor completion rates as: “learners enter learnerships merely because they want to access the stipend (allowance) provided through the programme” (Singinzi Consulting in Letsoalo, 2007:1) and poor recruitment and selection of candidates as well as poor support mechanisms in the learnership programme’ (Lundall in Letsoalo, 2007:1). Most importantly, the report argues the inefficient delivery of skills training via a learnership programme, which contradicts the “notion of excellence and learning progression”, which sits at the core of skills development objectives (Letsoalo, 2007; Butcher, 2007).

## **2.7 Challenges in establishing and implementing learnerships**

Challenges relating to role ambiguity, co-operative partnerships and a lack of consolidated reporting systems are amongst those cited in various evaluation reports (SAMDI, 2005: viii). Prominent amongst these challenges are a lack of understanding of learnerships amongst stakeholders; lack of mentors and

coaches in the workplace which result in learners being relegated to tasks that are unrelated to their specific learnership programmes (SAMDI, 2005: viii).

The first report on the State of Skills issued by the Department of Labour (DoL), detailing statistics as at March 2005, discloses resounding success with learnership intake (DoL, NSDS, State of Skills, 2006/2007). At initial implementation stages, the Department of Labour, in a quest to make the learnership programme a success, set high quotas in terms of the number of learnerships that should be registered by certain target dates (Letsoalo, 2007). The NSDS initially formulated success indicators, which acted as a prescriptive barometer for target achievement (Potgieter, 2003:173). One such success indicator has that by March 2005 a minimum of 80 000 people under the age of 30 would have entered learnerships (Department of Labour, 2001 [b], 19, in Potgieter 2003:174). Statistics published by the Department of Labour, after this date, revealed a success rate of 132% of learnership enrolment (Department of Labour, NSDS 2005). Even though this statistic portrays success in terms of learnership enrolment, it does not report on the important aspect of completion rates. Media reports reveal that completion rates were as low as 19% (Letsoalo, 2007). A further problem found that learners were not able to find employment once they had completed the learnership programme (Letsoalo, 2007).

Cooperation from business was solicited by way of tax rebates and levy refunds. The Minister of Labour further beleaguered SETAs with claims of underperformance in terms of reaching prescribed quotas that were initially set for registration of learnerships in industry (Department of Labour, 2005; Motlanthe in SAMDI, 2005:61).

In order to advertise the success of learnership programmes, SETAs and training providers widely published their success stories in attaining and, in most cases, exceeding targets in terms of the number of learnerships that had been registered. An example was set by the Minister of Labour with the announcement that the Information Systems, Electronic and Telecoms Technologies SETA had registered “almost 1000 learners ahead of its March

2004 target which places them within easy reach of their target of 3500 learners by March 2005” (ITWEB, April 6, 2004).

Similar positive results were reported by Davies and Farquharson (2004:181) on the purported success of learnerships across all sectors. Davies and Farquharson (2004:336), as well as Smith, Jennings and Solanki (2005:537), state that learnerships have been heralded as the panacea to all South Africa’s skills problems and maintain that stakeholders that are involved in learnership programmes, especially the learners themselves, were satisfied that learnerships were implemented and managed correctly. Their studies utilised data obtained from a baseline study in 2004, and used statistics that were obtained through pilot projects, which were implemented during the periods 1997 to 2001 in the KwaZulu-Natal area.

Smith *et al.*, (2005:537) further expounds on the success of learnerships in South Africa. Their study considered the success factor across the “different strata of the South African labour market”, making a distinction between employed learners (referred to as 18 (1) learners SDA) and unemployed learners (referred to as 18(2) learners according to the SDA). The empirical study also made a distinction between various NQF levels, subdividing them into the following categories: Levels 1-3; Levels 4-5 and Levels 6-7. Their overall findings were that a general feeling of satisfaction regarding learnership programmes was found among learners at various levels, however, they stressed a need for further research, which focused on unemployed learners who are generally entered into lower level learnerships. (Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005:537).

As South Africa enters its second phase of the NSDS the report on the state of skills in South Africa (NSDS 2005-2010) have hailed the learnership initiative as a resounding success. Statistics declare an overall 97% rate of placement for all classes of learners that were enrolled in a learnership programme during 2004-2005 (NSDS 2005-2010). The NSDS report focused on quotas and targets that were set and met, but other studies cautioned against “merely chasing after numeric goals to a stronger commitment to measure the impact of

an intervention” in terms of its quality rather than quantity (Grawitzky (2006) in DoL, NSDS, State of Skills in SA, 2006/07:50-51).

The positive viewpoint published by the state and affiliated stakeholders, belies real benefits to individual learners in the long term and contradicts media reports, which expound on the huge dropout rate of learners who enter learnership programmes (Mokopanele, 2004:1; Robinson, 2005:3; Letsoalo, 2007:1). Media reports have underscored the drastic failure rate of learnership throughput reflecting the percentage of ‘drop outs’ to be as high as 85 to 90% (Robinson, 2005:3; Letsoalo, 2007:1).

Lundall (2003:6), in line with sentiments reported by the media (Mokopanele, 2004:1), quoting statistics during the fledgling stages of learnership implementation, and maintained that figures reported by the Department of Labour (NSDS Synthesis Report December, 2002) showed that the ratio between the number of registered learnerships (20 043) and the number of completed learnerships (2 868) reflects a meagre 14.3% of learnership throughput. Lundall confirmed, however, that more detailed ‘data suggested that the relatively better organized SETAs had been instrumental at exhibiting greater efficiencies’. These were cited as the Financial Seta (FASSET), and the Health and Welfare SETA (HWSETA), (Lundall, 2003:6). Despite arguments regarding ‘teething problems’ during implementation that were bound to keep success rates low, more recent reports (Letsoalo, 2007:3) continued report low completion of 19% and low placement rates of learners who had completed (no statistics reported).

Viewing the problem from a broader perspective, Bennell (1998:1) argued that training and skills development through programmes such as learnerships (Vocational Education Training VET as they are known in some European countries), had generally failed in their efforts to equip learners with required capacity to increase productivity for the benefit of the employee and employer and, importantly, personal prosperity in the form of increased income for workers (Blom, 2006:2). Blom (2006:2) refers to a “perplexing phenomena” with regard to an “increasing move away from the first principles of the NQF: of

mobility...enhanced access to education, training and [consequential] employment opportunities.”

Factors related to poor recruitment and selection practices; learners’ lack of knowledge regarding expectations from learners during the learnership programme; employer and training providers’ lack of planning and coordination between theoretical content (classroom based) and practical application (workplace based); can result in a mismatch between learner expectations and realities experienced during enrolment. These shortcomings, according to anecdotal evidence and personal perceptive observation, are thought to be a major cause for some learners not deriving benefits of the programme, as intended by the NSDS.

However, Bellis (in Hattingh, 2004:6) cautions against creating a divide between learning and working as in knowledge and skill. He states that the operative should be the learning component, which should be part of the structured learning programme that is offered by the training provider, as well as the structured work that is offered in the workplace by the employer; hence, bridging the divide between gaining knowledge and acquiring skills.

“The process of implementing a learnership varies in principle from traditional training offered in the workplace. A learnership is intended to assist in meeting the skills gap in the workplace while at the same time offering the learner an opportunity to obtain credits towards a registered qualification. Therefore, employers should firstly ensure that learnerships meet skills requirements and follow a structured, well-planned framework when entering into learnership agreements with stakeholders. Learnerships should be developed in occupations where there is an actual need” (Bellis in Hattingh, 2004:6-7).

Learnerships are important because “the success of a learnership is whether, at the end, the learner is able to practically use the skills that s/he has been taught” (NQF Consultative Document, 2003:5). A learner will be trained in how things are done, and this training should be undertaken in normal workplace

conditions. The learner is also taught theoretical aspects of 'why' things are done. The learner will, at various stages of the learnership, be assessed to see if (and how) s/he is progressing and (whether) s/he is able to perform tasks that s/he has been trained to do. This assessment, in itself, will be structured to have a strong practical element (NQF Consultative Document, Pretoria, 2003:5).

## **2.8 Recruitment and selection challenges**

The most problematic challenge found during evaluation of learnership programmes are those concerning recruitment and selection of learners (SAMDI, 2005:viii; Du Toit, Serfontein & Dealers, 2005:8). Du Toit *et al.* (2005:5) maintain that poor recruitment and selection of learners results in learners, in some instances, not being correctly matched to the level of learning. They further claim that challenges regarding standardized procedures for recruitment; inclusion of important role players such as training providers in the recruitment and selection process; mismatched learners in terms of level of ability and inability, were amongst the most prevalent challenges found in procuring suitable learners.

Recruiting learners for training and development is slightly different to standard recruitment and selection procedures that are used to fill a vacant position in the workplace. Learners should be assessed in terms of their potential to learn and their motivation to complete a course, unlike the case for filling a vacancy where levels of competence concerning skills and knowledge was already acquired. As a result, recruitment and selection should be carefully planned and coordinated and consistently applied by all provider stakeholders involved (Du Toit *et al.*, 2005:5).

Davies and Farquharson's (2004:336-352) studies were conducted at the initial stages of learnership execution, based on a pilot project, during 1997 and 2001 in KwaZulu-Natal. These projects have served as a useful basis for advice and lessons learnt with regard to explicit recruitment processes. They maintain that recruitment and selection should be carefully designed to ensure a correct



match between learner and programme, which in turn results in the desired outcomes of learnerships.

Important processes, which lend itself to cooperation and planning in the recruitment process hinder the already complex implementation process of the learnership programme. Lundall confirms that poor selection of learners as well as poor support mechanisms were found to be amongst the major reasons for non-completion of learnership programmes (Letsoalo, 2007:1). Davies and Farquharson (2004:336) contend that the complexity of stakeholder coordination and collaboration, especially in light of their immensely differing objectives which span vastly divergent priorities, makes it difficult to plan and coordinate processes such as recruitment, selection, induction and orientation of programmes such as learnerships.

Du Toit *et al.* (2002:56) recommend that learners should be fully informed regarding the content and outcomes of specific learnership programmes. Enrolling learners in learnership programmes for which they have no interest or do not possess the necessary entry level skills and knowledge, is tantamount to setting up a learner for failure.

Du Toit *et al.* (2002:56) maintain the importance of employer involvement during the recruitment process and see the non involvement of employers as a lack of responsibility on their part. Du Toit expresses that 'learnerships are about job creation ... [and] .. if employers are not recruiting learners whom they can potentially employ, then the objective of the skills development legislation is not being followed' (Du Toit *et al.*, 2002:56).

## **2.9 Concluding remarks**

Whilst it is reassuring to appreciate that common problems encountered at implementation of the skills development strategy in South Africa are not unique to its region when considering its status as a developing economy, as opposed to developed regions such as the UK and other leading European industrial nations, it should still be acknowledged that South Africa has a long

way to go before its labour force can be equated to and compared with other nations in order to be recognized as a proficient workforce. It is, therefore, imperative that the system of learnerships and its consequent acquisition of recognized qualifications, which are (or should be) aligned to the SAQA quality of assessment, should enable learners an opportunity to enhance their employability status.

Alternately, at administrative levels of learnerships, high levels of learner turnover (Mokopanele, 2004:1; Robinson, 2005:3; Letsoalo, 2007:1; Butler, 2007:1); poor records of empirical research related to learner success after completion (Department of Labour (DoL) NSDS, State of Skills, 2006/2007); and lack of availability of data which record and monitor turnover data (DoL, NSDS, State of Skills, 2006/2007); suggests a need for closer investigation of learner perceptions and experiences during and after attending a learnership.

This chapter offered an introductory and explanatory framework regarding the concept of learnerships in the context of current challenges and progress made thus far. This was considered necessary in order to give credence to the nature and complexity of multi-stakeholder programmes such as learnerships. Judging from positions of the various role players, it is evident that learnerships are complex programmes that are set in a dynamic changing environment and should be appraised and fine-tuned on a continuous basis.

The following chapter offers a discussion of challenges that surface in the learnership process with particular focus perceptions of learners with regard to their improved employability after obtaining a learnership qualification.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LEARNERSHIPS AND EMPLOYABILITY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Since the objective of the study was to survey perceptions of learners enrolled in learnership programmes, with reference to their opinion of improved employability, it was necessary to initially review existing literature regarding the context and purpose of learnerships as a mechanism to improve employability; comments on expectations of learners enrolled in a learnership programmes; as well as opinions expressed on the success or failure of learnerships.

The system of learnerships is a fairly new concept in South Africa, and has yet to build a substantial body of literature that can be referenced for best practice by the various stakeholders involved in the programme. Hattingh, Theron and Bellis (2002:12) maintain that "... most of the current work on learnership development and implementation is exploratory, as practitioners grapple with the challenge of translating these characteristics into practice". Lundall (2003:3) verifies that the developing stage of skills development strategy, and, consequently, learnership programmes, limits the extent of relevant and applicable research regarding learnerships in general and specifically how it relates to and impacts on employability in particular.

#### **3.2 Learnership process**

Learnerships offer an opportunity for learners to attend a theoretical and classroom-based programme which will enable the learner to obtain a qualification that is officially endorsed and nationally recognised (Department of Labour, NSDS 01-002. Learnerships; Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005:537). The duality of learnerships offers an ideal learning situation for learners who, through historically disadvantaged circumstances, have been unable to attend

a traditional school and therefore, been deprived of building their prospects for enhanced employability. Learnerships, therefore, have been declared as an ideal opportunity for previously disadvantaged, especially, young unemployed people, to increase their employability potential and consequently improve their living standards (Fasset Learnership Information, 2003:12).

According to the Skills Development Act, learnerships must:

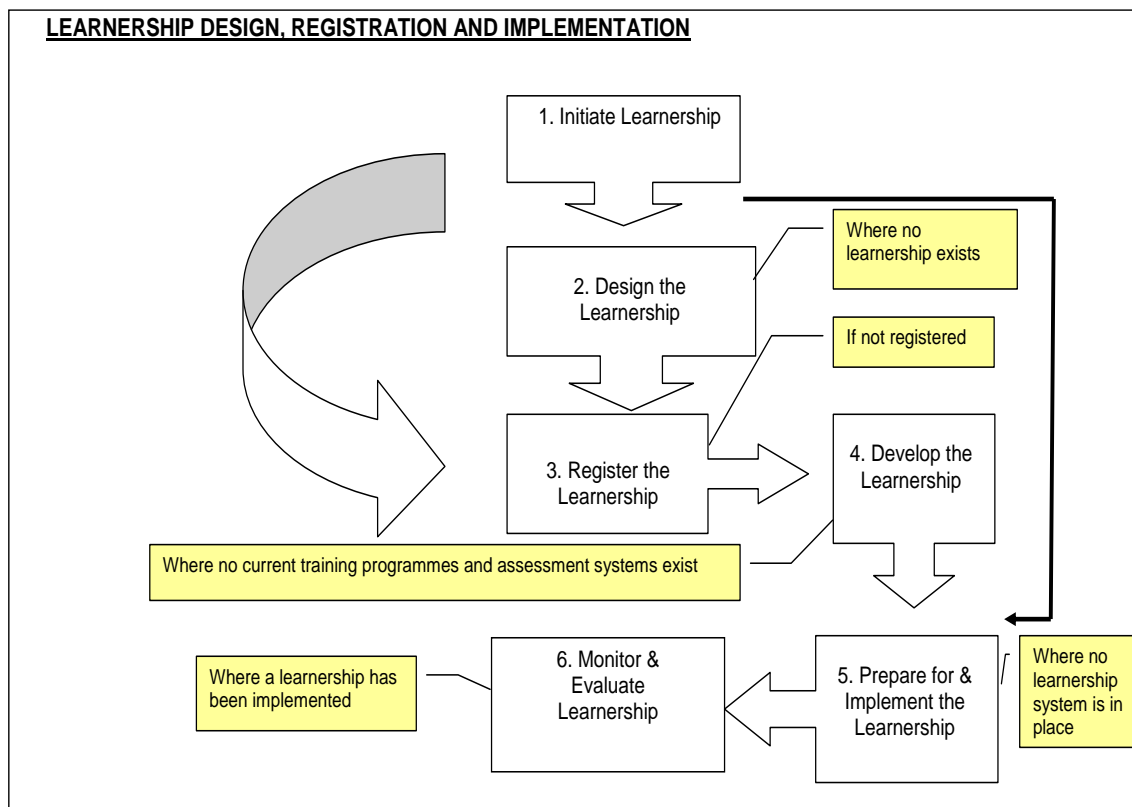
- consist of a structured learning component
- include practical work experience
- be governed by an agreement between the learner, employer and education and training provider
- lead to a qualification registered on the NQF and
- relate to an occupation (Fasset Learnership Information, 2003:3).

In terms of Section 36 (2) (3) and (3) (4) of the SDA, employers have an obligation to choose an appropriately registered training provider and to negotiate, in conjunction with the learner and training provider, the time frame, location and mode of delivery and assessment related to the learnership. The employer is also obliged to ensure that the learner is able to learn in a supportive work environment with appropriate facilities and that the learner has adequate supervision and mentoring in the workplace, while appropriate assessment is conducted on-the-job.

Every learnership programme should be related to a specific occupation. As Lundall (2003:15) states “learnerships are spread over a number of NQF levels ranging from levels in further education to levels in higher education and, although related to apprenticeship agreements in form, are entirely different in their content and coverage of learning requirements and are ultimately determined through the exhibition of a specified competence from the learner”.

Figure 3.1 below depicts the process applied when designing and implementing a learnership. It is important to note the last step in the process, which requires that continuous monitoring and evaluation is performed in order to ensure that quality is not compromised at any stage (Fasset Learnership Information, 2003:12).

**Figure 3.1: Learnership Design Registration and Implementation**



Source: Fasset Learnership Information Guide (2003:12)

### 3.3 Integration of theory and practice

Hattingh (2004:5) clarifies that “learnerships can be implemented in any occupation where work-based learning paths are viable, as learners have to demonstrate their competence by applying what they have learnt in the workplace”. Of further significance is the major focus of learnerships on vocational employment-oriented learning, which is particularly suitable for learners who require mentoring and guidance in applying learning to the workplace.

For the individual learner, the learnership should have far reaching consequential benefits, since it culminates in a certificate, which is both portable and can serve as a building block, which is incorporated within the NQF as a registered qualification. Hence, it contributes towards one of the major objectives of the skills development strategy, namely “to provide a wide

variety of routes to qualification through appropriate articulation that facilitates optimal mobility while ensuring standards are maintained” (Bellis, 2000:20).

However, problems with coordination between theory obtained in the classroom environment, offered by an accredited training provider and practical experience offered by an employer, has proved difficult to operationalise. Integration of application of theory, in its simplest forms, require a huge amount of planning and design with regard to course content, learning material and appropriate assessments, amongst others (Du Toit, Serfontein & Dealers, 2005:13). Presently, these practices and coordinated management thereof are not being realised and have been identified as some of the biggest shortfalls in learnership programmes.

One programme, which seems to be having a positive impact in terms of applying theory to practice, is in the New Venture Creation Entrepreneurial Skills Learnership (Pretorius & Wlodarczyk, 2007:505-506; Buys & Havenga, 2006:36). Pretorius and Wlodarczyk (2007:505-506), in an evaluatory report, claims that the tangible learning aspects of the curriculum, which involves “the actual start-up of a real business venture in the learning process is in line with the strategic intent of the NSDS”, which requires that learners are able to actually create a business, which serves as the experiential component of the programme as learners have a tangible outcome, which they can build on in future. Despite these, learner attrition rates, as with several learnership programmes, seem to present a problem for training providers and other stakeholders in the programme (Pretorius & Wlodarczyk, 2007: 505).

### **3.3.1 Theoretical component of learnership programmes**

The skills development regime has placed workplace learning at the core of the training provider. Learnership programmes, which is one of the most important vehicles in the workplace, offers learners an opportunity to enter structured learning programmes that result in a portable credit building certification programme (Bisschoff & Govender, 2004:70).

The training provider is, therefore, obliged to ensure delivery of quality training, which uses relevant, developmental, outcomes-based course material in learnership programmes. Hence the training provider should evaluate the performance of the learner in terms of concordant and appropriate, unbiased assessment criteria (Coetzee, 2002: xiii).

One of the requirements for offering learnership training that is recognised by the skills development regime, is accreditation of trainers, and the learning programmes that they offer. Due to the need for and scarcity of accredited training providers, anecdotal evidence suggests that an entrepreneurial development has given rise to providers that offer their services on a consultancy bases as separate business entities. This does not always bode well for learners, as private training providers (having the same objective as private business) will seek to enhance their profit margin at the expense of quality training (Coetzee, 2002:3).

Research conducted across all provinces during 2005 revealed that learners and training providers in classroom environments are faced with a myriad of challenges, which they should deal with (Du Toit *et al.*, 2005:22). Matching learners' level of qualification and interests to the specific learnership programme; taking into account learners who had not been previously exposed to a workplace; coping with misinformed learners who did not have sufficient information regarding the content and curriculum; were amongst some of the challenges faced by providers.

High expectations of learners regarding personal benefits, as well as attitudes of learners towards taking responsibility for learning, were also found to amongst issues that are faced by implementers (Du Toit *et al.*, 2005:23). Some learners felt that learnership programmes were misleading in their marketing messages, which result in them registering for a programme with misleading information, which, in turn, contribute to the high rate of learner turnover (Prodigy, 2005:7, in Pretorius *et al.*, 2007:526).

### **3.3.2 Practical workplace component of learnership programmes**

One of the major stumbling blocks in learnership programmes has been the lack of coordination, planning and commitment on the part of employers to implement learnerships at the workplaces (Singh, 2002:2; Jacklin, 2003:49). Singh (2002:2) found a linear relationship between an organisation's level of awareness and perceptions of organisations in term of propensity to implements learnership programmes. Organisations with high awareness of learnership programmes as a method of skills development would obviously be more prone to positive perceptions of benefits of implementing learnerships as a developmental tool for employees, and be aware of concomitant benefits for the organisation. Despite incentives that are offered to organisations for implementing learnerships, there still seems to be a lack of commitment from most organisations (Jacklin, 2003:49). Singh (2002:2) maintains that the Departments of Education and Labour should take responsibility to ensure that organisations understand the importance, as well as the benefits for business and individuals that participate in such skills development at the workplace.

Billett (2001:1) regards workplace learning as a responsibility of both the learner and the organisation, but places ownership with the organisation to offer the necessary support and guidance in the workplace. Workplaces, he maintains, should afford opportunities to learners to participate in work activities and should offer support to learners. Only then, according to Billett (2001:1), can quality of learning take place.

According to Hattingh (2004:16), the uniqueness of learnerships, as opposed to other forms of learning, can be described as being "structured [programme] in that they contain a specific range of learning in the workplace and with a training provider". Hattingh (2004:9) emphasizes the importance of structuring learnerships and states that workplace learning should not be limited to a narrow range of general tasks such as filing or other unpleasant tasks.

Learnerships should be collaborative in its planning between the training provider and the workplace provider. These parties should jointly decide on the



most appropriate method to achieve desired outcomes, as well as the structuring of workplace experience according to specific unit standards, outcomes and, ultimately, the learnership programme in its entirety.

There should be planned and managed integration between learning and application to ensure a direct correlation between what is learnt and what is practiced. Decisions concerning what learners will learn from a training provider, as well as in the workplace, should be clearly stipulated and relevant to the workplace, the learner's qualification and the world of work, in general.

Part of the workplace experience should include appropriate assessment of learners to evaluate and ensure that learners are competent and are able to perform the specific tasks and skills that are acquired. Whereas the training provider would assess the theoretical aspects of the learnership programme, the employer is responsible for assessing practical aspects of the learning programme. Coetzee (2002:136) explains that assessment will only improve learning when it provides a multidimensional picture of what learners know and can do. Therefore, this implies that assessment of learners on a learnership programme will include being assessed at both the workplace by an employer and in the classroom by a training provider.

Billet (2001:209) maintains that workplace learning can only be effective where support, guidance, opportunities and access to resources are part of a coordinated plan which is specifically designed for learners. Research conducted by Billett identified and confirmed that the readiness of the enterprise to accommodate learners in the form of appropriate activities and guidance, is a crucial indicator of learner development. He (Billet, 2001:209) moreover maintains that opportunities for participation in the workplace further entrenched the quality of learning and development for individual learners.

Hattingh (2004:9) stresses that the role of the learner should be clearly understood as that of a learner and not an employee who is studying for a course, while continuing to work in a regular job. The learner should, therefore, be afforded an opportunity to "focus their attention and energy on learning,

without being distracted by urgent office tasks that force most full-time employed learners to do the best they can with study assignments, given everyday work pressures”.

The integration of application of learning in the workplace should be continuous and not at the end of a period of, for example, six months as this could give rise to unlearning owing to time delays between theory and application (Hattingh, 2004:9). However, despite explicit guidelines concerning the duration and location of various learning components, Lundall (2003:6) cites major problems amongst employers as he believes that employers are not willing to enter into agreements with educational or governmental organisations to coordinate learning and workplace experience for learners.

Billett (2001:209) argues that workplaces that have planned strategies for their workplace learning programmes will typically afford learners opportunities for learning. Organisations that offer learning opportunities should ensure offered guidance and support as the workplace should form the core learning environment in any vocational training programme. Billett iterates the importance of the workplace in guided learning, citing various workplaces ((Billett, 1998; Billett, 2000) in Billett, 2001:209) where strategies such as modelling, coaching and opportunities to question, identified these factors as key features for quality learning and development of learners.

He further states that “readiness is more than preparedness for guided learning to proceed. It also includes norms and work practices that constitute invitational qualities for individuals to participate in and learn through work. The degree by which workplaces provide rich learning outcomes through daily activities and intentional interventions will be determined, at least in part, by its readiness to afford opportunities and support for learning” (Billett, 2001:210).

In several instances, employers were not aware of requirements for successful implementation (Du Toit *et al.*, 2005:13). Learners’ perceptions, however, were positive in terms of appropriateness of the workplace venue and to the theoretical classroom content (Du Toit *et al.*, 2005:24).

### **3.4 Learner expectations**

It is apparent that provider stakeholders in several instances do not take cognizance of learner expectations and perceptions. The State of Skills report of 2006 – 2007 elaborates on learner intake, but does not report on throughput rates. To enable improvement, an analysis regarding learners' reasons for leaving the programme and their attitudes towards the programme would be useful (Department of Labour; NSDS, 2006/7:50).

People will generally enter an educational programme with some expectation of benefits that they will derive from this programme (Vroom, 1964 in Bergh & Theron, 2007:160). Vroom, when postulating his expectancy theory, believed that people are motivated by the expectations of beneficial outcomes for the individual. In most cases these benefits are tangible and intangible by nature. Robbins explains Vroom's theory by stating that "... the strength of a tendency to act in a certain way depends on the strength of an expectation that the act will be followed by a given outcome and on the attractiveness of that outcome to the individual (Robbins 2003:173). This relates to the fact that learners are eager to enrol for the learnership and have high expectations of the benefits they will experience once they have completed the programme.

Tangible rewards, in the form of a certificate, will form part of the reason why people enrol for programmes such as learnerships. These could further translate into rewards that are obtained through employment which is received as a result of the qualification or increased income which is obtained through promotion at the workplace (Theron in Bergh & Theron, 2007:161). Further rewards could be considered in the form of confidence gained and self esteem acquired. The latter refers to intangible, but equally important, benefits. With this in mind, this study explored learners' perceptions regarding their expectations during attendance of a learnership programme and then again sought to correlate these results once they had completed the learnership programme.

A positive example in point is the learnership programme offered by the Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunications Technologies SETA (ISETT SETA) which purports to equip learners with skills which they can be applied to launch their careers by marketing themselves with confidence. The learners are also encouraged to become self employed by offering their computer programming skills to the market through entrepreneurial endeavours (Anon, 2007:16).

### **3.5 Learnership outcomes**

Some of the most important principles of training, according to Glueck, Davies and Nadler (in van Dyk *et al.*, 2001:150), follows that “all people are capable of learning [therefore] any normal person can learn something at any time in his or her life. [However] because people differ we do not all have the same approach to learning”.

Adult learners, as is the case with learners in the workplace, perceive and experience learning in different ways. “Adults are motivated to learn when they experience a need to know or do something in order to perform more effectively [therefore] learning must be useful to enable them to perform a task or to solve a problem, to be applied in the near future” (Geldenhuis & Ngokha, in Bergh & Theron, 2007:106). “Some of the most common complaints of learners [enrolled in learnership programmes] are that they experience study material as not having any practical value, that they are compelled to attend a course ... that they consider as irrelevant, and that the quality of the course material, presentation or training techniques...” are often not well linked to actual skills that are required for the job. (Geldenhuis & Ngokha, in Bergh & Theron, 2007:100-101). Du Toit *et al.* (2005:10) found that more than a quarter of the learners had not selected the specific learnership that they were enrolled for, but were placed, without little or knowledge of the content of the learnership, by training providers who operate the learnership. Other problems identified that learners were not matched to the NQF level of the learnership, which means that learners were either over qualified or under qualified for the learnership that they were entered (Du Toit *et al.* 2005:10).

“Outcomes-Based Education and Training, essentially implies that everything in the educational and training system focuses on what is essential for the learner to be able to do at the end of their learning experiences” (van Dyk, Nel *et al.* 2001:150).

The learnership programme, which is based on principles of outcomes-based education and training, requires that learners attend a theoretical learning experience, which is matched with a practical component, sometimes referred to as ‘on-the-job training’. Some learners are able to grasp theory and practical and immediately adapt to the programme, while others, especially those who have not been in a learning environment in recent past, find the learning more difficult to grasp (Cowley, 2002:2).

According to Hattingh (2004:9-10), “all learning, including that, which results from practical application and workplace experience, should be focused on achieving the outcomes specified. The purpose of the workplace experience is, therefore, clearly described and is not only to get a feel for how things work in practice, or to gain experience in some general selected tasks, which are randomly selected by the learner’s supervisor or mentor”... “the assessment of outcomes is based both on the institutional learning and the workplace application. Therefore, the learnership will have to give evidence of what was learnt, as well as of the ability to apply that learning in the real world of work”.

While the focal point of this research is not to study andragogy and expound on the theories of adult learning or outcomes-based education, it is nevertheless considered important to associate factors that motivate adult learners to succeed and complete a training intervention. As adult learners are the subject of workplace learning it is necessary to link the learning principles of outcomes based education and training in order to show that these aspects form part of the learnership programme.

Billet (1994:15) emphasizes that in order to accomplish success with workplace learning the workplace has to adopt an environment conducive to learning. He

accentuates the point that “learning arrangements require access to activities and guidance within a culture of vocational practice ...”. This further stresses the importance and the need for vocational expertise as a pivotal success factor in workplace learning.

The SDA prescribes rights and obligations of the learner (s 36 (2) (1) and (3) (1)) in terms of the right to adequate access to resources, quality training, proper assessment and certification on completion of the learnership agreement. The learner is obliged to work for the employer as part of the learning process and to comply with all workplace policies and procedures, which are set by the employer. The learner is also obliged to avail him/herself for work and study as and when required, to attend all training courses offered and to apply him/herself diligently to tasks that are set by the employer and or training provider.

Reports on private individuals who currently attend learnership programmes offer a non-specific view of the actual programmes that they attend. A case in point is a reported interview with a learner who had entered into a learnership programme with an insurance company under the Financial and Accounting Services SETA, (Anon, 2004b). The learner gave his job description as consisting mainly of general office administration as a bookings clerk in the company’s Business School.

Another example cited was in the Banking SETA where a learner gave her job description as organising travel arrangements for employees at the bank that employed her (Anon, 2004c). These job descriptions seem too generic and mostly offer general administrative and clerical skills that are not specific to particular industries. Another concern is that persons who registered for learnerships do not complete the programmes.

In a recent report, Lundall (in Anon 2004a), a senior researcher in skills development at the University of Cape Town, states that he is “convinced that there is a breakdown developing between the levels of learnerships registered and the level of completion rates”, which, he claims, are hovering at the 10%

mark. Similarly, the NSDS Implementation Report for April 2002 to March 2003 reported that a mere 15.8% of registered learners completed their learnerships during this period (Anon, 2004a).

Further research conducted by Lundall (in Letsoalo, 2007:1), cites ongoing problems with quality of learnership programme delivery. Lundall alludes to these problems by noting that "...the system is working inefficiently and the notion of excellence and learning progression that we all aspire to, is merely rhetoric".

### **3.6 Employability and sustainable livelihood**

Rosove (1982:114, in Cotton, 2001:7) refers to work as being "of central importance to the well-being of people in our society" and emphasises the importance of government's responsibility to ensure that its workforce is equipped with necessary skills to enable them to enter the labour market and to earn a wage in order to enjoy a sustainable livelihood.

Whereas employment refers to an individual having a job, employability means that one has the essential qualities needed to find employment, to keep such employment, to advance in the workplace through promotion and to be able to seek and obtain new employment where necessary (Bhaerman & Spill, 1988:42-42 in Cotton, 2001:6). Employability is about obtaining employment and being able to improve one's position while in employment (Hillage and Pollard, 1998:2). In so doing, an individual is able to earn an income and improve his or her standard of living.

Employability, according to Hillage and Pollard (1998:1), can be defined as "a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required". In order to ensure employability, relevant skills, knowledge and experience should be acquired through access to education and training (Hillage & Pollard, 1998:1).

Through the medium of learnership programmes, the NSDS has, as a prioritised objective (Department of Labour, NSDS 2005:10), the aim of “promoting employability and sustainable livelihoods through skills development”. These objectives are primarily aimed at marginalised unemployed people in the labour market, considering South Africa’s legacy and related issues of poverty and inequality (Barker, 2003:3).

The NSDS (Department of Labour, NSDS 2005:10) further clarifies this statement by clearly quantifying its objective stating its measurement of success appraised by 2010, when a majority of unemployed people should have received training. The strategy consequently elaborates that at least 70% of people who received accredited training should be placed in formal employment; be self-employed or should be engaged in further studies. Davies and Farquharson (2004:181) consider achievement of these objectives through learnership programmes, which will allow for “fast-tracking the acquisition of skills and increasing a learner's chances of employment”.

The system of learnerships seeks to eradicate the legacy of under-skilled workers and its consequent inheritance of high levels of unemployed people in South African society. Learnerships are hence viewed as a central mechanism for achieving this transformation. The SDS (Section 2) places learnership programmes at the helm of correcting the skills deficit by the year 2010.

Albeit that this study takes a premature view of this situation, as it was undertaken prior to the 2010 objective date, it is considered imperative that skills acquisition is able to translate into enhanced employability and improved livelihoods as a matter of urgency.

### **3.7 Learnership programmes as a mechanisms for improved employability**

A learnership is seen as a mechanism, which will fast track the dilemma related to a dire lack of skills in the workforce, and has been heralded as the answer to the skills deficit problem in South Africa.



Learnerships are proposed to play a significant role in affording learners access to education and training in the workplace and, subsequently, increasing their employability (Burns & Marshall, 2004:185; Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005:537). Learnerships are also projected as an opportunity and an enabler to facilitate a culture of continued education and skills acquisition, and, consequently, contribute to principles of lifelong learning.

Technology and its resultant revolutionary changes to traditional work practices have demanded that workers are equipped with skills beyond routine, repetitive production lines that are historically found in factory environments (Lankard, 1990 in Cotton, 2001:6). Almost all contemporary work processes require that employees are able to operate computerised machinery and equipment. This, in itself, presents a challenge for employers to ensure that their current workforce is sufficiently skilled to meet requirements of a technology driven workplace. Packer (1992, in Cotton, 2001:6) believes that skills that are required by employees are an imperative for employers, who, in order to survive in today's competitive market should utilise their workers skills to "relentlessly pursue excellence, product quality, and customer satisfaction."

Furthermore, considering the almost unique situation within which the South African workforce has been historically entrenched, implementation of an accelerator in the form of learnership programmes was seen as a solution to the high levels of workers who are found lacking in employability skills (Jacklin, 2003:47; Department of Labour, 2008).

The Department of Labour, as part of its Skills Development Strategy, reiterates its imperatives by stating that "...promoting a strong skills base, high rates of human development, and a well-functioning labour market, are essential components of a strategy to attract new labour-using investment. It is these same attributes that enable people to more fully participate in the labour market by identifying opportunities, whether in finding jobs or generating self-employment" (Department of Labour; Learnership website).

### **3.8 Concluding remarks**

This chapter reviewed and discussed related literature in terms of reported challenges and successes with regard to learnerships and offered a perspective of the notion of enhanced employability of learners.

Since the recent inception of learnership programmes in South Africa, a proliferation of studies have, and are, currently being undertaken, which examines perceptions of various stakeholders that are engaged in the learnership programmes (Fester, 2006:9; Graham, 2004:1) however, a limited number of theoretical and empirical studies and references are made to experiences of learners who enrolled in these programmes.

Cognizance should be taken of individual learners' perceptions of personal benefits of enrolment, as it is vitally important for potential learners to perceive the learnership as a viable option for future education and training. Especially as the learnership is seen to be a vehicle for equipping the labour force with much needed skills, not only as a benefit towards a prosperous economy at macro level but, equally importantly, as a means to educate the, up to now, poorly skilled individual at micro level.

Current challenges that learnership programmes face, clearly identify stakeholder abilities, their obsession with quotas instead of quality and excellence in learning programmes, and learnership curriculum as major concerns.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH PLAN AND DESIGN

#### 4.1 Introduction

Efficacy of learnership programmes is reliant on the contribution of a number of important stakeholders from policy implementation to learner beneficiaries. Best practice dictates that strategies relating to Human Resources and specifically Human Resource Development, are enhanced when all stakeholders are able to offer their perceived opinions with regard to efficacy of such programmes (Skinner, Saunders & Beresford, 2004:185). In the context of this study, stakeholders that were researched are learners enrolled in learnership programmes.

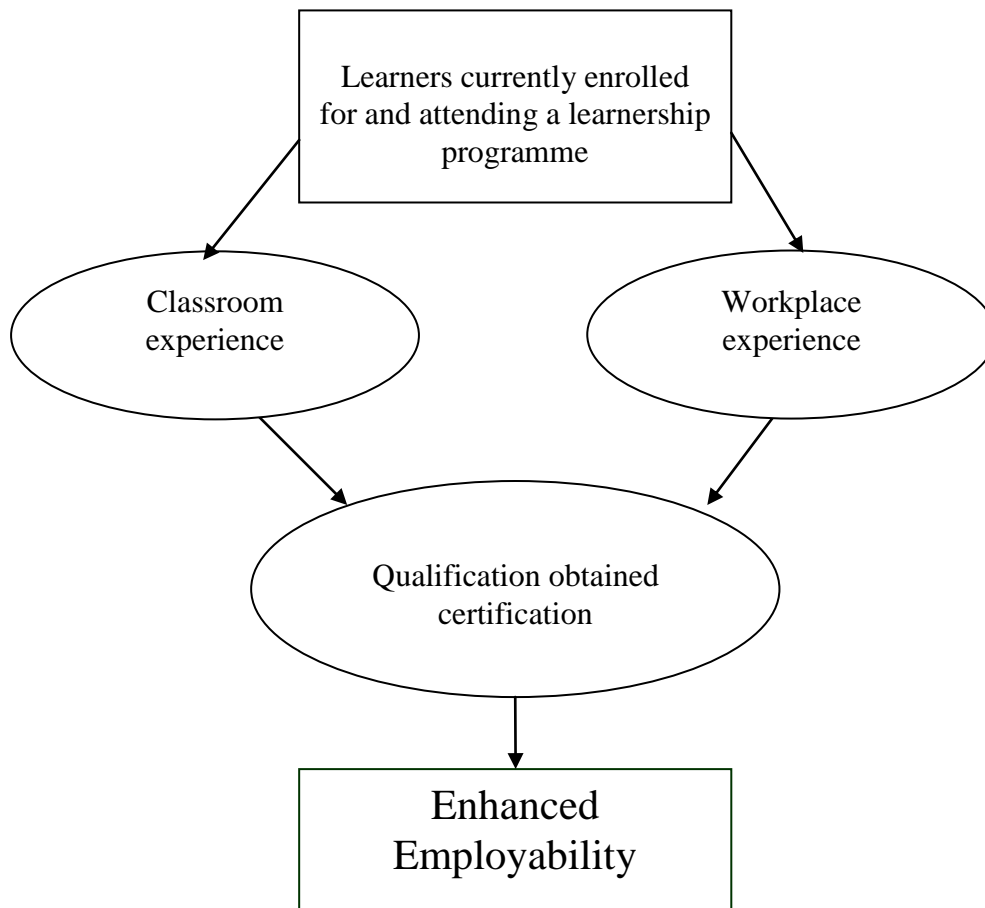
Students, on entering a learning programme, which offers a certificated qualification, have certain expectations with regard to the value of such programmes to enhance their current lifestyle. Learnerships, as learning programmes which offer a qualification in the form of a certificate, are no different.

Learners who engaged in learnership programmes have high expectations when enrolling for these programmes, especially with regard to benefits that are offered by learnership providers. These benefits, amongst others, propose to increase employability and, consequently, improve learners' living standards once they have acquired a certificate upon completion. Contemporary research, with regard to perceptions of learners enrolled in learnership programmes in the South African context, are limited and no specific study at a national level has been found, which specifically focuses on the investigation of this problem.

Employability is dependant on the level of knowledge, skills and attitudes that work seekers (in this event, the learners) have acquired (Hillage & Billett, 1998: 4). This study set out to investigate learners' perceptions during their experience and enrolment in a learnership programme; and thereafter, on

completion of such a programme, with specific reference to their consequent employability status and improved living standards, once they obtained a certificate on completion of the learnership programme. The layout and areas of study are depicted as a schematic diagram in Figure 4.1 below.

**Figure 4.1 Schematic outline of the conceptual framework for the study**



The literature study in the previous chapter sets the framework for research methods that were applied in this study. This chapter provides a description of the research methodology, the research design and the procedure, which was applied in this study. It also explains the scope and delimitations of the study and concludes by offering a brief description of data analysis methods, which are employed in this study. Results and interpretation of the data is presented in Chapter Five.

## **4.2 Purpose of the study**

As the study sought to describe the experiences of learners' perceptions while enrolled in a learnership programme, the study was found to be descriptive in nature (Terre Blanche *et. al.*, 2002:38).

The objectives of this study were to examine whether learners' expectations are being met in terms of their individual expectations of learnership programmes; what learners' experiences and perceptions are of attending a learnership programme; to explore reasons for entering into the learnership programme; to examine learners' experiences while attending classroom and workplace learning; and to examine learners' attitudes regarding benefits of learnership programmes for personal future gains.

The study was conducted to investigate perceptions of learners who enrolled in a learnership programme, and was conducted over a period of twelve months during the periods 2007 to 2008. Based on a literature review of previous studies done on stakeholders' perceptions and semi-structured interviews conducted with three SETA representatives and training providers (MAPPSETA, TETA SETA AND MERSETA), this study sought to explore perceptions of learners, by using a questionnaire.

### **The questionnaire contained the following sections:**

(refer to Appendix A on page 193)

#### **Biographical information**

Knowledge of the learnership, which was attended (name of learnership; level at which learnership is registered on the NQF; duration of the learnership) and work experience and current job title (Question 1).

#### **Prior work experience**

Learner work situation prior to joining the learnership and motivation for joining the learnership (seeking information on reasons for joining a learnership and

reason for choice of the specific learnership that they are currently enrolled in) (Questions 2 and 3).

### **Prior knowledge and expectations of learnerships**

Learners' knowledge regarding learnership programmes, in general (Questions 4 and 5). Learners' expectations before starting the learnership programme (Question 6).

### **Learner recruitment experience**

Learners' experience when applying for the learnership (Question 7).

### **Learner experience in learnership programme**

Learners' experience when commencing the learnership programme (Question 8). Learners' experiences regarding availability or training facilitators (Question 9).

Availability of mentors; coaches; supervisors and resources for learners while attending the learnership in the classroom and at the workplace (Question 10).

Learners' experience and opinions regarding classroom based learning in terms of ability to grasp and understand theory and ability of training facilitators to offer training (Question 11). Learners' experience in terms of workplace learning and whether it is related to the theory that is offered in the classroom (Question 12). Availability of a mentor and/or supervisor in the workplace (Question 13).

### **Learner future plans for personal development**

Learners' future intentions and perceptions of benefits of programme towards improving current job status and for further personal development (Question 14).

## **4.3 Research problem**

Recent implementation of learnership programmes in South Africa has seen a proliferation of studies that focused on perceptions of management and provider stakeholders that are involved in learnership programmes, but have

not seen any focus on perceptions of individual beneficiaries, namely the learners themselves. In order to build best practice and ensure ongoing quality improvements in learnership programmes, it is important that all stakeholders, role players and participants in the programme are offered an opportunity to articulate their personal experiences and perceptions.

Learners are often not afforded an opportunity to express their experiences, opinions and feelings regarding challenges and successes that are encountered while enrolled for a learnership programme. While policy makers use various best practice systems to implement programmes such as learnerships, they often neglect to factor in the end-users' or ultimate beneficiaries in such programmes. Since the input of learners enrolled in a learnership programme can be used as a measure of success or failure of the programme, engaging learners to participate and offer them an opportunity for meaningful feedback of their experiences in the programme, are critical factors for the success and improvement of the infancy stages of learnership programmes for the future.

Given the vast amount of resources and collaborative planning required as investment in implementation, administration and processes required of learnership programmes, and, most importantly, the need to improve skills development in the country, it is imperative that all parties are given a voice. By the same token, the subject of learnership programmes are complex, and demands a huge amount of collaborative processes and interrelated mechanisms, hence any empirical research is best limited to one aspect of the learnership programme.

#### **4.4 Objectives of the study**

Primary objectives of this study were to explore the perceptions of learners who were currently enrolled in a learnership programme.

Secondary objectives were to: explore learners' experiences during enrolment; and investigate whether individuals' future plans are aligned to the initial objectives of the programme stemming from objectives of the NSDS.

This study sought to investigate experiences and perceptions of learners, while enrolled in a learnership programme, by exploring:

- learners' perceptions prior to enrolling for the learnership;
- learners' status prior to enrolling;
- learners' motivation for joining;
- learners' experiences during attendance;
- learners' intended goals and objectives for their future; and
- future plans of learners once they complete.

By investigating and exploring learner perceptions, one could establish whether the NSDS learnerships are delivering in terms of the benefits that it expounds to the learners who undertake this form of vocational training and development in the workplace.

## **4.5 Research design**

In order to provide a framework for an empirical study, a mixed methods strategy was adopted, as this approach was believed to best serve the objectives of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:4). Using a mixed methods approach, data was collected at two points during the duration of the learnership. The research commenced with quantitative survey questionnaires, followed by qualitative focus group interviews.

### **4.5.1 Formulation of the research question**

The main research question sought to investigate perceptions of learners with regard to their perceived benefits of learnerships for their future individual development in education and training.



The central research question for the study sought to address the following:  
What are learners' perceptions of the learnership programme that they had enrolled for?

The sub-questions were:

- What motivated the learner to enter the learnership programme?
- What are learners' experiences while attending classroom based (theoretical) learning?
- What are learners' experiences of the work-based (practical) learning component that is required in learnership programmes?
- Are classroom (theory) and work-based (practical) learning linked?
- What are learners' perceived benefits of the learnership programme for their own future personal development?

**Questions under investigation centred on:**

- learners' perceptions of benefits of learnerships prior to entering the programme;
- establishing whether information communicated during the recruitment process is understood by the target audience;
- learners' experience while attending the learning programme in order to establish whether outcomes based education is applied, as prescribed by SAQA guidelines for quality training and education; and the
- perceived benefits of attending a learnership programme, so as to establish whether learnerships are deemed by beneficiaries (learners) as a viable form of acquiring education, training and a qualification to enhance their personal growth and lifestyle.

Where learners are not well matched to the level of a learning programme, namely either under-qualified or, conversely, over-qualified; their experiences and subsequent perceptions could result in negative consequences. This, in turn, will cause learners to be demotivated to work towards successful completion or leave the programme before completion.

## **4.6 Research methodology**

As previously mentioned, multi-strategy approach (Bryman, 2004:454), which is also referred to as mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:23) was adapted for this study. A mixed method allowed for greater prominence of the strengths of the data collection and data analysis techniques (Bryman, 2004:454). According to Bryman (2004:454), the technical version, unlike the epistemological approach, sees multi-method research as being able to enhance reliability and validity of data in a complimentary and supportive manner rather than being seen as incompatible, as believed by proponents of purist paradigms.

Data was therefore collected for analysis both during and after participants had attended the learnership programme.

### **4.6.1 Research paradigm**

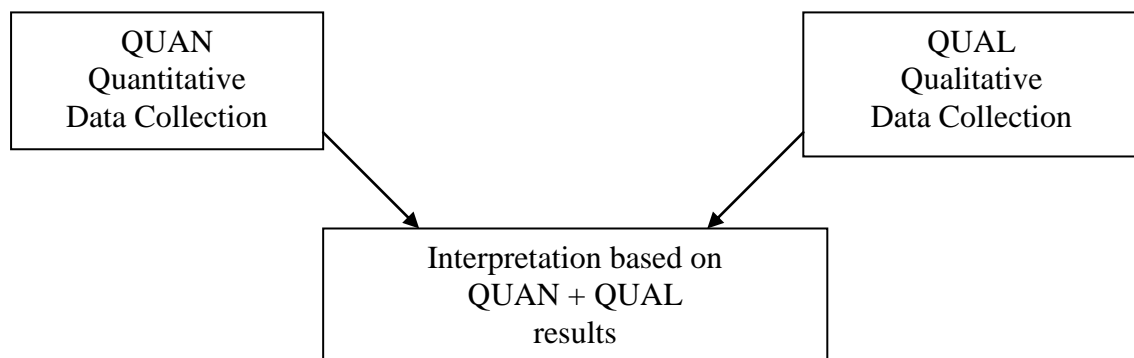
Mixed methods research is immersed in differing paradigms and positions itself in a world view, which is regarded as pragmatism (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:23), which argues from an ontological perspective, maintaining that multiple realities exist and that multiple ideas, which include using what works, will evidently offer multiple perspectives of reality. According to Creswell *et al.* (2007:27), mixed methods research values both objective and subjective knowledge, therefore embracing deductive and inductive processes (Cherryholmes, 1992; Murphy, 1990; and Rory, 1990, in Creswell *et al.*, 2007:27). Toshakorri and Teddlie (2003a) in Creswell *et al.*, (2007:26) argue for a mixed methods approach, labelling pragmatism as a practical and applied research philosophy, [which] should guide methodological choices.

### **4.6.2 Mixed methods approach**

Mixed methods research uses both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures, taking its perspective from different world-views or paradigms in positivism, as well as constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 2000;

Creswell 2003 in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:23). Creswell *et al.*, (2007:5) and Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002:431) maintains that mixing quantitative and qualitative data in a single study, also often referred to as methodological triangulation, will offer a far better understanding; present convergent evidence when applying different methods of data collection; and lend credibility to the construct validity of the research problem, rather than when using either one approach on its own. According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:143), 'measurement reactivity', in cases where subjective constructs such as attitudes and perceptions are variables that are measured, could be subject to 'faking' or 'acquiescence' on the part of participants. This then further argues for the value of using triangulation methodology in order to strengthen the outcomes of the study. For this study the mixed methods approach that was applied and assumed the format as illustrated in Figure 4.2 below.

**Figure: 4.2 Triangulation Design**



Source: Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007:63

#### **4.6.3 Quantitative methodology**

The initial method of data collection utilized a quantitative method by way of a survey questionnaire. Using descriptive methods of presentation, results of the data are portrayed in tabular and graphic format.

#### **4.6.3.1 Survey questionnaire**

Questionnaires are well suited to gathering reliable subjective measures such as stakeholder perceptions, experiences and expectations of a learning encounter in question (McNamara, 1999:1). Questionnaires are also found to be “an efficient data collection mechanism when the researcher knows exactly what is required and how to measure the variable of interest” (Sekaran, 2000:233). Further reasons for using questionnaires are that they are considered to be easy to administer and allows one to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. McNamara (1999:1) stresses the importance of maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, as participants were encouraged to give their honest opinions regarding their personal feelings and experiences, which could cause learners to encounter feelings of intimidation. In this instance, therefore, confidentiality was necessary to ensure that participants respond honestly.

For this study, questionnaires were administered to 124 participants. Participants were addressed during classroom time. The purpose of the study and the procedure were explained to participants who were then requested to complete the questionnaire.

The sample that was used to administer the questionnaire was based on learners who were accessible and available (Mantzopoulos, 1995:169) during the period of study and, consequently, included learners who enrolled in various learnership programmes, registered at the time with various SETAs throughout the area. While it was not possible to obtain a broader distribution of learners across a wider spectrum of the 23 registered SETAs, nine different learnership programme coordinators conceded to participate in the study, which represented a spread over seven different SETAs. A total of one hundred and twenty-three ( $n = 123$ ) learners completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was handed to learners during a contact session with a training provider. The purpose of the study, as well as the questionnaire, was explained to learners, while they were encouraged to ask questions where needed. Learners were thereafter afforded sufficient time to complete the questionnaires, which allowed for a 100% response rate (Sarantakos, 2000:223-243). As a result, all

questionnaires, with the exception of one questionnaire which was incomplete, were usable for this study.

#### **4.6.4 Qualitative methodology**

In order to gain more in-depth knowledge about learner perceptions, expectations and experiences, the study was further complimented with qualitative data collection by way of focus group interviews (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002:399; Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:188).

##### **4.6.4.1 Focus Group Interviews**

To facilitate a greater degree of reliability for data collection and in line with triangulation methodology (as demonstrated in Figure 4.2 on page 76), the latter part of the data collection was conducted by using focus group interviews. Focus group interviews are considered an efficient means to obtain a range and depth of information in a relatively short time (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2002:11; Mc Namarra, 1999:1).

Focus groups consist of a group of individuals who have experienced commonality through a specific encounter (Powell & Single, 1996:499; Terre Blanche, 2002: 388), and in this case the group members attended a learnership programme together. Focus group interviews allowed an in-depth exploration through group interaction and discussion, which permitted participants an opportunity to express their feelings and experiences in an open, honest, candid and secure environment (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002:388; Mc Namarra, 1999:1).

Kitzinger (1995:1) maintains that focus groups enable group dynamics, which can facilitate a non-threatening environment where people in groups are allowed to “explore and clarify their views” in a discussion by using their own language and, consequently, generating their own questions, which often leads the research to enter into new unpredicted trends and themes.

Focus group interviews explore a specific set of issues that exploits the interaction within the group discussion to elicit information, which can be applied as research data (Kitzinger, 1994:103-104) and "... capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data" (Kitzinger, 1995:299). Focus group methodology, as a qualitative method was, therefore, found to be the best strategy to obtain in-depth information and encourage dynamic discussion between participants who had participated in the initial survey questionnaire and had, subsequently, completed the learnership programme.

The interviews were conducted between three and six months after the learners had completed the learnership programme. Only learners who had completed the programme were considered for the focus group interviews. This was necessary in order to establish factors that are associated with learners' perceptions and to seek information on their actual status with regard to employability and living standards once they successfully completed the programme and acquire the necessary certification.

After a period of a few months, and once learners had completed the learnership programmes, convenience sampling was applied resulting in 39 learners being invited to attend a focus group interview and 19 learners attending the interviews. The sample of learners who attended the interview was drawn from the original list of participants who completed the questionnaire. This was necessary to ensure authenticity of participants who originally engaged in the study.

Three groups consisting of between five and seven participants attended the interview sessions. Refer to Table 4.3 on page 84 for a breakdown of attendees of the focus group interviews.

#### **4.7 Research population**

Learnerships have been established across all sectors in South Africa. Various industry sectors were divided into twenty-six main operational or industrial

activities. The study was conducted in the province of the Western Cape and was focused in the Cape Peninsula region.

The population consists of all learners enrolled in a learnership programme during the period September 2007 and December 2008. A representative value of the total population was not possible to establish as statistics for currently operating learnership programmes were not available from the Department of Labour at the time of conducting the study. Earlier statistics, published during 2005 by the Department of Labour, reported a figure of approximately 511 active learnerships, which represents about 64% of the target set by the NSDS. The national statistic for learners enrolled in a learnership was reported to be in excess of 170, 000 with approximately 64% declared as unemployed (Department of Labour; (NSDS 2001-2005) State of Skills in SA: 2006:37-38). This figure however does not make a distinction for various provinces and was, therefore, not possible to draw any meaningful representivity percentiles from these statistics. Statistics for 2006 to 2008 were not available at the time.

#### **4.8 Sampling procedure**

The following sampling procedures were applied for the quantitative and subsequent qualitative collection of data.

##### **4.8.1 Quantitative procedure**

Using non-probability convenience sampling, a total of seven SETAs were identified. Meetings were conducted with these SETA Managers to explain the purpose of the study and to establish whether learnership programmes were currently being offered within their SETA. Permission was then sort to conduct the study. The SETA managers willingly provided contact details of training providers who were currently offering learnership programmes.

The training providers were contacted to arrange meetings and to explain the purpose of the study. Further permission was then sought from training providers to administer the survey. All training providers readily agreed to make

arrangements for learners to complete the questionnaire during their classroom contact periods. Eight learnership programmes based in seven SETAs were able to avail themselves to participate in the survey. Table 4.1 presents a breakdown of the surveyed learners according to their respective SETAs and illustrates their percentile representivity.

**Table 4.1 Number of learners surveyed according to SETAs (n = 123)**

<b>SETA</b>	<b>Number by SETA</b>	<b>% by SETA</b>
Clothing, Textile, Footwear & Leather (CTFLSETA)	54	44%
Education, Training & Development (ETDPSETA)	2	1%
Insurance (INSETA)	20	16%
Media, Advertising, Printing & Packaging (MAPPPSETA)	15	12%
Services SETA (SERVICESETA)	15	12%
Transport SETA (TETA)	8	7%
Wholesale & Retail (W&RSETA)	9	7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>

For the sake of clarity, it is worth noting that the Clothing Textile Footwear and Leather SETA (CTFL SETA), even though most representative in terms of the number of participants, constituted two separate learner groups that registered for vastly different learnership programmes. One programme offered a learnership in the Clothing Industry for Sewing Machine Operators at NQF Level 2, whereas the second learnership offered a course in Man Made Fibres at NQF Level 2. These learnership programmes had a total of 34 and 20 enrolled learners, respectively.

All participants present for lessons on the day were handed a questionnaire during classroom sessions. Personally administering the questionnaire was seen as advantageous to the collection and completion of survey data, and ensured a 100% response rate (Sekaran, 2000:234).

Cost and time constraints, as well as the need to collect data from as large a number of respondents as possible within a short period of time, formed part of the rationale to personally administer the questionnaires.



#### **4.8.2 Qualitative procedure**

Following from the quantitative questionnaire survey, participants were then selected to take part in a focus group interview. Participants for the focus group interviews were selected from the original list of participants' sample size (n = 123) who had completed the questionnaire. Table 4.2 on page 85 presents a comparative representation of the quantitative participants versus qualitative participants listed according to the SETAs.

Each training provider was contacted and the purpose and aims of the focus group interviews and need to obtain participant lists were carefully explained to each of them. Training providers were explicitly requested to send only the contact details of participants who had originally taken part in the survey questionnaire. Three training providers readily assisted with lists of contact details of learners.

Participant lists and contact details were obtained from the course co-ordinators based on the list of seven different SETA groups, which participated in completing the survey questionnaire. The researcher attempted to contact all the learners that were listed, however, some participants were unable to attend owing to work commitments, while others did not respond to the call, which could indicate that their contact numbers were either no longer being serviced or unsubscribed.

The lists contained learners' names, home addresses, and contact numbers. All listed participants were contacted. However, after several attempts and for various reasons, only a percentage of the listed participants were able to agree to attend a focus group meeting. For some of the contact numbers there was no reply; others, especially at home numbers, family members answered and said that the person was not available. Table 4.3 on page 85 gives a breakdown of participants who were contacted in comparison to the number of participants who were actually able to attend the sessions. Of the twenty who did not attend, fourteen (70%) participants did not answer their cell phones or home telephones. Most of the cell phone numbers had been discontinued. Of

the remaining six participants who did not attend, two participants said that they were currently employed and could not take time off work, and one participant's parent promised that he would call back to confirm the appointment and did not, while the remaining three agreed to attend, but did not arrive for the interviews. No reasons were sought for their non-attendance.

Participants who were available to attend were given a thorough explanation of the purpose of the group sessions, while participants were also notified of the approximate time frame for the sessions. The term 'interview' was avoided during the telephone conversion as some participants were not in full employment or were unemployed, and it was felt that the term 'interview' might mislead participants into conceiving the invitation as that of an interview for employment (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson, 2002; Krueger and Casey, 2000; Powell and Single, 1996:499).

Interview dates and times were based on learners' availability to attend at a given time and venue. As a result, three groups, which consisted of eight, seven and four learners, respectively, attended the focus group sessions. Refer to Table 4.3 on page 83 for a breakdown of the groups per SETA. The following SETAs formed part of the focus group interviews: Media and Advertising SETA (MAPPP); the Services SETA (SERVISETA); and the Insurance SETA (INSETA).

## **4.9 Sample size**

The sample size and breakdown of the groups for both the quantitative and qualitative study are explained below.

### **4.9.1 Quantitative sample size**

Participants for the initial stage of the research comprised of 124 enrolled learners registered in eight different learnership programmes across the Cape Peninsula.

A total of 124 survey questionnaires were completed. One questionnaire, however, was incomplete and was therefore eliminated from the study. As a result the sample size consisted of **one hundred and twenty three learners (n = 123)**.

#### 4.9.2 Qualitative sample size

The purposive method of sampling was used to identify three groups of learners for the focus group interview. Participants for the focus group interviews were selected from the total list of the original sample size of 123 participants who completed the questionnaire. Participant lists and contact details were obtained from course coordinators (training providers) based on the list of seven different SETA groups who originally participated in the survey questionnaires.

**Table 4.2 Participants included in quantitative and qualitative survey, according to SETAs:**

SETA	Quantitative Questionnaires	Qualitative Focus Group Interviews
Clothing, Textile, Footwear & Leather (CTFLSETA)	√	
Education, Training & Development (ETDPSETA)	√	
Insurance (INSETA)	√	√
Media, Advertising, Printing & Packaging (MAPPSETA)	√	√
Services SETA (SERVICESETA)	√	√
Transport SETA (TETA)	√	
Wholesale & Retail (W&RSETA)	√	

Interviews were conducted using structured questions which were mostly open-ended in order to obtain information and were arranged in a logical order. The questioning route commenced with general questions and escalated to more specific questions in order to find a range of opinions of people across different groups, and to reveal feelings, comments and thought processes of participants, whilst allowing for full participation of all group members (Powell &

Single, 1996:499). The duration of sessions were approximately three hours, which allowed the group at least twenty minutes to explore each question.

**Table 4.3 Breakdown of focus groups according to SETAs:**

<b>SETA</b>	<b>NO. OF LEARNERS CONTACTED</b>	<b>NO. OF LEARNERS ATTENDING</b>	<b>LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMME NAME</b>
MAPPPSETA	13	8	Digital Design Foundations
SERVICESETA	20	7	Entrepreneurial Skills - New Venture Creation
INSET	6	4	Financial Administration & Short Term Insurance
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>19</b>	

#### **4.10 Research procedure**

The procedures that were applied for both the quantitative and qualitative collection of data are described below.

##### **4.10.1 General**

For the survey data collection, questionnaires were distributed to all learners during classroom sessions. The researcher remained in the venue (classroom) while learners completed the questionnaire.

For the focus group interviews, meetings were held with three groups at separate times and venues.

##### **4.10.2 Research instruments**

The following section describes the instruments used for the quantitative and qualitative data collection.

###### **4.10.2.1 Survey questionnaire structure**

The questionnaire contained fourteen questions and was based on a similar study, which was conducted by the Human Science Research Council, South African Management Development Programme for Community Development

Workers (SAMDI, 2005). The questionnaire was adapted to the specific objectives and purpose of this study. Following from the quantitative survey, a qualitative focus group methodology was applied, where participants were drawn from the original sample of participants.

#### **4.10.2.2 Focus group interviews structure**

Logically structured, open-ended questions, which elicit explanation and description, were used (Krueger & Casey, 2000:41). Participants were seated around a table facing each other. A casual atmosphere was created by keeping initial conversations unstructured and relaxed. Also bearing in mind that learners had completed the learnership some months before (periods ranged between three and six months since completion).

#### **4.10.3 Survey questionnaire procedure**

The researcher met with the learners during their classroom sessions. Learners were introduced to the questionnaire by way of a short presentation, which explained reasons for the study, while at the same time offering an 'ice-breaking' effect. This method is found to be useful in cases where students who attended lower level programmes, felt threatened by supposed evaluation and assessment by an 'intruder', creating a threatening environment, which could ultimately impact negatively on the process of completing the questionnaire (Sekaran, 2000:234).

The learners were introduced to the research topic with a brief explanation of the background and purpose of the study. Learners were encouraged to ask questions regarding interpretation and understanding of the questions (Sekaran, 2000:234). The researcher explained the importance of honest feedback, while reiterating aspects of confidentiality and anonymity. This was done to encourage and motivate learners to complete the questionnaire as honestly as possible, bearing in mind the subjective nature of variables being tapped (Sekaran, 2000:235). This method also resulted in a hundred percent

return rate, as all the learners present during the session completed and handed back the questionnaires.

#### **4.10.4 Focus group interview procedure**

Participants were telephonically invited, and the purpose of the group sessions, were explained to them. Participants were also notified of the approximate time frame for the sessions. The term 'interview' was avoided during the telephone conversation as some of the participants are not in full employment or are currently unemployed and, it was felt that the term might mislead participants into conceiving the invitation as that of an interview for employment.

The questioning route commenced with general questions and escalated to more specific questions, which focused on a range of opinions of people across the different groups and to bring out feelings, comments and thoughts processes of all participants. Questions were aimed at encouraging participants to enter into discussion regarding their experiences, perceptions and attitudes towards the learnership programme.

The duration of the sessions were approximately three hours, which allowed for at least twenty minutes to explore each question (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2002:53; Krueger & Casey, 2000:39-40).

Questions were used as a guideline only and the interviewer allowed participants, during the interview sessions, to relate their personal feelings and experiences as these materialized. In the process, themes and patterns were allowed to emerge and were captured via a digital recorder as they occurred during the interview. This data was then developed into themes with the use of Atlas.ti, a qualitative computer software programme.

#### **4.11 Delimitations and scope of the study**

Considering the dynamic nature of learning programmes, including that of learnerships, as well as other apparent factors such as stakeholder collaboration, labour market conditions and the developmental stages of learnership programmes in the education and training arena, this study was limited to only one of the factors related to outcomes of the skills development strategy in South Africa. Other factors related to availability of participants and willingness of stakeholders to participate played a further role in setting the scope for this study. This study, therefore, covered learners who were enrolled in learnership programmes that were established in the Cape Peninsula during the period 2007 to 2008. It focused on eight groups of learners who attended learnership classroom sessions at the time. These learnership programmes were established in seven of the twenty-three nationally established SETAs.

Due to the small number of representative SETAs, the narrow geographic location and the divergent nature of each SETA in relation to its specific occupational interest and work methods, it would probably not be advisable to generalise results of this study across all learnership programmes in South Africa. Marshall and Rossman (2006:42) cautions, emphasising that results that are obtained from a particular study, should be carefully considered before generalizing and contributing to our understanding of a particular phenomenon.

#### **4.12 Data analysis**

Data was analysed for both quantitative and qualitative methods. The following offers an explanation of the methods of analysis.

##### **4.12.1 Quantitative analysis**

Use was made of a statistician to assist with generation of appropriate statistical analysis. Using the software programme, SPSS v.5, descriptive statistics were generated. Chapter Five offers a presentation of the statistical data, as well as interpretation and analysis of results.

#### **4.12.2 Qualitative analysis**

Transcript-based analysis was used to analyse the data that was obtained from the focus group interviews. Field notes served to complement the transcriptions where necessary. Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were sent for transcription (Krueger & Casey, 2000:130). As mentioned earlier, focus group interviews were conducted and subsequently analysed using Atlas t.i. to conduct thematic analysis in order to interpret and present the results. According to Kreuger *et al.*, (2000:128) the use of computer software ensures that the analysis is systematic, sequential and easily verifiable. Kitzinger (1994: 106) advises that focus group methods are effective for encouraging interaction between people who have experienced a common occurrence “ to engage with one another, verbally formulate their ideas and draw out the cognitive structures, which previously have been unarticulated ...” .

Findings from the transcripts were summarised and themes were identified. The focus group discussion centred on ten points of interest, and Chapter Five will offer a complete discussion of the findings for this data analysis.

#### **4.13 Challenges encountered during this study**

This study was conducted within a dynamic environment where new policy development and critical evaluation of complex issues surrounding skills development and sub sequential issue of learnerships, are emerging on an ongoing basis.

The NSDS objectives have identified major shortfalls in learnership programmes and aim to reintroduce apprenticeship training, skills programmes based on unit standards and generally seek to build stronger linkages between FET and HE institutions (DoL, NSDS, State of Skills in SA, 2006/07:51). This study did not seek to investigate the myriad of macro related issues involved in learnership programmes per se.



Due to limited resources such as budget, time constraints and access to stakeholders, the study was delineated to a limited number of available learners in the Cape Peninsula, Western Cape.

#### **4.14 Concluding remarks**

This chapter offered a discussion of the research methodology, data collection methods, delimitations and scope of the study. The following chapter presents an interpretation and full analysis of the data.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Following from Chapter Four, which dealt with a description and discussion regarding the research design that was applied in this study, this chapter deals with results of this empirical study. It describes and presents data that was acquired and statistical processes that were applied. As the study used a mixed methods approach, the chapter presents an initial analysis of data from a quantitative methodological approach. Using a survey questionnaire, which contained closed-ended multiple option questions, data was collected from participant learners, while they attended the learnership programme. The data is quantitatively presented in graphic and tabular format, while a qualitative approach is used to present data that was gathered when learners completed the learnership programme. The qualitative method used focus group interviews to gather and analyse the latter part of the study.

#### **5.2 Data cleaning and coding**

As the questionnaires were personally administered, a 100% response rate was achieved during data collection. As a result, the data analysis was completed with one hundred and twenty three responses ( $n = 123$ ). Data was entered onto an excel spreadsheet for further processing in SPSS version 10. All data was manually checked by an assistant and errors corrected on the spreadsheet (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2002:101).

#### **5.3 Data presentation**

Results of the quantitative analysis will reveal any differences that exist between learners enrolled in learnership programmes and between the seven

SETAs that were surveyed. Descriptive data is presented in graphic and tabular format in order to simplify the data received via the survey questionnaire.

#### 5.4 Sample of participants

A total of 124 learners participated in the survey. From the total questionnaires that were administered, one questionnaire was only partially completed and was, therefore, discarded. The questionnaires were administered to learners who were accessible and available at the time of the survey. The table below (Table 5.1) provides a breakdown of the sample, which displays representative SETAs.

The following section presents results of the completed questionnaires with regard to the demographic data.

#### 5.5 Demographic representation of the data

Table 5.1 provides a breakdown of the number of learners registered for each of the respective SETAs that were surveyed. As displayed in Table 5.1, the Clothing, Textile, Footwear and Leather Seta (CTFL) represented a majority of learners who were surveyed for this study. The number for this SETA represents forty-four percent (44%) of the total number that were surveyed. The two learnership programmes are largely unrelated, however, as one learnership was offered in the textile industry, while the other was offered in the clothing industry.

**Table 5.1: Sample breakdown of learners surveyed by SETA (n = 123)**

<b>SETA</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>%</b>
Clothing, Textile, Footwear & Leather	54	44%
Insurance	20	16%
Media, Advertising, Printing & Packaging	15	12%
Services	15	12%
Transport	8	7%
Wholesale & Retail	9	7%
Education, Training & Development	2	1%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>

This high representation is purely owing to the availability and access of learners for this study and does not denote or characterize any significance in the number of learners who registered across various SETAs in the Cape Peninsula in the Western Cape at the time, as statistics with regard to the total number of learners enrolled for this SETA, or others, were not available for comparison at the time.

### 5.5.1 NQF level of learnership

Learners enrolling in the learnership programme should register for a programme, which is at a higher level than their existing qualifications in order to enable articulation and qualification building. An interesting comparison is, therefore, made between the level of the learnership programme and the level of the qualification of the learner entering into that programme. Table 5.2 below depicts the NQF levels for learners on entering the programme.

**Table 5.2 NQF level upon entering learnership programmes**

<b>NQF LEVEL</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE PERCENT</b>
2	54	43.9	43.9	43.9
3	21	17.1	17.1	61.0
4	48	39.0	39.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Although this study does not allow for further analysis on an individual basis, it would be of interest to ascertain whether the qualification sought by the learner was in another industry and/or whether, for example, the learner was seeking to change his or her occupation by entering into a different study course.

The fact that the qualification does not seem to be taken into account as it should, is cause for concern and may require further investigation in future.

**Table 5.3 Learner qualification level**

<b>NQF LEVEL</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE PERCENT</b>
0	1	.8	.8	.8
1	5	4.1	4.1	4.9
2	17	13.8	13.8	18.7
3	16	13.0	13.0	31.7
4	75	61.0	61.0	92.7
5	9	7.3	7.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

When comparing the above two tables (Table 5.2 and Table 5.3), a point of interest and concern lies in the fact that the main purpose of learnership programmes, by their nature, offers learners an opportunity to progress further up NQF levels. However, a quick comparison of the qualification level of learners on entering the programme and the qualification level of the learnership enrolled for, shows that a majority of programmes (44%) are offered at level 2 and level 4 (39%), whereas a significant number (61%) have already reached level 4. Furthermore, even though a small number, namely 7% of all learners have already completed a level 5 qualification. Further analysis, with regard to expectations that learners had in terms of achieving qualifications through learnership education, will possibly emerge when qualitative data are analysed further in this study.

### **5.5.2 Duration of learnership programme**

The following table (Table 5.4) represents the duration of learnership programmes on offer. Learnerships, according to the Department of Labour, are supposed to operate for a duration of twelve months, where 60 percent of their time is spent in the classroom gaining theoretical experience, and 30 percent at the workplace gaining relevant practical experience.

In order for learnerships to be effective, it is important that this workplace experience is matched with the theory that is learned in the classroom environment to ensure that knowledge is transferred in the form of application to theory (Billett, 2001:3). For any meaningful transfer and application of knowledge and skill (where applicable), a course should ideally operate for

twelve months (Department of Labour, NSDS 01-002, 2001). It is, therefore, evident from the table below (Table 5.4) that merely fifty percent of the programmes for which learners are enrolled, are twelve months in duration. Almost thirty percent of the rest are for six months with 6 percent being declared as a one month learnership programme. The significance of this is important as it indicates that some programmes are possibly being registered as learnerships while they should be listed as skills programmes or even short courses, and not be classified as a learnership qualification.

**Table 5.4: Learnership programme duration**

<b>DURATION (MONTHS)</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE PERCENT</b>
1	8	6.5%	6.5%	6.5
3	20	16.3%	16.3%	22.8
5	34	27.6%	27.6%	50.4
12	61	49.6%	49.6%	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	

### 5.5.3 Demographic profile of learners surveyed

#### 5.5.3.1 Gender

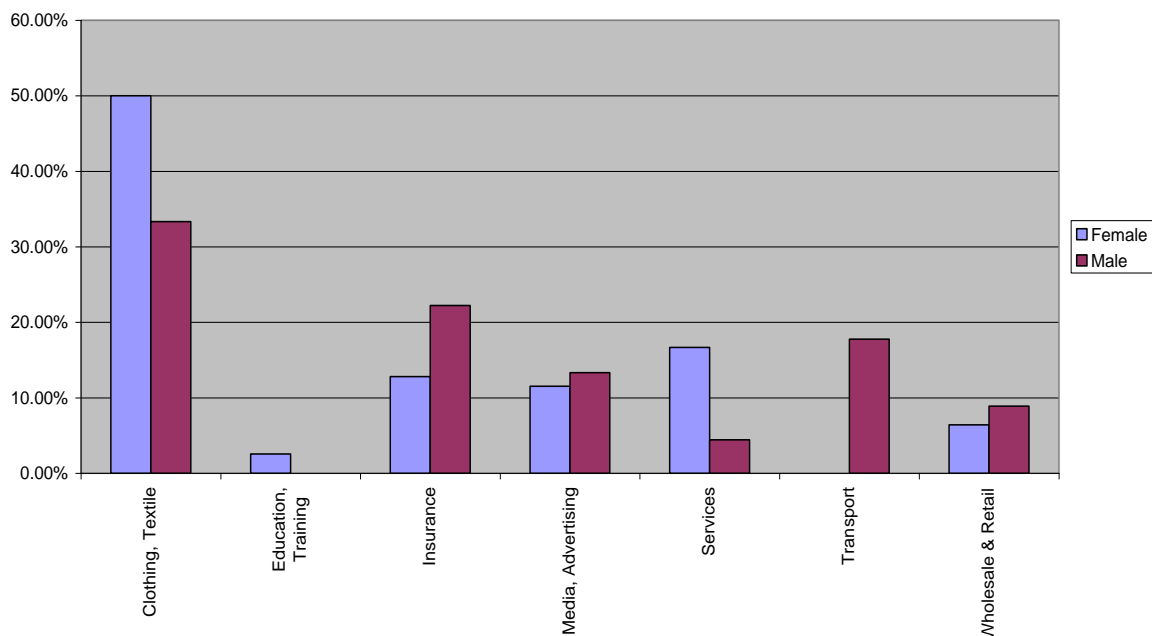
With regard to gender, females represented 78% of the sample. This is well related to government mandate to escalate females' levels of skills by way of learnership programmes, but it can also be attributed to occupations that were surveyed, namely those represented in the Clothing and Textile SETA and the Insurance SETA, where job occupations for Sewing Machinists and Administrators are predominated held by females. Demographic profiles are depicted in Table 3 and Figure 3 below.

**Table 5.5 Gender distribution of sample**

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE PERCENT</b>
Female	78	63.4%	63.4	63.4
Male	45	36.6 %	36.6	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

A further display of gender distribution appears in the graph below, which depicts distribution for each SETA. Once again the high representation of females in the Clothing and Textiles SETA is indicative of the nature of the industry where occupations such as those of sewing machinists are predominantly occupied by females. However, for this SETA, two separate learnership programmes were surveyed at different training providers. These programmes had the highest number of enrolled learners (34 and 20, respectively), which represents 44% of participants and, therefore, explains why there was a high number of participants in this (Clothing & Textile) sector.

**Figure 5.1 Gender distribution of sample by SETA**



### 5.5.3.2 Disabled learners

Since disabled people have been included under the definition of previously disadvantaged persons, according to the Employment Equity Act (Act No. 55 of 1998), the Department of Labour has emphasized inclusion of people who have disabilities as a priority in skills development. In terms of learners who have disabilities, eight learners, (three females and five males), comprising 6.5% of the total number of learners surveyed, declared this status. Learners were not required to give details of the types of disabilities they had. Table 5.6 presents the number of surveyed learners who have disabilities.

**Table 5.6 Disabled Learners**

<b>DISABLED</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE PERCENT</b>
No	115	93.5%	9.35	93.5
Yes	8	6.5%	6.5	100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100</b>	

The number of surveyed learners who declared that they have a disability compares well to the mandatory 4%. The Department of Labour regards the learnership programme as an opportunity to escalate the skills of people who have disabilities and has aimed to use the learnership programme as a platform for developing skills of disabled people, amongst others (DoL, NSDS, State of Skills in SA, 2006/07:49).

Of the eight disabled learners, four learners (50%) were unemployed prior to commencing the learnership (one female and three males), which also bodes well for the future of disabled learners. However, when considering the job functions of the SETA's surveyed, with the exception of the Transport SETA, most of the occupations, which are classified as soft skills, should be able to accommodate certain types of disabled people.

### **5.5.3.3 Age distribution of participants**

In terms of age, the NSDS has prioritized learnership programmes as an opportunity for the youth to acquire much needed skills. Preference, it states, should be aimed at the under 35 year old learner. Table 5.7 depicts the age distribution of learners.

It is important to note the age distribution of learners, as learnership programmes, according to the Department of Labour are predominantly aimed at empowering workplace entry category, which is a younger generation of workers. The distribution of age in terms of priorities set by the Department of Labour clearly depicts that learnerships are well placed within the preferred categories of 18 to 35 with only a small percentage of learners falling into the older categories.



**Table 5.7: Age distribution of learners by SETA (n=123)**

<b>SETA</b>	<b>18-24 year old category</b>	<b>25-34 year old category</b>	<b>35-44 year old category</b>	<b>45 and older</b>	<b>Total</b>
Clothing, Textile	17	24	11	2	54
Education, Training	0	0	1	1	2
Insurance	18	2	0	0	20
Media, Advertising	12	3	0	0	15
Services	5	4	4	2	15
Transport	1	6	0	1	8
Wholesale and Retail	1	8	0	0	9
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>123</b>

Further analysis, however, reveals that possibly the emerging services sector, namely Insurance and Media industries, are prone to attract the younger generation as opposed to the manufacturing sector such as the Clothing and Textile industry, which has a longer history of being in operation and, as a result, would possibly comprise of an older generation of employees and hence learners. The textile industry is historical in its establishment in the economic arena, whereas services sectors, which are considered as an emerging industry, particularly media operations, which are dominated by highly technological work processes, would be more inclined to attract the younger generation.

#### **5.5.4 Education qualifications**

This section deals with learners' levels of education when entering the learnership programme and then compares their education levels with that of the learnership programme that they enrolled for.

The education level of surveyed learners prior to entering into the learnership programme reveals that seventy-five learners (61%) entered the learnership programme with a post matric or level four qualification. A total of nine learners (7%) obtained a post-matric diploma prior to enrolling for the learnership

programme. Table 5.8 below represents the levels of education in terms of NQF qualifications.

**Table 5.8: Learners' education level on entering learnership**

<b>NQF LEVEL/ Qualification</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE PERCENT</b>
0 / Grade 3-7	1	.8%	0.8	0.8
1 / Grade 9	5	4.1%	4.1	4.9
2 / Grade 10	17	13.8%	13.8	18.7
3 / Grade 11	16	13.0%	13.1	31.7
4 / Grade 12	75	61.0%	61.1	92.7
5 / Diploma	9	7.3%	7.3	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 5.8 clearly indicates that most learners (61%) obtained a level four (equivalent grade 12) qualification, with a majority of the remaining learners (32%) entering the learnership programme between a grade zero to grade three qualification. According to the objectives of the Skills Development Act (SDA, No. 97 of 1998) learnerships are designed to offer articulation and portability to learners, since they offer learners an opportunity to gain qualifications, while at the same time, it promotes life-long learning.

In addition, Figure 5.2 (on the following page) shows qualification profiles of learners when entering the learnership programme, according to the SETA's that they have enrolled with. Prior educational qualification levels are significant to establish, as learnership programmes are designed to be progressive by nature (Hattingh, 2004:12).

The graph (Figure 5.2) clearly indicates that the service industries, namely Media and Insurance, have the highest levels of post matric learners. These industries have advertised their learnership with matric as an entry requirement, while other learnership programmes, even though they indicated a preference for post matric qualifications, did not necessarily have all learners who were in their employ who met this requirement.

**Figure 5.2: Qualification profile of learners by SETA**

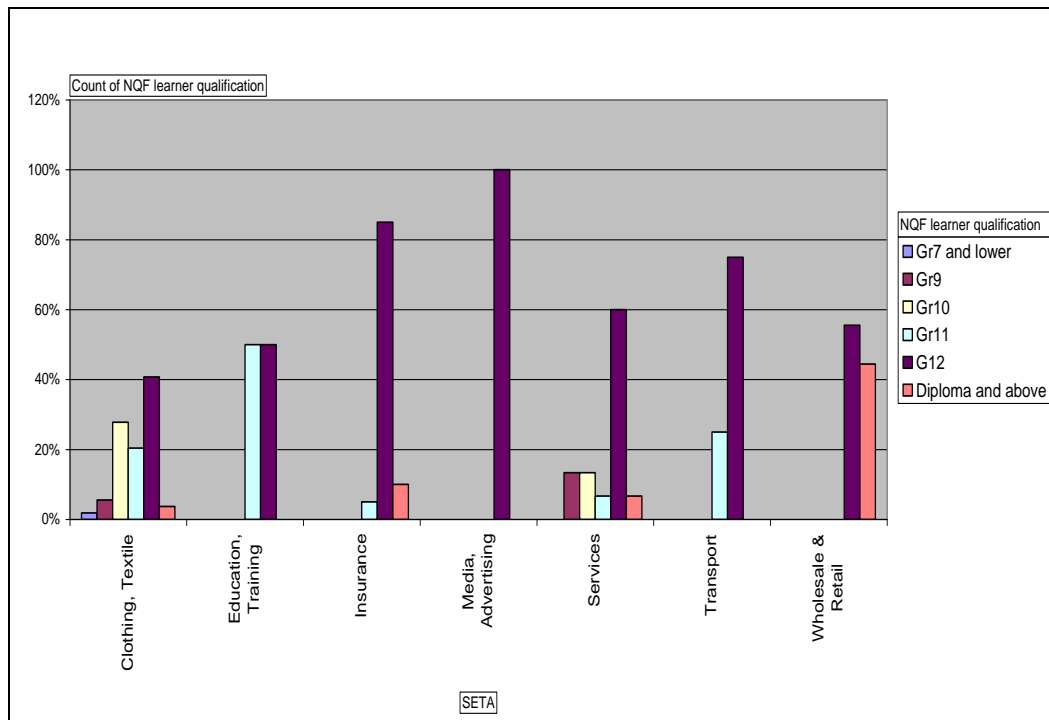


Figure 5.2 illustrates a positive association in line with objectives of learnership programmes, which are intended to offer opportunities to previously disadvantaged learners to enter into a learning programme, which will benefit them in terms of obtaining a qualification, which is portable and able to articulate into higher qualifications in future.

#### 5.5.4.1 Education qualification level compared to learnership level

The purpose of a learnership programme is to offer work-based education, which is portable and offers the learner an opportunity to progress further up the NQF ladder and, ultimately, achieve a higher qualification in terms of SAQA and SDA objectives.

Learners were asked to state their qualifications at the time of entering the learnership. These figures are displayed in Table 5.2. Learners were then required to state which level the learnership programme is registered at. These statistics are depicted in Table 5.8. On comparison, it was revealed that some learners are enrolled for on a learnership programme which is below their

individual qualification level. This implies that learners should be enrolled for learnership programmes on a level which is above their current status to enable them to progress and ultimately to attain a qualification at a higher level.

On comparing individual learners' levels with learnership programmes which learners were enrolled for, it appears to present a problem when considering that 61% of all learners had already previously acquired a level 4 qualification (equivalent to grade 12), and 7% of learners had already completed a level 5 qualification. At the same time none of the learnership programmes on offer for this study exceeded level 4. This is contradictory to the objectives of learnership programmes as it implies that a majority of learners are already attending learnership programmes, which are either equal to or below their current qualification levels. This could also imply that training providers and employers, when marketing, recruiting and selecting learners, are not communicating implications to learners, and are possibly not advising learners on the proposition for learnership qualifications. Table 5.9 offers cross tabulation which depicts a comparison of the levels of learners compared to those of the learnership programme they had enrolled for.

**Table 5.9 Comparison of educational qualification levels to learnership levels**

<b>NQF LEVEL</b>	<b>LEARNERS NQF LEVEL ON ENTERING</b>	<b>LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMME LEVEL</b>	<b>DIFFERENCE</b>
0 / Grade 3-7	1	0	1
1 / Grade 9	5	0	5
2 / Grade 10	17	54	-37
3 / Grade 11	16	21	-5
4 / Grade 12	75	48	27
5 / Diploma	9	0	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>0</b>

### **5.5.5 Employment status prior to entering learnership programme**

The questionnaire required that learners state their employment status prior to entering the learnership programme. It was considered important to enquire as to learners' status as learnership programmes have been heralded as a cure

for the country's unemployment problems. A misconception of learnerships, which is often cited, asserts that learners assume the learnership to be a vehicle for employment. In other words, learners are led to believe that entering into a learnership contract with a training provider, an employer or both, is the same as entering into an employment contract and that employers have an obligation to ensure that learners are employed once the learnership programme is completed.

Table 5.10 depicts the number of employed versus unemployed learners. The obvious large majority of learners in employment correlates positively with the objectives of the SDA, since the Act promotes further education and obtaining of qualifications for both employed and unemployed learners.

**Table 5.10: Unemployed learners**

<b>LEARNERS</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE PERCENT</b>
Employed	96	78.0	78.0	78.0
Unemployed	27	22.0	22.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Further analysis of the data revealed the following results: 22% of all learners indicated that they were unemployed at the time of entering the learnership, of which eight percent had recently completed their schooling and had no vision regarding their future plans and, similarly, under a separate statement, nine percent of learners indicated that they had felt lost and had no plans. A total of 24% of learners indicated that they were looking for any job, while 32% of learners stated that they were looking for work, which would suit their interests and abilities. A total of 27% of learners said that they wanted to participate in a training programme, and applied for various training courses.

A total of 49% of employed learners stated that even though they were employed, they wanted to obtain a qualification. This factor further lends credence to the Skills Development Act (SDA, No. 97 of 1998), and links to the SDA objective for learners to enter learnership programmes in order to obtain a qualification to further enhance their employability status.

**Table 5.11: Employed learners with no formal qualification**

<b>LEARNERS RESPONSES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE PERCENT</b>
No	63	51.2%	51.2	51.2
Yes	60	48.8%	48.8	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The open ended section for this question received a twelve percent response rate and analysis of these responses revealed that a majority of learners stated that they were employed, but wanted to improve their qualifications. This high percentage is significant as it indicates that learners who entered into the learnership programme had a sense of wanting to improve their employability status and, consequently, improve their standards of living by acquiring a job or improving their current job.

Results for this section are positively aligned in terms of the objectives laid down by the Skills Development Act, since it seeks to mobilise employees into being motivated to improve their education status through accessing work-based education and training, which offers meaningful results in the form of a qualification and a tangible certificate. This indicates that learners, generally, entered the learnership programme in order to improve their employability status and, consequently, their income potential, which is one of the main objectives the Skills Development Act (SDA, No. 97 of 1998) and not merely because it is just another training programme.

Positive perceptions experienced by learners while still attending the learnership programme were further interrogated through focus group interviews. These interviews were conducted once learners completed the programme. Taking into account that fact that a learnership qualification should be able to prove its ultimate benefit, by translating into rewards such as improved employability and, consequently, enhanced living standards. The aim of the focus group interviews was to explore whether these ideals had been achieved in terms of further tangible benefits.

### 5.5.6 Perceived value of learnership programme

This section of the survey required that learners indicate their reasons for wanting to enter a learnership programme. Closed-ended responses were requested with an open-ended option, which could explain any other reason that was not listed.

The questionnaire sought responses from learners with regard to the perceived value that the learnership programme would afford learners in terms of its potential to improve learners' qualifications and also required learners to state why they had entered into that particular learnership programme.

The questionnaire asked learners to respond to questions based on reasons for participating and enrolling in the programme. Participants were allowed to have more than one response. Table 5.12 summarizes respondents' answers for this section.

**Table 5.12: Reasons for entering the learnership programme**

Factor	Frequency	Percent
I wanted to obtain some skills (data code: prior reason want skills)	89	72.4%
It was an opportunity and I felt I had nothing to lose (data code: prior reason saw opportunity)	75	61.0%
I wanted to gain a qualification (data code: prior reason want qualify)	67	54.5%
The Programme was free (date code: prior reason free training)	36	29.3%
I felt that the programme was unique and I was keen to participate (data code: prior reason unique programme)	32	26.0%
I have always wanted to work in this industry (data code: prior reason enter this industry)	24	19.5%
The programme provides me with an allowance (data code: prior reason need allowance)	15	12.2%

The results reveal that 19% of learners stated that they always wanted to work in the specific industry that they are enrolled for. This indicates that learners

were probably currently employed in this particular industry and were, therefore, seeking improvement in their positions at work.

Only 29% of learners indicated that they had entered the learnership programme because it was free. Although this response shows that learners were honest about their motives, this factor proved a major problem in terms of misconceptions that learners may have had in terms of what the learnership had to offer (Lundall in Letsoalo, 2007:3).

The number of learners who had entered the learnership in order to obtain a qualification totals 54%. As discussed earlier in the survey section, this high percentage has positive implications for the efficacy of learnership programmes, but will be further explored in the second phase of the data analysis where interview data was obtained.

Twelve percent of learners indicated that they entered because the learnership offered them an allowance. The low percentage in this category related to the number of learners who were unemployed before entering the learnership. Most of these learners attended the Insurance SETA learnership and had reportedly been recruited from the community as part of a programme to skill unemployed workers.

A high percentage of learners (72%) stated they had entered the learnership in order to obtain skills. This correlates well with the findings regarding expectations that learners had had prior to entering the learnership programme.

An average of 26% of learners indicated that they felt that the learnership was unique and that they were keen to participate. However, this survey does not offer any further exploration into this factor and should be explored through further investigation.

A high number of learners (61%) indicated that they regarded the learnership as an opportunity and that they felt that they had nothing to lose. Once again



this indicates that a number of learners wanted to improve their education level and sought opportunities for self development.

Nine percent of learners indicated other reasons. Of these other reasons, thirty percent said that they wanted to gain skills to start their own business. These reasons were mostly responses from learners who were attending a learnership at 'New Venture Creation' in entrepreneurial skills, while the balance of learners felt that the learnership would offer them an opportunity to gain skills and experience, which would improve their current status and working conditions.

By far the most significant responses were from learners who wanted to acquire skills (72%); acquire a qualification (55%); and identify an opportunity to learn (61%). These high percentages confirm that learners, generally, did not enrol for free training or merely to gain an allowance.

### **5.5.7 Knowledge of learnerships**

Learners were asked whether they had any knowledge of learnership programmes prior to entering. A total of 88% of learners indicated that they had some knowledge of learnerships prior to commencement of the programme. It was considered to be important to establish this variable, as levels of knowledge prior to entering the learnership would have an impact on learners' expectations and, ultimately, impact on learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the learnership programme. The graph (refer to Figure 5.3 on the following page) also depicts the manner in which learners acquired knowledge.

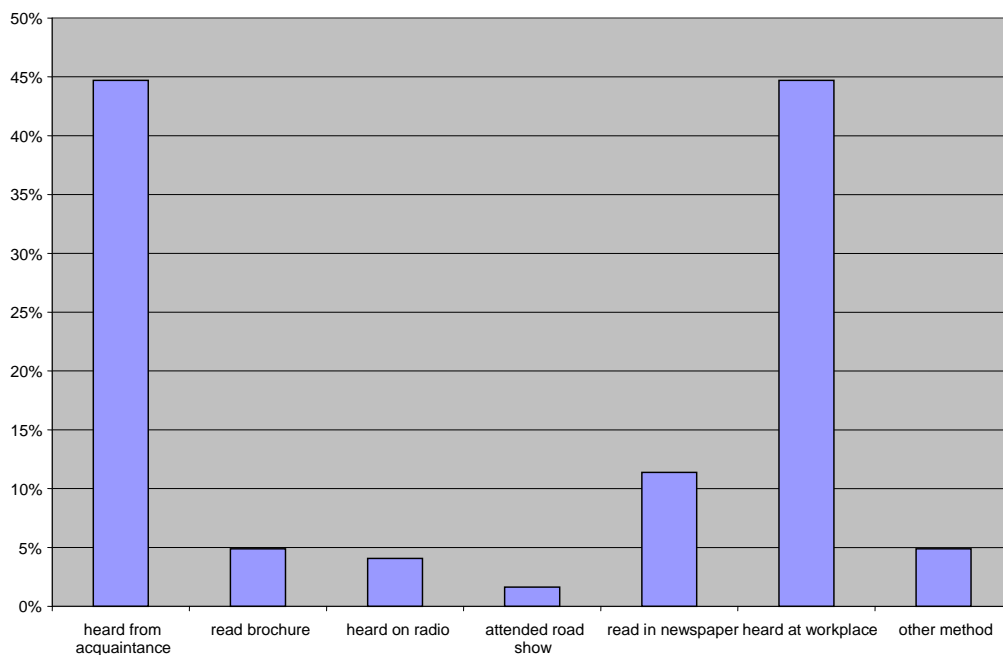
The following categories were used to determine how learners gained knowledge of the learnership. The learner heard about the learnership from an acquaintance: the majority of learners (45%) indicated this category; and read about the learnership in a brochure: 5% indicated this category; learners' responses to the question regarding knowledge of learnerships, are presented in Table 5.13 on page 108.

The response rate for learners who had heard about learnerships at work corresponds well with the number of learners who were currently employed and

were enrolled in the learnership programme at the workplace. Learners who were employed prior to starting the learnership, would most likely have been approached by their employer to enter the programme.

The second highest rate of forty five percent related to learners who heard about learnerships from family, friends and institutions such as church groups and community centres. The problem with word-of-mouth communication, however, gives rise to misinformation and can aggravate the level of unrealistic expectations on the part of learners.

**Figure 5.3: Levels of knowledge regarding learnerships prior to commencement**



This is especially prevalent where people, owing to economic problems, foresee programmes such as learnerships to be able to meet their need for income in order to make a living. This perpetuates an expectation that learnership programmes will automatically offer learners a job upon completion.

**Table 5.13: How learners heard about the learnership**

	<b>Yes (%)</b>
Heard from a friend, family member or at church	45%
Heard about the programme at work	45%
Saw an advert in the newspaper	11%
Read about learnerships in brochure	5%
Heard about learnerships on the radio	4%
Attended a road show or presentation	2%
Other	5%

### **5.5.8 Learners' prior expectations**

This is an important section of the questionnaire as it addresses one of the main objectives of the study which seeks to explore learners' perceptions of the learnership programme. One's perceptions give rise to certain expectations, which, in turn, will set a tone for success or failure of a task or programme (Vroom, 1964 in Bergh & Theron, 2007:160-161).

The questionnaire sought to enquire from learners what their expectations were prior to joining the learnership programme and then required them to state whether they, at that point of the programme perceive that these expectations will be met upon completion. In order to further explore this phenomenon, learners were asked to express whether they perceived their expectations to have been met once they had completed the learnership programme. The latter part of the investigation are discussed under qualitative findings in the second part of this chapter.

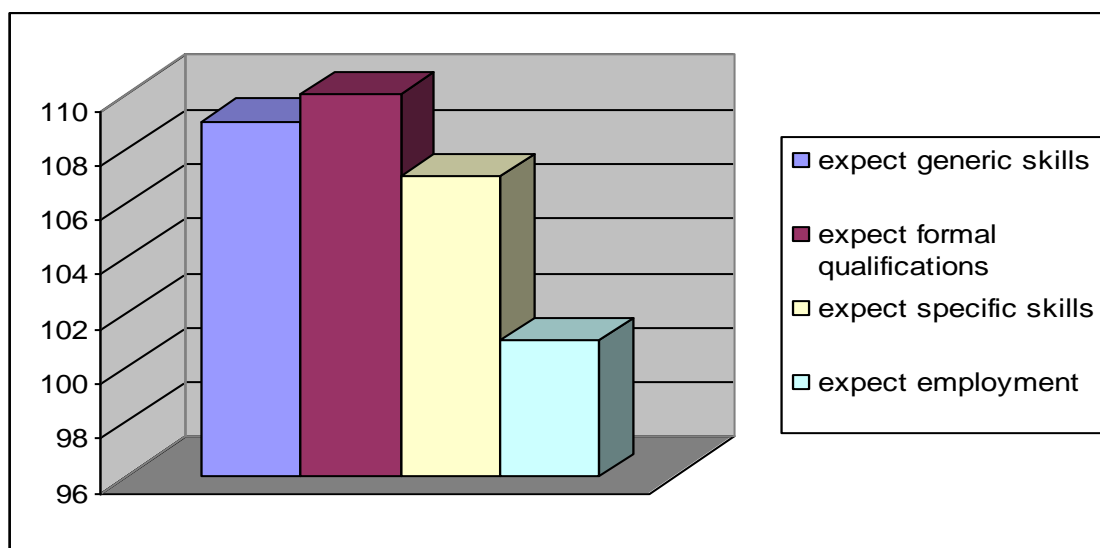
Four options were given to respondents. For this section of the survey learners were asked to state what their expectations were before commencing the learnership programme. This indicator was required in order to measure anticipated expectations, which learners had while attending the learnership programme and, thereafter, to compare results once they completed the learning experience to see whether learners perceive that the programme had

met these expectations. A total of 110 participants (89%) indicated that they had some form of expectation prior to entering the learnership.

The questionnaire required responses for the following categories:

- expect a formal qualification on completion of this programme;
- expect to have acquired generic skills on completion of this programme;
- expect to have acquired specific skills on completion of this programme.
- expect to find employment after completing of this programme; and

**Figure 5.4 Learner expectations prior to commencement**



The questionnaire facilitated more than one response for the various categories to this section. Learners were therefore able to respond to more than one expectation. The highest indication showed that more than 75% of learners had an expectation to acquire a formal qualification and a little over 60% and 50% of learners, respectively, expected to acquire generic and specific skills while only 38% of learners expected to obtain employment. This correlates positively to the previous section where learners responded in the majority regarding their aspirations to obtain general and specific skills and to obtain a formal qualification. Once again, this indicates that learners, who entered into a learnership programme, perceive the programme to be able to equip them with necessary qualifications and skills, which will enable them to obtain employment.

The questionnaire also required that learners indicate, at the stage of enrolment whether they perceived that the learnership would be able to deliver of their prior expectations. A total of 94% of learners responded. Table 5.14 depicts percentiles for the results with regard to various aspects related to learner expectations and the learners' perceptions of these being met.

As indicated, most learners expected that they would receive a skill (97%) and obtain a formal qualification (93%). These important aspects link directly to the objectives of the study and are explored in the analysis section, which was conducted by way of focus group interviews, post-completion of the learnership programme. These interviews reveal whether the expectations of learners were actually met and explore specific issues, which learners perceived as strengths or weaknesses in the programmes.

**Table 5.14: Expectations before and during the learnership**

Expectations	Did you have this expectation?	Has the programme, thus far, met this expectation?	Difference between expectation had and expectation met
	Yes (%)	Yes (%)	(%)
(a) I want the programme to provide me with generic skills	97%	77%	20%
(b) I want the programme to give me a formal accredited qualification	93%	61%	32%
(c) I want the programme to provide me with employment	85%	40%	45%
(d) I wanted to work in this industry but did not have the skills needed, therefore, I enrolled in this programme	79%	60%	19%

Expectation (c), which has a comparative rate of 85% to 40%, required learners to state whether they wanted the learnership to provide them with employment. The large difference could be owing to the fact that most learners (78%, refer

previous Table 5.10) were already in employment and, therefore, the question would not have any significant meaning for them.

The difference in learners' expectations and these being met in terms of formal qualifications and skills, (a), (b) and (d), respectively, could be owing to the fact that learners are at varying levels in the programme and could have responded differently once they completed the learnership.

Alternatively, learners could have gained negative perceptions of the learnership thus far and did not believe that the programme offered them what they had expected before entering. Further analysis, which was investigated via focus group interviews, reveals whether learners were able to realise their aspirations upon completion of the learnership.

#### **5.5.9 Learnership process**

Even though this study does not focus on the recruitment and induction processes of the learnership programme the importance of having such structures in place are paramount to ensuring that the correct types of learners are placed in the correct programmes, and furthermore that they are properly inducted into the programme.

Recruiting and selecting the correct learners, and then ensuring that orientation and induction is implemented are important aspects of the learnership process. Therefore, learners should be carefully matched to a learnership programme and then be offered the necessary information to ensure that they have a clear understanding with regards to the process; responsibility for own learning; requirements for successful completion; and expectations of various role players.

The following section deals with the various stages of the learnership from recruitment, selection, induction, classroom (theoretical) and practical (workplace) experiences that learners were exposed to. Table 5.15 depicts results regarding the recruitment, selection and orientation process. These

sections are offered under one table as they form part of the initial implementation process and if not correctly executed can have negative consequence for the success of the learnership programme.

**Table 5.15: Learnership process**

<b>Process</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>
(a) The learnership was explained to me	92%
(b) I completed an application form	75%
(c) I wrote a selection test	75%
(d) I was interviewed	51%
(e) I attended an induction / orientation programme	50%

Item (a) shows a high score in terms of learners being introduced to the learnership by way of an introduction to the programme. The fact that only 51% of learners attended an interview, as part of the learnership selection process, could once again be owing to most learners already being employed at the time of entering the learnership. Employers and training providers might have identified specific categories of employees for the learnership, and have gained individual biographic data from their personal employee files. However, the low level of learners who attended an induction programme is cause for concern. This low score does not correlate with the high score received for item (a), where learners indicated that they were introduced to the learnership when it was explained to them.

#### **5.5.10 Starting on the learnership**

During the orientation process learners were asked whether specific terms and concepts of the learnership were explained to them and whether they understood these aspects. These specifics were thought to be important as they apply to the learnership programme, and knowledge of terms and concepts would contribute towards learners' understanding of the learnership. The table below (Table 5.16) shows the responses in this respect. The high percentage of "Yes" answers indicates that in most cases learners received extensive orientation to ensure that the concepts, terms, processes, individual responsibilities and consequences of the programme, were understood.

**Table 5.16: Understanding terms, concepts and processes**

<b>Terms, Concepts &amp; Processes</b>	<b>Yes it was explained</b>	<b>Yes I understood</b>	<b>Differences between explained vs. understood</b>
What a learnership is	95%	76%	19%
What a skills programme is	90%	60%	30%
How the learnership works	95%	69%	26%
Your role in the learnership	91%	72%	19%
What is recognition of prior learning (RPL)	78%	58%	20%
The training provider's role in the learnership	91%	67%	24%
What a formative assessment is	82%	59%	23%
What a summative assessment is	74%	51%	23%
How the learner allowance works	85%	50%	35%
What would happen if you were found to be not yet competent	92%	69%	23%
Your obligations and what is expected of you	97%	69%	28%
A job description for the learnership	88%	66%	22%
The learnership contract	93%	71%	22%
The employment contract	89%	68%	21%

The first part of the question, which states whether various terms and concepts were explained, received a positive response, however, important variances were found in some of the questions relating to whether learners understood what they had been told. The lowest scores were found in terms of the learner allowance and understanding around various types of assessment. With regard to the learner allowance, once again, as most learners were currently employed, the allowance did not affect them. Allowances or stipends are paid to unemployed learners to cover basic costs such as travel and lunch money. Therefore, low understanding would not necessarily have an impact on the successful completion of learnerships. The low rate of understanding regarding forms of assessment could have an impact, as assessment in learnership programmes should be varied, and range from formative to summative types of assessment.



### 5.5.11 Theoretical classroom training

The following question sought to establish whether learners were able to relate theoretical aspects of the training to the workplace's practical experience. Results are depicted in the following table (Table 5.17).

**Table 5.17: Classroom experience related to workplace**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I feel that the learnership has taught me a lot and I am able to use my skills in the workplace	88%	9%	3%
The course covers all that is needed in the workplace	74%	25%	1%
Most of the time I find it easy to relate the training to what is needed in my job	71%	27%	2%
When I am working and have questions, I am able to find someone who is willing and able to assist me	84%	16%	0%

This question received a relatively high rate of response for all the sections. As can be construed from the table (Table 5.17) more than 70% responded positively for all the categories. The highest rate of 88% of learners felt that they would be able to transfer the theoretical learning to the workplace. This implies that learners were able to understand the learning material offered in the classroom environment.

### 5.5.12 Resources and support within the learnership programme

Learners were asked whether they had certain resources at their disposal. This question sought information regarding support for learners in the form of work experts and learning resources, learning material, books, and Internet access, amongst others. The following table (Table 5.18) illustrates the findings.

**Table 5.18: Learner resources**

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>
A mentor: someone who is able to help you, for example, show you how to work with a difficult problem	98%
An assessor: a person who marks your assignments	98%
Training materials for example assignments and articles	93%
A supervisor: someone who you report to at the workplace and who manages your performance	92%
A logbook or learner file / learner plan	89%
Job description of the job you are training for	88%
Training resources such as books, library, Internet	73%

As with the previous section, learners were positively disposed towards the question of resources, especially regarding the availability of a mentor and assessor. This indicates once again that the classroom environment is well structured and has good support arrangements in place.

### 5.5.13 Training provider ability

The following questions required learners to express their feelings with regard to understanding theory that was offered during classroom sessions. Most learners responded positively to the theoretical aspects of the learnership. Learners also responded positively to the abilities and availability of training providers, but indicated a slightly lower response with regard to their perceptions of the level of preparedness of training providers. The following table (Table 5.19) shows learners' perceptions of their classroom experiences.

**Table 5.19: Perceptions of training provider**

<b>Classroom experience</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>
The training provider allows us (learners) to be actively involved in the class (for example group discussions)	86%
I am able to understand all the theory in class	79%
The training provider is always available when I need assistance with the theory	72%
The training provider is always well prepared for class	62%
I understand the theory and find that it is too easy (I am bored)	11%
The theory is not easy to understand and I feel lost	11%

### 5.5.14 Practical workplace training

The second part of the question required learners to express their experiences regarding workplace experience. A number of learners who registered with a training provider stated that they did not have a workplace as they had enrolled for the learnership directly with a training provider. This goes against the principles of learnership programmes, which require a three way relationship between employers, training providers and learners. This is also reflected in the percentage (64%) of learners who confirmed that they had a workplace which offered them practical training, as well as the low percentage (58%) of learners who said that they were able to use the theory in the workplace.

**Table 5.20: Workplace experience**

<b>Practical experience in the workplace</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>
I believe that I will be a more productive worker with the skills I am getting in this learnership	78%
I have a workplace which gives me practical training in this learnership	64%
I am able to use the theory I have learned in the workplace	58%
The work I do in the workplace is not related to the theory in this learnership	8%

A high score of 78% was recorded for learners who believed that they would be more productive as a result of the skills acquired in the learnership. Results are represented in Table 5.20. One of the most important aspects of learnership support lies in the availability of a mentor and supervisor. Learners need to be able to make enquiries regarding work processes and having a 'champion' at their disposal is imperative to gaining skills and experience on the job.

The learners were required to relate their experiences with regard to the mentor and supervisor support and capabilities. Learners consistently expressed a positive experience regarding mentors and supervisors in terms of their abilities and support that they offered. More than 80% of learners felt that their mentor was knowledgeable with regard to the learnership programme while 78% of learners felt that their mentors had knowledge about the job they (the learners) were training for. Table 5.21 depicts results that were revealed.

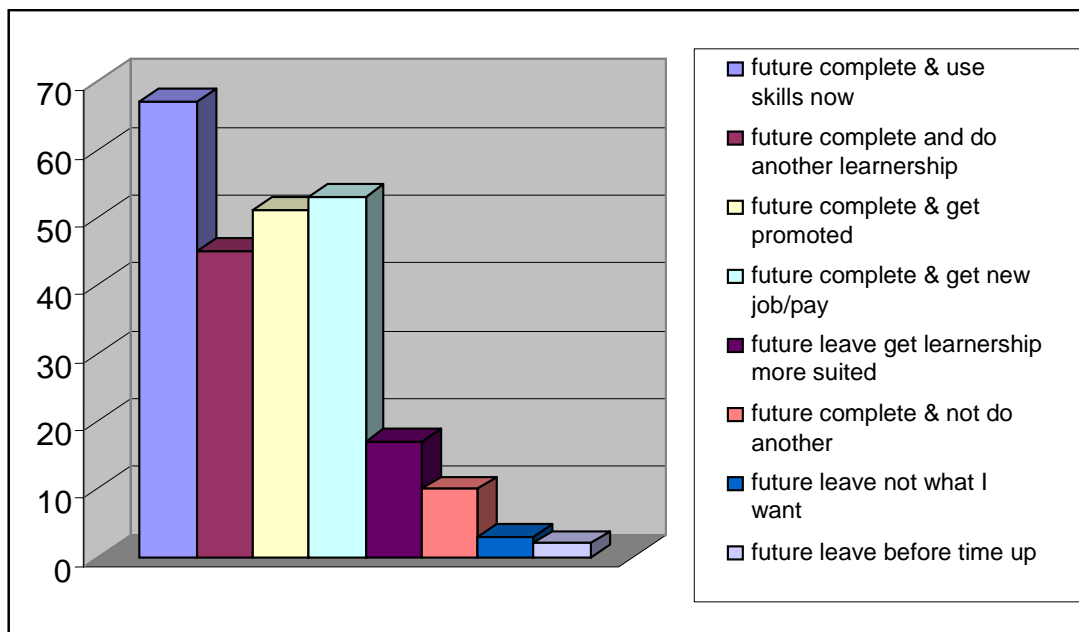
**Table 5.21: Mentor and supervisor support**

	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
Knowledge about the job you are training for	78%	22%	0%
Available to you when you need him / her	76%	24%	0%
Knowledgeable about the learnership programme	81%	19%	0%
Able to answer questions relating to the learnership and / or the job	72%	27%	1%

**5.5.15 Learners’ future intentions**

The last section of the questionnaire required that learners relate their plans for the future with regard to the training and education experienced and the qualification acquired from the learnership. This question received an overall average score. This bodes well for the overall success of learnership intentions, as learners, albeit an average, regard the learnership as a stepping stone to improving their working conditions and, consequently, their earning potential. It also reflects learners’ understanding of the need to acquire skills in order to improve their future lifestyle. The following graph gives an indication of the various responses received from learners. Further numeric clarification is exhibited in Table 5.22 on the following page.

**Figure 5.5: Learners’ future intentions after completing the learnership**



Learners were also asked whether they would abandon the learnership before having completed it. This question sought to explore overall negative experiences and disappointment with the learnership programme. Only two percent of the learners who responded to this question indicated that this as an intention.

Notably, as depicted in Table 5.22, 54% of learners who were surveyed had positive intentions towards the use of skills that they obtained during the learnership process, and 43% intended to find new employment, which pays a higher salary. The expectation that learners had of being promoted once the learner completed the learnership programme is also considered as a positive intent. As these learners were still in the phase of attending the learnership, it was not possible to establish whether these positive intentions would be realised. A further study, post-learnership completion, would reveal whether learners were able to utilise their skills to enhance their earnings and, consequently, improve their lifestyles.

**Table 5.22: Learners' future intentions**

<b>Future Plans</b>	<b>Yes (n-scores)</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>
I intend completing this learnership and using the new skills in my current job	67	54%
I intend completing this learnership and hope to get promoted at my place of work	51	41%
I intend completing this learnership and then finding a job that will pay a higher salary / wage	53	43%
I intend completing this learnership and applying for another learnership programme	45	37%
I intend leaving this learnership and then enrolling in something more suited to my interests and abilities	17	14%
I intend completing this learnership but I will not sign up for another one in future	10	8%
I intend leaving this learnership programme because it is not what I expected it to be	3	2%
I intend leaving this learnership programme before I have completed it	2	2%

It is also encouraging to note that 37% of all learners who were surveyed intended to continue studying by using the learnership programme as a means

of obtaining further education and an ultimate qualification. This ideal is in line with the main objective of learnerships.

The learnership programme is intended to offer previously disadvantaged workers an opportunity to obtain a qualification through "providing both vertical and horizontal articulation within the qualifications framework, [and] ... also produce meaningful competencies for productive work" (Department of Labour, NSDS, 1997).

This section of the analysis dealt with the quantitative section of the results. The data was presented in graphic and tabular format in order to summarise and simplify the findings and give meaning to the analysis and discussion.

The following section of this chapter presents the qualitative data analysis, which used collected data during three focus group interviews. In order to obtain data which is relevant to the study, namely to seek information with regard to learners employability status, the learners had to have completed the learnership programme at the time of the interview. Learners were therefore invited to the interviews following a period of three to six months after completing the learnership programme in order to reflect on their overall experiences.

## **5.6 Qualitative data analysis**

The following section presents the collected data using a qualitative method.

### **5.6.1 Introduction**

A qualitative method of analysis was applied to analyse data that was collected after learners had completed the learnership programme. Data in the form of focus group interviews, which used semi-structured questions, was applied to three groups. All the participants for the focus groups had previously participated and completed the survey questionnaire.

## 5.6.2 Composition and structure of focus groups

The three groups represented in the focus group interview sessions were affiliated to the Services SETA (SERVICESETA); the Media and Advertising SETA (MAPPP) and the Insurance SETA (INSETA). A minimum of six to eight participants, from each of the three groups, were invited to participate. Participants for the focus groups were chosen from a list of contactable and available learners. The only criteria observed were to include groups from different SETAs as this would offer a broader perspective to the data. A breakdown is depicted in Table 5.23 below.

As each of these groups was distinctly different in their specializations, certain factors would prove to be unique to each of them. For example, workplace learning for Group 2, differed from the proposed structure in which learners are placed at an actual workplace to acquire specific skills related to the learnership programme that they enrolled for. This group completed the Entrepreneurial Skills learnership programme.

**Table 5.23: Focus groups according to SETAs and number of participants**

<b>GROUP NO.</b>	<b>SETA</b>	<b>NO. OF LEARNERS LISTED AND CONTACTED</b>	<b>NO. OF LEARNERS ATTENDED AND INTERVIEWED</b>	<b>LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMME NAME</b>
1	MAPPPSETA	13	8	Digital Design Foundations
2	SERVICESETA	20	7	Entrepreneurial Skills - New Venture Creation
3	INSETA	6	4	Financial Administration & Short Term Insurance
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>19</b>	

According to the curriculum, learners are not placed with a workplace provider as in the case of other conventional learnerships. Instead, they are required to create and start a new venture business with the idea that this business will or

could possibly serve as an initial start-up for learners. Therefore, it was practical to offer a brief description of each of these learnership programmes in order to contextualize the focus group findings and themes, which are discussed below.

### **Group 1: MAPPPSETA: Digital Design Foundations**

This learnership programme is a foundation programme, which offers learners an opportunity to learn basic digital design. Learners are placed with media and advertising companies for a period of three to four months to gain relevant workplace experience.

### **Group 2: SERVICESETA: Entrepreneurial Skills – New Venture Creation**

This learnership programme recruits aspiring and established entrepreneurs in the community. The programme is designed to equip learners with skills that are required to establish and operate a sustainable business venture in order to gain an income and, consequently, offer employment opportunities to the community in which it operates.

### **Group 3: INSETA: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance**

This learnership programme, established by a reputable insurance company, recruits current matriculated employees and unemployed learners from various communities. The learnership aims to equip learners with generic and specific skills for the insurance industry. Learnership training is offered by the company's in-house training academy.

## **5.7 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis was applied with the assistance of Atlas.ti V5.2 software in order to code the data and identify major themes as they emerge. Data was obtained from three focus group interviews, and was transcribed and arranged



according to emerging themes and subsequent sub-themes, which were identified (Aronson, 1994:1).

The most salient points relevant to the objectives of the study were identified and developed into a set of finite codes, which represent the most important findings from the interview data (Attride-Stirling, 2001:385). In total, 136 responses, which were directly related to the objectives of the study, culminated in seven themes that were identified. Each response line was coded to indicate the group number. Thereafter, a number was assigned to each participant that was present for the group interview. Numbering ensured that anonymity and confidentiality could be maintained (Powell & Single, 1996: 502). Group numbers were applied, as listed in Table 5.23 (on page 117), and participant numbers were allocated according to the seating arrangements of individuals during the focus group interview.

Table 5.24 offers a tabular representation of the main findings and themes that were developed from the focus group data, and depicts the number of responses for each theme. The table is arranged according to the order in which the themes are discussed in the qualitative section of this report. The density of responses provides an indication of the issues that participants were most vociferous about.

Even though the interview used semi-structured questions, participants were encouraged to voice their experiences to enable new themes, feelings, thoughts and incidents which emerged during the interview.

The data suggests a number of issues, which have implications for learnership efficacy. Primarily, among these, are the impact of learnership qualifications on employability; classroom and workplace experiences; the opportunity to apply skills acquired; and subsequent improved living standards.

**Table 5.24: Number of themes identified**

<b>THEME NO.</b>	<b>THEMES</b>	<b>NO. OF RESPONSES</b>
1.	Theoretical / Classroom experience	14
2.	Practical / Workplace experience	26
3.	Impact on Employability	31
4.	Impact on Living Standards	20
5.	Expectations Met	23
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>114</b>

### **5.8 Qualitative discussion and findings**

The following discussion is presented according to the identified themes. The most salient aspects for each theme were identified and presented for this section. The focus groups are discussed separately under each theme. Following each group discussion related quotes are presented in tabular format to confirm salient findings that were established for each theme.

The order of the themes is presented according to the process and structure of learnership programmes. For ease of reference, this process is repeated below:

- Learners are first introduced to the **class-room** environment for theoretical learning.
- Learners are then required to attend the **workplace** for vocational or work related experience.
- Once the learnership period is completed, learners receive their qualification in the form of certificates, which they use when **seeking employment**.
- Consequently, obtaining employment should **improve their living standards** through earning a wage or salary.

Even though this expression is a simplified version of the learnership process, in essence, learners would perceive and expect the learnership programme to offer them these experiences and consequential benefits.

### **5.8.1 Theme 1: Theoretical classroom experience**

According to the SDA (Act 97 of 1998), learnerships consist of a theoretical component, which requires that learners attend a planned and structured learning programme based on unit standards, which have been formalized through registration and subsequent accreditation by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

All learners should be assessed during and upon completion of the theoretical learning and all structured learnership programmes should contain elements of fundamental; core; and elective components. The data for this theme, perceptions of classroom experience, identified important responses which were found to be directly relevant to the premise of theoretical aspects of the classroom encounter.

#### **5.8.1.1 Discussion: Theme 1**

##### **Theme 1: Theoretical classroom experience**

##### **Group 1: MAPPPSETA: Digital Design Foundations**

The computer design group was most vocal when asked to offer their impressions on the classroom and theoretical learning component of the programme. Learners felt that a lack of planning and coordination was the course for negative perceptions that were experienced by them. Outdated material, irrelevant theory and a lack of practical application in the workplace were some of the comments received from learners. The relevance and recency of the learning material was a drawback, which most learners considered a concern. Learners also considered the learning material to be outdated or not relevant to the course.

Comments regarding the ability of training providers were stated as another point made by learners. Some learners felt that training providers were not adequately equipped to teach a particular programme. They felt that the institution had capable teachers, but that they were not allocated to their learnership programme.

Curriculum planning and implementation was also identified as a shortcoming for some of the learnership programmes. Learners complained that they did not receive any clear direction regarding the programme that they were enrolled in, while also citing problems with training provider ‘teachers’ not always being sure about the course content that they presented. Learners felt that the curriculum contained too much theory and insufficient practical training and felt that this aspect impacted directly on their workplace experience.

Some learners felt that the course content was not relevant to requirements for the workplace, while others felt that they were not sufficiently informed before entering the learnership programme. For example, some learners did not have computer skills when they entered the learnership and had to learn the basic skills of computer operations before they could continue with classroom learning. This they felt was an obstacle to their learning progression. Learners felt that the theoretical component of the learnership programme did not sufficiently prepare them for the workplace. Table 5.25 contains some of the responses obtained during the focus group interview for this group.

**Table 5.25: Theme 1: Direct Quotes: Group 1 Concept Interactive**

<b>Theme 1: Theoretical classroom experience</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G1.6	No clear direction for the programme – they changed their minds and had no proper plan.
G1.3	The programme was boring; they can change some of the programme.
G1.2	Teachers not always sure what they doing – some teachers were good but sometimes not patient with us.
G1.3	They have some teachers inside who are good, but they did not give us these teachers.
G1.4	They did not give us all the training we need for the workplace – only gave us Quark, Photoshop, Acrobat, Adobe – we need Basic.
G1.5	They did not do proper foundation.

**Theme 1: Theoretical classroom experience****Group 2: SERVICESETA: Entrepreneurial Skills – New Venture Creation**

For this group of learners a major drawback regarding theoretical classroom learning was related to infrastructure and facilities. Learners commented that the training provider had experienced problems with availability of training facilities, which caused learners to perceive that the training provider had cash flow problems and did not have sufficient funds to offer the programme. This perception created a negative impression on the learners.

With regard to the theoretical component of the learnership programme, older learners, especially those who had not recently been in a classroom environment, felt that the amount of theory was excessive in relation to the duration of the programme.

Positive aspects for this group, however, were constructive as a majority of learners felt that the curriculum was relevant and well planned and that the training provider was well prepared. They offered positive comments with regard to the training provider's attitude towards them as learners and felt that the learning experience had equipped them adequately for the future.

Perceptions were also positively related to the theoretical content of the programme. Learners related teaching methods such as the use of case studies as a method, which enhanced their understanding of real life situations, problem solving and decision making skills.

Learners further felt that acquiring financial skills for business operations would enable them to operate a business, which is successful and sustainable for the future. Learners for this group were most enthusiastic regarding their newly acquired knowledge and skill even though at the time they were still awaiting the certificates for completing the qualification. Table 5.26 below contains some quotes from the focus group interview.

**Table 5.26: Theme 1: Direct Quotes: Group 2 New Venture Creation**

<b>Theme 1: Theoretical classroom experience</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G2.1	I enjoyed the class and (the training provider) is a good teacher.
G2.5	(the training provider), you can see that's her passion, she's not human because she's never down! She would get extra information and always helped with questions.
G2.7	For me it was the calculations, the financials and forecasts. People always say that, and it's one of the biggest reasons why businesses close.
G2.2	The learnership was good for me. I learnt a lot of new stuff and I can see how I am going to use it in my business.
G2.5	There were lots of things I learnt and I can now apply in my business.
G2.4	I learn a lot in this learnership. Things I did not know before.

**Theme 1: Theoretical classroom experience**

**Group 3: INSETA: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance.**

Learners who attended the learnership with the Insurance SETA offered comments related to the volume of work that they were expected to absorb during the classroom sessions. Learners felt that they had not received adequate induction and orientation as a foundation for their learning. As a result, they felt that they were not sufficiently prepared and, therefore, did not know what to expect from the learnership programme. This dilemma became apparent when learners complained that they were faced with a huge amount of theoretical learning, continuously having to write tests and were expected to attain an 80% pass rate. Some learners felt that they should have been informed of these expectations before entering the programme.

Learners also felt that the volume of work that they had to memorise was excessive and they complained that the reading material was too lengthy. Learners felt that the duration of classroom teaching was too long and should have been afforded more time to gain experience at the workplace.

Most learners in this group, however, were positive regarding classroom experience as they attended the learnership through an insurance company and had assurance of obtaining a contract of employment on successful completion of the learnership. Table 5.27 contains some quotes from the focus group interview.

**Table: 5.27 Theme 1: Direct Quotes: Group 3: Financial Administration and short term insurance**

<b>Theme 1: Theoretical classroom experience</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G3.1	There's a lot of knowledge they put into your head that you must remember, I think they didn't give us too much exposure to the work place, only afterwards. I think with this like personal development training (pdt), they give you this training and then they put you in the work place so you can see what it's about.
G3.2	The three months was too short, they gave you so a file and you must do it in three days, which was technically impossible, your head was sore after those three days.
G3.4	You go into the training and you see all these files and you're so worried about being able to do it but once you get into the workplace and you're working it's fine.
G3.4	They also wanted us to get exposure of everything, not just one side, we did different processes.

### **5.8.1.2 Interpretation: Theme 1: Theoretical classroom experience**

In general, the experiences identified for this theme pointed to weaknesses in the curriculum and the structure of the programme. An imbalance was identified between classroom attendance and workplace learning in terms of the duration of these periods. While at the same time the classroom learning was not always well structured and did not particularly articulate to the practical component in the workplace. In other words, learners were not able to make the connection between classroom theory and workplace practice. These problems are absolutely contrary to evidence which is required for the efficacy of learnership programmes.

The most significant points can be summarised as follows:

- curriculum planning is inadequate;
- learners' level of skills and knowledge are not assessed during the recruitment and selection phase, as a result, 'learning assumed to be in place' is not identified;
- learning material was considered as inappropriate at times, which impacted on the availability of resources;
- curriculum content was considered inadequate for the course (learners felt that they were not sufficiently prepared and equipped for the workplace); and
- duration of the learnership programme was considered to be too short in some instances (learnership programmes should operate for a minimum duration of 12 months).

Not all responses regarding curriculum issues were negative, however. Some positive aspects, especially those related to the New Venture Creation learnership, yielded some optimistic responses. These comments are in line with recent findings by Pretorius and Włodarczyk's (2007: 505-506) study that was specific to the New Venture Creation learnership, which claims that tangible learning aspects of the curriculum require that learners actually create a business. For this reason learners are not directly linked to a business organisation for the practical component of the learning programme. This 'hands-on' approach to learning was positively perceived by learners.

The learners felt that the support offered by the training provider, as well the encouragement and camaraderie experienced from other learners in the classroom environment, enabled them to learn easily and do their best.

### **5.8.2 Theme 2: Workplace experience**

Learnership programmes are composed of two specific areas, namely that of theory and practice. The classroom experience on its own will not afford a learner the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to improve their



employability status. Pivotal to the success of learnership programmes, is the concept of experience and skills that are acquired in the workplace.

Employers form an essential part of the training and development, which are experienced by learners. Employers should ensure that their workplace is conducive to imparting knowledge and skills to learners and that it is a centre for learning and imparting such knowledge. Employers should have trained staff, which are able to coordinate and integrate theoretical knowledge that learners have acquired in the classroom with that of the physical and practical workplace.

It is imperative that learners are given an opportunity to learn and are able to apply knowledge and skills that are acquired in the classroom, in a practical manner at their specifically assigned workplace.

It was, therefore, disquieting to observe that the workplace component for this study received the most critical responses from learner participants. Negative responses that were identified for this theme provides a clear indication of one of the major weaknesses in learnership programmes.

#### **5.8.2.1 Discussion Theme 2**

##### **Theme 2: Workplace experience**

##### **Group 1: MAPPPSETA: Digital Design Foundations**

The Digital Design group of learners experienced the most negative incidents during their workplace encounter. Most learners felt that they had been treated as a nuisance, which resulted in learners spending most of their workplace learning in an unstructured ad hoc manner.

Some learners commented that they spent most of their days without guidance from employers, while they were not assigned to any structured learning programme and that they would sit for hours with no instructions except to 'surf' the Internet without much direction as to what was expected of them.

Learners from this group expressed a deep sense of disappointment in terms of their expectations regarding the process of learning and an opportunity to apply the theory to real life practical work situations. The learners were aware and informed of the learning process and what the role of the employer should be at the workplace. Therefore, they expressed their disappointment.

The learners enrolled in the Digital Design learnership also expressed a degree of negative sentiment on a personal level. Learners displayed a cynical attitude towards workplaces that they were placed at. This became apparent when they remarked that they felt unwelcome and experienced a sense of being a burden to the employers.

**Table 5.28: Theme 2: Direct Quotes: Group 1: Concept Interactive**

<b>Theme 2: Workplace experience</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G1.3	When I went to the job they did not give me much time. I felt like I was in the way.
G1.3	They make you feel like you waste their time.
G1.5	I was given a lot of stuff. They expect you to do it all. But there was nobody to teach you.
G1.2	And when it's your last day they don't even say goodbye to you.

**Theme 2: Workplace experience**

**Group 2: SERVICESETA: New Venture Creation**

Learners that enrolled for the New Venture Creation learnership did not attend a formal workplace to gain experience and apply theoretical concepts obtained during the classroom attendance. As the learners were being taught related skills to operating their own businesses, programme organisers arranged a market day with the aim of offering learners an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in market research and operations. Learners were required to

manufacture a product and to offer it to local customers. Learners were not clear about the criteria that was used to evaluate their business venture, but expressed a lot of satisfaction while undertaking this task.

For this reason, this group offered the most positive comments with regard to their perception of the workplace experience and the learnership programme in general.

**Table 5.29: Theme 2: Direct Quotes: Group 2: New Venture Creation**

<b>Theme 2: Workplace experience</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G2.6	Practical experience was got through markets where we had to sell our own stuff.
G2.5	Yes. We produced something because it was for one day that we did it.
G2.6	We had this one day, we had to allocate the venue where we were going to have it, we had two different venues, you had to put up your stall and then Deborah came around to see what it looked like and then they judged you.
G2.7	From our market day we actually continued doing business afterwards as a group.

**Theme 2: Workplace experience**

**Group 3: INSETA: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance**

This group faced a problem of insufficient time to gain workplace experience as they were exposed to a very short period of time at the workplace. This group also experienced a sense of not being given dedicated time to practice their skills within the workplace. Most comments related to the duration and structure of the workplace component. Learners commented on the availability of mentors at the workplace and even commented that the people that they needed to see, asked them to return at some other time as they were not prepared to meet with them or were not available at the specific time of schedule. Learners were placed with other workers while they demonstrated

what they could do. The experience seemed ad hoc and not as though it were linked to a structured learning programme and / or curriculum.

**Table 5.30: Theme 2: Direct Quotes: Group 3: Financial Administration and short term insurance**

<b>Theme 2: Workplace experience</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G3.1	We got two weeks exposure. Their planning was not so good... People were busy...
G3.4	It was the end of the month as well. Then we went and they said we must come back because that person's not in or that person's not ready for you.
G3.2	Sometimes they just dump work on you.
G3.4	Sit there and maybe they send you to somebody and you sit by that person and they show you what they can do, not what they can do but what they are able to at that point.

#### **5.8.2.2 Interpretation: Theme 2: Workplace experience**

The subject related to learner perceptions of their workplace experience, which offered the most opposing views and insights, as one group of learners was exposed to a different workplace experience, compared to the other two.

The New Venture Creation learners had not been introduced to any formal workplace as the nature of the programme did not require them to do so. In total contrast to the other two groups, this group had a highly positive experience at the market day, which was designed to test their workplace skills, and rendered constructive results for future business contacts and expansion.

Negative experiences, therefore, were recorded for the other two groups that were exposed to the corporate environment and, for the most, did not offer any positive sentiments towards employers. Taken as a whole, learners for the latter two groups felt that poor planning and lack of commitment from employers' perspective, resulted in their workplace experience amounting to tokenism. Learners generally perceived that employers had not prepared a practical learning programme and were using them as 'free labour' by giving them daily ad hoc tasks to perform. This programme often had no connection to

the theoretical components that were learned during the classroom sessions and, as a result, impacted negatively on learners' self confidence and esteem.

Learner responses indicated that a large percentage of employers and providers of work experience were, in most instances, not prepared for the learners or perceived it as a 'quick fix' in declaring their involvement in learnership programmes and consequently claim tax and other incentives, which the learnership programme affords. Most learners felt that employers had no structured programme or plan in place to accommodate their practice or 'workplace experience'. As is evident from the responses depicted in Table 5.3, some disturbing text was identified during the interviews. Some of the radical responses refer to learners feeling that they 'were not welcome' ; that 'they were left to their own devices for two weeks' and 'there was nobody to teach you'. Comments gained from learners indicate that they were fully aware of requirements for the workplace in terms of the employers' role in workplace learning.

These situations are directly opposed to the efficacy of learnership programmes, which should have a structured classroom and workplace component.

### **5.8.3 Theme 3: Impact on Employability**

The Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998 Sec.1.2 (a) (i)) specifically purports to ensure that learners are offered an opportunity to develop through attending programmes such as learnerships. As part of its objective to obtain skills in the workplace its aim is centred on improving workers' levels of qualifications, and thereby enable workers to improve their employability status.

This question, therefore, required that learners offer their perceptions on the impact of attending and completing a learnership programme, and on their employability status. In other words, it is hoped that by obtaining a qualification through a learning programme such as a learnership, will give the learner an

opportunity to find employment quicker than if they had not obtained the qualification.

### 5.8.3.1 Discussion: Theme 3

#### **Theme 3: Impact on Employability**

##### **Group 1: MAPPPSETA: Digital Design Foundations**

Learners in this group commenced this question with a positive response but, on further insight, commented on their lack of work experience. They felt that a qualification was not sufficient to improve their chances of obtaining employment and stated that employers do not consider one's qualification, but rather one's years of related work experience.

Learners also felt that they were not able to find employment in the industry related to their qualification. Some learners felt that they exhausted available opportunities in the market and were prepared to accept any work in order to be gainfully employed. Some learners also passed political comments stating that opportunities were only given to other races. This group felt strongly that they were disadvantaged in the corporate world and that jobs that were specific to the qualification that they obtained through the learnership, was only available to people of other races. On reflection, 90% of this group was unemployed and all resided in townships where low income and poor living standards are prevalent.

Learners were asked whether the qualification that was received through the learnership programme had made them more employable. Table 5.31 offers some comments that were received from participants for this group.

**Table 5.31: Theme 3: Direct Quotes: Group 1: Concept Interactive**

<b>Theme 3: Impact on Employability</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G1.1	Yes there are chances better than before.
G1.3	We have more chances and we have more skills but we are still not able to get work.
G1.4	I can get employed if the company is willing to give me more money and a chance, but all the companies want work experience.
G1.6	I wanted a job in the media industry but I will take any job.
G1.1	Only Whites and Coloureds and Indians get all the opportunities. And maybe by mistake one Black learns about it and is admitted to the course.
G1.6	We think that Blacks are not given opportunities to know about the courses.
G1.7	They just put us in IT because the jobs don't pay so well. And for the design jobs they get White people and they are able to learn all the stuff.

**Theme 3: Impact on Employability**

**Group 2: Services SETA: New Venture Creation**

As mentioned earlier, the group that attended this learnership was in a unique situation as they were skilled in successfully operating their own business, unlike other groups that wanted to enter the corporate business world. Therefore, this group would seek to obtain capital and start a business venture that matched their interest and skill. For this learnership programme, learners did not receive their certificates and were not able to produce evidence of a qualification when approaching a bank or lending institution for a loan. The learners felt strongly that this impacted on their ability to start a business venture.

This group also expressed disappointment as they had not been paid the full allowance or stipend, which was required for learners who attended a learnership programme. Learners felt that this allowance was crucial to them being able to invest the money as start up capital for their business venture.

Problems that they encountered were apparent when asked how the learnership experience and qualification had benefited their employability status. Table 5.32 offers some of the direct quotes extracted from the interview data.

**Table 5.32: Theme 3: Direct Quotes: Group 2: New Venture Creation**

<b>Theme 3: Impact on Employability</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G2.6	People – banks want to see your papers but we still waiting for our certificate.
G2.5	We want to apply what we've learned on top of practically what we had, now but we're at a deadlock, no bank or any institution is prepared to help us, we have no financial records.
G2.4	Now we under lot of pressure. We can't start a business cause we have no proof of qualifications.
G2.2	We don't have any joy at banks to get start up money.
G2.6	We're only equipped with the knowledge of what we can do but we don't have the funds to accelerate, to apply what we have learned.
G2.7	As a group we're disappointed because they promised us and we knew from the beginning we were going to get this final stipend and we knew already what we were going to do with that money.
G2.6	It was going to be a jumpstart for our businesses.



**Theme 3: Impact on Employability****Group 3: INSETA: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance**

Learners in this group were the least vocal with regard to improved employability. A contributing factor could be that all learners for this learnership programme were employed in entry level positions with a reputable and established insurance company. This company operates a successful business school (academy) on the premises where all employees are educated and schooled about corporate processes that are unique to this business. The learnership programme is one of several varied training programmes that are operated by the academy.

Related to enhanced employability status, learners were required to offer their opinion regarding their potential for promotion. Learners voiced their satisfaction with the effect of the learnership qualification concerning their promotion status. They felt that management had more respect for their ability and even though none of them had been promoted to any significant status, as entry level employees, they expressed a sense of achievement as management had awarded them with extra responsibility in their daily tasks.

Table 5.33 below offers some comments that were made by learners, which clearly indicate a positive disposition towards their perceptions of improved employability.

**Table 5.33: Theme 3: Direct Quotes: Group 3: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance**

<b>Theme 3: Impact on Employability</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G.3.1	I started paying the critical stuff and I eventually got a job now as a data inserter, payroll and stuff like that. It's also up to you as an individual but I think the training helped a lot.
G 3.2	Sometimes your job role is a benefits administrator but they give you more admin work on the sideline. They kind of trust you because of how you work.
G3.1	Yes. when I came out of training I was used as backlog, they were going to use me everywhere so from there they actually made me a benefit payment clerk.
G3.4	And through that they saw like it paid them at the end of the day, because there's people training now, the whole process. We are still there, we're still working there so it did pay off, that's why I'm grateful for the whole training thingy.
G.3.1	I didn't get a promotion, but I get more work. More work is better because the more you work the better you become as a person, money is not involved I think. I pay out money but I don't get it but work is actually nice.
G3.2	Always you will see in the paper, there's a job, 2 years experience, maybe you know the job but you don't have the experience, maybe you've studied it but experience is important.
G3.4	It would be nice to maybe work somewhere else as well, maybe just go into other fields as well.
G3.2	Not other fields, but a company like say Allen Gray or something. It makes you feel like you can do it and can go work there, before you didn't think like that.

### **5.8.3.2 Interpretation: Theme 3: Impact on Employability**

In general, the number of positive responses, indicate that most learners perceived that the learnership had afforded them some sense of achievement. On closer examination, however, these statements are too broad to have any

significant impact on the employability levels of workers. Workers seemed optimistic with regard to their potential to obtain better jobs with higher salaries or promotion in the workplace with an added increase in salary, but none of the learners, following some months of completing the learnership, had any concrete evidence that they had actually benefited from the learnership qualification.

In reality, the negative responses indicate quite clearly that one of the main objectives of learnership programmes, namely enhanced employability, is not being achieved, at least not through learnership programmes.

On closer examination of the major responses for this theme, there is a clear indication that learners do not perceive the learnership qualification as a vehicle and/or a mechanism for enhancing employability, nor as an accelerant to obtain employment. The most critical voices were heard from the Digital Design learners regarding benefits of enhanced employability, which result from qualifications that are obtained from learnership qualifications.

Most of the learners perceived that their employability status had not been enhanced through attending a learnership programme. Learners did not experience any significant change regarding their ability to find employment despite having acquired additional qualifications. Most of the learners did not perceive any improvement in their lives. This is especially apparent for learners who had been recruited to the programme through public advertising and were not employed at the time of entering the learnership. Some of these learners had an expectation of obtaining employment through the learnership programme.

Responses from the group that attended the learnership through the insurance industry yielded the most positive responses in terms of employability. The insurance industry is considered to be amongst the largest industries in the corporate sector and owing to its stability, learners were in most cases offered employment immediately after completing the learnership programme. It was,

therefore, considered as an advantage for learners who enrolled for these learnerships.

Alternately, in terms of enhanced employability, the learnership programme for entrepreneurial skills was considered to have an advantage over the previous groups, as they were taught skills, which would directly be applied in the self-employment arena.

The New Venture Creation learnership provides learners with an opportunity to design a business plan in line with opportunities and needs of the market. Hence, learners should be able to establish and operate (at least on a small scale) a new business venture, once they complete this learnership.

A major disappointment, however, regarding the group that attended the New Venture Creation Learnership in relation to accelerated employability status, stemmed around a major lack of resources and opportunity, as these individuals came from a historically disadvantaged group and considered themselves as lower income earners.

The fact that learners had still not received their certificates also seriously hindered their ability to obtain financial assistance from banks and other financial institutions. Learners felt that institutions would show more confidence and be more willing to extend assistance in the form of capital or credit when they (learners) are able to produce tangible evidence of educational qualifications.

#### **5.8.4 Theme 4: Perceived impact of learnership qualification on standard of living**

Living standards are enhanced when individuals, in this study referred to as learners in this study, are able to enhance their employability status and thereby gain employment, which offers a wage or salary and, as a result, are able to afford an improved standard of living. Hillage and Billett (1998: 4) refer to these as 'employability assets', which comprise of knowledge, skills and

attitudes of individuals. By applying these acquired 'assets', employees are able to enhance their living standards by earning an income and, consequently, improve their standard of living.

The Oxford Dictionary defines standard of living as 'the amount of money and level of comfort that a particular person or group has.' This further implies that individuals are able to afford to purchase goods and services, which ensures a comfortable life.

For this study, perceptions of participants with regard to their improved standards of living were explored. Learners were required to consider whether they were able to afford to live a more comfortable lifestyle as a consequence of obtaining income through employment and as a result of acquiring a qualification through the learnership programme.

Learners were directly questioned with regard to their perceptions of an improved standard of living as a consequence of acquiring a qualification and an enhanced employability status. Responses below offer insight into the opinions of learner participants and are discussed separately for each focus group interview. Thereafter, an integrated discussion is offered, which endeavours to synthesize the data for this theme.

#### **5.8.4.1 Discussion: Theme 4**

##### **Theme 4: Impact on standard of living**

##### **Group 1: MAPPPSETA: Digital Design Foundations**

Learners who attended the Digital Design learnership programme felt that they had not benefited in an economic sense from obtaining a qualification in digital design through the learnership programme.

Learners for this group were particularly negative with regard to the industry's racial demographics, which did not favour them as Black youths. Their perceptions are that of a 'White dominated industry', where Black youths are

not given opportunities to obtain employment. Learners referred to themselves as foundation students, and gave an impression of experiencing low self esteem. This is most unfortunate and in direct contrast to objectives of the advancement of skills development in South Africa. An important objective of the NSDS seeks to ensure that all races are afforded an opportunity to improve their living standards, especially among the previously disadvantaged individuals.

Some learners felt that the qualification was barely able to afford them a recognized qualification and described it as a “foundation, which had no walls”. This implication reflects an opinion that the learnership programme does not sufficiently equip them for the workplace. Others complained that they were not able to obtain employment in the industry for which they had attended the learnership.

Some learners did not experience any change in their living standards as they were still looking for employment, while others were employed, but not in the industry for which they had obtained a qualification. Learners were particularly disappointed, since they are not recognized for the qualification that they had obtained. Table 5.34 below offers some direct quotations that are related to this theme for group one.

**Table 5.34: Theme 4: Direct Quotes: Group 1: Digital Design Foundations**

<b>Theme 4: Impact on standard of living</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G1.1	It was like building with no walls we only have a foundation.
G1.6	I don't see any change in my life.
G1.3	I am still looking for work – no change since I finished.
G1.1	I want to use my skills I learnt in the learnership but I am doing another learnership in hospitality; nothing to do with media. I can't find a job in this industry.
G1.4	We did 8 of internship – but industry is White dominated environment.
G1.8	I am employed; I work part time at the moment, but not doing same as what I was taught, just junior work.

**Theme 4: Impact on standard of living****Group 2: Services SETA: New Venture Creation**

When asked how the learnership qualification had impacted on their standard of living, this group stated emphatically that they had not experienced any positive impact on their lives as a result. This group was particularly aggrieved by the fact that they had not received any proof in the form of certification from the learnership programme management or training provider. They blamed this factor as a major reason for them not being able to secure capital in the form of a loan from a bank. They stated that banks or lending institutions would not consider them for loans as they are considered to be unqualified and, therefore, a financial risk. Learners perceive that the qualification will allow them some form of status when engaging with organizations such as banks and other financial institutions.

Learners for this group also blamed the fact that they still had a portion of the stipend allowance owed to them. This allowance, they contend, would have given them an opportunity for start-up capital and would have, therefore, allowed them to start a business, which would have resulted in earnings from profits obtained by the business. Table 5.35 lists some direct quotes that were obtained from this focus group interview.

**Table 5.35: Theme 4: Direct Quotes: Group 2: New Venture Creation**

<b>Theme 4: Impact on standard of living</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G2.3	It does not help to make positive impact on my life yet.
G2.5	We want to apply what we've learned on top of practically what we had, now but we're at a deadlock, no bank or any institution is prepared to help us, we have no financial records.
G2.2	We don't have any joy at banks to get start up money.
G2.6	People – banks want to see your papers but we still waiting for our certificate.
G2.6	We're only equipped with the knowledge of what we can do but we don't have the funds to accelerate, to apply what we have learned.

**Theme 4: Impact on standard of living****Group 3: INSETA: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance**

This group was not quite able to offer a clear opinion of improved living standards post learnership qualification. Learners for this group were employed at entry level positions as administration clerks with a reputable insurance company. The learnership was explicitly designed to teach them work processes that were specific to the company's systems. This could be a reason why they did not consider an improved standard of living as part of benefits that were obtained through obtaining a qualification. Table 5.36 lists some direct quotes that closely related to this theme.

**Table 5.36: Theme 4: Direct Quotes: Group 3: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance**

<b>Theme 4: Impact on standard of living</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G3.1	I don't think it makes your life better.
G3.1	I started paying the critical stuff and I eventually got a job now as a data inserter, payroll and stuff like that. It's also up to you as an individual but I think the training helped a lot.
G3.3	The reason for training us was to fill gaps up, part of it was for us to also do the work properly and follow the processes, because some people get in there and don't know what to do, they hear from other people how it's supposed to be done, but that's the short cut way.
G3.4	They also wanted us to get exposure of everything, not just one side, we did different processes.
	G3.2 Through my experiences, at work also, the different people I've... I just learned a lot.

Learners focused on the content of the learnership programme and considered their exposure to various areas and work processes as an important step in their learning programme. This was then the essence of their perceptions with regard to improved living standards that they experienced in the learnership programme. They did not experience any increase in earnings, but did experience an increase in responsibility. This had a positive impact on learners



as they felt that they were better equipped to deal with all aspects of the work and could be assigned to various work processes and divisions.

#### **5.8.4.2 Interpretation: Theme 4: Impact on standard of living**

Responses were relatively positive for this theme but predominated around issues with regard to employability and consequent effects on learners' living standards. The most disturbing responses found under this theme centred on learners not being able to earn an increased salary or wage once they acquired a qualification. Learners felt that employers assumed that they were happy with the allowance that they had earned and would, therefore, not be opposed to a low salary of R1400.00 per month. Also distressing were the perceptions of younger learners, in this case group one learners who were predominantly from a lower income background. They believed that particular industries favour certain racial groups over others. The reality in this instance is harsh and will probably remain a hindrance for some time into the future.

#### **5.8.5 Theme 5: Learners perceptions that their expectations have been met**

People generally enter learning or educational programmes, which they consider to be advantageous to their future well-being and they do so with varying expectations concerning to what benefits of these programmes will afford them in the future. Learners who enter into a learnership programme are no different. These expectations are even more elevated when learners expect a qualification in the form of a certificate, which they perceive will enhance their ability to obtain employment and consequently augment their living standards.

This theme sought to enquire learners' perceptions once they had completed the learnership programme, and further sought to explore reasons for their expectations were either met or not met. This theme, therefore, considers the overall perception of individuals with regard to their expectations and how they perceive the learnership programme to have benefited them from a personal perspective.

The survey questionnaires required that learners state whether they had entered into the learnership programme with certain expectations. The questionnaire also offered various categories for learners to consider. A significant percentage (97%) of all participants that were surveyed, while still attending the learnership, stated that they had some expectations of benefits that they would receive from the learnership with specific regard to gaining generic skills, while a similar percentage (93%) of learners perceived that the learnership qualification would provide them with experience and a formal qualification. A tabular presentation was presented earlier in the quantitative analysis (Table 5.14 on page 110) offering a breakdown of learner expectations with further emphasis on skills acquisition and employment.

#### **5.8.5.1 Discussion: Theme 5**

**Theme 5: Learners Expectations met**  
**Group 1: MAPPPSETA: Digital Design Foundations**

The digital design group of learners were of the opinion that the learnership programme was responsible for placing them in employment. As most of them were still unemployed some three months after completing the learnership, they felt that the learnership qualification had not met their expectation of obtaining gainful employ and earning an income through this employ.

While some learners expected the training providers and SETAs to give them employment, other learners were more realistic and stated that the content of the programme had served as a foundation course and an introductory phase, which would further allow them to gain entry into the industry and may benefit them in future. Learners realised that the learnership programme would not be sufficient to give them enough experience in the industry, but felt that they had gained confidence and benefited through building self esteem.

This group of learners put forward the most positive opinions with regard to the learnership programme being able to meet their expectations. Expressions

such as ‘paradigm shift’, ‘mindset change’ and ‘confidence booster’ were articulated during the focus group interview.

**Table 5.37: Theme 5: Direct Quotes: Group 1: Digital Design Foundations**

<b>Theme 5 : Expectations met</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G1.3	It gave me a stepping stone.
G1.2	LS did not give us a job yet but I feel it gave me confidence.
G1.1	LS only focus on few things and not give us enough experience to know our industry.
G1.4	We are still waiting for LS to give us jobs.

<p><b>Theme 5: Learners’ expectations met</b>  <b>Group 2: Services SETA: New Venture Creation</b></p>
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Most learners felt that the learnership programme had changed their perspective on managing a business and equipped them with knowledge, skills and confidence to start up and successfully operate a new business venture. Learners particularly expressed their increased levels of confidence in being able to perform certain business functions that are necessary to operate a business and be able to express themselves more eloquently when entering into discussion and negotiations with outside parties regarding the business.

The most positive aspect lies in the relevance that learners found in the curriculum. Learners were able to apply knowledge that was gained during the classroom experience and immediately relate to relevance of the course content to the real world of business.

Negative comments, albeit not many, once again centred on the fact that they were not able to approach a bank for a business loan as they did not have the

required certificate, which prove their qualification. The administrative shortcoming, therefore, has been a setback for these learners.

Learners also felt that the learnership for new venture creation could be coordinated with larger businesses, giving small business owners an opportunity to network and to join work streams, which could offer them information and business links and which offered them a prospect of obtaining business opportunities.

**Table 5.38: Theme 5: Direct Quotes: Group 2: New Venture Creation**

<b>Theme 5 : Expectations met</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G2.4	It's a paradigm shift.
G2.5	Our mindsets changed that we only thought about business.
G2.2	It made you confident that I can do it. You can go to the institutions and know what to say.
G2.4	But what we learned here can be applied practically, especially if you're someone who has already started a small business, you can see the relevance of everything. See what you can do.
G2.5	I would advise anyone who wants to go into business to do the New Venture Creation learnership instead of going to a college.
G2.5	The government needs to construct something that goes head-to-head with SETA's and anyone who qualifies to be a small business person must be allocated some money according to how they will see the business.

**Theme 5: Learners' expectations met**

**Group 3: INSETA: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance**

When asked whether their expectations were met, this group did not respond directly. They did, however, indicate that their expectations had been met in terms of them being able to obtain knowledge and experience of a wide range of job duties, which placed them in an advantageous position compared to

employees who had not been enrolled for training through the learnership programmes. One learner was asked what his expectations were. He said that he expected to learn and that the learnership programme had offered him exactly what he expected. Once again, as with the previous group, one learner felt that his confidence had been improved since his superiors had more trust in him.

**Table 5.39: Theme 5: Direct Quotes: Group 3: Financial Administration and Short Term Insurance**

<b>Theme 5 : Expectations met</b>	
<b>Group Identification</b>	<b>Direct Quote</b>
G3.1	To learn. It did meet my expectations because I learned a lot out of the whole...
G3.3	It changed my whole attitude, I was very laid back but it changed the way I think.
G3.2	I'm probably not going to work at (this company) next year... but something just changed.
G3.3	When people start having faith in me, people do take notice of me. It's an honour.
G3.4	Like the terms, the acronyms they use, I never knew stuff like that, now I can relate to someone when he speaks about that, you feel comfortable, I'm not a lee blik, (empty vessel) I'm full of knowledge.

#### **5.8.5.2 Interpretation: Theme 5: Learners' expectations met**

In terms of learners' perceptions regarding whether the learnership qualification had met their expectations, this focal point elicited an interesting number of responses. Most of the issues which learners felt met their expectations, centred on their perceptions of the value of a learnership qualification for future prospects in work, employability and improved living standards. As previously discussed, the group that was most positively disposed to the outcomes of obtaining a learnership qualification, was Group 2. As these learners were empowered to establish their own businesses, they were able to directly apply the knowledge and skills that they learned during their classroom attendance to

that of a real business operation. The other two groups, however, owing to the nature of their learnership programme, had more dependence on external parties and hence perceived that they should have been offered more opportunities to gain employment or to become more employable.

On the negative side, even though confidence and self esteem were boosted, perceptions were often reflected in 'none delivery' of tangible benefits. This theme elicited a large number of data, which indicated strong opinions with regard to negative issues perceived by learners. Some learners had cause to feel disappointed with the outcomes of benefits for their personal employability status and living standards. This was especially evident from data that was derived from the group one learners.

The most significant negative comments centred round the expectation that they would be much more employable. Therefore, statements such as :

- 'they ask you how long you have done the work and not what you did in the learnership' (refer to participant G1.5.) and
- 'maybe the company wants to achieve a goal or something so they just give us a learnership' (refer to participant G3.26).

Even more important is the fact that some learners did not receive their certificates at the end of the learnership programme, while others were still waiting for the balance of their allowances to be paid out.

Most of the negative responses that were identified from the data related to administrative shortcomings on the part of stakeholders. Most concerning is the fact that learners had not yet graduated or received evidence of their attendance in the form of certificates. The implications of not verifying attendance and completion of an educational programme is directly opposed to the objectives of the NSDS since learners will not be able to show increased levels of employability as they will not be able to obtain employment and, as a result, acquire the benefits of earning a salary or increase their earning potential.

## **5.9 Synthesis of quantitative versus qualitative data**

In comparing the data that was collected during attendance of the learnership programme, which used a quantitative survey questionnaire against data that was collected some three to six months after completing the learnership, which was collected via focus group discussions, it showed a marked change in learner perceptions and opinions with regard to benefits of learnership qualifications for improved employability status and, consequently, enhanced living standards.

The following discussion offers a comparison found for some of the more salient points from the analysis of the data.

### **5.9.1 Learner perceptions and expectations while enrolled**

Learners were asked to give their responses to a possible list of expectations that they held before joining the learnership programme, and whether at that stage of the programme, they felt that their expectations were being met. For one of these categories, 93% of learners had indicated that they had specific expectations for the programme to afford them a formal accredited qualification. Furthermore 61% of these learners felt that the programme would be able to meet their expectations.

Learnership programmes, as articulated in the skills development strategy, are designed to offer learners an opportunity to acquire skills and enhance their employability status. The survey questionnaire required that learners provide reasons for them entering or enrolling in the learnership programme.

Data that was collected clearly indicated that learners held high perceptions of the outcomes for their personal employability status. Table 5.11 (on page 103) illustrates that 72.4% of learner participants wanted to obtain more skills, while 54.5% of learners enrolled in order to gain a qualification.

After completing the learnership programme learners' responses reflected the following:

With regard to improved levels of skills, most learners were happy that they had been given an opportunity to obtain skills through attending a learnership programme and felt that it would benefit them in future. They did, however, state that their present situation had not shown any improvement, but that they would optimistically await an improvement in their situations. A few learners felt that they were equipped with skills, but had no opportunity to use these skills and that these skills might be redundant by the time they are able to obtain employment.

With reference to obtaining a qualification:

Learners who were employed and enrolled for the learnership during their employment period felt that the qualification would give them an opportunity to be promoted, even though they had not experienced any potential for promotion at the time. Learners who were not employed at the time of attending the learnership, conversely, did not perceive the qualification as beneficial as several of them were still seeking employment. In addition, some of them had not been given certification and, therefore, had no evidence of successful attendance.

### **5.9.2 Learners perceptions after completion**

Having completed the learnership programme, learners seemed to have changed their perceptions regarding the benefits of learnership with specific reference to their employability status. Most learners were negative regarding the ability of learnership qualifications to act as a catalyst for improved employability and hence enhanced living standards.

As previously discussed, the fact that two of the three groups stated that they had not obtained any form of qualification, left several learners with the perception that their expectations had not been met. This failure on the part of



administrators to acknowledge the learners' success in completing a learnership programme, points to some of the major weaknesses that are evident in the management of the learnership process.

### **5.10 Concluding remarks**

This chapter presented an analysis of the data and interpretation of results of the research study. Some clear indications have been observed, since learners, once they had completed the learnership, in most cases, did not perceive the learnership qualification as a possible benefit to their employability status.

As indicated by the data presented in this chapter, the most salient findings of the study point to the overall contrasting experiences of learners prior to and after the learnership programme.

Learners clearly entered into the programme with high expectations and enthusiasm but experienced disappointing results after they had completed the programme. As previously stated learners, particularly those who participated in the New Venture Creation Learnership and the Digital Designs Learnership, indicated their disillusionment with regard to the programmes' inability to afford them a tangible certificate in recognition of successful completion of their respective qualifications. Learners, on receipt of concrete evidence of their achievements are able to use these certificates to seek and obtain gainful employment. This is especially significant in the light of the current economic situation relating to the high level of unemployment and the concomitant lack of employment opportunities for workers with low level skills as experienced in this study.

Another essential benefit to attending a learnership programme lies in the programme's ability to equip learners with specific skills which would enable them to achieve employment in an occupation suited to their interests and ability. This significant advantage was not experienced learners as they generally did not obtain work related to their specific skills and knowledge.

As the latter part of the study was conducted after a period of three to six months post completion of the learnership programme, it could be beneficial for further research to complete the same study, possibly using the same participants, after a period of twelve to eighteen months, after which time learners may have had more opportunity to seek and find employment or promotion at their workplace.

Chapter Six, which follows, offers recommendations and conclusions based on the findings of this research study.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore perceptions of learners regarding the efficacy of learnership programmes in the Cape Peninsula in terms of their ability to enhance employability and consequent improved living standards.

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings, aligns them to the aims of the study and offers divergent and convergent views that are related to current literature and findings on this topic. It also demonstrates that learnership programmes still need to develop a framework for best practice in order for various stakeholders to ensure quality.

In order to answer the main research question, the following sub-questions were investigated:

- What perceptions do learners hold with regard to the relevance of training and education experienced in the classroom during the learnership?
- What perceptions do learners hold with regard to the relevance of training and education experienced in the workplace during the learnership?
- To what extent has the learnership qualification contributed towards improved level of employability of learners?
- To what extent has the learnership qualification contributed towards positively impacting on learners' standard of living?
- In general, has the learnership experience met the expectations that learners had when enrolling for the learnership programme?

Due to the mixed methods approach of data collection and analysis, the discussion presents both quantitative and qualitative findings for these

objectives. This enabled a comprehensible and unambiguous understanding of the discussion and findings for each construct.

Louw (2006:59) maintains that learnerships contribute to “better employability”. Learnerships have been concluded to add confidence in obtaining employment by virtue of enhanced employability and an opportunity to obtain a qualification. Learners experience positive outcomes as a result of the learnership experience, while learnerships contribute to “better employability” (Du Toit, Serfontein & Dealers, 2005:1, South African Management Development Institute, 2005:46; Louw, 2006:59; Stemmers 2005:69). In particular, Louw’s thesis (2006), which set out to establish that learnerships can act as a positive contributor towards improving employability of learners, concluded that learners will become more employable for industries besides the industry in which the learnership programme resides. However, it was found that the workplace constituent holds an imperative component of learnership success in acquiring employability skills (Louw, 2006: 59). He concludes that “specifically the structured workplace learning component, increases confidence [in learners] in obtaining employment [or] in the possibility getting employment and hence improves employability”.

As previously mentioned, learnership programmes have been criticised for not delivering in terms of its efficacy and especially with regard to high drop out rates quoted in the media (Letsoala, 2007). Influencing factors, which aggravate retention rates could possibly be related to:

- Poor marketing of learnerships available, resulting in a low application rate which is costly and time consuming;
- Poor recruitment and selection of learners, resulting in learners being mismatched to the programme; namely learners who are under prepared for the learnership (level too high) or Learners who are over qualified for the learnership (level too low); and
- Poor induction and orientation of learners into the programme.

All of these have resulted in learners not having sufficient knowledge of learnerships before enrolment and learners being over-qualified or under-qualified to attend the learnership programme. Once enrolled in the programme, learners soon become demotivated and eventually leave the programme.

If learners perceived the learnership programme as beneficial to their own future development, they would be motivated to complete the learnership and, in some instances, enrol for further learnerships in order to improve their personal levels of education.

In due course learners will be able to use the learnership programmes as a 'stepping-stone' to acquire a quality education and, consequently, build their qualifications, as well as gain knowledge, skills and ability in the workplace. Ultimately, learners will be able to enjoy improved lifestyle on a tangible level, and gain self-esteem and confidence on an intangible level.

Objectives of the study were to gain insight into perceptions of learners, thereby showing how learners' expectations of personal benefits of learnerships are not taken into account. This means that learners are not sufficiently aware of learnership benefits for future personal development; learners' drop-out rates are owing to their misconceived perceptions of the learnership processes, (namely theory; practice and assessment); learners are not correctly matched to the learnership programme (mismatched in terms of NQF levels) and learners are not sufficiently informed and empowered to make a choice between various levels and types of learnership programmes.

One of the main objectives of the learnership Programme for beneficiaries is an opportunity to receive work experience through training and education, not unlike being enrolled at a formal learning institution such as a Further Education College (FET). Through attendance of the learnership, learners thus obtain a recognized occupational qualification, which is portable and can ultimately culminate in a completed qualification on the NQF (NSDS, 2001c).

If learners

- have insufficient knowledge of the specific learning programme prior to enrolling;
- are not correctly matched to the learnership programme at the initial stage of recruitment and selection;
- are not correctly inducted onto the programme;
- do not receive meaningful teaching and learning in the classroom; and
- are not exposed to workplace training, which is linked to the theoretical classroom learning;

chances are, they will not experience benefits of the programme and, consequently, objectives of skills development strategy will not be achieved as proposed by the NSDS.

## **6.2 Perceptions of theoretical classroom experience**

### **6.2.1 Responses obtained from survey questionnaires**

The initial survey questionnaire findings revealed the following:

For this section of the study, specific questions were asked relating to the classroom experience. The following results relating to question nine were found:

*Q. I feel that the learnership has taught me a lot and I am able to use my skills in the workplace.* A total of 88% of learners felt that the classroom experience was relevant, while 9% disagreed.

The second question related to the course content:

*Q. The course covers all that is needed in the workplace.* A total of 74% agreed that the course was adequate for the workplace, while 9% disagreed with this statement.

As is evident, a high number of positive responses (both in excess of 70%) indicated that learners were well disposed to the classroom experience in terms of benefits of classroom learning, as well as content of the curriculum.

Question 11 of the survey questionnaire required that learners offer their perceptions with regard to various aspects that are related to classroom experience. These related to theory that was received in the class the training providers' ability, availability and preparedness.

Once learners had completed the course, however, they offered totally divergent views. The following section provides a discussion of the post-learnership views which were collected via focus group interviews.

### **6.2.2 Responses obtained during focus group interviews**

Qualitative analysis with focus group interviews revealed the following:

Data that was collected for this theme identified a number of responses as discussed in Chapter Five. Most of the responses referred to the theoretical aspects of the classroom encounter and had a negative connotation. Learners most often felt that programmes were not well thought out and that more careful planning should be made. In general, these experiences pointed to weaknesses in the programme and are contrary to evidence, which is required for efficacy of learnership programmes. Louw (2005:55) and Stemmers (2005:52) confirm that major shortcomings in learnership curricula involves classroom training, which is often not sufficiently job related and is too generic to impart relevant job related knowledge and skills.

The results of this study offers strong evidence, which suggests that some of the reasons could be ascribed to planning inadequacies as well as poor recruitment and selection practices. In general, these experiences pointed to weaknesses in the programme and are contrary to evidence, which is required for efficacy of learnership programmes. The evidence suggests that:

- curriculum planning is inadequate;

- learners' levels of skills and knowledge are not assessed during the recruitment and selection phase and, as a result, 'learning assumed to be in place' is not identified;
- learning material was considered as inappropriate at times; and
- curriculum content was considered inadequate for the course (learners felt that they were not sufficiently equipped for the workplace).

This last point is of particular importance as this relates directly to questions posed in the survey questionnaire (questions 11 and 13) which required that learners should have access to a training provider during the classroom learning and a supervisor and mentor at the workplace.

*Q. When I am working and have questions I am able to find someone who is willing and able to assist me.* An overwhelming 84% of learners responded positively to this question. This corresponds with responses that were received during the focus group interviews. Learners felt that "...having all the people around you so if you don't know you can ask somebody next to you", was a positive aspect within the classroom environment.

These positive aspects, however, indicated that while support was available to the learners, this support was offered by fellow learners in the classroom and colleagues at the workplace. Which suggests that training providers in the classroom; and supervisors and mentors at the workplace do not have a proper monitoring programme in place.

### **6.2.3 Recommendations**

It is evident that learners experienced problems regarding the relevance of learnership programme theory during classroom sessions. Stakeholders should ensure that curriculum planning and coordination become a priority in learnership programme management. In particular, registration of learnership programmes and coordination of programmes should be assessed and audited according to rules laid down by both the departments of Labour and Education.



Quality assurance is of utmost importance when teaching and learning imperatives are required. Offering qualifications for the sake of fulfilling quotas, will soon reflect in the tangible expression that learners will have to exhibit in the actual workplace.

### **6.3 Perceptions of workplace experience**

Imperatives for learnership programmes are that they contain both classroom and workplace experience. The Department of Labour is emphatic when they stress "...where there is no workplace, there is no learnership" (DoL, Learnership website, 2004).

#### **6.3.1 Responses obtained from survey questionnaires**

Quantitative data, which was collected via the survey questionnaire, revealed that more than half of the learners (64%) perceived the workplace experience as an opportunity to obtain relevant work-related experience through training. An even greater number of learners (78%) believed that they would be better equipped and would, consequently, become more productive through skills that they acquired in the workplace.

Once learners completed and exited the learnership programme, however, in sharp contrast to the questionnaire results, the focus group data revealed a cynical and pessimistic view of the workplace encounter.

#### **6.3.2 Responses obtained during focus group interviews**

The results for this variable showed the highest scores in terms of negative responses throughout the focus group interviews. Learners' main criticism was that employers did not plan or structure any meaningful training for them, which allowed learners to spend their time with menial tasks, which had no relevance for the learning programme, let alone alignment to the unit standards that were developed for the specific learnership.

This study reveals that most of the evidence suggests that the workplace experience is far from adequate for learners to be able to gain any meaningful encounter, which, in turn, would translate into significant learning for the learners. Most of the evidence suggests a serious lack of commitment on behalf of employers to accommodate learners in the workplace.

Hattingh (2004: 16) advises that the workplace component of a learnership programme should be designed so that the workplace experience offers a “direct correlation between what [has been] learnt [in theory] and what is [needed] in practice”. She continues to emphasise the deliberate integration between these components stating “this is what the learners will learn from the training provider and this is what they will do in the workplace to relate this learning to the real world of work” (Hattingh 2004:16).

Singh (2002:1) confirms that organisations are unenthusiastic and largely unwilling to implement and manage learnership programmes in the workplace. His study bore evidence to the fact that none of the organisations that participated in the study had current plans, and did not implement learnership programmes. This speaks to a dire need for organisations to commit to the collaborative nature of vocational training and development, which are required to make skills acquisition a success in this country. Whereas Jacklin (2003:47) lays the responsibility firmly in the hands of employers emphasising that despite the ‘free market’ ploy to focus on the profit margin and the low value level of investing in skills development, employers should calculate the financial and psychological benefits for the organisation when implementing and participating in education and skills development of its human resources.

### **6.3.3 Recommendations**

In order for any meaningful workplace experience to be gained, learners should be exposed to work related theory which is aligned to and forms part of the unit standards for each learnership programme.

Moreover, the importance of organisational input cannot be sufficiently emphasised, since it can be argued that workplace skills should drive development of the curriculum, as industry dictates which skills, knowledge and experiences are required to fulfil a particular occupation, especially in the light of the dynamic nature of work in these ever-evolving technology-driven industrial activities.

Also of importance is assessment, which is supposed to be carried out in the workplace. One wonders how learners were passed or declared as competent, if no proper assessment was made at their place of work.

Workplace learning should become a major priority for all workplaces and organisations should become accountable for learners who enter the workplace to acquire particular skills.

Learnership programmes should be specific enough to enable employers to identify, which areas of learning should be developed and how these areas will be assessed and reported.

Employers can only begin to experience the economic benefits for the organisation by investing in skills development in the workplace when they engage whole-heartedly in learnership and skills programmes.

#### **6.4 Perceptions of improved employability status**

As a consequence of learning, which learners experienced and the consequent qualification obtained through successful completion of the learnership, the ultimate benefit should be that learners become more employable. This construct was measured by using the qualitative focus group interview as the question more readily applies to the post learnership status of learners. The question was put to learners in terms of their perceptions of improved employability.

#### **6.4.1 Responses obtained during focus group interviews**

Learners were required to demonstrate whether their situation had improved in terms of positive aspects regarding employment or promotion, which implies acquisition of earnings in terms of salary or an increase in current earnings as a result of promotion. This proved to be untrue as almost all participants, with the exception of a few interviewees in group three, emphatically stated that they had not experienced any positive outcomes in terms of improved employability status. Contrarily, participants expected to be gainfully employed by the time they completed their studies and obtained the qualification, but had not even graduated and, therefore, had no evidence of the qualification that they had aspired to during attendance and completion of the learnership programme.

It can, therefore, be stated that the learnership programme is not achieving objectives, which are articulated in the National Skills Development Strategy in terms of its ability to improve employability of learners.

#### **6.4.2 Recommendations**

A major priority for all stakeholders that are involved in learnership programmes, especially at a macro policy initiation level, should be to actively seek to afford and create opportunities for learners to obtain employment. It is demotivating for any individual to experience a long period of unemployment upon completion of a learning programme. Hence, the government should make a concerted effort to apply their minds to obtain a way in which employers are kept more accountable in terms of their contribution to the skills deficit and low employment problems that are being experienced in this country. Even further down the line of accountability is the question of the school curriculum and its ability to equip learners at a secondary level with basic employability skills such as literacy and numeracy and other important related life skills for confidence building and self esteem. By improving the overall education system, learners will be enabled at a young age, through education and life long learning, to elevate their chances of being aptly employed.

## **6.5 Perceptions of improved standards of living**

The question of consequential improved living standards is linked to the above construct.

### **6.5.1 Responses obtained during focus group interviews**

In relation to this study, learners who enrolled in these learnerships did not perceive that their lives were in any way improved through acquired income or increased levels of income. On the contrary, learners felt that they had been disadvantaged to some extent. They stated that the certificates that they received listed the amount of the allowance, which they believe employers have interpreted as an acceptable amount to use as a starting salary. During their employment interviews, employers offered learners a starting salary which equalled the stipend allowance that was given to them by the SETA.

Other problems involved the fact that learners had completed the learnership but had not received any recognition of attendance in the form of a certificate or any other acknowledgement of attendance. Learners also experienced disappointment, since they still had some monies in the form of allowances due to them. The Entrepreneurship Skills learnership group were mainly affected by this, as they expected to put the allowance to good use by investing it into their business ventures.

A general conclusion can, therefore, be made that a majority of learners who participated in the latter part of the study perceived the learnership qualification to be more of a disadvantage to them instead of being beneficial in terms of improving their standards of living.

### **6.5.2 Recommendations**

The Skills Development Act seeks to improve learners' employability levels and, consequently, advance their living standards. Inequality in income is a

historical dilemma within South Africa's labour market and, as such, will impact on the living standards of employees. However, implementation of learnership programmes, according to the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998), set out to combat this predicament by implementing a human resource development programme, which will allow employees to improve their status and the chances of employment and income.

Further investigation should be conducted to explore how employers can be convinced of benefits of implementing learnership programmes. Employers should be made aware of the benefits of offering learners employment once they complete a learnership. This will encourage learners to complete the programme and will assist employers to build a skills pool, which comprises adequately trained employees.

This win-win situation will ensure that employees are placed in meaningful jobs and hence able to earn a salary or wage.

In relation to a specific issue raised during the interviews, from an administrative perspective, it is recommended that the allowance, which is paid to learners should be removed from their certificates as it serves no beneficial purpose, except perhaps to inform other learnership programmes. Consequently, it has proven to be more of a disadvantage for learners.

## **6.6 Perceptions of learners' expectations**

This variable was explored in terms of learners' general perceptions with regard to the overall learnership experience. This construct was tested post learnership completion in order to ascertain learners' general perceptions of the entire programme.

### **6.6.1 Responses obtained during focus group interviews**

A major factor that emerged from the data centred on the poor administration of learnership programmes. For example, some six months after having completed their learnership programmes, learners were still waiting to graduate

and to receive their certificates. This study, in particular found that this factor was evident for two of the three focus groups that were interviewed, namely the New Venture Creation Learnership and the Foundation Learnership in Digital Design. Louw (2006:59) confirms that similar problems were identified by learners who were surveyed during November 2005 and were registered with the Information Technology SETA (ISETT SETA). Weak administrative programmes could be a cover for more serious issues, which are not evident at face value. For example, some anecdotal evidence suggests that learnership qualifications are “not worth the paper they are printed on”. These perceptions, even though anecdotal, could damage the whole concept of vocational education and training for employees and potential employees.

### **6.6.2 Recommendations**

Quality in delivery of learnership programmes should be monitored on a regular basis and deficient programmes should be cancelled to ensure that all role players provide programmes, which meet standards that are established by relevant parties.

Learners should also be aware of expectations in the form of benefits, as well as responsibilities for completion of learnership programmes before they place their signature to a contract. Clear communication of expected benefits for learners should be part of the induction and orientation programme.

The grievance procedure should be regarded as effective and not merely listed on paper. From an individual perspective, learners should be aware of the grievance procedure, which they should be able to successfully invoke in cases such as the examples expressed by learners above.

### **6.7 General Findings**

The findings for this study argue that the concept of learnerships and its concomitant qualification could serve as an enabler to enhance learners' confidence and self-esteem. These values may increase the possibility for

learners to improve their potential for success in the workplace. A myriad of other factors should, however, be taken into account when applying benefits of a learnership qualification to enhancement of individual employability. These include factors in the macro environment such as economic market conditions, while a micro perspective such as individual learner abilities could all have an impact on the success of learnership programmes.

Notwithstanding these factors, the study found that learners did not perceive themselves to be more employable owing to the following factors:

- from an administrative perspective, learners were not more employable as they had, in most instances, not received any tangible evidence of completing a learnership programme (certificate not issued upon completion);
- most learners were still seeking employment some three to six months after completion of the learnership;
- some learners perceived the workplace as a racial divide and blamed employers' attitudes for their unemployed status; and
- some learners did not regard the learnership as a means of enhancing employment, since, according to them, most employers are not interested in investing in the learnership process.

## **6.8 Implications for various stakeholders**

The collaborative nature of learnership programmes requires that various stakeholders are able to plan and coordinate their respective responsibilities and roles to afford success of such programmes. This has however proven more complex than anticipated.

### **6.8.1 Societal and policy implications**

The implementation of learnership programmes has seen an overabundance of zeal and gusto and an increase in vocational education in South Africa. The attitude of bringing training and development through education to the level of the workplace, has been and should remain, a major priority in a country where education and training has been severely deficient.



Skills development, in particular learnership programmes as an instrument for training and educating the workforce, will remain an imperative well into the future for South Africa. The skills deficit requires a continual renewal and regeneration of policy, as pilot programmes identify problem areas and best practice dictates adaptation of new improved methods and procedures.

However, initial implementation of learnerships has been plagued with misrepresentation of quotas, media reports on an over-emphasis of target achievements, and insufficient evidence of quality education and training provision.

This study confirmed that learnership programmes are not as efficient and effective as proposed and that reported statistics, which are related as success stories in the media, contradict real issues, which should be addressed at government level.

Several of these problems stem from administrative dysfunction. Role players at the implementation and execution phase often grapple with problems of funding, resources and clear guidelines, while policy makers seem oblivious to these challenges. Issues that were cited as part of the problems relate to learners being unable to access their certificates; learners not being paid their full allowances even months after completion; and learners not matched to an integrated workplace programme. All these issues give rise to concerns regarding assessment and accreditation practices and begs an enquiry into the legitimacy of programmes that are offered to learners.

On going investigation should be conducted in order to facilitate and monitor quality aspects of implementation of the delivery of learnership programmes.

### **6.8.2 Practical implications for industry**

In a free-market economy where the profit motive is a primary objective of a business, employers will most often perceive employee skills development as a social responsibility at best and, as such, place it on a secondary list when

considering strategic imperatives for sustainability. Hence, skills development in the form of learnership programmes, have not been a priority for several employers.

In order for learnerships to be a success, employers should participate in a more meaningful and committed way in order to render learnership implementation a success. Incentives are offered to employers for taking learners into their employ, while learners offer their loyalty to the organisation that has taken the effort to train them. Notwithstanding the benefits to employers, it remains a last resort for employers to fully participate in learnership programmes.

Despite these seemingly lucrative tax benefits, amongst others, employers still do not give learnerships that relate to workplace experience any importance in their daily list of priorities. As long as this attitude prevails, learnership programmes will not realise the success that it aims for and learners will not be afforded the credibility that they require to enhance their employability status.

### **6.8.3 Implications for vocational education and training**

The need for clear and explicit policies and procedures are of primary importance to all stakeholders that are involved in learnership programmes. An evaluation programme which monitors and audits learnership programmes directly will ensure that learnership programmes are implemented and executed to the qualitatively in accordance with legislated standards.

From an operational perspective, recruitment and selection of learners should be given stringent attention. Learners should be selected on a basis of specific criteria, while entry level guidelines should be clear. Training providers should ensure that rigorous policies and procedures are implemented in terms of the learner selection process. This will ensure that relevant learners are recruited, and that they are correctly matched to an appropriate learnership programme based on their capabilities, level of knowledge, skills and experience, as well as

personal interest in the programme. It will also avoid the problem of low throughput rates, which is experienced with learnerships across all levels.

#### **6.8.4 Implications for individual learners**

For as long as learnership programmes are not sufficiently supported by employers and other role players, the credibility of obtaining a qualification via this method of education, training and development, will fail to be regarded as a legitimate qualification by industry and society, in general.

Learners should be given an opportunity to obtain a highly valued and credible qualification, which is accepted at all levels of industry and, which will serve as an instrument for proof of learners' levels of competence.

Marketing and recruitment practices should be implicit to ensure that learners are aware of implications on both positive and negative aspects of learnership programmes. This should also be emphasised once more during the induction and orientation phase. Information and awareness will ensure that learners are fully aware of what to expect, which will negate any unrealistic expectations on their part.

Learners are also often not aware of their responsibilities when joining a learnership programme. Clear communication will ensure that learners complete the learnership and reduce the large learner turnover rate, which is experienced at present.

### **6.9 Delimitations and challenges**

Reasons for the limited number of participants was explained in chapter one where an explanation was offered regarding the number of participants included in this study (123 participants) which included learnerships offered by eight different companies across seven different SETAs at varying learnership levels.

This study, therefore, did not include a representative number of participants enrolled in the 23 SETAs, nor does it make any comparison between the seven SETAs that are represented in this study and can. The findings for this study can therefore, not be generalized across all SETAs or across all occupation levels.

A further limitation stems from the fact that learners were enrolled for diverse learning programmes at different levels on the NQF and within a variety of specific time frames, therefore, replication of this study should be approached with caution.

An additional challenge which was experienced with regard to the time frame is that learners, when they completed the questionnaire, were at various stages of the learnership programme and, therefore, some could have been experiencing, for example, the novelty of the programme on the one hand, while others who were already in the concluding stages of the programme, may have had different opinions regarding the learnership. As the stage at which learners were at in terms of the time scale was not obtained, this factor could have had an impact on responses that were received in the survey.

Aspects of the survey questionnaire, particularly question fourteen, which sought learners' plans for the future in terms of career advancement and further studies, were not investigated after the learners completed the learnership. It is felt that the period after completion was not sufficient for learners to have established themselves in any meaningful programmes at that stage and, therefore, could be a subject of further investigation.

This study did not also include an investigation into reasons for poor learner retention and throughput, which, among others, were found to be one of the major shortfalls in learnership efficacy. Critics, however, believe that poor recruitment and selection processes are an apparent cause for concern if future successes in learnerships should be considered. Such problems could be overcome by well researched target markets, clearly communicated marketing messages, and stringent recruitment and selection criteria to ensure that the

correct type and level of learner is placed within an appropriate learnership programme, whilst ensuring that learners are fully aware of the benefits of the programme and their responsibilities towards the programme.

### **6.10 Suggestions for future researchers**

It is recommended that further research should be conducted over a period of time in order to establish the benefits of learnership qualifications and to establish whether the learnership experience has had an impact on learners' propensity for improved employability and consequent improved living standards. Further research should also focus on administrative deficiencies and limitations.

Research in the following areas with regard to learnership programmes may improve the system:

- Return on investment for employers who implement learnerships.
- A framework for employers to implement learnership applications.
- Benefits for employees on acquiring learnership qualifications, particularly publications where case studies that have documented positive results are reported.

### **6.11 Conclusion**

It is common knowledge to assume that market forces and several other macro issues within the economic and political environment of a society will dictate, to or larger and lesser degree, the demand for labour, as well as the prosperity of the labour force. It is assumed that this situation, in turn, may impact, either positively or negatively, the living standards of the workforce.

The skills development strategy and its consequential learnership programme and process in South Africa have experienced a huge amount of criticism and sceptical reviews. Skills development is and will remain a dynamic and evolving process. Legislative amendments to the Skills Development Act (No. 93 of 1997), which impact on the management, administration and execution of

learnership programmes have, since the completion of this report, been implemented (Department of Labour, NSDS 2006/7) and its authority and responsibility has been shifted to a new ministerial department within government. The official opposition however, within South Africa's government constantly calls for the complete 'scrapping' of the skills development initiative, arguing that it has not yielded any meaningful transformation in the state of skills in South Africa, but has cost the country, and its tax payers billions of rands (SAFM News report 1, Nov 2007).

The dilemma in South Africa with regard to a lack of skilled workers in the labour market and an over supply of under skilled workers stems, to a certain degree, from insufficient or sometimes incorrect labour market statistics. Where policy makers are fully and more accurately informed with regard to labour market demands, specific occupational shortfalls can be identified and prioritised, while partnerships can be established to focus on developing curricula and implementing programmes to combat these deficits.

One of its major challenges remains a need to obtain commitment and to coordinate inputs of all the role players and stakeholders who, by their nature, hold a dichotomy of goals and objectives. Seeking alignment in divergent roles will inevitably cause conflict in a purported free market and could lead to a misunderstanding of responsibilities and be further challenged by political and personal agendas. Therefore, there is a need to continuously obtain information and to conduct research, which will inform policy formulation of challenges and problems, and enable adjustments to legislation and processes, which will evidently evolve into best practice.

Learnership programmes have been implemented as part of a national strategy to overcome the urgent need to skill South Africa's poorly equipped workforce. To this end, learnership programmes have been regarded as an ideal solution as it includes learning programmes for all occupational types and levels, which makes a distinctive effort to include previously disadvantaged learners, giving them a route to an education and training environment.

Education and training programmes, in the form of learnerships, cannot hope to succeed without an efficient and effective structure, which offers clear guidelines in terms of roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

Of primary importance to learnership success is an ability of recruiters to match learners' potential to learn; learning capacity of individuals; their motivation to learn; and personal interests and characteristics, which will ensure that a proper match is made between the learner and the specific learnership programme. The actual experiences of learners in the classroom and workplace should be well planned and executed. Learners should have full knowledge of the programme that they enter and meaningful orientation and induction should be offered during their initiation into the programme, even before they commit themselves to the contract. If this is not done, poor retention rates of learners will continue. If structured and meaningful recruitment, selection and orientation is not conducted, learners will attend learnership programmes as tokens and no real acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience will be imparted to learners. A real need exists for learners to be fully competent to enter the workplace, as the need for skilled and qualified workers is ever increasing and has become a real demand in the current labour market.

Resources, which could have been applied in more meaningful ways could be redirected into programmes that work. The skills development regime in South Africa should take full cognizance of problems, challenges and success factors in order to build best practice guidelines for vocational training and development. The skills development regime, however, since 2009 have been legislated under a new framework under the decree of the NQF and even though still in transition have established quality councils and will operate under the custodianship of the Department of Higher Education and Training (Isaacs, 2009:2)

Even though South Africa has adapted much of the framework for its dual system of vocational training as part of its human resource development strategy from German, UK and Australian systems, amongst others, the context

in which it operates with regards to its economic situation and its concomitant labour market profile, is too generic an approach to skills development policy which would not be a sensible or prudent option. Karlsson and Berger (2006:53) believe that the developed and largely uniform social conditions prevalent in these industrialised economies should not be imitated and that the model for South Africa warrants much more of a specific tailor made representation for the South African labour market.

In order to improve service delivery of learnership programmes, stakeholders should be held accountable for their contribution to the process. Learners should be recruited into programmes that are meaningful to them as individuals and which are able to enhance their personal skills and interests.

By including opinions and perspectives of learners, learnership success will go a long way towards meeting its strategic imperatives. A body of empirical research should be conducted and assembled in order to build knowledge of vocational skills training and development in South Africa.

Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the global market, coupled with ever increasing changes in technological advancement; continuous transformation of work methods; and demands that constant research should be conducted to explore best methods to skill workers and to equip them with necessary skills, will enable them to meet challenges of this dynamic market.



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BELLVILLE CAMPUS  
Symphony Way  
Bellville  
7535  
Business Faculty, Human Resource Department  
Tel: (021) 959 6599 / 6300

# **QUESTIONNAIRE**

## **Perceptions of learners enrolled in a learnership programme**

September/October 2007

Dear Learner,

Congratulations on choosing to enter into a learnership programme in order to further your work experience and education qualifications. The success of the learnership programmes is important for all citizens in our country. For this reason we are continuously seeking to find ways to improve the learning experience for you, the learner, as well as the other role players involved. By taking part in this study you will be contributing to the enhancement of these programmes.

We kindly request that you complete the attached questionnaire. The statements are related to your personal work opinions, thoughts and feelings, being experienced by you while attending this learnership programme.

It should take you about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Please ensure that you respond to every question and feel free to ask for further explanation where necessary.

All information provided will be treated in absolute confidence. Your name does not appear anywhere on the questionnaire, therefore no individual respondents can be identified.

Thank you for participating.

Yours faithfully,

Lynn de Louw

# TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

1. The following are general questions. Please tick  the correct box.

What is your age category?	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 and older

What is your racial classification?	African	Asian/Indian	Coloured	White

What Gender are you?	Male	Female

Do you have a disability?	Yes	No

What is the highest educational qualification that you have obtained?	NQF Level
Honours / Master's degree	7
First Degree / Higher Diploma	6
Diploma / Occupational certificate	5
Matric / N3	4
Std 9 / Gr11 / N2	3
Std 8 / Gr10 / N1	2
ABET 4 / Std 7 / Gr9	1
ABET 3 / Std 5 / Gr7	0
ABET 2 / Std 3 / Gr5	0
ABET 1 / Std 1 / Gr3	0
No Schooling	

Please complete the following table:

What is the name of the learnership you are attending?	
What is the level of the learnership you are attending?	
How long will this learnership take to complete?	
What is your current job title?	
Have you had any previous work experience? If yes, please list the types of job functions you have had.	
Where did you get your previous work experiences?	
State the total number of years of work experience.	

2. If you think about the time before you started the learnership, how would you describe your situation? Please tick ✓ one or more of the following boxes.

I was not working	I had just completed secondary school and did not know what to do	I was looking for any job	I was looking for work that would suit my interests and abilities	I wanted to participate in a training programme and was applying for various courses
I felt lost and did not have any plans	I was working but always wanted to enter this field of work	I was working but wanted a qualification	I had a temp job	Other: Please explain

3. Can you think about why you wanted to participate in this particular Learnership programme? Please tell us which of the following applies to you. You may choose more than one response.

I have always wanted to work in this industry	The programme was free	I wanted a qualification	The programme provides me with an allowance	I wanted to obtain skills
I felt the programme was unique and was keen to participate	It was an opportunity and I felt I had nothing to lose	Other: Please explain		

# GETTING ONTO THE LEARNERSHIP

4. When you think back to before you started the course, did you know or did you hear the term learnership?

I <u>had not</u> heard about learnerships in general and had no idea what it was about	I <u>did hear</u> about learnerships in general but did not know exactly what it was all about.

5. How did you hear about the Learnership? You may tick more than one response.

I heard from a friend / family member / church	I read about the programme in a brochure	I heard about the programme on the radio	I attended a road show/ presentation	I saw an advert in the newspaper
I heard about the programme at work	Other: Please explain			

6. Before a person starts any training or employment programme, they have certain expectations. Tell us which of the following were your expectations of the learnership.

I had expectations about the learnership	Yes		No	
Expectations	Did you have this expectation?		Has the programme, so far, met this expectation?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
I wanted the programme to give me a formal accredited qualification				
I wanted the programme to provide me with generic or general skills				
I wanted the programme to provide me with employment				
I wanted to work in this industry but did not have the skills needed - so I wanted the programme to give me the specific skills needed				



7. Thinking back to the process when you applied for enrolment onto the learnership, which of the following happened to you? You may choose more than one response.

	Yes	No
The learnership was explained to me		
I filled in an application form		
I wrote a selection test		
I was interviewed		
I attended an induction/ orientation programme		

## STARTING THE LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMME

8. Once you were selected and started the learnership programme, were the following explained to you and did you completely understand it? Please tick  the appropriate boxes.

	Yes it was explained	No it was not explained	Yes I understood	No I did not understand
What a learnership is				
What a skills programme is				
How the learnership works				
Your role in the learnership				
What is recognition of prior learning (RPL)				
The training provider's role in the learnership				
What a formative assessment is				
What a summative assessment is				
How the learner allowance works				
What would happen if you were found to be not yet competent				
Your obligations and what is expected of you				
A job description				
The learnership contract				
The employment contract				

# THE LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMME

9. Thinking about the theoretical / classroom and practical training you have received so far, which of the following describes the way you feel. Please answer all the questions.

	Strongly agree i.e. definitely yes	Somewhat agree i.e. maybe, yes and no	Strongly disagree i.e. definitely no
I feel that the learnership has taught me a lot and I am able to use my skills in the workplace.			
The course covers all that is needed in the workplace.			
Most of the time I find it easy to relate the training to what is needed in my job			
When I am working and have questions I am able to find someone who is willing and able to assist me			

10. Please indicate if you have the following resources available at your learnership:

Resource	Yes	No	Comments
A mentor: someone who is able to help you, for example showing you how to work with a difficult problem at work			
An assessor: a person who marks your assignments			
A supervisor: someone whom you report to at the workplace and who manages your performance			
Training resources such as books, library, internet			
A logbook or learner file / plan			
Training material e.g. assignments, articles etc.			
Job description of the job you are training for			

# THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

11. Thinking about the theoretical part (classroom training) of the learnership, which of the following applies to you? You may tick ✓ more than one response.

I am able to understand all the theory in class.	I understand the theory and find it is too easy. (i.e.I am bored).	The theory is not easy to understand and I feel lost.
The training provider allows us (learners) to be actively involved in the class (e.g. group discussions)	The training provider is always available when I need assistance with the theory	The training provider is always well prepared for class.

# THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AT THE WORKPLACE

12. Thinking about the workplace training of the learnership, which of the following applies to you? You may tick ✓ more than one response.

I have a workplace which gives me practical training in this learnership	I am able to use the theory I have learnt at the workplace	I believe that I will be a more productive worker with the skills I am getting in this learnership.	The work I do at the workplace is not related to the theory in this learnership

13. If you have a mentor or supervisor (someone who advises you in the workplace), complete this section. Is your mentor or supervisor?

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Knowledgeable about your job you are training for			
Available to you when you need him/her			
Knowledgeable about the learnership programme			
Able to answer questions relating to the learnership and / or the job			

# MY FUTURE PLANS

14. Once you have completed the learnership what are your career plans for the future? Tick ✓ the response which best describes your future plans.

I intend completing this learnership and using the new skills in my current job	I intend completing this learnership and applying for another learnership programme	I intend completing this learnership and hope to get promoted at my place of work	I intend completing this learnership and then finding a job that will pay a higher salary/wage
I intend leaving this learnership and then enrolling in something more suited to my interest and abilities	I intend completing this learnership but I will not sign up for another one in the future.	I intend leaving this learnership programme because it is not what I expected it to be	I intend leaving this learnership programme before I have completed it

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!**

# **FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE & QUESTIONS**

**Research topic:  
Efficacy of learnership  
programmes  
L de Louw**

**TOPIC: EFFICACY OF LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMMES**  
**STUDENT: L DE LOUW**

**METHODOLOGY:**

The participants have been selected from the list of the original sample size (n = 123) who completed the questionnaire. The selection for participation in the session was based on accessibility and availability. Participant lists and contact details were obtained from the course coordinators based on the list of seven different SETA groups who participated in completing the questionnaire.

Three groups were approached to attend the focus group sessions. The three groups were affiliated to the Services SETA (SERVICESETA); the Media and Advertising SETA (MAPPP) and the Insurance SETA (INSETA). A minimum of six to eight participants, from each of the three groups, have been invited to participate in the sessions.

The questions are mostly open-ended and have been arranged in a logical, funneling order. The questioning route commences with general questions and escalates to more specific questions, focused in order to find a 'range of opinions of people across the different groups' and to bring out the 'feelings, comments and thought processes..' of the participants and allow each participant to respond.

The participants were telephonically invited, and the purpose of the group sessions, were explained to them. The participants were also notified of the approximate time frame for the sessions. The term 'interview' was avoided during the telephone conversation as some of the participants are not in full employment or are currently un-employed and, it was felt that the term might mislead participants into conceiving the invitation as that of an interview for employment.

The duration of the sessions are approximately three hours, allowing for at least twenty minutes, to explore each question.

It is envisaged to make use of an assistant who will handle the recording aspects (audio and written) during the session. The assistant will take notes and monitor the audio recording machine. This will enable the interviewer to pay full attention to the responses and, where necessary, elicit further information to obtain re-phrase or repeat questions to encourage the participants to give relevant information.

Sources: Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson 2002; Krueger and Casey 2000.

**Opening:**

Thank the participants and put them at ease by explaining the purpose, method (structured questions) and time frame of the focus group. It is important, considering the lapsed time since attending the learnership course (approximately three to six months since completing the course) that learners are focused to start thinking of their experiences while attending the learnership programme. The time lapse however is also necessary in order to

answer the research question in terms of learners' perceptions and actual lifestyle improvement.

Ensure the participants that all information given will be kept confidential and that participants will remain anonymous.

**Questions:**

1. Having recently completed the learnership programme how do you perceive that the certificate you obtained has impacted on your life / standard of living today? (e.g. previously unemployed and now have job; currently earning more than did before learnership etc....) Explain in which ways.
2. If there are any of you who felt that the learnership was not suited to your personal interest and capabilities (in other words you felt that you were over or under qualified for the learnership) what would you consider to be the reason for this mismatch? What would you advise the Coordinators of the programme should do to avoid this in future?
3. On the whole do you consider that the learnership qualification **has or has not benefited** you personally and why?
4. Some of you said that you would, after completing the learnership, apply the new skills in your current job. Explain how you have been able to do this and also how this has improved your working methods (in other words – has it made your life at work easier / are you better able to cope or do your job?)
5. Has the learnership qualification allowed you to get promoted at your place of work? Explain.
6. How many of you have been able to leave the job you were in at the time and are now working in a job which you consider to be better than the previous one (in any way tangible and intangible)? In other words, has the learnership qualification made you more employable? Explain how you think the learnership programme enabled you to do this.
7. Has anyone of you applied to enrol for another learnership since completing this one and why?
8. What was the most enjoyable part of the learnership experience and what was the toughest or most difficult part of the experience?
9. If there is anyone that left the learnership before the time, what would you consider to be the main reason for your not wanting to complete the learnership? What would you advise the Employer/Training Provider in order to avoid this happening in future to learners?
10. When you think back about the expectations that you had before joining the learnership and consider your situation now – do you think that the learnership programme has been able to meet your expectations and how?

The various levels (in terms of the NQF) of learners enrolled for the programme vary between level 2 and level 4. While some learners will be able to understand the language used in the questions, it may be necessary to rephrase the questions for others, especially where English is not a first language.

As the interviewer has not had verbal communication with the learners before the event, the interviewer will need to gauge the literacy level and level of understanding, once the interview sessions commence.























