

**Voicing the educational experiences of out-of-school youth in Eswatini**

**By**

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*“The youth of Eswatini are the nation’s most valuable asset. It is their energy and ideas that will drive the country’s development. In that regard the voice of the youth is important. As a country we need to take into consideration their concerns and give them a stake in the future of the Kingdom of Eswatini.” The Prime Minister of Eswatini<sup>1</sup>: Dr Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini (Oppenheimer et al., p. 8)*

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<sup>1</sup> His Majesty King Mswati III officially changed the country’s name from Swaziland to Eswatini on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018. When referring to people it is now; Liswati-singular, Emaswati-Plural.

## **ABSTRACT**

The minimal or non-involvement of out-of-school youths in educational policies meant to address their issues, contributes to the failure of some interventions. The educational experiences and perspectives of out-of-school youths have been ignored in favour of statistical data. This has contributed to some out-of-school youths being categorized as not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in Eswatini.

By focusing on out-of-school youths aged 15 – 24 years, this thesis attempts to give voice to their educational experiences and explores NEETs' contributions as co-researchers to the process of conducting the study. Using a narrative inquiry approach and life history design within an interpretivist paradigm, this study set out to interpret, analyse and theorise out-of-school youths' educational experiences. The youths' experiences serve as the unit of analysis. Methods of data collection including photo voice, interviews, focus group discussions and journal writing research methods provided the opportunity for meaning making and an in-depth understanding of the NEETs experiences, what contributed to them becoming NEETs and how co-researching contributed to the study.

Using theoretical lenses from Illeris' theory of learning, the lifespan development psychological theory and social capital within the lifelong learning approach, the study found that the NEET concept is influenced by neoliberalism. A young person is a 'Not' in relation to modern formal learning aspects but might be richly endowed in relation to traditional informal learning and employment. Structural barriers such as family backgrounds expose youths to a life of poverty which impacts negatively on the youths' educational access and completion, access to scarce jobs and social connections.

Informal learning, particularly in poverty and when faced with economic crises was valued by participants. Even though the skills and values acquired informally have been stigmatised and less favoured compared to those acquired formally, out-of-school youths used them as a

means of livelihood. The engagement of informally acquired skills demonstrate the NEETs' need for more opportunities in their trajectory to the world of work, recognition as agents of change within their families, communities and even nationally, and their need for social support.

The study proposes the FILLL framework to understand out-of-school youths learning experiences as an alternative to the reductive NEET category. FILLL comprises Family and community involvement (F), social Insertedness (I); Learning (L) not only as lifelong but also as life-wide and life-deep; Livelihoods (L) including informal activities; and Legacies (L) that people inherit, learn and renew from those who had come before.

## DECLARATION

I, Tibekile Ainethah Manana, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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\_\_Prof Peter Rule\_\_

Name of Supervisor



\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

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To all my siblings, I thank each one of them (nine) and their families for their continued and uniquely expressed contribution to who I am today.

## **ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

AIK – African Indigenous Knowledge

DESD – Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)

EFA Goals – Education For All

EMIS – Education Management Information System

EGCSE – Swaziland General Education Certificate in Secondary Education

EPC – Eswatini Primary Certificate

FILLL – Family involvement, Insertedness, Learning, Livelihoods and Legacies

FPE – Free Primary Education

ILO – International Labour Organization

IMF – International Monetary Fund

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

MOE&T – Ministry of Education and Training

NDS – National Development Strategy

NEET – Not in Education, Employment and Training

NETIP – National Education and Training Implementation Plan

NFE – Non-formal Education

NPE – Non-formal Primary Education

OVC – Orphans and Vulnerable Children

PRSAP – Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan

SPSS – Statistical Package for Social Sciences

REC – Rural Education Centres

SACU – Southern Africa Customs Union

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SESP – Swaziland Education Sector Policy

SESSP – Swaziland Education Sector Strategic Plan

SNI – Sebenta National Institute

UNESCO – United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organization

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF – United Nations Children Education Fund

WTO – World Trade Organization

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# **CHAPTER ONE:**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Literature has demonstrated that educational interventions meant to address the issue of youth who are categorised as not in education, employment or training (NEET) lack their involvement or voices (Marsh, 2009, Olenik, 2013). The minimal or non-involvement of the supposed beneficiaries of these policies is a cause for concern as the number of NEETs continues to increase internationally, particularly in Sub-Saharan countries including Eswatini. There is, therefore, a need for understanding what contributes to being a NEET and how the issue can be addressed from the NEETs' point of view. In other words, this entails looking at the NEETs issue from a 'nothing about us without us' perspective (Marsh, 2009; O'Brien, 2014).

This study focused on out-of-school youths, categorised as NEETs and aged between 15 and 24 years. The life history approach, within narrative inquiry, was used to obtain an in-depth understanding of NEETs' educational experiences. Five youth<sup>2</sup> co-researchers, categorised as NEETs, were purposively selected from the four administrative regions of Eswatini. These co-researchers used the photo-voice method to share their life stories in a focus group discussion. Each of the five co-researchers also then used semi-structured questionnaires to interview ten NEETs from their respective areas on their life histories. Whilst conducting the interviews, the co-researchers kept journals of their experiences. Their reflections and insights were shared in a focus group discussion. The use of co-researchers was important in achieving the second study aim: to find out their contribution to the study.

To dig deeper into the NEETs' educational experiences, the study used three theories which were applied within the lifelong learning approach. The lifelong learning approach was used to understand individual learning experiences from different learning contexts for application to life situations from birth to death. An individual goes through developmental stages in his/her life time where what has been learnt in each stage needs to be applied. To understand the NEETs experiences through the developmental stages, firstly, the lifespan development

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<sup>2</sup> In this study the term 'youth' is used in three ways: (i). As a collective noun for young people, e.g. 'the youth's perspective' (the perspective of young people as a group); (ii). As a countable noun for individual young people, e.g. 'the youths assisted me in collecting data'; (iii). as an adjective, e.g. 'five youth co-researchers'.

theory was used (Fasokun, Katahoire & Oduaran, 2005). Secondly, the contemporary learning theory (Illeris, 2003) was used to understand all the different forms of learning experiences that have taken place in the youths' life contexts. Finally the social capital theory (Field, 2005) was used to understand how the learning contexts are interrelated and have contributed to the young people becoming NEETs.

The chapter begins with presenting the statement of the problem followed by the research questions. The context of the study, which is Eswatini, is then presented with a brief overview of issues relating to the NEETs issue internationally, regionally and nationally. The chapter is concluded with a brief summary of each of the eight chapters of the study.

### **1.1.1 Statement of the problem**

The youth who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) are now a global concern (Aitchison, 2010; Population Reference Bureau, 2013; ILO, 2017). The Population Reference Bureau (2013) states that 31 percent of the youth between 15 and 24 years are NEETs and there are more females (17 percent) than males (14 percent). Youth categorised as NEETs are considered to be disengaged from both work and education (Marsh, 2009; New Zealand Government, 2012; The Economist, 2013). They are affected by a situation where either the jobs created are too few to absorb them or they lack the appropriate skills and qualifications to access and stay in those jobs (Department of Higher Education, 2013).

These NEETs are part of the global "youth bulge", as statistics show that 1.03 billion people world-wide are aged between 15 – 24 years (Oppenheimer, Spicer, Trejos, Zille, Benjamin, Cavallo, Kalou & Leo, 2011, p. 26). According to the Brenthust Foundation report, the youth bulge refers to a situation where a percentage of youth as a proportion is large compared to the total population' (Oppenheimer et al., 2011, p. 26). The youth bulge is common in sub-Saharan African countries, South Asia and the Middle East (Fawcett, Hartwell & Israel, 2010). The concern, therefore, is that as the youth bulge is demonstrated in the statistics of these countries, the percentage of NEETs in these countries may also be high, particularly for those who are 15 – 24 years old.

The Economist (2013) states that around 300 million of 15 – 24 years olds world-wide are not working. In rich countries, the figure is estimated at 26 million in total, whilst in developing countries the estimate is 260 million. In New Zealand, the NEETs' rate was 12.5 percent which was higher than Australia (11.4 percent), and lower than the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland which were at 14. 8 and 17.6 percent respectively (New Zealand Government, 2012). In South Asia, NEETs comprise over a quarter of the unemployed. The Department of Higher

Education and Training (2013) in South Africa states that NEETs constitute one of the greatest threats to social stability as they face difficulties in finding jobs. The social problems that the youth face because of unemployment include poverty, HIV and AIDS, drug abuse and others (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). Whilst more than 50 percent of the youth is unemployed in the whole of South Africa, the youth unemployment rates differ within the South African provinces: the NEETs range is between 29.7 and 36.4 percent (Department of Higher Education, 2013; Development Bureau of Southern Africa, 2011).

Eswatini is also characterized by the youth bulge with one third of the country's population comprising of youth (Oppenheimer et al., 2011, p. 8). Moreover, 'over 50 percent of the country's youth between the ages of 15 – 24 is currently unemployed, an indicator that a majority of young people are not in school or at a tertiary education and training institutions' (Nkabinde, 2014, p. 24).

The world statistics on NEETs underlie increasing concern about the group as a potential economic, social and political problem. NEETs become a heavy burden on taxpayers (The Economist, 2013). In the United Kingdom, for instance, 10 percent of the 16 – 19 years cohort nationally is usually identified as NEETs (Marsh, 2009) and the country invested 1bn pounds of the taxpayer's money to address the issue over a three year period (Guardian, 2012). According to Marsh (2009), this figure might have been higher by six percent if the unaccounted-for youth had been included and even higher if the category was stretched to include the 15 – 24year olds. The resolution to invest the taxpayer's money to ensure jobs and training was criticised as it replaced the issuing of bursaries. The concern the government of the United Kingdom had was that 'The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training has been too high for too long – we are determined to bring the numbers down' (Guardian, 2012, p. 2).

The issue of the youth who are out-of-school, especially the NEETs, has recently attracted attention, especially within the Southern African region and has begun to be considered more seriously (Aitchison, 2010). The Brenthurst Foundation report states that it expected that 'by 2025 nearly one quarter of the world's young people (under the age of 25) will be from Sub-Saharan Africa' (Oppenheimer et al., 2011, p. 14). Educational interventions, in line with international declarations and some unique to individual countries, seem not to be reducing the number of NEETs. Worthy of note is the lack of effort among researchers and policy-makers, demonstrated by the literature, in consulting or involving the NEETs themselves to get their perspective on how their issue can be addressed (Oppenheimer et al., 2011;

Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009; Marsh, 2009; O'Brien, 2014). Interventions tend to rely only on statistical data rather than what the NEETs themselves have to say about addressing their situation.

### **1.1.2 Focus and purpose of study**

This study focuses on the educational experiences of youths (15–24 years-olds) in Eswatini who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). The concept of NEETs was formally identified in 1999 (Cuzzocrea, 2014; Marsh, 2009). Through the use of narratives and photo-voice methods the study conducted an in-depth understanding of the educational needs for youths categorized as NEETs. The focus on this age group is on their specific educational needs as they face the school-to-work transition. This group of youths are at a stage of finding pathways to employment which is critical for the country's economic future (Development Bureau of Southern Africa, 2011; Mayer, 2011).

The characteristics of youths categorized as NEETs have contributed to society viewing them as failures and a socio-economic burden and thus they are often ignored even in decisions that concern their lives. The characteristics of NEETs include having very little or no access to education and employment, and few economic, social or creative opportunities (Marsh, 2009). Being a NEET at this age is associated with negative outcomes later in life. These include unemployment, reduced earnings, poor health and depression. These outcomes result in costs for both the individual and the economy. The potential of this youth is wasted as they cannot fully explore their economic, personal and social possibilities. Common factors were that NEETs were likely to suffer from economic and social disadvantage; to have low levels of attainment, to be turned off by the education system, and to see themselves as failures (Marsh, 2009, p. 1). Although some employers are not interested in qualifications, most are interested in attracting candidates with the right attitudes and social skills. Some NEET's are often excluded from social networks that can help secure employment opportunities (for example if their parents are not working) (Marsh, 2009, p. 2).

The purpose of this study was to understand the educational experiences of out-of-school youths, categorised as NEETs, in Eswatini. The emphasis was on the importance of understanding the NEETs' experiences so as to contribute to the development of educational interventions and policies that relate to their learning. The other premise of the study was to explore their contributions as co-researchers to the process of conducting the study. These perspectives were acquired through considering their life stories and experiences as well as deploying them as co-researchers.

### 1.1.3 Research questions

- i. What are the educational experiences and attitudes of out-of-school youth in Eswatini?
- ii. How have out-of-school youths' educational experiences and attitudes contributed to them being NEETs?
- iii. How and what do the youth contribute as co-researchers through the process of conducting this research?

## 1.2 Context of the study

The study was conducted in the Kingdom of Eswatini (see Figure 1.1 below). The Kingdom is in Southern Africa and lies between South Africa and Mozambique. It has an estimated area of 17 364 square kilometres. The country is amongst the smallest in Southern Africa with a population of about 1.168 million and a 1.3 percent annual population growth rate (OSISA, 2012).



**Figure 1.1: Map of Eswatini**

Source: [www.mapsofworld.com](http://www.mapsofworld.com)

### 1.2.1 Eswatini's administrative and political system

The Kingdom received its independence from Britain in 1968. The colonial period influenced the country's legal, social and educational institutions which are inclined towards the British model (Roberts, 2006). Politically, Eswatini is governed by the 2005 Constitution and is an absolute monarchy with very limited democratic participation. The political situation in the

country is contested both inside and outside the country, because the government and monarchy do not promote a multi-party system of governance (Boudreau, 2010).

Administratively, Eswatini has a dual system of government that combines both the traditional and western parliamentary systems. The country is divided into four administrative regions: Hhohho, Manzini, Lubombo and Shiselweni. Both the traditional and the western parliamentary system use the regions to facilitate administration and economic development (Jele, 2011). Traditionally, within these regions exists the traditional level of government known as '*Tinkhundla*' (Constituencies) centres. There are 55 *Tinkhundlas* throughout the country with each *Inkhundla* (singular for Constituencies) having a number of chiefdoms under it. Members of parliament are elected from these *Tinkhundlas* (ibid.). The Prime Minister is appointed by the King (currently King Mswati III). The King is also responsible for confirming cabinet Ministers who are recommended by the Prime Minister (The Government of Swaziland, 2005a). The last Parliamentary elections were held in October 2013. Since the country does not have a mechanism for registering political parties, Eswatini has not held an election on party lines since 1972 (Vandome, Vines & Weimer, 2013). The 2005 Country Constitution allows for individuals to stand for elections at the different *Tinkhundlas*.

### **1.2.2 The economic system in Eswatini**

Economically, the Kingdom of Eswatini, as a small land-locked country, is heavily dependent on its imports and exports. The country is highly 'dependent on sugar exports, Southern African Customs Union (SACU) tariffs and remittances' (Ndlela-Ber-Moe, n.d.; Vandome, 2013). Although Eswatini is classified as a 'middle-income country many economic and social indicators appear to be inconsistent with this classification due to the uneven distribution of income' (The Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2014, p. 8). According to the Eswatini Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2009/2010, sixty-three percent of the population was still defined as poor (Central Statistical Office, 2010). The unemployment rate is at 28 percent, the GDP per capita is US\$4, 03 and the adult HIV and AIDS prevalence rate is 27.02 percent (The World Fact Book, 2016). Youth unemployment was even higher with 52.3 percent of people aged 15 – 24 jobless according to the 2007/2008 Eswatini Integrated Labour Force Survey (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2011 cited in Jele 2011, p.7). In the period 1992 — 2005, the poorest 20 percent of the population had a 4 percent share of the country's wealth as opposed to the richest 20 percent who enjoyed around 56 percent of the wealth (United Nations Development Programme, 2007 cited in Jele 2011,

p. 6). To compound the economic problem, Eswatini was faced with a fiscal crises in 2011 and the youth were hard hit as many became jobless (Vandome,Vines & Weimer, 2013).

With regard to livelihoods, the people in Eswatini obtain their food mainly through growing it themselves, as the predominant form of livelihood is through agriculture (Boudreau, 2010). According to Boudreau (2010, p. 4), Emaswati 'grow or produce food themselves, purchase food from the market, and/or receive food in exchange for services or as gifts'. Poorer households, however, rely mostly on receiving food in exchange for services or as gifts whilst wealthier families either grow or purchase food. The exchange for services between the poor and the wealthier families is due to the fact that a good harvest in Eswatini is usually produced by high income generating families. The divide between the wealthier and poorer households that exists in Eswatini 'is consistent with other areas in Africa where poorer households produce a small portion of their annual food needs from their own fields, and the rest they obtain through some form of exchange' (ibid., p. 5). Households in Eswatini engage in the following means of agricultural livelihoods: selling crops and livestock or providing agricultural labour.

The other form of livelihood besides agriculture is salaried employment. As a result of the search for cash through salaries there is a high percentage of rural-urban migration. 'Emaswati are extremely mobile both within the country and outside the borders' (Whiteside, 2003, p.32). Whilst there are no data on internal migration, Whiteside (2003) highlights a common practice that most urban households maintain linkages with their rural homesteads by visiting them at least once a month. The connection between rural and urban economies in Eswatini cannot be overstated. According to Ndlela-Ber-Moe (n.d.), in many cases they are almost inseparable in family terms, as city-employed people have their main residences in town but commonly go to their rural homes on weekends and holidays. Twenty-five percent of Emaswati live in urban areas in search of work (Dlamini, n.d.). The Eswatini National Trust Commission predicts that at the current rate of rural-urban migration, 70 percent of the population will be living in the urban areas by 2030. Migration has been viewed as one of the drivers of HIV infection in Africa (Ndlela-Ber-Moe, n.d.).

With regard to cross border mobility, Emaswati sought employment outside their home country around 1998 so that single men would be at their places of work for periods of up to a year (Whiteside, 2003). Whilst Thonje (2014, p. 2) states that Eswatini contributed a steady stream of employees to South Africa, Whiteside (2003, p. 32) states that during this period Eswatini also 'received economic migrants, mainly from Mozambique'. Literature

emphasises that general labour migration from Eswatini to South Africa increased markedly in the 1990's (Government of Swaziland, 2009). However, migrant labours specifically mine-labour related started declining during the same period (ibid.). It is argued that the decline in migrant labour, for whatever reasons, might have impacted negatively on Eswatini livelihood, especially in rural areas where the income was mainly used for agricultural inputs.

### **1.2.3 Eswatini and HIV and AIDS**

HIV and AIDS is Eswatini's biggest threat socially and economically with the first AIDS reported case identified in 1986 (Vandome, 2013). Although there has been a decline, Eswatini has the highest adult HIV prevalence rate in the world at 27.2 percent (NERCHA, n.d.; The World Fact Book, 2016). Between 1992 and 2004 the prevalence rate rose from 4 percent to 42.6 percent amongst women attending antenatal clinics. In 2006 this prevalence declined to 39.2 percent. This raised a hope that was soon lost as 42 percent was again recorded in 2008 (ibid.). The infection rate for youth aged 15 – 29 years was 26 percent in 2006 and 40.3 percent for youth aged 20 – 24 (Government of Swaziland, 2014; UNICEF, 2013). The high rate of HIV infection has a powerful social impact, for example, in the number of orphans, single-parent and child-headed households, and an economic impact in the slice of the budget allocated to AIDS treatment (UNICEF, 2013). HIV and AIDS related illnesses are also reported as having a strong impact on the drop-out and repetition rates in the country's education system (UNESCO, 2011; Whiteside, 2003).

## **1.3 Education and training in Eswatini**

This section presents the history of Eswatini's educational system from the colonial period through independence to the present system. The aim of this section is to provide a context for understanding the out-of-school youth's educational attitudes and experiences. The argument is that educational policies and interventions (verbal or written) affecting the out-of-school youth are developed by those in dominant positions to achieve their agendas.

### **1.3.1 Education during the precolonial period**

Being a relatively small country, Eswatini has a centralised system of education that is administered under the Ministry of Education and Training. The western style of education was introduced to Eswatini in 1902 with the onset of British colonialism. Before 1902 the education system was modelled on the segregationist system developed in the Transvaal province of South Africa (Booth, 2001; NET Industries, 2013). In 1916, under the British rule, free and compulsory education was made available to all white children. On the other

hand, education for Emaswati children was never used as an instrument of human progress but as a tool that established and sustained the project of colonialism and Christian mission (ibid.). The emphasis was on religious instruction, and agricultural and manual training. As the educational goals were foreign to the siSwati way of life and tradition, so was the curriculum and examination system. However, it was important then, as it is now, because it was and still is the prerequisite for formal sector employment. Emaswati parents, however, wished their children to have access to both the formal education system as well as traditional or indigenous education (NET Industries, 2013). As the Kingdom approached independence an integrated school system replaced the racially segregated educational system in 1963, in an attempt to achieve the goal of a non- racial Eswatini (Booth, 2001; NET Industries, 2013).

### **1.3.2 Traditional and informal learning**

In Eswatini, traditional or informal learning gives emphasis to the existing cultural value structures within a predominantly oral and practical ethos. This form of learning is centred on the family which is viewed as ‘the principal social unit’ (NET Industries, 2013, p. 1). In siSwati culture the responsibility for informal learning falls on the entire community. Parents, older relatives and community members at large teach the young to respect, obey as well as preserve accumulated knowledge. The accumulated knowledge and traditions are passed from generation to generation through proverbs, songs and stories. Such knowledge prepares the youth not only for adulthood but for employment as well. Even long after independence Emaswati still strive to uphold traditional education (Booth, 2001; State, 2013).

#### ***1.3.1.1 Education after Eswatini’s independence***

Since the country’s independence in 1968, the Eswatini government has had the challenge of addressing the education system that it inherited from the Boer and British influence. Towards this effort, Eswatini has either signed or ratified international conventions, agreements and statements that underlie its educational provision (Jele, 2012; Khumalo, 2013). Amongst these agreements are the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (2000) particularly Goal Number 2 that promotes equal access to education, The Education for All (EFA) Goals (2000), Children’s and Protection and Welfare Act (2012), the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was ratified in (1995), the UN Convention on Persons with Disabilities (2007), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities Bill is still in parliament. Eswatini achieved Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1985, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Agenda 2030.

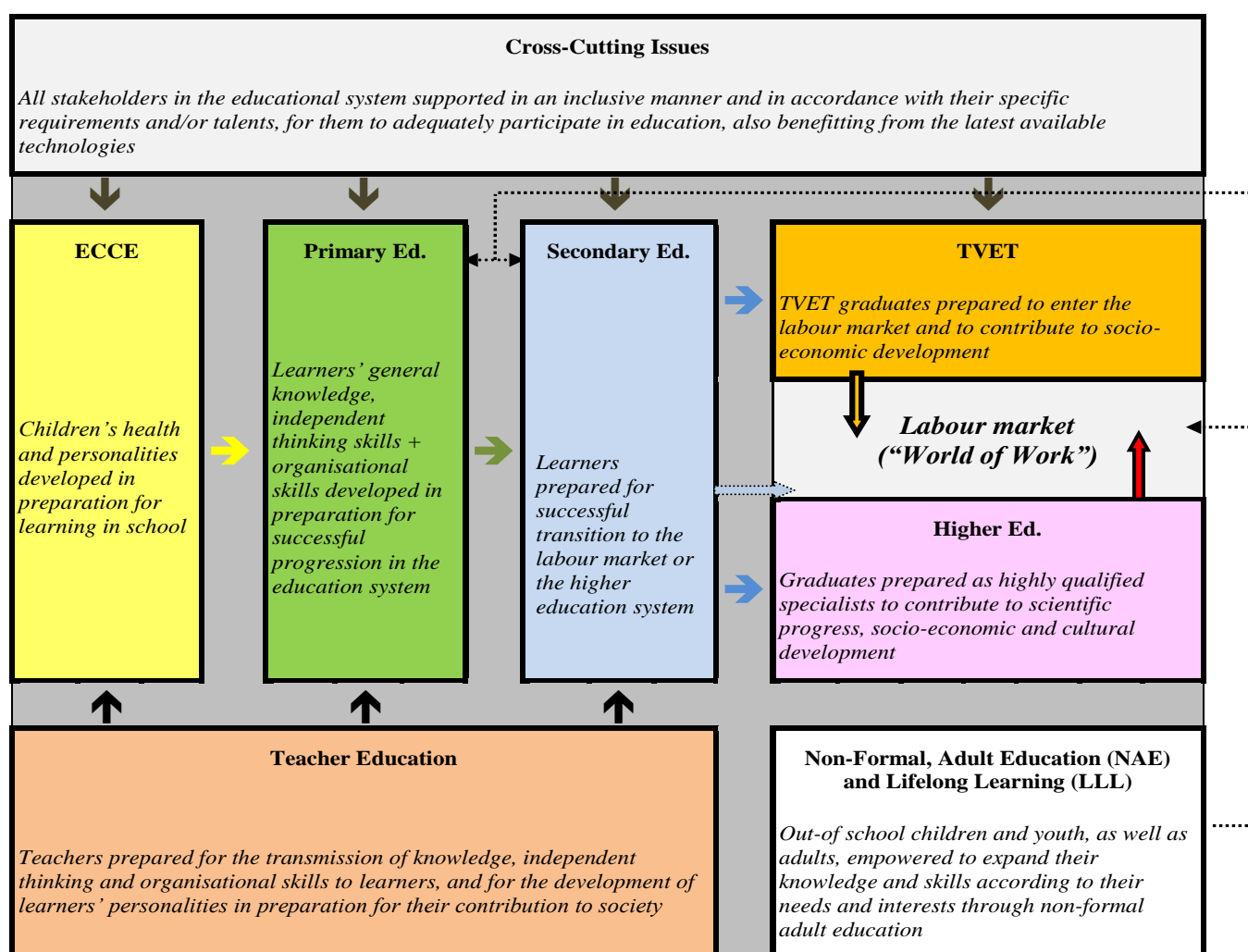
Within the country, the policy that relates to education is the 1999 National Development Strategy (NDS). The strategy spells out government's economic priorities for 25 years. The vision for this strategy is that by the year 2022 the Kingdom of Eswatini will be amongst the top 10 percent of medium human development countries. The Swaziland Constitution (2005) also has a statement on educational provision. Section 29 article 6 of the Constitution states that 'Every Liswati child shall within three years of the commencement of this Constitution have the right to free education in public schools at least up to the end of primary school, beginning with the first grade'. However, this right was not implemented until an Ex-Miners Association took the Eswatini government to court for ignoring the clause. As a constitutional right the Ex-Miners Association won the case against government and Free Primary Education was rolled out in 2010. To implement the Constitution, the Free Primary Education (FPE) Act was enacted in 2010.

Within the context of the roll-out of free primary education, it is worth noting the significant link between education and poverty evident in literature (Preece, 2006, PRSAP, 2005). The Swaziland Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (2005) states that, although being literate does not add to a person's number of years, literacy can enhance a person's goal to seek an enriched life. Illiteracy is strongly believed to be collated with poverty both in the economic sense and the deprivation of opportunities for a better life (ibid.). The realization of the link between education and poverty contributed to Eswatini's ratifying international conventions, agreements and statements, as cited earlier, to promote an educational vision to the citizens (Jele, 2011).

Within the education sector, the Ministry of Education and Training developed the Education Sector Policy (2011). The emphasis of this policy was on the provision of relevant, quality and affordable education and training opportunities for the entire population of the Kingdom of Eswatini in order to develop all positive aspects of life for self-reliance, social and economic development and global competitiveness. One of the Education Sector policy's objectives is to provide opportunities for all pupils of school-going age and adults to develop themselves in order to improve the quality of their own lives and the standard of living of their communities. The policy also points out that the non-formal and continuing education sector should provide options for those Eswatini citizens who have missed some or all of their formal education.

### 1.3.3 Eswatini's Education structure and profile

The country has an Education Sector System structure that attempts to ensure that everybody has access to education regardless of age and socio-economic background. However, it should be noted that, despite this interlinking structure catering for all, there is still an increasing number of out-of-school youths, particularly those referred to as NEETs in Eswatini (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). The disturbing question then is how far do these policies go in responding to the needs of the NEETs in Eswatini? The chart and discussion below present Eswatini's education structure and how the structure is supposed to work in terms of learner performance or in ensuring that all learners access the world of work (The Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2014).



**Figure 1.2: The interrelation of the Eswatini's educational system sub-sectors' outcomes.**

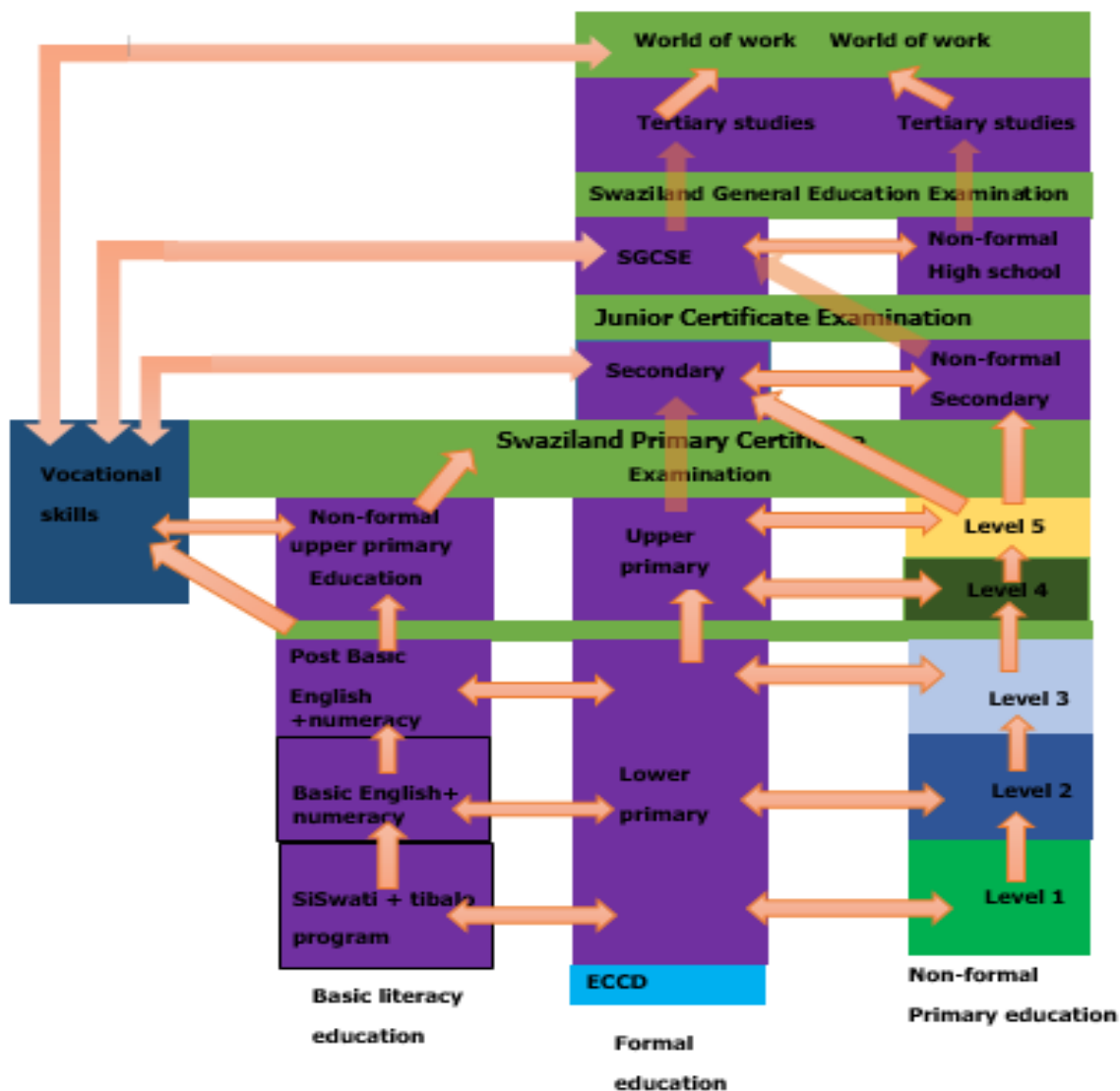
Source: The Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland (2014, p. 52).

Figure 1.2 above illustrates the interrelations of Eswatini's educational system sub-sectors'

goals and how they support learners from early childhood to adulthood and the world of work. The sub-sectors include Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Primary Education, Secondary Education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Higher Education, as well as the world of work. The Teacher Education and Cross-cutting Issues sub-sectors are enabling or support mechanisms for the learner's progression up to the world of work. The Adult and Non-formal Education sub-sector also ensures access to the world of work by catering for out-of-school children, youths and adults who have either not entered or have dropped out of the formal education system. Some of the main programmes offered by the sub-sector include Basic Literacy, Vocational skills and Continuing/Alternative Education. This sub-sector allows those learners whom formal schooling has not benefited, to gain access to a work trajectory through an alternative route.

Normally a child starts education at ECCE at the age of three to six years. This is followed by a cycle of twelve (12) years of completing primary and secondary education. Primary education lasts for seven years and leads to the Eswatini Primary Certificate (EPC) examination. Secondary education lasts for five years and is punctuated by a Junior Certificate (JC) examination taken after the first three years, and then followed by a two-year cycle that prepares learners for the Eswatini General Certificate of Education (SGCE) examination. The EGCE certificate normally gives access to training institutions that prepare the learner for the world of work.

Whilst Figure 1.2 illustrates learner support by Eswatini's educational system sub-sectors to the world of work, there are details on the support given to learners who have never been employed or have dropped out of education, which are not clearly articulated in the chart. Figure 1.3 below illustrates the support or trajectories for out-of-school learners to the world of work.



**Figure 1.3: The parallel pathways of formal and alternative education to the world of work.**

Source: Sebenta National Institute, 2014.

Figure 1.2 also missed out on emerging developments within the Education Sector, and the parallel system of non-formal to the formal education system. This parallel system allows ease of movement for learners between the two systems and within each system. As already alluded to, the Adult and Non-formal Education (ANFE) sub-system provides an alternative route to the world of work to learners with no access and who have been failed by the formal education system.

Figure 1.3 illustrates the opportunities for access and progression between and within the formal and Non-formal Education. The illustration (Figure 1.3) also depicts the two systems' convergences at high stake examinations as learners from both systems sit for the same

external examinations. This means, for quality assurance, qualified teachers instead of volunteer teachers normally used for basic literacy, are used in Non-formal Education. Therefore, an arrow from Teacher Training to Non-formal Education has to be inserted in Figure 1.2. In the same illustration (Figure 1.2), the arrows from Primary education, Secondary education and World of work to Non-formal Education should indicate a movement that is in both directions.

The introduction of Non-formal Primary Education was a step towards the creation of a fully parallel system for educational access that allowed learners' movement between the two systems at appropriate levels and times. As much as students drop out-of-school to join Non-formal Education, some students re-enter formal education as and when opportunities allow. With regard to the world of work, whilst Non-formal Education learners are capacitated for self- and wage-employment, some learners already in employment also enrol in Non-formal Education programmes for professional development and/ or self-actualisation. There is also a relationship between Non-formal Education and Cross Cutting Issues, and the arrows in Figure 1.2 should indicate this. Cross cutting issues are always cited as contributing factors to students' drop-out and ultimately their joining Non-formal Education. For instance, from 2002 the Non-formal Education department experienced an influx of children who enrolled for the Basic Literacy programme due to the impact of HIV and AIDS (Sebenta National Institute (SNI); 2002/2003).

In 2009 the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini acknowledged the challenges faced by students to enter formal education as well as the contribution of non-formal or alternative education in assisting learners to re-join formal education. Therefore, alongside the rollout of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2010, the Non-formal Primary Education (NPE) programme was established. The Non-formal Education system, once fully established, will allow educational access to learners at all levels without the limitations of age and socio-economic background including educational level.

#### **1.3.4 Eswatini's Educational Achievements and Challenges**

Whilst Eswatini's education system has made positive strides, challenges have also been faced. These achievements and challenges are in the areas of access, drop out and repetition, access to tertiary education and Non-formal Education.

##### **Educational Access**

A small percentage of children access pre-primary education in Eswatini and that contributes to the inequality in children's educational background in Grade One (UNESCO, 2010;

UNICEF, 2013). According to these reports only 33 percent enrol in pre-primary and 26 percent of these children are orphans. The country's enrolment rate in Grade 1 reached 93 percent in 2011; 93.5 percent boys and 91 percent girls (Education Management Information Systems, 2013). The proportion of pupils reaching Grade Six increased from 60 percent in 2007 to 74 percent in 2010. However, only 27 percent of children who should be in secondary school are enrolled. The decline in enrolment as they go higher may be affected by the high dropout and repetition rates which are the greatest challenges in the country's educational system (EMIS, 2015).

### **Dropout and repetition rate**

The drop-out rate at primary school level is 4 percent and more boys than girls drop out, whilst at secondary school level the drop-out rate is 26 percent. At secondary school, pregnancy is cited as the main cause for dropping out. It was observed that some children start school late and/or repeat which results in them being in the wrong grade in terms of age. For instance, UNICEF (2013) states that 57 percent of Eswatini children are at an inappropriate or wrong grade. Children who are in an inappropriate grade tend to perform poorer than their younger colleagues as a result of poor educational foundations and psychological challenges, and thus lose the motivation to finish school.

### **Training and Higher Education**

According to Marope (2010, p. xvii) in Eswatini 'educational access is limited across all levels of the education not only at tertiary level'. The country has a national university, three teacher training colleges (accredited by the national university since 2012), nursing colleges and several vocational and skills training institutions. Those that have completed formal education have access to state funds if they wish to pursue studies at the university or technical institutions.

### **Adult and Non-formal (Continuing) education**

Those exiting early from formal schooling system have a number of emerging routes (as indicated in Figure 1.3) through which they can still progress academically or access vocational education and training. Whilst vocational skills training are provided by several skills centres including Rural Education Centres (REC), Sebenta National Institute (SNI) is the only organisation providing basic literacy in the country. Sebenta National Institute has also provided non-formal primary education since 2012 as an alternative provision for Free Primary Education. For children this programme promotes re-entry to formal education at an appropriate age or grade. The Alternative Primary Education learners currently sit for the

same Eswatini Primary Certificate (EPC) as formal education learners. After their SPC the Alternative Primary Education learners access Alternative Secondary Education that is provided by Emlalatini Development Centre (EDC) through a distance learning mode. After writing the same certificate (SGEC), the learners access Higher Education with the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) at the University of Eswatini (UNISWA). For the youth and adults, the Non-formal Education programme affords an alternative route to educational progression until they enter the world of work. It should be noted that socio-economic situations force learners from any level of the educational system including the world of work, to seek the services of basic literacy, Non-formal Education and vocational skills. Learners from higher education usually register for the vocational skills.

In my view, the lack of access to formal education, repetition and the dropout rate contribute to the number of the youth that are not in education, employment or training in Eswatini. Dropping out happens at different levels and within both academic and vocational education systems (Simelane, 2011). I view this as a cause for concern for the Eswatini economy with regard to young people's access to training and their employability. This demonstrates the need for developing educational interventions that are relevant to the learners needs so as to ensure educational access and progression to the world of work.

#### **1.4 Interventions to address the NEETs problem**

Educational interventions to address the NEETs' issues, internationally and in Eswatini, have been based on empirical data with superficial youth consultation if any. For instance, internationally the MDG reports only state that the number of out-of-school children globally has dropped from 100 million to 72 million in 2007 and that these trends revealed that some 56 million children worldwide could still have been out-of-school by 2015 (UNESCO, 2010). The reports, however, do not indicate the views of the out-of-school youths on these interventions.

With regard to Eswatini's compliance with the MDGs, particularly Goal Number 2, the following milestones have been achieved:

**Table 1.1: Milestones for Eswatini's Primary Education since 2002**

YEAR	MILESTONE
2002	Free textbooks
2003	Free stationery
2003	OVC Grant
2005	Free Primary Education (FPE) in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini
2009	FPE programme launched
2010	FPE Act enacted and programme rolled out for Grades 1 and 2
2011	New Education Sector Policy

Source: UNICEF (2013)

To improve educational access whilst responding to MDG Number 2, the Government of Eswatini has introduced the grants for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) established in 2003 (Motsa & Morojele, 2017) and the Free Primary Education (FPE) programme that was rolled out in 2010.

With regard to the provision of literacy, like other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Eswatini's literacy rates significantly improved from 40 percent in the 1960's to 89.1 percent in 2007 (Central Statistical Office, 2007). This indicates that in Eswatini, 9 140 000 adults were illiterate: 2 838 400 males and 6 301 600 females (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010 cited in OSISA, 2012). Whilst there was much improvement in adult literacy reflected by the 2007 Eswatini's 2007 Population Census (Central Statistical Office, 2007), there was a head count of about 37 000 children of school going age that were out-of-school in Eswatini (OSISA, 2012). According to the OSISA study, 19 000 of those out-of-school were 15 – 24 year old youth, 11 590 male and 7 410 female. The NEETs were viewed as a response to an education system and economy that is unable to cope with educational demands (Aitchison, 2010). These youths had, in many cases, inadequate or low educational levels which made them virtually unemployable in the increasingly sophisticated 'knowledge economy' workplaces. Such characteristics hindered the NEET's contribution to a country's economy; even then they were seen as a drain.

Of great concern is that these interventions are universal and do not look into individual learners' concerns and contexts. According to Yates and Payne (2006), such interventions, which aim at reducing NEETs, tend to group NEETs and prescribe a universal intervention

for them. They argue that the interventions ignore the different situations and difficulties faced by these young people within their varied contexts. Some of the interventions the Eswatini government has employed to address NEETs include improving educational access and transition and increasing youth employment opportunities.

The implementation of FPE partly responded to the issues of financial challenges faced by learners not accessing or dropping out of, school. The number of primary schools increased from 587 in 2009 to 595 in 2010 (EMIS, 2012). The Education Management Information Systems report (2012) states that the highest enrolment was also reported in 2010. However, Grade One had the highest increase in enrolment and drop-outs in 2010 as compared to 2009. The highest dropouts could be attributed to the over-aged children who enrolled for Grade One. The age requirement for entry into Grade One is 6, but a larger portion of the pupils was aged between 7 and 8 whilst some were between 10 and 20 years (EMIS, 2012). Primary schools registered these over-age children contrary to the FPE Act which states that these students should enrol in Non-formal Education.

The FPE's implementation was faced with challenges (Mdluli, 2010). High enrolments were one of them, as in some places learners had to be turned back whilst in some schools a class had more than 60 learners. Although this was purported to be 'free' educational provision, there were hidden costs such as transport fees and uniforms. The inclusion of over-age children was another challenge. The formal school teachers did not have the strategies of teaching these learners. Some areas were inaccessible geographically.

Repetition and dropout rates continued to be a challenge even with the introduction of FPE (EMIS, 2012; Mdluli, 2010). The high influx of the learners resulting in classroom congestion might have compromised the quality of teaching and learning. Lack of individualized care for learners with special needs, which include the over-age children, may have contributed significantly to the high failure and dropout rate.

Although the Net Enrolment Rate at 94.4 percent is celebrated, there are still children of school-going age who are out of formal school (EMIS, 2015). The number of secondary schools as opposed to the growing number of primary schools resulting from the implementation of FPE, does not promote access and educational transition on its own (ibid.). Even the scholarship policy that provides financial assistance after completing Eswatini General Certificate for Secondary Education (EGCSE) alone does not seem to address the issue as only 7 percent of the children who entered primary complete or write SGCSE examination. I believe that an increase in understanding of this special group (NEETs) and

their educational needs by policy developers can contribute in reducing their being out-of-school, in training or employment.

With regard to improving youth employment opportunities, the Government of Eswatini has also taken some steps. In 2009 a ‘National Youth Policy’ was developed. The vision of the policy was to create and ensure

an enabling environment for young people to actively participate and contribute to the transformation and socio-economic development and good governance processes that shape the present and future destiny of the communities in which they live (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009, p. 3).

Following this policy, a Youth Enterprise Fund was established in 2009 whose aim was to reduce youth unemployment through the provision of business capital for young people aged between 18 and 35, as well as for associations and companies headed by the youth. Other initiatives to reduce youth unemployment include ‘Junior Achievement’ and ‘Kick Start’.

Ignoring the youth’s voices, their attitudes and experiences may have contributed to the interventions’ low success rate. As Dlamini (2013, p. 3) indicates,

‘Youth is most often excluded from participation in the policy processes yet the policies also have a bearing on the youth. In Eswatini, although 43 percent of the total population comprises of the youth, the current urban rural structures allow for very minimal participation of the youth in the economic, social and political arena’

Given this current limitation, this study seeks to explore an in-depth understanding of the youth’s educational experiences from their own perspective within the Eswatini context.

## **1.5 What the study will do to address the problem**

The study seeks to bring about an in-depth understanding of the educational needs for the youth who are not in education, employment or training. The study used the NEETs perspective or world view to understand their educational needs. Out-of-school youth’s, who were NEETs, were engaged as co-researchers and research participants. The narrative approach and life history design was adopted for and in-depth understanding of the NEETs educational experiences. In my view, seeing the youth’s educational needs through their life stories can contribute to the design and development of an appropriate learning intervention. It could also assist in structuring learning experiences that are meaningful to them as NEETs

and thus not only promote access to learning but sustain their motivation for being in a learning environment as well.

## **1.6 Rationale for study**

### **1.6.1 Personal motivation and significance of the study**

I have been involved in adult and Non-formal Education for almost all my adult life as my journey with adult and Non-formal Education began early in my professional life. When I completed my 'O' level <sup>3</sup>, I went for a pre-service course in science education. It was whilst I was pursuing that course that I learnt of a Diploma in Home Economics Extension. This was a course that would have enabled me to assist women: individuals, groups and cooperatives in communities in the development of their Home Economics skills. I was disappointed to find that the course had been discontinued and had to pursue the Diploma in Home Economics to teach in secondary schools.

After teaching in a secondary school for a year, I applied for a position to work with Rural Education Centres<sup>4</sup>. This position gave me the opportunity I had always looked forward to: working with the disadvantaged members of our community, both men and women, both young and old. I worked with the Rural Education Centres as a Teacher Leader in Adult and Non-formal Education for 26 years where I facilitated the acquisition of vocational skills among out-of-school youth and adults. It was at this time when I started realizing that there were youths who had never been to school or had dropped out of formal education. These youths could not access tertiary education or formal employment because they lacked academic qualifications. Some of these youths used the Non-formal Education route to access self- or wage-employment by enrolling in the vocational skills programme. Although the youths managed to have a form of livelihood, the society and the youths themselves did not recognise this form of employment in the same way as formal employment accessed after tertiary education.

I joined Sebenta National Institute in 2010 where my involvement in adult and Non-formal Education broadened. I worked with adults and out-of-school youth and children throughout the country. The Institute's mandate was to provide Basic Literacy, Vocational Skills as well as Non-formal or Continuing Education. From 2010, the Institute extended its work to

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<sup>3</sup> 'O' Level is the higher secondary education last grade where students write an external examination for entrance into an institute of higher education. This level is currently referred to as the Swaziland General Certificate for Secondary Education (SGCSE).

<sup>4</sup> Rural Education Centres (REC) are formal education schools, mainly secondary, where even adults and youth come to use the same facility as children to learn vocational skills for self- and wage-employment.

provide Non-formal Primary Education (NPE) to out-of-school or over-age children. The major focus was creating equivalence between formal and Non-formal Education such that a learner re-joins formal education at age and grade appropriate levels. On implementing the Non-formal Primary Education mandate, the Institute realised that the programme attracted not just out-of-school children, enabling them to re-join the formal education system, but also a number of youths and adults enrolled. To me that was lifelong learning in practice as those who were age appropriate re-joined formal secondary education after their Eswatini Primary Certificate examination whilst the older and employed demanded Non-formal Secondary Education. The Institute witnessed an annual increase in enrolment of youths and adults in the Non-formal Education programmes (both academic and vocational skills). For me, this increase demonstrated a need for an educational programme that would be flexible to meet the educational needs of learners at their point of need, irrespective of age and socio-economic background. It indicated that, with a full political will, an intervention that met youths' educational needs was possible and this could ultimately reduce the number of NEETs in Eswatini.

### **1.6.2 Significance of the study**

I share the view as espoused by UNESCO (2010, p. 55) that 'denying children an opportunity to place even a first step on the education ladder sets them on a course for a lifetime of disadvantage'. It violates their basic human right to education. It also wastes a precious national resource and precludes a potential driver of economic growth and poverty reduction. In most cases out-of-school youth are often overlooked and talked *about* but not *with*. Educational progress often focuses on school progression for the age appropriate group whilst the situation of dropouts among children and adolescents has been subject to less scrutiny. The government's focus has up to now, like the *Out-of-school children report in Eswatini* by Berg, Wyk, Hofmeyr and Ferreira (2018), been only on data reflecting educational access for all children and adolescents, school drop-outs, progression through primary education and the transition to secondary education. However, these data lack what the out-of-school children and youth have to say for themselves about their education. The contribution of this study is that out-of-school youths' views need to be considered, not only those views expressed superficially through simple questions and answers but through appealing to their inner being so as to access their feelings, attitudes and world view. Such views would then inform educational policies meant to address youth and NEETs in particular.

### **1.6.3 Gap in scholarship**

There has been no similar study on education from the NEET's point of view in Eswatini, and very few elsewhere. Most studies and reports in Eswatini are about statistics and learning for children in the main stream. A few studies reflect only statistics on the children and youth who are out-of-school including those not in employment or training. These studies include the *Out-of-school children report in Eswatini* (Berg, Wyk, Hofmeyr & Ferreira, 2018), the study on *Youth and Adult Learning in Southern Africa* (Aitchison, 2010), and the Brenthurst Foundation report (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). These studies will be discussed further in Chapter 2. Reports include MDG progress reports (UNESCO, 2010, 2015) and annual reports from the Eswatini's Ministry of Education and Training (EMIS, 2012, 2013), which mainly focus on statistics from formal education. Other studies which focused on non-formal or out-of-school learning, as well as some studies like the Sebenta National Institute census on the profile of learners in Non-formal Education (Sebenta National Institute, 2012). This study reflects that this group is side-lined, ignored and/or not often included in socio-economic development issues. So this study aims to bring in how the NEETs feel about their educational experiences, which are often ignored and only statistically represented in their formative years.

The other gap that this study will address is on the methodology. While studies exist which have engaged youth as co-researchers such as Smith (2010) and Shelagh (2015), discussed in Chapter Five, this has not been done regarding the experiences of NEETs. For this research, I used NEET's as co-researchers who were trained on data collection using a semi-structured questionnaire.

### **1.6.4 The lifelong learning approach that underpins this study**

This study is situated within the lifelong learning approach. Although Varavan (2010, p.70) views lifelong learning as 'elusive' and Aspin (2007, p. 4) says it is a 'slippery term', I use this approach as a guiding and organising principle in understanding the needs of the NEETs. The lifelong learning approach is a call for educational reform and a fresh look at the concept of learning which encompasses a broader perspective than viewing learning only as formal schooling (Ouane, 2011). Viewing learning beyond formal schooling to include informal and non-formal is often interpreted differently not only in different contexts but even within the same context (Aspin, 2007, 2012; Varavan, 2010). I think the broad view of learning is necessary to understand NEETs within Eswatini's socio-economic and political context.

Even though there are different perspectives, many theorists agree on the main components of the lifelong learning approach: the need to learn from the cradle to the grave (Aspin, 2007; Medel-Anonvevo, 2002; Ouane, 2011; Preece, 2009; Yang & Valdes-Cotera, 2011; Duke & Hinzen, 2012). The lifelong learning approach states that learning takes place at all times, at all levels and by many means: formal, non-formal and informal. According to Duke and Hinzen (2012, p.19), 'learning must be associated with all dimensions of life conceived and expressed as 'lifelong', 'life-wide' and 'life-deep'. The lifelong learning approach states that individuals are continuously in need of acquiring skills, knowledge and competencies for them to function within society at any given stage. This learning is needed to fulfil individuals' personal purposes, social purposes, economic purposes and social cohesion (Banks, Au, Ball, Gordon, Gutierrez, Heath, & Zhou, 2007).

### **1.7 Theoretical framework**

In this study the life span development theory, the contemporary learning theories, as well as the social capital theory were used to understand the educational experiences and attitudes of the NEETs. The life span development theory (Baltes, Lindenberger & Standiger, 2007, 1999; Baltes, 1987; Fasokun et al., 2005) was used to understand the developmental experiences NEETs have gone through since birth. It also brought in the psychological lens in understanding development at the different stages the out-of-school youth have gone through in their lifespan. The theory also helped to contextualise development within the African context so that a better understanding of NEETs could be developed within the geographic, cultural and historical context of Eswatini.

Illeris's (2003) contemporary and comprehensive learning theory provided the study with a lens to understand how learning through these developmental stages has taken place. As a comprehensive learning theory, it views learning as a continuum: informal, formal and non-formal. This means the theory provided a lens to explain learning from all educational institutions: home, school, and society.

The social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Field, 2008; Putnam, 2000) brought in the societal lens in understanding the connections of these institutions – for example, family, school, church, media, and other social formations – that have contributed to the development and learning experiences of the out-of-school youth. The theory explained the nature of social connections within and beyond each institution and how they have acted on the youth through their developmental and learning stages.

The different theories are used to explain how education prepares individuals for maximum contribution at the different human development stages, in particular, for employment. The study explores how education acquired informally, formally and non-formally prepares one for adulthood with regard to the socio-economic contributions, expectations and roles one has to play. The theories of adulthood and lifelong learning are explored as they relate or interlink with the social capital theory. In some cases, these roles are achieved through the normal human development process whereas in some cases they come as a result of life catastrophes.

### **1.8 Research methodology**

The study drew from the interpretivist paradigm. The life history approach to understand youth's lives (15 – 24 years) from birth to 24 years old was adopted. According to Sikes (2006), life histories 'provide a depth and richness of information and insight that other methodologies cannot'. In this study five NEETs were purposively selected as both research participants and co-researchers. The research methods used were the photo-voice, interviews, journals and focus group discussions. The co-researchers were trained first on the use of photo-voice and then on how to collect data using open ended questions. The co-researchers also purposively selected 10 participants, making a total of 50 participants in all. They then presented the analysis of their participants' views on education and their contribution as co-researchers in a focus group discussion. The data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative styles. The narratives were analysed using themes: thematic analysis. Statistical analysis was used for the quantitative data.

### **1.9 Limitations of the study**

A detailed discussion on how anticipated challenges were overcome is presented in the Research Methodology chapter.

### **1.10 Overview of the thesis chapters**

With the introduction and background to the study already covered in this chapter, the overview of succeeding chapters in the study is as follows:

#### **Chapter Two: Literature review**

Chapter Two discusses literature related to the study. The chapter explores the origins and currency of the NEETs concept. It also explores factors contributing to youth being categorised as NEETs as well as studies conducted around the NEETs issue.

### **Chapter Three: The lifelong learning approach**

The third chapter critically discusses literature relating to the lifelong learning approach with a focus on how lifelong learning contributes to the categorisation of youths referred to as NEETs. The chapter discusses lifelong learning expressed as ‘life-wide’ and ‘life-deep’, a view that this study adopts. Literature is also used to respond to critiques of the lifelong learning versus the lifelong education approach. A call for Afrocentrism, particularly for the countries of the South, is presented in response to the critiques of lifelong learning.

### **Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework**

Chapter Four presents three theoretical lenses used to understand NEETs in the study. The first theory is the lifespan development theory (Baltes et al., 2007, 1999; Baltes, 1987) which is not only used to understand the individual experiences of the youth through the developmental stages but also to contextualize them within Eswatini. The second theory is the contemporary learning theory (Illeris, 2003) which is used as an umbrella of all learning theories to understand how youth learn. The third theory is the social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Field, 2008; Putnam, 2000) which assists in understanding the importance of the connections between these educational institutions.

### **Chapter Five: Research Methodology**

This chapter explores literature relating to the research paradigms and methodology. The study was situated within the interpretivist paradigm and used narrative inquiry within a qualitative orientation. The life story approach to research was used where co-researchers shared their educational experiences in a focus group discussion and later conducted interviews using open-ended questionnaires with fifty youths who were not in education, employment or training.

### **Chapter Six: ‘Our experiences’: Co-researchers’ life stories**

This chapter addresses the purpose of the study in ‘giving voice’ to out-of-school youth. The life stories of the five co-researchers were shared using the photo voice method. The narratives powerfully illustrate some of the themes and patterns of the lives of out-of-school youth in Eswatini.

### **Chapter Seven: Interpretation of research participants’ experiences**

In Chapter Seven, participants’ views from the interviews are presented using the themes generated from coding the narratives. The themes presented in the findings include NEETs experiences with regard to: age distribution; geographical location; family background;

educational access and progression; support system; training; societal expectation; and future aspirations.

### **Chapter Eight: ‘Nothing about us without us’: Co-researchers’ contribution to the study**

This chapter presents the co-researchers’ contribution to the study. The contribution made through co-researching are presented thematically and include the following: in-depth understanding of being NEETs; creation of a dialogic space within the research process; co-researchers’ empowerment and learning about conducting interviews; and the value of informal learning in addressing the situation of being a NEET. The themes contribute to our understanding of co-researching in the context of research about NEETs.

### **Chapter Nine: Theorizing the findings**

This chapter presents the interpretation of the findings. The presentation focuses on the lifelong learning approach and the social capital theory. Illeris’ comprehensive and contemporary learning theory as well as the lifespan developmental theories is brought in as part of the discussion within the two sections.

### **Chapter Ten: Summary and Conclusion**

Chapter Ten presents the summary and synthesis of the findings. The chapter presents insights generated through the voicing of the out-of-school youths’ educational experiences in their perspective. The generated insights are at an empirical, methodological and conceptual level. The chapter puts forward that all three levels bring into question the reductiveness of the NEET construction. It brings to the fore that the term ‘NEET’ is socially constructed and influenced by the neoliberal framework within the lifelong learning approach. However, it does harm to the deeper and wider understanding of out-of-school situatedness, agency and possibility. Therefore, the FILLL framework is presented.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This research study is focused on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the educational experiences of out-of-school youths between 15 and 24 years of age who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Eswatini. The study sought to understand NEETs' educational needs from their perspective by taking a look at their life stories and experiences. Hart (1998) emphasises the importance of reviewing literature on a subject or topic under study so as to understand the history and debates around it. For this study the review of literature explores the concept and currency of NEET, the origins of the NEET concept, the related global concerns resulting in its worthiness for being researched, the experiences and attitudes contributing to the youth becoming NEETs, the international and national interventions implemented to address NEET's issues, current areas of interest in the NEET scholarship, and possible areas which have been apparently neglected by previous studies.

### **2.2. The concept and currency of 'NEETs'**

This section explores the debates around the origins of the NEETs concept, its economic impact and how the concept spread to other countries (Chiara, n.d.; Cuzzocrea, 2014; Furlong, 2007;). The NEETs concept originated in the United Kingdom in 1999 in a political climate which included a change in benefits for youths aged 16 – 17 years (Chiara, n.d.; Cuzzocrea, 2014; Furlong, 2006;). Cuzzocrea (2014) states that the challenge was that these youths were under-age and therefore not eligible for the unemployment benefit, yet they could also not access youth training programmes. The inability to classify these young people resulted in them being viewed as 'the forgotten underclass' or the youth that 'count for nothing and [are] going nowhere' (Cuzzocrea, 2014, p. 5). A 1999 government report from a Social Exclusion Unit reflected that researchers had started using the phrase 'not in education, employment or training (NEET)' as a proxy for social exclusion and to draw attention to the heterogeneous nature of the category of these young people (Cuzzocrea, 2014; ILO, 2015). Referring to this category of youths as NEET was an attempt to address the negative connotation for the young people who were purportedly not engaged in any positive activity.

The use of the term NEET later spread to other countries, although with a broadened or extended meaning to suit each country's context, and became a statistical classification (Bacher, 2014; Chiara, n.d.; ILO, 2015;). The broadened and extended use of the term NEET

in different country contexts contributed to a lack of an international definition (Chiara, n.d.; Cuzzocrea, 2014). However, most literature (Bacher, 2014; Chiara, n.d.;) has adopted the International Labour Organization's (2015: p.1) definition of the NEET rate as:

The percentage of the population of a given age group and sex who is not employed and not involved in further education or training ... [young people] meeting two conditions: (i) they are not employed (i.e. are unemployed or inactive), and (ii) they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the [study].

Contextualizing the definition of each of the components of the NEET acronym – employment, education or training – by different countries was a major contributor to the lack of an international definition of NEET (Chiara, n.d.; ILO, 2015). Whilst some NEETs may not be in employment because they have been discouraged as jobs are not available or they lack the job requirements, in other countries cultural barriers prevent people, particularly women, from leaving home for work (ILO, 2015). So, for some countries unemployment, especially for women, may not be viewed as an issue. With regard to education and training, for some countries, education includes part-time and full time education and excludes Non-formal Education and any short duration educational activities (Cuzzocrea, 2014; ILO, 2015). Training is based on the practical application of a special skill or task often learnt by doing. It is often done to improve performance and/or productivity in a work environment (Surbhi, 2015). Therefore, the use of the term, NEET, may be too broad or too narrow for some countries (ILO, 2015).

Furthermore, the term NEET is increasingly used as a measure of the youths' disengagement and vulnerability in developed countries (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013; Marsh, 2009; New Zealand Government, 2012; The Economist, 2013). Literature (Bacher, 2014; Furlong, 2006; ILO, 2012; Marsh, 2009) refers to NEETs as youths who are discouraged and disengaged from the labour market and perhaps from society in general, and are associated with deprivation, financial exclusion, and low attainment. These are youths with weak family and other support social networks such as peers. Such youths carry a stigma and they have low human capital, low educational attainment and little engagement in politics.

The ILO (2015) argues that the interpretation of the term is often misguided, troublesome or incomplete as it gives no in-depth information particularly when relating to employment.

According to this report, discouragement from work may be a result of several factors. These factors may include mismatch in skills, lack of information on where and how to find work, and/or previous job searches yielding no results. Being classified as a NEET may thus arise from a variety of contributory factors. An attempt to address the NEET condition, therefore, requires a deep understanding of who the NEETs are. In addition, these contributory factors are context-specific and culture-specific, and generalising assumptions about NEETs from developed countries to developing countries may be problematic.

Most countries tend to ignore the in-depth understanding of the term and use the NEET concept, in general interpretation, to draw attention to the issue and associate it with the assumed potential to address the condition (Bacher, 2014; ILO, 2015). However, the general use of the concept has resulted in the development of unifying interventions to address NEETs concerns that are often developed based on available data without seeking the views and concerns of the youth themselves (Marsh, 2009). This has been the case even with international declarations like Education for All (EFA) Goals, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000) and now Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015) which have components for addressing youths who are referred to as NEETs. Such interventions have trickled down to individual countries. Although these international and national interventions have yielded some results, the increasing number of NEETs is still a concern (Bordak, Maseda & Rosso, 2015; ILO, 2016).

Even though the term NEET was an attempt to address the negative connotation of disengaged youths in the United Kingdom at the time, Yates and Payne (2006) still view the NEET concept as being negative and problematic in that it tends to define youth by what they are not. Other literature supports the argument that using the term NEET results in viewing this category of youth as problematic but also as misguided and incomplete. This is because it tends not to consider their socio-economic backgrounds as the cause of social problems, as well as ignoring the structural causes contributing to being categorised as a NEET (Furlong, 2006; ILO, 2015;). The main argument is that ignoring the NEETs socio-economic background and their varied situations, difficulties and experiences when conceptualizing educational responses, is, of course, ignoring their voices and involvement. As a result educational interventions addressing the NEETs issue use fire-fighting approaches instead of focusing on the root causes (ILO, 2015).

Literature points out that the general use of the NEET term might contribute to missing the target and thus not addressing the issue. Marsh (2009) supports the view that the term NEETs

is negative. In the Scotland case, for instance, the term NEETs was less often used; instead, those in the situation were described as '*young people in need of more choices and more chances*' (Marsh, 2009, p. 90). This study, however, employs the term 'NEETs' not because I was ignoring the negativity and lack of recognizing diversity in the backgrounds of youth categorized as NEETs, but because the study is interested in the various contextually located experiences of the youth often referred to as NEETs. That being said, the study uses the term with reservations, given the criticisms noted above, and continuously interrogates its usefulness and accuracy throughout the study. Therefore, this study has adopted the South Africa's Higher Education's definition of people not in education or training as referring to people who are not attending an educational institution (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013).

With regard to employment, the study regarded youth who were not employed during the time of the study and were actively looking for work or trying to start a business, as being 'not in employment' (ibid.). These youths, at the time of the study, were available for any form of education or work. This means the youth would have been pursuing some form of education, accessing employment or starting a business at any time if they had the choice. Therefore according to this study these youths were, at the time of the study, within the category of NEETs (not in education, employment or training).

The study adopted the South African's definition of NEET because of the many other similarities Eswatini shares with South Africa. Eswatini and South Africa share a 'contiguous border, have a long history of migration, and have strong economic ties' (Thonje, 2014, p. 12). The existing relationship between South Africa and Eswatini is of great significance because of the country's membership of the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) in which South Africa is an important determinant of its trade patterns.

With regard to the study's definition of youth, although the Eswatini Youths Policy refers to young men and women aged 15 – 35 years as the youth (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009), the study focused on youths aged 15 – 24 years. Whilst agreeing with the Eswatini Youths Policy on the challenges faced by youth in general, the study focused on the 15 to 24 years range as a strategic group more susceptible to change, rather than stretching to the 35 years of the youth definition (Development Bureau of Southern Africa, 2011). I concur with the South African Development Bank (2011) that, since this group (15 – 24) is at a school-to-work transition

stage, finding pathways to employment is critical for the future of a country's economy and vital for themselves as individuals. This study argues that meaningful and effective pathways cannot be found without the involvement of the people concerned. This is in line with the 'nothing about us without us' concept (O'Brien, 2014, p. 1). So, as part of youth in the country, the NEETs' voices and concerns are very important (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). In the Brenthurst Foundation report even His Excellency the Prime Minister of Eswatini affirmed this:

The youth of Eswatini are the nation's most valuable asset. It is their energy and ideas that will drive the country's development. In that regard the voice of the youth is important. As a country we need to take into consideration their concerns and give them a stake in the future of the Kingdom of Eswatini. (Dlamini cited in Oppenheimer et al., 2011, p. 8).

### **2.3 NEETs and the 'youth bulge'**

The 'youth bulge' is discussed in this section as it impacts on the two major themes the reviewed literature revealed on NEETs: their economic and socially related experiences. With regard to the economically related themes, issues such as the impact of the fiscal crises on the youth and the youth's employment status are explored.

The 'youth bulge' is a growing concern internationally as it is linked to the growing population of youths worldwide, of which those referred to as NEETs are a part (Fawcett et al., 2010; Oppenheimer et al., 2011; UNPF, 2014). According to the UNFPA (2014), the global youth population totals 1.8 billion. Of these, about 1.5 billion of the youth worldwide are aged between 15 and 24 years and 1.3 billion live in developing countries (Fawcett et al., 2010, p. 10). These figures represent the largest-ever youth population group recorded in history and refers to what has come to be known as the 'youth bulge' (Arnot, 2012; Fawcett, 2010; Oppenheimer et al., 2011; The Economist, 2013). The youth bulge is especially evident in Sub-Saharan African countries and 'will continue for the next 20 years' (Fawcett et al., 2010, p. 10).

Naturally a promising future or positive societal expectations are raised by the youth bulge; however, the ever increasing number of NEETs tends to shatter those expectations (Arnot & Swartz, 2012; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). The positive expectations are a result of having a high population of youth in an era of all the educational interventions being implemented internationally and regionally (Oppenheimer et al., 2011; UNPF, 2014). Such interventions, as

presented in one of the sections below, aim at a future consisting of a majority of young people being world problem-solvers, people who could make new discoveries to contribute in the building of industries and to the transformation of the economy. Such a world would ensure employment for all irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds. In the African context, Africa's economic future and prosperity would be driven by the youth's ideas, energy and commitment.

The reality, however, is that NEETs lack basic education, employment opportunities and social connectedness particularly in developing countries (Fawcett et al., 2010). Literature points out that as the voices, ideas and views of the increasing number of NEETs with an array of vulnerabilities are not sought when implementing innovations, the future that has positive developmental impact cannot be realised (Bacher, 2014; Chiara, n.d.; Cuzzocrea, 2014; Fawcett et al., 2010; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). These vulnerabilities are discussed in detail in the following sections.

The international growing concern on the youth bulge is also a concern for the Southern African region including Eswatini. Eswatini was classified amongst the countries with an extremely high percentage of youth bulge as it was 26.3 in 2009 (Fawcett et al., 2010). The country was in the same category as Lesotho and Cambodia, amongst others. Other moderately developed countries were classified as moderately high (15 –19 percent) whilst most developed countries were classified as low with below 14 percent. The high AIDS and TB mortality of adults, might be a contributing factor to the greater demographic proportion of the youth in Eswatini (Whitehead, Andrade, Arrehag, Dlamini, Ginindza & Parikh, 2006) since the birth rate is 25.1 (54<sup>th</sup> world highest) (CIA, 2014) and life expectancy is 51.6 years (221<sup>st</sup> out of 224 in the world) (The World Fact Book, 2016). This means there are more children and youths with fewer adults to look after them.

## **2.4 NEETs and the economic situation**

In this section I explore literature relating to the economic concerns around NEETs, particularly as they relate to the 'youth bulge' (Arnot & Swartz, 2012; Fawcett et al., 2010; Oppenheimer et al., 2011; The Economist, 2013), the country's fiscal crises and the availability of jobs (UN, 2013; UNESCO, 2010). It is argued that, as the NEETs concept is increasingly used as a measure of youth marginalisation and disengagement, having few youths referred to as NEETs is viewed as a sign of a healthy transition from school to work for countries (Cuzzocrea, 2014; ILO, 2015).

#### 2.4.1 The financial crisis and NEETs

Literature reflects that when countries are faced with the effects of a financial crisis, employers tend to sack the inexperienced first, primarily the youth (The Economist, 2013). This is particularly the case for emerging economies that in most cases have the largest numbers of youths. Eswatini, for instance, experienced the lowest growth rates in the region in the year 2000 which resulted in the youth unemployment situation deteriorating even further. Although classified as a middle income level country, Eswatini's economic growth rate has been below sub-Saharan Africa which has been 5.8 percent a year (Oppenheimer et al., 2011; UNDP, 2013). The lowest growth rates were a result of the impact of the fall in the revenues of the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) of which Eswatini is a member (UNDP, 2013).

In addition, the 2008/2009 and 2010/2011 global crises severely affected the economy of Eswatini (Brixiova, Fakudze & Kangoye, 2012; Vandome et al., 2013). At this time, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) revenues fell by 57 percent and this fall weakened Eswatini's labour market. Since the country is highly dependent on SACU, government was unable to provide jobs. The economic downturn thus resulted in job losses, wage cuts, cuts in hours, as well as closures of businesses. This economic challenge affected mostly the youth who comprise a third of Eswatini population (Brixiova et al., 2012; Oppenheimer et al., 2011).

**Table 0.1: Unemployment rates in Eswatini in 2010**

	15–24	25–34	35+	Total
Regular definition	52.4	30.5	16.0	28.5
Relaxed definition	64.0	40.7	28.6	40.6

Source: UN (2013, p. 7)

The above table demonstrate the impact of the fiscal crises on Eswatini particularly the youth aged 15 – 24 years. The relaxed<sup>5</sup> unemployment rate of youth aged 15 – 24 was 64 percent. According to literature, youths who live on less than \$2 a day remain vulnerable to social exclusion, unemployment, and underemployment (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). The inadequate

<sup>5</sup> Relaxed definition: survey counted discouraged workers as part of labour force (United Nations, 2013). 'Relaxed' thus includes not only those who are actively seeking work but also those who are 'discouraged' and who no longer seek work.

job creation and lack of self-employment in high value-added and high-productivity sectors reflect Eswatini's need for structural transformation in order to remove the bottlenecks to improve the labour market for young Eswatini (UNDP, 2013, p. 8).

#### **2.4.2 NEETs and employment opportunities**

The vulnerable position of the African youth hinders them from taking up what can be referred to as formal employment regardless of remuneration and quality. The majority of youths in Southern Africa including Eswatini are employed in low value-added and insecure jobs (UNDP, 2013; AUC/OECD, 2018). This means most youths end up in underemployment which again leaves them in a position of vulnerability and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Factors such as a lack of social networking for job opportunities and losing hope or being discouraged after several attempts to find a job, contribute to the vulnerable position of youth unemployment (ILO, 2012). These factors are often not taken into consideration when statistics on unemployment or underemployment are compiled.

According to the Brenthurst Foundation report that presents dialogues on how governments from Zambia, Mozambique and Eswatini have responded to the youth's unemployment crises in Africa, there are three factors that are viewed as contributing to youth unemployment (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). These factors are poor economic growth rate, high population growth and poverty. The poor economic growth rate in Africa manifests itself in low economic activity, low investment and a small formal labour market, and the youth are the most affected. Youth unemployment has been singled out as the main challenge in realising an improved socio-economic future. The level of unemployment is very high in Eswatini especially if those who are under-employed or in informal employment are included (UNDP, 2013).

Literature reveals that the youth's lack and/or mismatch of skills needed for employment is the main concern for the youth particularly in developing countries. A lack of skills has an adverse effect on economic growth and poverty reduction as the youth fail to access productive employment (Korzh, 2013; Oppenheimer et al., 2011; UNDP, 2013). Oppenheimer et al. (2011) stated that the youth dropping out of education lack professional skills to access or contribute to economic development. The Brenthurst Foundation report also stated that for the sub-Saharan Africa region, 47 percent of the youth are unemployed (Oppenheimer et al., 2011, p. 29). Of these 18 percent are young men and 27 percent are young women who are illiterate, verifying that the youth in this region is unprepared to meet the demands of the labour market.

Besides the youth bulge, NEETs' social position, skill shortages and mismatch in skills being contributing factors to unemployment, the literature also reveals that employment opportunities are being affected by NEETs social connections (Marsh, 2009; Fawcett et al., 2010; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). This means some youth lack information about job opportunities, job requirements, necessary processes or how they can improve their job opportunities. Some youths do not have the information on how to improve their prospects and, even if they know, they lack the financial means to do so because of their poor family backgrounds (Brixiova, Ncube & Bicaba, 2014).

Literature points to the need for various countries' governments to tackle the youth unemployment challenge (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). It is believed that without young people's access to jobs and means of livelihood a country's economic situation would be highly challenged, as young people would tend to seek other ways of releasing their energy than focusing on strategies to address their livelihood. Most governments, in the Brenthurst Foundation report suggested interventions and/or strategies to address youth issues (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). The suggested interventions emphasised youth training, professional apprenticeship and interaction with employers. However, these countries did not mention getting the youth's voices as one of the strategies. For me this meant these strategies were to be developed and implemented 'for' and not 'with' the youths as beneficiaries.

The youth bulge and increasing number of NEETs does not bring any hope for African countries especially in the Sub-Saharan region. The literature indicates that there are structural impediments to youths' employment in Eswatini (UNDP, 2013; Vandome, et al., 2013). According to UNDP (2013, p. 8), the Eswatini government is facing a challenge in her effort to improve labour market for the increasing young Emaswati. The youth bulge and the fiscal crises make the Eswatini government and the business sector unable to provide jobs and self-employment in high value-added and high-productivity sectors. The ILO (2015) also expands on the structural constraint to employment by stating that a high NEET rate as compared with unemployment rate could mean that a large number of youths are discouraged workers, or do not have access to education and training. In most countries this group is a measure of the excluded, marginalised and forgotten youth (ILO, 2015).

According to The Brenthurst Foundation report the 'youth's unemployment can be segmented across a number of variables, most notably gender and geographical location' (Oppenheimer et al., 2011 p. 30). With regard to geographical location, the issue of unemployment in

Eswatini particularly for youths aged 15 – 24 years was more pronounced in urban areas as the rate was triple the adult rate. ‘With these rates and trends, the youth unemployment is not sustainable and ceases to be an economic issue only. As the 2011 experiences from North Africa showed, if unaddressed, the low and declining youth employment could lead to social and political unrests’ (Brixiova et al., 2012, p. 6).

The reasons for the high urban youth unemployment rate include rural-urban migration (Brixiova et al., 2012). Rural-urban migration transfers the incidence of youth unemployment from rural to urban labour markets. Another reason for urban youth unemployment is that employers in urban areas are very commercial, and they are required to pay high remunerations. They therefore opt to hire skilled adults rather than inexperienced youth. In rural areas, on the other hand, agriculture is the main economic activity that tends to absorb youth seasonally or as part time labourers.

The other variable is gender. The Brenthurst Foundation report states that in sub-Saharan Africa, the female youth are less active in employment, education or training as compared to their male counterparts (Oppenheimer et al., 2011, p. 29). Females in this region generally have lower levels of school enrolment, school attainment and employment.

The literature reviewed above demonstrates the structural challenges faced by youths who end up being classified as NEETs because they cannot access employment. These challenges are a result of the number of jobs available that does not match the increasing number of youths. Policy makers have emphasised the urgent need to tackle the youth unemployment challenge (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). The governments involved in report pointed out that without jobs youths seek self-destructing and economically non-productive ways of using their time and releasing their energy. What is worthy of note is that these governments have only emphasised engaging the employers when developing the interventions. Sadly, getting the voices of the beneficiaries, the youth, has been ignored, although they have pointed out that youths have valuable ideas.

## **2.5 The social position of being a NEET**

The above section has discussed some of the economic factors contributing to the youth becoming NEETs. Some of the economic factors cited above are interlinked with the social factors that are discussed below. That is, the social factors may be a cause and/or result of the economic situation discussed above and vice versa. This section begins with exploring literature on NEETs’ social status and how their status links to the level of involvement in

issues relating to their lives. It also explores how issues such as poverty, lack of educational skills and knowledge, HIV and AIDS as well as gender contribute to the position of being a NEET.

### **2.5.1 NEETs' social status and involvement in decision making**

By definition, being categorised as the youth locates individuals between childhood and adulthood. According to Eswatini's youth policy, this period 'is a time in life when most young people are going through character building stages, facing many challenges and threats which are unique to them as a social group' (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009, p. 7). It is a transitional stage to adulthood where what happens in one's life greatly impacts on the future in an almost irreversible way (Arnot, 2012; Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009). Social expectations are that between 15 and 24 years of age, individuals are expected to complete formal school and either are undergoing training or have just completed training. If one has successfully negotiated the human development stages as stated by Rogers (1972), by the age of 24 years individuals are at the young adulthood stage. According to Erikson (1959), youth at this stage should be independent economically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. They should be able to start a career, family, be voted for and vote. Youth who have not been able to negotiate their way through adolescence to young adulthood often view themselves and are viewed by society, as failures. These youths tend to have a low self-esteem.

Whilst the youth bulge, as previously presented, compounds the economic challenge, it also impacts socially due to the position society tends to assign youth particularly those referred to as NEETs. Even though literature states that the youth within this age range of 15 – 24 years are supposed to be the future leaders, workers and citizens of their nation, the reality is different (Arnot & Swartz, 2012; Fawcett et al., 2010; UNFPA., 2014). Because of the NEETs' inability to contribute to the socio-economic development, this category of youth is often viewed as a social risk and normally excluded in decision-making processes, even those that affect their lives. In a world of adult concerns, young people are often overlooked in terms of their human rights. This is even worse for youths that are not in education, employment or training (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013; Marsh, 2009; New Zealand, 2012).

Besides being overlooked and viewed as failures by society, this category of youths often has a negative sense of their future. For most youths this negative sense of their future results in them having low self-esteem, being at risk of participating in crime, gangsterism, trafficking,

and violence (Arnot & Swartz, 2012; Fawcett et al., 2010). Because of this perception, the group often become non-participating citizens in community issues even if it affects them.

Literature in this section reveals that the youth are often ignored by society or by the communities they live in when decisions are made just because they are young and more so if they are in the category of being NEETs. Being in the category of youths referred to as NEETs also indicates poor family background and thus poor social connections to access anything beneficial to their lives. The Eswatini's national youth policy, for instance, states that Emaswati youths are faced with the fragmentation of supportive communities, with policies and practices that are inequitable, with governance issues, as well as with the impact of rural-urban migration (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009, p. 9). In the following section I present literature on how factors such as lack of educational access and progress as well as poverty contribute to youths becoming NEETs.

### **2.5.2 NEETs' access and progression in education and training**

Lack of access to and progression in education and training contribute to the increasing number of NEETs. Below I show that a number of factors contribute to the lack of educational access and progression. Such factors include issues of poverty, HIV and AIDS, as well as gender.

Youths deprived of formal education lack the skills and knowledge necessary to access employment opportunities. Literature points out that victims of this deprivation are mostly the youth from poor households (UNESCO, 2010; UNICEF, 2013). The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2010) states that countries faced with limited budgets, especially developing countries, tend to compromise all provisions relating to human development, especially educating the vulnerable. Such compromises have a larger impact on poor and vulnerable households. Therefore, children from poor households suffer the most because families, like governments, compromise their children's education when faced with monetary constraints (UNESCO, 2010).

The EFA Global Monitoring report (UNESCO, 2010) points out that early childhood educational provision continues to be neglected by most governments. In most countries pre-school education is only for those who can afford the fees. This means children enter primary school at different levels of school readiness. The unequal school readiness levels create disparities for children within the same classrooms. They are also a challenge to the teacher who may tend to ignore those who cannot cope because they are not at the same level of school readiness as those who have been to pre-school. School readiness contributes to

learning achievement. It also contributes to high rates of school drop-out as those children who were not ready for school cannot cope with those who can and they receive little attention from the teacher, especially in the context of large classes (UNESCO, 2010; UNICEF, 2013). The different levels of school readiness demonstrate that, apart from the global financial crises, social inequality tends to be a barrier to Universal Primary Education (UNESCO, 2013b; UNESCO, 2010). Children's socio-economic background tends to create inequality and compromise their identity even before they get to formal education at any level (Arnot & Swartz, 2012).

These inequalities could be addressed through education, as education is supposed to lay the foundation for a productive life; to promote tolerance, peace and understanding between people; and to fight discrimination of all kinds (UNESCO, 2010). However, the USAID (2013) project points out that education has two 'faces' or alternative uses. Education can be used positively, to promote peace, or negatively as an exclusionary and oppressive system. To foster the positive contribution of youth to economic development, education should strive to correct the wrongs of social inequalities which exist even before some of these children come to formal school.

Dropping out of formal school makes the youth ashamed of themselves, thus contributing to the youths' minimal participation in civic and political life. Young people facing such challenges are already at a disadvantage in life, even when they attempt to access basic social services (Berg, Wyk, Hofmeyr & Ferreira, 2018; UNESCO, 2010). In many countries these inequalities are linked to gender, ethnicity, languages and location. Some of these social identities the child brings to school need to be mitigated as they are a barrier to skills and knowledge acquisition on their own.

The Learning and Skills Network report highlights the negative use of education as expressed by some young people who identified negative attitudes towards school going right back to their time in primary schools (Marsh, 2009). Most of those who dropped out either did not like school, needed more help and encouragement from teachers, had experienced bullying, fell pregnant or were from unstable family backgrounds. The study further points out that institutions frequently create unnecessary barriers by being too inflexible when there is scope to be more creative as a means of encouraging young people to re-engage, to resist the temptation to drop out or to progress further, given that they lack self-confidence, attainments, supportive homes and local infrastructure. Such cases indicate the negative use of education

where the development and implementation of unifying policies tends to ignore learners' contexts.

Literature, therefore, argues for educational policies that recognize local variations and the diversity of circumstances (Oppenheimer et al., 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006). Unifying policies tend to ignore the social inequalities such as poverty, gender, social status and ethnicity that young people bring with them into the educational arena. Educational policies should address the deep-rooted societal gaps not only issues relating to abolishing school fees and school uniforms in isolation. There is a need for an in-depth understanding, including looking at the problem through the child's eyes, to inform the provision of meaningful education.

### **2.5.3 NEETs and poverty as a social disparity**

Poverty is one of the social disparities that contributes from an early age to youth being categorised as NEETs, particularly in Africa (UNESCO, 2010). The 2018 Africa Development Dynamics, for instance, has rated Eswatini amongst the ten top countries with the highest inequality in income in the world (AUC/OECD, 2018). The Brenthurst Foundation report, also, states that 72 percent of youth live on less than \$2 a day in Africa (Oppenheimer et al., 2011, p. 29). Their human development, which is transitional between childhood and adulthood, is often faced with life challenges that affect the rest of their lives (Arnot & Swartz, 2012). Arnot and Swartz (2012) argue that the transitional position of youth, between childhood and adulthood, makes youth especially vulnerable to poverty. Malnutrition is another source of inequality that is related to poverty. In developing countries 175 million children enter primary school having experienced malnutrition which does irreparable damage to their cognitive development (ibid.).

### **2.5.4 NEETs, HIV and AIDS**

Being infected or affected by HIV and AIDS is another social disparity related to poverty. The effects of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and poverty result in some youths being orphans, heads of their household or just homeless, having little or no income, experiencing a poverty-stricken life in their families, dropping out of formal school or assuming roles and responsibilities of adulthood at a very early stage (Motsa & Morojele, 2017). These circumstances rush the human development process with the result that the young person is expected to play the adult role without the necessary skills acquired from the socializing institutions, including home, school

and community. Motsa and Morojele (2017) refer to such children and youths as being vulnerable.

### **2.5.5 NEETs and gender**

Gender is another social disparity that is linked to poverty. In many countries social inequalities are linked to gender, ethnicity, languages and location (UNESCO, 2010). Gender gaps, for instance, are very wide in South and West Asia as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa as in most of these countries there are still fewer than nine girls in school for every ten boys (UNESCO, 2013b). The social identities that the girl-child brings to school needs to be mitigated as they are a barrier to skills and knowledge acquisition on their own. However, in Eswatini the primary school gender gap has been narrowing as it was 93.5 percent for boys and 91 percent for girls whilst the net enrolment was at 93 percent in 2011 (EMIS, 2012).

In concluding this section, the literature indicates that the social position of NEETs is one of being side-lined by society due to the restrictive circumstances of their lives, viewing themselves as useless, being faced with poverty, coming from poor family backgrounds, lacking social connections and any productive involvement in society. What is noticeable in the literature is the silence regarding the social agency and generative capacities of those classified as NEETs.

## **2.6 Responses to NEETs' issues**

In this section I explore literature on the interventions adopted to address the NEETs issue globally, regionally and nationally. Several educational research studies and reports that have been carried out on the 15 – 24 year olds tend to bring out only quantitative and leave out qualitative data that focus on the youth's personal views and experiences (Aitchison, 2010; EMIS, 2012; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). Most research tends to use research methods that do not engage the youth themselves. Consultations, if conducted, are superficial and do not get to the root cause of being a NEET. As such, unilateral policies are developed which tend to ignore the NEETs context or environment. Literature also points to the neoliberal framework that tends to dominate and influence the development and implementation of educational policies regarding NEETs (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hursh, 2001; Klees, 2014).

In this section I will start by exploring international interventions then move down to the country-level interventions on NEET issues. Then I will explore literature on the influence of neoliberalism on the development of policies. The section will be concluded with studies that

emphasise the importance of beneficiaries' voices so as to inform the development of policies that reach out to where the beneficiaries actually are.

### **2.6.1 International interventions and development of unilateral policies**

Most international progress reports reflect only statistical data on how countries fare with international declarations. For instance, to address social disparities relating to the youth and their educational needs, the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 agreed on Education for All (EFA) targets. The EFA targets were meant to meet basic learning needs including those of the youth as it looked at issues of access to free and compulsory primary education. The emphasis on meeting learning and life skills needs for young people was aimed at addressing poverty and access to employment. The EFA goals were further emphasized in the United Nations Millennium Summit where countries agreed on eight development targets to be achieved by developing countries by 2015. These goals were referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). Both agreements were meant to increase globalisation and economic competitiveness in the North and the South. However, according to Preece (2009), the MDGs were meant for the countries of the South whilst the North adopted the Memorandum for Lifelong Learning.

Whilst this study does not focus on the North and South debate addressed by Preece (2009), literature points towards the move towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for all countries, whether South or North. The aim of SDG number 4 is to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, 2016, p. i). The argument forwarded by this report is that 'if we leave the current young generation without adequate schooling, we doom them and the world to future poverty, environmental ills, and even social violence and instability for decades to come' (ibid, p. ii). This argument by the Global Education Monitoring report does not necessarily ignore the achievements made through the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's).

Great strides were taken towards achieving the MDGs (UNESCO, 2010) by individual countries. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2010) demonstrates the success by individual countries particularly with regard to Universal Primary Education as secondary and tertiary participation had been increased in many countries. The reports also reflect an improvement in overcoming hunger, poverty and child maternal mortality. My concern for these reports, however, is that there is only statistical data revealing that since 1999 the number of out-of-school children had dropped by 33 million. Although the report reflects a drop in the

percentage rate for girls who were out-of-school, from 58 to 54 percent and an increase in the numbers of adults in adult literacy programmes of 10 percent, the underlying variables contributing to the drop and increase are not reflected. Neither are the voices evident of the people who are the subject of the report.

With regard to a lack of the youth's voices, whilst the EFA report points out statistical achievements on the EFA targets for Eswatini, the EMIS report points out the challenge on the country's education (Dlamini, 2014; EMIS, 2015). According to these reports, the educational challenges, which are derived mainly from statistical data include the drop-out and repetition rates (Berg, Wyk, Hofmeyr & Ferreira, 2018). The causes for these are merely speculations as there is no evidence from those who had dropped out <sup>6</sup>or were at risk of dropping out<sup>7</sup>. Despite the introduction of free primary education in 2010, in 2011 the drop-out rate is high for Grades 1, 6 and 7, at 4, 12 and 5.04 percent respectively (Berg, Wyk, Hofmeyr & Ferreira, 2018; EMIS, 2015). The reports also states that the repetition rate is around 15 percent on average. In my view this means even with Free Primary Education intervention in Eswatini, the number of NEETs would still be high considering the high drop-out rate.

Other reports that focused on statistical data include Atchison's (2010) study on youth and adult learning in Southern Africa. His study analysed statistical data and has recommendations about what could be done to address the challenge of youth who are out-of-school; however, the study does not state the youths' views. The Brenthurst Foundation report by governments from Zambia, Mozambique and Eswatini develops policies to curb youth unemployment in their respective countries (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). These interventions were government driven and youth voices were conspicuously missing whereas it is the youth who are the targets of these educational interventions. The dialogues held were amongst policy makers and the interventions implemented were designed by them with superficial, if any, consultation with the youth. In Eswatini, the out-of-school study (Berg, Wyk, Hofmeyr & Ferreira, 2018) and the census report on learners between 10 – 18 years who were in Non-formal Education (Sebenta National Institute, 2012), like the other reports already mentioned, focused on statistics and just highlighted some of the socio-economic background of the individuals without getting their perspective on educational issues.

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<sup>6</sup> Drop-out: children who attended school at some point in the past but have since left. They may have done so before or after completion of primary or lower secondary education (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2011, p. 15).

<sup>7</sup> Risk of dropping out: Children who are not participating in the intended level of education for the intended duration and at the intended age (ibid. p. 10). Late entry into school implies that the child is over-age, a risk factor for non-completion of primary or secondary education (ibid. p. 14).

## **NEETs and handing out allowances**

The NEETs challenges overwhelm even the best efforts for employment generation worldwide (Oppenheimer et al., 2011; The Economist, 2013). In Europe, for instance, NEETs are very heavy on taxpayers as they receive allowances referred to as Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA) which seem to have their own challenges (Marsh, 2009). Funds assigned to disengaged youth in Europe amount to one percent of the Gross Domestic Product (ibid). Dealing with the NEETs in developing countries is different from Europe because of scarce resources. Developing countries tend to compromise all provisions relating to human development including education (UNESCO, 2010). To me, handing out allowances to the NEETs as practiced in the North and compromising basic services as in the developing countries cannot make a significant contribution in the reduction of NEETs. Handing out allowances is not sustainable and creates dependency as I view it as giving the youth fish instead of capacitating them on how to fish. Compromising basic services does not prepare the youth for a productive life. In my view there is a need for efforts that will fast track economic development and respond to issues of youths that contribute to their failure to negotiate the transition process.

In conclusion these studies, including the census report, point out the situation of the youth and recommend how it can be addressed. Some of the studies reflect the youth themselves expressing their desires to be reintegrated into the formal education system. However, the studies do not demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the youth's feelings in relation to their experiences towards their educational provision. In my view most of these studies were *about* the individuals, not *for* them. In other words, the youths have been the object of the research studies as opposed to being the research subjects. This has the effect that little is known about their attitudes towards education, their life stories, and educational experiences, and not much scholarship brings in their voices in the educational interventions.

### **2.6.2 Methodological approaches to youth research**

Although some studies and reports focus on statistical data, there are studies that have used methods to dig deeper into the issues surrounding educational challenges faced by the youth. Literature argues that rather than seeing young people as problematic or a challenge just from the statistical data, youths should be seen as partners who can contribute to socio-economic growth and development (Furlong, 2006; Making Cents International, 2012; Yates & Payne, 2006). According to Making Cents International (2012) there is a need for evidence-based, sustainable, scalable and cost-effective programmes to address NEETs issues.

Young people are also concerned about not having a say in policies impacting on their lives (Marsh, 2009; UNDP, 2013). The young people are ‘convinced that people who are not attuned to their needs, behavioural trends and characteristics are the ones making the decisions that have an impact on their development’ (UNDP, 2013, p. 30). Literature points out that data informing youth interventions should not be limited to statistical data but should also address key aspects such as the youths’ experiences, livelihoods, community services performed by youths, their associations, networks and relationships; how they spend their time; who influences them; their hopes and aspirations, and concerns; the forms of family support received and/or expected; and sources of self-esteem (Fawcett et al., 2010; Marsh, 2009; Phillips, 2010). Collecting data that include all these aspects of the youths’ lives would facilitate the in-depth understanding of who the NEETs are, instead of defining them by what they are not (Yates & Payne, 2006). Not understanding who NEETs are results in firefighting approaches to programme development. In the research methodology chapter, I present the participatory research methods used in this study to demonstrate how disadvantaged groups including NEETs can contribute to a study that touches on their lives.

## **2.7 Educational interventions and the neoliberal framework**

Unifying educational policies are influenced by the neoliberal framework (Youngman, 2000; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Tarabini, 2010, Ganti, 2014). Whist Ganti (2014, p. 92) traces the term neoliberal to 1925 and views it as ‘an offspring of the Great Depression’, other authors state that its ideology and theories emerged around the 1970s (Youngman, 2000; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Kascak & Pupala, 2011; Ganti, 2014). Ong (2006) states that neoliberalism seems to be different things depending on one’s vantage point (Ganti, 2014, p. 90). Neoliberalism is an ideology concerned with the deregulation of the economy, the liberation of trade and industry and the privatization of state owned enterprises; it can also be understood as a set of related economic policies, modes of governance and a range of cultural phenomena linked to individualism (Youngman, 2000; Gant, 2014 ). The concept is centred on the idea that market mechanisms are the means to ensure an efficient and productive economy and maximize economic welfare (Youngman, 2000). Within the neoliberal framework it is believed that the youth should acquire proper skills to enable them to access wage employment, achieving financial growth and increased job opportunities (McGrath & Powell, 2016).

As an ideology of governance neoliberalism ensures that educational provision promotes learner productivity, entrepreneurship and ultimately improves national economic growth

(Youngman, 2000). Educational policies developed within the neoliberal framework are supported by the world's largest and most influential multinational funding agencies for education such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and are calculated towards increased entrepreneurship rather than the people's welfare (Lakes & Carter, 2011; Youngman, 2000). Literature argues that neoliberalism uses education and educational institutions, as highly relevant contexts, to develop human resources that are needed for economic growth and successful competition in the world market (Youngman, 2000; Davies & Bansel, 2007). Unifying policies within the neoliberal framework transfer educational provision risks and responsibility from the state to the learners (Davies & Bansel, 2007). In implementing these policies, schools and universities compete amongst themselves as they decide on school tuition, curricula issues, teacher expertise and escalating prices for textbooks and other learning material as well as administering high-stake standardized testing (Lakes & Carter, 2011). In a neoliberal society 'young people chase credentials to gain security in future education or workplaces. Failure to achieve, is deemed one's own fault and human beings are made accountable for their predicaments' (ibid. p.107-108).

Neoliberalism seems to extend freedom of choice to individuals and give them the right to plan their own lives rather than being directed by the state as a central planning authority (Ganti, 2014, Davies & Bansel, 2007). Individuals within this framework are made to believe that they have the power of choice, whereas their actions often respond to calculated acts towards financial achievement by those in power who are often a minority (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Tarabini, 2010). Such choices are viewed as emphasizing self-reliance, autonomy and independence as a necessary condition for self-respect, self-esteem, self-worth and self-advancement (Lakes & Carter, 2011). However, these privatization policies that promote individualization and competition do not provide for the uninformed, misinformed or fearful parent or learner who just welcomes the increased freedom of choice as active citizenship (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Individuals who are victims of this influence tend to believe that the educational choices they make are to further their own interests and those of their families, whereas those choices are state-directed and controlled. According to the neoliberal framework, the acquisition of proper skills by individuals would ensure access to employment which would then lead to economic growth as more jobs would be created for all. Therefore, educational policies and subject choices tend to promote entrepreneurship skills in order to achieve financial prosperity.

In conclusion, the promotion of individualism and competitiveness by the neoliberal framework tends to erode the foundation of human associations manifested within African communities, families and general friendships (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). Social institutions are reconfigured to ensure that they produce individuals who are economic entrepreneurs rather than promoting African values such as collective responsibility. Whilst promoting the entrepreneurs, the neoliberal framework erodes the self-esteem, self-worth and self-advancement particularly of the disadvantaged youths.

Due to the influence of the neoliberal framework, most of the educational interventions do not interest the youths' who are supposed to be the beneficiaries. For instance, most countries have increasingly realized that one shot at education is not enough to respond to unemployment (UNESCO, 2010). Globally it has been realized that to combat the increase in unemployment a strategy that emphasizes skills as a driver of employment, productivity and economic growth, should be adopted. Vocational education is viewed as smoothing the transition between school and the world of work, especially to combat youth unemployment. In Latin America and the United States, vocational education extended opportunities to marginalized young people who had dropped out-of-school, for employment as well as for re-entering education (McGrath, Akoojee, Gewer, Mabizele, Mbele & Roberts, 2006). However, challenges to vocational education included poor links to employment markets, underinvestment, and poor quality. These challenges, according to the EFA report, often result in vocational programmes being shunned by youth as they cannot relate to them. In my view this is a result of focusing on creating entrepreneurs rather than understanding the youth and how to structure programmes that relate to them for effective economic development.

### **2.7.1 Youth education, training and employment in South Africa**

In an attempt to address youth unemployment, the government of South Africa invited stakeholders to respond to the White Paper for the Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). The government noted a host of problems related to poor quality education provided during the apartheid period. The Green Paper (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012) emphasized that these problems need to be analysed so as to identify reasons for their persistence and to design interventions on how they could be overcome. These interventions included formulating policy frameworks to establish colleges throughout the country, providing quality university education for the increasing population and capacitating graduates by providing pre- and post-training, and flexible and sustainable innovations for their livelihoods.

It is worth noting that the South African government, like the other governments, omitted the youth's voices as one of their stakeholders. They sought comments and contributions from formal stakeholders within the education and training sector, organised business and organised labour. On the other hand, government acknowledged the existence of social inequalities amongst its citizens. These social inequalities related to gender, class, and race. The Green Paper also acknowledged that it was mainly the young people, three million who were 18 – 24 years of age, that faced a very bleak future and that the post-school system should meet the needs of the economy and society as a whole.

### **2.7.2 Youth education, training and employment in Eswatini**

There has been no study in Eswatini on NEETs; however, interventions to address educational quality and access have been implemented. The Brenthurst Foundation report reveals that Eswatini's greatest concern is school drop-out rates, declining enrolment in tertiary education, and the inability of young people to acquire the necessary skills to participate in the economy and in meaningful employment (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). Therefore, interventions such as the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Fund which provides financial support for education, the Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2010 and Non-formal Primary Education (NPE) were adopted. To address youth unemployment the Youth Empowerment Fund, vocational schools, and tertiary level sponsorships have been implemented.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The chapter argues for a shift from only statistical data to qualitative research processes that give a voice to the disadvantaged groups, whom the literature views as experts on their own lives, to inform inclusive policy development on issues affecting them. It is from within such a premise that the study combined both the survey and the life histories to bring in the youth's voices in understanding their educational needs. The study was meant to get an in-depth understanding of their different social identities which are deep rooted and their classroom/learning experiences as a result of these social inequalities.

There was and still is a need for efforts that will fast track economic development and remove bottle necks in the labour market in order to respond to the youth unemployment challenge (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009, Oppenheimer, et al., 2011; UNDP, 2013). This study argues that efforts to address unemployment and educational interventions need to be relevant to the youth's context as well as being responsive to their needs as opposed to the generalist approaches to employment creation. Such interventions can only be relevant if one deeply

understands one's target audience. The life stories are meant to dig deeper into the youth's experiences so as to respond appropriately.

The reviewed literature revealed the following gaps in the strategies implemented to address NEETs issues: neglect or superficial consultation with youth in interventions, methodological approaches adopted into youths' studies, the neoliberal framework and unifying policies as the deficiency of the term NEETs.

### **2.8.1 Neglect or superficial consultation with youth in interventions**

The studies, except for the Scotland case study, are characterised by the absence of the youth voices in the development of youth's interventions. In cases where the youth's contribution is sought, it is only superficial. However, I would like to point out that educational research internationally is now focusing on understanding how the disadvantaged view or understand educational provision within their own context (Arnot & Swartz, 2012). Developing educational provision after understanding the beneficiary's point of view will avoid what Arnot and Swartz (2012) refer to as 'philosophical interventions'. They argue against a philosophical interpretation of what needs to be taught in formal schools which tends to look only at a unified outcome and ignores individual differences and contexts. Uniform interventions, from philosophical views are meant to create a unified citizenry that is able to equally compete and participate in development. I agree with Arnot and Swartz (2012) that focusing on philosophical interventions tends to perpetrate tension and to frustrate individuals who attempt to access or use what has been proposed by government, especially amongst the youth. This study argues that there is a need for a critical and in-depth approach to understand these tensions and frustration that the youth experience especially, in their attempt to access the unified provisions.

### **2.8.2 Methodological approaches adopted into youth's studies**

Literature pointed out a need for a strategy in developing data collection systems with a focus on disaggregated statistics to identify marginalised groups and monitor their progress (Arnot & Swartz, 2012; Fawcett et al., 2010; Marsh, 2009; UNESCO, 2010). There is a need for governments to invest more in developing national data systems that will promote the understanding of the marginalised and its causes. The reports argue for a shift from statistical data using only quantitative research processes to data that would include the voice of the disadvantaged group (NEETs), to inform inclusive and responsive policy development. Digging deeper and questioning assist in understanding how NEETs end up being automatically classified as marginalised, even in some cases, before they get to any form of

education. The study seeks to get an in-depth understanding of their different social identities which are deep rooted within their context.

### **2.8.3 Neoliberal framework and unifying policies**

Influenced by the neoliberal framework, educational policies, as seen in the Brenthurst Foundation report, focus on what is unifying and general (Oppenheimer et al., 2011). They tend to ignore the social inequalities such as poverty, gender, social status and ethnicity that young people bring with them into the educational arena. Children's socio-economic backgrounds tend to compromise their identity even before they get to formal education at any level (Arnot & Swartz, 2012). The identities that these children bring to formal education tend to create tension within the classroom and school in general. Such life experiences include being born into poor families or losing one or both parents as a result of HIV and AIDS. Unifying policies tend to ignore these experiences, whereas learners in their learning process have to work on them before accessing and/or internalising new knowledge (ibid.).

These interventions, that ignore the views of the beneficiaries, also tend to ignore the fact that children have acquired some skills and knowledge before they come to formal education. Formal education is most often viewed as the only form of education: where one attends for an average of twelve years and is equipped for all socio-economic challenges. The unified interventions tend to ignore that the different identities that children bring to school are learnt and they are who they are. Educational interventions, therefore, need to embrace these identities, which are a result of informal learning, for learning to be meaningful.

Whilst Arnot and Swartz's (2012) study presented the tension and frustration young people face in citizenship; social responsibility, education, I argue that this frustration can be generalised to any educational provision. I can borrow the same argument that education is often used as a political strategy to unite populations characterised by social inequality and division. It is this one size fits all philosophy that tends to frustrate, leave out youth, especially those between 15 – 24 years, and put them at a disadvantage for employment opportunities.

#### **2.8.4 The deficiency of the NEET term**

The term NEET is negative by describing youths in terms of what they are ‘not’ and implying that this ‘not-ness’ is a problem (Yates & Payne, 2006). This is part of a lineage of negative terms, including ‘marginalised youth’ and ‘lost generation’, which define young people in terms of deficit (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). On the other hand, the alternative – ‘in need of more choices and more chances’ is so wide that it could apply to almost any young person, even those who are in employment, education and training, but whose potential would be enhanced by more or better ‘choices’ and ‘chances’ (Marsh, 2009).

The term ‘NEET’ indicates privileged domains of modernity – employment, education, training – in relation to which the youth are ‘outside’ (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). These domains provide conceptual windows for looking both inwards and outwards: how and from what does ‘EETing’ exclude young people (inward gaze)? What do they do instead (outward gaze) of ‘EETing’? What does this NEET’s ‘outsideness’ entail? What other roles do the NEETs play – besides student, trainee and employee – and what is the social value and currency of these other roles?

A limitation of the NEET formulation is that ‘employment, education, training’ are understood as formal categories. What about informal work, learning, training? The ‘EET’ of ‘NEET’ are also often understood in economic terms within the neoliberal worldview: how are youth being prepared by institutions (education, training) to contribute as productive units (employment) to profits, productivity and competitiveness? But young people contribute in a wide range of ways besides ‘EETing’: as family and community members, as citizens, as consumers, as peers, as cultural actors, and as people engaged in livelihoods which fall outside the purview of the formal sector.

‘EETing’ normalises and normativises a Western trajectory for youth which is based on western post-industrial society (Preece, 2009). Here it is normal for the majority of youth (80 – 90 percent) to progress through education and/or training and to enter into the world of formal employment, perhaps re-entering education and training at various times during their adult lives. In sub-Saharan Africa, where many young people do not complete schooling, where employment prospects in the formal sector are extremely limited and where people’s attachment to a rural subsistence economy is often crucial to their livelihoods and well-being, the western trajectory is far from normal, even if it is becoming normative (Lekoko & Modise, 2011; Preece, 2009). If young people are not neatly ‘EETing’, they are categorised as

those who are ‘not’, as non-productive, as the nonentities of modernity who are in need of policy and programme interventions to bring them back to the normative mode of ‘EETing’.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **THE LIFELONG LEARNING APPROACH**

*‘As long as you live, keep learning how to live’ (Seneca Philosopher in Cohen, 1975, p. 83).*

*‘The wise man is one that constantly wonders afresh’ (Andre Gide in Cohen, 1975, p. 83).*

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I explored literature on the concept of ‘not being in education, employment or training’ (NEET). In this chapter I present the discourse between lifelong education and lifelong learning as two approaches used as guiding and organising principles for educational interventions in different educational errors (Jarvis, 2009). I use literature to trace the origins of the lifelong education and the lifelong learning approaches and their implication to educational interventions. This is then followed by a focus and exploring critiques of the lifelong learning approach as an approach within which the study is situated. To respond to the critiques, I present African Indigenous Learning (AIL) which I view as a contextualised lifelong learning approach not only for Africa in general but also as applicable to the Eswatini context. The chapter concludes with the relevance of the lifelong learning approach in an in-depth understanding of youth categorised as not in education, employment or training.

In introducing the discourse between the two approaches I first define education and learning.

##### **3.1.1 Definition of education**

‘Education is the process of facilitating learning, or acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. It is commonly divided into pre-school, primary school, secondary school and then college or apprenticeship’ (In Wikipedia.). Whilst acknowledging the previous definition of education and the providing institutions, this study embraces Ngaka, Openjuru and Mazur’s (2012, p. 110) definition of education as ‘an important asset that raises people’s aspirations to increased social, economic, and cultural performance; raises their level of awareness of their environment and equips them with the necessary skills and ideology for contending with the problems they encounter in their daily lives’. Ngaka et al. (2012) further argues that education is very important in human lives as a process of preparing individuals to be responsible citizens. It is through education that accumulated knowledge, skills and values are deliberately imparted from one generation to the other through various forms of teaching and learning. The view of education as an ‘asset’ by this definition is in line with the study. Whilst emphasising the preparation of an individual, indicating institutions responsible for

educational provision, the definition views education as encompassing both formal and non-formal. In addition, the definition presents education as relevant not only to work but also to 'social, economic and cultural performance' and so has a holistic emphasis that does not focus only on 'knowledge' or 'information' but includes raised levels of awareness and skills.

### **3.1.2 Definition of learning**

The study adopts Illeris's (2003) definition of learning as it is holistic and interactional, and resonates with the 'life-wide' and 'life-deep' aspects of lifelong learning. Illeris defines learning as 'covering all processes that lead to an individual's lasting changes in capacity with regard to emotions, motivation, attitude and or social character that is not due to genetic biological maturation' (Illeris, 2003, p. 397). Illeris's definition 'avoids separation between learning, personal development, socialization, qualification and the like regarding all processes as types of learning when viewed from different angles or positions' (ibid., p. 397).

### **3.2 Lifelong education and lifelong learning in policy discourse**

There has been confusion with distinguishing between the lifelong education and lifelong learning approaches and some people have decided to use these terms synonymously (Boshier, 2011; Jarvis, 2009). The confusion may be caused by the fact that they are both internationally recognised educational 'approaches' used or adopted by countries to guide and organise the development and implementation of their educational policies and to ensure that learning happens from the cradle to the grave (ibid.). Another reason for the confusion may be that literature reveals that the two approaches have influenced the development of educational policies during different educational and learning eras. Literature reveals that the lifelong education approach developed from adult education provision and became prominent in the 1960s and 1970s; and that there was then a paradigm shift from a lifelong education to a lifelong learning approach within educational policy development (Barros, 2012; Jarvis, 2009), beginning in the 1980s or 1990s. This study, however, although focusing on lifelong learning argues for a complementary relationship between the approaches in developing lifelong learners.

### **3.3 Origins of lifelong education**

Lifelong education has evolved over the decades from its formulation in a British policy document of 1919 (Preece, 2009). Literature cites two other authors, Linderman in 1926 and Yeaxlee in 1929, as amongst the first people to write about education for life (Barros, 2012; Preece, 2009). The approach is traced back to oral education and then to adult education

(Keming, 2011). During the 1960s UNESCO advocated for countries to develop educational policies that provided education as a continuum (rather than compartmentalizing it) and as happening throughout a lifespan: from the cradle to the grave (Barros, 2012; UNESCO, 2013).

Keming (2011) traces lifelong education back to earlier times when self-directed education was the main pathway towards coping with the world. Adults passed on knowledge and skills orally to the younger generations. Later, what was passed on orally was written down. Ouane (2011, p. 25) traces lifelong education to the wake of World War II. He states that at this time lifelong education was viewed using notions such as ‘fundamental education’, ‘continuing education’, ‘basic education’, ‘permanent education’, and ‘recurrent education’. Barron (2012) states that these educational views and innovations were guided and organised by the lifelong education approach.

The lifelong education approach was emphasised by UNESCO who viewed education as a right not only for the privileged or elite or one age group, but for all. UNESCO then facilitated several documents to promote lifelong education making lifelong education to be the government’s or the state’s obligation (Barros, 2012; Preece, 2009; Rule, 2011). Governments or states control the choices of what has to be learnt and then finance its implementation. Therefore, the lifelong education approach is viewed as an external process to the learner, controlled by the state; collective, political and deliberate (Barros, 2012; Rule, 2011). Governments deliberately use educational systems and processes to pursue their wishes of producing the type of people they desire. Jarvis (2004) states that in lifelong education, knowledge and skills are transmitted to those considered not to be ready for social life.

UNESCO’s view to lifelong education resulted in their promotion of the lifelong education approach around the 1970s through documents (Cohen, 1975; Preece 2009, Medel–Anonvevo, 2002, Yang & Valdes-Cotera, 2011; Rule, 2011). One of the documents that promoted lifelong education was UNESCO’s Faure’s report: *Learning to be* (UNESCO, 1972). According to Ouane (2011, p. 25) the Faure’s report was commissioned by UNESCO following students and young people’s demonstrations all over the world in 1967. Faure’s report had four pillars on learning: learning to be, learning to know, learning to do and learning to live with (Yang & Valdes-Cotera, 2011).

According to Barros (2012), the main concept of the lifelong education approach was the criticism of formal education, which is typically associated with schooling. The approach argued for the recognition and accreditation of all forms of education: non-formal and informal rather than only formal. Viewing education only as formal education compartmentalises education which, according to the lifelong education approach, has to be seamless and to happen throughout a lifespan. The conceptualisation of education according to the lifelong education approach is presented below.

**Table 0.1: The lifelong education approach as continuum**

	<b>Formal education</b>	<b>Non-formal Education</b>
Purpose	Normally directed to children; long-term, certified, has pre-established and sequential system of education from early childhood to tertiary.	Normally short-term, specific and directed to a specific need such as the provision of skills to children, young people, and adults. Normally, minimal or no prerequisites required.
Timing	Long cycle, preparatory, full-time	Short cycle, recurrent, part-time.
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Includes prescribed and compulsory basic education with explicit goals, evaluation mechanisms, qualified teachers and regulated activities.</li> <li>-Content standardised and input centred, normally determined by teachers or other authorities.</li> <li>-Knowledge and skills for future use.</li> <li>-Entry requirements determined by provider.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible, varied rigidity of curriculum focusing on learners' needs (individualised),</li> <li>-Practical; immediate use of knowledge and skills</li> <li>-Participants actively identify their learning needs and methods guided by a facilitator</li> </ul>
Delivery methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Institution-based, isolated from environment.</li> <li>-Rigid structure, teacher-centred and resource intensive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Environment-based and embedded in the community.</li> <li>-Participatory techniques dominate, equal partnership among facilitators and participants, recognises prior learning.</li> <li>-Resource efficient.</li> </ul>
Recognition and accreditation	Selective: a strainer, a pyramid, select first and then train; system rejects participants at different stages; once out, normally, cannot get back in; system ends up with very few (elitist).	Normally open: get in and out at any time; no prior selection, only self-selection by participants; no rejection, no failures, no permanent dropouts; may lead to certification
Control	External, hierarchical	-Self-governing, democratic

Adapted from; (Dib, 1988; Ngaka et al., 2012; Preece, 2009; Rogers, 2004; Schugurensky, 2000)

### 3.3.1 The lifelong education approach and formal education

The lifelong education approach presents lifelong education not only as formal education, understood as 'the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured 'education system', spanning from pre-school to tertiary' (Coombs & Ahmed,

1974, p. 8) but as embracing the other forms of education as illustrated in Table 3.1 (Dib, 1988; Ngaka et al., 2012; Preece, 2009; Rogers, 2004; Schugurensky, 2000). The approach recognises education as including Non-formal Education and using the other educational institutions than only formal such as colleges, community, media or church (Jarvis, 2009; Rogers, 2004). Therefore, the lifelong education approach also emphasises that education neither begins nor ends with the process of acquiring a qualification but can continue throughout the lifespan using formal and non-formal forms of institutional provision of education.

One aspect of the critique underlying the argument for lifelong education pays attention to life phases. According to Rogers (2004), the lifelong education approach criticizes the classic formal education system, which views life as being divided into three phases: the first phase (childhood) being one of full time education and no work, the second phase (working adulthood) being one of work and no or little education, and a third phase of retirement (one of no work and relatively little education, which has been added more recently) (Rogers, 2004, p. 33). Viewing education in phases also tends to compartmentalise and limit education as mainly occurring during childhood and less during adulthood.

A second aspect focuses on credentiality. Cohen (1975) states that people with a compartmentalised view to education would often be heard saying ‘I have completed my education’, meaning being awarded a certificate, diploma, degree or any other credential. People aligned with the view that recognises all forms of education and their institutions, as in the United States, refer to a certificate presentation ceremony as ‘commencement’, or a ‘passport’ for entering the world of work and experiences that would continue to help improve one’s life. Belanger (2015) views formal credentials as only the visible part of the educational iceberg. An addition to this point would be that this compartmentalised view contributes to viewing those who have not acquired formal certificates as failures in life.

The third aspect is its centralised and rigid model in terms of curriculum, delivery and assessment (Jarvis, 2009; Preece, 2009; Rogers, 2004). In formal education the processes of teaching and learning are at a specific place, stipulated time, offered by qualified individuals and often outside one’s home in formal education institutions. It is often age-graded and requires compulsory attendance, with the ultimate goal being the attainment of certificates and degrees which would qualify one for formal employment. This means in formal education there is a ‘normative’ process which learners have to fall within or pursue in their lifespan development process. If a learner falls outside these ‘norms’, which again happens to be part

of the NEETs' characteristics discussed in Chapter Two, they are excluded by the educational system as it cannot accommodate them.

In conclusion, the lifelong education approach emphasises that there is learning that takes place outside the formal education structures. When embracing the lifelong education approach governments or states should develop policies that influence educational provision throughout an individual's lifespan from cradle to the grave rather than viewing education as schooling only and equating lifelong learning with adult or basic education. The educational policies influenced by this approach should recognize Non-formal Education as well – as presented in the section below.

### **3.3.2. The lifelong education approach and Non-formal Education**

The lifelong education approach emphasizes that school and the formal curriculum alone do not, effectively and efficiently, by themselves meet the educational needs of individuals or communities (Cohen, 1975; Dib, 1988; Ngaka et al., 2012; Rogers, 2004). There is a need for the recognition of the other forms of education to ensure that education is provided throughout an individual's lifespan, even for those who are not accommodated by the rigidity of formal education. In this section, I present Non-formal Education as one of the forms of education recognised by the lifelong education approach.

Although Dib (1988) argues that there is no comprehensive and standard definition of Non-formal Education for common usage, Table 3.1 indicates its differences to formal education which help in the understanding of what Non-formal Education is. Coombs and Ahmed (1974, p. 8) define Non-formal Education as 'any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children'. It is the type of education that takes place outside formally organized schooling. According to Ngaka et al. (2012), Non-formal Education surfaced in response to some of the educational needs and gaps that are not addressed by formal education. However, Non-formal Education may take place even before schooling, such as initiation schools which are part of traditional Non-formal Education.

The most significant characteristic of Non-formal Education responsive to the problems of formal education is its flexibility. Table 3.1 illustrates the characteristics of Non-formal Education as being flexible, accommodative, using participatory approaches and not necessarily emphasising certification (Jarvis, 2009; Ngaka et al., 2012; Rogers, 2004).

According to Singh (2015), through the flexible aspect of Non-formal Education, learners may add or use it as an alternative to formal education, especially when it runs parallel to the formal education system. He argues that, although in some cases Non-formal Education may be structured like formal education; it is more flexible, and thus more accommodative of learners with learning challenges than formal education. Its responsiveness and successes in its use as an alternative to formal education has resulted in Non-formal Education's recognition in pushing the implementation of international education agendas (Rogers, 2004).

Non-formal Education has been used to achieve objectives such as educational access and equality prioritised by Education for All (EFA) and the Global Campaign for Education that emphasised the provision of Non-formal Education (Preece, 2009). Rogers (2004) argues that Non-formal Education expands educational systems so that education can be accessed by all irrespective of their socio-economic background. Expanding educational systems involves employing strategies to reach the unreached, including those who fell through the formal education cracks. The focus is more on mass education than only on education provided by formal education. This includes recognising the different forms of Non-formal Education such as vocational education, adult literacy, continuing education, adult education, remedial education, and internship, distance education and on-the-job-training (Ngaka et al., 2012).

Unfortunately Non-formal Education has been viewed as remedial education for those who lack the required skills and knowledge, and/or who are disadvantaged or discriminated against (Ngaka et al., 2012). Rogers (2004) argues that discourses on the development of Non-formal Education have been influenced by certain world views. The view of Non-formal Education as being only for the disadvantaged stems from the neoliberal influence. Within the neoliberal influence, citizens should follow a 'normative' process to the world of work. Those who lack the skills and competencies are viewed as 'deficient', the 'nots' who need a second chance or an accelerated or alternative educational programmes to enable them to respond to the demands of the market economy and the fast changing world (Ngaka et al., 2012; Preece, 2009). Unfortunately these interventions were developed without consultations with the beneficiaries and they were developed on a one-size-fits-all basis, with no consideration of learners' socio-economic backgrounds (Ngaka et al., 2012).

The other challenge is that Non-formal Education has been viewed as confined only to adults who lack (economically and in skills) in life and are therefore in need to acquire the relevant knowledge to access wage or self-employment. The lifelong education approach, however, proposes that Non-formal Education can also be a form of education for everyone at every

age. It is not confined to adults and to those who lack in life, but it is one of the ways individuals can acquire knowledge.

Non-formal Education also has the advantage of focusing on the validation of learning, rather than on accreditation systems, in that it can be immediately applicable to life's situation or challenges. This form of education also emphasises recognizing prior learning as well as experiential learning as opposed to standardized tests (Preece, 2009; Rogers, 2004). Non-formal Education recognizes knowledge, skills and values acquired through the other forms of education: informal and formal.

Based on these presentations, I support the view that Non-formal Education has great value in its application to daily life and to the world of work. I, therefore, support Rogers (2004) who argues that there is a need to assist society (parents, individuals as well as policy makers) to make a paradigm shift from viewing education only as schooling and to recognise Non-formal Education as also providing skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to access employment. There is a need for social reform where society realizes that the main purpose of education is not just to get a job but to develop the skills and attitudes which would enable individuals to access as well as stay in employment.

### **3.3.3 The lifelong education approach and informal learning**

One of the critiques of lifelong education is that it recognizes learning from formal and Non-formal Education but ignores informal learning. Informal learning is a process by which individuals acquire and accumulate knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment (Schugurensky, 2000). Coombs and Ahmed (1974, p. 8) agree with Belanger (2015) in that, although 'informal learning is unorganized and often unsystematic, it accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning – including that of even a highly schooled person'. According to Livingston (1999, cited in Schugurensky, 2000, p. 1), informal learning is 'any activity that involves the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skills which occurs outside the curricula' of formal or Non-formal educational institutions. In other words, lifelong education also recognizes educational institutions outside formal institutions, before, during and beyond schooling. Such institutions include: at home (family), at work, at play, from the example and attitudes of family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. In this technological age, some learning takes place through television, video games or mobile phones. Some individuals own computers and other gadgets which

provide some form of learning, particularly through access and exposure to the Internet. The lifelong education approach values all forms of learning regardless of when it happens and where it is acquired.

Belanger (2015) argues that even in formal education there is always an informal learning dimension. He states that formality and informality are two components that are always present, although in varying degrees, in any educational activity. Most individuals, either intentionally or accidentally, participate in unstructured learning experiences at every age and in every sphere of activity.

Schugurensky (2000) states that informal learning has three aspects: self-directedness, incidental learning and socialization. In self-directed learning, individuals or a group may decide to undertake a learning activity without being assisted by a facilitator. However, that activity may include a resource person who may not necessarily have a planned syllabus or curriculum for the activity. For instance, a group of young people, *imbali*<sup>8</sup> and *ingaja*,<sup>9</sup> may learn a certain type of traditional dance from someone or another group whom they know to be an expert in traditional dance within that community. These young people will have the intention of learning how to dance and they will be conscious when the learning has taken place, even though this may happen without a syllabus in place.

Incidental learning is when an individual realises that s/he has learnt something out of a particular experience. The individual did not intend to learn or acquire certain skills and knowledge from that particular experience. For instance, a young person may not feel confident to express his or her views because an attempt to do so had resulted in being ridiculed. So to avoid being ridiculed the young person will avoid saying what s/he feels.

Socialisation is learning where individuals internalise values, attitudes, behaviours and skills that occur in their daily lives. With socialisation, no prior intention to learn is made and individuals often do not realise that they have acquired these values or attitudes. It is only when one is faced with a social environment that one's response to that environment reveals

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<sup>8</sup> Imbali: From time to time in Eswatini a cohort of young adolescent and virgin girls within a specific age range and for a number of years is given a collective name and a leader. Currently these girls are known as '*Imbali*'. These girls are often called for community or national duties such as cutting of the reeds for constructing the traditional royal residents' enclosures. It is in such events where traditional values are instilled mainly by elderly women. The values promoted for each cohort includes abstaining from sex before marriage, respect for yourself and other people including the elderly.

<sup>9</sup> Ingaja: Young boys also are given a collective name, current cohort is *Ingaja*. Traditionally, values relating to a boy child are instilled when they are called to perform activities. Such activities include the annual cutting of trees known as *lusekwane*, to construct the royal kraal, as well as weeding and harvesting the royal fields.

the attitudes, values and biases one holds. For instance, sometimes individuals only realise that they hold certain values, beliefs and aspirations as they reflect on questions being asked by somebody else. Even then, it is the responses that will provoke the person to question her/himself on why s/he is behaving the way s/he does that would make her/him realise the values, attitudes, prejudices or beliefs s/he holds. It is also after digging deeper into the person's life that the person can realise how those attitudes were formed, which is in itself, critical reflection.

In conclusion, the lifelong education approach entails learning throughout life. The approach recognizes only learning from formal and Non-formal Education and ignores informal learning from everyday life.

### **3.4 The lifelong learning approach**

This section presents the context, origins and principles of the lifelong learning approach. Many countries failed to develop policies to implement the lifelong education approach during the 1980s (Belanger, 2015; Hager, 2011). Hager (2011) also cites criticism by educational writers as a contributing factor to the decline of interest in education that happens throughout an individual's lifespan at this time. Instead, a strong interest in learning as a continuum (the lifelong learning approach) resurfaced mainly as a result of the neoliberal framework in the 1990s (Belanger, 2015; Hager, 2011; Jarvis, 2009; Preece, 2009). Belanger (2015) referred to it as a 'second wave'. The influence of the neoliberal framework on the lifelong learning approach is discussed in detail under the section, 'Lifelong learning and the neoliberal framework' below.

Whilst lifelong education focuses on the state as the provider of educational services, the lifelong learning approach emphasizes the learner's responsibility to acquire skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding and to use them to address daily challenges (Barros, 2012; Preece, 2009; Rule, 2011). Lifelong learning is viewed as an ideology focusing on the individuals to acquire skills so as to be more productive in their work places (Boshier, 2011; Preece, 2009). Preece (2009) cites Jarvis (1998) who argues that, whilst education, as provided by the state, is a public phenomenon, learning is done by the individual privately and happens throughout the individual's lifespan. The principles of lifelong learning are that learning is lifelong, life-wide and life-deep (Banks et al., 2007; Belanger, 2015; Duke & Hinzen, 2012; Singh, 2015). To understand learning using these three principles entails

understanding that learning is not only about continuous learning, but it is also about unlearning and forgetting as some skills become obsolete (Medel-Anonvevo, 2002).

### **3.4.1 Learning as lifelong**

The first emphasis of learning as lifelong is that it happens throughout an individuals' lifespan. Literature, however, tends not to agree on when a lifespan begins. Whilst some literature argue that learning begins from the 'womb' (Jarvis, 2009; Torres, 2011) most literature presents the need to learn from the cradle to the grave (Aspin, 2007; Duke & Hinzen, 2012; Medel-Anonvevo, 2002; Ouane, 2011; Preece, 2009; Yang, 2015). This study, however, will not dwell on the 'when' it starts but that it happens throughout the individual's lifespan, whether from the womb or birth to the grave.

The other main emphasis of the lifelong learning approach is its being continuous 'to equip people with resources to deal with a fast changing and uncertain world' (Preece, 2009). The approach states that individuals are continuously in need of acquiring skills, knowledge and competencies for them to function within society at any given stage. The rapid global developments in technology have resulted in new and innovative ways of communicating information. According to Ouane (2002), this information is communicated to individuals, communities and societies at a speed that has resulted in the world being a global village. To cope with these developments and the socio-political-economic context that has also changed, continuous acquisition of skills and knowledge (learning) throughout life is necessary.

Therefore, within the lifelong learning approach, the learner is responsible for the transition and pathways between the different educational systems including school to work, and between the work place and education and training systems (Crowther, 2004; Preece, 2009). The learner is also responsible for acquiring skills during the lifespan, to be able to manage interpersonal sociability, reflect on the belief systems and adapt to new experiences in response to daily needs.

### **3.4.2 Learning as life-wide**

According to Torres (2011), lifelong learning should be viewed as a much wider concept than as only temporal. Rather, the emphasis is that learning can take place at all times, at all levels and by many means: formal, non-formal and informal (Belanger, 2015). This learning is needed by individuals to fulfil personal purposes, social purposes, economic purposes and social cohesion (Gvaramadze, 2007). According Bank et al., (2007), learning can take place in a variety of forms and settings such as in family, workplace, communities, and leisure settings throughout the life of the individual. The breadths of experiences in these settings are a source of adversity, comfort, support in people's lives and they develop the ability to adapt to new situations, ranging from unfamiliar to complex issues.

Learning as life-wide also entails the assessment and recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through the demonstration of the individual's know-how as applied knowledge. Individuals demonstrate their understanding, knowledge, values, and attitudes in responding to everyday life rather than only through qualifications recognized or accredited through formal educational institutions and programmes. In other words, in life-wide learning the acquired competencies and skills should enable individuals to be responsible citizens.

### **3.4.3 Learning as life-deep**

Life-deep learning 'embraces religious, moral, ethical and social values that guide what people believe, how they act, and how they judge others and themselves'(Banks et al., 2007, p. 12). Belanger (2015) argues that learning has not happened unless people find personal meaning in what they are learning and are able to assimilate, and subsequently mobilize what they have learnt. He refers to learning as an intimate experience that strengthens inner joy and a sense of who we are (ibid., p. 11).

Literature interprets education and learning as an interactive process between the provider (supply side) interests and the needs of the learner (the demand side) (Aspin, 2012; Ouane, 2011). In my view, education and learning should be viewed not as parallel processes, but as collaboratively linked with the sole purpose of producing a lifelong learner. Learning should not be left only in the hands of the learner but the state should seek learners' voices in order to provide educational interventions that are relevant to the learners' needs within the learners' context.

In concluding this section, I support the argument that the emphasis on the individual taking responsibility for learning that would lead to one's happiness does not remove the

responsibility of governments or education providers (Crowther, 2004; Rule, 2011). The lifelong learning approach should emphasize the role of both the individual and the state as essential to equip a learner to cope with the changing requirements of the world (Ouane, 2011). The lifelong learning approach should create a more balanced approach to a system of education and learning (Duke & Hinzen, 2012). It should emphasize developing the lifelong learning characteristics through the lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning endeavour. The purpose of lifelong learning should be to develop a lifelong learner; to enable individuals and societies to live a meaningful life; and to identify and solve everyday challenges for personal and social development. Therefore, there should be a partnership between the learner and the provider in the development of a lifelong learner who would not be passive but be able to address life challenges, such as those faced by youths characterized as NEETs.

### **3.5 The tension in the implementation of the lifelong learning approach**

There is a lot of contestation around the term lifelong learning which reflects different economic and ideological interests that tend to affect its implementation. In this section, I present the impact of the influence of the neoliberal framework in operationalising the lifelong learning approach (Livingstone, 2008; Youngman, 2000). This will be followed by how different contexts impact on the interpretations and subsequently the focus of the lifelong learning approach in countries of the North and South (Preece, 2009).

#### **3.5.1 The lifelong learning approach and the neoliberal influence**

In the section on the origins of the lifelong learning approach, I presented that the approach, dominated by neoliberalism, reflected a broader change that took place in the international political and economic context (Barros, 2012; Hager, 2011; Youngman, 2000). According to Barros (2012), the concern of the neoliberal political consensus is the future of the economy, the development of policies and the role of the state in the economy. So, within neoliberalism, a new global economy associated with a growing prevalence of financial investment, as a way of thinking about the economy, as well as the emergence of a new international division of labour, came into being (ibid.).

The neoliberal framework centres on the idea that the way to ensure an efficient and productive economy and maximise economic welfare is through a market driven mechanism (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hursh, 2001; Tarabini, 2010; Youngman, 2000). The framework views governments' interventions as disruptive and which have to be removed to liberalize capital flow and trade worldwide. In what appeared to be the promotion of democracy and

individual freedom, countries are encouraged to develop policies promoting the privatization of public enterprises, deregulating government control systems, and expanding their international free trade. However, this ‘democracy’ and ‘individual freedom’ result in countries competing in this international free trade according to their comparative advantage. The comparative advantage has resulted in advanced countries being at an advantage in using conditions set in international trade agreements and sanctioned by organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to pressurize governments of the South to reduce their public sectors and open up economies to foreign trade and investment (Youngman, 2000). Through these comparative trade systems, the advanced countries tend to strengthen the Third World countries’ reliance on the market mechanism. The comparative trade systems tend to maintain the role of Third World countries’ as exporters of raw materials rather than producers (ibid.).

The implications of the neoliberal framework for education are that governments needed to re-orient their educational services towards the needs or demands of business (Davies & Bansel, p, 2007; Hursh, 2001; Youngman, 2000). According to Youngman (2000), this perspective entailed a shift in the driving forces from bureaucracy-led (national or state-controlled) systems, to market-led arrangements which were believed to be empowering communities. He argues that within this perspective, the realities of existing inequalities are viewed as individual incentives for competition in the world of work. The perspective therefore rejects the concern for state support of efforts to secure educational equity amongst its citizens.

In the 1990s, the neoliberal emphasis on the reduction of state interference or support was meant to further embrace the development of educational policies promoting what looked like individual freedom and choices for economic growth (Youngman, 2000). The influence of the neoliberal framework resulted in international educational bodies and subsequently governments, insisting on greater efficiency and accountability from educational establishments (Aspin, 2012; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Tarabini, 2010). It was also at this time that UNESCO emphasised again the promotion of lifelong learning based on the Delors report: *The Treasure Within* (1996). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the international focus, basically from UNESCO, on lifelong learning resulted not only in the review of the Faure (1972) and Delors (1996) reports but also in the concept being the focus of international conferences (Medel-Anonvevo, 2002; Yang & Valdes-Cotera, 2011). This happened through events such as the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien in 1990, the Fifth Conference

on Adult Education held in Hamburg in 1997, the World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000, the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) (2009) and the World Conference on Sustainable Development (2012). The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) (1990) used the lifelong learning framework to come up with education targets that were set for 2015 (Preece, 2009, Yang & Valdes-Cotera, 2011). The Education for All had six targets: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Universal Primary Education (UPE), Learning Needs of All Youth and Adults, Improving Levels of Adult Literacy, Gender Parity in Primary Education, and Educational Quality. These targets promoted efforts made to ensure educational provision spanning from Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to adulthood including universal primary education, life skills, literacy and gender equality (Preece, 2009).

However, the Education for All initiative failed to achieve the lifelong learning objective, particularly in the Third World countries, as it did not consider the contexts nor the learner profiles (Aspin et al., 2012; Torres, 2011). Governments were only encouraged to review policies to address issues of access caused by physical and temporal disjuncture and to implement universal and massive educational interventions to raise learners' profiles for economic transformation. However, the learners themselves were not involved in the decisions taken for these interventions. For instance, the findings revealed that the socio-economic profiles of learners contributed to unequal access to the educational provision (Aspin et al., 2012). Another major finding was that parents' educational backgrounds, occupations and household incomes were other elements contributing to the youth's lack of access to education and employment. International educational research and monitoring reports did not include the views of those affected which could have revealed the gaps which contributed to the failure of the Education for All initiative (Torres, 2002).

To conclude this section, it is also worth noting that, although the implementation of the above-mentioned educational policies were to be applicable to all countries, both rich and poor, some became an initiative more for the poor than the rich countries (Preece, 2009; Torres, 2011). For Torres (2002, p. 6), for instance, the Education for All initiative was a message from the rich to the poor countries that in their lifetime the poor should 'make sure that they get a bit of literacy, a bit of numeracy and that they are happy with it for the rest of their lives'. The section below details the interpretation of the lifelong learning approach by the countries of the North and South particularly using the neoliberal framework lens.

### **3.5.2 Interpretation of the lifelong learning approach in the North and South<sup>10</sup> through the neoliberal lens**

The lifelong learning approach was meant to be a global initiative; however, in practice the approach was interpreted differently in the countries of the North and South (Torres, 2002; Preece, 2009). For countries of the North the lifelong learning approach was adopted as an organising principle in pushing their agenda for the knowledge society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The approach was viewed as key to political, societal and educational advancement. As a result, The European Memorandum for lifelong learning came onto the scene in 2000 and defined lifelong learning as ‘an all purposeful activity, undertaken on an on-going basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skill and competence . . . To adjust to the demands of social and economic change and to participate actively in the shaping of Europe’s future’ (The Commission of European Communities, 2000, p. 3).

The European Memorandum ‘synergistically combined lifelong learning and its dual relationship to citizenship and employment and promoted active citizenship, necessary knowledge and skills, values and attitudes towards employment and work’ (ibid., p. 3). The emphasis here was social inclusion as lifelong learning was viewed as arguing for continuous learning for individuals to be, to do, to know, and to live together. So, for the North embracing the lifelong learning concept was feasible as the citizens had plenty of opportunities for lifelong learning. The youth and adults could access any form of education as there was a large coverage for formal education, Non-formal Education was practised in its own right and informal learning was becoming a part of organised learning. Average citizens had access to early childhood education and adult education. However, even with all these conditions in place, the involvement of the beneficiaries in policy formation was minimal if any.

Whilst lifelong learning emphasized broadening the opportunities of acquiring skills and knowledge beyond formal education and included non-formal and informal learning in the North, the South was faced with livelihood challenges, especially for the poor (Torres, 2002 Preece, 2009). Many countries of the South, Eswatini included, were faced with a low

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<sup>10</sup> North and South: Commonly used to refer to the contemporary division between rich and poor countries in the global political economy. From the early 1950s these areas were referred to as the Third World, to indicate countries outside the First World of advanced industrial capitalism and the Second World of industrialised state socialism. However, the Second World collapsed in 1989-91; therefore the terminology South and North (Youngman, 2000).

completion rate in primary education which had an impact on the transition to secondary and tertiary education and subsequently to the world of work.

As presented in Chapter Two, one of the contributing factors to being categorized as NEETs is a lack of education and skills. The lack of skill is exacerbated by the fact that, for the countries of the South, as opposed to the North, the fundamental problem is educational access and Non-formal Education is still viewed as a second-hand, compensatory or remedial kind of education for the poor and not for all. Although literature argues that human beings tend to learn a lot informally (Torres, 2002), countries of the South need to recognize this form of learning. Therefore, for the countries of the South the expanded vision of education enshrined in the lifelong learning approach was not inculcated within their educational policies. For these countries basic education was not viewed as the foundation for lifelong learning but as a target for education for the poor.

Therefore, I agree with Torres (2011) that the interpretation and implementation of the lifelong learning approach through the Education for All initiative was different for countries of the North and of the South. As a result of these interpretations, achieving the objectives of the lifelong learning approach was not realized. The focus on basic education has made the EFA goals to be about formal education from pre-primary to tertiary levels. In this way it tends to create a divide between formal and Non-formal Education and ignores informal learning. It does not acknowledge literacy education as a basic learning need and associates adult education and literacy as education for the poor, disadvantaged and underprivileged. The focus does not view all learning as continuous that includes non-formal, adult education and literacy. Coupled with the Millenium Development Goals, the Education for All initiative 'became primary education for school children, children became the poorest girls on earth' particularly in Africa and Asia (ibid, p. 6)

In concluding this section, the cited literature points out that, although the lifelong learning approach was meant for all countries, there was a divide in interpretations for the countries of the North and of the South. The neoliberal framework's influence on educational policies had different impacts on educational goals. Faced with an array of socio-economic challenges, for the countries of the South 'Education for All' meant a struggle for survival, whilst for countries of the North it was a means of maintaining their dominant positions.

### **3.6 The critique of the lifelong learning approach**

Critiques of the lifelong learning approach view the focus on the learner as a ‘blaming the victim’ mentality, as a form of social control in development and as means for capitalism to reproduce itself (Boshier, 2011; Crowther, 2004; Preece, 2009; Rule, 2011).

#### **3.6.1 Focusing on the learner – victim mentality**

Within the lifelong learning approach, the acquisition of knowledge and skills was seen as an individual and a personal duty (Barros, 2012, p. 120). Literature views the emphasis of placing the learner as being responsible to select what he/she wants to learn as an approach that makes it easier to blame the victim (learner) for failures in life (Boshier, 2011; Crowther, 2004; Rule, 2011). They argue that by applying the lifelong learning approach the learner is placed at fault, as a consumer, if they are not able to take advantage of the learning opportunities. Such a view leaves the state unaccountable for educational provision, whereas I believe that the state should continue and be responsible for educational provision and adopt strategies to ensure that the learner is responsible for learning. Duke and Hinzen (2012) states that there is a need for education to do everything possible to create opportunities to fulfil individuals’ learning needs and related capacities. In this regard, Somtrakool (2002:29) views lifelong education as ‘education for life and life for education’. Therefore, I concur with the statement by Irina Bokova that ‘Learning and education is [are] essential for the dignity of every woman and man – it is vital for healthy societies and inclusive, sustainable development’ (UNESCO, 2013a, p. 9). In my view this statement calls for an end to the tension between lifelong education and lifelong learning, but for the two to come together to ensure that a lifelong learner is produced.

#### **3.6.2 Lifelong learning as means for capitalism to reproduce itself**

Literature also critiques the lifelong learning approach as used as a form of social control in development and as a means for capitalism to reproduce itself (Crowther, 2004; Livingstone, 2008; Youngman, 2000). The lifelong learning approach, as influenced by the neoliberal framework, situates learning as an individual responsibility to acquire skills in order to cope with the ever-changing technology. The emphasis on acquisition of skills calls for flexibility in education and training so as to meet the changing demands of the market. Crowther (2004) argues that flexibility is a manifestation of a world dominated by the market, the demand-supply syndrome, where individuals have to acquire skills to meet the short-term fluctuating demands of the market economy.

The market economy, influenced by the neoliberal framework, accompanies a political philosophy that promotes capitalism as being essential for democracy and individual freedom (Youngman, 2000). Policies promoting the privatization of public enterprises and individual choices in serving the market economy is done so that it looks like democracy is being promoted. Private and multinational organisations, given the flexibility to compete in the expanded free trade, apply all strategies to stay financially competitive. Companies tend to use vocabulary such as ‘downsizing’, ‘right sizing’, ‘redundancy’ and ‘job losses’ (Crowther, 2004). Since the lifelong learning approach places the responsibility of learning on the individual, the issue of flexibility puts learners at a disadvantage. Learners are not able to acquire competencies for employment. The youth in particular, who lack experience as they would come into the workplace directly from tertiary institutions, are unable to accumulate the required experience from employers.

This vocabulary, used by companies in their striving for economic competitiveness, goes with the demand for learners who will respond rapidly to these fluctuations. Bourdieu in Crowther (2004) characterises this syndrome as ‘flexploitation’. He refers to this ‘as a new mode of domination based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission and into the acceptance of exploitation’ (ibid., p. 126). The less powerful groups such as the unemployed youth, illiterates, adults and out-of-school youths are the most affected by the job uncertainty and insecurity. Crowther (2004) also argues that, apart from not having the means to continuously access opportunities for continuous skill acquisition, these groups also lose out on social capital, such as trust, loyalty and mutual support, which is established under long-term commitments to an employer or to workmates. Therefore, by means of the ‘flexploitation’ syndrome, although viewed as important for economic success and employability, the less powerful groups end up increasing the number of unemployed, temporary employed, low-paid and of those in insecure forms of employment in industries. These groups include youths categorised as not in education, employment or training.

In conclusion, the lifelong learning approach cannot be left within the neoliberal framework only. Wangoola (1996) proposes a transformative political economy. He argues that there has been an over-emphasis on the economy in isolation from culture and society. There has been limited focus on comprehending the subjective and cultural dimensions of domination and resistance, so that oppressions based on sex, race or ethnicities have been ignored. To counter

the demands of the neoliberal framework, Wangoola (1996) draws our attention to Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism.

Afrocentrism for a transformative political economy calls for a more autocentric<sup>11</sup>, sustainable development, particularly in the developing countries (Wangoola, 1996). Haque (1999, p. 213) agrees with Wangoola (1996) and advocates for a reconceptualisation of industrial production, environmental protection, democracy, cultural diversity, justice, peace, cooperative values, freedom, and equality. There is a need for the identification of a central agency of social change, a political goal or an organizational form of politics that will cut across classes, race or ethnicity. Such groups include women's and gay's movements. These groups would adopt a bottom up strategy of addressing the impact of the market-driven society, and will use three ingredients. They will first understand the existing society, that is, its socio-economic challenges and who is affected most. Secondly, they will develop a vision for the future. Lastly, they will develop strategies on how to get to the future they have envisioned. Essentially, the proposed autocentric and sustainable development approach would ignore the question of who controls global economic structures and resources.

### **3.7 African perspective of lifelong learning**

Finally, I present African Indigenous Knowledge (AIK) (Lekoko & Modise, 2011) as a proposed organizing ideology to counter the neoliberal framework particularly in operationalizing the lifelong learning approach. According to Lekoko and Modise (2011), the shift from the lifelong education to lifelong learning approach that came during the 1990s does not warrant shifting the responsibility of learning from the state to the individual. In other words, it does not necessarily mean bowing to the demands of the market economy as influenced by the neoliberal framework (Hager, 2011; Torres, 2011; Youngman, 2000).

Lekoko and Modise (2011) view the lifelong learning approach as a torch for education and learning that is relevant, appropriate and needs to be appreciated by Africans. They argue that the approach needs to be conceptualized within an AIL framework. The framework proposes a lifelong learning approach that is entrenched deep in the practices, cultures and knowing of many Africans. AIL also has fundamental implications for the African perspective on the lifelong learning approach (Lekoko & Modise, 2011).

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<sup>11</sup> Autocentric: 'development based on domestic, human needs and the use of local resources' (Kondo, 2012, p. 4).

The AIL framework is the collective versus the individualistic and competitive approach to learning, learning that is context-based for relevance and the immediate application of skills, attitudes, values and knowledge. The AIL framework also allows learners to continuously validate indigenous knowledge and promote the validation of their experiences and the reality of their social living as they interact with friends, family, and the entire community. Therefore, time in this framework is perceived as the composition of events rather than years, months, weeks, days, hours or minutes (ibid.) In my view, the AIL fundamentals make the lifelong learning approach different from the Western lifelong learning approach.

The first fundamental of the AIL framework of lifelong learning is that it promotes collectivity versus the linear, market driven and individualistic form of learning promoted through the neoliberal framework. The AIL framework promotes 'We' versus 'I'. The 'We' defines 'aspects such as learning in action, immediacy of application, interactive methods and time valued in respect of events that constitute it' (ibid., p. 16). Success is viewed as collective rather than individual.

The second fundamental on this approach is the validation of experiences and the reality of social living and influence in life-wide learning, thus active interaction with family, friends and the community at large is vital. The approach promotes indigenous education and learning which is suppressed by Western concepts. In AIL, education and learning are functional. They help to prepare the young people to fit into society at large as there are teachers and instructors for all forms of educational provision: informal, formal and non-formal. For instance, through observation, children (boys and girls) learn livelihood skills from their parents. They may acquire skills, knowledge, attitudes and values by observing at very early stages of their lives and later practice under the guidance of parents to plough fields, perform household chores, and generate income.

AIL is characterized by the goal to produce useful members of society. The goal of education in this framework is to produce citizens with good character, health, knowledge about the community, history and beliefs. So, the formal educational curricula should not only be built on or recognize informally acquired knowledge but should also have Africa and particularly their home country as a focus. Focusing on the local rather than regional or global environment promotes immediate application, self-learning, and experiential learning rather than abstract knowledge. This means the approach, promotes transfer of learning amongst learning institutions; learning in schools is not separated from learning in the wider society. It is argued that this separation does not prepare Africans to be productive in their communities.

Within AIL, the world is not viewed universally but it recognizes contexts in the continuous acquisition of relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes and values (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). The recognition of individuals' contexts provides the opportunity for lifelong learning being continuous and a validation of indigenous knowledge. Individuals view learning as an event-in-action thus questioning the logic and consequences of linear and numerical perspectives. In other words, the approach supports learning as lifelong, life-wide and life-deep as it promotes interaction between learner and what is learnt.

Learning in AIL allows individuals to tap into the accumulated knowledge of locals and also to have a voice in educational decisions rather than echoing leaders or bureaucrats' voices (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). Lastly, viewing learning as an event-in-action results in time being perceived as functional and situational or a composition of events, for instance, most elderly people in Eswatini do not know their dates, months or even the years of births; all they know is the event that was happening when they were born. Some were born during drought, just after the Second World War (*Emasotja nakabuya emphini*), or when the King was installed (*Nakubekwa inkhosi*); even their names would capture the event.

The criticisms of AIL might be that it does not help African countries in the context of the modern 'game' of neoliberal globalisation. Others might be that it is backward-looking, ethnically or tribally based and fundamentally rural. However, AIL emphasizes the social validation of the individual's functionality; developing the individual's confidence in being a responsible citizen rather than competing for the market economy (Bandura, 1977). This individual functionality may entail performing exceptionally well in small social community groups such as 'stokvels'<sup>12</sup>, income generation and other support groups rather than competing for formal jobs.

### **3.8 Using the lifelong learning approach to understand NEETs**

As presented in Chapter Two, literature highlights the complex and problematic issues contributing to youths being categorized as NEETs which, for some youths can be traced through their developmental stages. The issues include the NEETs' family backgrounds, their socio-economic position, as well as educational access and progression. In view of these complex issues, placing the study within the lifelong learning approach will assist in

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<sup>12</sup> Stokvel — An Afrikaans name for a group of individuals who come together to make informal money savings, the money is loaned out at an agreed interest rate, and profits are shared or used to buy agreed upon items at an agreed period within a year.

understanding the youths' educational experiences in their developmental stage and how the experiences have contributed to them becoming NEETs.

The lifelong learning approach is learning that takes place throughout one's life. Through learning, individuals can become effective citizens who successfully negotiate challenges through the different stages of life. Success in this sense is measured by the ability to contribute or respond to life challenges effectively. Through the lifelong learning lens, it may be understood how the different forms of learning - formal, non-formal and informal - have contributed to who the youths finally become.

Understanding the youth's experiences during their developmental stages will also assist in understanding the relation between lifelong education and lifelong learning. The understanding of the tension as it relates to the ideological influences of these two approaches to educational policies.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

Literature points out that lifelong education and lifelong learning are 'both innovative educational strategies capable of mobilizing and transforming society' (Barros, 2012). Literature states that in countries influenced by the lifelong education approach, educational policies focus on the provider who has the responsibility for education, that is, the state or government (Barros, 2012; Preece, 2009; Rule, 2011); whereas in the lifelong learning approach the acquisition of skills and knowledge is the responsibility of the learner (Barros, 2012; Preece, 2009).

This study argues for the use of both the lifelong education and lifelong learning approaches to understand the youth's educational experiences, from birth, which have contributed to them being categorised as NEETs. Secondly, I argue that viewing the approaches as separate entities that can function without the other, instead of the two approaches as complementing each other for the development of a lifelong learner, has contributed to youths being categorised as NEETs. The responsibility of developing a lifelong learner should not only be with the learner (the individual) but also with the state. Thirdly, there should be consultations and involvement of the youth on the educational policy development, decisions taken and implemented to produce a lifelong learner who is relevant to his/her society. This entails adopting educational research methods that would involve the beneficiaries.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the lifelong learning approach, which provides a lens for the purpose of understanding the youths' educational experiences particularly those youths referred to as not in education, employment or training (NEETs). In this chapter I present three theories used, within the broad framework of the lifelong learning approach, to understand the NEETs educational experiences. These theories are the life span theory in developmental psychology (Baltes et al, 1987, 1999), the contemporary and comprehensive learning theory (Illeris, 2003) and the social capital theory (Field, 2005, 2008; John, 2009).

### 4.2 Overview of the theories used

Below I present the summary of how the three theories are used in the study within the lifelong learning approach.

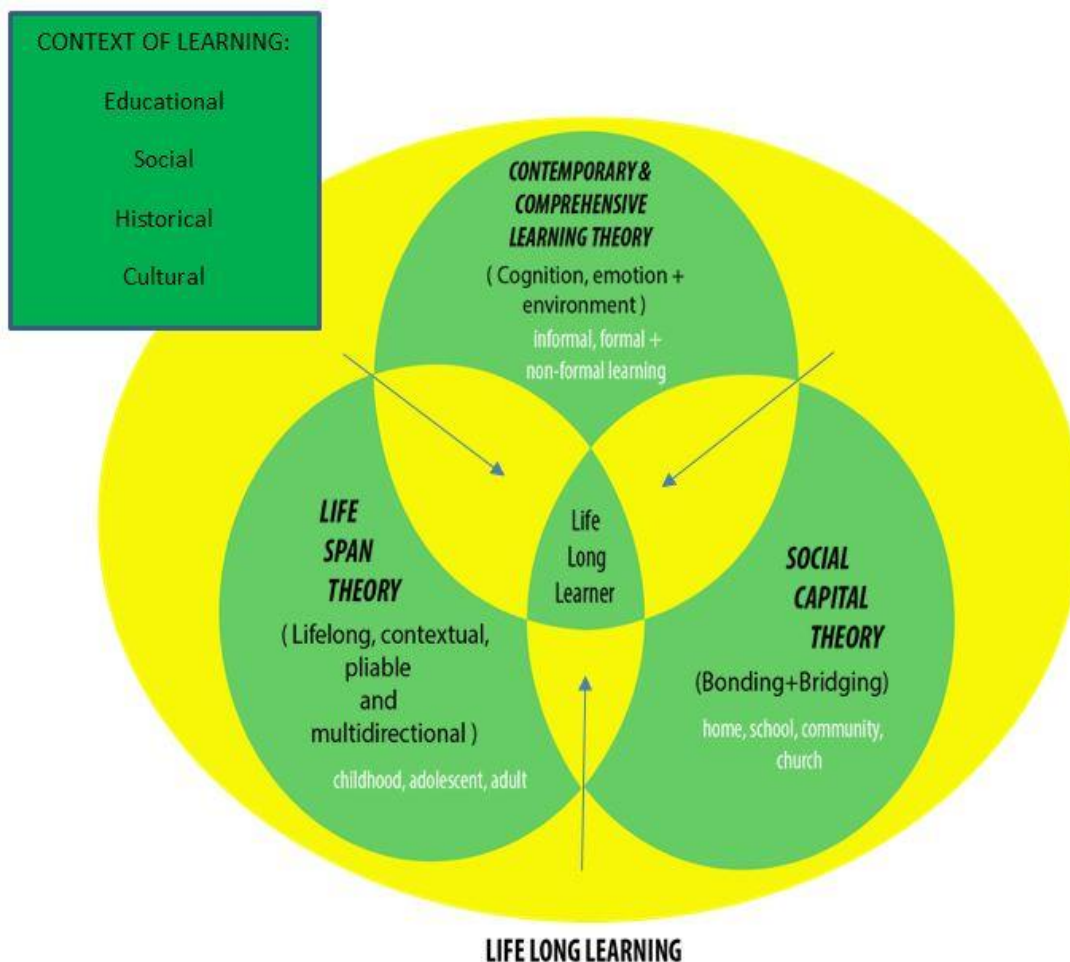


Figure 4.1: Summary of theories used in the study

I view the lifelong learning approach and the three theories as very important and linked in guiding an attempt to understand the complex nature of the youth, the NEETs in particular. The life span theory of developmental psychology focuses on the wide ranging physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes or movement processes that have occurred among the youth since birth (Baltes et al., 1999; Baltes, 1987; Fasokun et al., 2005; Sugarman, 1986). Since the theory emphasizes an individual's context as influencing development, the theory is used to understand how these influences, at the different stages of their development, have contributed to some youths becoming NEETs. Erikson (1959), for instance, divided the human life span into eight stages and argues that there is need for skills and knowledge acquisition to resolve each of the life crises presented by the different stages in life. So, the theory brings in the psychological lens in understanding the different influences in an individual's life and how the presence or non-presence of those influences contribute to youths becoming NEETs.

The life span theory also helps to understand that these contexts, whilst not operating independently of each other, are sources of influence within which individuals act, react, organize their own development and contribute to the development of others within their lifespan (Lerner, 2013, p. 29). Each stage must be recognized as being of equal importance since successful negotiation at each stage prepares individuals to move to or to function productively in the following stage (Fasokun et al., 2005). This means proper functioning in each stage is dependent on the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that have been acquired in the previous stages; that is to say, the learning that would or would not have happened in the previous stages.

Regarding learning, I used a theory which is viewed as an umbrella of all learning theories: the contemporary and comprehensive learning theory (Illeris, 2003). The theory was used to understand the youths' learning experiences during their developmental stages and also how learning for youths/ NEETs could be promoted. Illeris' (2003) learning theory assists in explaining how their skills, knowledge, attitudes and values have been acquired. Whilst acknowledging the focus of different learning theorists, the theory states that every learning process will always involve two assumptions: there is an interaction between the learner and the environment; and there are three dimensions: cognition, emotion and societal (ibid.). This view of learning recognizes that learning occurs in all life stages as well as that all forms of learning - formal, non-formal and informal - need equal recognition. This theory therefore fits well with the life-wide and life-deep lifelong learning approach presented in Chapter Two.

Recognizing all forms of learning entails recognizing all forms of educational institutions and learning contexts: home, school, peers, community, church and media. The social capital theory emphasizes the connectedness of the institutions from which the person learns or acquires the knowledge and skills throughout life. The theory explains the strengths and types of social connections within and beyond each institution, and how they have acted or not acted in producing a lifelong learner capable of contributing socially, economically and spiritually. The social capital theory is used to understand how the social context and institutions have contributed or can contribute to the youths being viewed as NEETs; particularly because youths are viewed as adults by most literature whereas they are at a transitional stage from adolescence to adulthood (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). In adulthood, individuals are expected to have acquired skills and knowledge and to apply them in their social, economic and political responsibilities.

#### **4.3 The life span theory in developmental psychology**

In this section I first present a broad description of the lifespan theory in developmental psychology which I used to understand NEETs educational experiences. The description is followed by the origins of the theory, its concepts, and how the theory has been used in related studies and critiques. I conclude the section with the relevance of the theory to my study.

Lifespan theory in developmental psychology is concerned with the patterns of movement or change throughout an individual lifespan (Baltes et al., 2007; Baltes, 1987, 2005; Sugarman, 1986). The theory deals with ‘the study of individual development – ontogenesis from conception into old age’ (Baltes et al., 2007, p. 59). The core assumption is that development is not completed at adulthood or maturity, but that ontogenesis extends across the entire life course and that lifelong adaptive processes are involved (ibid.). A human lifespan refers to the maximum number of years an individual can live (Fasokun et al., 2005) which may also be referred to as the whole of a person’s life, total lifespan, total life space or total life course (Sugarman, 1986). Lifespan theory in developmental psychology encompasses wide-ranging, contextually analysed change, growth and decline processes occurring across the whole of an individual’s lifespan (Baltes, 1987; Fasokun et al, 2005; Sugarman, 1986). These changes or movements in an individual’s life span are about the person’s physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. During the lifespan the physical changes may result in the development of the individual’s brain, height, weight, motor skills and in hormonal changes. Cognitively these changes may lead to the development in individual thought, intelligence

and language. Individual's social and emotional changes may result in the development of relationships with other people, and changes in emotions and personality (Baltes et al., 2007, 2005).

Besides looking at the several aspects of the same person, the life span theory is also concerned with the interrelatedness of these aspects (Papalia, 2007). According to Baltes et al. (2007, p. 569) the theory has four overall objectives. The first objective of the theory is 'to offer an organized account of the overall structure and sequence of human development across the lifespan'. The second objective is concerned with 'the interconnections between earlier and later human developmental events and processes. Explaining the biological, psychological, social and environmental factors and mechanisms which are the foundation of lifespan development', is the third objective of the theory. The last objective is specifying 'the biological and environmental opportunities and constraints that shape individual's life span development; this includes the range of individuals' plasticity'.

#### **4.3.1 Origins of the theory of lifespan developmental psychology**

Baltes et al. (2007) trace the origins of the theory of lifespan developmental psychology to a German developmental historian, Johann Nicolaus Tetens. They cite Tetens' (1777) two-volume monumental work on human nature and its development whose scope covered the entire lifespan from birth into old age: *Men-schliche Natur and ihre Entwicklung* in 1777. In their view, Tetens (1777) is the founder of the field of developmental psychology. During Tetens' time, human development in Germany was understood to reflect factors of education, socialization and culture. So, his work focused on human development beyond early adulthood to the entire lifespan. His primary focus was on the structure, sequence and dynamics of the entire life course. His work resulted in the emergence of lifespan psychology. However, Baltes et al. (2007) notes that Tetens' work on lifespan developmental psychology was ignored during his time.

In North America and European countries, lifespan psychology emerged in the mid-1960s and early 1970s (Baltes et al., 1987). The ontogenic thinking in these countries was within the field of genetics and biological evolution. Their focus on development shifted from child psychology and child and adolescent development to adult development and ageing.

According to Baltes et al. (2007), certain factors nurtured the interest in lifespan developmental psychology in North America and Europe. These included an historical change in the demographic context as most of the population was ageing at this time. More research was, therefore, conducted on theories of ageing and development of the conceptions of

ontogenesis to characterize development and ageing. The research was on whether one theory or approach dealt with the phenomenon of growth, and the other with decline. The major concern of the American and European research studies was the ageing of the researchers and participants during their longitudinal studies. Their studies sought answers on question with regard to the ‘effects of child development in later life, which childhood developmental factors are positive or risk prone for later healthy development?’ (Baltes et al., 2007, p. 574) These developments led to the emergence of a need for collaboration among all age specialities of research developmental psychology, from child development to the psychology of ageing. The above interest in human development resulted in the evolution of human development from within the confines of the traditional approaches which focused only on development in childhood, to a process of development that is from conception to the end of life (Fasokun et al., 2005).

#### **4.3.2 The life span theory in developmental psychology and its concepts**

Key concepts in the literature are that human development is lifelong, multi-dimensional and multidirectional, pliable and contextual (Baltes & Baltes, 1980; Baltes, 1987, 2005; Lamb, 2010; Papalia, 2007; Sugarman, 1986).

Literature points out that human development is lifelong, from conception to death (Baltes et al, 1980; Baltes, 1987, 2005; Lamb, 2010; Papalia, 2007; Sugarman, 1986) According to Sugarman (1986), there should be no assumption that there is a plateau or decline in development, even in adulthood or old age. Papalia (2007) argues that the concept of human development as a lifelong process of adaptation is what is referred to as lifespan development. He agrees with Baltes (2007) that each period of the lifespan development is influenced by the individual’s experiences which affect what that individual becomes. In viewing human development as lifelong, each period of human development has its own unique characteristics and value, none more or less important than any other. The learning experiences acquired during the distinct, broad, socially constructed age ranges of the pre-natal period, infancy, pre-school, middle childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood (Fasokun et al., 2005) are equally important in an individual’s lifespan.

Erikson, for instance, presents a normative age-graded human development process which can be influenced by context, as follows:

**Table 4.1: Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development**

Stage	Psychological crises	Radius of significant relations	Description
1 (Birth to 1 year)	Trust versus Mistrust; Is the world a trustworthy place?	Maternal person	Development of trusting relationships with caregivers and of self (Hope) <sup>13</sup>
2 (2 – 3 years)	Autonomy versus shame and doubt; Can I do things myself or must I always rely on others?	Parental person	Development of control over body functions and activities (Will)
3 (3 – 5 years)	Initiative versus guilt: Am I good or am I bad?	Basic Family	Teaching limits of self-assertion and purposefulness (Purpose)
4 (6 – 12 years)	Industry versus Inferiority: How can I be good?	Neighbourhood school	Focus on mastery, competence, and productivity (competence)
5 (12 – 18 years)	Identity versus role confusion: Who am I and where am I going?	Peer groups	Focus on formation of identity and coherent self-concept (Fidelity)
6 (early 20's)	Intimacy and solidarity versus isolation: Am I loved and wanted?	Partners in friendship, sex, competition, cooperation	Focus on achievement of an intimate relationship and career direction (Love)
7 (late 20's – 50's)	Generativity versus stagnation: Will I provide something of real value?	Divided labour and shared household	Focus on fulfilment through creative, productive activity that contributes to future generation (Care)
8 (after 50)	Integrity versus Despair: Have I lived a full life?	'Mankind' 'My kind'	Focus on belief in integrity of life, including successes and failures (Wisdom)

Adapted from: (Erikson, 1959; Hoffning, 2010; Bae, 1999; Cherry, 2014; Robins et al., 1998)

Another concept of the lifespan theory in developmental psychology is that human development is multidimensional and multidirectional throughout life and involves a balance of growth and decline (Baltes, 1987; Sugarman, 1986). Developmental studies look at different areas that are at play in a persons' life span. These areas are physical, cognitive, personality and social human development. Each area plays a role in life span development. So different developmental studies focus on different areas (Fasokun et al., 2005). As people gain in one area, they may lose in another and at varying rates. People seek to maximize gains and minimize losses by learning to manage or compensate for them.

Human development is also pliable or plastic, which refers to modifiability of performance (Baltes & Baltes, 1980; Baltes, 1987; Sugarman, 1986). Many abilities, such as memory, strength and endurance, can be significantly improved with training or practice even later in life. Behaviour is always open and constrained at the same time. Humans have the capacity

<sup>13</sup> A word in brackets under descriptions in the table refers to the virtues a child may emerge with in the process of negotiating through a developmental stage.

for change throughout the lifespan from birth to death. The consequences of the events of early childhood are continually transformed by later experiences. Plasticity is linked to similar concepts in the social sciences. Much of what happens in the lifespan is a direct reflection of the goals, resources and norms of a given society and societal contexts differ in the structure, emphases and sequential ordering of such factors (Baltes et al., 2007, p. 584).

Another key concept of lifespan theory is that human development is contextual (Baltes et al., 2007; Baltes, 1987; Fasokun et al., 2005; Sugarman, 1986). According to Baltes (2006), developmentalists moved beyond viewing the process of learning as a marker of experience to capturing context as a system of influence on the process of learning. He argues that each person is influenced by certain circumstances which are defined by time and place, geography, history, climate and socio-cultural systems. These physical and social environments provide individuals with social realities and experiences that tend to channel their development into different purposes and directions. Through the socialization process, individuals interact with their historical and social contexts and they either change or change their contexts (Fasokun et al, 2005; Sugarman, 1986). In the following sections, I present the contextual influences in human development in the three biocultural components, and the bio-ecological approach.

Scholars (Fasokun et al., 2005; Papalia, 2007; Sugarman, 1986) agree with Baltes (2007) that there are three biocultural components that are considered to be at the foundation of human development. These components are the normative age-graded influences, normative life events and history graded influences. Normative age-graded influences are what normally or under similar conditions are expected to occur to an individual during the life span. Normal age-graded influences include entry age to schooling, puberty, entry to the world of work, getting married, menopause, and retiring from formal employment. According to Fasokun et al. (2005), individuals within a particular age group are expected to experience similar biological and environmental influences regardless of when or where they are raised. These 'normal' age-graded influences are often described statistically, in sequence and timing of change (Sugarman, 1986). However, Sugarman (1986) argues that other than what is regarded as 'normal', an individual has a number of holistic life courses which have different seasons. Each season or stage of the individual's life is marked with characteristics and potentialities which, when trying to understand that person, must not be ignored.

Normative life events are the unusual events that have a major impact on individuals' lives (Papalia, 2007; Sugarman, 1986). Such events include an unexpected career opportunity, the death of a parent when the child is young, parents separating or divorcing, pregnancy in adolescence, terminal illness, and abuse in the family. These events tend to negatively cause stress, as they take place when the person does not expect it, is not prepared for it or might need special help adapting to it.

History graded influences are events that are common to a particular cohort or a group who share a similar experience (Baltes et al., 2007; Fasokun et al., 2005; Papalia, 2007; Sugarman, 1986). Fasokun et al. (2005) argue that individuals are in part a product of the social times in which they have lived. He further states that cohort effects provide history graded influences or events. Such events include economic depression, wars and epidemics. In the African context, the impact of HIV and AIDS is one such 'history graded influence'. Developmentalists argue that to know or understand an individual, one has to look into the history of that person (Fasokun et al., 2005; Sugarman, 1986).

Developmentalists such as Havighurst, Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky and Erikson approach the field of human development from a variety of perspectives (Fasokun et al., 2005). Havighurst (1972) defines a developmental task 'as a task which arises at a certain period in the life of the individual, the successful achievement of which leads to her/his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by society and difficulty in later tasks' (Manning, 2002, p. 75). Developmental tasks amount to a socially approved timetable for individual growth and development (Tennant, 2006, p. 44). Timetables differ among social groups and among the purpose of development culturally, socially and historically defined, and cannot be regarded as universal.

Given the different contexts an individual is exposed to in his/her lifetime, the purpose of development cannot be regarded as universal (Fasokun et al., 2005). The definition of maturity, which is demonstrated through appropriate behaviour and actions, is also different across cultures. In Western culture, maturity is demonstrated by individuality, autonomy and an integrated self. Individual aspirations in the Western world are centred on an occupational hierarchy that is prepared through competing in the years of formal school. In my view the lifespan perspective in the Western world human emphasizes the neoliberal framework.

In African culture, maturity is demonstrated by social responsibility and interrelatedness (Fasokun et al., 2005). Children in Africa, including Eswatini, are socialized so as to become acceptable members of their society and community, competent in knowledge, values and

skills such as talking and proper behaviour in different situations. Group values are developed in preparation for roles that they have to play in their family, community and society in general.

#### **4.3.3 The lifespan theory in developmental psychology and its use in research studies**

To illustrate the use of the lifespan theory in developmental psychology in research studies, I used Smith-Osborne's (2007) *Life span and resiliency theory: A critical review*. Smith-Osborne's (2007) focused on longitudinal studies and found a positive relationship between a number of individual traits and contextual variables and resistance among children, adolescence and young adults, as well as those of middle-age, and in later life stages. A variety of historical and conceptual risk factors of human behaviour in the social environment were examined as they applied in social work and education.

In this study, the resiliency focused on risk populations overcoming stress and adversity to achieve functional outcomes either during a life stage, a specific trajectory (e.g. educational or deviancy) or throughout life. The longitudinal study investigated Hawaiian children who overcame certain life odds by the time they reached adulthood. This study was developed in the post-Vietnam War era and the post-colonial era of globalization.

Three concepts of the resilience theory were examined. The first one was the individual's vulnerability. In the study, vulnerability included the traits, genetic predispositions, environmental and biological factors. The second were the protective factors, including the contextual characteristics and interventions that operate to enhance or promote resistance. The third concept was the risk factors to resilience that include conditions and adversity, such as poverty and factors that operate to reduce resistance to stressors or adversity.

With regard to vulnerability, Smith-Osborne's (2007) cites Sharon McQuaide in her research on *Women at Midlife* who examined biological and cohort variables to resilience. McQuaide found historical differences in the way women cohorts achieved well-being as described by Erikson. According to her, the generation of women entering midlife at the time of the study differed from previous generations. Some of the women in this study experienced physical disability, poor health, involuntary unemployment and limited spending power. Due to their vulnerable status they were less likely to achieve well-being and other indicators of generativity.

On protective and risk mechanisms the forms of resilience have been found to vary according to the type of adversity, the type of resilience outcome and the life stage under analysis; risk

factors in one context may be protective in another. With regard to protective mechanisms, Smith-Osborne's (2007) study revealed that in the face of adversity, certain strategies are employed at different stages of the lifespan. That is, first, individuals reduce risk impact by strengthening social networks and/or successfully coping with preceding events that may have been milder or stressful. Secondly, they reduce negative chain reactions to risk impact by promoting resiliency traits such as self-efficacy, optimism and by setting up new opportunities for success.

#### **4.3.4 The critique of the lifespan theory**

The critiques of the lifespan theory point out that there is insufficient attention paid to biological factors (Lamb, 2010). Most researchers tend to have an overview and compare cohorts at a given time. Longitudinal studies, which should follow up the research participant over a lifespan, tend to be avoided by researchers. Longitudinal studies which would include the biological aspect are considered to be important in child development and its later effects. Such studies look at the different levels at which the environment affects children's development. The main challenge for this type of research is that it is often not completed as either the participant or the researcher dies before the study is finalized.

Besides criticizing the original theory for a male bias, the originators of the theory are also criticized for operating almost exclusively within a Euro-American middle-class framework (Smith-Osborne, 2007). In a way, this limits the utility of the theory for application in diverse cultures and classes. In my view, however, this criticism needs to be addressed by researchers in different contexts including Africa. There is a need for qualitative and mixed methods research which can be undertaken within an interpretivist paradigm to address some of the concerns about the theory.

In conclusion, lifespan theory in developmental psychology promotes the need for understanding individual trajectories within different contexts (Sugarman, 1986). In this study the theory is used to understand youths categorized as NEETs cultural and historical experiences. The theory encourages policy developers and researchers not to rely on their intuitive frameworks but argues that 'listening to the developmental needs voiced by those they study' would contribute in development of relevant policies (Lerner & Ryff, 1978, cited by Sugarman, 1986).

#### **4.3.5 Relevance of the lifespan theory to the study**

Newman and Newman (2012) identify some useful advantages of the life-span theory of developmental psychology in understanding the NEETs' educational experiences. One advantage is that the psychosocial theory locates development within the framework of relationships. In this study the lifespan theory assisted in clarifying the youth's systemic connectedness to the people who were older and younger as they relate to the youth's past, present and future expectations. This theory emphasized issues of intergenerational transmission and the reciprocal influences of the generations. The influence and systematic connectedness with other people linked the lifespan theory with the social capital theory as the latter also emphasizes the reciprocal effect of relationships. The lifespan theory linked with the contemporary and comprehensive learning theory (Illeris, 2003, 2015), in that it provided a positive lens on the youth's life course, which was marked by the different stages where a demonstration of certain skills and knowledge was required. Through the lifespan this theory, I was able to dig into the youth's capacities, such as hope, purpose, love and caring, and their struggles of childhood leading to who they had become, based on societal and self-perception.

The lifespan theory also assisted in identifying and emphasizing themes and the directions of growth for youths from childhood until the time of the study. These themes are detailed in Chapters Seven and Eight as findings. In Chapter Nine the theory is used with the other theories to assess the influence of experiences during the youths' developmental stages; that is, how their relationships with others have influenced their sense of self and connectedness with others in society.

#### **4.4 The contemporary and comprehensive learning theory**

In this section, I present the ideas of the Danish educational theorist, Knud Illeris, as an additional lens to understand the learning of NEETs. Illeris' (2003, 2015) contemporary and comprehensive learning theory is a useful comprehensive theory which takes into account both the psychological and environmental aspects of learning. I begin this section with an overview of the theory. I then present the theory's origin, concepts and use in related studies. I conclude the section with the critiques of the theory and its relevance to the study.

The contemporary and comprehensive learning theory provides a framework or model which 'is [a] sort of umbrella' to other learning theories (Illeris, 2003, p. 396). The theory moves beyond conceiving learning as just the acquisition of a syllabus or a curriculum for a professional qualification, to including the development of 'personal qualities and the ability

to perform adequately and flexibly in known and unknown situations’ (ibid. p, 396). According to Illeris (2003, p. 397), the definition of learning in this theory ‘covers all processes that lead to an individual’s lasting changes in capacity with regard to emotions, motivation, attitude and or social character’.

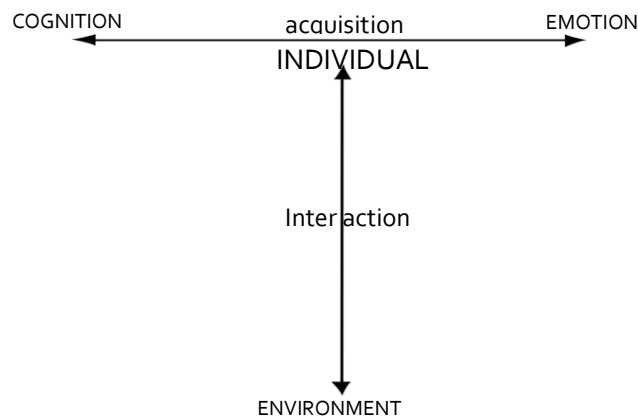
The theory recognizes that learning is a complex process that takes place within educational institutions such as home and the work environment, as well as in the society more broadly. As such, the theory recognizes all learning – informal, formal and non-formal – through all the stages of the human life-span (Jarvis, 2009; McClusky, 2007). Therefore, this theory seeks to encompass all theories that respond to the definition of learning, how learning happens in different contexts and stages of the lifespan, how learning can be promoted and ‘what happens when learning fails or become distorted’ (Illeris, 2015).

#### **4.4.1 The origins**

The 1990’s debates on lifelong education versus lifelong learning resulted in theorists asking themselves many questions (Illeris, 2003). The questions were influenced not only by professional, psychological, educational and management debates but also the growing expenses of educational measures. Governments were also asking themselves if the money they invested was towards teaching (education) or learning (the acquisition of knowledge and skills) (Illeris, 2003). This was particularly so as there was a gap in the transfer of knowledge to everyday life (Illeris, 2009). The lack of knowledge transfer resulted in educational theorists asking themselves questions around learning and the learning process. These questions included: What is learning? How does it come about? How can it be promoted? Why does teaching not always result in learning? Different learning theorists respond to these questions, from how a child learns and later from how adults learn.

#### **4.4.2 The concepts of the contemporary and comprehensive learning theory**

The theory has two fundamental assumptions and three dimensions of learning (Illeris, 2003). The two fundamental assumptions are that all learning is an interaction of two different processes, the internal and the external, as illustrated in the next page:

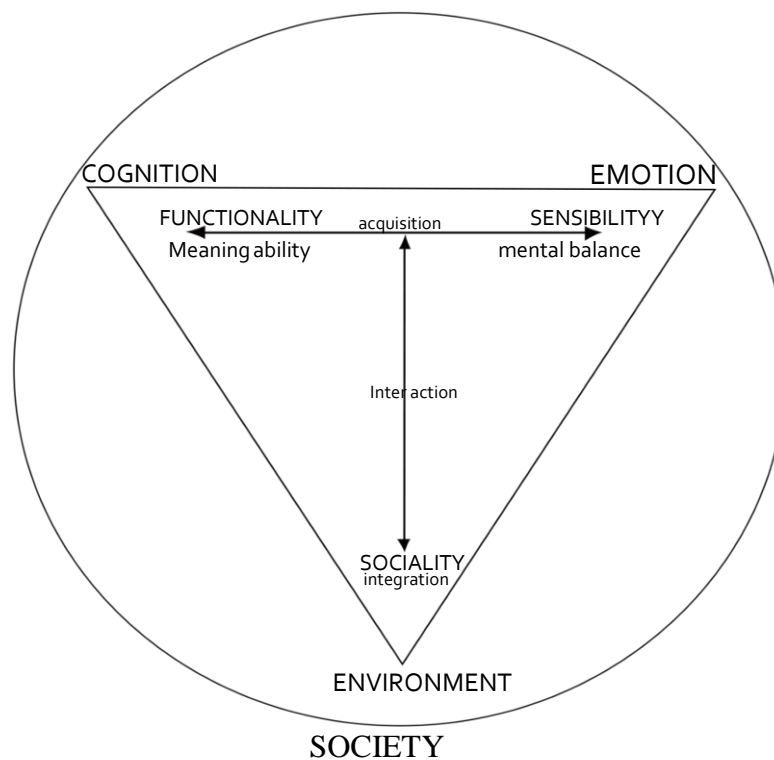


**Figure 4.2: The Fundamental processes of learning. Source: Illeris (2003, p.399)**

Figure 4.2 illustrates the two fundamental assumptions of learning: the internal and external interaction processes of learning. The first assumption, symbolized by the vertical double-headed arrow, is represented by the interaction of the individual learner (at the top) with the environment which is placed at the bottom as the basis of the interaction. The interaction is between the learner and his or her social, cultural and material environment. For instance, during the youth's developmental stages until the time of this current study, there was and still is an interaction between the youth and environment, which is the context which has contributed to them being categorized as NEETs.

The second assumption, which is represented by the horizontal double-headed arrows, is internal to the learner. This is the internal psychological process of acquisition and elaboration; the connection of new impulses as a result of learning (Illeris, 2003). According to this theory, in any learning process, the internal psychological process of acquisition and elaboration of knowledge and skills should interact with the learners' external processes of the social, cultural and material environment. Illeris (2003) argues that theorists tend to deal with the external and internal processes separately whilst in the contemporary and comprehensive learning theory he proposes that both processes should be active for any learning to take place.

The contemporary learning theory also focuses on three learning dimensions comprising of cognition, emotion and societal dimensions (Illeris, 2003; McClusky et al., 2007). These dimensions are illustrated in Figure 4. 3 in the next page:



**Figure 4.3: The processes and dimensions of learning.** Source: Illeris (2003, p. 400)

The core claim of Illeris's (2003) theory, as illustrated in Figure 4.3, is that all learning always involves three dimensions or spheres. The three dimensions model emphasizes that in any learning process, within society, there is the development of functionality, sensibility and sociality.

The theory's three dimensions model is illustrated above by an inverted triangle, two of whose points are cognition (knowledge and skills) – the individuals' functionality; and emotion (feelings and motivation) – the individuals' sensibility, which are at the top. The third point is the environment – the individuals' sociality, which is at the bottom.

The function of cognition refers to the learning content: the 'knowledge and motor learning which are both controlled by the nervous system' (McClusky, Illeris & Jarvis, 2007, cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 97). Within this dimension, the learners construct meaning and ability which enable them to deal with everyday changes. This meaning-making ability develops or results in an individual's functionality. The emotional or psychodynamic dimension secures mental balance and assists in developing personal sensibility. This dimension involves 'psychological energy, transmitted feelings, emotions, attitudes and motivations which both mobilize and, at the same time, are conditions that may be influenced and developed through

learning' (ibid, p. 97). Both the cognition and emotional functions are internal or psychological functions illustrated by the horizontal double-headed arrow.

To complete the triangle the cognition and emotional dimensions are then connected to the environment which is at the bottom. The environment is the external or social dimension in the learning process. This dimension helps to build up the sociability of the individual as learning happens through participation, communication or co-operation with other people in his or her environment. Therefore, according to Illeris (2003), all three dimensions function within a given society indicated by the placing of the entire learning process within a circle.

Illeris' (2003) theory also bases its concept of learning on the assumption that a learner is actively involved in constructing his or her own knowledge. It states that in constructing knowledge a learner activates four levels of learning which are different in scope and nature. These levels or types of learning activated in different situations and connections are cumulative, assimilative, accommodative and transformative learning (Illeris, 2003; McClusky, 2007). Cumulative or mechanical learning is most frequent during the first years of life and happens in special situations in the other stages. This is isolated information about something new that is not related to any other part. It is usually characterized by automation; recalled and applied information in similar learning contexts such as remembering personal identity numbers, telephone numbers and pin codes.

Assimilative learning or learning by addition is the common form of learning. Ordinarily, 'the design of many educational and school activities, are concentrated on and often only aimed at assimilative learning' (Illeris 2003, p. 403). Assimilative learning involves linking new to existing information. It takes place in all contexts of learning as one gradually develops one's cognitive, emotional or social capacities. This form of learning is characterized by the application of what is learnt within that context but is challenging when there is a need to apply or transfer what has been learnt across fields.

Accommodative or transcendent learning takes place when the learner finds difficulty in understanding or relating to new knowledge. For the learner to make meaning of what he finds interesting or important, there is a need for breaking down or reviewing what one already knows to accommodate the new information. This process can require mental energy as the individual may have to cross existing limitations to accept and understand something that is significantly new. This form of learning can be transferred to other relevant contexts as a result of internalization. Both assimilative and accommodative learning characterize every day, general and sound learning (Illeris, 2003).

Transformative or expansive learning is a very demanding process of learning which usually takes place as a result of a crises-like situation and often results in personality changes in order to move forward (Illeris, 2003; Merriam, 2007; Salva-Mut, 2015). According to Merriam et al. (2007), the contemporary and comprehensive learning theory can also be used to understand resistance to or rejection of learning as well as transformational learning. Transformational learning may include simultaneous changes in all the three dimensions of learning: cognitive, emotional and the environment (social context). This form of learning links the whole person (body, mind, self, life history) with her/his social context as the individual makes sense of life experiences through a process of 'using prior interpretation to construct new or revised interpretation of meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action' (Merriam, 2007).

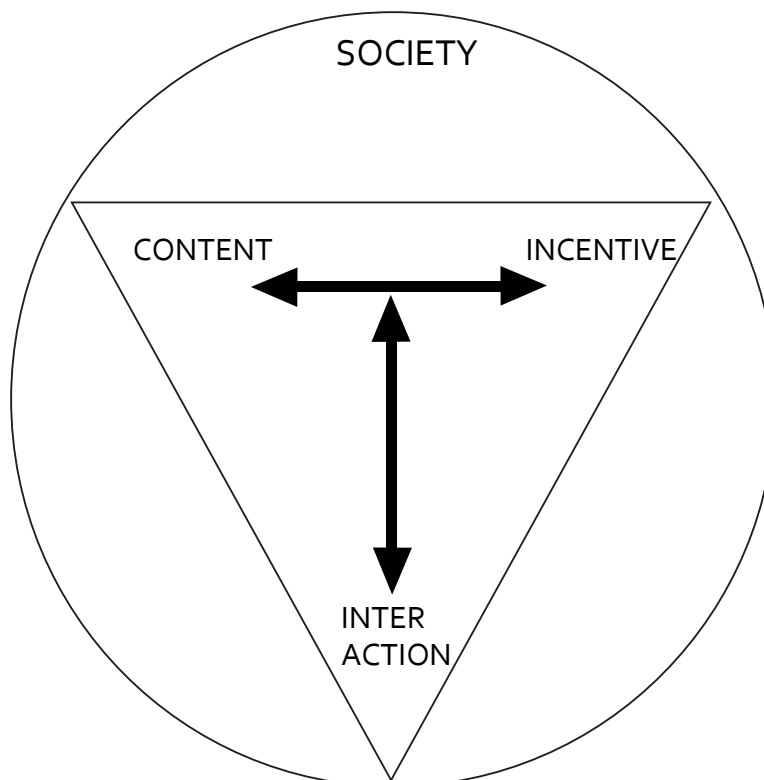
There are four main components of transformative learning: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse and action. Although the transformative learning process begins with experience, experience alone does not result in transformative learning. For Mezirow (1995), critical reflection is the key component of transformative learning (Merriam, 2007).

According to Merriam et al. (2007), thinking is different from critical reflection that results in transformative learning. Critical reflection is a cognitive process that involves examining underlying beliefs and assumptions that affect how we make sense of an experience (ibid.).

Merriam et al. (2007) point out the importance of social interaction as one of the conditions for critical reflection that result in transformative learning. Merriam et al. (2007, p. 134) further point out that 'clearer understanding is achieved through talking with others'. In my view this assertion agrees with the need for a shared understanding of what one believes in and a willingness to justify or supply reasons for that belief (Rule, 2004). Rule (2004) therefore argues for a need of a critical or dialogic space where individuals meet to reflect on their realities as they adapt, reject and adopt development strategies about their future. He presents conditions for effective dialogue as a need for a physical place to meet, freedom of communication amongst the people, an attitude of openness towards learning from one another, a negotiation of new sets of relationship where dominance (knowledge as a preserve of the few) is rejected, and reflection and consensus which may not necessarily mean there can be no conflicts. In my view, if some of these conditions are not met, effective learning, especially in adulthood, may not take place.

Apart from focusing on transformative learning the theory also attends to what happens when intended learning become distorted or fails to happen (Illeris, 2015). Illeris's (2015) focus on

why learning fails or become distorted led him to change the terms used from his initial model (Illeris, 2003) to the following illustration:



**Figure 4.4: The three dimensions of learning** Source: Illeris (2015, p. 30)

As illustrated in Figure 4.4 the term for ‘cognitive’ changed to ‘content’, ‘emotional’ to ‘incentive’ and ‘environment’ to ‘interactive’ dimensions (Illeris, 2015, p. 35). The content dimension refers to any kind of the individual’s capacity and ability such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, understandings, beliefs, behaviour and competencies. The incentive dimension is the mobilization of mental energy to drive the learning process and includes the individual’s motivations, emotions and volition. The interaction dimension refers to the process of initiation and supply that takes place between the learner and the environment during the learning process.

Illeris (2015) maintains that all three dimensions of learning are involved in learning at different ages but influenced by the learner’s pre-conditions, dispositions and by the general society. The theory is characterized by its focus on the different learning contexts: home, school, community and work. It also attends to learning at the different stages of the lifespan: childhood, youth, adulthood and mature adulthood. In all the different contexts and life

stages the learner's content acquisition process is viewed as always being subjectively influenced by the value placed on the learning incentive in response to the supply and demand from the environment.

Therefore, the theory suggests that when learning is distorted or fails to happen there is mislearning, learning defence or learning resistance. According to Illeris (2015), mislearning is associated with the content dimension and relates to content being misunderstood as a result of the individual's lack of concentration, non-recognition of prior learning or lack of clarity when communicating. Learning defence is associated with the incentive dimension and relates to the rejection or distortion of learning, resulting from a strategy adopted by the individual to deal with that particular situation (a defence mechanism). Learning resistance relates to the interaction dimension and is associated with the learner's rejection of values, preferences and understanding not in line with what is held personally (ibid., p. 30).

#### **4.4.3 A critique of the contemporary and comprehensive learning theory**

A critique of Illeris' theory is that it is a Western model which might not take into account African way of life. Although 'emotion' and 'incentive' are part of the model, the theory may have a negative impact on the marginalized members who are mostly from African society (Merriam et al., 2007). For instance, when the promised social change is not realized the marginalized view themselves and are often viewed, as useless. Participants in social action, within this theory, are made to feel responsible for the outcome even if it is not their fault or have lacked follow-up on the agreed activities. Therefore, rather than promoting collective action, this theory is essentially a model of individual learning. This may not account well for the spiritual dimensions of connectedness evident in African contexts and the importance of collective identities (Lekoko & Modise, 2011), such as those of NEETs in the Eswatini context.

#### **4.4.4 Relevance of the theory to the study**

There are three main reasons for bringing in the contemporary and comprehensive theory to understanding NEETs educational experiences. The first reason is the array of challenges or experiences likely to have been faced by NEETs during their developmental stages as presented in Chapter Two. These experiences include unstable family backgrounds, poverty, and being infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. These are the different contexts youths' have been exposed to since birth. Therefore, when understanding their educational experiences, one has to first understand how learning has been happening or not happening

during the developmental stages up to the time of this study. Illeris's focus on learning as interaction with the environment is useful in this regard.

The second reason for using the theory is that the literature review also revealed that the NEETs, as youths between the ages of 15 – 24, are at a transitional stage of the human development process from adolescence to adulthood, as per Erikson's (1972) human development stages. According to Erikson (1972), they are considered as young adults faced with critical adulthood tasks involving being independent from parents or guardians and making decisions necessary to carry out adult life. According to Havighurst (1972), adult life tasks decisions faced by the youth in this category include starting a family, choosing ones' religious affiliation and career, personal beliefs, values and attitudes as well as political affiliation, all of which might involve learning. This means a learning theory that focuses on how young adults learn is necessary not only to understand their experiences but also to develop educational interventions that would be relevant to them. Illeris's inclusion of types of learning related to important life changes, including accommodative and transformative learning, is pertinent here.

The third reason is that literature also revealed that there was a need to involve youths, in this case, NEETs, in educational decisions and policies about them. Youths have expressed that the principle of 'nothing about them without them' should be applied regarding interventions that concern them (O'Brien, 2014). So, I picked the contemporary and comprehensive learning theory as a theory that would assist in understanding learning that has contributed to youths becoming NEETs and how learning could be structured for them so that they contribute positively to their own development. According to Merriam et al. (2007), in this theory, learning is not just the acquisition of knowledge and skills but there is a link between learning, personal development, socialization and qualification.

#### **4.5 Social capital theory**

In this section I will first present the rationale for including social capital theory into understanding the NEETs educational experiences as well as their involvement in educational interventions about them. The rationale will be followed by a presentation on social capital theory, its concepts, origins and use in empirical studies.

#### **4.5.1 Defining social capital**

There are several definitions of social capital (John, 2009) originating from theorists who hold different concepts. Bourdieu (1986), for instance, is popular for bringing in other forms of capital: economic, cultural and symbolic. Although defined differently as a result of its several orientations, social capital can be viewed as the types of strengths of relationships shared by people, structures and organizations (Field, 2005; John 2009; Harpham et al. 2004). The theory also focuses on how the social structural relationships influence aspects of individuals' lives; one's education and social development are linked (John , 2009). The social structures relate to an individual's behaviour such as connectedness, networking, associational life and civic participation. The facilitating aspects of social capital concerns influencing actions such as attitudes, perceptions, support, trust, and social cohesion (Harpham et al., 2004).

Therefore, there is no single definition but literature points out that social capital includes all aspects like sociability, social networks, social connectedness, trust, reciprocity, community engagement, sense of identity and norms (Ottebjør, 2005). Viewing the emphasis on social relations between or amongst individuals, Kawachi (1999) supports the view that says social capital cannot be identified but can only be seen in action. He argues that social capital plays a crucial role in the functioning of the community, especially amongst the youth. The role it plays spans from the prevention of juvenile crime, promoting schooling and education in general, and the promotion of successful youth development; to the smooth functioning of democracy and the advancement of economic development.

#### **4.5.2 The origins of the social capital theory**

Many theorists identify Lyda J. Hanifan as the first user of the term 'social capital' in 1916 (John, 2009). For her, social capital referred to 'goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families' (Little & Shackel, 2014, p. 48). She used capital to emphasize her view of the importance of social structure among people with a business and economic view. A more detailed description was later provided by Woolcock and Narayan (2000). Moving beyond Hanifan's definition, they brought in the importance of community participation when they did research on promoting schooling amongst children. They emphasized the role played by social capital in education and schooling and defined it as

those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among the individuals and

families who make up a social unit....if [an individual comes] into contact with a neighbour, and they with other neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social capital which may bear a social potential sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community (Hanifan, 1996, p. 130, cited in Woolcock and Natayan, 2000, p. 228).

#### **4.5.3 Key concepts in the social capital theory**

The concepts of the social capital theory are associated with three theorists; James Coleman, Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986) and are presented below:

##### **James Coleman**

Coleman (1988) focuses on the structure of relationships within the family and neighbourhood and explains shared obligation, expectation, norms, and sanctions. His version of social capital proposes to use it alongside other resources such as skills and expertise (human capital), tools (physical capital) or money (economic capital) (John, 2009). Coleman's social capital focuses on the family and extends to the neighbourhood (John, 2009; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). In his view, social capital forms a resource for the person. Within families, he focuses on social capital between children and their parents. He argues that the presence of both parents determines social capital whilst for children with a single parent or orphaned, indicates a deficiency in social capital. So he views social capital as either supportive or restrictive of certain actions in an individual. For instance, he argues that parents can create or restrict the creation of human capital for their children and/or their generation. In this regard, human capital, such as a secure sense of self-identity, confidence in expressing opinions, being lifelong learners, and emotional intelligence, is dependent on the relationships within the family. His social capital encourages parents to communicate with children as opposed to just sharing facts. Communication within families develops social capital for the child that can be used for a livelihood.

The 'closure' concept is another concept of social capital according to which individuals and their actions should be viewed as interdependent rather than independent (Coleman, 1988). He argues that the tighter the interdependence, the stronger the social capital and he refers to that as the closure concept (Bassani, 2003). According to Coleman actions by individuals within a group should operate in a cohesive way so that the acquisition and the retention of social capital is facilitated, resulting in an increased density or closure of social capital. The

closure concept is mostly expected amongst family members and within schools, as well as community groups such as associations, church and other groups.

Social capital for Coleman also facilitates productivity through norms and sanctions, authority and social relations, which facilitates and controls social capital even outside the family. This includes the school setting among students, teachers, parents, between teachers and students, teachers and parents and between students and parents. In order to fully understand and assess social capital in the school environment, one must examine all relationships and interactions among parents, teachers and students (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). Increasing social capital can have beneficial outcomes such as better communication and greater academic achievements.

Coleman argues that there is a need for individuals to rationalize their engagement as purposeful and action-oriented in particular contexts not only for individuals' but also for social organizations' productive activity. He presents four aspects that are facilitated by social capital in organizations or society: shared obligations and expectations, information opportunities (networking), and norms and sanctions, as well as authority relations. In this way, Coleman's work on social capital brings in economics based on a functional and rational choice concept of the relations between people (John, 2009; Salva-Mut, 2015). His economic aspect sees the individual with self-interest 'shaped, redirected, constrained by the social context; norms, interpersonal trust, social networks and social organizations [which] are important in the functioning not only of the society but also of the economy' (Coleman 1988, p. 96). His functional aspect of social capital sees an individual within a social and cultural environment who is subject to norms, rules and obligations.

### **Robert Putnam**

Putnam (2000) focuses on the features of organizations such as trust, norms and networks that contribute and facilitate the improvement of societies. Social capital, according to Putnam, is 'defined as features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions' (Putnam, 2000, p.167). Unlike Coleman who focused on the family, Putnam saw social capital as going beyond family to community and society and as far as national networks (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). He referred to social capital as a 'collective asset' and a 'common good' of neighbourhoods and communities (Putnam, 2000, p. 168). He viewed the tools (physical capital and training and education (human capital) as resources to increase productivity, and that social contacts can affect the productivity of individuals and groups.

Putnam views social capital as glue to a community as he brings in two kinds of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding refers to inward looking within homogenous groups such as families, social or ethnic groups. Bridging refers to relations between different groups, which are outward looking networks. Both the bonding and bridging have powerful positive and negative effects, although Putnam suggests there are more negative effects of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). To illustrate his point, he argues that a well-connected individual in a poorly connected community is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected community. For me, Putnam's social capital means, for economic development, individuals need to be connected and live in a connected environment. This social capital is even more essential with the youth who need to access and stay in employment. Synergy occurs when governments cooperate with community networks and organizations in order to achieve a common goal.

### **Pierre Bourdieu**

Bourdieu's concept of social capital offers a critique of hierarchy, power and social inequality (Bourdieu, 1986). Whilst Coleman focuses on social capital within family, social and ethnic groups and Putnam takes Coleman's social capital further to the nation, Bourdieu asks the questions, who is this social capital for and what type of social capital does the individual need? (John, 2009). Bourdieu (1999) uses social capital to explain the cold realities of social inequality and how these are reproduced so that the dominant classes retain their position (Gauntlet, 2011).

Bourdieu uses social capital as a tool for analysing and critiquing hierarchical power and inequalities in societies (Bourdieu 1999, cited in John, 2009). Like Coleman (1988), he argues that social capital cannot be explained on its own but must be considered together with cultural capital. He states that the dominant class in society tends to control the means of production which also includes educational provision. The capitalist ideology supports the control of the acquisition of cultural capital to only a few through pedagogic processes in educational institutions. Gaining cultural capital to supplement the accumulation of economic capital circulates within the dominant class. Therefore, Bourdieu uses social capital to analyse individuals' range of networks that can be mobilized and also the amount of capital (economic, cultural and symbolic) each member brings to the network.

Bourdieu's social capital also emphasizes that having relationships only is not enough but individuals need to understand how these networks work, can be maintained and utilized over time (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). They must be constructed and skilfully maintained in order

for the actor to utilize their resources. Bourdieu (1977) further describes cultural capital as cultural beliefs, traditions and standards of behaviour that promote success and accomplishments in life (ibid. p. 2). Cultural capital is passed from generation to generation through parents spending economic resources on culturally valued items such as books, theatre and cultural artefacts. Bourdieu's interest is in how cultural and economic forms of capital are used or work together to reproduce social inequalities.

#### **4.5.4 Use of social capital theory in related studies**

In this section I present Korzh's (2013) in-depth study on vocational education using two cases of orphanages in urban and rural settings.

Korzh (2013) used Bourdieu's conception of social capital to understand the role of education in a study focusing on vocational schools and universities in Ukraine (Korzh, 2013). In this study an in-depth examination of two cases of orphanages in urban and rural settings was undertaken by tracking orphans who studied in vocational schools and universities. The aim was to understand the role of social capital in accessing employment. This understanding was conceptualized through Bourdieu's forms of capital: economic, cultural and social capital. Economic capital was used to understand the socio-economic inequalities that children with no parental care experienced when pursuing post-secondary education and ultimately entering the world of work. Cultural and social capital were used in the analysis of the pre-requisites to enter higher education and employment for the Ukrainian graduates. The research methodologies were observation and interviews of students, teachers and caretakers, as well as administrators.

The findings were that the Ukrainian orphans escaped challenges in their distressed households such as hunger, domestic violence, abuse and psychological sufferings, to face various traumas in orphanages mainly due to lack of economic capital. They faced the effects of neoliberalism, which was prevalent during this era, and which resulted in the orphanages being privatized. The absence of state control in the orphanages affected the quality of secondary education. The state did not have an oversight role on the education being provided such that the curriculum offered was inferior, the curriculum was not challenging and learners could not acquire the relevant qualifications for post-secondary education. The orphans also lacked academic guidance and support to prepare them for post-secondary education. Due to a lack of qualifications, access to higher education was very limited for these orphans, even though higher education was paid for by the state. Therefore, most orphans were tracked into vocational schools that were also viewed as a dead end for the under-privileged during this

neoliberal era. Vocational qualifications, for the few who accessed it, only led to a subsistence level of employment and did not take its graduates out of poverty. In essence, the majority of orphans remained on the margins of society, lacking qualifications (cultural capital) for higher education and/or social connections (social capital) for employment.

Korzh (2013) revealed that social capital was the gatekeeper to both quality education and decent employment in the Ukraine. The orphans who were deprived of parental care subsequently experienced socio-economic inequality even before entering education. For them, the lack of parental support (social capital) was the beginning of a non-normative trajectory to the world of work. They lacked the resources needed to access quality education so that they could acquire the right qualifications for higher education (cultural capital) and ultimately lucrative employment. Those few orphans who managed to receive the qualifications struggled in a labour market stratified by unequal access to social capital or personal connections. Therefore, the majority of orphans in the Ukraine remain on the margins of society due to lack of employment. Korzh (2013) noted a need for an in-depth understanding on how education can assist orphans in the Ukraine. Such an understanding could be enriched by involving the orphans themselves. She noted that most research sidelined their voices or perceptions.

#### **4.5.5 Critique of social capital**

Critiques of the social capital theory argue that the stretching and broadening of the theory to cover many different types of relationships deepens the difficulty in measuring social capital (Ottebjør, 2005). Whilst some researchers are in support of the comprehensive approach, others feel it should be narrowed down so as to have focus.

Fukuyama (1999) argues that, whilst social capital, particularly Coleman's closure concept, may be positive, it may also have a negative application. This argument particularly refers to gangsters or mafia whose social capital density (closure concept) promotes and sustains the unacceptable behaviour. Social capital, particularly the closure concept, tends to exclude outsiders, promote excess claims on group members, and restrict individual freedom. The impact of social capital on individuals with social deviance or gangsters is the inability to leave the group even if one wants to.

Schaefer-McDaniel (2004) argues that researchers also tend to neglect incorporating young people's perceptions of their relationships and their environment, but collect information (about the young people) from parents and teachers. He points out that it is a methodological and theoretical error to assume that parents or teachers can present the researcher with

accurate perceptions of student or child social networks and environmental perceptions. He therefore calls for research methodologies that would include the participants' perspective so as to know the value of social capital, particularly for young people.

#### **4.5.6 Relevance of social capital theory in the study**

The need for the social capital theory came about for several reasons. The literature review revealed that some of the NEETs experiences included a lack of support from home, school and community. Some NEETs were from unstable families, have experienced a life of poverty, lacked academic qualifications for tertiary entrance, and those with skills, knowledge and/or qualification could not access or keep their employment because they were not socially connected (Marsh, 2009). To me, it shows that it is important to understand the relationships that youth have developed and how those relationships, which are linked to their social capital, have or have not assisted the youth to be the best they can be. Understanding such relationships will also assist in strategizing on how best interventions on issues relating to NEETs could be developed.

The study used the concepts of the social capital theory as explained by Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu who are defined as the fathers of the theory (Baron, 2000; John, 2009; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). It has been pointed out earlier that Coleman (1988) focuses on the structure of relationships within the family and neighbourhood and explains shared obligation, expectation, norms, and sanctions. For the NEETs those concepts are important in understanding how the existence or non-existence of parents has affected who they are.

It has also been mentioned, earlier, that Putnam (2000) focuses on the features of organizations such as trust, norms and networks that contribute and facilitate the improvement of societies. He extends his focus from the family and neighbourhood to include the society at large. He identifies two elements of social capital: bonding and bridging. Putnam's (2000) concepts can be used to explain youths' experiences with regard to fulfilment and non-fulfilment of their expectations of reciprocal relationships with their close families (bonding) and with other community members (bridging).

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital offers a critique of hierarchy, power and social inequality. It brings in other forms of social capital to question the social positioning of an individual. In this study Bourdieu's (1986) concept is used to understand how the youth's lived educational experiences landed them in the position they have found themselves in. It also assists in understanding how education (cultural capital) can be instrumental in maintaining societal categories such as the elites and the illiterates or less educated.

According to Bourdieu's (1986) concept social capital consists of two dimensions: one; social networks, two; connections/relationships and sociability.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

To understand an individual's life there is need to understand the history and the environment that individual has lived in. Premised within the understanding that learning happens from birth to death, there was need to understand the different contexts of the out-of-school youths and how the experiences in these contexts and lifespan have contributed in them becoming NEETs. It is also argued that an individual acquire skills, knowledge and attitude in these contexts or learning institutions. There is therefore a need to understand how learning and or mislearning in these contexts has happened in the different life stages the out-of-school youths have gone through. It was also important to understand, in their own perspective, how learning can be promoted and the barriers to learning can be reduced. Lastly there is need to understand the connectedness of the different contexts or institutions and their contribution to effective learning.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented three theories used in this study to understand the youths' educational experiences from their perspective. In this chapter I present literature on what underpinned the methods and approach adopted in the study. In the first section I use literature to explore research paradigms or world views. The section is concluded with a justification for situating the study within the interpretivist paradigm. I then present data sources. The study is qualitatively orientated so I used the narrative inquiry research approach and the life history research design in the in-depth understanding of youth's educational experiences. The photo voice, interviews, journal writing and focus group discussion research methods were adopted. For each method used, I present literature to support its contribution or advantages as well as its disadvantages in research. I concluded the section on data with presenting data analysis process. The final section of the chapter presents my position as the principal researcher, trustworthiness of the study, ethical consideration and the limitations of the study.

Before the presentation on the research paradigms I bring to the fore the aim and the research questions this study is addressing.

##### **5.1.1 The aim of the study**

The aim of the study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the educational needs of the youth who are not in education, employment or training. The study attempted to get an inside view of their educational needs from the youths' perspectives.

##### **5.1.2 Research questions**

- i) What are the educational experiences and attitudes of the out-of-school youth in Eswatini?
- ii) How have the out-of-school youth's educational experiences and attitudes contributed in them being NEETs?
- iii) How and what do the youth contribute as co-researchers through the process of conducting this research?

## **5.2 Research paradigm**

In educational research, the four commonly used research paradigms are positivism, post-positivism, critical realism, pragmatism and interpretivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this section, I first present an overview on how paradigms respond to questions relating to ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology in a research study. I then discuss why I situated the study within the interpretivist paradigm. As I discuss this, I also explain how the interpretivist paradigm has influenced my choice of research design, data collection methods and analysis of the findings.

### **5.2.1 What is a research paradigm?**

Paradigms ‘represent a world view that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual’s place in it, the range of possible relationships in that world and its parts’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107). Whilst in research Guba and Lincoln’s definition is used as a standard reference (John, 2009), Wahyuni (2012, p. 69) cites Jonker and Pennink (2010) who bring in specifics as they define research paradigms ‘as a set of fundamental assumptions and beliefs as to how the world is perceived which then serves as a thinking framework that guides the behaviour of the researcher’. These definitions indicate that research paradigms are about the philosophical framework of the research. They inform the research practice.

In particular, literature presents research paradigms as human constructions responding to questions on ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Wahyuni, 2012). These dimensions are interconnected in that an answer given to any one of them affects the answer to the other component. Ontology refers to how being and reality are perceived, the form and nature of what can be known (Wahyuni, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Whilst reality can be perceived as external, objective and independent of the researcher or social actors, other paradigms perceive reality as subjective, socially constructed, multiple and something that can change.

Epistemological questions respond to what can be viewed as valid and acceptable knowledge which is linked to the understanding of, or belief in, the way knowledge should be generated and used (ibid.). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.108), ‘It is the relationship between the knower, would-be knower and what can be known’. The answer to the epistemological question is dependent on the response to the ontological question on how reality is perceived. The axiological question is concerned with issues of ethics; the roles and values held by the researcher on what is being studied. The methodological question involves how the researcher or would-be knower would go about finding out what he or she believes is reality or can be

known. The way this would be found out cannot be divorced from the responses to the ontological and epistemological questions.

I, agree with Wahyuni (2012) that it is imperative to question the paradigm that the researcher has applied in a research study in order to understand how the study has been framed. The way the researcher views the world has a bearing on how she or he would go about understanding the phenomenon (Morgan, 2007). Paradigms assist in understanding the methods of data collection and analysis adopted by the researcher and point to the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research.

Research paradigms commonly discussed in literature include positivism, post positivism, critical realism, interpretivism and pragmatism (Wahyuni, 2012; Teddlie, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; John, 2009). John (2009) argues that there is no one paradigm that can be elevated over another. Each paradigm is dependent on the researcher's persuasiveness and how it is used, rather than its proof. I situated this research within the interpretivist paradigm and the rationale for using that world view follows below.

### **5.2.2 The Interpretivist paradigm**

Within the interpretivist paradigm, there is a belief that the nature of reality is socially constructed (Wahyuni, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivists critique the positivist and post-positivist views in that they believe that reality is multiple, subjective and may change rather than being external, objective and absolute. Ontologically the interpretivists assume that reality is 'constructed inter-subjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially' (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, p.1). The interpretivist's focus, 'is on the details of the situation, the reality behind the details, subjective meanings and motivating actions' (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70), rather than on scientific methods proposed by positivism and post-positivism. As opposed to other paradigms, interpretivism is about 'understanding people's interpretation of their own social reality in a given situation; how they feel, live and act' (Chilisa & Preece, 2005, p. 183). This interpretivist study thus focuses on understanding youths' lives, the way they have acted, felt and lived through their developmental stages, in other words, within their own context, through their own perspectives.

Epistemologically, interpretivists believe that knowledge is subjective and affected by context, history, power and relations as opposed to being acquired only through scientific methodologies as proposed by positivists. According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006, p.1), 'we cannot separate ourselves from what we know'; the researcher and what is researched are

‘linked such that who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others and the world’. For this study, therefore, the researcher, the youths and their experiences cannot be separated. What is rendered as truth is dependent on the researcher’s values as negotiated through dialogue with the researched. Knowledge in this paradigm is created or is what emerges through dialogue, as conflicting interpretations are negotiated with the subjects or research participants. The emphasis is on the context-specific knowledge rather than generalizable propositions.

The negotiation process means that the interpretivist paradigm is value-laden as the researcher becomes part of what is being researched. The negotiation process locates interpretation of what is true within a particular context of time and place, and may be reinterpreted and negotiated differently in other contexts. Therefore, epistemological considerations within the interpretivist paradigm such as culture, social setting, and relationships are very important. I found the interpretivist paradigm especially relevant to understanding from the different settings in Eswatini, the youths’ educational experiences within their space, time and environment.

Methodologically, interpretivists usually use qualitative or naturalistic methods to ensure the dialogue or negotiation of truth between the researcher and the researched is ‘locally and specifically constructed’ (Andrade, 2009, p. 43). This study used narrative inquiry as a research approach to data collection and analysis (Pinnegar, 2012). I analysed the youths’ life stories and used these stories to generate themes. In the section below, I discuss narrative inquiry and its justification for use in this study.

It should be noted though, that some statistical data were used, which may link to an argument for situating the study within the pragmatist paradigm, which is often associated with mixed methods research. In this study, however, the numbers were only used to explain and/or emphasize relationships among themes as they emerged from the narratives of the youth’s experiences (Pinnegar, 2012). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 317) argue that, when conducting research that would bring about social change and influence social policy, the most persuasive policy research should include both of these elements - numbers and narratives. Using numbers to define the scope and patterns of the problem and narratives to demonstrate how the problem impacts on daily life provides empathetic understanding. Therefore, given that the study sought an in-depth understanding of the youths’ educational experiences through the youths’ eyes, the narrative enquiry approach and the life history design were adopted.

### 5.3 Data sources

In this section, I first present the sources of data used in the research. The data sources were the youth participants, the co-researchers; their words and photographs, and the completed journal entries. I then present the justification for the qualitative orientation and the research methods used which are photo voice, survey interviews, journal writing and focus group discussion. Finally, I present the data collection tools which include the pictures, interview questionnaire, focus group schedule, cameras, and journal texts used to make entries.

#### 5.3.1 Data sources and research methods

The data sources that were used in this research were the co-researchers and youth participants.

#### The co-researchers' profiles

The study engaged five out-of-school youths as co-researchers. However, one of the initial five co-researchers (Makhosi) could not finish the whole process and had to be replaced by Nomsa. Makhosi was only involved in the photo voice method. She then dropped out after sharing her life story. Nomsa started participating when the co-researchers reviewed the questionnaire, interviewed the participants and shared their insights. The profiles of all six co-researchers are presented below.

**Table 5.1: Co-researchers' characteristics**

Name	Sex	Age	Ed. level	Geographical Region	Parent / Guardian	Family livelihood	Co-researcher's engagement during study	Personal aspiration	Post-study engagement
Mfanzile	M	22	O' Level	Lubombo (rural)	Both parents	Farming	Soccer and deejay	Tertiary education	Deejaying
Thokozile	F	20	O' Level	Hhohho (urban)	Guardian other	Pension	Volunteering	Tertiary education	Tertiary studies
Nomsa <sup>14</sup>	F	24	Tertiary education	Manzini (urban)	Mother	Farming	Volunteering	Employment	Volunteering
Lunga	M	22	Tertiary education	Shiselweni (rural)	Self	Piggery project	Piggery project	Training in piggery project	Piggery project
Sibongile	F	22	O' Level	Lubombo (rural)	Mother	Small vending business	None	Training, education	Assisting mother with income generating
Makhosi	F	21	O' Level	Shiselweni (rural)	Brother	Govt & Nurse, Piggery project	Piggery project	Restarting Form four	Back to formal school

<sup>14</sup> Nomsa replaced Makhosi as a co-researcher. Makhosi participated up to the presentation of their life stories and Nomsa participated in the focus group discussions and interviewing the research participants.

Table 5.1 shows the co-researchers' characteristics. The selection criteria for co-researchers were based on age, geographical location, sex and educational level. Co-researchers with a minimum educational level of Form V or Eswatini General Certificate in Secondary Education (EGCSE) were selected because of the need for them to capture concepts on research methodologies during training sessions such as photo voice and interviewing skills. From my experience in working with the out-of-school youth someone with a lower level of education might find difficulties with this. The targeted youth were aged between 15 and 24, represented rural, urban and semi-urban areas as well as both sexes as two of them were males and three were females. The co-researchers had to have the same characteristics as the research participants particularly in terms of social context, urban or rural, so that the research participants could identify with them. The study was also gender sensitive so as to have a balance in the characteristics of out-of-school youth. It was not the aim of the study to focus on a particular gender but just on out-of-school youth in general.

The co-researchers' employment and/or livelihood status varied. Nomsa was looking for a job, whilst Lunga, although he started tertiary education, could not finish due to financial challenges. So he was engaged in an income generating activity at the time of the study. The other three were either in the process of applying for tertiary studies (Thokozile) or trying other means of livelihood. Mfanzile wanted to restart high school education as his subject choices did not allow him access to tertiary training. Sbongile, on the other hand, was still not sure of what to do with her life. However, towards the end of the study, she reported that she had joined her mother in her income generating activity.

Initially I had planned to purposively identify ten youths as co-researchers. The plan was that these ten co-researchers would then identify ten research participants with each of whom they would conduct oral interviews. However, due to the research time frame, financial constraints and the range of methods used, I then reduced the number of co-researchers to five but maintained the number of research participants for each co-researcher as ten.

The five co-researchers were drawn from the four geographical regions of the country. There was representation from the urban setting, peri-urban as well as rural areas. I used my connections as a professional, as a member of a church denomination and as a Liswati woman to identify the co-researchers. After explaining my research objectives and target populations, it was easy for my connections to identify the co-researchers from these different geographical contexts. The ease of identifying a co-researcher fitting the characteristics was evident when I had to replace one co-researcher who had relocated. All my connections had

someone I could replace her with; however, I was guided by the gender of the previous researcher.

The co-researchers used the snowballing and convenience sampling techniques to identify the ten research participants for oral interviews. Snowball sampling, is a form of link tracing network, where research participants are used to identify other participants of the same kind (Gile, 2010). Unlike convenience sampling, literature presents snowballing as normally used for hard-to-track populations (Streeton, 2004). The co-researchers combined both sampling methods for ease of identifying research participants within their contexts. Each co-researcher conducted the interviews in their respective areas. Therefore, the co-researchers first interviewed the ones they knew, who then helped them to identify other participants. They also interviewed NEETs whom it was convenient for them to interview in terms of time, distance and gender representation.

### **5.3.2 Qualitative orientation**

This study is situated within the qualitative orientation of conducting a research. The qualitative orientation accommodates shift from a view of knowledge that is absolute and objective to that which is socially constructed and accommodative of the researcher's view; the co-researchers and research participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Wahyuni, 2012). In the following section I present how literature defines co-researching. The discussion also presents literature on how co-researching has been used in qualitative studies. I finalize the section with how youths who are also not in education, employment or training were used as co-researchers in this study.

Using the qualitative orientation to do research, especially within the interpretivist paradigm, and adopting the life history design, meant focusing more on the 'emic' perspective (insider-participant) as a lens for synthesizing and interpreting study findings (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012). Understanding 'the complex world of human experiences and behaviour from the point of view of those involved in the situation of interest' is the goal of qualitative orientation to research (Krauss, 2005, p. 764). In the qualitative orientation, as pointed out earlier, the researcher and the researched construct knowledge together as opposed to the researcher being an expert in knowledge about others. For an in-depth understanding, a flexible research design and methods of data collection and analysis are used by the researcher. The flexible approaches help the researcher to view the phenomena through the participants' eyes and so to generate subjective as opposed to objective interpretations. In the qualitative research orientation, researchers need to record their own biases, feelings and

thoughts and to state them explicitly in their report otherwise analysis could be attributed to the participants' point of view. This study focused on how the youth participants made sense of their own lives, from the inside. In other words, it 'voiced out', allowing what is inside of them to come out. Co-researching was one of the methods used to promote what was inside the youths to come out.

### **Youth as co-researchers**

Literature states that co-researching is a participatory method within the qualitative orientation where the people affected by the topic are involved in the study (Chappell, 2013; Shelagh, Willows & Jardine, 2015; Smith, 2010). More research studies, after the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), have engaged children, youth and people living with disabilities (O'Brien, 2014; Chappell et al., 2014). This form of engagement reflects a shift from a view of research that ignores such groups and makes decisions for them, to a view that recognizes them as subjects rather than objects of research. In this view they are recognized as capable and competent to make decisions and to appropriate aspects of their culture through talking and interaction with others.

According to Hayes (2012), using co-researchers is like getting a handle on the outsider-insider debate by seeking and partnering with a member of the group being studied. Co-researching provides the outsider (researcher) and the insider (participant) a perspective on understanding a phenomenon (Bergold & Thomas 2012; Smith, 2010). As 'knowers or experts in their own lives, who in turn are able to contribute knowledge', people affected by the topic are the best resource for what they feel and also for how it can be addressed (Chappell, Rule, Dlamini & Nkala, 2014, p. 5). Therefore, involvement of co-researchers is a move from the researcher manipulating participants to understanding the phenomenon from the participants' view with regard to their experiences and matters affecting them (Shelagh et al., 2015).

Co-researching also responds to the argument 'nothing about us without us' (Marsh, 2009; O'Brien, 2014). Co-researching addresses those who have been silenced as a result of hierarchical power relations (Brown, 2010; Chappell et al., 2014). Literature states that co-researching can be used to carry out research among ordinary citizens, individuals with poor socio-economic backgrounds and, in particular, the youth (Bastien & Holmardottir, 2015). In this study co-researching has been used as 'youth researching youth' and as 'peer' researching (Bastien & Holmardottir, 2015, p. 164). Youths with the same NEETs characteristics were

used to get an in-depth understanding of their own peer group. Co-researchers through participatory research methods brought in their voices as well as those of the research participants to generate an in-depth understanding of NEETs' educational experiences.

### **Use of co-researchers in research studies**

Other researchers have adopted co-researching as a participatory research method. In this section, I present studies conducted by Smith (2010) and Shelager, Bergold and Thomas (2012) as relevant examples. In the presentation, I summarize their focus and findings. I will then conclude the section by presenting the weaknesses cited by these researchers in the use of co-researching.

Smith (2010) reports on the experiences of a project that worked with young homeless people as co-researchers in four countries: the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Portugal and the Czech Republic. The co-researchers were recruited and trained, and then conducted interviews on people like them. Several points were highlighted by the co-researchers on the co-researching and their general experiences of the study. They noted that it was helpful that the co-researchers were at the same level as the interviewees in terms of age, background and knowledge. For instance, it was an ice breaker between the co-researchers and interviewees when the co-researchers shared that they had also been homeless or were still homeless. The interviewees also felt less ashamed to tell their own stories, as they felt that there was a more equal relationship between them and the co-researcher. They even felt free to use a language that was better understood by people of their own kind. In addition, the co-researchers were able to reach out more easily to diverse youth participants who were like them, using the 'snowball effect', than it would have been for an outsider (ibid., p. 20). The young people also viewed themselves as better judges of truthfulness and honesty than the academic researcher, as people from within.

Smith (2010) found co-researching to be an empowering process as well, for both the interviewee and the interviewer. The researcher first trained the co-researchers in the interview process. The training was empowering to the co-researchers so that they were then able to share their opinion on the questionnaire and responses from the respondents. It was found as well that the interaction between trainer and co-researcher was a mixture of fun and formal matters.

Shelagh (2015) also involved children as research partners (co-researchers) to examine their contributions to the research process, and their role in knowledge co-generation and the

dissemination of information. She used photo voice to investigate the children's food-related lived experiences. This was a community-based participatory research study. The process involved training the co-researchers who were referred to as research partners. The co-researchers contributed to some aspects of the research design, conducted interviews with Grades 3 and 4 photo voice participants, participated in data analysis and in the development of culturally relevant photobooks. The results were that the co-researchers were able to incorporate culturally appropriate strategies as they interviewed participants, adopted relevant conversational approaches, built rapport by articulating personal and cultural connections, and engaged in mentoring and health promotion as they interviewed participants.

In conclusion, literature points out that the advantages of co-researching include bringing in the insider's view, the facilitation of knowledge co-generation and sharing, and the creation of a dialogic space for critical reflection and the enhancement of research skills (Bergold, 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Shelagh et al., 2015; Smith, 2010). According to Lapan et al., (2012), co-researching brings in the 'emic' perspective (insider- participant) as a lens for synthesizing and interpreting study findings. According to Shelagh et al. (2015), co-researching allows people who share the same kind of community, cultural knowledge, sometimes even geographical areas and environments, to reflect on issues that concern them. The sharing was, in this instance, facilitated by a person who shared the same characteristics as the research participants.

With regard to knowledge co-generation and sharing, the literature point out that co-researching provides the opportunity for both the researcher and the co-researcher to generate knowledge. In other words, there is partnership and ownership of the generated knowledge (Shelagh et al., 2015; Smith, 2010). According to Shelagh et al. (2015), building knowledge that is relevant and credible both within and outside of their communities is the contribution of co-researching to the research processes. The involvement of research assistants in Shelagh et al.'s (2015) study, for instance, resulted in the co-development of a culturally relevant photobook communicating health promotion messages. The photobook was a result of co-constructed meaning through their discussion of research findings and implications.

Co-researching also creates a dialogic space for critical reflection (Shelagh et al., 2015; Bergold 2012). According to Lapan et al., (2012), co-researching enables the establishment of rapport between the researcher and the researched. During the research process, relationships that promoted dialogues and narrowed intergenerational gaps between researcher and co-

researchers were established. According to the findings, in Lapan's (2011) study, as the sessions moved from logistical challenges to personal sharing, familiarity between the researcher and participant increased. This resulted in a dialogic space being created. The dialogic space promoted focus on critical reflection encouraged collaborative ways of thinking, and fostered creativity and a sense of collectiveness between co-researchers and participants.

Another advantage of co-researching cited by literature is the enhancement of interview strategies (Bastien & Holmardottir, 2015; Shelagh et al., 2015). According to Shelagh et al. (2015), co-researching provides an opportunity for the co-researcher to demonstrate leadership skills, a belief in their involvement and the realization that their contribution to the community is important. As the co-researchers put their realization into practice, their interviewing strategies are enhanced. They tend to encourage research participants to respond by employing techniques that emphasize a conversational two-way exchange. According to Bastien and Holmardottir (2015, p. 176), research becomes not only about the production of original ideas and new knowledge but about systematically extending one's current horizons in terms of increasing knowledge and skills in some task, goal or aspiration.

Co-researching, like all approaches, has its weaknesses (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Smith 2010). Smith (2010), for instance, points out the difficulty faced by co-researchers in dealing with emotional issues raised by their life stories and/or those of the interviewees. To address this challenge, we had a session on counselling during our training. The co-researchers did point out also that they had to employ their counselling skills during the interviews. To address the emotional issues, I also invited a social worker to all the discussions that we had.

Another potential weakness is the inexperience of the co-researchers. Even after training, they do not have the expertise of an experienced researcher and may make mistakes. In addition, the co-researchers have their own biases which might influence how they collect and understand data. The co-researchers' biases were addressed during the training and piloting of the interview process where there was modelling, observations and support. The support was also extended to the data collection period where a line of communication between the co-researchers and the researcher was provided through the provision of airtime.

## **5.4 The narrative approach to research**

To focus on understanding the youths' experiences from their perspectives, I used a narrative inquiry approach which is within the qualitative orientation to research (Pinnegar, 2012). In this section after first presenting the narrative inquiry approach, I then present justification for its use. To conclude the section, I present life stories as an additional and complementary narrative approach used in this study.

Literature presents narrative inquiry as arising from an old practice of how human beings have lived and told stories about their lives for as long as they could talk (Clandinin, 2012). The use of narrative inquiry was traced to medicine (positivism paradigm) as a response to ethical scandals but located its roots and recognition as an emerging approach in the field of social research (ibid.). 'Narrative inquiry begins with lived and told experiences which are then used as both a method and a phenomenon of study' (Pinnegar, 2012, p. 3). Human beings think, perceive and understand the meaning of their lived experiences in a narrative structure which is different from scientific knowing. This narrative way of thinking about lived experiences and the narrative methodologies which are used to understand the experiences, together make up a new approach to research.

In contrast to a quantitative orientation to research which rests mainly within the positivist paradigm, narrative inquiry is within the qualitative orientation for understanding human actions (Pinnegar, 2012). Within the qualitative orientation, narrative inquiry promotes 'multiple ways of knowing and studying the world and the interactions of people' (Clandinin, 2007, p. 7). The method of inquiry always has experience as lived and told stories as its starting points. According to Clandinin (2012), narrative inquiry is a way of honouring participants and their lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding. She cites Dewey's (1975) notion of experience as 'a notion of an expressible of all which is expressed, not because it is so remote or transcendent but because it is so immediately engrossing and a matter of fact' (ibid. p. 5). One of the ways of qualitative knowing entails making sense and interpreting knowledge as narrated or told by the researched in their own context and perspective - a narrative inquiry.

According to Dhunpath and Samuel (2009, p. xii), narrative inquiry is not simply about telling or listening to tales about individuals lives; life history design 'aims to explore, analyse and interpret the gaps and silences, biases and exaggerations of the teller of the tales'. Narrative inquiry involves the reconstruction of a person's experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu (Pinnegar, 2012, p. 4). Enquiry aims not to generate an exclusively

faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower but to generate new relations between a human being and the environment, her life, community and the world (Clandinin, 2012).

#### **5.4.1 Rationale for narrative inquiry**

The study investigates the lived educational experiences of NEETs. Narrative inquiry provides for those who were previously silenced and regarded as irrelevant and unavailable for theorizing to tell, interpret or find meaning in stories (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). Engaging the disadvantaged in research requires a move from viewing them as objects within the positivist paradigm to subjects as proposed by the interpretivist paradigm and the adoption of the qualitative orientation to research. According to Pinnegar (2012), this move, which narrative inquiry embraces, includes factors such as the relationship between the researcher and the participants, the use of words versus the use of numbers as data, a change from focusing on the general and universal towards the local and specific and, lastly, widening the acceptance of alternative epistemologies and ‘simultaneously embrace narratives as a method for research and narrative as the phenomenon of study; both stories and humans are continuously visible in the study’(ibid. p. 6).

In narrative inquiry, both the researcher and the researched are learners in the research process. Instead of being viewed and referred to as ‘Others’ or ‘Subaltern’, the people on the margins such as the poor, youth, disabled and under-privileged, can speak and be listened to (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 20). In this study, narrative inquiry provides that ‘dialogic space’ for youths to share their educational experiences with the researcher without feeling like the ‘other’ (Rule, 2015).

The relationship between researcher and researched also entails a move from viewing the researched as decontextualized, to recognizing their context (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). Clandinin (2012) states that experiences as lived and told, have a social dimension. Baddeley and Singer (2002) support the importance of the social dimension as they extend Erikson’s (1959) work on identity and argue that more understanding is gained by studying how individuals move through crises towards self-development over time. They argue that people tend to create their life stories from cultural myths, images, symbols as well as influences from settings such as family, community and media. The social dimension of experiences also enacts narrative inquiries’ distinctive feature of focusing on the youths’ specific contexts and specific societal influences at their different developmental stages rather than just being

general. The purpose was not to generalize the findings but to understand their experiences within their specific contexts of family, school, community and place of work.

Narrative inquiry recognizes ‘multiple ways of knowing and studying the world and the interactions of people’ (Pinnegar, 2012, p. 6). This recognition not only widens the acceptance of alternative epistemologies but also embraces narratives as a method for research and narrative as the phenomenon of study. In narrative inquiry, both stories and humans are continuously visible in the study. In this study, the youths; referred to as NEETs are the human beings under study and their experiences told in their own voices are the phenomena. Such an approach also responds to methodological questions such as: Who owns the story? Who can tell it? Who can change? What do stories do to us? The ‘us’ here, in the context of this study, refers to both the policy developers and the youths.

#### **5.4.2 Life history**

This study used life histories as told by youths and transcribed into text to obtain an in-depth understanding of the youths’ educational experiences within the context of their lives. Literature indicates that life history, life story and biography are designs or research styles that can be used within a narrative inquiry approach to research (Clandinin, 2012; Sikes, 2006). In this section, I present the significance of a life history in this study and how its limitations were addressed.

Life history allows the researcher and the researched to carefully consider and articulate the researched phenomenon in a respectful manner (Angen, 2000). Angen (2000) points out that, during the dialogue on the narratives of the life histories, the awareness of choices and interpretations previously held is raised and critically reflected upon. This results in a written account of the reflections and planned actions that may then be disseminated as evidence of the discourse. This emphasizes the aspect of narrative inquiries where the relationship between the researcher and the researched is that of the co-construction of knowledge (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009).

The significant users of life history design were Thomas and Znanieck in their landmark study of *The Polish peasant in Europe and America (1918–1920)* in which the recorded life of a Polish immigrant, Wladek Wisniewski, was presented (Sikes, 2006). Over the years the popularity of life history design has fallen in and out of favour. It was at its peak in the 1930s, marginalized in the 1940s and resurfaced in the 1970s particularly in educational research.

In life histories, the individual gives his or her own understanding of life experiences over time. Literature points out that lives cannot be lived outside social, cultural, historical and natural events (Bird, n.d.; Sikes, 2006). Sikes (2006, p. 2) also states that individuals' life stories are continuously influenced and shaped by other people, trends and values in the world at large. In this study, therefore, the life history design facilitated an in-depth understanding of youths categorized as NEETs. The focus on their life histories was on their personal, subjective perception and experiences of education within their context. This design aimed to assist in finding connections in the youths' lives over time, especially between childhood and adulthood.

The life history research design also places people at the heart of research (Bird, n.d.). Literature states that life history design is often used with people with less power who are mostly marginalized or elderly; people with learning disabilities and people who have been institutionalized, underprivileged or defiant (Sikes 2006; Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009; Carrigan, 2009). According to Carrigan (2009), life history design allows voices that have been previously silenced, to be heard. The design seeks to get inside the world of the subjects and appeals to their held views and perceptions of the world through sharing life stories (Sikes, 2006). In contrast to other designs that give what I view as a 'superficial' view, in that they highly depend on the researcher, life histories give the subject the opportunity to express narratively how he or she sees the phenomenon.

Whilst life histories may seem to be giving the subjects or research participants supreme control, they are 'framed within the specific conventions of how tales are told, read and listened to in cultural context' (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 4). Life histories are not just transparent windows through which the research subject's life is seen. The researcher plays an active role in selecting, organizing, sequencing and presenting the narrative (building the 'window' and seeing through it), so the researcher is also very significant. Whilst my position as a researcher and someone with experience in working with out-of-school youth in Eswatini had an impact in the construction of the youth's stories, I was conscious not to present a reductionist and abstract version of my understanding. Instead I used my position and experience to choose the dimensions of social reality that generated 'alternative ways of seeing, knowing, understanding and interpreting life experiences' in an interconnected way of life (ibid, p. 5).

The advantages of using this design include the richness and depth of information sourced, compared to information sourced using other designs (Sikes, 2009; Bird, n.d.). Researchers,

as a result of their interest in those who have been ignored and are different, can use the life history design as a tool to give voice to the previously silenced and oppressed. Thus, life history research designs have been used as an empowering process. Another advantage is that the writing from life stories tends not only to be interesting but can also move people into action. Firstly, people who are in decision-making positions are brought into critical realization as the stories are about people who have feelings, lives and futures just as they do. Secondly, even the people who tell the stories of their lives get an opportunity to reflect on their way of life and to take action to change.

The disadvantages of life histories include raising questions around epistemology, design, sample size, depth of interview and approach to interview (Bird, n.d.). In essence, these questions emanate from a concern as to whose truth it is in the responses to the questions and whether the life history accurately reflects the facts of the life as lived. Questioning of the facts can also raise issues of researcher bias and interests, as well as their interviewing, transcription and analytical skills. Whilst I accept that there are different schools of thought about what constitutes a fact, the study attempted to respond to these questions by using more than one research method, that is photo voice, interviews and focus group discussions. Different data collection tools were also used; the pictures, interview questionnaire, focus group schedule, cameras, and journal texts used to make entries. The use of multiple sources and methods in the writing and interpreting of the youths' life stories assisted in meeting the demands for 'high quality, rigorous and respectable research'; this is the process of triangulation (Rule & John, 2011, p. 108).

#### **5.4.3 Use of life history design in research**

Although literature cites several research studies that have used life stories in educational research, in this study I present only a few. The first are a collection from Dhunpath and Samuel's (2009) book. The second one is by Carrigan (2009). These studies used life stories to present the educational experiences of learners whose views on learning when conducting research studies are often not sought or are ignored. These studies are thus similar to research studies relating to NEETs' educational experiences (Marsh, 2009; O'Brien, 2014).

Samuel (2009) traced student teacher's experiences in the development of the English language. Just like the student teachers who were required to move beyond the interviews to construct their own experiences of developing competence in the English language over different periods in their lives, the youths in my study also had to trace educational experiences to the world of employment. They also referred to different stages within their

life contexts such as their homes, families, schools, tertiary education and the world of work. The emphasis in both studies, Samuel's and mine, was on giving the students a voice to express their professional or educational development.

In the same collection, Harsha Kathard (2009) explored issues and processes in the analysis of life history data. Just as in the NEETs' research study, Harsha Kathard used the narrative method for an in-depth understanding of people often excluded by society, involving them in the co-construction of knowledge as well in issues of analysing personal truth. This chapter relates to the NEETs study with regard to the research and the researched relationship.

Mershen Pillay (2009) used life history to demonstrate the privilege occupied by researchers both methodologically and theoretically. This relates to helping researchers to reflect on their intent, morality and faithfulness in moving to critical ways of knowing. Researchers, like myself, use their academic broad-mindedness and their privilege of theoretical understanding and other resources to read and reconstruct participants' stories and recount them authentically. The study encouraged 'multiple resources of theory building that emerge from within, between and outside of (empirical) data production' (ibid. p. xiv).

Renuka Vithal (2009) explored the notion of coherence to be developed between the methodological approach used and the theoretical intentions in the research process. The emphasis of this chapter that related to the NEETs study was on how democratic participation should characterize the quality of narrative studies' theoretically, methodologically, ethically and epistemologically.

In the second study, Carrigan (2009, p. 1) also used the life history design to listen to the narratives of male prisoners who were accessing education classes in prison, in order to hear their story of what education and learning meant in their lives. Carrigan's (2009) use of interviewing and thematic data analysis was particularly relevant to my study. In addition, his research participants were similar to mine in that they were a marginalized group whose voices are often silent and silenced just as the NEET's voices have been.

## **5.5 Research methods**

In the following section I present the photo voice, interviews, focus group discussions and journal writing methods used in the research study. I also highlight the merits and demerits of each method in the study.

### **5.5.1 Photo voice**

Literature points out that photo voice is a powerful method that enables people with limited power not only to express their experiences, but also to share them with others (Kuruman & Lai, 2011; Simmonds, 2015). Many researchers, such as Simmonds, Roux and Avest (2015), Whitefield (2005), and John (2009) have used the photo voice method in their studies. Simmonds (2015) states that photo voice provides a valuable way of dealing with sensitive issues such as gender-based violence and poverty, as well as HIV and AIDS. Literature reveals that photo voice provides an alternative way of promoting participation in research within vulnerable populations such as children, girls, women, the elderly, ethnic minorities and among people with intellectual disabilities (Kuratani, 2011; Simmonds, 2015). This research method tends to establish partnerships among stakeholders as they are engaged in the research processes of planning, data collection, presentation and the analysis of photos. As a research method, photo voice has been viewed as superseding traditional methods of facilitated discussion and has been used to capture the needs of the marginalized population or those previously without a voice.

Simmonds (2015) defines photo voice as a research method in which participants convey information through photographs. When using this research method, participants choose photographs regarded as most appropriate for them to orally present a certain phenomenon. Kuratani and Lai (2011) view photo voice as a participatory research strategy used to allow individuals to reflect upon their individual or community strengths and concerns through the use of visuals. The central component of photo voice is participation and dialogue. In research, photo voice has been used in disciplines such as sociology, education, anthropology, health, economics and geography (Simmonds, 2015).

Photo voice, as a research method, was first introduced in 1995 as photo novels by Wang and Berris (Kuratani & Lai 2011; Simmonds, 2015; John, 2009). According to Simmonds (2015), Wang and Berris gave cameras to a group of rural village women farmers in Yunnan Province in China so that they could take pictures and tell narratives of their experiences to reach out to policy makers on issues that concerned their lives. Based on the work done by Wang and Berri, it was found that photo voice could be used to enable people to record and reflect their concerns and passions within their community and thereby promote critical dialogue and knowledge about issues and inform research policy makers about their concerns.

When using photo voice as a research method, the collection, selection and then the sharing of the photographs are of vital importance. The collection (taking photos) is followed by the

participant's selection of photos that he or she considers most relevant. This is a vital step that happens before sharing with others. The sharing of meaning by the participant helps group members to see the world through the other's eyes, which may result in the change in how the other persons involved in the dialogue view the world. Such dialogues can also contribute to the change in policies affecting that particular group, as policy makers get to understand the phenomenon through those sharing their experiences.

According to Kuratani and Lai (2011), photo voice provides the ability to overcome social barriers. Group members using photo voice are able to share their experiences, perspectives and feelings with other people. Photo voice also provides insights to the researcher. It tends to provide information that would not have been accessed if the traditional discussion methods were used. The research method places the control of what is important to highlight in the discussion in the hands of the participants rather than the researcher.

In this study I used photo voice to enable the youth who were not in education, employment or training to voice their educational experiences. Literature had revealed that the youth was one of the social groups whose voice was ignored or sought superficially by researchers (Marsh, 2009). The use of research methodologies that did not involve youths, even if they were the focus of the study, was highlighted by literature that has stated the youth's concern that there should be 'nothing about us without us' (Marsh, 2009; O'Brien, 2014). Therefore, I concurred with Simmonds (2015:35) who cited Heath et al (2009:116):

that it is felt by many youth researchers that visual methods have a particular potential to give young people more control over the process of data generation and to express themselves in a medium with which many appear to be particularly comfortable.

The argument I share with these researchers is that instead of viewing the youth categorized as NEETs as a societal burden and an economic drain whose opinions do not matter, it is high time that researchers involved them in research. Although it is true that society's view towards NEETs is negative and that view has contributed to the NEETs viewing themselves as useless (Marsh, 2009), literature points out that photo voice can help give them a voice, empower them and to be in control of their lives (Kuratani et al., 2011; Simmonds, 2015).

#### ***5.5.1.1 Planning for the use of photo voice in research***

According to Kuratani et al. (2011), the planning and implementation processes are very important in creating an environment that would ensure professionalism and trust when using

photo voice for research. Planning photo voice researches include the formation of relationships between the principal researcher and those who will be engaged to understand their world. Forming relationships has to start early in the research process. Participants need to be introduced early into the objective of the study, and to be shown how they will benefit from the study and the whole research process.

Planning photo voice researches also involves training those individuals who will be engaged in the study. According to Kuratani et al (2011), photo voice projects that emphasize training have reported a higher quality of participation. Chappell (2013) also saw the necessity of training co-researchers as he conducted a one week training for them. The training not only provided them with skills on how to use cameras to take good quality pictures but also trained them in research skills. These included skills and concepts such as confidentiality, types of questioning, listening skills, ethical considerations and informed consent.

In this research five youths who were purposefully identified as co-researchers were first invited to an introductory meeting to the study. In this meeting the research study was explained to them: its purpose and benefit to them. After this meeting, the co-researchers attended training sessions on the use of photo voice.

#### ***5.5.1.2 Weaknesses of photo voice***

Literature points out the danger of an emphasis on the technology and equipment rather than meaning making, the need for consent from people appearing in the picture, the lack of group facilitated discussion, and the lack of social action from findings, as potential weaknesses of the photo voice method (Kuratani et al., 2011; Simmonds, 2015) . These weaknesses were addressed by the principal researcher during the training of the co-researchers. First, the principal researcher emphasized selecting available pictures. Pictures taken using their cell phones were part of the collection to identify the best pictures to assist them in telling their story. The focus was more on the pictures than the instrument used to take the pictures. Secondly, aspects of gaining access and ethics were also addressed by emphasizing the importance of seeking permission to take or use a picture that included another person. Lastly, it was emphasized that the study was on giving voice to the NEETs to inform decision-making. Taking action on what was shared was not the purpose of the study.

#### **5.5.2 Interviews**

An interview is a research method where one person asks another person questions on a particular topic, or issue, and the other responds (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p.1). It is used by

a researcher to understand the factual aspects and meaning of an interviewee's perspective (the story behind a participant's experience) on a certain subject (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2008, p. 2). Interviewing is one of 'the most common methods for data collection in qualitative research...used to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of individual participants' (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008, p. 291). Gill et al. (2008) present three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured.

A semi-structured interview is where the researcher has an interview guide comprising of a list of key issues and questions to be covered (Gill et al., 2008; Kajornboon, n.d.). This was the type of interview used in my study. Unlike in structured or standard interviews, the interviewer can ask additional questions in the order and with the wording that would be understood by the interviewee. The strength in semi-structured as opposed to structured interviews is in the probing for clarification or further explanation of a certain point. However, the same strength of semi-structured interviews can be limited by the researcher's lack of interviewing skill. In this study I addressed these limitations through training and modelling for the co-researchers.

A questionnaire that had several key questions that guided the sharing of NEETs experiences was developed (See Appendix Two). The co-researchers used the questionnaire to dig deeper into an experience through follow-up questions for in-depth understanding. This was in line with the interpretivist research paradigm adopted to generate an in-depth understanding of the NEETs' educational experiences.

### **5.5.3 Focus group discussion**

Although focus groups share some characteristics with semi-structured interviews, the benefits are not the same (Gibbs, 1997). One of the main characteristics shared is that a focus group discussion is also one of 'the most common methods for data collection in qualitative research' (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). Unlike individual interviews, focus group discussion is characterized by the interaction between participants (Gibbs, 1997). Participants with similar characteristics share their views and experiences in a discussion under the guidance of a moderator (Gill et al., 2008; Gibbs, 1997). In a focus group discussion, the moderator needs to apply leadership and interpersonal skills for an effective discussion. The ideal number of participants in a focus group discussion is seven to nine participants. A conducive environment to express opinions, feelings and ideas is another requirement for the discussion. The discussion is video- or audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

The benefits of focus group discussion include a large amount of information that is shared by participants. Data from focus group discussions are accessed within a short period with little cost and preparation. These attributes may lack in other data collection methods. Another benefit is that the data are in the respondent's own words, which may contribute to obtaining deeper levels of meaning, making connections and identifying subtle nuances. This is particularly so because the method allows the researcher to probe into verbal and non-verbal responses. A third advantage is that participants can respond to each other's views and generate a group perspective through interaction. The disadvantages of focus group discussion include the need for a strong moderator who will control, probe and guide the discussion. Without an effective moderator, the discussion can be dominated by highly opinionated participants, resulting in skewed data. Having an ineffective moderator can result in a chaotic discussion that can produce data that are difficult to analyse (Marczak, n.d.).

Although focus group discussions can be used in their own right, in this study the method was used to complement the other methods in gaining insights into youths' educational experiences (Gibbs, 1997). The discussions were moderated by the principal researcher using a questionnaire guide (Appendix three) which assisted her to guide the discussion. All five co-researchers participated in all the three focus group discussions. The forms and nature of discussions are detailed under the relevant research method below.

#### **5.5.4 Reflective journal writing**

Whilst there is not enough literature on the use of journals in teaching, learning and research, the available literature points out that reflective journals can provide a qualitative data collection method for use with learners, teachers and the researchers themselves (Phelps, 2005; Ortlipp, 2008). Ortlipp (2008) used reflective research as an educational tool with doctoral students. The novice doctors used recordings from their journals to share experiences through journals in their research.

Reflection is a mental process in which one thinks about things by going back over them (Phelps, 2005, p. 38). It involves our mental reaction to perceived issues and inconsistencies and a willingness to challenge personally held values, beliefs and assumptions. So reflective journal writing is documentation of the emerging interpretations from the reflections 'thus providing a holistic picture of the interplay between the individuals' histories and their current and emergent state (Phelps, 2005, p. 38). Insights into sensitive or initially held assumptions are therefore documented.

In this study, reflective journals were used by the five co-researchers to document what they learnt about the process of being a co-researcher, their interpretation of being a NEET and how the situation of being a NEET could be addressed. The co-researchers were first trained by the principal researcher in how to use a reflective journal before they went out for data collection. Copies of their journals were shared with and referred to by all the participants during the focus group discussions.

## **5.6 The data collection process**

Before the data collection could commence, I held an initial meeting where I explained the objectives of the research to the co-researchers. The role that they were requested to play in this exercise and their choice to participate or not to participate were also explained. I also explained to the co-researchers that there were no incentives that they would receive by participating in the study. However, they were reimbursed for their transport, food and communication costs (airtime). As a researcher, I did not have financial support for the incentives. From my pocket I could only manage to reimburse them. After the meeting the co-researchers were given time to decide whether they wanted to participate or not. I was very grateful for their willingness to participate even without the incentives. They committed themselves by signing the consent form.

The data for this study were collected in three stages. The first stage involved the collection of data from the five youth co-researchers who were NEETs themselves.

### **5.6.1 Photo-voice**

The photo voice data collection process occurred in three stages: the training on photo voice; the identification of pictures to use when presenting their story; and the focus group discussion. The purposively selected co-researchers were first trained in the photo voice method, the use of a camera and selection of pictures for use in their narratives. During the training, the principal researcher explained that the NEETs were to take as many pictures as possible which they could use to tell a story of their experiences from childhood and of future aspirations. This meant they were to select three pictures each that they would use to tell their life stories. After the training, there was piloting on the use of photo voice by the co-researchers. During the piloting, the co-researchers used one picture each to tell a part of their story.

After clarifications on the presentations from the piloting, the co-researchers were then ready to go out and collect three pictures to tell their story. The co-researchers were then asked to select pictures to present their story on their educational experiences from birth, what they viewed as having contributed to who they are, and their future aspirations. They had to justify the choices of their pictures with regard to the three questions. They presented their stories in a workshop situation (focus group discussion). I facilitated the focus group discussions. There was also a recorder and a social worker present. The discussion was held in one of the offices at my workplace. Before the beginning of each session the co-researchers were offered something to eat and a moment to unwind as they shared their trip to the office with their colleagues. The discussions were recorded and then transcribed.

### 5.6.2 Interviews

The second stage of the data collection process was the co-researchers conducting the interviews of the ten research participants each (NEETs). This stage also commenced by training the co-researchers in interviewing skills. The semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix two) was also introduced during the training. The co-researchers were given an opportunity during the training and after piloting to make their input on the questionnaire. The co-researchers were given one week to interview two people each from their respective areas as part of the piloting process. After this, the co-researchers had thirty days to go to their communities to identify and interview ten interviewees each. The interviewees' age distribution is presented below:

**Table 5.2: Interviewees (co-researchers and research participants) age distribution and geographical locations**

Administrative Region	Age									
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	Total
Hhohho	1	2	2	0	2	1	5	2	5	20
Manzini	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	4
Shiselweni	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	2	1	8
Lubombo	0	2	2	1	4	0	0	4	5	18
Total	1	5	5	1	7	2	8	10	11	50

### **5.6.3 Reflective journals**

The third and last stage was the focus group discussion on what the co-researchers had learnt during the study. This part of data collection focused more, although not exclusively, on the third research question: the contribution made by co-researchers to the study. The source of data was the co-researchers' journals. After the training on conducting interviews and using reflective journals, the co-researchers recorded their reflections about their insights on their everyday experiences as co-researchers during the data collection process. As already mentioned, copies of the journal recordings were shared amongst the focus group participants and referred to as each co-researcher presented his or her reflections on the experiences of the interview process. I facilitated the discussions using a questionnaire guide (Appendix three). These discussions were also recorded and data were then transcribed.

## **5.7 Data analysis**

In this research, I used life history design to tell the NEETs educational story in a 'rich, in-depth details about the specific life experiences, memories and interpretations that the individuals' told (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 4). In this section, I present how the NEETs experiences were interpreted and analysed. Analysis in narrative inquiry uses words that are often collected as stories about the research participants (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2012). According to Dunphath and Samuel (2009), the analysis of and reporting on narratives within the qualitative orientation should allow someone who reads them to decide on the trustworthiness of the story as reported through the teller's perspective. The analysis process in this study, therefore, involved the principal researcher and partly the co-researcher's construction and reconstruction of the NEETs stories and interpreting them in a way that made sense of their social context.

My interest in this study was on voicing the educational experiences of out-of-school youths whose voices had been previously ignored and their ideas taken for granted or not considered at all in decisions concerning their lives (Marsh, 2009). As opposed to the reductionist approach to analysis with 'the intention to fix the deficit without sufficient attention' paid to issues surrounding the youth being categorized as NEET (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 20), the data analysis process for this study began as soon as I engaged the research participants in the co-construction of the interpretation of their lived stories. From the very first engagement the participants were made aware of their role as contributors to what would be their educational experiences: the 'iterative' process of data analysis (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 12). The co-construction started when the research was introduced. The explaining of the

purpose of the study not only prepared the co-researcher's mind-set for the meaning making process but also for their participation in collecting the ingredients (data) to use when making meaning. This was evidenced by the adaptation of the questionnaire and the further explanations on certain research participants' experiences during discussions by the co-researchers. The co-researchers' abilities to clarify issues indicated that the participants sought clarification during the interviews. As the researcher, I probed for better and in-depth meaning of the NEETs' experiences during the photo voice presentation and focus group discussions. The co-researchers also probed the participants' responses during the interviews. This process further demonstrates the co-construction of the meaning of the NEETs experiences by the researcher and the research participants. This is consistent with the emic as opposed to the etic perspective of analysis.

Data analysis was done in three stages. The first stage was the data transcription. The qualitative orientation to data analysis and the co-construction of move from positivist towards interpretivist does not authorise the researcher to speak for the participants; instead it emphasizes the importance of their voices in the analysis and reporting. The next stage of data analysis was the construction and writing of the co-researchers' stories presented in Chapter Five. The traditional presentation of stories 'as a single, neat, unfolding trajectory in which the actor acts consistently' has been challenged (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 30). Guided by the qualitative orientation within the interpretivist paradigm, I used the co-researchers' stories which were presented in their own voices.

The stories were first transcribed by the social worker who was part of the focus group discussions. Having another person to do the transcriptions provided me with an opportunity to reflect further when reading them. The reflection not only enabled me to probe further when the co-researchers validated their stories for trustworthiness but also assisted me in seeking coherence in the co-researcher's accounts (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). For coherence, I considered issues that ensured the stories' relevance to the co-researcher's social context and personal realities. For instance, the co-researchers' body language, emotions, use of mother tongue and physical presentation were highlighted in the stories presented. The coherence issues responded to the in-depth understanding of the NEETs educational experiences as presented in Chapter Six.

The social worker also transcribed the narratives from the questionnaire and focus group discussions. I then checked the transcriptions. All these transcriptions, including the co-researchers' stories, were subject to thematic content analysis (Rule & John, 2011). They

were first coded and later, themes were generated from the codes. The themes that were used in the analysis emerged from the data rather than being determined before the data collection. The generated themes are presented in Table 5.3 below.

**Table 5.3: Themes generated from the research transcriptions**

Themes on educational experiences and attitudes of out-of-school youths	Themes on the contribution of co-researching in the study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- age distribution and geographical location;</li> <li>- family background;</li> <li>- educational access and progression; support system;</li> <li>- training;</li> <li>- societal expectation;</li> <li>- future aspirations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In-depth understanding of being NEETs;</li> <li>- creation of a dialogic space within the research process;</li> <li>- co-researchers' empowerment and learning about conducting interviews;</li> <li>- the value of informal learning in addressing the situation of being a NEET.</li> </ul>

As informed by the interpretivist paradigm, the study was not on hypothesis testing as in most empirical research, but was negotiated with the co-researchers and participants. The unit of analysis was the youths' educational experience.

According to Dunphath and Samuel (2009), analysis of narratives such as life stories, can include numbers or statistical analysis. Besides coding and generating themes from the narratives, I also solicited the services of a statistician to analyse the structured questions using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS is a data analysis tool that gives the frequency responding to each question (Gert, 2017). I also used the tool to cross tabulate between two fields with the purpose of finding the relationship. The analysed data enriched the discussion of the themes in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Table 5.4 summarizes the research design by linking the research questions to sources of data, methods of data collection, instruments and data analysis.

**Table 5.4: Summary of the research methods and sources of data**

Research Question	Source of data	Data collecting Method	Instrument used	Analysis
1. What are the educational experiences and attitudes of the out-of-school youth in Eswatini?	50 Interviewees	Interviews	Semi-structured questionnaires	Narrative Statistical
	5 Co-researchers' words and photographs	Photo voice  Focus group discussions	Instructions, cameras  Focus group schedule	Narrative  Narrative
2. How have the out-of-school youth's educational experiences and attitudes contributed to them being NEETs?	50 Interviewees	Interviews	Semi-structured questionnaires	Narrative Statistical
	5 Co-researchers words and photographs	Photo voice  Focus group discussions	Instructions, Cameras  Focus group schedule	Narrative  Narrative
3. How and what do the youth contribute as co-researchers through the process of conducting this research?	5 Co-researchers	Focus group discussions	Semi-structured questionnaires  Journals	Narrative

## 5.8 Trustworthiness

In the qualitative orientation to research, trustworthiness is often used instead of validity as a measure of the integrity of the research (Rule & John, 2011; Teddlie, 2009). Trustworthiness is used as an assessment of the extent to which an inquirer can persuade audiences that the findings are worth paying attention to (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, cited in Teddlie, 2009, p. 26).

As opposed to quantitative research where issues of validity, representativeness, and reliability underpin the quality of data, in qualitative research trustworthiness 'is achieved by giving attention to the study's transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability' (Rule & John, 2011, p. 107). In this study the issue of transferability as opposed to the dominant term, generalizability, was achieved by providing in-depth descriptions of the youths' experiences, within their context (Eswatini; rural and urban setting). Credibility is measured by whether or not the in-depth descriptions provided may allow a reader to consider if the youths' experiences are similar to youth's experiences in other contexts (ibid.). For dependability and confirmability, the co-researchers verified the content of their transcribed stories through the triangulated use of multiple sources and methods. Furthermore, there is the disclosure of the whole research process as discussed below: the researcher's positionality, ethical consideration, and research limitations.

## **5.9 Researcher positioning**

Besides being the principal researcher in this study, three of my other positions might have had an influence on the research. As an adult education practitioner with many years of experience working with out-of-school youth in Eswatini, I had extensive insight into their problems. This was useful in helping me to conceptualize and design the study, and to relate to the participants, but I made sure that I did not impose my own assumptions on the data that came from the participants. As a senior manager and a mature woman who was old enough to be their mother, there was a concern on participants' freedom to share their life stories. This was addressed in that, before each session started, there was time for small talk and sharing of refreshments between the researcher and the co-researchers. By the time we got to discuss business, the co-researchers were relaxed and sharing their ideas freely. The time difference between their arrival and the sharing sessions was also an advantage in that many of the participants ended up confiding in me about their general life concerns.

## **5.10 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations entail how I have dealt with issues of consent, participation, power relations between the researcher and the researched, emotionality, and neutrality (Dunphath, 2012). Research participants (co-researchers and interviewees) made an informed decision to participate in the study. They were informed about their rights to participate and withdraw at any point of the research process. The co-researchers and interviewees were also assured of confidentiality of the information they would share. Confidentiality included assuring them that pseudonyms were going to be used and that the data collected were to be kept safely for

five years before disposal. Based on their understanding of these explanations, the co-researchers and interviewees signed a consent form (Appendices Four and Five). Parental or guardians consent forms were signed for youths below eighteen years (Appendices Four and Five). According to Bird (n.d.), life stories can uncover or resurrect a distressing past which may render it empowering or exploitative. In this study, I engaged the services of a social worker who was prepared to address emotional distress during the focus group discussions. For ethical considerations, ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (attached in Appendix One).

### **5.11 Potential limitations of the study**

The potential limitations of the study include the youths' participation and retention, sample size and finances. With regard to youths' participation and retention, I had anticipated that it would be difficult to access youths as co-researchers and research participants. Although literature had revealed that the population of youth who were not in education, employment or training was high in Eswatini, I thought engaging them would be hard. I had envisaged that for some youth participating in this study, it would be viewed as worthless and further confirm societal views in seeing them as failures. As such, I anticipated that some NEETs would not be willing to express their views. However, the study revealed the opposite. Most youths were willing to participate in the study. This was evidenced by the fact that the co-researchers shared that they could have interviewed more people were they required to do so. With regard to retention, some youth might have been in the process of securing some form of employment, education or training opportunity. This opportunity might have arisen within the six months of data collection. In my study, one co-researcher did withdraw for these reasons, but I was able to recruit another without too much difficulty.

I viewed the sample size as another limitation of the study. Fifty research participants may not be representative of all youths not in employment, education or training in Eswatini and thus findings would not be generalizable. However, according to Cohen et al. (2000), life history research is more atypical than representative as it focuses on cases.

Financial support was viewed as another limitation. Focusing on youths that were spread throughout the country had financial challenges with regard to transport, communication and meeting logistics. Also, the data collection tools for photo voice and face-to-face interviews had their own financial demands, such as stationery costs. Besides the co-researchers' transport, lunch, stipend and airtime during the data collection period, at first I thought I had to provide co-researchers with ten cameras. However, co-researchers insisted on the use of

their smart phones to take pictures, which were later printed. With that expense removed, I was then able to focus on the other financial expenses.

The last envisioned limitations were my own position, assumptions and bias. As earlier mentioned, having been involved in adult education and now with out-of-school youth for more than three years, I already had assumptions about youth learning. To minimize my bias, I engaged youths' as co-researchers, involved them in finalizing the semi-structured questionnaire, collecting data and validating the transcribed data.

## **5.12 Conclusion**

The chapter argues that an interpretively situated, life history methodology within a qualitative orientation was appropriate for the study. Youths categorized as NEETs need to be involved as experts on issues concerning them than adopting methodological approaches that position them as just objects or the 'other'. Therefore, the narrative inquiry approach and the life history design within the qualitative orientation was viewed as promoting understanding of the NEETs educational experiences from their perspective. Furthermore, co-researching, for an 'emic' perspective ensured the construction of truth between the researcher and the research participants. The next chapter presents the co-researchers' life stories.

## CHAPTER SIX:

### ‘OUR EXPERIENCES’: CO-RESEARCHERS’ LIFE STORIES

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study in the form of the five co-researchers’ narratives from presentations of their life history using the photo voice method. The co-researchers used three pictures each. In the narratives I have included some pictures, with concealed identities, for better understanding. Before presenting the life history of each co-researcher, I present a brief description of the setting for the discussion and then the appearance of the co-researcher. It concludes with a summary.

#### 6.2 The co-researchers’ life stories

Below are the stories derived from the transcription and told in first person. I have, however, done minor editing for meaning and logical flow in the stories. The names and places used are pseudonyms as agreed with the co-researcher at engagement, that their identities would not be revealed.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, the focus group discussions took place in the principal researcher’s offices. The discussions commenced after refreshments provided by myself as the co-researchers had travelled long distances to attend. All the participants were seated around the same table facing a flannel board where the co-researchers pinned their selected pictures as they told their story. I, as the principal researcher facilitated the presentation.

##### 6.2.1 Mfanzile Mpungose

Mfanzile was dressed smart casual for a boy of his age. He volunteered to be the first one to share his story as he collected his pictures and sat in a way that demonstrated he was ready to share. He had chosen a picture of soccer players (not included in the text), himself with a friend and himself deejaying. Mfanzile readily responded to questions asked. As he told his story he expressed emotions demonstrating how he felt about that event or stage of his life. He would smile when telling about something of great interest to him like his love for soccer and his friends. He was remorseful when sharing about his attitude towards school.

*I was born and I grew up in the rural areas of Eswatini. I have both my mother and father, and they are the ones that raised me and paid for my education. My parents are really supportive and they continue to support me even now, I won’t lie. They have supported me since I was young and even now they would like for me to have a bright future. I did my*

*primary and secondary school in my home area and finished my high school in South Africa. When I was at school, I was too playful and not serious with my school work. In primary school I was not someone who thrived on my work as a student (bengingakatimiseli).*

*Me and my friends enjoyed playing soccer more than school such that soccer occupied my mind all the time (pointing at the picture). So as the lessons continued I would be thinking about the soccer that we would be playing after school. Therefore, I repeated classes from primary school because I did not have a passion for school.*

*I completed my primary school and I furthered my studies at the secondary school in my home area. My playful attitude continued even there. What motivated me to complete my primary school is that in high school we wore long trousers [rather] than the shorts worn at primary school. But also there I did not have a lot of motivation, I was still filled with my playful ways and we continued to play even harder. I even acquired friends who I thought would be playful with even in class. We used to pick subjects that we knew that the teachers teaching those subjects were not committed to. So their subject allocations were perceived as playful sessions more than serious and with a commitment to learning. I really did not have that drive for my school work, till I got to Form 3 where I failed.*

*I failed in secondary school in 2010. I failed and I decided to quit school. I left school and went for vocational training in house wiring at Bosco Skills Centre. So I trained at Bosco, in terms of house wiring, and when I was supposed to undergo my grade testing because it was only one year and then you grade test. There were problems at school that prevented us from grade testing within that year. I told them that the following year I had to resume my studies, so I did not grade test in Bosco but instead I went to South Africa to complete my high school career. Whilst I was still doing my training at Bosco my family said that I have to go back to school, because I had decided that I did not want to go back to school. And I had gone to train there because I wanted the skill so that I could get a job. But they said I must go back to school. So I went back to school, and they said that it would be better if I went to South Africa because I wouldn't be able to go to school in my area.*

*As I started my education in South Africa I came to the realization that I wanted to be someone and to have something in life. In primary and secondary school I was very playful and not serious about school. But as I went back to study in South Africa I really wanted to achieve something.*



*I went to South Africa with this friend of mine (lifting up the picture) who had already completed his education. When we got to South Africa he was the one that helped me a lot in order to change my life. Although I was still playful, I limited my soccer time to weekends and sometimes I would get home late during the week. This was due to the fact that I rented my own place, I was alone and therefore I was in control. So my friend helped me as he tried to motivate me about life in general so that I could focus on my studies. I remember there was a time, during exam time, when I saw it better to quit soccer because I was a soccer player even there. This*

*was due to the fact that soccer games, during the weekend, would start at nine and they would continue for the whole day and again on Sundays. So therefore you would find that I would not get time to study meanwhile it was exam time. I took that decision because of my friend. But at first I resisted and would argue with him, but I ended up listening to what he had to say. So I was doing my Grade 11 and I passed it very well. And then I went to Grade 12, in Grade 12, because he had taught me a lot of things about life. Looking back, I realize that I had been able to pass Grade 12 because I had decreased my soccer time and focused mainly on my school work. I passed with a B in Grade 12. If I had not focused on my studies and limited my soccer time I would not have passed. But the problem there is when we have passed, because we are from Eswatini, I would not get a school for training that side, I had to come back here. I did not have a study permit. So I still have to make means to try and get how I can continue with my education.*

*Whilst in South Africa there were situations that could have hindered my success. For example where I lived; you would find that the neighbourhood boys would rob people or on your way to school they would corner you, in order to obtain money for cigarettes. The path that I used to school was in the bushes. It would happen that whilst I was walking to school I would come across some boys and they would want money for cigarettes. At other times if you refuse they could beat you up or even kill you. You would find that at other times, like for me I would have to be in class by half past six and other times, six. This would be during winter, it would be cold, I would have to wake up in the morning and go to school. It would still be dark*

*at that time. So what would happen is that a person would end up giving up, it would be better if I went home than to be hurt by these boys. It was challenging, because maybe I would start at about six, and after school I might be expected to attend and maybe I would only be out of school at 4:30. Meanwhile, I have to still get to my place and do my homework, and when I get home I need to cook. You would sometimes find that I would do my homework till midnight.*



*I am a person that enjoys music a lot. In this picture I am playing music in my house. So I spend a lot of my time indoors, listening to music. If, for example, it is New Year's Eve or Christmas or things like that, you will find that we are with my family and other*

*community members listening to music. I am the sort of person who spends a lot of time with music, even when I am at home. My family see me as their own little disk jockey (DJ). When there are family events they know that I will make them enjoy the event with my music.*

*I had a lot of dreams for me in life. I wanted to become a DJ, and a soccer player. But the problem with being a soccer player in my area is that we are located in the rural area, so even if you manage to play the sport you do not get the support and eventually nothing comes of it. It is difficult to market yourself, so therefore soccer is not suitable for me because I do not have the right market. Even the deejaying, I engage with it whilst I'm at home, because when, I look at the various instruments that I would need, and I look at their costs, I would not be able to afford to buy them, so I cannot continue with that. However, I do play music for very small events around my area.*

*Whilst I was at school I used to enjoy Maths Literacy. You would find that other students would ask for assistance, especially when examinations were approaching. So, I think I would end up enjoying teaching and explaining to people. Right now, what is holding me back is that I do not have the steps that I should follow so that I can succeed and go train as a teacher. There is no direction. I have also found that I cannot apply anywhere with my subjects. The subjects that I did at school were History, Maths Literacy and I do not think Maths Literacy is a subject in Eswatini yet. So, when I look at my results I don't think they could accept me.*

### **6.2.2 Thokozile Nkosi**

Thokozile volunteered to be the second one telling her story. She was also presentable for her age. She is naturally a bubbly type of person. When it was her turn to tell the story, she commanded attention by her upright sitting position and an attitude that said 'I am ready to share my experience'. Thokozile had many pictures with her and mentioned that she had so much to tell so that she had a challenge in identifying the three pictures to choose. However, she pinned up her three pictures: her grandmother in the hospital; herself working on a computer preparing for a presentation; and herself presenting in a workshop. She then started sharing her story. As she told her story, she also expressed her emotions, reflecting her attitude and feelings towards that particular experience.

*I am a girl born in a suburban area in Eswatini. I am from a family that is not big. I was brought up by my grandmother and grandfather. My mother is not someone I lived with whilst growing up. Well my father, when I had just been born there was talk that I wasn't his and that I did not look like him (Giggles nervously and looks around anxiously). My mother passed away when I was eight. I have a brother from my mother's side and other brothers that are from my father's side, they are my father's children. But from my mother's side, I live with my brother with whom I share a mother. I was raised by my grandparents. I am what I am today, what you can see, it is because of the work of my grandmother. There is a lot that she has done for me. When I look at her, I am filled with gratitude. She has struggled to educate me and it was not because she had a lot of money but she wanted me to become something in the future. My father was around but he couldn't... I do not know if he couldn't or what. Or if it was the way that fathers do things. He came back in to my life when I was in Grade 6. He started by acknowledging that I was his daughter and that I was a Dlamini, and that I looked like him. So it was that he paid for my expenses only when he felt like it. You would see the money, my father is the sort of person that had money and you would see [it], as he would buy cars like you would buy scones. But when it came to me and school he would be resistant.*



*Well in the pictures, the first one is a picture of my grandmother (pointing at it).*

*My grandmother is in hospital here. I chose it because I am what I am because of her. She brought me up in the right way.*

*Because of my grandfather, who was still working at the time, when I did my preschool I was like a well-to-do child. I used the kombi to get to school and my*

*lunch box was good. I did my primary and secondary education in the small town where I lived with my grandparents. I completed my primary education and in the Eswatini Primary Certificate and Junior Certificate Examinations I obtained first class. So, in primary school I was the sort of child that loved school, I was determined. At my grandmother's place, there were other children who were almost my age. There was that competitive spirit with my other uncles' and aunts' children. So there was that competition, of who would achieve more. I got a first class in the external examinations not because I was smart but because I was determined. I used to be sent home because of school fees like every child because my grandfather retired when I was in Grade 4, so I would sometimes stay at home for approximately a whole week as my grandmother tried to gather money for me to go back to school. That made me worried if I would manage to get to secondary school because of the financial situation. This worry was because when you start Form 1<sup>15</sup> there was a need to get deposit money alongside money for a new school uniform. But then my uncles managed to scrape some money together and I managed to start my Form 1. So I got into Form 1, I was still the child that was determined and that got good grades. And then I got to Form Three, and through determination I managed to pass.*

*When I got to Form 1, what I did not like or understand was that I used to get sleepy when it was time for History. It was the only subject that I was not interested in. Another subject that I did not like was Home Economics. I was the sort of student that passed the theory. But when it came to the practical, I was bad especially in sewing; even if I had given myself time to sew a garment the teacher would hit me for not getting it right. So I was a child that was afraid of being hit and in my school they used to hit us. So I was trying to avoid being hit, by doing my*

<sup>15</sup> The first year of secondary school in Eswatini.

*homework and I would return to school having completed it. I would ensure that it was done, even if it was wrong because I understood that I could not be hit because it was wrong, rather than if it was not done. So when it came to Home Economics, I would take my time to sew my apron and when I came back to class the teacher would tell me to start again because it was wrong. And I would give myself the time to do it again the next day only to find that it was still wrong.*

*At high school I acquired new friends. I usually say that in life if you want to be a CEO then you should hang around CEOs. If you want to be great, hang around great people. So when I got to Form 4, that is when I started wishing to hang around people that would have a positive impact on my life (Starts smiling broadly). If I remember correctly there was a group which was called Chillaz. What basically brought us together as a group were books. We were six, and one of them was the top student nationally in the Junior Certificate examinations that year whilst the others were in the top 50 or top 10. We had the slogan that said that 'we are encouraging the spirit of excellence'. I remember one day they called us to the Mathematics staff room, because the teachers had heard that there is a group called the 'Chillaz', to explain what the group was about. We explained that we were just children that have placed school first, and education. So there was no fooling around, as we sat together even in class. And we would sit two by two, so it would be the six of us and then the rest of the class would follow. Every member of the group had to pick a position that they would like to have (Giggles and smiles broadly). I was the CEO of the 'Chillaz'. So everyone would pick a position that they would like to see themselves in. So when we got to Form Five, I was always in my books and studying. I remember when I went to write my Form 5 exam, the subjects that I enjoyed when I got to high school, were the Sciences, more especially Physical Science. I also enjoyed Accounts and English. But what motivated me a lot were my friends, the people that I had surrounded myself with played a huge role in my life.*

*What I did not like is the way I was taught at school. There was an Accounts teacher who used corporal punishment and I was afraid of getting beatings. So when it was time to pack up and go to Accounts there were always feelings of apprehension of whether or not he would hit me today, or what would actually transpire. I am the type of person that shuts down once you start shouting at me or hitting me, therefore I do not comprehend anything after that. The teacher would beat us if we have failed a test. But I remember that one day he hit us for each question that you got wrong and then he would hit you for not getting to his passing mark. It didn't go down too well with me because I did not understand why he was hitting me because I did not get to the passing mark and that I got a question wrong.*

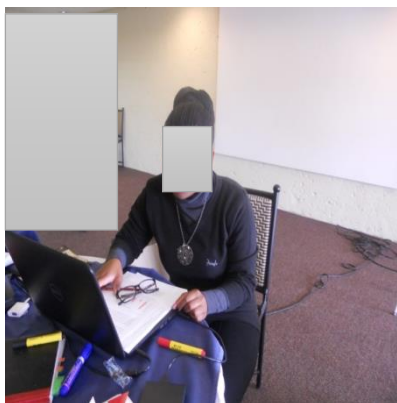
*So, when I got to Form 5, through my determination, I managed to obtain six credits. Unfortunately, I got D in Mathematics. This is what is holding me back now and that's closing a lot of doors. I started applying to the University and they did not accept my application and I believe it was because of my D in Mathematics and they thought I did not qualify. (Looks up and pauses for a while). So, I stayed the whole year doing nothing. I wanted to apply to other places, because I believed that if they did not accept me at the University then maybe they would accept me at other places such as Ngwane Teachers' College or William Pitcher Teacher's College. So there came a time when I needed money and you know how parents can be when they need to spend money (Closes eyes). The first challenge that I faced was when I asked my father for some money to apply to Nazarene Teachers' College, he said that this meant I did not know what I wanted to do. Because I wanted to go to the University but now I have turned around and I wanted to apply to a College.*

*In life, whilst I was growing up and still at school, I wished to study auditing. But as time went by my dream has changed. I had said earlier that my grandmother is in the hospital. To attend this meeting, I am direct from the hospital where I look after my grandmother. As I was sitting in the hospital, caring and looking (Ngigadzile and ngibukile), there was a change as I realized that I love nursing, the medicine and the caring. Because I found that I loved it, I have found that even as I care for my grandmother, I am filled with love as I do it. My grandmother has a leg ulcer. She started having a sore that showed signs of being cancerous. She has been in the hospital for three months now. So as you see me now, I have come straight here from the hospital because I am caring for her. That is the reason why I say that I love this nursing thing because I am not into the money as much.*

*But yes I have a dream that is that as I grow up and as I continue with my education, that I do my MBA. But right now I feel like nursing is where I am. When I change her because she cannot go to use the bathroom on her own ... everything. I need to take her and place her on her wheelchair, and bath her... everything. I sometimes even tell her that I love what I'm doing. It's where I am, where I am called to be. There is no frustration (Kute lokugongonyeka mhlawumbe ube nekucansuka). Because when you do something that you do not love then there is usually that sense of frustration.*

*After I couldn't apply to all the places that I wished to get into, I decided to take matters into my own hands as I wanted to become something better. So I went out looking for greener pastures, and I managed to get hired at AMICAAL where I did condom distribution. And it*

*was what opened a number of doors. I have also volunteered in other organizations which has somehow assisted me to discover talents that I have.*



*For instance, I have since discovered that I am a public speaker naturally. In this picture I am preparing for my presentation in a workshop. I am gifted a lot, that is a gift that the Almighty gave me, to speak in front of many people. As a result of this talent I have been invited to workshops organized by some organizations in Eswatini. These include Gender Links, Fast Track and others. In all these organizations I was just volunteering, not employed.*

*What hurts me the most and what I could ask the Kingdom of Eswatini to help us with is scholarship. We are sitting at home, it is not that we have failed or what. People are here and they have passed, we have passed... but the problem is money. I would like to plead, especially with government that they look at this, and look into it a lot. There is nothing that is painful... that has hurt me a lot where I stood up and I decided that I do something. It's not that I am sitting. I have been to the Members of Parliament, business people where I have been requesting that perhaps they can provide me with a study loan. It's not that they will be giving me the money but it is just that when I am done I will repay it. It stems from within, it is very painful when I wake up in the morning, when people see you bathed and dressed and going to town. And they think that it is enjoyable, and you met an elderly person who will ask you, where are you working now? There is nothing that compares to that pain, especially when you cannot explain everything to them in detail about what is happening. All they see is that I am in town and dressed up but they do not understand that the position that I am in is not pleasant where I am. I wish that one day, I have great hope that one day, all will be well... it will be well... it will be well (Sobbing).*

### **6.2.3 Lukhele Lunga**

Lunga was the eldest amongst the five co-researchers. He was not dressed any differently from his peers. Lunga had two pictures: a pigsty; and a young boy. He could not take the picture of his neighbour's car but only talked about it. Lunga had 'a matter of fact' attitude, an attitude that said, 'This is how I see and believe in this.' This was demonstrated in the way he responded to questions and expressed his emotions on certain experiences in his life.

*I was born in a family where I had five siblings (including myself) from my mother's side, whilst we were three from my father's side. I was a child that was born out of wedlock. And*

*that created a number of problems for me as I grew up, which resulted in me moving out and living with my grandmother (my mother's mother). But my mother did not live with us, within that homestead. Therefore, I grew up with three other people. It was the two of us, my grandmother, my sister who is my mother's daughter [I come after her (Lengimlamako)], and her surname is Zungu. So my surname is Lukhele, my sister is Zungu and the other three are Zwane's. And the Zwane's is where my mother is currently residing as a wife (Sowendza ka Zwane).*

*So we grew up with my granny, and she feared the Lord (brushes forehead). She was so immersed in her faith that she was a priestess. So we grew up knowing the principles of the bible. (Pause) So we grew up, going to church regularly. We used to partake in it, in the morning, afternoon and evening. (Smiles and pauses). So that made me become my grandmother's child, because where ever my granny went, I would be right there as well. When she left in the morning, I would leave and go to church with her. (Pause).*

*So when I started my preschool, I could not pinpoint what was different about my home as compared to other homes. Yes, I acknowledge that there were things that I didn't get. I could not identify the difference. For example, I could see the neighbour's children having a number of toys and playing with them. But I did not feel like I wanted the toys, I saw that I did not have them, but I did not feel the need to ask my grandmother for them.*

*Therefore, I was the person that followed my grandmother to church, and therefore I grew up within church. I was in Sunday school and I could say that I was the best at Sunday school when they were awarding presents for individuals who had the most attendance. Everyone would state that it was obvious that I would take that award. So I grew up under the principles of the Bible.*

*So I entered Grade 1, I already knew that I had to go to church on Sunday, meanwhile I could also read the Lord's Prayer through the help of my grandmother. So I could ask for certain things as a child. So when I got to Grade 2, I had, let's say, bad luck (Pauses and diverts gaze), and because of playing, I had to repeat a grade. It was really sad especially because where I come from, and the boys that I lived with, I was the only one that had failed. I had to repeat Grade 2 whilst everyone passed to the next grade. (Looks angry and disappointed in himself). But then that did not make me give up, since I picked myself up and tried and passed.*

*My grandmother was the type of person that, even though she was a priestess, she also cultivated pigs. She started rearing pigs even before I was born. So I learnt the chores involved in rearing pigs very early in life, for example the time that a pig should be given food and when the right time to sell them is. I knew that our source of livelihood was from rearing the pigs. So I got to understand that pigs had to be sold after they were a certain size. The best part was when they were sold as I knew that I would get something from my grandmother. So for the whole of my primary school I knew that I would go to school in the morning and my grandmother would remain to take care of the pigs. But in the evening, it would be me, no matter what, taking care of the pigs' needs.*



*I was unable to take a picture of the pigs, but I took a picture of the pigsty; the building. This is because I am where I am today, and I do not know any other money within my life apart from the money that was generated from pigs. This picture shows the type of life we lived at home with my grandmother. It is in the rural areas in*

*the Shiselweni District.*

*Another thing is that my grandmother, although she just told me about this, a teacher, she did not retire but she resigned as a school teacher. She was hired at the Bible school as she pursued God's work.*

*So my father was a person that helped conceive me, but I did not really know him well. I used to hear that there is a Babe Lukhele that is at New Heaven but in a different community known as eNgongomela. I also heard that he was a teacher but he also resigned and then he started working in Krugersdorp in South Africa. So I grew up knowing that, and there was nothing that I got from him. So I grew up and finished my high school.*

*High school was hard because my grandmother became a pensioner at the Bible school. But she would go out as a pastor and go to preach. And I understood that the money she got there was what we were depending upon. And the pig project also started to decline and it became evident that the business was dependant on the fact that my grandmother worked at the Bible school. So its decline had a negative effect on me because when I was in Form 3 I could not*

*write my examination due to lack of money. But we prayed continuously. And then, as a result of not being able to write my exams, I had to repeat Form 3. So I repeated Form 3 and I was able to write my exam in that year, and I passed and got into Form 4. But it was also hard, so my grandmother went to one of the teachers, and requested that he squeeze me within the list of orphans in the school. That worked and therefore government paid for my studies for Form 4 and Form 5.*

*So it carried on with that hardship of growing up and understanding that it was hard at home. But I would not go to the Lukhele's because I knew that I would not get anything from them. By then I was aware where my paternal family was. So I just continued to live with my grandmother and I grew up there. So even in Form 5 I wrote my examination, it was because of my grandmother and I knew that I got assistance from government because of my grandmother's request. Unfortunately, I did not manage to get good grades. That became a problem because my grandmother died two years after I had gotten my results.*

*After my grandmother's death I was lucky that, because of prayer, there was a Mr Dlamini who said he wanted to see my results. After seeing my results, he said that, although there was not enough money, with the results that I had there was a college in Newcastle in South Africa which I could enrol in. He said, "You should go and try your luck there and see if you can come back with something." This is where I studied Civil Engineering, and I registered for a four-year course. So I started with the N's, so I did N1, N2, and N3 and then there was no money from Mr Dlamini, who paid for my school fees. And that forced me to leave before I had completed the course that I had registered for. So I got subject certificates only. So then after that I went home, and I stayed at home and there was no one living there besides myself. It was just me because I knew that my mother was married but I could ask her for certain things but I knew that I did not have the right to ask her for help. Due to the fact that she is married and she needs to take care of her own children now. But I would tell her of the small problems that I would face and then she would try to help where ever she could.*

*I later got a call from a certain woman who said that she had a job for me in a distant town and asked if I would be interested. I did not know what kind of job this was, and did not know this woman except that she got my number from someone I knew. I then moved to that town and I started working there, in her butchery. After two years I lost interest in working, living in that town and decided to come back home. So when I got home I lived there alone, using the little money that I had acquired from my job.*

*Later on, a neighbour told me that she had gotten some pigs but she would not be able to manage all of them. She asked if I would be able to have the energy to take one or two so that I would be able to maintain myself. I was very happy, and although I did not have money, I knew that pigs had a lot of money, especially since I was raised from proceeds taken from pigs. I am currently at home and I am busy with rearing my pigs. And that is what has kept me going. Although I don't have a target market for now so that I can get a lot of money. I usually sell them to my neighbours, especially when it is pay day for the elderly in my constituency.*



*I took a second picture of the boy that I live with, because I wanted to compare the situation he is in and what I have gone through in life. So I thought I should use him as a reminder that I was once there myself. The child came to us as the year started and we all did not know the child. The child was brought to us by people who said he was my uncle's child. I do not know where my uncle is right now. But I heard that he is in Richard's Bay. So since I left school I have never seen him. But then that meant that it would be the two of us within the household. The boy was doing Grade 4. So we lived together, and I doubt that my uncle knows that the child that he got from outside wedlock is now living within the homestead; maybe he thinks that he managed to dump the child wherever he dumped them, but the child managed to get home. So we live together, which makes it very difficult. Even though I might wish to go somewhere and do something, it is difficult because leaving someone that is that young to live by themselves is not good.*

*When I look at him and the way he struggles with his education, it corresponds with my life story, to the way that I went to school. His education ... right now they need money for school fees. And I have no way of adding him to the orphaned and vulnerable children's fund,<sup>16</sup> and I don't even know if he will pass when year-end comes about or if he will finish the school year. They require the top up fee. And now I don't know how I am going to help him but maybe believing that one day, because I am someone that believes in prayer, something is*

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<sup>16</sup> This refers to the government fund supporting such children at school.

*bound to happen. Even the pigs, and although I haven't gotten the right market yet, I would sell to my neighbours, and they would often ask for discounts. You cannot sell a pig for E1 500 (Chuckles). They usually ask for discounts because they often buy the pigs while they are still piglets, so you end up pricing it at E250.*

*At first I did not understand because I did not go for training on how to rear pigs. I had learnt tips from my grandmother. When these ones arrived I understood that I had to feed them and then sell them. But then they advised me to sell them as piglets, just after weaning them. Once you start feeding them do not allow yourself to sell them because then I would make a loss. So now it is pregnant again, so I want to see if I try to sell them as piglets and I try to sell them before I start buying them food then maybe I will be able to make a profit. But anyway, it is not really a good thing in life.*

*When I look at my future, it is blurry. I recently got in contact with a Mr Lukhele, but not from my father's family. Mr Lukhele told me that there is someone who is rumoured to be my father in some distant area. The man rumoured to be my father has the same name as my biological father. So I went to my mother and I enquired about my father, and what sort of person he was. And then she explained to me what I wanted to know and she said that I must ask this man to find out more about my alleged father. I was able to meet this person that they said was my father only to find that he had also heard that he might have gotten a child from his girlfriend. And therefore he had the wish to see me as well. He came home and everything was explained to him. Although he said he understood, he did not promise anything. He has a job as a safety officer in a certain mine. I am somehow hopeful that he will do something for me before the end of the year. However, it concerns me that: what would be the use of finding my father, when there is a child back home that does not have a father because I do not know where my uncle is? So it is difficult for me to leave him. So even if I can find my father and do what I do, moving out of the homestead ey! (Sighs) is still very difficult because of this child who just arrived. At the same time my dreams need to be accomplished and at the end I need to become something or I need to strive for a better life. And then I longed for my neighbour's car, although I could not take a picture of it. Then I used that picture depicting that I wish that one day I will get to that point. And that is where it ends.*

#### 6.2.4 Sbhongile Mafu

Sbhongile could be classified as the shy one amongst the co-researchers. However, when her turn to share her story came, she was prepared. She had a picture of herself and her baby sister (not included in the text), another with a friend and third one was a picture of a house. Although she told her story in a soft voice, she managed to touch the other participants' emotions. She responded to questions readily and in a matter-of-fact manner in her soft voice. Sbhongile's emotions were expressed as she narrated all her experiences and some of them are captured in her story.

*My name is Sbhongile Mafu. I am 22 years old and I am the first-born at home. My present home is in the rural areas in the Lubombo region. From birth till I was seven years old, I stayed with my grandmother because my parents were not married. After they were married, we moved from one place to the other as my father changed jobs. My mother decided to settle in this rural area, which I now call home, after my father's death.*

*I started my primary education at my grandmother's place in the Manzini region. I then went to a primary school in the Lubombo region from Grade 3 to Grade 7. I can say that I was a hard-working student not that I was smart. In short, I was not an intellectually gifted child, I studied very hard. In Grade 7 I passed with a second class. I had two friends in primary school and I transitioned with them into high school as well.*



*I had one best friend in high school who, however, is no longer my friend now. When she got into college, she turned her back on me. I think maybe she got better friends where she is.*

*When I completed my primary school, I started high school at Mhlume High School. I did my Form 1 to Form 5 there. When I was in Form 3 I got a second class. In high school I enjoyed Home Economics and English. What I liked most about Home Economics was the practicals that we did and I really didn't like the theory part. Because the teacher would really hit us more within the theory section than the practical aspect. While we were at school in Form 3 there were a lot of challenges, for example I did not have a Mathematics teacher as he would not teach us, therefore we had to find our own way, which made me develop a hatred for the subject. My hatred for the subject got to the point where I*

would get angry when it was time for Mathematics. The hatred for the subject has affected me a lot within my life.

I was able to complete my high school as I wrote my 'O' Level examination. Unfortunately, I did not do well in the examination as I only got 2 credits and the rest were passes. I think the reason for not passing well in Form 5 is that, whilst I was in Form 5.... (Pauses) mhhhhh.... (Looks down) While I was about to write my Form 5 exam, my parents would argue a lot whenever I would have to study. That used to give me a problem because, when I would start studying, they would start arguing. This gave me some difficulty as this arguing would mean that I couldn't study anymore. This happened to a point where I could not study at home anymore. I would get home and put my books away, do a few house chores then I would go to my friend's house and study there and come back at around 9pm. When I got back my father would sometimes shout at me, asking where I was. But my mother would tell him that I would not study at home anymore because they would constantly be fighting.

What also made my results to be bad, really bad, (frowns) was what happened just before the examinations. When I got home from a party (pause) that the school had prepared for us as completing students, they came to tell us that my father had passed away. They said he was involved in a car accident and he died instantly. That really hurt me, like really hurt me such that I (eyes full of tears so she looks down and pauses for a little while), could not do anything during those days. My mother also left us alone and went to her parental home. We lived alone as children (sobs). The following year, because I hadn't passed well, I could not go anywhere (exhales slowly). I wanted to go upgrade<sup>17</sup> but there was no money. My mother did not benefit from my father's estate. So we lived in Tshaneni and sometimes they would lock us out of the house because we could not pay rent.

My mother had a brother with whom she shared the same surname, not that they were blood relations. My mother's brother would help out with paying the rent. He used to pay half because we lived with his children. Sometimes he would also not pay and therefore they would come lock us out. When they came to lock the house, they usually found me in the house. As I could not do anything to stop them, I would just sit outside and cry. I also did not have friends then because once someone close to you dies then people do not like you anymore and I do not know why. So all my friends, all of them deserted me. Actually, right now, I don't have any friends. So when my father died all of my friends turned their backs on me. I am not sure if they did not care about me because they were in colleges when I was not.

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<sup>17</sup> A process of rewriting the exams in order to improve results.

*At the beginning of 2013, my mother built a house around Mananga, in an area called Manjengeni, to be more specific. And that is where we live right now. It was very difficult to live there at first as we started doing things that we were not used to doing like going to fetch water from the river, going to gather firewood (Kutfota) and other chores done in rural areas. When my mother sent us to get water or firewood with my sister, we would sit down on the road and cry and remember our father. We would comfort each other, stating that we would also be okay one day, and then we go back home. But the life that we are leading now doesn't please me a lot (silence).*

*My father was the one who was working. He was working at AH Transport and he was the senior mechanic there. We had a good life then because anything that we needed we would get. Even in relation to school, he did not give us much of a hassle. At the beginning of every year my father would go pay for all of our school fees. So we did not have a problem with school fees while my father was alive. But what is happening now is that my siblings are under the OVC grant so they do everything for them.*

*Concerning my future, I have already said that I did not pass well. So I am just sitting at home, doing nothing because the problem is I cannot even secure a part-time job that will keep me busy. I'm just sitting and dependent on my mother, just like all my siblings. This is sad because sometimes I will ask for something from my mother and she will sometimes complain stating that I am also old now, I need to also make a plan. So I then do not know where I should go and then I would just sit down and cry because it is sad.*

*My mother makes fish pies which are another thing that I have learnt as I now stay at home. It is easy to make, and although she used to make them while we lived in Tshaneni, I did not know how to make them myself and I did not have the interest to learn either, but now I know how to make them. She sells them to the nearby primary school. And I would sometimes accompany her and I would carry the buckets, I would feel ashamed as this is a difficult thing (giggles nervously). I prefer just staying at home and not talking to anyone. That is why I do not know a lot of people from the area. I only talk to my mother.*



*This picture represents my dream house (holding up photo to the group). I wish to have a beautiful house, which is more beautiful than this one. And have my own car and travel like other people, and actually have a nice life.*

### **6.2.5 Makhosi Dlamini**

Makhosi was dressed appropriately for her age. She was very prepared to share her experiences. Makhosi picture are not included in the text. She had a picture of herself just sitting, another in her brother's car and the third one was her pigsty. She sounded very angry with herself for her wasted opportunities towards schooling, which, in her own words, had landed her in her current position. Makhosi also readily responded to questions posed to her, which helped in digging deeper into her experiences.

*My name is Makhosi Dlamini and I am from the Shiselweni area. My mother has four children, two girls and two boys. I am the second born. But my father had a lot of wives. But he had the problem that his wives would die. My mother was his third wife and the two wives before her had already passed away. So then my mother also passed away. I was raised to have Christian ways and therefore be a Christian. I am a child that is respectful and I also like talking to people and sharing ideas about life.*

*I did my primary school and secondary education in the same area. I obtained a merit both in the Eswatini Primary Certificate (Grade 7) and the Junior Certificate examinations (Form 3). I was in Form 3, before I even sat to write my examination, approximately September 23 (voice quivers) when my mother, who gave birth to me, passed away (looks down). This (her current situation) is because I had lost my mother and I did not get the time to study. Whilst I was at school my grandmother came to school during the lunch hour to take me home. I was shocked as to why she was there and why she had come to pick me up because the school day had not ended. I left school with a strange feeling that I would cry that day. So when I got home they told me. And I was very, very hurt. I became sick and was even admitted to hospital so I really did not study. This disturbed me and I was not able to write my exams very well so I was amazed when the results came back because I did not understand how I could get a merit.*

*My elder sister's school was different from mine so I also found her at home; I also found that she was in a bad shape. But I noticed that the two boys that were younger than me did not*

*fully understand what was happening. They cried when they heard the news but as children, after a short while they were playing.*

*My mum, who worked at a pharmacy in Nhlanguano, was the one responsible for paying our school fees. My father did not care, and he did not find educating girls important; he believed in educating boys. He worked in the mines in South Africa. My father worked in Johannesburg in Carletonville. He lived there and he would only come back whenever he felt like he remembered his homestead. He only came on weekends and did not bother himself about maintaining our homestead. He would just come by and check up on us and whatever he wanted to check up on. He would not ask us on how school is going. My father was around but he couldn't (silence)... I do not know if he couldn't or what. Or if it was the way that fathers do things. My mum was the one that was responsible for us. My father didn't care. And my mum would see to everything at home.*

*My mother liked to work, as she cultivated her own crops, we reared white pigs and we also had chickens. She used the money from these projects to pay school fees, buy food and maintain the homestead.*

*My mother was a hard worker whilst my father, when I analyse him now, was a womaniser. My father would be moving with whoever was on the move as well. But he was married to my mother and they lived together. But sometimes he would leave and sometimes he would not come back, sometimes he would be gone for months. So eventually we did not worry about my father. We knew that we had a father and some people did not. Although we were grateful that he was alive, we were concerned that he did not come back home.*

*After the death of my mother, I did not want to go back to the same school. But my sister requested me not to change schools and therefore I did my Form 4 there. I lived alone at my homestead as my sister was now working at a certain shop. I did not get good grades in Form 4 but I got promoted to Form 5 ('O') Level. I decided not to go to Form 5 the following year as I realized that rushing to complete school with poor grades would not help me, as after completing school I would sit at home and not do anything with poor grades. I asked myself who I would stay with at home anyway. And what would I do. Would waking up and feeding the pigs satisfy me, or looking after the chickens, tending to the yard and cooking? That would not help me. So I asked my sister if I could repeat the grade, and my sister had no problem with me repeating as long as it would be beneficial to me. She would not make that decision for me because she believed that, when you are in Form 4, you already know what you wanted for your future. So I requested not only to repeat but that I move to another*

*school. I had learnt that the school that I requested to be moved to had a reputation of academic excellence and that their passing mark was high.*

*In this new school my fees were paid by both my sister and my brother (from my father's side) who was a nurse. In this school there was a lot of corporal punishment. For example, the school bell would ring at ten past, and in the winter time I would always be late so I knew that I was going to be beaten just for being late. My problem was that I am slow. My brother and sister tried very hard to make our lives normal like others. They did not want it to be exposed that our mother had passed away and that our father did not take care of us. I used to have a lunchbox for school and I also had pocket money to spend. In the morning I would be dropped off by car at school and sometimes they would fetch me in the afternoon as well. Or sometimes I would walk there because it was not far away. So I was able to concentrate in school.*

*My brother, although a nurse, also had a lot of other jobs that he would engage in. He was a farmer and reared pigs, chickens and he also had a store. But I would enjoy the farming aspect, especially sweet potato and then it was the pigs and chickens. So at school I liked Agriculture and Home Economics but the fashion and fabric component, because I could design my own things and then sew them. I liked doing my brother's chores even at home which I still do even now.*

*I raise my own pigs now as I already know what I have to do. But sometimes I ask my brother to assist with the pigs; food because it can be very expensive. He assists me often but I feed the pigs myself. I am grateful because one of my pigs gave birth to 13 piglets, but one died. The pig gave birth to the piglets at night and unfortunately the one fell into water, the thirteenth one. Even now, I still have them; it is just that in my life I hadn't wished that it would end here at rearing animals.*

*I would come back home and do my chores and then study. Every Saturday, we were forced to have studies at school. So I went to school on Saturdays, we all had to go in our school uniform and no one was allowed to wear casual clothes on these Saturdays. This is because wearing casuals caused other students not to attend the study sessions, as some students would come dressed very nicely so it was made a rule that we wear uniforms so that we would all be the same. So we would study at school and there would be teachers that would help us, and the study sessions would end at 13:00. So I think that helped me out because I was able to get good grades, because we were 72 in the class but I got position 12 (smiling).*

*The Saturday sessions helped me and I progressed to Form 5. When I got to Form 5 I started fooling around, I won't lie. I even got a new group of friends. In Form 5 we knew that we were now seniors, we were just 'those girls'. Even our dress code had changed a bit and even our bags always had a little something in them. It wasn't the same as when I was still a junior. So you could even see that there was a bit of mischief in place. And even then I would not go straight home; instead I would always go to town first. There was nothing specific that we wanted to do in town. So we would just wonder around town, and there would be nothing that you would buy. If you did buy something we would buy 'NikNaks'<sup>18</sup> or chocolate or something like that. It was just a waste of money to go to town after school. Therefore, as I was doing all of this, my brother realized this. He called me and asked about this behaviour. I admitted that I was actually doing it. So he said that if I try to serve two kings, only one king will succeed. I can't be a student and also a town frequenter. If I chose school then I should go to school and if I chose to go to town then that is what I must do.*

*I did not listen to my brother's advice. I would come back home late and could not do my homework. All I would do was iron my uniform and then I would just sit and play with my phone. He decided to take my phone away and told me to study so that I could pass. He would even tell me to emulate him as he was a qualified nurse. He showed me his graduation pictures and went on to say that he was now employed, had built his house, was married, had a car and was now enjoying his money. He told me that if I also wanted to end up like him I had to study and get good grades. He emphasized that school is very important as it is what would help me in the end. So he said I must just persevere and not look at the fact that my mother passed away, I must just study hard. I promised him I would do as he had advised. But because I had my group of friends and I had a lot of 'dodgy' things that I was involved in, I did not get good grades in Form 5 (goes silent, trying to hold back tears). So I did not do well. I got a lot of C's only. And when I got my results my brother shouted at me and I cried as well. I also thought that if I had a mother, she would not have shouted at me as much as he had, but then I later realized that it helped me because my mother would have comforted me and told me it was okay. Meanwhile, my brother was not stroking my ego, he was just telling me that I was wrong and he was not hiding that from me. So my brother told my father that I had passed but he stipulated that he did not care and that we must not involve him in such matters as he did not educate girls, as all they know is how to get pregnant and waste his money. According to him, a girl would say she is going to school but really she is just going*

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<sup>18</sup> NikNaks: A popular brand of snack manufactured by a South African Simba chips company and primarily made from maize, vegetable oil, salt and cheese.

*to look for men. I said a little prayer for God to help him for he did not know what he was talking about. I know how I am and we as females are not all the same.*

*And then some time later my father got the girlfriend whom he lives with now. So now my father says that I am ill-treating this woman within our homestead. He only says this to me and not my sister, as my sister rarely comes home from work. So he would often speak to me like this. So one day I spoke up because I then understood that he was just messing with me, and I was not the same child that he used to mess with and the plan was to show him my true colours. So I told them that for that day I would put respect aside and tell him what I thought. I told him that I am not ill-treating my mother but if he just wanted me to move out he should just say nicely that, “my daughter could you...”*

*He put her up in my mother’s homestead. I had no problem with it because I thought that my father realized that he needed a partner. So I continued to tell him that I had no problem with the women but I had a problem with him. I told him that I could go back to living with my brother who has been taking care of me anyway. But I won’t turn my back on you (father) even when I start working, as I will send money back to you as I know that it will assist in the household, as you are my surviving parent. So then you can live with this woman as you have already married her and you cannot change that or tell her to go back to her parental home.*

*My brothers are around but they are still young. But they can also see how life is and what kind of person my father is. So I told my father that I would try and fend for myself so that you do not have to take care of me. I will see to my life, as I will put my life in God’s hands and I will be able to try and fend for myself as I have some knowledge that is at my disposal that I can use to try and succeed.*

*I was thinking of going back to school and restarting Form 4. My brother will pay for my school fees. In my life I wish to be a police officer and I still love it now. I wish with all my heart to go back to school and get my education. Because my brother will be paying for my school fees, I will help feed his pigs as I continue feeding mine. Helping my brother with rearing the animals will reduce the load of hiring someone to do that for him. I will also continue to have my own pigs and will give the proceeds to my brother because he is responsible for my upkeep. I would be lying if I said that I have a shortage of something because he does not take care of me. I am clothed by him and he usually says that I should ask him for the things that I need. Everything, even the money, I take it and give it back to him as I do not know what I can do with it. And then sometimes he gives me some of the*

*money and tells me to see what I can buy with it, and usually I save this money because there is nothing that I absolutely need.*

*I learned from my mother to work for a living as she was a hard worker, independent and did not rely on her pay job. So she would go further and do farming and rearing of animals and she would not say that she will wait for the end of month to get money. So she used to work and also assigned us [job] as well and nobody would laze around. The only reason you would loiter around would be after you had completed your chores. Every morning you knew what was expected of you and which chores you need to complete. And we were taught to be respectful, and go to church, and come back and do your chores. If you were finished with your chores then you would either find something else to do or rest. So this made me realize that, even if I did not get a well-paying job, I know that I can fend for myself, as I know that I should always be busy with something and not just sit around. This is true for my brother as well, as he is a nurse but he has a store, he farms and rears animals. This encourages me to be like him or even exceed him.*

### **6.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the five narratives of the co-researchers in this study. In doing so, it addressed the purpose of the study in ‘giving voice’ to out-of-school youth. The narratives powerfully illustrate some of the themes and patterns of the lives of the out-of-school youth in Eswatini, which are thematically analysed and elaborated in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **FINDINGS: INTERPRETATIONS OF YOUTHS EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

*“When I look at my future, it is blurry”* Lukhele Lunga (Co-researcher)

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The chapter presents findings, from the youths’ perspectives (both co-researchers and research participants), in response to two of the research questions: What are the educational experiences and attitudes of out-of-school youth in Eswatini? How have out-of-school youth’s educational experiences and attitudes contributed in them being NEETs? The emphasis is on understanding the experiences so as to contribute to the development of educational interventions and policies that relate to their learning. The out-of-school youths involved in the study were between 15 and 24 years. The data were collected through photo voice as presented in Chapter Six, as well as the interviews and focus group discussions.

To present the findings on the NEETs experiences, I have used themes generated from the qualitative data. To illustrate or emphasize certain points in my presentation, I have used quotations from the qualitative data and graphs generated from the quantitative data derived from the questionnaire. The themes were informed by concepts from the reviewed literature and theoretical framework, as well as the research questions.

#### **7.2 The NEETs’ experiences**

The NEETs’ experiences, the co-researchers and research participants, are presented based on the following themes: age distribution; geographical location; family background; educational access and progression; support system; training; societal expectation; and future aspirations.

##### **7.2.1 The NEETs’ age distribution and geographical location**

Out-of-school youths who participated in the study were of different ages and from all the four administrative regions as indicated in Table 5.2 in Chapter 5. Table 5.2 shows the age distribution and geographical location of the NEETs who participated in the study. The youngest was 16 years old and the highest percentage (58) of participants fell into the category of youths aged between 22 and 24. Twenty percent of the participants were youths who were between 17 and 18 years old. The findings suggest that the possibility of being a NEET increases as the youth gets older – a phenomenon that requires further research.

The youths' ages indicate that they were born between 1990 and 1998. According to literature, the year 1990 was three years after the first AIDS-related death was recorded in Eswatini (Kanduza, 2003). The NEETs under study were therefore a cohort subjected to the historical impacts of HIV and AIDS (Mabuza & Dlamini, 2017). HIV and AIDS were not the focus of this study; however, further research needs to be conducted on the correlation between the NEETs experiences and the impact of HIV and AIDS, as indicated by Whitehead (2003).

Table 7.1 shows that the geographical locations of NEETs in this study were spread throughout the country. Focus group discussions indicated that some youths were not found in their birth places but in other geographical locations which indicated that some NEETs experienced migration between regions or locations. Although the research participants were not numerically representative of the population in each region and location, there were participants from urban (Hhohho and Manzini regions), semi-urban (Manzini region) as well as rural areas (Shiselweni and Lubombo regions). Some NEETs had the experience of only one way of life, which is, being in the urban or rural area throughout their lives, whilst others had moved either from rural to urban areas or vice versa, and so had educational experiences in more than one area. The interviews indicated that the reasons for these movements varied. They included their parents' employment and marital status, personal shame in repeating a grade in the same school, loss of a parent or a desire to find a better school.

Lukhele Lunga, for instance, did his primary and secondary school education in his home area. He only left home when he went for vocational training. Mfanzile Mpungose, on the other hand, not only moved within Eswatini but also left the country as he completed his education in South Africa. Mfanzile said;

I failed my secondary school in 2010... instead of restarting I decided to quit school and go for vocational training... Whilst I was still doing my training at Bosco my family said that I have to go back to school, because I had decided that I did not want to go back to school... So I went back to school, and they said that it would be better if I went to South Africa because I wouldn't be able to go to school in my area.

Sbongile Mafu, who experienced life in the rural (Lubombo) and urban (Manzini) areas because of her parents' marital status and type of employment, had this to say:

I started my primary education at my grandmother's place in the Manzini region. I lived with my grandmother because my parents were not married at that time. After

they were married we stayed in the Lubombo region. I then went to a primary school in the Lubombo region from Grade 3 to 'O' Level.... My mother decided to settle in this rural area, which I now call home, after my father's death.

Although Makhosi Dlamini also moved schools, her movements were within the same geographical location:

After the death of my mother I did not want to go back to the same school. But my sister requested me not to change schools and therefore I did my Form 4 there. ..I did not get good grades in Form 4 but I got promoted to Form 5 ('O') Level<sup>19</sup>... So I asked my sister to repeat the grade, and my sister had no problem with me repeating as long as it would be beneficial to me. ...So I did not only request to repeat but that I be moved to another school. I had learnt that the school that I requested to be moved to had a reputation of academic excellence and that their passing mark was high.

The data indicated that most of the co-researchers experienced some kind of migration in their upbringing. Whilst one reason for participants' movement was an attempt to find a better school, attend training or repeat a class, others moved because their parents were in search of employment. These movements might have disrupted the NEETs learning process as theorists state that learning is a result of an interaction between the learner and the environment (Illeris, 2003). So if the learners' environment was changed, as was the case with some NEETs, learning might have been affected. The possibility of youths who experience migration becoming NEETs may be higher for those who were negatively affected by that movement but this would have to be tested empirically. As presented in the life stories the movement may be that of parents or guardians or the youth themselves.

Another reason for the youth's movement was the search for jobs. The data from the questionnaire also show that, at the time of the study, most of the NEETs indicated current residential locations that were not their places of birth. Most of them were found in the urban and peri-urban areas in search of jobs. This concurs with literature in that the rural-urban migration is often experienced as a result of job seeking (Whiteside, 2003; Ndlela-Ber-Moe, n.d.; Dlamini, 2014). Whilst rural-urban migration transfers the incidence of youth unemployment from rural to urban markets (Oppenheimer et al., 2011), an analysis of Eswatini's HIV response and modes of transmission revealed that 'migration and mobility pose a risk of HIV for both those travelling and those left behind' (The Government of the

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<sup>19</sup> **'O' Level:** This is the grade where students sit for the external examination. Qualifications from this examinations lead to tertiary education; colleges and university just as matric examination in South Africa.

Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009). The Eswatini government's analysis of HIV response and mode of transmission also revealed that labour migration from Eswatini to South Africa increased markedly in the 1990's (ibid.). In the next section I present the family backgrounds of the NEETs.

### 7.2.2 The NEETs' family backgrounds

The family relationship of adults responsible for the out-of-school youths who participated in the study varied as indicated in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1: Current adult responsible for the research participants by gender**

Current adult responsible for you	Gender of participant			Total
	Male	female	Not stated	
Father	5	4	0	9
Mother	10	11	0	21
Sibling	1	2	0	3
Grandfather	1	0	1	2
Grandmother	2	2	0	4
Aunt	0	1	0	1
Uncle	0	2	0	2
Self	2	1	0	3
Other	2	3	0	5
Total	23	26	1	50

Table 7.1 shows quantitative data on adults responsible financially for the NEETs at the time of the study. The data show that close to fifty (50) percent of the NEETs were being taken care of by their mothers whilst fathers were responsible for only eighteen (18) percent. The other NEETs were taken care of by their grandparents, uncles, siblings and others who may have not have been their blood relatives. These data concur with the summary of the co-researchers' life stories presented in the previous chapter. The data emphasize that NEETs have experiences of being brought up in different family settings other than by the father and mother staying together. Whilst some NEETs lived with both parents, ten percent were taken care of by their grandparents. Some of the NEETs either had to take care of themselves or take care of their siblings as well. This means that living with a single parent, a grandparent or in a child-headed homestead, are some of the experiences faced by the youths during their developmental stages who ended by being categorized NEETs. In the next section, I present

insights from the NEETs on the roles played by family members <sup>20</sup> during their developmental stages.

### **Parental role**

NEETs shared different experiences with family members within the family types in which they grew up. The most interesting experiences concerned the role or contribution made by these family members in their lives. As a result of the experiences with each of the family members, the youths viewed their contribution in their lives differently. They either viewed the contribution as most significant or treasured whilst other family members' contributions were viewed as non-existent or less significant. Some NEETs had the experience of being raised by both parents and treasured them both: 'They paid for my school fees till the end' said Mfanzile.

More participants (23), however, treasured their mothers the most whilst seven (7) treasured their grandmothers, five (5) NEETs treasured their fathers and the rest treasured their grandfathers or siblings. On the same note more NEETs (15) viewed mothers as highly influential, whilst 14 viewed their peers, eight their fathers and the rest their grandparents and siblings as highly influential. Acknowledging mothers as being the most important person in the NEET's lives was also mentioned during the focus group discussions and the journal recordings by co-researchers. Most of the co-researchers said, 'My mother is everything to me'. In the journal recordings, one of the co-researchers wrote: 'I learnt that mothers are people that are more understanding in nature. So a lot of children go to their mothers for help'.

Amongst the NEETs that acknowledged the contribution made by their fathers was Sbongile Mafu whose father paid her school fees and those of her siblings.

My father was the one who was working. He was working at AH Transport and he was the senior mechanic there. We had a good life then because anything that we needed we would get. And even in relation to school he did not give us much of a problem. This is because at the beginning of every year he would go pay for all of our school fees. Therefore, the school side would be settled. Then my father passed away.

But after her father's death, Sbongile also became fully dependant on her mother. Sbongile also shared that, ever since her mother became the bread winner in the family, life was frustrating as she did not have a sustainable source of income. Her source of livelihood was

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<sup>20</sup> **Family members:** Family members in this study refer to the youth's biological mother, father, grandparents and siblings.

the small-scale income generation activities through selling basic food items like vetkoek<sup>21</sup>, niknaks sweets and roasted peanuts. The money generated from this activity did not match the family needs. Although Sbongile appreciated her mother's efforts in supporting them, she also realized the impact of her frustration in the inadequacy of her efforts; 'This is sad because sometimes I will ask for something from my mother and she will sometimes complain'.

Whilst some youths treasured the role of their fathers in their lives, for others the father's role was minimal even if their parents stayed together. Makhosi Dlamini, who was from a polygamous family, said:

But my father had a lot of wives. But he had the problem that his wives would die. My mother was his third wife and the two wives before her had already passed away...My father was around but he couldn't (*Silence*)... I do not know if he couldn't or what. Or if it was the way that fathers do things...My mum was the one that was responsible for us. My father didn't care.

Makhosi's father was also a migrant worker who would be away from home for months;

My father worked in Johannesburg in Carletonville. He lived there and he would only come back whenever he felt like he remembered his homestead. But sometimes he would leave and sometimes he would not come back, sometimes he would be gone for months. So eventually we did not worry about my father. We knew that we had a father and some people did not.

Makhosi's silence, in the first quotation above, is also interesting: 'but he couldn't....' She could not express what he could not do. In a way this silence points syntactically (in the structure of the sentence) to her father's absence or perceived lack of care. Makhosi's father was not only absent from Makhosi's life but might have been exposed to HIV and AIDS as a migrant worker: 'but my father had a lot of wives. But he had the problem that his wives would die' (Ndlela-Ber-Moe, n.d.; Whiteside, 2003). However, the cause of his wives' deaths was not shared. AIDS-related fatality is one possibility arising from Makhosi's statement. Later in this discussion we will see how children without fathers are prone to dropping out-of-school.

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<sup>21</sup> Vetkoek: (an Afrikaans word) is a type of deep fried yeast bun sold by hawkers in public places in Southern Africa

Thokozile Nkosi, on the other hand, said this about her father who had initially denied paternity of her:

So it was that he paid for my expenses only when he felt like it. You would see the money. My father is the sort of person that had money and you would see [it], as he would buy cars like you would buy scones.

Some of the youths never got to know about their fathers throughout their developmental stages. Lukhele Lunga, for instance, never received anything from his father: 'So my father was a person that helped in conceiving me, but I did not really know him well ....and there was nothing that I got from him.' For Lunga, the person who is treasured the most is his grandmother, as his father did not contribute at all and his mother remarried and left him.

The data indicate that, even where both parents were alive and raised their children together, the mother played a more significant role than the father in the NEETs' lives. In most cases, the mothers struggled, financially, to ensure that their children's welfare was taken care of. Mothers, unlike fathers, were mostly unemployed as data from the questionnaire revealed that most mothers were either homemakers or engaged in small scale businesses. Most fathers were either absent or peripheral to the lives of the NEETs. It is possible that the youths' experience of having absent or distant fathers in terms of responsibility contributed to them being NEETs. The youths only had their unemployed mothers to look up to. This tended to make them vulnerable and live in poverty. In the section on school experience, for instance, I present data on the relationship between the NEETs having a responsible mother and dropping out of school.

In some cases, the youths' experiences of living in poverty were a result of being born in a single-parent household, in a polygamous family or due to parental death. Being raised by one's maternal parents and not being sure of one's paternal family is a challenge to one's identity. From my personal experience as Liswati, the issue of identity contributed even more to Thokozile's acknowledgement of her grandmother than either of her parents. The uncertainty of who her father was resulted in Thokozile's grandparents playing the parental role.

It is also noteworthy that, where the mothers also failed to take responsibility in the NEETs' lives, the parenting role was played by grandparents, as the next section indicates.

## Grandparents' role

Most of the youths did not grow up in a family structure where both parents were staying together. Some NEETs had single parents as a result of parents not being married or due to death. These made many of the youth attribute who they were or had become, to their grandparents.

Thokozile Nkosi said:

I was brought up by my grandmother and grandfather because I was born out of wedlock. This created a number of problems for me as I grew up...My mother is not someone I lived with whilst growing up. Well my father, when I had just been born there were talks that I wasn't his and that I did not look like him (*giggles nervously and looks around anxiously*). My mother passed away when I was eight. But from my mother's side, I live with my brother with whom I share a mother. I was raised by my grandparents. I am what I am today, what you can see, it is because of the work of my grandmother. There is a lot that she has done for me. When I look at her, I am filled with gratitude.

Lukhele Lunga also had this to say;

I was a child that was born out of wedlock. And that created a number of problems for me as I grew up which resulted in me moving out and living with my grandmother (my mother's mother). But my mother did not live with us, within that homestead. Therefore, I grew up with three other people. It was the two of us, my grandmother, my sister who is my mother's daughter (*lengimlamako*), and her surname is Zungu. So my surname is Lukhele, my sister is Zungu and the other three are Zwane's. And the Zwane's is where my mother is currently residing as a wife (*sowendze ka Zwane*)<sup>22</sup>.

Thokozile Nkosi said her grandparents took sole responsibility for her.

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<sup>22</sup> Based on my personal knowledge as Liswati, I understand that Lunga's mother had two children before marriage. These children had different surnames (Zungu; the first born and Lukhele; the co-researcher's surname). The mother then got married to a man by the name of Zwane, with whom she had three other children. According to Emaswati custom, from my own experience as Liswati, a woman does not take children from a previous relationship or marriage to a new marriage. Usually they are raised by her parents just like Lunga and his sister were raised by their grandmother.

Eeeh, I am what I am today, what you can see it is because of the work of her [grandmother's] hands. There is a lot that she has done for me. When I look at her, I am filled with gratitude...She has struggled to educate me and it was not because she had a lot of money but she wanted me to become something in the future.

She also said whilst her grandfather was employed, life was easy: 'My grandfather worked at an electricity company and then he retired when I was in Grade 4'. It was after her grandfather's retirement that they all started to be fully dependant on her grandmother.

Lukhele Lunga, who was born out of wedlock, said he became his grandmother's child from his mother's side:

Wherever my granny went, I would be right there as well ...My granny managed to provide in ways that I did not understand. But as time went on and through growing up I understood that it was God's power. So I also started understanding God's ways.

The data in Table 7.1 indicate that in cases where parents could not raise their children, grandparents (grandmother or grandfather) tend to take over the parental role. This is characteristic of African culture as opposed to the countries of the West where individualism is promoted and a nuclear family arrangement is more common, than extended families. In Western culture a child belongs only to their biological parents; nuclear family in African culture the responsibility of raising a child is beyond the nuclear family ; in Eswatini children are raised communally (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). They end up being raised by the grandparents where they also end up being the responsibility of uncles, aunts and the general community. This goes with the saying that '*It takes a community to raise a child*'. The findings that relate to this saying will be discussed in detail in the section on the NEETs' experiences of family support.

The co-researchers' narratives regarding the role of mothers and grandmothers in their upbringings are informed by the quantitative data. The data also reveal that, although the youth acknowledge both grandfathers and grandmothers, their grandmothers tended to be more recognized. The grandparents play the role so well that some of the youths see them as the most treasured persons in their lives. One research participant had this to say about his grandparents: 'They supported me in everything as I lost my parents when I was young.' Another one said, 'My grandparents sacrificed a lot for me to become who I am today'.

The vulnerability of the youths raised by grandparents is evident as their source of income is limited or non-existent. In other words, youths brought up by grandparents tend to live in

poverty just like the ones raised by their mothers. The youths' experience with poverty contributed in a variety of ways to them being NEETs. Because of poverty, some did not complete schooling as they could not afford school fees. Poverty also prevented others from pursuing tertiary studies. The lack of fees contributed to the youths' inability to submit application forms to colleges and to pay for their tuition and accommodation.

In the next section I present the NEETs' religious experiences.

### **Family and Christian values**

Literature reveals that the most important socialization agents are the home, religion, school, community and media (Haralambos, 2000). 'Eswatini is majority Christian', so in most homes Christian values and ethics are instilled in children (Golomski & Nyawo, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, it is no wonder that most youths in this study revealed that they grew up in a Christian family and were taught Christian moral values. Most of the youth attribute their Christian faith to family teachings. Mfanzile, for instance, acknowledged his parents who instilled certain values in him: 'My father and mother taught me life principles in word and action.' Makhosi, who was raised by her mother, said, 'At home I was raised to have Christian ways and therefore be a Christian. I am a child that is respectful and I also like talking to people and sharing ideas about life'.

The findings reveal that the youths brought up by grandparents were exposed to Christian values as well. Thokozile and Lunga said their grandmothers taught them good Christian values. Thokozile said about her grandmother:

There is a lot that she has implanted within me, I'm a soldier because of her, and she has told me the whole truth. I grew up within a family that prays. I love the church because of my grandmother.

Similarly, Lunga said:

So we grew up with my granny, and she feared the Lord (*brushes forehead*). She was so immersed in her faith that she was a priestess. So we grew up knowing the principles of the Bible. (*Pause*) So we grew up, going to church regularly...I already knew that I had to go to church on Sunday, meanwhile I could also read the Lord's Prayer through the help of my grandmother.

The data show that the NEETs were exposed to religion by their families as part of the socialization process. The churches and Christian practices that the NEETs were exposed to

instilled values such as respect, self-discipline and honesty. For some it also instilled some form of resilience to life challenges. For example, Thokozile's application of the acquired Christian principles from her grandmother continues to be a source of strength when faced with life challenges: 'I sometimes feel the power draining away but then I am able to speak life to what I want. And state that I am the head, not the tail'. In other words, their Christian faith gave these youths hope even when their future seemed blurry.

### **Family livelihood**

With regard to livelihoods, 17 of the participants' indicated that their parents or guardians were unemployed. Only seven parents were in wage employment and twenty-two were in self-employment. Those parents who were employed were mostly in low paying jobs such as pre-school teachers, security officers, mine workers, and domestic worker. The self-employment included farming, hawking and tailoring. There were, however, those with better paying jobs such as police officers, a magistrate and others in the civil service. Some of the parents who were in formal employment were also engaged in some form of self-employment.

Amongst those who were engaged in both wage and self-employment were Makhosi's mother and brother as well as Lunga's grandmother. Makhosi said, 'My mother liked to work, as she cultivated her own crops, we reared white pigs and we also had chickens. She also worked at the pharmacy that is located in Nhlanguano.' Makhosi's brother was a nurse and he also reared pigs. Lunga said:

My grandmother was the type that, even though she was a priestess, she also cultivated pigs ...she would go out as a pastor and go to preach... even before I was born I found that life was all about the pigs. And I understood that the money she got there was what we were depending upon.

Sbongile was raised by her mother who was engaged in income-generating activities as a hawker. These activities became the family's source of livelihood after the death of Sbongile's father. Although she felt ashamed of going out to sell her mother's wares in the beginning, she later joined her mother as she realized that there was no other source of livelihood for her.

From the employment profile of the parents and guardians presented above, the NEETs were exposed to a life that could be categorized in the low-income bracket throughout their developmental stages. They were exposed to strategies that barely allowed them to survive

economically. In other words, the data reveal that the youths who ended up being NEETs experienced a life of poverty. Their experience with poverty contributed in their inability to access some social services such as formal and Non-formal Education because of the financial resources required. I found the data to be very interesting in that, for some of the NEETs, their current engagement at the time of the study revealed that they had reverted to those strategies they had been exposed to during their developmental stages. This was interesting to me in that it brought up the reproduction of family roles and circumstances which I present in detail in a section on informal learning or training.

To summarize the family background of NEETs, the findings suggest that the NEETs under study were born in the era of the first reported AIDS-related death. They were thus part of a generation of Eswatini youth that was profoundly affected by the consequences of AIDS, including high mortality and family instability (Mabuza & Dlamini, 2017). The majority of NEETs in the study were not raised by both of their biological parents. Rather, they were raised by single parents (either the mother or father), grandparents or some other relatives, and some NEETs were even from child-headed families. These experiences exposed NEETs to a life of poverty, marginalization and being deprived of certain basic social services. Poverty has a characteristic of reproducing itself (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p.130). However, some of these NEETs did not live within these expectations; they reverted to the strategies they had learnt informally when formal education failed them. In the next section, I present the findings on the NEET's informal education.

### **7.2.3 NEETs' Informal Learning or Training**

In this section I present what some of the research participant's indicated as informally acquired values and skills. They indicated that the skills were acquired from their families, churches, peers and community members which were later used for their survival. Table 7.2 indicates the informally acquired skills.

**Table 7.2: Skills and values acquired by research participants through informal learning**

<b>Values</b>	<b>Skills learnt</b>	<b>Income-generating skills</b>
-Respect -Responsibility -Independence -Self-discipline -Work ethic	-Household chores -Singing -Public speaking -Sales person -Dancing -Football	-Making chicken nests -Looking after cattle -Farming -Pig rearing -Poultry rearing -Making and selling fish cakes and vetkoek

The NEETs did not go into a classroom situation to acquire these skills and values indicated in Table 7.2. Rather, this occurred through socialisation in a variety of social settings as indicated in Table 7.3.

**Table 7.3: Contexts where participants acquired skills**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Home	3	16	19
Community	8	2	10
Peers	4	0	4
Church	1	1	2
Other	2	0	2
Missing	5	8	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>50</b>

The contexts from which the NEETs acquired these skills vary but mainly it was from home as presented by Table 7.3. When asked about learning contexts that had contributed a lot to who they had become, most of the NEETs identified their home (19), community (10), peers (4), church (2) and other (2) as contributing most.

Youth had learned certain skills informally and some of them were using those skills to earn a living at the time of the study. These skills were learnt through watching their parents, friends and even guardians perform particular tasks and emulating them. The data suggest that the youths acquired this learning through performing their daily chores under supervision as they were growing up. Lunga and Makhosi learnt how to raise pigs from their grandmother and mother respectively. Lunga said:

So I learnt early about the work that is associated with pigs, for example the time that a pig should be given food and so forth. Uhmhm and we knew that the money that we got for the household was from the pigs. So I got to understand that pigs had to be sold

after they were a certain size. And I knew that selling them would mean that I would get something from my grandmother....So for the whole of my primary school I knew that I would go to school in the morning and my grandmother would remain to take care of the pigs. But in the evening it would be me, no matter what, taking care of the pigs' needs.

Here we see that Lunga learnt a range of skills and knowledge regarding pig-rearing. This included the practicalities and logistics (time of feeding, task allocation) as well as the household economics related to the activity (selling, optimal value). In addition, he learnt about the value of this activity for the household and him in particular ('I would get something from my grandmother'). He learnt these important lessons at an early age ('for the whole of my primary school'). The detail of Lunga's account suggests that it was a formative and experiential learning process which he was able to draw on later in life.

Makhosi also learnt certain values, such as self-sufficiency, responsibility, self-discipline and hard work, from her mother and brother;

What I learned from my mother was that my mother was a hard worker and she was independent, and she did not rely on her [formal] job. So she would go further and do farming and rearing of animals and she would not say that she would wait for the end of month to get money. So she used to work and also use us as well and nobody would laze around. The only reason one would loiter around would be because they have completed their chores. And every morning you knew what was expected of you and which chores you needed to complete. And we were taught to be respectful, and go to church, and come back and do our chores. If you were finished with your chores then you would either find something else to do or rest. So this made me realize that even if I did not get a well-paying job, I know that I can fend for myself, as I know that I should always be busy with something and not just sit around. And this is true for my brother as well, as he is a nurse but he has a store, he farms and rears animals. And this encourages me to be like him or even exceed him.

At the time of the study both Lunga and Makhosi were using the pig-rearing skills learnt informally for their own livelihood:

And therefore now I am sitting at home and I am busy with rearing my pigs...And I am grateful because one of my pigs gave birth to 13 ...And that is what has kept me going. Although I don't have a target market for now so that I can get a lot of money.

So I usually sell them to my neighbours, especially if the grannies are getting their grants.

Sbongile initially did not like her mother's survival skills but had resolved to use them for her own survival:

Yes my mother makes fish pies which are another thing that I have learnt. It is easy to make, and although she used to make them while we lived in Tshaneni, I did not know how to make them myself and I did not have the interest to learn either but now I know how to make them. She sells them to the nearby primary school. And I would sometimes accompany her and I would carry the buckets, I would feel scared as this is a bit of a disgrace (*kulihlazwana nje*).

The findings reveal that youths tend to fall back to what they know best when life seems not to be working to their advantage. In these data we see that what they know best is what they have learnt informally. The data show that NEETs do try to find strategies to make their lives meaningful and draw upon their own resources. This stands as a counterpoint to the literature that NEETs are helpless and end up being an economic burden to the state by expecting grants (Marsh, 2009). In their attempt to fend for themselves, the NEETs in this study have found themselves re-living their family roles and circumstances. They have gone back to the survival strategies they know and have seen to be working throughout their upbringing. Interestingly, these livelihood strategies come from growing up in a rural context and make use of indigenous, informally acquired knowledge and skills. They are also founded on values such as hard work, cooperation, discipline and responsibility.

Besides livelihoods, some have also found themselves reproducing the circumstances that they grew up in. Lunga, for instance, said regarding a boy in his household:

And then I took a second picture of the boy that I live with, because I wanted to look at him and his life and how I have also been through the situation that he faces now. So I thought I should use him so it is a reminder that I was once there myself... The child got to us and this child was grown. It was said that this was one of my uncle's children. And I do not know where my uncle is right now. But I heard that he is in Richard's Bay. But then my brain also tells me that what is the use of finding my father, when there is a child back home that does not have a father because I do not know where my uncle is? So it is difficult for me to leave him.

Lunga's learning here is profound and different to other kinds of informal learning mentioned. His socialisation of being left by his father and the boy being left by his uncle might have taught him that men abandon their children, but he does not follow that pattern. Instead, through an act of reflection (taking a 'second picture') and empathy, he changes the pattern and decides to care for the boy. Perhaps he learnt this responsibility from his grandmother. He disrupts the pattern of abandonment by taking responsibility (Cox, 2016). This also signals the shift from a child's perspective (finding my father) to adult responsibility ('there is a child back at home...it is difficult to leave him').

The reliving of family roles and circumstances also emphasizes that learning is lifelong and is not confined within a formal setting but includes informal and non-formal learning. The NEETs experiences reflect that youth resort to survival skills acquired informally particularly when they cannot draw any from formal education. To me this means for individuals to contribute productively to society the lifelong learning approach to learning should be adopted. All forms of learning – informal, formal and non-formal – should be recognized equally (Preece, 2006, p. 51). It also indicates that family roles are shaped by wider structural factors, such as poverty and migrant labour, which continue from one generation to the next.

The data also show that there is some stigma attached to the strategies that arise from informal learning, such as pig-rearing and selling vetkoeks. These are looked down upon compared to formal jobs that arise from formal education. However, it is worth noting that the study shows that it is the informal learning and income generating strategies that NEETs revert to in order to survive, so these have great actual value in a context where the formal economy cannot accommodate everyone. Even those who have formal jobs, as in the case of Makhosi's brother and mother as well as Lunga's grandmother, include informal income-generating activities as part of their livelihoods. This study shows that, although informal learning may be stigmatized, the data demonstrates that it has significant contribution as it relates to values, work and lifelong learning. The deficit view which lies behind the stigma is based on attitudes influenced by neoliberalism (Youngman, 2000; Yates & Payne, 2016) rather than what the NEETs face in reality. In the neoliberal framework youths who have acquired skills through informal learning are not recognized.

### **Societal attitudes towards informally acquired skills**

The neoliberal influence has resulted in society recognizing certain skills and ignoring others particularly based on how they have been acquired; traditionally or informally as indicated in Table 7.4.

**Table 7.4: Characteristics of traditional/informal learning and modern/formal learning as viewed by the society**

Traditional informal learning	Modern Formal learning
Traditional activity	Modern activity
Informal economy	Formal economy
Low status	High status
Learnt in family and community settings	Learnt in education and training institutions
Associated with rural life and livelihoods	Urban
Enables survival	Aspires to access middle class

The whole concept of NEET is defined according to modern formal learning. A young person is a ‘Not’ in relation to formal learning aspects but might be richly endowed in relation to traditional informal learning. This raises questions about what kind of construct ‘NEET’ is. One might argue that it is a western, middle class, or neoliberal construct that excludes many youths by labelling them in deficit mode as ‘Nots’.

#### **7.2.4. NEETs’ school experiences**

In the section below, I present the NEETs’ school experiences in formal education as they relate to educational access, progression and completion. According to the findings, the NEETs’ socio-economic background impacted on their educational experiences in all aspects. The NEETs also shared insights on what would promote educational progression even at a tertiary level.

The findings reveal that the NEETs’ experiences with educational access are demonstrated in the highest level of education they achieved and their dropping out of formal education. Experiences that the NEETs linked to dropping out related to single- or double-orphanhood, corporal punishment, repetition of a grade and walking a long distance to school. Gender as a barrier to education, although not identified by many, was another experience the NEETs had that relates to access to education.

#### **NEET’s and highest level of education**

The highest educational level of out-of-school youths who participated in the study varied from pre-school to tertiary studies as indicated in Table 7.5.

**Table 7.5: Highest level of formal education attained by participants by gender**

Highest level of formal education	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Not stated	
Pre-school	0	1	0	1
Primary	4	1	0	5
Secondary (J.C.)	5	11	0	16
High School	10	10	1	21
College	2	0	0	2
University	2	3	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>50</b>

Table 7.5 shows that twenty (20) of the NEETs who participated in the study had attained high school ('O' level) followed by those with secondary education (16). Whilst there was an equal number of males and females with high school education, more females than males had secondary education. There were also youths who are NEETs who had a tertiary level of education. On the other hand, only one youth was recorded who had not progressed beyond preschool education. These data thus show that the educational level of NEETs varies from the lowest as pre-school to the highest level as tertiary. In the section on NEETs and training, I present the effects of low educational qualifications on NEETs' access to tertiary education.

### **Dropping out of school**

The NEETs shared reasons for dropping out of school that were orphanhood, corporal punishment, repetition of grades and distance to school. The co-researchers' narratives and the quantitative data indicated in Table 7.6 indicates a link between orphanhood and being categorized as NEET.

**Table 7.6: Parents alive and gender**

Gender	Father only	Mother only	Neither alive	Both alive	Not stated	Total
Male	0	9	10	2	3	24
Female	2	8	10	3	3	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>50</b>

Table 7.6 above shows that 20 youths had lost both parents. The next highest figure (17) was those with only their mothers alive. Orphanhood exposed the NEETs to poverty where no-one was there to pay for their school fees or buy them school uniforms. In the advent of poverty, some of the NEETs managed to continue with their education through the assistance of relatives, community members or government grants, whilst for others the loss of a parent became a big constraint and resulted in them just dropping out-of-school.

For instance, parental absence for Lunga and Thokozile resulted in them being in full custody of their grandparents from childhood. Lunga appreciated his grandmother's efforts as he said he felt he was not very different from the other children he went to school with. He observed, though, that inequality amongst children in school was a result of their background:

You find that the homesteads that we come from are not the same, some are very poor... For example, I could see the neighbour's children having a number of toys and playing with them.

Thokozile was also in the full custody of her grandparents although both parents were alive. She mentioned that, whilst her grandparents were working, life was good but after their retirement they did not have money for her school fees. Her grandparents' retirement led her to miss certain classes as school authorities would use suspension to pressurise parents who had delayed or not paid their children's school fees. The lack of money also made her uncertain of progression to the next class:

I used to get sent home like every child because my grandfather had retired when I was in Grade 4, so I would sometimes stay at home for approximately a whole week as they tried to gather money for me to go back to school...I was worried if I would manage to get to Form 1 as I had passed my Grade 7. This was as a result of money since when you start Form 1 there is a need to get deposit money alongside money for a new uniform.

Makhosi lost her mother just before writing her Junior Certificate examinations and was really disturbed. She was an intelligent student as she obtained a merit both in primary and secondary examinations. However, despite her bereavement, she managed to sit for the examination:

I was not able to write my exams very well so I was amazed when the results came back because I did not understand how I could get a merit. This is because I had lost my mother and I did not get the time to study.

The above data show that losing either or both parents' results in a child being vulnerable. The child may feel discriminated against as she or he would not have access to some of the basic items. Above all, some of the youths did not have the financial means to continue with their education as there was no-one to pay for their school fees. Lack of school fees has been cited as the major contributing factor in youths dropping out-of-school (EMIS, 2012). The

above data also indicate that the loss of parents, which in many cases exposes youth to poverty, tends to deprive even the most capable youths from contributing to their own and the country's development, as it would have been the case with Makhosi. The relationship between having parents or not, to pay school fees and school dropout is presented below.

**Table 7.7: Reasons for dropping out of school and parents alive**

Parents alive	Reason for dropping out of school							Total
	Subjects too hard	School fees	School uniform	Distance to school	Corporal punishment	Other	Not stated	
Mother	2	3	0	2	1	1	0	9
Neither	2	4	1	1	3	4	0	15
Both	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	3
Not stated	0	3	0	0	0	0	20	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>50</b>

Table 7.7 shows that a lack of school fees was the main reason for orphans, double or single orphans, to drop out of school. Of the 58 percent of the NEETs who dropped out of school because of school fees, 48 percent of them were double or single orphans. Although data on only father alive was not available, 18 percent of the orphans who dropped out had only their mothers alive. Orphans were also more vulnerable to the other contributing factors to dropping out, such as corporal punishment, subjects being too hard or lack of school uniform.

Apart from the reasons for dropping out-of-school, cited in the table, the co-researchers' journals also mentioned pregnancy as a reason for dropping out among girls. Sbongile during a focus group discussion shared that

most girls in the rural areas such as Malibu [not the real name of the place] drop out of school because they become pregnant. And the reasons that they cited were that most of them are poor, they do not have a lot of things. So whilst they are at school people would come and offer them everything in exchange for sex.

The findings reveal that poverty is the main reason for dropping out of school. The data show that being an orphan (single or double) made the NEETs vulnerable to dropping out of school. More orphans tend to experience the impact of poverty, more than when both parents are alive. Whilst the vulnerability is greater regarding financial demands, the data also show that orphans are more vulnerable to school drop out for the other reasons. The insights from the co-researchers also reveal that poverty and being a girl child, as shared by Sbongile above, complicates the NEETs' vulnerability to dropping out of school.

### **Dropping out of school and corporal punishment**

Table 7.7 shows that the second most common reasons for dropping out-of-school after ‘school fees’ was ‘corporal punishment’ and ‘subjects being too hard’. The youths experienced corporal punishment at school for various reasons and so they viewed corporal punishment differently. Whilst many youths’ felt corporal punishment would assist them to improve their performance, other youths’ shared that their school performance was negatively affected by it. Makhosi, for instance, who wanted to repeat Form 4, changed to a school reputable for excellence and a high pass rate. She did not mind that the school also had a reputation for corporal punishment.

Thokozile, on the other hand, was very fearful of corporal punishment such that she would try by all means to avoid conduct that would result in her being punished. Corporal punishment also contributed towards her attitude to certain subjects and her inability to internalize what was taught:

So I was a child that was afraid of being hit and I went to school in Mhlatane, and they used to hit us. So I was trying to avoid being hit, by doing my homework and I would return to school having completed it. But what I did not like is the way I was taught at school. There was an Accounts teacher who used corporal punishment; meanwhile I was afraid of getting beatings. So when it was time to pack up and go to Accounts there were always feelings of apprehension of whether or not she would hit me today, or what would actually transpire... I am the type of person that shuts down once you start shouting at me or hitting me, therefore I do not comprehend anything after that.

More orphans dropped out-of-school because of corporal punishment followed by those who only have their mothers alive. Although the numbers in this study are too small to draw general conclusions, for me it is a concern that the highest number of those dropping out because of corporal punishment are the orphans whilst children with both parents alive did not cite corporal punishment as a reason for dropping out-of-school. In my view this might be due to the fact that in Eswatini culture a parent, particularly a father, disciplines a child using corporal punishment. So a child would be familiar with this form of discipline from home. I also know of parents who would administer corporal punishment again to a child once they have been informed of the child’s misbehaviour in school or in the community. These findings talk to the partnership or collaboration amongst the institutions (home, school, church and community) that contribute in the raising of a child. The importance of such collaboration calls for further research.

### **Dropping out of school and repetition**

Youths felt very ashamed of repeating a grade. This was especially when most of their friends did not have to repeat. This attitude towards repeating contributed to some having to change schools. For Mfanzile, Lunga and Makhosi, repeating a grade was really embarrassing. Whilst Lunga braved the shame, Mfanzile and Makhosi changed schools. Mfanzile said

I had to repeat a grade. It was really sad especially because where I come from and amongst the boys that I lived with I was the only one that had failed. I had to repeat grade two whilst everyone passed to the next grade. (*Looks angry and disappointed in himself*). But then that did not make me give up, since I picked myself up and tried and I passed.

Mfanzile could not brave going back to the school he had dropped out of: ‘So I went back to school...I went to South Africa because I wouldn’t be able to go to a school in my area.’ Likewise, Makhosi, who did not want to go to the next class because of being promoted<sup>23</sup>, requested to change school: ‘So I did not only request to repeat but that I am moved to another school.’

### **Dropping out of school and distance to school**

Long distances to school and unsafe paths were a risk for learners to drop out of school in fear of being attacked by thugs. Mfanzile, for instance, walked long distances and experienced harassment on his walks to school, which exhausted him.

### **Gender and access to education**

Gender inequality with regards to access to education was experienced by some of the female youths. Khosi’s father felt it was useless to educate girls;

My father did not care, and in his head he had these notions that he does not fund girls’ education, he only educates boys...So my brother told my father that I had passed but he stipulated that he did not care and that we must not involve him in such matters as, “I do not educate girls as all they know how to do is get pregnant and waste my money”.

Khosi’s father here shows a traditional, patriarchal attitude towards girls’ education. The cultural assumption behind Khosi’s father’s attitudes is the understanding that it is a waste of

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<sup>23</sup> Promotion: In Eswatini, a student who fails to meet academic requirements for the next grade may be allowed to transceed based on other acceptable criteria such as continuous assessment.

economic resources to educate girls, as they are only good for getting married and raising children. Boys, on the other hand, are the future providers of their homesteads. So educating boys rather than girls, was viewed as an economic investment. What is interesting here is that the brother appears to differ from his father – “My brother told my father I had passed” - suggesting possible intergenerational differences in attitudes towards girls’ education.

### **NEETs and experiences that contributed to effective learning**

In this section I present the NEETs’ shared insights on what contributed to effective learning. These are the teaching and learning method adopted, their attitudes towards school, their teachers’ professionalism in the teaching and learning process, family disputes, motivation and the value they attached to the subjects learnt.

Effective learning and methods of teaching preferred by participants is presented below.

**Table 7.8: Teaching method preferred by gender**

Preferred teaching methods		Gender			Total
		Male	Female	Not stated	
	Lecture	5	10	0	<b>15</b>
	Group discussion	12	11	1	<b>24</b>
	Individual learning	5	4	0	<b>9</b>
	Not stated	1	1	0	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>50</b>

Table 7.8 shows the teaching methods youths preferred, which were group discussion followed by the lecture method, whilst individual learning was the least preferred method. The preference for group discussion to individual learning suggests a preference for collective and interactive approaches to learning where students learn and share together. This resonates with the focus within African indigenous learning which includes learning from and with others, rather than learning as an individual pursuit (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). It also suggests a preference for oral methods (Group discussion and Lecture) rather than writing.

### **Effective learning and attitude toward school**

The NEETs also shared that their attitude towards school had a bearing on their learning. They shared that their love for school contributed to their progress whilst a playful attitude contributed in their failure in making it academically. Thokozile and Sbongile shared that they felt that their positive attitudes towards their school work correlated with their school performance.

Thokozile said

I loved going to school from primary up to high school ... so when I got to primary school I was the sort of child that loved school, I was determined ... so I got into Form 1 I was still the child that was determined and that got good grades.

Sbongile shared that she felt that her hard-working attitude contributed towards her getting good grades in school:

I can say that I was a hard working student not that I was smart. I was not an intellectually gifted child, I studied very hard. In Grade 7 I passed with a second class... because I was determined with my school work and I loved my school books, I managed to obtain a first class. Not because I was smart.

On the other hand, some NEETs felt that their playful attitude contributed towards their dropping out and slow progression rate in school. As Mfanzile Mpungose explains:

When I was at school I was too playful and not serious with my school work...therefore I failed ever since primary school, I did not have a passion for school.

Mfanzile felt that his playful attitude also affected his concentration levels:

In primary school I was not someone who thrived on my work as a student (*Bengingakatimiseli*). I and my friends enjoyed playing soccer more than school such that soccer occupied my mind all the time. So as the lessons continued I would be thinking about the soccer that we would be playing after school. Therefore, I repeated classes from primary school because I did not have a passion for school.

Lukhele Lunga shared this about his playful attitude: 'So, when I got to Grade Two, I had, let's say, bad luck (pauses and diverts gaze), and because of playing I had to repeat that grade.'

To conclude this sub-section, the findings imply that, whilst some children brave the shame of repeating, others cannot. They opt for change of school or just drop out. The NEETs also believed that their attitude towards school either enabled them to progress well (Thokozile and Sbongile) or delayed them (Mfanzile).

## Teachers' professionalism

The teacher's performance in class also contributed to youth's attitude towards a certain subject. Sbongile and Mfanizile's attitudes towards subjects were affected by the teacher's commitment to teaching. For Sbongile, the teacher's lack of commitment resulted in her hating Mathematics:

Hmmm, while we were in school in Form 3 there were a lot of challenges, for example I did not have a Mathematics teacher as he would not teach us therefore we would have to find our own way, which made me develop a hatred for Mathematics. To the point where I would get angry when it was time for Mathematics. And that has affected me a lot within my life.

Mfanizile, on the other hand, ended up choosing subjects which did not enable him to enter tertiary education. His criteria for subject choice were based on the teacher's commitment to teaching: 'The subjects that I picked, I picked because I knew that the teachers teaching those subjects were not committed and hence their subjects were seen to be playful classes.'

Youths' attitudes towards subjects were also affected by corporal punishment, and the value they placed on that particular subject. Sbongile said in high school she loved Home Economics but only when it was time for the practical section. With regard to theory she said, 'I really didn't like the theory part because the teacher would really hit us more within the theory section than the practical aspect'.

## Family disputes

An environment conducive to learning is necessary to enhance learning. Sbongile cited the disputes between her parents as contributing to non-performance in school;

Whilst I was in Form 5... (*Pauses*) mhhhhh... (*Looks down*) While I was about to write my Form 5 [exam], my parents would argue a lot whenever I would have to study. And that would give me a problem because when I would start studying, they would start arguing. This gave me some difficulty as this arguing would mean that I couldn't study anymore. This happened to a point where I did not study at home anymore.

## **Effective learning and the value attached to subjects**

The data suggests that there was a tendency to link the value of subjects with the immediate application of that subject to everyday life. Makhosi, for instance, preferred Agriculture and Home Economics as she could relate what she learnt to her everyday life:

But I would enjoy the farming aspect, especially sweet potato and then it was the pigs and chickens. So at school the subjects I liked were Agriculture and Home Economics but [also] the fashion and fabric component, because I could design my own things and then sew them. I liked doing my brother's chores even at home which I still do even now.

The findings show that NEETs' motivation to learn contributed towards academic progression. Besides attitude, teachers and distance to school, the school's dress code also motivated the students to continue with their education. For instance, the difference between primary and secondary school uniform seem to have contributed to the NEET's desire to progress with education. Lunga said 'I had already told myself that in primary school we would wear shorts, so what motivated me to complete my primary school is that in high school we wore long trousers'.

To conclude the findings on NEETs and school experiences, the data reveal that there is a link between the NEETs' socio-economic background, educational access and progression. The data show that most of the NEETs experienced poverty and were from unstable family backgrounds. Such experiences tended to contribute to their difficulty in accessing or to their dropping out of formal education. Such findings concur with Irina Bokova's comments that, when faced with budgetary constraints, families, like governments, tend to compromise their children's' education (UNESCO, 2010). For some families, the compromise would even be gender related. They would prefer to have a boy child as opposed to a girl child going to school.

### **7.2.5 NEETs and support**

NEETs experienced support from parents, family, siblings, friends, teachers and the community. The NEETs shared that the support they received either contributed positively or was a barrier to their educational success.

In the section on family background, I presented the NEETs experiences with individual support from family members followed by how the NEETs viewed the support and the value they attached to each member's support. The findings revealed that most NEETs, even if the

fathers were alive, valued their mothers more. The data also revealed that most NEETs were double- or single-orphaned with most of them having experienced support only from their mothers. Most of the NEETs who were double-orphaned were supported by their grandparents or siblings. There were some NEETs, however, who experienced support from both parents.

Mfanzile was one of the very few who enjoyed his parental support from birth;

They have supported me since I was young and even now they would like for me to have a bright future...My parents are really supportive; they support me, I won't lie. After all they are the ones that convinced me to go back to school, as they realised that I would not have a future without my education.

Makhosi enjoyed the support of two of her siblings: 'And my school fees were being paid by both my sister and my brother that is a nurse in Nhlngano'. However, Makhosi was particularly appreciative of her brother who, besides supporting her financially, became her role model, counsellor and mentor:

I owe it all to my brother because if I wasn't like this (*Playful attitude*) maybe I would have passed my 'O' level... So he said that if I try to serve two kings, only one king will succeed. I can't be a student and also frequent town...As I cannot do both of these things...He (*my brother*) would even tell me to look at him and how he was a nurse, and I could see his graduation pictures and see that he completed all his studies... He emphasized that school is very important as it is what will help me in the end. So he said I must just persevere and not look at the fact that my mother has passed away, I must just study hard. And I said that I would try to do that.

The data shows that six NEETs experienced orphanhood and were either supporting themselves or received support from their siblings. To me the data shows, particularly with Makhosi, siblings tended to take the full parental role of being providers, counsellors, mentors and role models when the parents or guardians were absent or not able to do so.

**Table 7.9: Adult currently responsible for you: Gender cross tabulation**

		Gender			Total
		Male	Female	Missing	
Adult currently responsible for you	Father	5	4	0	9
	Mother	10	11	0	21
	Sibling	1	2	0	3
	Grandfather	1	0	1	2
	Grandmother	2	2	0	4
	Aunt	0	1	0	1
	Uncle	0	2	0	2
	Self	2	1	0	3
	Other	2	3	0	5
Total		23	26	1	50

Apart from close family members and siblings, NEETs received support from extended family members and/or community members as presented in Table 7.9. For example, Thokozile said: ‘but then my uncles managed to scrape some money together and I managed to start my Form 1.’

Lunga shared that he received financial assistance from a neighbour (not related to him), who assisted him to pursue his tertiary studies in Newcastle, South Africa. Societal network also resulted in Lunga’s employment:

And then in 2011, I got a call that, and I did not know this woman. But she tried to explain that her surname was Madvuna from Pigg’s Peak, and that she had a job for me as she needed someone to work for her.

Sbongile said:

My mother had a brother because they shared the same surname not that they were of blood relations. And he would help out with paying the rent, so he would pay half because we lived with his children.

Apart from parents, siblings, extended family and community members, NEETs received support from their friends; they attribute part of their educational success or failure to the type of friends they chose during their developmental or formative stages. According to Thokozile, for instance, the circle of friends she chose (the ‘Chillaz’ who motivated and competed with each other) contributed to her educational success whilst Mfanizile and Makhosi shared that their friends contributed to their educational failures.

Thokozile said:

What motivated me a lot were my friends; ... So when I got to Form 4, that is when I started to hang around people that would have a positive impact on my life. (*Starts smiling broadly*) ...there was a group which was called 'Chillaz'...basically what brought us together were books...We had said that everyone in the group needs to pick a position that they would like to have. (*Giggles and smiles broadly*) I was the CEO of the 'Chillaz'... So there was no fooling around.

Thokozile's set of friends demonstrate that a sense of agency can be developed through shared values and practices (Merriam & Kae, 2014). They co-operatively agreed upon individual learning tasks which ensured commitment to assigned duties and ultimately resulted in enhanced learning in that a community of high achievers was developed. Unlike in the case of Sbongile who found herself without friends to depend on (discussed below), Thokozile's group demonstrate the value of interdependence that holds the collectiveness and wellbeing of individuals (ibid.).

Thokozile's group also demonstrate the power of Coleman's (1988) closure concept. The group's actions operated in a cohesive way so that the density of the social capital resulted in them being a closed group: 'So there was no fooling around, as we sat together even in class. And we would sit two by two, so it would be the six of us and then the rest of the class would follow'. Apart from family members, the density of social capital such as that shared by the 'Chillaz' is usually expected from church groups and associations (Coleman, 2008).

Mfanzile also shared how the friends he surrounded himself with contributed to his downfall and to the playful attitude that resulted in him repeating classes. He, however, later got a friend who advised him correctly so that he made a resolution to suspend his soccer games and focus on his education:

Encouraging me to change was all him [*his friend*]. But at first I resisted and would argue with him, but I ended up listening to what he had to say. So I was doing my Grade 11 and I passed it very well.

Makhosi also shared how her friends contributed to her downfall at high school after doing well at secondary school even though she lost her mother during that period. She said:

And when I got to Form 5 I started fooling around, I won't lie. I even got a new group of friends...I had my group of friends and I had a lot of dodgy things that I was

involved in. So you could even see that there was a bit of mischief in place. And after school I would not go straight home then; instead I would always go to town first. Therefore, I did not get good grades in Form 5. (*Goes silent, trying to hold back tears*)

Sbongile shared that she experienced neglect by her friends and she believes that was a result of losing her father. She felt the neglect at a time when she felt she needed them the most.

Besides support from home and friends, NEETs shared that the support or lack of support from their teachers contributed to their educational success. The NEETs appreciated the extra effort put by some of their teachers who went beyond their normal working hours to weekends in an attempt to assist them. Youth viewed this weekend teaching as very helpful.

We were forced that every Saturday we have studies at school (sic). So I went to school on Saturdays, we all had to go in our school uniform and no one was allowed to wear casual clothes on these Saturdays. This is because wearing casuals caused other students not to attend the study sessions, as some students would come dressed very nicely...

### **Government support**

After the loss of a parent, most of the youths experienced living either alone or with their siblings. Life in a child-headed home proved to be very challenging for these youths. It was after realizing the impact of HIV and AIDS that the Eswatini Government started grants for orphans and vulnerable children. For both Sbongile and Lunga, the government grant was very beneficial. Lunga also said: 'But it was also hard, so my grandmother went to one of the teachers, Mr Mamba and she requested if he could squeeze me within the list of orphans'. Sibongile shared that:

...therefore government paid for my studies for Form 4 and Form 5...But what is happening now is that my siblings are under the OVC grant so they do [pay] everything for them.

The data show that NEETs received support from different people other than their parents throughout their developmental stages. The support included their extended family, siblings, friends, community members and the government. Despite the challenges the youths faced with regard to family background, these NEETs did not give up but managed to complete their education through these different forms of support. What is notable about the data is the importance of key relationships to the educational success or failure of students.

### 7.2.6 Access to further studies

Most of the youth could not access colleges or universities due to a lack of relevant qualification such as grades attained or subject choices at high school, as well as a lack of finances.

Mfanzile, although he had not completed school, gained entrance to a vocational institution but faced other challenges that resulted in him not graduating. This indicates that there was training that at least some youths could access even if they had not completed their formal education. Mfanzile shared this:

I failed my secondary school in 2010... instead of restarting I decided to quit school and go for vocational training... I had gone to train there because I wanted to acquire the skill so that I could get a job. There were problems at school (vocational) that prevented us from grade testing within that year that they had said that we would grade test.

Thokozile, Sbhongile and Lunga, on the other hand, could not access university or other tertiary institutions because of their grades. Thokozile said;

And then I got to Form 5 where I got six credits except for Maths where I got a D. I did all of the sciences: Biology, Agriculture, Physical Science, and Accounts. I credited everything, and I believe it was because of the Mathematics that I did not qualify [for entrance into tertiary institutions]. *(Looks up and pauses for a while)*.

Sbhongile said; 'I went to school until I reached Form 5 and completed, but I did not do well.' For Mfanzile the challenge was not only the choice of subject, but it was also that he had completed his education outside Eswatini: 'I could not get a school that side (South Africa). I needed to come back here.'

In Eswatini he was again faced with the problem of the subject choices he had:

But it was found that my subjects eish... it doesn't look like I can apply anywhere with them, they are very different. The subjects that I did at school were history, maths literacy and I do not think maths literacy is a subject in Eswatini yet. So when I look at my results I don't think they could accept me.

Apart from entry requirements to either a university or college, youths face financial challenges. The NEETs shared that the financial demand starts from submitting the application form. One needs to submit as many applications as possible in order to increase

opportunities for acceptance. Application on its own is costly. Then there are the tuition fees. Lunga was able to access college; however, lack of finances resulted in him dropping out. Lunga said;

In 2008 when I had my results I could not restart; so I went to Newcastle [South Africa], which was a school of technology...This is where I studied Civil Engineering, and I registered for a four year course. So I started with the N's, so I did N1, N2, and N3 then there was no money from Mr Dlamini who paid for my school fees. So I could not complete.

The findings reveal that NEETs' educational level and or financial situation had a negative impact in their access and completion of tertiary training.

### **7.2.7 Societal expectations of NEETs**

Most of the NEETs shared experiences on attitudes they had received from members of the community with regard to their societal positions. They shared tension and frustration between societal expectation and the realities they lived in. Thokozile said:

It is very painful when I wake up in the morning, when people see you bathed and dressed and going to town. And they think that it is enjoyable, and you meet an elderly person who will ask you where are you working now?

In their frustration the NEETs shared that they were also looking to government and members of society to support them so that their NEETs status changes. Thokozile said:

I have been to the Members of Parliament, business people where I have been requesting that perhaps they can provide me with a study loan. It's not that they will be giving me the money but it is just that when I am done I will repay it.

The data show the anxiety and uneasiness within the NEETs as they experience failure and social exclusion. Whilst NEETs expect assistance from government and some members of society to change their social status, society expects every child and youth to achieve the normal developmental progression. Society expects that youths between 15 and 24 years should contribute towards the economic development of the society. The youth's developmental experiences, on the other hand, have resulted in the uniqueness of their situation. They have not been able to follow the normal developmental progression as expected by society. As such, they are also expecting government and the community to assist

them in meeting their societal role; for instance, as Thokozile stated, they need financial support to access training.

### 7.3 NEETs' future plans and aspirations

The findings presented above tend to paint a gloomy picture for NEETs. Some literature reveals that youth with such experiences in their developmental stages often have a negative sense of their future, give up about life and have low self-esteem (Fawcett, 2010; Marsh, 2009). However, most of the NEETs in this study suggested the opposite. They shared their future plans and aspirations, particularly with regard to improving their employability as Table 7.10 indicates.

**Table 7.10: How can employment opportunities be improved?**

Suggestion for improving opportunities		Gender			Total
		Male	Female	Not stated	
	Training in vocation skills	7	9	1	17
	Training in business skills	9	5	0	14
	Access to capital	5	9	0	14
	Other	1	1	0	2
	Not stated	1	1	1	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>50</b>

Table 7.10 above shows how NEETs think their employment opportunities can be improved. By employment opportunities they refer to both waged- and self-employment. The NEETs believe that training and access to capital are important for one to live a meaningful life. I think they do not state skills only because some of them already possess a skill but they cannot make a living out of it due to lack of capital.

The lack of success in their attempts to make life meaningful has resulted in them seeing their future plans vanishing before their eyes. Lunga said: 'When I look at my future, it is blurry.' Sbongile said:

So I am just sitting at home, doing nothing because the problem is I cannot even secure a part time job that will keep me busy. I'm just sitting and dependent on my mother, just like all my siblings.

I should mention though that, although these NEETs see their future as blurry, there is still a glimpse of hope in some of them to achieve their childhood aspirations. Some of the NEETs

aspirations were revealed in the photo voice exercise. Lunga wished for a car: ‘And then I longed for my neighbour’s car, although I could not take a picture of it.’ Sbongile wished for a house: ‘This picture represents my dream house. I wish to have a beautiful house, which is more beautiful than this one. ..., and actually have a nice life.’

Whilst some NEETs, faced with similar challenges, end up sitting at home and doing nothing others are prompted by their aspirations to continue fighting for a better future. Thokozile, for instance, wished to study auditing;

But as time went by .... I had said earlier that my grandmother is in the hospital. As I was sitting in the hospital, caring and looking (*ngigadzile and ngibukile*), there was a change as I realized that I love nursing, the medicine and the caring. Because I found that I loved it. I have found that even as I care for my grandmother, I am filled with love as I do it.

Mfanzile also believes that, when faced with life challenges, the individual needs goal setting, self-control, directedness, and determination in order to realize his or her dreams:

As I started my education in South Africa I came to the realization that I wanted to be someone and to have something in life... So then I had decreased my soccer time, and my main focus was on my school work. I underwent my Grade 12 and I passed with a B in Grade 12. This is due to the fact that I rented my own place, I was alone and therefore I was in control.

Thokozile shared Mfanzile’s belief in taking control of your own life in order to succeed:

I have this idea that I am the captain of my own ship... It is something that I wish for in life to see myself as someone that sits in front of those big screens and swing my chair. I am a dreamer and I can see myself as someone great, putting aside what I see today...After I couldn’t apply to all the places that I wished to get into, I decided to take matters into my own hands as I wanted to become something better...I wish that one day, I have great hope that one day all will be well... it will be well... it will be well (*Sobbing*).

She strongly believes in pursuing life opportunities;

That I hold it all in my hands, everything that I need to happen is within me. And a lot of people usually say that the sky is the limit. But to me it is not, it is never the limit, you can explore the planet and find new galaxies and then you conquer the sky.

Thokozile's expression of high aspirations while simultaneously sobbing, shows the tension between the idea and the reality that NEETs face, and the continuing painful struggle to transform harsh realities. During the discussions, the NEETs shared their experiences on how they have taken the responsibility of their lives into their own hands. They mentioned that they have pursued their God-given talents, volunteered to be of service to certain organizations and used the opportunity to restart in formal education.

### **7.3.1 Pursuing talent**

Although unemployed, NEETs shared that they have talents that could be promoted. The talents identified include being good at playing soccer, public speaking and deejaying. Mfanzile said that some of the challenges they faced in pursuing their dreams included their geographical location, social networks and poverty.

I wanted to become a deejay, and a soccer player. But the problem with being a soccer player in my area is that we are located in the rural area, so even if you manage to play the sport...you do not get the support and eventually nothing comes of it. It is difficult to market yourself, so therefore soccer is not suitable for me because I do not have the right market.

Apart from geographical location, the youths attributed their non-participation to development to lack of financial resources;

Even the deejaying, I engage with it whilst I'm at home, because as I see I look at the various machines that I would need, and I look at their costs. I would not be able to afford to buy them. However, I do play music for very small events around my area.

Besides their talents, NEETs also felt they can use the skills acquired whilst growing up, especially those skills that have contributed a lot to who they have become. This has been discussed in detail under the section on reproduction of family livelihood.

### **7.3.2 Volunteering**

The NEETs felt volunteering your services to organizations in their neighbourhoods would come with certain benefits. Thokozile said

I joined the organization called Alliance of Mayors Initiative for Community Action on AIDS at the Local Level (AMICAAL), where I am doing condom distribution. It is not that we are getting paid there but what happens is that they sometimes give us E250 per month but we only get it after two months so that means we get E500.00.

And that is the money that has helped me this year, to try and apply to almost all the institutions that I wish...

I need to mention that I was able to identify Thokozile as my co-researcher through the organization she volunteered her services to. Our relationship in this study has resulted in me assisting her to register for a public relations course in one of the tertiary institutions. Chapter 8 examines the roles and learning of the co-researchers.

### **7.3.3 Formal schooling /restarting**

Some of the NEETs believe that returning to formal schooling would help them to achieve their dreams. As Makhosi stated:

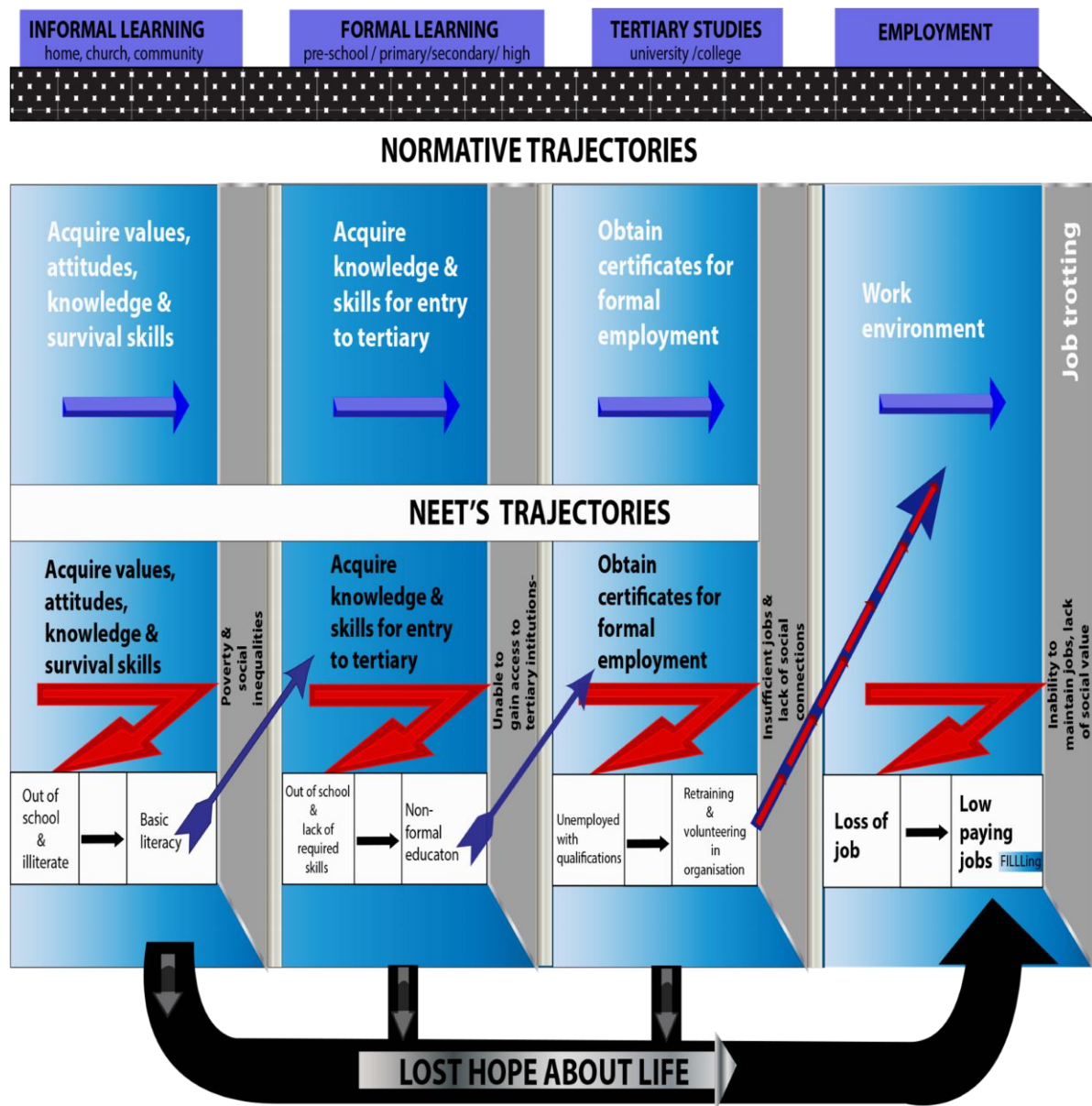
I was thinking of going back to school. Specifically Form 4 and just study. Because in my life I wished to be a police officer and I still love it now. I wished with all my heart to go back to school and get my education. So it is that...

The findings reveal that life experiences have hit so hard on the NEETs that some lost hope and cannot see how they can overcome the situation they have found themselves in. Others, however, still believe that their success lies within themselves and they are keen to finding alternative routes to achieve them. This suggests that educational planners and policy makers cannot view all NEETs the same way and then come up with unifying policies. They will definitely miss out on addressing their educational needs. The study has revealed that NEETs' contexts, aspirations and ways to address a situation are not the same (Marsh, 2009). This emphasizes the need for soliciting their views (voices) when developing any educational intervention. It also confirms the concept; 'Nothing about us without us'.

## **7.4 Findings summary**

The findings reveal that the NEETs in this study experienced poverty as a result of their family background. Poverty affected their educational access and progression. When faced with other structural barriers such as scarce jobs resulting in unemployment, the NEETs in this study resolved to make use of their informally acquired skills for their livelihood. The NEETs in this study also revealed the importance of support – family, peer, community – in an individual's life span.

The illustration below demonstrates the impact of the NEETs experiences from their family background, through formal and tertiary education in their attempt to reach the world of work, wage- or self-employment.



**Figure 7.1: NEETs trajectories towards employment opportunities**

Figure 7.1 illustrates the unaccomodative nature of a society influenced by the market-driven neoliberal concept and lifelong learning approach. NEETs' shared their life trajectories to the

world of employments. Most of the NEETs shared how they failed to follow the normative trajectory of human development from their childhood. Normatively, although perhaps not normally in Eswatini and many other developing nations, children move from their families to formal education, then to tertiary education and then access the world of work which in most cases is wage-employment. This trajectory links to the normative age-graded experiences outlined in lifespan theory (Erikson, 1959). This study, however, presents a disrupted and non-linear route to employment opportunities for youths categorized as NEETs which unilateral educational policies influenced by neoliberalism tend to ignore. The NEETs experiences, as illustrated by the trajectory, demonstrates the calculated effort and focus towards successful completion to the market world only for the minority (Youngman, 2000; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Lakes & Carter, 2011).

The study presents poverty as the main challenge, expressed by the NEETs, in accessing and continuing their education. Most of the NEETs who dropped out were double orphans or only had their mothers alive. The main reason for lack of access and/or dropping out was lack of school fees. By dropping out the youths failed to acquire academic qualifications that would afford them entry into tertiary education, provided they could afford the associated costs.

The data also reveal that those NEETs who made it through high school with assistance from extended family or community members, again faced challenges of accessing and completing tertiary training. The issue of access to tertiary related to finances and qualifications. Most of the NEETs did not qualify in terms of their level of education or the subject choices they made. For those who qualified, NEETs lacked finances and support to either submit their applications or pay tuition fees until completion.

The findings, as illustrated in Figure 7.1, also show that although some NEETs make it through tertiary education, they then faced employability issues. Those who had graduated could not find a job using the qualifications they had. This was despite submitting applications to different possible employers only to be ignored or turned down. However, the NEETs, instead of resolving into self-pity, tended to adopt certain strategies to improve their employability. These strategies, as shared by Nomsa, included volunteering. This is done so as to create connections or to be exposed to possible employers. NEETs opted for such strategies as volunteering even though there are usually no monetary returns.

The tendency by NEETs of adopting alternative strategies to address challenges instead of losing hope reveals that being a NEET is not their fault. The study revealed that when formal education fails to assist an individual to transcend from school to employment as per the

norm, what the individual has learnt informally comes into play. The findings present some of the NEETs as having found some ways of creating and sustaining their livelihoods (survival skills) through what life has taught them and have seen to be working. The study shows that the NEETs are using skills learnt informally from home to make a living. Lunga, Makhosi and Bongi, for instance, are now engaged in the income generating activities they were engaged in as they were growing up. Lunga and Makhosi were both raising their own pigs at the time of study whilst Makhosi had partnered with her mother in selling food items for a living. These findings challenge the idea that youth are in deficit (not in education, employment or training) because some have found ways of making a livelihood.

The findings also reveal the importance of support in an individual's lifespan. Some NEETs, for instance, were able to complete school and acquire livelihood skills through support from extended family, peers, community members and government. Receiving such support whilst growing up resulted in Lunga finding himself in the same situation as when he was growing up. This links to the idea of social reproduction in that there is not only the reproduction of their livelihoods but also family reproduction (family relationships, caring for the next generation). Lunga, not only shared that his source of livelihood was the piggery project learnt from his grandmother, but he also found himself raising a child whose family background was similar to his during his developmental stage.

With regard to future aspirations, the youth were still holding on to their dreams. Some were doing something towards achieving those dreams, whilst some had lost hope. The attempts they were making include volunteering their services in some organizations or engaging relatives and influential people for financial assistance. Their aspirations confirm that NEETs are not hopeless citizens or in deficit but are 'young people in need of more choices and more chances' (Marsh, 2009, p. 90).

Following the above findings and after the next chapter which discusses the contributions of the co-workers, in the theorizing chapter (Chapter Nine), I address first the concept of NEETs and the deficit assumptions which the study is challenging. I present how the concept of NEETs being in deficit has been constructed within the neoliberal framework, and also show what my findings leave out.

Secondly, the study brings in informal learning as crucial in a context of poverty and unemployment. The theorizing chapter emphasizes the importance of NEETs and lifelong learning; the relationship between traditional informal learning and modern formal learning.

Thirdly, the theorizing chapter also addresses NEETs' political economy: the fact that there are not enough jobs nor places in education for those who need them. There are thus structural obstacles which NEETs tend to personalize ('I am not good enough', 'It is my fault') whereas actually the society, its capacities and prescriptions do not accommodate them. This is the reason behind NEETs saying, 'When I look at my future, it is blurry.'

## **CHAPTER EIGHT:**

### **‘NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US’: CO-RESEARCHERS’ CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

In this study I worked with five out-of-school youths, not in education, employment or training (NEETs), who participated as my co-researchers. This chapter addresses the foci in Research Question 3: How and what do youth contribute as co-researchers through the process of conducting this research? The key issue in this question was exploring the ability of NEETs to contribute and take decisions on issues concerning their lives. The chapter responds to the societal view that youths categorized as NEETs are useless, helpless and a societal burden who, like all marginalized groups, are incapable of contributing or taking decisions that relate to their lives (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009; Marsh, 2009; O'Brien, 2014; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). According to Bergold (2012), co-researching draws into the study participants who are affected by the theme. The co-researchers conducted the interviews and so helped to collect the data for this study; they were also a source of my data through their use of photo voice and participation in focus group discussions, and their responses to the questionnaire when interviewed by me as the principal researcher.

The chapter presents the NEETs' contribution as co-researchers in this study in four themes: in-depth understanding of being referred to as a NEET, the importance of creating a dialogic space, the importance of empowerment, enhancing research skills, holistic learning and the value of informal learning in addressing the situation of being a NEET. The themes were generated through content thematic analysis; I first coded the transcriptions from all the data and then grouped similar codes into themes.

#### **8.2 In-depth understanding of being NEETs**

As demonstrated in Chapter 5; Table 5.2, the co-researchers' profiles were similar to the research participants. The co-researchers shared that the study helped them to realize that their experiences of being NEETs were not unique to them as individuals but were common to youths who fall within the category of NEETs. In other words, it helped the co-researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of what it means to be a NEET, in relation both to their own and to others' experiences. Subsequently, this enabled them to contribute to the purpose of the study, which was to give voice to the NEETs educational experiences.

The co-researchers' involvement was not just at the data collection stage. Besides being involved in the photo voice process the co-researchers were involved in the adaptation of the questionnaire that they used for interviewing the research participants. They were also involved in focus group discussions where they shared insights on their experiences on the data collection process as well as on being co-researchers. The process they were involved in was systemic, as described by Bastien and Holmardottir (2015). The co-researching process started with the photo voice method where the co-researchers shared their life stories regarding their educational experiences that contributed to them being NEETs. I think that process enlightened the co-researchers not only in their task of being co-researchers, but also on the ultimate goal of the study: understanding NEETs' educational experiences. Although not voiced by the co-researchers themselves, for me this was evidenced by their contribution towards adapting the questionnaire. The co-researchers contributed to ensuring that the questionnaire was relevant to their group in terms of clarity, cultural sensitivity and relevance to the target audience. For instance, they added church as a social context for acquiring skills and pastors as being one of the most influential and significant people in their lives. They participated in ensuring that the questionnaire was an authentic tool for digging deeper for information from the participants.

The co-researchers shared insights on their involvement in the study in general and on the interview process in particular. They mentioned that the study helped them to realize that there are others of their own kind out there who are NEETs and are between 15 and 24 years old. Mfanzile welcomed and expressed it as a source of comfort; the knowledge of other youths with similar experiences.

This was echoed by Nomsa who felt the study was really enlightening;

The study that we did was good; it also opened my eyes as I am one of those that fit within the study. I was able to meet others that were able to complete their university education but then they are not doing anything now...They do not have jobs, but not because they do not qualify, as we do have the certificates, we apply but we cannot get a job.

Lunga also noted that most NEETs were from unstable family backgrounds which contributed to an upbringing greatly affected by poverty. The poverty the NEETs experienced affected their educational access and progression in terms of completing formal education and transitioning to tertiary studies. He said:

You find that the homes that we come from are not the same; some are very poor...At times you find that this individual is the one that has to look after younger siblings. Therefore, when they finish school they are under pressure to find a job and furthering their studies is out of the question...Meanwhile others do not have enough money to pay for their school fees to further their studies. You will find that some individuals completed their high school in 2010 but will apply to study further and that person will stay for two or three years without their application being approved.

All the co-researchers shared their frustration on the treatment they received from society. Nomsa said:

Some people will ask you if you are working yet or congratulate you on graduating and then they would ask you for money (*cringes*). And when you try to explain that I have graduated but I am not working yet. Then they look at you weirdly because graduating means that you are working now. And you would inform them that there is still nothing and they would tell you that you are playing (*frowns*). Imagine being told that, it hurts if someone tells you that.

Although some of the research participants had lower educational levels than some of the co-researchers, as presented in Table 7.6, the co-researchers found themselves identifying with the research participants in terms of their socio-economic background and inability to access employment and training. The co-researchers' involvement in the adaptation of the questionnaire helped them to better understand the aim of the study and what was required by the questions. Their understanding helped especially where they needed to explain, during the interview, what a question demanded even for those who could not understand because of their educational level. In this way the co-researchers were able to share insights, during the focus group discussions, on the educational experiences of NEETs regardless of their educational level.

Therefore, co-researching contributed to an in-depth understanding of NEETs in that the co-researchers were able to first increase their personal knowledge of being NEETs and then contribute to digging deeper into the experiences of others. This concurs with Bergold's (2012) view that co-researching should involve people who are affected by the theme. In the case of this study, the co-workers were also NEETs, faced with all the educational experiences contributing to them being NEETs, going out to get the experiences of the others of their own kind. I, therefore, concur with literature that co-researching is like opening a door from inside; it is 'peer research' - in this case it was 'youth researching youth' (Bastien &

Holmardottir, 2015, p, 164). So the co-researchers insights contributed to the knowledge construction of being a NEET in Eswatini (Shelagh, 2015; Smith, 2010). To me this concurs with the contention that:

Research is not only the production of original ideas and new knowledge (as it is normally defined in academia and other knowledge based institutions). It is also something simpler and deeper. It is the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one's current knowledge in relation to some task, goal or aspiration (Appadurazi's, 2006, cited in Bastien, 2015,p. 176).

Sharing the same characteristics with the people being studied also contributed to helping the co-researchers to select research participants. In this study, co-researching contributed in the 'snowball effect' as co-researchers were able to reach out to the other NEETs in their areas (Smith, 2010)p. 20). Most of the co-researchers said 'I could have interviewed more than ten participants in my area through the assistance of the other participants'. The co-researchers were able to identify NEETs in their areas because they knew some youth who shared the same characteristics as them. These other youths also knew yet others with similar characteristics.

Besides learning that the experiences as NEETs were not unique to them as individuals, co-researching had other advantages. These advantages included the opportunity to discuss their situation as NEETs, enhancing their interviewing skills as well as bringing up insights on how some aspects of informal learning can contribute to reducing the possibility of one becoming a NEET. In the following section I start with co-researching as creation for a dialogic space.

### **8.3 Creation of a dialogic space**

Having the researcher and participant sharing the same experiences, as presented above, created a 'dialogic space' (Rule, 2004, 2015) for sharing information, trust and some form of friendship (Shelagh, 2015). According to Rule (2015, p. 319), 'dialogue is a particular kind of speech that happens between two or more people and is associated with the pursuit of knowledge'. In this study the co-researchers and participants felt they were talking and sharing information with one of their own. Because they shared similar characteristics, the participants and the co-researchers were able to build relationships such that the sessions, in some instances, moved from logistical challenges to personal sharing (Shelagh, 2015). The sessions got to where they trusted each other to the extent that they could share their deepest

feelings. Thokozile, for instance, shared that ‘I learnt that helping someone is not just calling them and stating what you need to be done’.

Sometimes the participants told their life stories and got so emotional that the co-researchers had to shift roles and provide empathy and encouragement on how to address their situation.

Nomsa, sharing on these insights, said:

One of the challenges that I faced was based on one of the questions (*flips through the questionnaire to look for the question*). Here is the question: “If you were able to change any stage or area in your life, which one and why?” So then the participants would list the reasons, for example some of the participants lost their parents so they were unable to pay for their school fees. So the participants highlight these challenges that they went through and you would find that they become emotional, they would cry and it would call for you to try and cool them down again, because you reminded them of those bad memories.

Nomsa had to draw lessons from her own experiences to address the life experiences shared by some of the participants:

As I looked at others’ backgrounds and what they experienced that ultimately led them to the situation that they are in today, I reached a point where I played an advisory role. I pointed out to the participants that the stage they were at in life, although they might have dropped out of school in Form 2 or Form 3, I highlighted that they were still young and dropping out of school did not mean the end of life. If there is an opportunity that avails itself, you could go back to school and finish high school because... I told them that I was speaking from experience. You finish school and further your studies and graduate and apply and cannot find a job, how much more difficult can it be for someone like you who dropped out in Form 2? It will be very difficult and you will only find jobs as someone’s domestic, and take care of other people’s children or you will need to herd cattle because of the level of education that you have.

Thokozile, on the other hand, sometimes felt the situation was beyond her:

I learnt to understand other people’s needs but I did not have the means to help them. For example, someone would tell you their life story and you would realize that they are worse off than you are, and I would ask myself how I could possibly help them.

The co-researchers also came across participants who had lost hope in life. Such participants did not have future aspirations. However, the co-researchers had been prepared for such encounters during their training. They were advised on referring cases they felt were beyond the provision of empathy and encouragement. Also, the focus group discussions and the follow-up telephonic communication with me as the principal researcher during the data collection process provided a 'debriefing' opportunity for the co-researchers to share the difficulties of conducting the research.

Mfanzile, for instance, met participants whose view of the future was as blurry as his. He shared how he used the strategies from the training sessions:

So, basically, I found that they needed motivation so that they progress from where they are. If they cannot go back to school they could find a place where they could train, for example, doing handicrafts, something that can help to generate income. They should not just loiter around as they might find themselves involved in some certain bad habits, which might lead to getting money illegally. And that might lead you to even bigger problems.

Still in an attempt to encourage participants who had lost hope, Nomsa shared this:

You will find that other people would have given up on life but as you talk to them and see that you are giving that person hope by telling them that they are not alone in that situation as a lot of people have finished school but they are also sitting at home like them. And not going to college or university does not mean your life is incomplete, there are still a lot of things that can help you progress as a person and ensure that you are a better individual in the future.

Nomsa went on to advise them on job creation opportunities:

Some will tell you that they want a job and they are thinking of going to the textile companies, so then you need to further probe that person and ask whether they see themselves working within these companies for the rest of their lives. So, you need to advise them about the options that they have such as self-employment which can help them to get money besides looking for someone to employ them and offer them a wage.

The findings reveal that co-researching in this study was not only about gathering data but also provided dialogic space as presented earlier. From these findings, I conclude that co-

researching provided an opportunity for the NEETs to ‘voice out’ their experiences freely (Chappell, Rule, Dlamini & Nkala, 2014; Chappell, 2013; Rule, 2004, 2015; Shelagh, 2015). Co-researching provided the conditions or space for the dialogue which are trust, openness towards learning from one another, and reflection for consensus in meaning (Rule, 2004). Such a space is a shift from viewing research participants as objects to subjects who are capable and competent of making decisions pertaining to their own lives (Chappell, 2013). For me the data shows that NEETs need space to discuss their day to day challenges with someone who would listen and work with them on coming up with solutions to address those challenges. I think for the NEETs, particularly, such opportunities are rare as they are often ignored in society. Youth’s voices, particularly NEETs, are often ignored as are many of the marginalized groups (Chappell et al., 2014; Chappell, 2013; Marsh, 2009). I concur with their argument that participants’ voices are important as ‘knowers’ and ‘experts’ on their own lives, who in turn, are able to contribute knowledge about their own lives (Chappell et al., 2014). So there is need to engage them in dialogue as experts of their own experiences and not ignore them as objects. Establishing the dialogic space will add value to whatever intervention is implemented as it has been argued, in matters that concern marginalized groups, that ‘nothing about us without us’(Marsh, 2009; O’Brien, 2014).

The findings also reveal what can be viewed as a disadvantage of co-researching. The disadvantage was the danger that co-researchers found themselves having to play other roles (supporter, advisor, and encourager) which may sometimes take over their role as researchers and so influence the kind of data that they collected. As mentioned earlier, attempts to address the possibility of co-researchers losing focus were addressed during the training where emphasis was placed on using the questionnaire as a guide. This was done so that the co-researchers, although empathetic to the participants’ situations, were able to focus on the study by using their learnt interviewing skills to continue with the interview.

#### **8.4 Co-researchers’ empowerment**

In this section I present that the type of empowerment for the co-researchers during the study enabled them to make wise and informed decisions about being NEETs. According to Swanepoel and De Beer (2011), empowerment is not just representation in a committee or whatever event or situation, doing physical work or just being taught certain skills. They argue that ‘empowerment is to have decision-making power’ (ibid., p. 52). The decision making power was not handed down by anyone, including the principal researcher, but it concurred with Chappell et al. (2014) and Kesby (2005) that participants make a deliberate

choice to be active participants in a research study. The co-researchers' empowerment was not just demonstrated after the objectives of the study were explained and they agreeing to participate in the study. Their being empowered was also demonstrated during the focus group discussions when they decided to share their insights about being categorised as NEETs and how they felt the situation of being a NEET can be addressed. This revealed that, as earlier stated, co-researching provided them with an opportunity for an in-depth understanding of being NEETs through the relationships that they built with the other NEETs. According to Bergold (2012) the relationship with the other NEETs allowed the co-researchers to inwardly step back cognitively and rethink their own situation. It was a result of the process of reflection, during their involvement in the research, that subsequently resulted in the co-researchers being empowered and taking decisions that the situation of being a NEET can be addressed. They also shared insights on how co-researching can be used to represent the NEETs' voices in a research study. In the following section I present the co-researchers' insights on the aspects of their empowerment: critical reflection, the importance of societal values and enhancing interview skills for NEETs.

#### **8.4.1 Empowerment and critical reflection**

I agree with literature that empowerment cannot be given by a researcher to participants through participatory research methods (Chappell et al., 2014). Neither can empowerment be worn or possessed, but the action must be repetitively performed in order to stabilize its effects (Kesby, 2005). In this process there is a progression of action and reflection. The co-researcher interviews the participant (action) and thinks about the interview during and after its occurrence (reflection). The co-researcher then shares the interview with peers (action) and in the process, they consider what it means in relation to their own experience and that of NEETs more generally (reflection).

This form of being empowered was first shared by Sbongile who deliberately took into her own hands the responsibility of being a co-researcher. I could not, as the principal researcher, empower her to be responsible but it was her choice to exercise her power. After repeatedly performing the interviews, Sbongile learnt to take control of the situation as a co-researcher. In other words, she developed leadership skills and she started taking control of her own life which, previously, she had challenges doing:

Well actually I have a shy character, but as I talked to people I became more comfortable and I found that I could also talk to the others, so then I wasn't as shy.

Through co-researching, Mfanzile's dreams about life were revived: 'The impact that this research has had is that it has pushed me to want to further my studies'. In my view this is also a demonstration of empowerment. Mfanzile might not have taken the decision to further his studies were it not for his involvement in the study that prompted him to internally reflect on his situation.

The insights by Sbongile and Mfanzile demonstrate that co-researching prompts an individual to reflect on the realities of his or her own life (Rule, 2004). This type of empowerment brings up an insight that, without relating with others, particularly those of their own kind, NEETs, in particular, could continue viewing themselves as losers.

Nomsa's previously held attitude towards a certain category of people was changed as a result of co-researching. Through co-researching, Nomsa not only learnt to interact with people from different backgrounds but realized that, although they may be different in some aspects to her, they also had similar characteristics to her. More than that, they were human beings from whom she could benefit:

So something else that I learnt is how to talk to diverse people and that really changed me. I was not the type of person who liked to talk to people that I believed were of a lower class than I am and I had my reasons for that. Yes, I am also of a low standard as well but I did not like those that were of a lower standard than me but then the research stipulated that I must go and talk to those people that are similar to you in terms of your needs and those that are below you. So now I am able to talk to anyone.

The data reveal that the study stimulated the co-researchers not only to reflect deeply on their situation as NEETs but also reflect on their assumptions and attitudes towards other people. According to Sugarman (1986), lifespan development assumptions and attitudes are a result of socialization. From the findings I tend to agree with literature that dialogue, which in this case was made possible through co-researching, is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their realities as they make and remake them (Freire, 1970; Rule, 2004). When people meet they reflect together on what they know and do not know and then act critically to transform the realities. This is not handed down by a researcher or an adult who may be viewed as 'giving a voice' to the youths by involving them in the research. For them to critically reflect on their realities, the co-researchers had to take a deliberate choice on how and what to voice with regard to issues concerning them and others of their own kind (Chappell et al., 2014).

This data shows empowerment as not linear but rather as a result of a network of relations. For instance, Thokozile's group of friends called 'Chillaz' encouraged each other academically. Lunga was also able to pursue his education and find employment because of his grandmother's relative and community members. Such networks contributed in the co-researchers' achievement of their hopes and/or aspirations as well as their resilience in working against the life challenges they faced during their developmental stages.

The co-researchers in this study were stimulated by their decision to be in control of the situation. This concurs with Kesby's (2005, p. 2055) argument that 'techniques of empowerment persuade people to construct themselves as reflexive agents', abstractly analysing the difficulties of everyday life and providing them with a set of tools by which to constitute or represent their opinions and experiences to themselves, their peers and facilitators.

### **8.5 Enhanced research skills**

Some of the co-researchers revealed that, although they had been engaged in research before, such as in school projects or with other organizations, they felt that the study assisted them in gaining more research skills. Nomsa, during the focus group discussion, shared that 'I would like to extend my gratitude for the opportunity to be a co-researcher and further sharpen my talent within research'.

The co-researchers used not only their research skills but also their position of being NEETs themselves and applied different strategies to access data for the study.

Although they faced different challenges, the co-researchers managed to overcome them and continued with their task. Besides using interviewing skills from the training, the co-researchers learnt and applied lessons from the interview process as they encountered challenges. The challenges included that some participants were too busy for the interview, some participants wanted to see the benefits for participating first, whilst others complained that the questionnaire was too long. The challenges shared by the co-researchers with regard to interview skills are as follows.

Lunga and Thokozile shared that participants complained about being too busy:

Meanwhile some people would look at the research questionnaire and state that they did not have the time to fill it out. There are a lot of examples of such challenges, where you would find that the person is the perfect fit for the research as they are in the target age and they aren't engaged in anything. They are the people that qualify but

they kept saying that they do not have time for the research and this was a big challenge that was there. There was one participant that I gave the form to, to fill out and I promised to come back.

The length of the questionnaire also made some participants reluctant to respond:

It was hard out there as some people refused to fill out the forms, and maybe what contributed was the size of the form so you cannot stop people on the street and ask them to fill out the form quickly. Even with someone that you have studied and you know very well when you ask them to fill out the form they would look at the size and decline.

Besides being busy, some participants wanted to know the benefits of participating in this study. Although the co-researcher would have explained the aims of the study in the beginning of the interview, they found themselves having to repeat this many times in order to ensure their participation. Mfanzile said:

As I would explain the research to others they would ask what the research aimed at and what they would get out of it in return, is it a job?... So it would be that challenge they will think that we want to drain them but instead maybe we could be assisting them. So due to the fact that there is a lot of research that is conducted, as people come to them to request them to become research participants and therefore they have been filling out questionnaires for a long time but they do not see the results.

Mfanzile felt some of the participants were not truthful in their responses:

But a real issue that we faced was that some people could not tell you what the real problem is. Even if you know that individual and the reasons for quitting school but because they do not trust you they will state other reasons. An example is what Sbongile said: that a person might have been pregnant, but when they talk to you they might change the story and blame their dropping out-of-school to lack of school fees.

The data reveal that, although the co-researchers faced challenges when conducting the interviews, they managed to use certain strategies, such as leaving the questionnaire and collecting it at the participant's convenient time, to encourage their peers to participate. According to some of the co-researchers another person, other than one of their own, would have experienced more problems. Such challenges are similar to other studies (Bastien, 2015;

O'Brien, 2014; Shelagh, 2015; Smith, 2010). I present some of these challenges in the next section.

## **8.6 Importance of societal values when collecting data**

Whilst some of the co-researchers believed that co-researching contributed to generating reliable data for the study, others felt otherwise. On the one hand, some co-researchers felt it was easier for them to get information from their colleagues because they shared similar characteristics. Some even shared age and similar geographical locations. The co-researchers were asked if it was beneficial to have them as co-researchers as opposed to an adult:

With me I think that you [adult] would not have gotten the information as they would have avoided you. It would not have been easy to find them. These individuals were used to me; it would just be that they would grow tired of answering questions on the form which would take a long time. A lot of them I knew and I know about their backgrounds.

Sharing the same characteristics such as age was viewed as beneficial by some of the co-researchers:

I think that there would have been a difference because we are the same age as them. And as you continue with the interview the participant realizes that they have similar stories to ours. So they will tell you the truth especially if you reassure them that there is nothing wrong with that as you are in the same or a similar situation as they are.

Another co-researcher emphasized the truthfulness of the information as well:

And another thing is that when a person lies or gives you false information I can tell that that person is not telling me everything, and so I try to ask them in another way so that I try to get the truth out of them. And this is something that I was not able to do before; being able to tell what kind of information that person was giving me. So for example even if a person tells me that they are working I can tell that they are just saying that and it's not the truth.

On the other hand, some co-researchers felt it would have been better if an older person who was unknown in the area collected the data:

I think that maybe they would weigh a bit more, (*sisindvo*) as Sbongile has said, we are the same age, you know me and you know that we are the same as I am also not

doing anything. To an older person I will be able to explain my story and unload the contents of my heart.

As I already explained to someone here about the guy that I got. He knows me as we live close to each other, and we are actually friends, but once you ask to fill out the form he will ask you a lot of questions and he will end up refusing to fill out the form. And someone else might see you going to town every day and once you tell them that we are similar they will think that you are misleading them just to have them fill out the forms. And sometimes when you ask some of the participants the research questions, you will find that their answers will not correspond, for example the person will say that they left school due to lack of school fees but later on they will cite another reason. So that person is afraid of revealing information about themselves as they fear that we just *(pauses as she looks for the right words)*.

The above data reveal tensions in the identities of the co-researchers as both co-researchers and NEETs. As NEETs, they shared characteristics with the participants and could understand their situations and assess the veracity of their responses. On the other hand, their roles as co-researchers set them apart and created some distance which they had to negotiate. The tensions in their identities resulted in some of the co-researchers sharing their views that a person who did not share the same characteristics as the participants, particularly an older person, would have been advantageous. This tends to be a drawback of youth researching youth that was also cited by Smith (2010). He mentioned that some participants preferred to talk to older interviewers rather than their peers particularly on sensitive topics.

Although the NEETs had differing views on the benefits of co-researching, particularly as the youth, they ended up agreeing that there were some benefits. They felt that, if one belongs to the same group and area, one could easily pick up if a participant is being truthful in the responses. They shared that co-researching does not only increase the opportunities to get information but also to get truthful information. The participants felt safer to talk to somebody of their own kind. So co-researching assisted in digging deeper into information that an outsider who did not have those characteristics could not have accessed. The data also reveal that having similar characteristics and sharing the same geographical area also assisted in the trustworthiness of the information collected.

## **8.7 Holistic learning**

Besides enabling the critical reflection process, the study found that co-researching promotes holistic learning as advocated by Illeris's (2015) theory. The data, presented in the above sections, show that the co-researchers learnt not only 'content' (e.g. skills of interviewing, knowledge about NEETs, ideas for their own future), but also, in relation to 'incentive', psychological and emotional aspects (e.g. feeling confident, taking initiative) and that both kinds of learning are related to 'social interaction' (sharing with participants, peers, the principal researcher). Besides the data presented on the section on enhanced skills, Sbongile, who shared that she was normally shy, shared the following as she reflected on the interviewing process and interactions with other participants:

(Giggles nervously) Well, I could say that I was one of those individuals that did not know what to do anymore. But as I talked to the different people it gave me hope to continue as I began to think that one day maybe I would be okay as well.

Sbongile's participation as a co-researcher resulted in a personal transformation or holistic learning defined by Illeris's theory. Her engagement with the three dimensions of learning, as advocated by Illeris's theory contributed to her empowerment in that she took decisions on issues relating to her situation and future as opposed to feeling hopeless about life.

## **8.8 Value of informal learning**

Besides promoting in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied, the co-researchers shared insights on the value of informal learning in facing every day challenges including that of being a NEET. Schugurensky (2000) argues that informal learning can be transformative. The shared insights were a result of the co-researchers' reflections on their life stories and interactions with the other NEETs. During the focus group discussions, the NEETs shared what they had learnt informally, as they interacted with the participants, about ways in which the position of being a NEET could be improved and addressed. The suggested ways include independence from parents or guardians, promoting career guidance in schools, having role models in the community and capacitation in entrepreneurship skills.

## **8.9 Becoming independent**

During the focus group discussion, the co-researchers agreed that most of the NEETs lacked independence from their parents or guardians.

Mfanzile, for instance, stated that NEETs need to stop looking up to their parents or somebody else to solve their problems for them:

What I learnt is that young people need to learn how to be independent, because some of them are old but they are still dependent on their parents. But once you have finished school then your parents need to focus more of their energy on your younger siblings. And once you have become independent there are a lot of things that you will be able to achieve like doing certain skills which may help you, especially if you did not do so well at school. This is because the skill that you possess will help you get money which may help you achieve something else later on.

For this study the independence referred by the co-researchers was the ability to make decisions and stand by them as opposed to waiting for an adult to tell you what to do. It is about individuals finding alternatives to address life challenges and situations. It is true that sometimes they might not have the money or capital to pursue their dreams but that does not mean life should end there. The NEETs shared that youth should adopt other means which could help them to change their situation.

This is a value or skill that has to be instilled from birth by parents and developed throughout the life span. It is done through socialization where values are learnt incidentally, and when individuals only realize that they have learnt something unintentionally. It tends to put the lifelong learning concept into practice. It is about the individuals' ability to use life skills, which include the ability to make decisions.

Whilst these skills are learnt informally during the socialization process, they are also enhanced at school during career guidance sessions, as well as through the modelling of people in the community. Such opportunities that create, according to the researchers, platforms for informal learning were lacking for some NEETs. The lack of such skills results in the NEETs lacking direction about their future.

### **8.10 Career guidance**

The co-researchers lamented that some youths finish school without any idea of what they will do with their lives. They lack guidance from their teachers and role models from their communities and so are just loitering. With regard to guidance whilst in school, Mfanzile said:

Others complete Form 5 only because it is the last class in their schooling careers, they do not know what they are going to study after Form 5. Even if you ask them of what they want to be, they do not know but that person is doing Form 5. Another thing is even as they are sitting at home there is nothing that they are doing, they just sit at home. If there is a job that is there, someone has worked hard in getting that job for them, they haven't done anything. Maybe they just called him or her and told them that there is a vacancy, they do not look for the jobs themselves.

The data emphasize the importance of career guidance in school where learners are not only empowered with life skills but are also exposed to life choices. This emphasizes again the importance of the lifelong learning concept which should underpin any form of educational provision. Through career guidance formal learning should be purposeful and goal oriented. This means the learners should be properly guided on the subjects they choose because they have been made aware of what they want to be in the future.

### **8.11 Role models in community**

For Mfanzile, the lack of people to look up to in their community also demoralises some of the youths and stops them from putting any effort into contributing positively:

And that once I have finished with my studies, I had to further be a good role model within my community, and maybe this might help my peers to see that I have furthered my studies and this is what I have achieved in life. This would probably motivate them so that they have that urge to want to become more like me. Because something that is really affecting us is that we do not have role models within the community.

### **8.12 Developing agency**

Just like the other co-researchers, Thokozile emphasized that youths need to take their lives into their own hands. They need to pursue their dreams and not wait for someone else to solve problems for them:

A number of the young people want to own a business one day but what are they really doing now so that they get to obtain their dreams? Nothing. It is good to dream in life and to identify that at a certain point in time you want to have achieved A, B and C, but the question is what you are doing now. No one will come to you and give you what you want. Let us have it within ourselves to fight strongly for what we believe in until it comes to pass.

The co-researchers shared insights on how NEETs always look forward to owning big businesses: 'Another thing that I got whilst I conducted this research is that a majority of us want to own something, we want to own our own big businesses'. They, however, suggested workable approaches to entrepreneurship, like starting small:

Another thing that has destroyed the youth is that we consider a real job to be when you swing on a big chair; to work in an office. That is what is considered a job. So we don't really consider the handicrafts as a job, we can tell people to train and work in that field. It's all in the mouth but when it comes to practicing it or enforcing it, then there is nothing. As young people we do not want to or we are lazy, a good job is one where I am wearing a suit and heels and go to the office. We do not want to go into the garden.

Thokozile then called for a change of view from the normative route to employment to recognizing employment opportunities that come as a result of pursuing the other forms of learning:

Our minds have been tuned to the fact that a real person is one that has a white collar job...let us stop conforming to routines that I should complete high school and progress to university. There is this person who became a billionaire at 19. He was travelling around the globe and he came to my school whilst I was doing my Form 5 at Mhlatane. He told us that he had never been to university, and that does not mean that I am saying it is a bad thing for you to want to go to university, but you must look at your capability. Because it has become a routine for us, that we must go to university and so forth but you need to look at what suits you.

As earlier pointed out and the above data reveal that most NEETs struggle to make informed decisions due to lack of guidance from parents, guidance from school and role models from the community. Due to lack of information and guidance, NEETs have a narrow view of what work means and what the possibilities are. As a result, when the normative route to accessing the world of work fails, they just lose hope and loiter around their communities. This concurs with one of the criticisms of the 'lifelong learning' perspective as it is used in neoliberal frameworks: that it transfers the responsibility of learning from the state to the individual. If you fail it is your fault (Crowther, 2004; Youngman, 2000). Some of the youths seem to have internalized this position whereas there are structural impediments such as lack of employment and shortage of finance for higher education, that are built-in limitations in the

system. These structural impediments contribute to the fact that not all youth can be accommodated in education and job opportunities. With the neoliberal influence, the states transfer the responsibility from the system to the ‘failures’ within the system; in this case the youths referred to as NEETs.

As a result of the lack of guidance, some NEETs end up looking up to their parents or someone else to solve their problems. The co-researchers, however, strongly urged NEETs to take their lives into their own hands. Thokozile said, ‘they should be responsible for their destinies’.

### **8.13 Summary of findings**

In this chapter I presented what and how co-researching contributed to the study using themes. The findings reveal that co-researching contributes to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon as the people who are used already had experiences of what is wanted to be understood. The use of people who identify with the study helps in the creation of dialogic space where there is a sharing of the deepest feelings on the issue being discussed. Through the sharing, reflection on alternatives or strategies for addressing the issue are identified by those affected. These findings demonstrate the importance of the youth’s voices in issues that relate to them. It shows that they are the best people to bring out solutions for their situation; on what works for them rather than relying on somebody bringing a solution about their problem to them.

Another finding in this study is the importance of social groups, such as peers, in promoting informal learning throughout ones’ lifespan. The co-researchers needed to be amongst people of their own kind to reflect on their personal situation and then on the others. The research process engaged for this study - the use of peer groups and the appropriate facilitation - stimulated critical reflection which led to empowerment for the co-researchers. With the knowledge acquired from the other participants and the experiences from their own lives, the co-researchers were able to take informed decisions about their future. This shows that sometimes youths may need the example or assistance of one of their own kind at critical developmental stages to be able to face challenges positively. For this reason, I subscribe to the concept that all forms of education should be underpinned by the lifelong learning concept where individuals continuously adapt and review concepts and previously held assumptions within their social context.

## **CHAPTER NINE:**

### **THEORIZING THE FINDINGS**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I present an interpretation and synthesis of the findings of the study. I focus the presentation on the lifelong learning approach discussed in Chapter Three and the social capital theory (Coleman, 1988; Field, 2005, 2008; John, 2009; Putnam, 2000) discussed in Chapter Four. Illeris' (2003, 2015) comprehensive and contemporary learning theory and the lifespan developmental theories (Baltes et al., 2007; Fasokun et al., 2005; Lamb, 2010), also presented in Chapter Four, are brought in as part of the discussion within the two sections.

In order to set the scene for my theoretical engagement with the findings, I first summarize the key findings presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. The study agrees with literature that the very concept of 'NEETs' is socially constructed within the framework of neoliberalism and influenced by the lifelong learning approach (Crowther, 2004; Livingstone, 2008). Within the neoliberal framework, humane values and aspirations are ignored and individuals are viewed and defined only within the economic or entrepreneurial contribution that they make or fail to make in society (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Ignoring the youth's voices and experiences promotes the imposition of educational interventions that are engineered by a few and shifts the blame for the NEETs' status from the state to the individuals (McGrath & Powell, 2016; Youngman, 2000). 'Blaming the victim' mentality is viewed as a form of social control in human development and a means for capitalism to reproduce itself (Boshier, 2011; Crowther, 2004; Preece, 2009; Rule, 2011). This mentality (as influenced by neoliberalism) tends to focus only on the formal aspect rather than informal and non-formal aspects within the lifelong learning approach.

The study brings in informal learning as crucial in a context of poverty and unemployment. The emphasis on informal learning as the most pervasive form of learning during an individual's lifespan is emphasized. The study argues for giving equal value to informal, formal and non-formal learning so that individuals continuously acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, to face life challenges.

Learning as life-wide and life-deep is also emphasized by the study. Besides recognizing all forms of learning, the study emphasizes the use of all learning institutions for an individual throughout the lifespan. The critique of the lifelong learning approach has been presented, earlier, as a means to maintain the status quo, socially, and for capitalism to reproduce itself.

(Crowther, 2004; Livingstone, 2008; Youngman, 2000). The lifelong learning approach, as influenced by the neoliberal framework, situates learning as an individual responsibility to acquire skills in order to cope with the ever-changing technology. The emphasis on the acquisition of skills calls for flexibility of education and training so as to meet the changing demands of the market. Crowther (2004) argues that flexibility is a manifestation of a world dominated by the market, the demand-supply syndrome, where individuals have to acquire skills to meet the short-term fluctuating demands of the market economy.

The study also presents how social capital and/or the lack of it contributed to youths becoming NEETs. The findings suggest that the institutions or contexts, as a form of their social capital through which an individual learns, should link with each other rather than operate or provide learning in isolation. The value of lifelong learning demonstrated by the NEETs involved in the study particularly the value of the skills, knowledge and values acquired through informal learning, was discussed. The findings also argued that structural obstacles, rather than the youths' shortcomings, tend to constrain access to educational opportunities, progression, and transition to tertiary studies and the world of work.

This current chapter concludes with a section, which draws from the findings, on the youths' suggestions to address the NEETs' issues.

## **9.2 The concept of NEETs and the deficit assumptions**

The data in the study demonstrate that educational experiences and attitudes of out-of-school youths in Eswatini contributed to them being referred to as NEETs by the community or society. The findings concur with literature that the NEETs concept of being deficient or inadequate is a societal construction rather than who the youths really are (Thompson, 2011; Yates, 2006). It is a concept constructed within the neoliberal framework (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hursh, 2001; Klees, 2014; Tarabini, 2010).

The way that neoliberalism normally functions is that the market directs the fate of human beings rather than human beings directing the economy (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Tarabini, 2010). Education within the neoliberal framework is not valued for developing culturally, socially, spiritually and politically responsible citizens but for developing economically compliant and productive citizens needed by the market (Hursh, 2001). Therefore, schools, universities and colleges within the neoliberal framework compete to produce highly individualized and responsible individuals who can become entrepreneurial actors across all areas of their lives (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Youngman, 2000). Individuals are made to

believe that they are exercising their freedom of choice when choosing skills to enable them to access wage employment, whereas they are in fact driven by the demands of the market. Within the neoliberal framework the acquisition of 'proper' skills by individuals should ensure access to employment which would then lead to economic growth and more job opportunities (Hursh, 2001; McGrath & Powell, 2016). Youths who do not follow this 'normative' development are viewed by society as being in deficit and lacking.

The goals of the neoliberal framework are job creation, poverty reduction and reduction of inequality (Klees, 2014). Therefore, according to societal views influenced by the framework, the youths who are not in education, employment or training are deficient in skills and knowledge that they can use to access employment in order to contribute to the country's economy and reduce poverty. However, the NEETs in the study demonstrated that they were not necessarily deficient of skills and knowledge. Although they were not in formal employment, they had adopted survival strategies and were contributing to the country's economy. Despite their experiences which include being raised in unstable families, orphanhood and poverty, NEETs resolved to make use of survival strategies learnt informally during their developmental years. For instance, Makhosi and Lunga were engaged in piggery projects whilst Sibongile decided to partner with her mother on her income generation project of making and selling vetkoek. Although these NEETs were using these skills as their only means of livelihood unlike their parents or guardians, they were contributing to the country's economy as opposed to being deficient. Therefore, to me the adoption of strategies by the youth demonstrate that it is not the NEETs that are deficient but it is the influence of the neoliberal framework that influences society to view them as deficient, hopeless and a societal drain. The framework renders them incapable of contributing to their own development.

Society, as a result of neoliberalism, expected the youth to be earning their living by entering the world of formal paid work at their age (Erikson, 1963). According to Erikson's theory of development the age group of the NEETs under study should be finishing high school, attending tertiary institutions or employed. For the NEETs, this was not the case. They were not in education, employment or training, so members of the society viewed and commented that they were useless as they saw them within the community. They planted a seed of inadequacy and failure in life amongst the NEETs as they had not followed the normative way of human development proposed by human development theorists (Papalia, 2007; Sugarman, 1986). The NEETs shared their frustration about the conflict between societal expectations and their personal view with regard to their status and the realities they lived in.

The insights shared by Thokozile about what people say to them meeting them each day has already been presented.

Most significantly and contrary to the above view, the findings also revealed that when given an opportunity to speak out on their situation, NEETs can contribute from a position of authority as ‘experts’ of the NEETs experiences themselves. The ability of NEETs, in the study, to voice their situation refutes the neoliberal assumptions that NEETs have lost hope in life and cannot contribute anything meaningful even about their own lives (Marsh, 2009). The study, through co-researching, demonstrated that NEETs can ‘voice out’ their experiences freely if an effort to engage them is made (Chappell et al., 2014; Chappell, 2013; Rule, 2004, 2015; Shelagh, 2015). Through co-researching, the dialogic space that includes trust, openness towards learning from one another, and reflection for consensus in meaning was provided (Rule, 2004). This engagement (co-researching) generated with and from the NEETs themselves not only an in-depth understanding of what contributes to being NEETs, but also strategies on how the situation of being a NEET could be addressed. The process whereby an individual goes beyond just representing a committee or group in an activity or event, to a level of making decisions for that group, is known as ‘empowerment’ (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p. 52). For instance, as shared by Sbongile, the empowered co-researchers changed character from being shy to being able to engage and become advisors to their colleagues during the study. The strategies shared as a group demonstrate that when given an opportunity, NEETs can use their experiences and opinions to ‘construct themselves as reflexive agents’ capable of analysing the difficulties of everyday life and coming up with strategies to address their situation (Kesby, 2005, p. 2055). In most cases young people’s voices, as with other marginalized groups, are often ignored by society and educational policy makers (Chappell et al., 2014; Chappell, 2013; Marsh, 2009). The study demonstrates that NEETs as experts of their own lives need dialogic space as ‘knowers’ and ‘experts’ of their own lives, (Chappell, 2014) to ensure that ‘nothing about them is without them’ (Marsh, 2009; O’Brien, 2014).

The educational institutions’ attempt to produce people demanded by the market tends to create inequities and widens the gap between the quality of education for the poor youth and that of more privileged students (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hursh, 2001; Klees, 2014; Tarabini, 2010). Educational institutions tend to promote standardization, accountability and competition amongst themselves and ultimately amongst their learners. In this competition for recognition, often manifested during high stake examinations, schools in Eswatini are categorized as good and poor performing, with performance measured with regard to their

products qualifying for access to tertiary institutions. The study revealed that NEETs, because of their poor background, fail to meet the demand by the market.

This practice of concentrating only on academic performance tends to recognize only one of the three dimensions of interaction for enhanced learning proposed by the contemporary learning theory: cognition, emotion and society (Illeris, 2013; McClusky et al., 2007; Illeris 2010). Illeris (2003) argues that all three dimensions need to be active for enhanced learning. The neoliberalism framework tends to ignore the learners' emotional and social aspects. Such a view of educational provision tends to create inequities and widens the gap between quality of education for those who have and the poor (Hursh, 2001; Tarabini, 2010). This is because parents would send their children to good performing schools whilst those who are poor remain in the poor performing schools. From my experience as an educationalist in Eswatini most of the high performing schools are private schools or public schools demanding school fees that are often not affordable to the poor. Although the study did not cover the schools attended by the NEETs, it would be interesting to find out the percentage of NEETs who attended private or public schools considered as high performing. This suggests that structural factors, such as what school a learner happens to attend, and how wealthy and educated their family is, which are beyond the control of the learner, are crucial in determining their prospects of 'EETing'.

In the neoliberal framework, learners' individualism as opposed to their collectiveness is promoted. The promotion of individualism by the framework is contrary to the African ideology of collectiveness (Fasokun et al., 2005; Lekoko & Modise, 2011). The move towards promoting academic excellence and access to employment amongst learners tends to shrug off collective responsibility for enhanced learning particularly amongst the vulnerable and the marginalized (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Tarabini, 2010). Competing for recognition and highest scores in the classroom leads to individualization amongst learners as opposed to collectiveness. Instead of using formative or classroom assessment to provide learner's feedback for effective learning (Mthethwa-Kunene, 2016), teachers reward good performers, and ignore or punish low achievers and the situations that surround their performance. The research findings also supported the African ideology of collectiveness (Lekoko & Modise, 2011) as the NEETs expressed preference for collective over individual methods of teaching. The NEETs in the study expressed that they preferred group work rather than individual assignments.

The failure in learners to acquire the right skills demanded by the market is rarely blamed on the governments' development or implementation of educational policies but on the individual (Preece, 2009; Rule, 2011). Within neoliberalism, individuals are not only expected to shoulder the financial responsibility for their learning but also to be academic giants and follow the normative developmental progression until they access the world of work. This is more the case where the state caters for their financial expenses; individuals are then blamed for not being able to acquire the knowledge and skills demanded by the market. The context or environment, other than finances, surrounding learning is rarely considered. At tertiary level, for instance, if a student has been awarded a scholarship, the student does not get financial support from government if repeating a year. It is only after passing, that the scholarship is again made available. Within the neoliberal framework, factors surrounding teaching and learning are ignored. Individuals are blamed for not attending school, dropping out of school, not studying the right fields and for their lack of entrepreneurship (Klees, 2014). The findings from this study, for instance, revealed that it is mostly the youth from unstable and/or poor families that are NEETs. Such youths have experienced poverty and have dropped out of school as a result of those experiences. In some instances, their home background put them at a learning disadvantage even before they got to Grade 1. Some of their classroom peers would have attended preschool education, so they would be competing for scores with students who are at an advantage.

Contrary to individualism promoted by the neoliberalism framework, the findings reveal that the African spirit of *Ubuntu* (I am because you are) contributed to the NEETs' survival (Korzh, 2013). In African culture, to a greater extent than in Western culture, the value of interdependence and collectiveness as opposed to individualism is promoted (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). African culture focuses on ties within the family (nuclear and extended) and socializing children into thinking that they are part of a group or community rather than being independent. The NEETs identified various people whom they most valued or who had contributed to what they had become. For instance, in cases where the mothers was not able to raise their children, grandmothers took up the parental role and in some cases siblings, uncles, aunts and community members contributed to the upbringing of the youth. In the next section, I present an interpretation of the NEETs experiences demonstrating how their social capital was translated into economic and cultural capital.

In concluding this section, the findings indicate that the NEETs concept is a result of the neoliberal framework's influence on society, within a Western view of the lifelong learning approach. The neoliberal framework removes the responsibility for education from the state

and leaves the responsibility of learning only on the learner. Policies developed within this framework are market-driven and promote standardization, individualism, and competition. Moreover, the social context, in this case the African context, is ignored together with its values, beliefs and practices. As such I view this concept as foreign to Africa and in Eswatini where collectiveness rather than individualism is promoted.

On the other hand, the adoption of the term and ideology of ‘NEET’ by countries like Eswatini indicates their integration into the neoliberal global economy where the categories of formal ‘employment, education and training’ determine the way that young people are valued. This ‘EET’ currency is globally hegemonic. In countering this hegemony within an African context, it is important to question the effects that this has on young people, and what it excludes or renders invisible and ‘uncounted’ regarding their identities, e.g. family involvements, social and cultural contributions, civic engagements and informal livelihood activities.

### **9.2.1 NEETs and the political economy**

This section presents the understanding of the effects of structural employment, and of the economic, social and political roles of young people in an economy influenced by neoliberalism. It brings in the NEETs’ trajectories to the world of employment.

Whilst the study supports literature that states that the concept of NEETs’ is socially constructed and not representative of who out-of-school youth really are (Yates & Payne, 2006), it also demonstrated the structural constraints on the trajectories faced by NEETs towards employment (Korzh, 2013; Making, 2012; UN, 2013). According to Korzh (2013), research often ignores or side-lines the structural constraints faced by youths from birth up to the world of work. Whilst some youths manage to follow the normal, linear and sequential lifespan development route to the world of work, some NEETs’ experiences revealed a not-so-easy route; a life of hardship and always fighting for survival, recognition and acceptance. The youths’ experiences of hardship begin from birth through formal school and are demonstrated by the youths’ need for alternative approaches, as opposed to the ‘normal’, from birth to the world of work transition. The structural challenges begin in the family and tend to impact on their access to employment, and on their economic, social and political roles. The youths’ trajectories are illustrated in Figure 7.1 (page 195).

Figure 7.1 explains how a poor (unstable) family background can be a structural barrier and contribute to marginalization, exclusion or being ignored by society throughout one’s lifespan. In a society dominated by the neoliberal framework, experiencing poverty from

birth, as most of the NEETs did, just dictates a life of hardship compared to normative life (Wangoola, 1996; Youngman, 2000) from birth to the world of work. The poor family background affected the youths' ability to access basic human services and their rights as children. The lack of such services impacted their whole lifespan such that they did not follow the normal development process like every other child. Although the study did not focus much on the correlation between poverty and school dropout, most of the youth cited inability to pay school fees as their reason for dropping out of school. Therefore, for the NEETs, poverty contributed to their inability to access or complete formal education. For instance, for entrance to formal school the child need finances for school fees, uniforms and other hidden costs. The effects of the poor family backgrounded included lack of access or progression in school, access to tertiary education and ultimately lack of access to formal employment and remaining employed. The study revealed that these hardships, which are linked to the youths' family background and not a result of what the youth themselves have done, contributed to them being NEETs. In other words, their family background was a structural barrier to basic services in life.

The market-driven educational system that focuses only on the cognitive – the internal psychological process of acquisition of knowledge – and ignores the external interaction process that takes place between the learner and his environment is being questioned. Illeris (2003) argues that learning includes three dimensions; the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions. Ignoring the social and emotional dimension means disregarding the environment or context of the learner which is necessary for effective learning. The NEETs experiences which they brought to the formal learning environment were ignored, whereas, according to Illeris (2003), they contribute to the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Most of the youth in the study, for instance, did not have preschool education. This means they entered Grade 1 at a different and lower level than their classmates. The difference in educational level was a barrier to the learners' academic progress as the teacher, due to the neoliberal framework, normally encouraged competition rather than competencies. This approach to learning compartmentalizes the learning process so that the learners who failed to meet the requirements saw themselves as failures and dropped out of formal education.

The illustration (Figure 7.1) also reflects a lack of promotion of knowledge transfer acquired through the different forms of learning. This again shows how the neoliberal framework was a structural constraint throughout the NEETs' development process. Illeris (2009) argues for learning that promotes knowledge transfer to the individuals' everyday situations. In other words he concurs with advocating for learning that is lifelong, life-wide and life-deep and

questions the logic and consequences of a linear perspective but supports learning that taps into accumulated knowledge (UNDP, 2013). It was through the application of accumulated knowledge from informal learning that enabled Lunga, Makhosi and Sbhongile to use their informally acquired skills for livelihood. Their resolution to use these informally acquired skills challenged the non-recognition of prior knowledge in a teaching and learning situation. Recognizing prior knowledge promotes knowledge transfer and equips individuals throughout the lifespan (lifelong) not only to build on existing knowledge for the sake of knowing (academic knowledge) but to be able to deal with different situations (life-wide) within a given context (life-deep). Depriving youth of such skills is like ensuring that there are youths who will continuously contribute to the increasing number of NEETs and remaining in that category for their entire lifetime.

The youth's trajectories as in Figure 7.1 demonstrate how the advantaged elites maintain the status quo of social inequality through national policies, whether educational, economic or just political by following the normative life to the world of work (John, 2009). Such policies, which impact on the youths at different stages in their lifespan, perpetuate social inequality, oppression and exclusion rather than promoting peace and stability and closing social gaps (Olenik, 2013; Tarabini, 2010). As earlier pointed out, the market-driven society and educational institutions tend to generate competition rather than accommodation amongst individuals for access to the most prestigious kind of schooling and to the best places in the occupational structure, thus reinforcing inequalities (Tarabini, 2010). Educational success is defined by a certain criterion specified by someone who may even be outside his or her cultural context. A cultural context may uphold morals and cultural values at the same level as academic achievement. This again ignores the youth's social background as argued by the three dimensions for learning (Illeris, 2003). If the youth does not meet these standards, society views them as failures without even considering the extra effort NEETs have to go through to access the world of work. Even some of the NEETs themselves, when faced with these structural obstacles, tend to personalize their inability to meet the demands, rather than considering strategies which they could employ to use the educational provisions that do not accommodate them to their advantage.

Another structural barrier revealed by the findings is the link between social connections and the ability to respond to life challenges throughout one's lifespan. Besides poverty, lack of education and appropriate skills, NEETs tend to lack social connections and/or support in responding to basic life challenges (Baron, 2000; Korzh, 2013). The findings support Kortzh's (2013) argument that individual connections (social capital) are cultivated primarily,

although not exclusively, at the household level. This again emphasizes the importance of family relations and community organizations in one's lifespan (Phillips, 2010). Many of the NEETs involved in the study were orphans. Whilst most of the youths were able to draw from their parental associations the other forms of capital such as economic and cultural capital, the study revealed that it was not the case for most NEETs (Field, 2005, 2008; John, 2009). The NEETs could not progress academically, nor could they access gainful employment as their level of social capital was very low.

Even after the NEETs had struggled up to high school education, access to tertiary education and employment was hard due to the lack of social connections. Thokozile, for instance, stated that she was not able to find a sponsor for her application fee to submit her application to several tertiary institutions. She also needed assistance to access a government scholarship. Nomsa also reiterated the need for social connections in that even though she was qualified, she could not be employed as there were no job spaces. She had made attempts to broaden her social connections through volunteering with some organizations. However, this did not yield immediate fruit, which concurs with Korzh (2013) that social connections cannot be established overnight.

Social networks are an investment based on trust (John, 2009; Ottebjør, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Korzh (2013) argues that developing trust involves individual and collective strategies, effort and time dedicated to continuous exchanges that have been traded for recognition. It is worth noting, therefore, that within the NEETs lifetime, their social networks are very limited; they can only benefit from those of their parents. However, as already alluded to, many of the NEETs involved in the study were orphans. Even for those who had parents, their connections were within the 'have nots' bracket where they may not know of options and opportunities to further their education or increase their chances of employment.

The study revealed that another structural barrier in accessing the world of work was that there were not enough formal and productive jobs for the youths. The United Nations report (2013) states that in Eswatini there is inadequate job creation and self-employment. Job creation was weakened even further by the fiscal crises for which the decline in SACU revenues highly contributed. Therefore, the lack of productive jobs in Eswatini, has contributed to the belief that increasing the number of years in school does not, on its own, increase the youths' opportunities for employment (Hursh, 2001; Korzh, 2013). Nomsa, for instance, who had a tertiary education, could not find a job. One is not sure whether Nomsa's non-employment was a result of inadequate jobs, mismatch in acquired skill or a lack of

social connections, as the elite group <sup>24</sup>tends to dominate the high value-added and high productivity jobs. Even in wage and self-employment, the less privileged youth tend to be in low value-added and insecure jobs, such as Lunga and Makhosi were engaged in at the time of the study (UNDP, 2013).

Having no voice in what affected them as the youth was another structural barrier to the youths' success. The study has supported the concern that people not attuned to the youths' needs, behavioural trends and characteristics are often the ones who make decisions that have an impact on their development (UNDP, 2013, p. 30). The NEETs insights, as co-researchers, have demonstrated that they are not just victims of the structural obstacles, as society believes they are, but they have ideas on how to address their situation and they can contribute towards educational policies and initiatives affecting them, rather than just living under the shadow of the elites (Yates & Payne, 2006). The findings, as illustrated in the youths' trajectories, reveal that ignoring their voices hinders effective learning and results in them remaining on the margins of society, possibly throughout their lifetimes; whereas if they were involved, as demonstrated by the co-researching process, critical reflection resulting in empowerment would be promoted. The co-researchers ended up coming up with solutions to address their situations not just as individuals but for the other NEETs as well. To me this emphasizes that when their voices are earnestly sought, not just for window dressing, they make meaningful contributions for their own benefit as the NEETs community and for enhanced learning.

The study also reflects a lack of a dialogic space as a structural barrier. The co-researchers' process of critical reflection was more meaningful during the group discussions than individually. This emphasises the need for social interaction and validation of what is learnt by the learner (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). Dialogic space proved to be important in the process of lifelong learning which co-researching provided. The need for social interaction and validation is lifelong. Individuals need guidance and encouragement from home, school and community which for the NEETs was another barrier as they were from unstable families, and ignored in schools which resulted in them dropping out and being marginalized by society which viewed them as useless. The co-researchers themselves shared insights on the need for guidance in school when selecting subjects and careers. They also pointed out the lack of proper models in their communities which could encourage them towards success. In other words, the co-researchers' insights echoed the United States (2013) report that for the youths'

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<sup>24</sup> The elite group – within this study the 'elite group' would be the group of youths that has followed the normative trajectory as illustrated in Figure 7.1: from home to school then to tertiary education and straight to the 'world of work'.

success there is a need for a link between societal structures and support systems. The report argues that families and parents are often a most important source of encouragement and positive influence for young entrepreneurs, sometimes through modelling. The support system, encouragement and guidance, starts from home, goes on to school through career guidance and support groups, right up to the world of work.

Figure 7.1 also depicts the other side of NEETs. That is a side that is not recognized by the lifelong learning approach within the market driven neoliberal framework. This side is where the NEETs do not just wait to be acted upon but learn and apply the skills and knowledge acquired from their life experiences. From the study some of the NEETs who were faced with such experiences did not give up on life but made all efforts to survive. Instead of losing hope some of the NEETs had, at the time of the study, resolved to make use of survival strategies learnt informally during their developmental years. These are the NEETs who, as depicted in the illustration, work against all the social obstacles and then are able to access the world of work. The form of employment can either be self- or wage-employment using either formally or informally acquired skills. This supports the view that NEETs are capable and competent to make decisions that affect their lives.

### **9.3 NEETs and lifelong learning**

In this section on NEETs and lifelong learning, I use the findings to argue that learning as the process of acquiring knowledge and skills happens throughout life from when an individual is born until death (Aspin, 2012; Banks et al., 2007; Medel-Anonvevo, 2002; Preece, 2009). The emphasis is placed on learning not only as lifelong and market driven, but also as life-wide and life-deep covering all aspects of life. Recognition of all forms of learning - informal, formal and non-formal - where individuals continuously acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to assist them to ‘successfully’ respond to life challenges, is emphasized.

I start the presentation with the importance of recognizing the often ignored aspect of informal learning, pointing to the crucial role played by the family in informal learning and the importance of those skills acquired informally as individuals go through the developmental stages. I conclude this section with emphasizing that all forms of learning and the learning institutions are important in developing a lifelong learner.

The findings presented the importance of informal learning in an individual’s life span. Although most of the youth had experiences with informal, formal and non-formal learning, for them, meaningful and significant learning was often acquired informally. It is worth

noting that informal learning is learning that is acquired through accumulating knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment (Schugurensky, 2000). There are three forms of informal learning: self-directed where a group decides to undertake an activity; incidental learning entails learning something as a result of going through a particular experience; and socialization where an individual acquires certain attitudes and values with no prior intention to do so. The sharing by most of the youths in this study demonstrated that the learning was mainly incidental and through socialization. For instance, one participant said; ‘I did not attend a class [to acquire the skill]’. This was the incidental form of informal learning. The youths’ shared experiences demonstrated that, although informally acquired, they appreciated the skills and values as these added values to their lives. Unlike their parents and guardians who were supplementing their income with these skills, the NEETs in this study shared that they used the informally acquired skills for survival.

The informally acquired skills and values shared by the NEETs include the following:

**Table 9.1: NEETs’ informally acquired knowledge, skills and values**

<b>Knowledge acquired</b>	<b>Skills acquired</b>	<b>Values acquired</b>	<b>Institutions where acquired</b>
Knowledge transfer Management of pigs and poultry Costing of products	Pig rearing	Respect	Home
	Poultry rearing	Responsibility	Church
	Making and selling vetkoek	Independence	Community
		Self-discipline	Peer group
		Ethic of hard work	

Whilst Table 9.1 illustrates the skills and values acquired incidentally, it also emphasizes the importance and role of family learning as presented in Table 7.2 where 38 percent of the research participants shared that they learnt their skill from home. The findings support literature that presents the family, in particular, as the foundation of the socialization process where life skills and values are learnt (Oetting, 1999). Knowledge, skills and values learnt from the family tend to guide or become a pillar throughout a person’s life so that the other learning institutions, informal or formal, build on what an individual has learnt from home through the resocialization process (John, 2009). Most of the NEETs shared that their survival skills were learnt at home. It is therefore a concern that most of the NEETs from this study were either orphans or from unstable families. Khosi for instance shared this:

I learned from my mother to work for a living as she was a hard worker, independent and did not rely on her pay job. So she would go further and do farming and rearing of animals and she would not say that she will wait for the end of month to get money. So she used to work and also assigned us as well and nobody would laze around. The only reason one would loiter around would be after they have completed their chores. Every morning you knew what was expected of you and which chores you needed to complete. And we were taught to be respectful, and go to church, and come back and do your chores. If you were finished with your chores then you would either find something else to do or rest. So this made me realize that even if I did not get a well-paying job, I know that I can fend for myself, as I know that I should always be busy with something and not just sit around.

Lunga said:

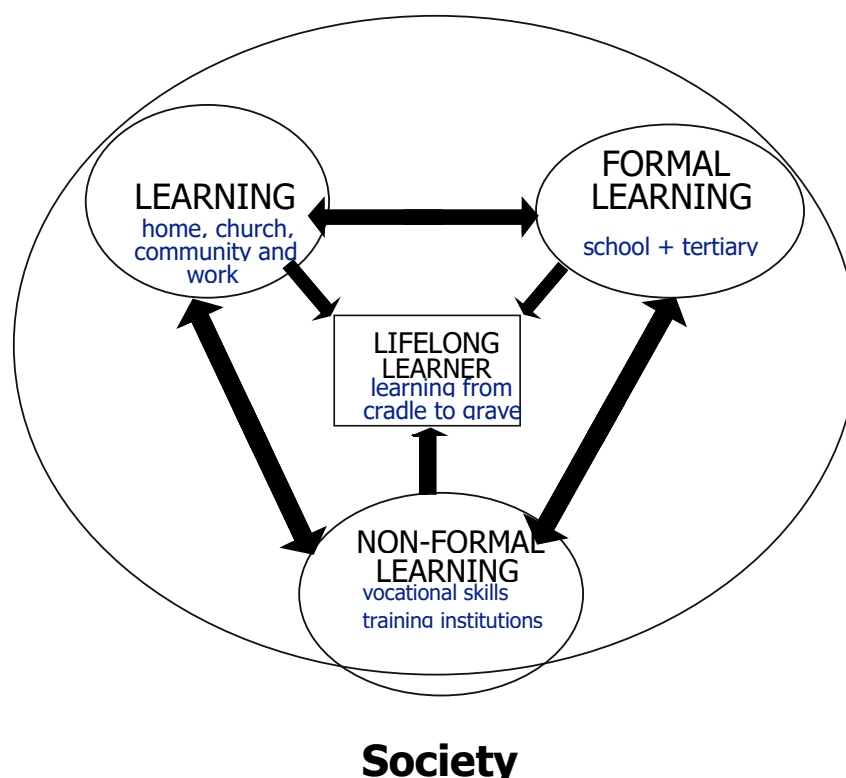
So for the whole of my primary school I knew that I would go to school in the morning and my grandmother would remain to take care of the pigs. But in the evening it would be me, no matter what, taking care of the pigs' needs.

Whilst Khosi and Lunga's experiences reflect knowledge, skills, values and attitudes learnt from home; the mother and grandmother respectively, their experiences also emphasize the value of relationships in informal learning, particularly during developmental stages (Baltes et al., 2007; 1999). Home is presented as the key site for learning knowledge and skills (e.g. farming, pig rearing), and attitudes (self-discipline, responsibility, and hard work). This emphasizes the need for recognizing informal not just formal and non-formal institutions in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by individuals during the lifespan. Recognizing all forms of learning also concurs with the critics of learning as being only lifelong (developing individuals for the market driven economy). The lifespan development theory promotes learning that is multidimensional (Baltes et al., 1999, 1987) which supports promoting life-wide learning (learning in all contexts) and life-deep (learning that upholds cultural values, beliefs and politics (Banks et al., 2007).

Although the NEETs involved in the study valued the informally acquired skills and values, and in some cases found them crucial to their actual survival, literature reveals that society prefers those acquired from formal institutions (Tarabini, 2010; Yates, 2006). The experiences shared by the NEETs revealed a difference or conflicts in perception regarding the value placed on such skills and values by them as users, compared to the society they lived in. The societal view is underpinned by the belief that it is only what is acquired through formal

education that will contribute positively towards an individuals' livelihood. This again links back to the framework of neoliberalism which favours and rewards formal education, formal learning and the formal workplace. According to neoliberalism, those left out of the formal system, even though they may value and use their informally acquired skills for survival, are often viewed as useless, their opinion not sought or just ignored. The study emphasizes the value of the informally acquired skills and refutes the view that NEETs are simply a societal problem and burden (Yates & Payne, 2006).

The emphasis on informal rather than just formal learning emphasizes that lifelong learning, applied broadly and outside the confines of the unilateral and market oriented educational policies influenced by neoliberalism, develops the enduring characteristics of a lifelong learner within individuals (Aspin, 2007; Aspin, 2012; Duke & Hinzen, 2012; Medel-Anonvevo, 2002; Preece, 2009; Rule, 2011). Such a view assists in developing an individual who will continuously and productively respond or negotiate life crises throughout the lifespan (Fasokun et al., 2005). These are challenges that may be brought about by different contexts and developmental stages. This calls for viewing learning as a continuum, not just an activity that starts when one enters pre-school or primary school and ends after university. Learning – informal, formal and non-formal – should be seen as complementary throughout life.



**Figure 9.1: The process of acquiring and application of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for a lifelong learner**

Figure 9.1 presents the process of acquiring and application of knowledge, skills and values as happening throughout life which has been emphasized by the study. According to Lekoko and Modise (2011), the ability to respond or apply acquired skills and values to life challenges emphasizes that the quality of learning cannot just be defined in terms of the amount of information acquired and recorded in formal examinations, but it is measured by the amount of learning that can be applied in real life situations. This approach, continuous acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes and application, views lifelong learning as event-in-action rather than time focused (Duke & Hinzen, 2012).

Continuous learning and the application of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in all settings at all times also involves questioning the logic and consequences of the linear-numerical perspective but supports the lifelong, life-wide learning and life-deep form of learning (Banks et al., 2007). It involves learning that allows tapping into the accumulated knowledge from other institutions and applying it to address everyday life challenges. It questions the emphasis of normative development because this confines learning to being only a response to the market economy; a response to formal employment. The youth in this study, for instance, used the skills and values that they had acquired informally for their livelihood rather than just those from formal education. This means when the youth faced poverty and unemployment they resorted to doing what they had seen or had experienced to be working from their respective homes.

Instead of promoting or building on previously acquired skills during one's lifetime, the study reveals that the tendency for society and the learners is to ignore informal or traditional learning or non-formal learning (Tarabini, 2010) and to put more value on modern formal education;. Learning experiences from the different learning institutions tend to be treated in isolation. The study argues that building on skills learnt or recognizing learning from any learning system or institution would also promote the interconnectedness of the learning institutions rather than them being viewed in isolation. The social capital theory talks to the relationship and connectedness of institutions (John, 2009). For instance, the relationship that exists within a family and linked with other institutions during a youth's development process, tends to affect who and what the youth becomes (Sugarman, 1986).

This view recognizes the need for institutional linkages and interconnectedness, that is often ignored by neoliberalism, and concurs with Vygotsky's argument that development will be different depending on when and where one grows up (Sugarman, 1986). This brings in viewing learning as life-wide; with family, parents and siblings, to the other larger influences

or socialization agents such as school, community and the church. When viewing learning as life-wide, skills learnt through socialization and incidentally, would be recognized and harnessed in formal and Non-formal Education. In other words, skills already acquired would be identified and promoted in the different contexts within an individual's life span in order to produce a responsible citizen. In the African context, for instance, a competent and successful individual should also uphold cultural values like respect, honesty and collectiveness (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). Individual's measure of success is not only about being just excellent or competent but should also be demonstrated by the individual's ability to relate with other people in the different contexts.

From the above findings on NEETs and lifelong learning, I therefore argue that it is not the NEETs that have failed but society's view of lifelong learning that has been augmented in a neoliberal world. We have viewed lifelong learning through the neoliberalist framework rather than enabling individuals to acquire and apply skills throughout life for social relevance. Such a view is opposed to viewing learning only within educational institutions. Instead educational institutions should be viewed as linking or as part of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is not only about knowledge and skills needed to access employment, but also about the values and attitudes necessary to adapt, belong and contribute as expected by the society.

The findings also respond to the argument on lifelong learning as promoting individualization and blaming failure on the individual rather than emphasizing the responsibility of educational institutions (Preece, 2009; Rule, 2011). Blaming the individual rather than the institution stems from the market driven view towards learning which advocates that accessing and staying in employment happens only after going through formal educational institution. For one to gain access and stay employed, only formally acquired skills from formal institutions are recognized. Other institutions, such as home and community, although providing values, attitudes and skills necessary in the work place, are ignored. Literature reveals that some youths, even if they can access employment, tend to fail to stay employed because they lack people skills or values which are acquired informally (Marsh, 2009). The nature of lifelong learning is to develop people's competencies to be responsible and confident and to be actors in roles required in different settings, as family members, friends, workers, employees and entrepreneurs, members of society and as national and world citizens (Yang & Valdes-Cotera, 2011).

## **9.4 NEETs and the social capital theory**

In this section I present how the types and strengths of relationships NEETs had with people, societal structures and organizations influenced aspects of their lives, their education and social development (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Field, 2005, 2008; John, 2009). I build on the previous section and further use the social capital theory (Field, 2005, 2008; John, 2009) to explain shared individual relationships with family, friends and the larger community. The NEETs shared experiences on how some of them were able, through employing forms of social capital, to be ‘successful’ in life, finish school and have some form of livelihood, whilst others could not. The ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ concepts of the social capital theory are used to explain how the types of or the lack of strength in social relationships experienced by the NEETs in their developmental stage, contributed to their status (Field, 2008; John, 2009). I also argue that, in African cultural contexts and in particular the Eswatini context, concepts such as the social capital ones of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’, can be different from Western culture. I also use the shared experiences to argue the importance of recognizing all the social institutions and their connections in producing a contextually competent individual.

The significance of connections and interdependencies with family, friends and members of the community is emphasized by this study. It is often social relationships or networks characterized by reciprocal obligations, expectation, norms and trust that contribute to a sense of self, a meaningful life and a feeling of self-esteem for an individual, particularly amongst the youth (Phillips, 2010). According to Field (2005, 2008), reaping the fruits of social connections and interdependence is social capital changing to economic and cultural capital for the NEETs: those who shared experiences of educational progression and success in general also shared relationships with certain individuals who contributed to that. The NEETs regard those individuals as significant in their lives. On the same note, most of the NEETs who dropped out of school did not enjoy certain types of relationships. Most of them were either single or double orphans. This suggests that the absence of certain relationships, particularly family relationships, contributed to the status of the youths being referred to as NEETs.

The types and strengths of the connections and interdependencies are crucial to improve the productivity of an individual and ultimately facilitate society’s coordinated action (John, 2009). Whilst bonding refers to inward looking networks within homogenous groups such as families, social or ethnic groups, bridging refers to the relations between different groups, which are outward looking networks (ibid.). This study demonstrates the powerful positive

effects of these two concepts during the youths' lifespans. The study reveals social support as contributing to one's success both financially and emotionally. The youths experienced a range of support from different social institutions beginning from the nuclear and extended family level and friends, to community and nationally in government.

The study emphasizes the understanding of the social capital concepts in context. In African culture 'bonding' is not just looking into the nuclear family but also into the extended family, including a polygamous family. For instance, the NEETs expressed that in the absence of their biological parents, they were assisted by extended family members such as their grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings, which is bonding. Whilst the Western culture can view the assistance from extended family as 'bridging', in African culture it is still referred to as 'bonding'. For Africans, family both nuclear and extended, is just family. 'Bridging' on the other hand is only when individuals' connections outside the family translate into economic and social capital. For instance, some NEETs expressed that they received financial assistance to pursue their education from members of the community (Field, 2005, 2008). For instance, Lunga's tertiary fees, although he ended up not completing his course, were paid for by a community member. The need to contextualize concepts especially to the African contexts, links with the earlier discussion on individualization as promoted by the neoliberal framework, as opposed to the African concept of collectivity.

The African view of social capital influences the definition or view of 'success'. As already alluded to, and as an African myself, I would attest that Africans feel responsible for the other person's success. This is particularly so if the person is related by blood (bonding) or is from the same community (bridging). The feeling of responsibility for the other person is the application of African and Emaswati concept of bonding and bridging. Taking responsibility for other people demonstrates the importance of social capital in the African context: '*Umuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu* (a person is a person through other people)' (Lekoko & Modise, 2012, p. 523). This was also reflected in NEETs pedagogical preferences as they expressed that they learnt better with others. Lekoko and Modise (2012) refers to this as learning 'that is communal, functional and constitutes an all-round active involvement' (ibid. p. 523). In group work the NEETs expressed that they not only learnt from each other but also supported each other for academic success.

Social capital may be viewed as social glue where individuals become empowered to question their status quo (Putnam, 2000). Individuals of the same kind who realize their own social status and then find connections with other people of the same kind, together begin to reflect

and come up with solutions about their situations. Through reflection on their experiences, the NEETs learnt about the less desirable effects of social capital. They learnt that most of them lost hope about life because they had no family support to see them through formal education. Some chose the wrong friends who influenced them in making choices that contributed to their failure. However, on the strength of the connections they enjoyed whilst conducting the study, the co-researchers resolved on strategies to solve their situations. The strategies were not only for themselves but could be adopted by other NEETs as well. These strategies show the importance of support groups for success in life as individuals' together question and take action rather than wait to be acted upon by decisions made by certain bureaucrats.

Lunga, for example, showed agency and responsibility when he found himself caring for the young boy whom he believed was his relative (although he was not a blood relative). He saw his life being reflected in this boy. He viewed himself as being where he was because of people who helped him, some of whom were not blood relatives. He was raised by his grandmother, and at some stage his school fees were paid by government through the assistance of teachers in his grandmother's school. His tertiary education, which he could not finish, was paid for by a community member. He thus benefitted from a combination of bonding and bridging capital in his own development. He then felt obliged to extend assistance to this young boy as circumstances had reproduced themselves.

In conclusion, the study reveals that it is not only the individual that needs to be connected but the social institutions that the youth comes in contact with should be connected as well. Social institutions should avoid operating in isolation but be connected and work towards interdependence if they are to serve an individual who will be interdependent. For instance, home, school and community as social institutions all contribute or have a role in bringing up an individual well adapted to circumstances. In Eswatini for instance, parent-teachers' associations are encouraged to promote parental sharing of knowledge and skills with children. In the African context, an academically competent individual should also uphold cultural values like respect, honesty and collectiveness (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). It is not just about being excellent or competent in your own right but also your ability to relate with other people. The ability of the individual to live with other people is crucial, which neoliberalism tends to ignore in its pursuit of producing highly competent individuals in the market driven economy. The need for recognizing all forms of social institutions as well as all forms of learning as beneficial to an individual is discussed in the section on NEETs and lifelong learning,

## **9.5 Coming in from the margins**

In this section I present what the NEETs themselves pointed out as strategies to address the issue of being NEETs. They pointed out the importance of youths' agency, resourcefulness and connectedness.

### **9.5.1 Youths' agency**

The study demonstrated that interventions without the NEETs contribution and involvement continue to place some youths at a disadvantage for their entire lifespan. The study also highlighted the need for a dialogic space where youths can express their views, feelings and aspirations for them to be active participants in decisions relating to their lives. For instance, in the focus group discussions, the co-researchers had this to say about their situation:

It is good to dream in life and to identify that at a certain point in time you want to have achieved A, B and C, but the question is what you are doing now. No one will come to you and give you what you want. Let us have it within ourselves to fight strongly for what we believe in until it comes to pass.

This responds to Merriam et al.'s (2007) argument on the need to stand fast, deepen commitment and face life challenges. The study highlighted that the youths took this stand in the company of others of their own kind. This emphasizes the need for peer support where there will be sharing of experiences, critical reflection and taking cooperative decisions and clear goals towards addressing life issues. This peer support would constitute a form of 'bonding' social capital which in turn might assist with the development of 'bridging' social capital.

### **9.5.2 Youths' resourcefulness**

Besides pointing out the need to take control of their situation, youths also recognized the need for a shift from the limitations imposed by the neoliberal thinking to viewing themselves as contributors, and experts of their economic development:

Our minds have been tuned to the fact that a real person is one that has a white collar job...let us stop conforming to routines that I should complete high school and progress to university.

Again, the study highlights that neoliberalism limits not only society's view on NEETs' resourcefulness, but also the view of the NEETs themselves. It is through creating a dialogic space that their resourcefulness can be harnessed fully. For this study, this was demonstrated

by the co-researching process that resulted in the youths' insights on how NEETs issues can be addressed.

Interestingly, the above quotation concurs with McGrath and Powell's (2016) argument that challenges focusing on employability and waged labour (not being able to work enough to earn a decent income) undermine many other capabilities and functioning. They argue for a shift to recognizing initiatives that, although they may be viewed as insignificant, are better than no work at all. Such livelihoods skills are not only accessible to the poorest but are highly valued by the beneficiaries.

Co-researching has also highlighted that there is no better way to address or promote initiatives by these beneficiaries than to involve them in decisions on issues relating to them. Such insights show that superficial involvement even in empirical studies is not enough, there is a need for in-depth understanding; getting their voices on issues that matter to them. This concurs with Chappell et al.'s (2014) stated need for a shift from assuming that research participants have no voice (can be excluded, left out or superficially consulted) but only someone in power (a researcher) can bring their experiences to light.

According to Making cents international (2012), programmes will continue to underperform if they fail to consult, involve and empower primary consultants. This study demonstrated that there is a need for applying research methodologies, such as co-researching, to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the group being studied, particularly if the group is as disadvantaged as the NEETs. Involving NEETs in discussions, processes and decision-making on issues concerning them requires the creation of a dialogic space where they can express their opinions and ideas. Co-researching was instrumental for the NEETs involved in the study to voice valuable ideas and strategies such as their agency; not waiting for someone else to decide or do something to address their situation. The insights shared by the NEETs during the study could be used to develop interventions rather than having only the 'knowledgeable', 'elites' or policy makers developing them based only on statistical data.

### **9.5.3 Youths and institutional connectedness**

The study also emphasized the importance of relationships and connectedness. The relationships and connectedness for individuals' 'success' should be between individuals such as in social groups, as well as relationships and linkages between institutions or other groups. The importance of individual's relationships and connectedness was exemplified by Thokozile's 'Chillaz' association.

Thokozile's friends demonstrated the closure concept of the social capital theory by their cohesive actions (Coleman, 1988). They achieved their goals as individuals and as a collective through their collective and monitored responsibility. As opposed to the individualized policies of neoliberalism, including learning interventions, these insights emphasize the importance of social groups as advocated by Wangoola (1996). He argues that such social or support groups such as women groups, stokvels and others, may be insignificant to the countries of the West but in African communities they make valuable contributions and bring about social change.

Creating and monitoring linkages for groups within and beyond schools, communities, and nationally, can also ensure balanced learning as lifelong, life-wide and life-deep. Zubok (2013) proposes a need for countries, including Eswatini, to partner with all stakeholders towards systematic instruction and children's upbringing, rather than providing compartmentalized educational services (Zubok, 2013). The proposal is for the equal recognition and promoting linkages of all institutions providing the different forms of education as lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning. The argument is that focusing only on formal education provided by formal institutions that are influenced by the neoliberal framework has contributed towards society viewing and treating the youths as failures, whereas they do make contributions in their other social networks.

Recognizing social associations and connectedness also concurs with the African values of collectiveness rather than blaming the victim mentality, and promoting individualism (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). In Africa the spirit of 'Ubuntu' is just a way of life where 'I am because you are' within a family, a community and even nationally.

The collectiveness, as earlier pointed out, also extends to teaching and learning methodologies. I support Making cents international (2012) that for youth especially, contemporary communication, entertainment and technology to inspire young people to new types of economic participation and connectedness should be employed. For instance, harnessing the powerful contributions of social groups and employing technology can enhance peer learning (such as the 'Chillaz' example) and contribute to individual achievement and subsequently community and national goals. Other than the example from Thokozile's friends, the youths also shared, in the interviews, insights on benefitting more from collaborative than individual learning.

## 9.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter advocates, using the theoretical lenses, for a shift from viewing and understanding NEETs as problematic and disadvantaged, (Yates & Payne, 2006) but rather as youths in need of social capital throughout their lifespan. The theoretical lenses emphasized the need for the reconceptualization of youths beyond the neoliberalism framework, not just as economic producers, but as social agents, community developers, voters and many other roles. There is also the need to reconceptualise what education and learning, in its formal, non-formal and informal forms, can contribute to helping them in a very difficult economic situation, was brought to the fore. Finally, social capital throughout the youths' lifespans was viewed as being fundamental in providing and supporting life opportunities and alternatives (Marsh, 2009) for the youth to achieve their full potential.

Therefore, a shift from society's traditional view of NEETs to the emerging view of youths as summarized in Table 9.2 below is advocated.

**Table 9.2: The traditional versus the emerging view of youths categorized as NEETs**

<b>Traditional view</b>	<b>Emerging view</b>
NEETs as threats	Youths as engines of growth
NEETs as vulnerable	Youths as catalysts
NEETs as a residual category	Youths as central to sustainable development
NEETs as marginalized	Youths as drivers of development
NEETs as victims	Youths as heroes
NEETs as followers	Youths as innovators
NEETs as leaders of tomorrow	Youths as leaders today

Adapted from (Olenik, 2013)

Table 9.2 summarizes the emerging view of youths categorized as NEETs as potential agents of change, as resourceful and as contributors not only in their own development but to the community and the country. To know the relevant opportunities for the role they can play there is need to understand the NEETs from their own perspective. There is also a need to engage research approaches that would assist in digging deeper so as to have, not just an understanding, but also an in-depth understanding. Involving them, not just superficially, will boost their self-esteem and make them to be in the drivers' seat of their own destiny, as well as that of their respective communities.

## **CHAPTER TEN:**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **10.1 Introduction**

This study has attempted to give voice to the educational experiences of out-of-school youth. In doing so, it has generated insights at an empirical, methodological and conceptual level. At all three levels, the findings of the study bring into question the reductiveness of the NEET construction. ‘NEET’ may be a neat way of categorizing out-of-school youth for the purposes of neoliberal economics but it does harm to our deeper and wider understanding of their situatedness, agency and possibility.

This chapter is presented in four sections. The first section reflects on the empirical insights. It argues that the NEETs concept is socially constructed and influenced by neoliberalism within the lifelong learning approach rather than representing who the youth really are. The study brings to the fore the youths’ voices on their educational experiences and attitudes which have been ignored by interventions and unifying policies (influenced by neoliberalism) as presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. Such experiences include living a life of poverty, dropping out of school, lacking social connections and lacking access to formal employment.

The second section reflects on the methodological insights. The section refutes the descriptive and negative connotation of ‘not-ness’ (Yates & Payne, 2006), ‘deficient’, ‘marginalized’ and a ‘lost generation’ (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009) for youths categorized as NEETs that renders them unable to contribute or take decisions concerning their lives. This study engaged co-researchers as resourceful and as experts on issues that relate to them, and who shared insights on developing interventions and policies concerning them (Marsh, 2009). The co-researchers voiced that developing interventions ‘with’ rather than ‘for’ them would result in programmes that better met them at their points of need. Therefore, research studies that view out-of-school youths only as ‘outsiders’, ‘the other group’ or ‘subaltern’ exacerbate the NEETs’ situation, whereas using windows to look both ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ (such as co-researching) is proposed (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009).

The third section reflects on the insights into the whole concept of NEET as defined according to modern, Western-oriented, formal learning. Influenced by neoliberalism, within the lifelong learning approach, the traditionally acquired skills and the institutions offering them as well as the individuals applying them for their livelihood, are often not recognized. A

young person is a 'Not' in relation to modern formal learning aspects but might be richly endowed in relation to traditional informal learning and employment. Therefore, as opposed to using the term 'NEETs' to reflect being in deficit, being hopeless and having lost hope about life, a shift is necessary to viewing them as in need of more opportunities, which might build on their existing knowledge and experience rather than devaluing it.

The study presents an emerging model for understanding out-of-school youths rather than one viewing youths only in economic terms. This model comprises 'FILLing' rather than 'NEETing' (Lekoko & Modise, 2011; McGrath & Powell, 2016). The model embraces the African Indigenous Learning (AIL) approach and it shifts from blaming the learner, rather than the provider, institutions or the state, for being a NEET, to a collective approach of all stakeholders (The state, learning institutions and the learner) in the learning process. The model entails F- for youths as members of Families; I- for social Insertedness, which refers to their participation in society as community members, citizens, consumers, peers, cultural actors; L- for all forms of learning happening throughout the lifespan; L- for Livelihoods, recognizing all forms of livelihood including informal; and the last L- stands for Legacy, including the knowledge, values, skills and traditions that youths inherit and develop as part of their culture.

I conclude this chapter by presenting recommendations for further research and my personal reflection on the study.

## **10.2 What are the educational experiences and attitudes of out-of-school youth in Eswatini?**

The findings as presented in Chapters Six and Seven, reveal that NEETs were exposed to a life of poverty, lack of social connections and a scarcity of jobs. As a result of these experiences, some NEETs could not access education and, therefore, lacked qualifications and/or finances for entry into tertiary education. Even those who managed to get financial assistance or support from individuals, community members and government, could not access or stay in employment because there were few jobs and they lacked social connections.

### **10.2.1 The life of poverty and being a NEET**

NEETs, in this study, had the following experiences in their developmental stages: a life of poverty as a result of their family backgrounds; low levels of education because they dropped out of formal education; lack of access to training because they lacked qualifications or

finances; and even for those who managed to get financial assistance or support, lack of access to or retention in employment because they lacked social connections.

### **10.2.2 Family background**

The findings revealed unstable family backgrounds and their link to poverty as contributing to youths' status as NEETs. These expressed experiences concur with Motsa's (2017) definition of the vulnerability of Eswatini children and the NEETs' characteristics defined by literature (Korzh, 2013; Marsh, 2009; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). Other than the ten percent of NEETs in the study who were brought up by both parents, NEETs experienced a diverse range of family settings. These other family settings included being brought up only by their mothers, grandparents, siblings or in a polygamous family setting. These findings revealed that in situations of having a child out of wedlock, death, or uncertainty of child's paternity, where either parents or even the mother failed to bring up their children, the grandparents took up that responsibility. In extreme cases, siblings took the parental role after the parents' death.

The family background and the roles played by each family member during NEETs' developmental stages influenced the NEETs' relative valuing of the contribution they made in their lives. Most (23) of the NEETs treasured their mothers, seven their grandparents and five their fathers. Also 15 of the NEETs viewed their mothers as highly influential, 14 their peers, eight their fathers and the rest grandparents or siblings. One co-researcher said, 'My mother is everything to me'. In one of the journals a co-researcher wrote, 'I learnt that mothers are people that are more understanding in nature. So a lot of children go to their mothers for help.' Another said, 'My mum was the one that was responsible for us. My father did not care'. These experiences reflect that, even though mothers are viewed as having contributed the most and as being highly influential, most mothers were unemployed or in low paying jobs resulting in a life of poverty for most of the NEETs' families.

### **10.2.3 Forms of livelihood**

The family's employment status contributed to NEETs' vulnerability. The NEETs' parents' and guardians' source of income was limited or non-existent as only seven parents were in formal employment, 17 unemployed, and 22 in self-employment. Even those in self-employment relied on subsistence farming, hawking and tailoring while those who were formally employed had low paying jobs such as pre-school teacher, domestic worker and mine worker. It was interesting to note that some NEETs' parents subsidized their formal employment income through informal income-generating activities: 'My mother liked to work as she cultivated her own crops, we reared white pigs and chickens. She also worked at the

pharmacy that is located in Nhlangano'. These findings reveal that parents or guardians found it difficult to sustain their families even though they supplemented their formal employment through income generating activities. The poverty levels were worse for homesteads where the adult(s) responsible were unemployed.

#### **10.2.4 Educational access and progression**

Out-of-school youths' economic situation affected their educational access and progression. Most of the NEETs never entered or dropped out of school because they lacked financial support as most (74 percent) of them were orphaned (40 percent double orphaned) and 34 percent with only their mothers alive. NEETs family economic status contributed to their access and dropping out of school and lacking educational qualifications to access tertiary institutions and relevant qualifications to access employment. One co-researcher shared that:

I used to get sent home like every child because my grandfather had retired when I was in grade four. So I would sometimes stay home for approximately a whole week as they tried to gather money for me to go back to school...

Even though some NEETs received financial support from extended family, siblings, community members and government (the OVC fund and Free Primary Education) to complete their primary education or high school, some still could not finish primary education. The Education Report (EMIS, 2013) still reflected drop-out as an educational challenge meaning that there are other contributing factors to school drop-out besides finances. A national data system that would address these other contributing factors, forms of vulnerabilities, and the views of the beneficiaries, would be more inclusive (Motsa & Morojele, 2017).

#### **10.2.5 Social support and connection**

Lack of information and social connections have been viewed as a contributing factor to youths' inability to access employment (Fawcett et al., 2010; Marsh, 2009; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). The NEETs were raised by parents or guardians who were unemployed, had little or no education and were in rural areas. Such parents lacked information on options for the world of work. The NEETs expressed the need to strengthen career guidance in schools as they viewed the lack of information about choice of subjects, available job opportunities, job requirements, and necessary processes on how they can improve or access job opportunities, as contributing factors to being a NEET. Since this study was not on the correlation between parental background and access to education, training and employment but on the youths'

experiences, an in-depth understanding on the relationship between these two variables would be helpful for educational interventions.

### **10.3 How have out-of-school youths' educational experiences and attitudes contributed to them being NEETs?**

The findings reveal that the experiences by the out-of-school youths put them at a disadvantage in accessing basic services such as education, thus lacking the necessary skills for employment. Experiencing a life of poverty, for instance, contributed in many of the out-of-school youths dropping out of school. Some of the youths dropped out of primary school whilst other at senior secondary and therefore were not able to access tertiary education.

Lack of social support contributed not only to their financial lack but also to their lack of connections, information and advice towards their development. Some of the youths, for instance Mfanzile, lacked advice on subject choices in secondary education which resulted in them choosing the wrong subjects that did not enable them to access tertiary education. Thokozile also lacked support for tertiary studies, whilst Nomsa could not access formal employment after completing her tertiary studies.

The findings also revealed that when faced with unemployment, the NEETs engaged in strategies for their livelihoods that they had acquired through informal learning. Reverting to strategies or survival skills experienced during formative years reveals that for NEETs when formal education failed they employed what they knew best: their informally acquired survival strategies. One co-researcher shared 'Now I am sitting at home and am busy with rearing pigs... And that is what has kept me going...' The resolution to use their informally acquired skills stands as a counterpoint to literature that says NEETs tend to be helpless and end up being an economic burden to the state (Marsh, 2009; Oppenheimer et al., 2011). The attempts made by NEETs in this study have been seen to be working as they enabled them to earn their livelihood. They have since made further use of their indigenous and informally acquired knowledge and skills. However, the study revealed that the traditionally acquired skills are not recognized and so they were categorized as NEETs.

### **10.4 How and what do youth contribute as co-researchers through the process of conducting this research?**

The findings reveal that co-researching contributes to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. I reflect on this contribution under four themes: NEETs as agents of change; the importance of a dialogic space for sharing innermost feelings; the importance of informal

learning and social groups in promoting critical reflection; and co-researching as sharpening youths' researching skills.

#### **10.4.1 NEETs as 'insiders' or 'experts on their own lives' not as change agents**

Co-researching provided a deeper understanding of the NEETs concept as out-of-school youths who already had the experiences of being NEETs. The co-researchers who shared the same age, locality, characteristics and experiences as the NEETs had the insider's view (Smith, 2010). Engaging youths with the same characteristics helped in the realization that being a NEET is broader than being an individual challenge. Nomsa shared this:

The study was good; it opened my eyes as I am one of those that fit within the study. I was able to meet others that were able to complete their university education but then they are not doing anything now.... They do not have jobs, but not because they do not qualify, as we do have certificates, we apply but we cannot get a job.

#### **10.4.2 Dialogic space and empowerment**

Co-researching provided space for people of the same kind to share their experiences. Co-researching provides dialogic space amongst research participants particularly for those often ignored, previously disadvantaged and without a voice to talk about their deep-seated feelings (Chappell et al., 2014; Chappell, 2013; Marsh, 2009). The development of trust and openness during the study resulted not only in the sharing of the deepest information, but also in reflection for a consensus of meaning (Rule, 2004). As they engaged with the other participants, the co-researchers were able to step back cognitively and rethink their situation. This reflection process resulted in them being empowered in the sense that they were in a better position to understand their situations and take decisions about the way forward (Bergold, 2012). In these reflections, the co-researchers were able to record in their journals and share during the focus group discussions insights on how to address the NEETs' situation. In other words, co-researching may result in actions on decisions taken to address a situation affecting people who previously did not have a solution. For instance, one co-researcher said 'The impact that this research had is that it has pushed me to want to further my studies'. The findings demonstrate that given the opportunity NEETs go further than just sharing or voicing out issues that affect them; they can also generate strategies to address those issues. It shows that they are capable and crucial partners in the development of solutions to their situation; and on what works for them rather than somebody bringing a solution about their problem to them.

#### **10.4.3 Informal learning and social groups**

Another finding for co-researching in this study is the importance of social groups, such as peers, in promoting informal learning throughout one's lifespan. The co-researchers needed to be amongst people of their own kind to reflect on their personal situation and then on those of others. The use of social groups stimulated critical reflection which led to empowerment for the co-researchers. With the knowledge acquired from the other participants and the experiences from their own lives the co-researchers were able to take informed decisions about their future. This shows that sometimes one may need one of their own kind at critical developmental stages to be able to face challenges positively.

Co-researching also provided the shift from viewing research participants as objects to subjects who are capable of making decisions pertaining their own lives (Chappell, 2013; Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). The dialogic space between the principal researcher and the co-researcher provided the space for the co-construction of knowledge between those affected by the phenomenon (the NEETs) and the principal researcher (the outsider). This approach responds to the epistemological question of whose knowledge it is. Co-researching situates the generation of the knowledge in relation to the beneficiaries. It also responds to the 'nothing about us without us' (Marsh, 2009; O'Brien, 2014) as their voices as 'knowers' and 'experts' of their own lives are viewed as important (Chappell et al., 2014).

#### **10.4.4 Research skills and trustworthiness of the data collected**

The findings revealed that proper training sharpened the co-researchers' interviewing skills and their focus on the research purpose. The co-researchers were not only in a better position to identify others of their own kind through snowball sampling but also better able to use the interviewing skills acquired during the training for the accomplishment of the research goal. The training on conducting interviews provided to the co-researchers equipped them appropriately. One co-researcher said, 'I would like to extend my gratitude for the opportunity to be a co-researcher and further sharpen my talent [skills] within research'. These skills acquired by the co-researchers enabled them to address the challenges during the data collection process. The challenges included participants' perceptions of the length of the questionnaire, emotions raised during the interview, the need to play roles of being advisors, supporters and motivators. The co-researchers managed to provide assistance within their ability without losing focus of their interviewing role.

## **10.5 The emerging view of understanding out-of-school youth; ‘FILLing’ versus ‘NEETing’**

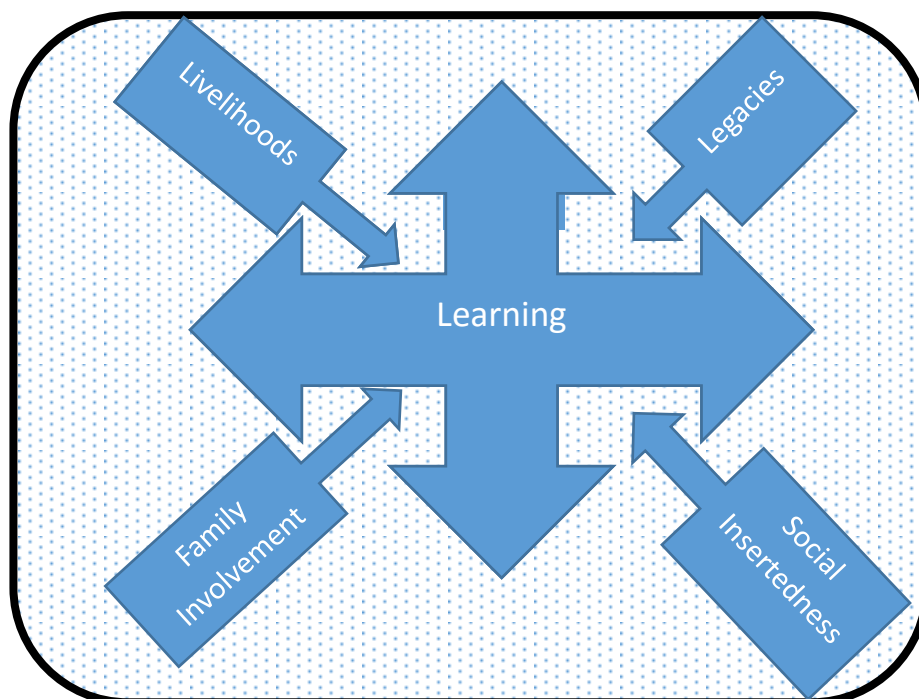
The study supports the need for a shift from viewing NEETs as problematic and disadvantaged (Yates & Payne, 2006) but rather as youths in need of life opportunities (Marsh, 2009). Understanding and defining the NEETs concept within the neoliberal framework tends to define youths as in deficit rather than in need of more opportunities, as lacking rather than resourceful and experts in issues affecting them and as marginalized rather than people who can be connected to achieve individual, communal and national goals. Therefore, as opposed to understanding out-of-school youth as being deficient and ‘NEETing’, the study presents a holistic approach: ‘FILLing’ to understanding out-of-school youths.

The holistic approach acknowledges that many out-of-school youths are in need of more opportunities rather than the ‘linear’ or ‘normative’ trajectory to the world of work. This indicates the various (re)entry opportunities needed by NEETs as opposed to the normative trajectories embraced by lifelong learning and the neoliberal framework. Therefore, there is a need for embracing and recognizing all forms of education - informal, formal and non-formal - as contributing to one’s economic, educational and personal development throughout one’s lifespan (Baltes, 1987; Baltes et al., 1999). The multiple opportunities required also reflect the need for social connections from different educational institutions, individuals and society in support (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Such support also promotes an individual’s engagement in issues regarding his or her life, which may result in the development of citizenry amongst the youths. This supports Lekoko and Modise’s (2011) view about contextualizing lifelong learning within the African context through the African Indigenous Knowledge framework rather than reductively and exclusively embracing the Western view of lifelong learning. The framework proposes a lifelong learning approach that is entrenched deeply in the practices, cultures and knowing of many Africans and has fundamental implications for the African perspective on a lifelong learning approach (Lekoko & Modise, 2011)

The study proposes the framework of ‘FILLing’ in order to address the concept of reductiveness of ‘NEETing’ as a way of understanding the agency, resourcefulness and connectedness of youth. The study argues that NEETs’ livelihoods need to be understood more broadly than the normal trajectory to formal employment: ‘NEETing’. NEETs play other roles as community members such as being members of a family, a peer group, and

other social groups and circles. NEETs in Eswatini are also citizens, consumers and cultural actors. These roles played by NEETs are often ignored, taken for granted or devalued by the neoliberal framework.

The FILLing framework proposed by the study is as follows:



**Figure 10.1: The FILLing framework**

F – Family involvements – as understood in an African context where collectiveness as opposed to individualism is promoted in raising children, supporting each other, siblings and peer groups, looking after parents and grandparents, and other relatives. The data in this study show the important role that youth play in the family, for example, the mentoring and supporting role that Makhosi’s brother played towards her in a sibling-headed household, Lunga’s adoption of the young boy in creating a new family arrangement, and Thokozile’s care of her grandmother. Here an extended family structure typical of African settings is more prevalent than the nuclear structure more common in Northern European settings. In the context of AIDS, family arrangements go beyond even this extended structure to include child-headed or sibling-headed structures, as well as other kinds of family assemblages not necessarily based on blood ties. Young people have a crucial role to play in such arrangements, especially given the decimation of the parents’ generation by AIDS-related illnesses.

I – Insertedness – including belonging and participation in the environment, as widely understood, including the wider social, political, cultural, ecological, and spiritual milieu. Here young people might play important roles in community organizations, faith communities, sports and leisure groupings and political organizations. This is the exercise of their agency as volunteers, adherents and participants. Examples from this study include Mfanzile's deejaying in his community, and Thokozile's and Nomsa's voluntary work and development of their own skills in community organisations. These links signal the contribution of young people to building society, which goes far beyond the spheres of formal education and employment.

L – Learning – Learning viewed as: lifelong, from the cradle to the grave; life-wide, recognizing skills, knowledge, values and attitudes acquired from a wide range of contexts, informal, formal and non-formal; and life-deep, including the 'religious, moral, ethical and social values that guide how people act and judge themselves and others' (Banks et al., 2007, p. 12). In this study, the most vital learning was often outside the formal frame; for example, Makhosi learning values of hard work and application from her brother, and youth learning how to rear pigs and sell vetkoek to survive. In this study, the most vital learning was often outside the formal frame; for example, Makhosi learning values of hard work and application from her brother, and youth learning how to rear pigs and sell vetkoek to survive. Here learning is understood as spanning the other aspects of Family, social Insertedness, Livelihoods and Legacies.

L – Livelihoods, including informal activities such as small-scale crops farming, food vending, tuck shops, livestock rearing, as well as livelihoods made through formal employment. Given that the livelihoods provided by the formal economy have limited reach, informal livelihoods, often linked to traditional agricultural activities and to providing services within communities, are crucial to the survival of many young people. For example, Lunga, Sbhongile and Makhosi used their informally acquired as a form of livelihood. This demonstrates the importance of learning that happened through informal and non-formal ways. How such activities articulate with formal education and training opportunities warrants far greater attention (McGrath & Powell, 2016).

L – Legacies – including those living legacies that people inherit, learn and renew from those who come before, such as language, tradition, culture, indigenous and informal forms of knowledge, and that they pass on to the next generation. In African contexts, these resources have been denigrated and neglected under colonial and neo-colonial regimes. They have also

been excluded or marginalized in the research, policy and practice of formal education, which takes Western models as normative. The recent renewed attention to the decolonization of higher education (Le Grange, 2016) has perhaps opened a space for foregrounding African living legacies in relation to adult and higher education. Such legacies, which arise from local expertise, experiences and conditions, can be seen as crucial resources for making a distinctively African contribution to a globalizing world. For example, Lunga's grandmother, both a priestess and a pig-farmer, passed onto him a complex legacy of knowledge, skills and values. This is already evident in the emergence of African fashion, music, design, cuisine and other cultural forms in what can be viewed, given the potential of Africa's rapidly increasing population and its 'demographic (Ahmed et al., 2016), as 'the African century'.

Therefore, the FILL framework provides a broader understanding of youths that are not in employment, education and training than viewing them only through the employment, education and training (EETing) lenses. Whilst the FILL framework may not replace the NEET concept as a crucial and serious indicator in a rapidly globalizing world, the study argues that EETing is not the only trajectory that is of value to young people in contexts of high unemployment and few formal educational opportunities, and is simply not available to many for structural reasons related to high unemployment, low economic growth and poor education and training systems. FILLing provides a way of seeing what else is of value, and how these other components may contribute to the holistic development of young people in an African context. It also underlies the importance of recognising indigenous knowledge systems and an African understanding of lifelong learning that is collective, intergenerational and relational.

## **10.6 Significance of the study**

The study supports literature that most NEETs experience a life of poverty which tends to be a structural barrier to their access to basic social services. This contributes to their marginalization, exclusion or being ignored by society, even in decisions concerning them (Korzh, 2013; Making cents international, 2012; UN., 2013). The study has voiced the structural barriers related to educational experiences from the NEETs' perspective rather than focusing only on statistical evidence (Korzh, 2013). Voicing the educational experiences has helped to understand who out-of-school youths really are. The emphasis on voicing the out-of-school youths' perspectives proposed by this study points to the importance of context when developing interventions and policies

Methodologically the study found that NEETs are able, knowledgeable and experts in taking decisions and identifying strategies to address issues concerning them when given the opportunity. NEETs like all other marginalized groups can contribute to their own self-definition and development (Chappell, 2013, 2014; Marsh, 2009; O' Brien, 2014). The study supports the concern that people not attuned to the youths' needs, behavioural trends and characteristics are often the ones who make decisions that have an impact on their development (UN, 2013). Engaging youths as co-researchers demonstrated that when youths' voices, including the voices of those categorized as NEETs, are earnestly sought through participatory methods, not just for window dressing, youths are capable of making meaningful contributions for their own benefit and for the community and that demonstrates the youths' agency and resourcefulness.

Conceptually the study presented a holistic approach to understanding out-of-school youth. As opposed to understanding them as being in deficit as 'NEETing', the study presents the 'FILLing' framework to understand their trajectories, the role played by social connections and the role played by the different forms of learning throughout their lifespans. For instance, the NEETs ability to resolve and value their informally acquired skills questions the 'NEETing' concept that is influenced by neoliberalism within the lifelong learning approach. Their ability to identify and implement survival strategies during their lives of hardship and faced during their developmental stages, demonstrate that they are in need of more opportunities than being seen as deficient. This realization emphasizes the need for recognizing all forms of learning: formal, informal and non-formal. The social support received by the NEETs in their trajectory towards the world of work also demonstrates the importance of recognizing the institutions of learning, social groups and their linkages for a successful life. Therefore, the FILL framework would contribute to a better understanding of out-of-school youth.

### **10.7 Recommendations for further study**

The study did not focus much on the correlation between poverty and school drop-out although most of the youth cited inability to pay school fees as their reason for dropping out of school. It would be worth investigating this relation more systematically. Furthermore, given the roll out of the Free Primary Education (FPE) (2010) and the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) fund (2006), an in-depth study on the causes of the continued school drop-outs as reported in the Education and Management Information System (EMIS) is necessary. Longitudinal studies, for instance would trace the child from the family to youth,

documenting experiences relating to educational access, school progression in school, access to tertiary education and ultimately access to formal employment and remaining employed.

It would also be beneficial to explore further the engagement of out-of-school youths as co-researchers, considering that the study focused only on 15 – 24 years old whereas classification of ‘youth’ in Eswatini is up to 35 years.

The study presented the FILL framework to understand out-of-school youth. Research studies that would reflect on and apply the concept presented by the framework would contribute to the improvement of the framework for a better understanding of out-of-school youths.

### **10.8 Reflections on my own learning**

When I started the research, I thought I understood the challenges faced by out-of-school youths as I was already involved in some of their programmes. However, being allowed to get into the NEETs world through their own view and voices, as they shared their experiences, made me realize my ignorance on what it really means to be out-of-school. I realized why the ‘fit for all’ programmes sometimes fail to address out-of-school educational needs and sometimes result in their dropping out. I learnt that out-of-school youths’ challenges are diverse and cannot be addressed in a ‘one size fits all’ approach to programmes.

The study also addressed my concern on how to engage research participants so that the researcher does not receive artificial responses which participants feel the researcher wants to hear. The research process (co-researching) assisted in bringing out the emic perspective of out-of-school youth; who they really are. The process employed to engage youths as co-researchers for an insider’s view was very involving for the youths. The emotions demonstrated during the sharing of their life histories and also during the focus group discussion, reflected that they were sharing from their hearts. To me this emphasized the importance of identifying a suitable research design for the purpose.

Lastly, the study presents a better understanding of the market driven society and a world influenced by neoliberalism within the lifelong learning approach whereby one is either a player or in deficit because of the standards set by a few. Africans, have viewed these standards as ‘normal’ whilst African values and particularly Emaswati values are eroded. The study argues that acknowledging and valuing the traditionally acquired knowledge and skills by the out-of-school youths is bravery and a glimpse of hope in maintaining the way of life of Africans and of Emaswati in particular. Instead of the competition towards acquiring the

modern or formal skills and recognition, the out-of-school youths sought ways of improving their informal skills. For instance, some co-researchers, young as they were, were rearing pigs as a form of livelihood. For me this gives hope that embracing the FILLL framework would contribute to a form of economic empowerment that preserve Emaswati values and would make the effort to make life meaningful within the Eswatini context possible.

## **10.9 Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the educational experiences and attitudes of out-of-school youths and how their educational experiences and attitudes have contributed to them being categorized as NEETs in Eswatini. Out-of-school youths in the study voiced their experiences of a life of poverty and of issues with their family background, forms of livelihood, educational access and progression as well as social support. Insights of the youth's experiences were presented in their own perspective rather than with statistical evidence which tends to inform unifying educational interventions and policies.

The chapter also presented insights on out-of-school youths as active participants in economic development. The resolution to use their informally acquired skills stands as a counterpoint to literature saying that NEETs are helpless and end up being an economic burden to the state. Although society may not value these indigenous and informally acquired skills as they remain invisible within the metrics of neoliberalism influenced by the lifelong learning approach, the NEETs in this study have seen these skills to be working as they were enabled to earn their livelihood. The value placed on informally acquired skills has thus been presented by the study as contributing to moving away from a reductive 'deficit' view to one grounded in generative agency and situatedness. The reductive view contributes to the youths' perception of their futures as 'blurry'; in not being able to utilize available 'choices' and 'opportunities' to become socially responsible citizens.

Finally, the value placed by youths on their informal learning raises questions about what kind of construct 'NEET' is. One might argue that it is a Western, middle class or neoliberal construct that excludes many youths by labelling them in a deficit mode as 'Nots' and 'NEETing'. The study presented a holistic framework for understanding out-of-school youths' experiences and attitudes as opposed to NEETing. The framework embraces a more holistic perspective of young people's family involvements, insertedness in communities, actual engagement in livelihoods, and participation in and renewal of living cultural legacies; FILLLing as opposed to NEETing. The framework recognizes and contextualizes all forms of learning, informal, formal and non-formal as well as all the learning institutions in an

individual's lifespan. The importance of the learning institutions and their connectedness in an individual's lifespan provides individuals with the social support as they transition to the world of work.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix One: Ethical clearance



02 April 2014

Mrs Tibekile A Manana (213568466)  
School of Education  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0233/014D  
Project title: Voicing the educational experiences of out-of-school youth in Swaziland

Dear Mrs Manana,

### Full Approval – Expedited

In response to your application dated 13 March 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Dr Peter N Rule  
cc Academic Leader Research: Prof P Morojele  
cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
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Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

Founding Campus

Edgewood

Howard College

Medical School

Pietermaritzburg

Westville

## Appendix Two: Questionnaire



### 1. Demographics

- i) Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
- ii) Gender: M ☐ F ☐
- iii) Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- iv) Administrative Region \_\_\_\_\_
- v) Marital status Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐
- vi) Religion \_\_\_\_\_
- vii) Current adult responsible for you(if any)

### 2. Educational experiences

(Tick the boxes that apply)

- i. Ever been to formal school; ☐ Pre-school ☐ Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ High school ☐ college ☐ university

- ii. Best subjects; ☐ English ☐ Mathematics ☐ History ☐ SiSwati ☐ Science ☐ Social Studies
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

- iii. Worst subjects: ☐ English ☐ Mathematics ☐ History ☐ SiSwati ☐ Science ☐ Social Studies
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

iv. Reasons for not attending formal school; 











  
Other\_\_\_\_\_

v. Reasons for dropping out of school;

Other\_\_\_\_\_

vi. What skills, if any, have you learnt outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

vii. How have you learnt these skills?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

viii. Best memories about learning

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

ix. Best memories about formal learning

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

x. What form of learning contributed a lot to who you are?

Other\_\_\_\_\_

xi. What form of learning least contributed to who you are?

xii. How would you change the learning experiences cited above

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

xiii. Which subjects would you promote and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **3. Parental information**

i) Parents alive;

Father

Mother

ii) Custodian; living with or alone

\_\_\_\_\_

iii) Parents occupation \_\_\_\_\_

iv) Parents highest education level:

a) Mother;

No schooling

Primary

Secondary

High school

Vocational training

Tertiary

b) Father;

No schooling

Primary

Secondary

High school

Vocational training

Tertiary

v) Extended family members and their employment status

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **4. Siblings' information**

i) Number of siblings

ii) Their current engagement; not in school, in school, Tertiary, Employed, None of the above

iii) Their level of education; Never been to school, Primary, Secondary, High school, College, University

iv) Their general interest

#### **4. Childhood/adolescence memories**

- i. The most significant event in your life
- |         |
|---------|
| Brother |
|---------|
- |      |
|------|
| Peer |
|------|
- |        |
|--------|
| Mother |
|--------|
- |        |
|--------|
| Sister |
|--------|
- |        |
|--------|
| Father |
|--------|
- |             |
|-------------|
| Grandmother |
|-------------|
- |             |
|-------------|
| Grandmother |
|-------------|

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- ii. Who is the most influential person in your life?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- iii. What are your best childhood learning memories? Please explain.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- iv. What are your best adolescence learning memories? Please explain

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- v. What are your worst childhood learning memories? Please explain

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### **5. Relationships**

- i. Who is the closest person to you;
- |      |
|------|
| Peer |
|------|
- |        |
|--------|
| Mother |
|--------|
- |        |
|--------|
| Father |
|--------|
- |        |
|--------|
| Sister |
|--------|
- |         |
|---------|
| Brother |
|---------|
- |             |
|-------------|
| Grandfather |
|-------------|
- |             |
|-------------|
| Grandmother |
|-------------|

Other \_\_\_\_\_

- ii. The person who contributed the most in your life;

Other\_\_\_\_\_

- iii. Form of contribution by the person;

- iv. Membership in associations;

Other\_\_\_\_\_

- v. If you were to change any area/stage of your life which one and why?\_\_\_\_\_

## **6. Training experiences**

- i. Skills possessed\_\_\_\_\_

- ii. Where the skills were acquired from;

- iii. Wish to improve skill, if yes, what are the suggestions

- iv. If do not have skills what are the challenges;

- v. How can training be made more relevant to you?\_\_\_\_\_

7. **Employment experiences**

- i. Ever been employed;
- ii. Reasons for not being employed;
- iii. Form of employment engaged in;
- iv. Reasons for leaving employment;
- v. How can your employment opportunities be improved;
- vi. What assistance do you need for you to access gainful employment  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix Three: Focus group schedule



1. In your view what is the purpose of learning?
2. What would make learning to be meaningful for youth in Eswatini?
3. In your view what gets in the way of learning for the youth in Eswatini?
4. Which of the learning experiences from the youth would you identify as most important and why?
5. What have you learnt from participating in this research process?
6. Please suggest how the research process could be improved so that we capture youths' experiences and attitudes in Eswatini.
7. Would you recommend the involvement of youth in collecting data from their peers to another researcher? Why?

## Appendix Four: Research project information letter/consent form – co-researchers



### 1. Study title and Researcher Details

**Department:** Adult Education

**Project title:** ‘Voicing the educational experiences of out-of-school youth in Eswatini’

**Principal investigator:** Tibekile Manana

**Supervisors:** Dr Peter Rule

**Ethical approval number** **TO BE GIVEN.**

### 2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in this educational study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully that will help you to make the decision. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

This study seeks to understand the educational needs of youth who are not in education, employment and training from their own perspective. The study will also get the youth’s views on how learning can be made meaningful to them. Lastly, the study will find out how youth as co-researchers can contribute to the research process

### 4. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because of your characteristics that fit the description of youth not in education, employment or training. I believe that your experiences will contribute to my understanding of youth’s educational needs, how youth’s educational needs could be met and how youth as co-researchers contribute to research.

### 5. How will the study be structured?

First, there will be a training workshop for the ten co-researchers on how to use a camera and take photographs. The co-researchers will then take photographs that show their experiences, choose five of these photographs and talk about what they mean. The co-researchers will be then be trained in interviewing skills. They will then each find ten youths who are not in education, employment or training and conduct face to face interviews with them. The final stage will be the focus group discussion where co-researchers will think about what they have learnt as co-researchers.

## **6. Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, I will give you this information sheet to keep and I will ask you to sign a consent form. If you decide not to take part later you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawal from the study will not have any negative consequences for anyone choosing to do this.

## **7. What will happen to me if I take part?**

The study will draw participants from different parts of the Kingdom of Eswatini. Most trainings/meetings will be held in Mbabane. Face to face interviews will be conducted at the most convenient place for the co-researcher and the research participant.

The study will take place between January 2014 to December 2016. The data collection exercise however is scheduled from February 2014 to July 2014.

## **8. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

I will not include your name or your address in this study. I will do this so that nobody can recognise you from the information that you will give.

## **9. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The final research report will be made available at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

The results of this study may also be presented at a conference and published in a journal. I will not write your name or address in any report or book.

## **10. Who is organising and funding the research?**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal.

## **11. Who has reviewed the study?**

My supervisor and a panel of academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

## **12. Contact(s) for Further Information**

If you have any concerns about this research project please contact:

Dr Peter Rule:, School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Education Building, Pietermaritzburg,

Email: [rulep@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:rulep@ukzn.ac.za)

[Tel: +27 33 260 6187](tel:+27332606187)

Professor S Collings, Humanities & Social Sciences research Ethics Committee, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building, Durban, Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

**Thank you!**

Tibekile Manana Cell. No 76073840/24045997

22 November 2013.

N.B. Please sign the attached slip if you consent to being a Co-researcher.

I ..... consent to being a co-researcher for the research project  
(APPROVAL NUMBER).

I ..... consent to participate in the photo voice research methodology.  
I.....consent to taking part in a focus group discussion if requested.  
I .....consent to my discussion/interview being tape recorded.  
I .....consent to the focus group discussion being tape recorded.  
I .....consent to identifying ten research participants.  
I.....consent to conducting face-to-face interviews with the ten  
identified research participants using a questionnaire in relation to this study.

I understand that my real name will not be used in any public report, unless authorized by  
myself and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences for  
my status in the community.

.....  
Signature

.....  
date

-----  
N.B. Parental/Guardant attached consent form for co-researcher's participation.

I/We ..... consent for ..... to  
being a co-researcher for the research project . (APPROVAL NUMBER).

I/We ..... consent for ..... to  
participate in the photo voice research methodology.  
I/We.....consent for ..... to  
taking part in a focus group discussion if requested.  
I/We.. .....consent for ..... to my  
discussion/interview being tape recorded.  
I/We .....consent for ..... to the  
focus group discussion being tape recorded.  
I/We .....consent for ..... to identifying  
ten research participants.  
I/We.....consent for ..... to  
conducting face-to-face interviews with the ten identified research participants using a  
questionnaire in relation to this study.

I/We understand that real names will not be used in any public report, unless authorized by us  
and that I/we are free to withdraw ..... from the study at any time,  
without any consequences for our status in the community.

.....  
Signature

.....  
date

## Appendix Five: Research project information letter/consent form – research participants



### 1. Study title and Researcher Details

**Department:** Adult Education

**Project title:** ‘Voicing the educational experiences of out-of-school youth in Eswatini’

**Co-researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal investigator:** Tibekile Manana

**Supervisors:** Dr Peter Rule

**Ethical approval number** **TO BE GIVEN.**

### 2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in this educational study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully that will help you to make the decision. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

This study seeks to document an in-depth understanding of the educational needs of youth who are not in education, employment and training in their own perspective. The study will also get the youth's views on how learning can be made meaningful to them. Lastly, the study aims to find out how youth as co-researchers can contribute to the research process

### 4. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as one of the research participants because of your characteristics that fit the description of youth not in education, employment or training. I believe that your experiences will contribute to my understanding of youth's educational needs, how youth's educational needs could be met and how youth as co-researchers contribute to research.

Co-researchers will hold a face-to-face interview with research participants using a questionnaire.

### 5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, I will give you this information sheet to keep and I will ask you to sign a consent form. If you decide not to take part you

are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawal from the study will not have any negative consequences for anyone choosing to do this.

#### **6. What will happen to me if I take part?**

The study will draw participants from different parts of the Kingdom of Eswatini. Co-researchers, who are youth who are not in education, employment and training will conduct face to face interviews with research participants at the most convenient place for the co-researcher and the research participant.

The study will take place between January 2014 to December 2016. The face-to-face interviews are scheduled for June 2014.

#### **8. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

I will not include your name or your address in this study. I will do this so that nobody can recognise you from the information that you will give.

#### **9. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The final research report will be made available at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

The results of this study may also be presented at a conference and published in a journal. I will not write your name or address in any report or book.

#### **10. Who is organising and funding the research?**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal.

#### **11. Who has reviewed the study?**

My supervisor and a panel of academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

#### **12. Contact(s) for Further Information**

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project please contact:

Dr Peter Rule: School of Department, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Education Building, Pietermaritzburg,

Email: [rulep@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:rulep@ukzn.ac.za)

Professor S Collings, Humanities & Social Sciences research Ethics Committee, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building, Durban, Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

**Thank you!**

Tibekile Manana – Cell No. 76973840/24045997

22 November 2013.

*I ..... consent to being interviewed in relation to research project  
(APPROVAL NUMBER).*

**I ..... consent to my interview being tape recorded**

**I ..... consent to taking part in a focus group discussion if requested**

**I ..... consent to the focus group discussion being tape recorded**

**I .....consent to completing a questionnaire in relation to this study**

I understand that my real name will not be used in any public report, unless authorized by our/myself and that I are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences for my status in the community.

.....  
Signature

.....  
date

---

**Parents/Guardant Consent**

*I /We..... give consent for \_\_\_\_\_ to  
being interviewed in relation to the research project (APPROVAL NUMBER).*

I/We ..... give consent for \_\_\_\_\_ to be  
interview being tape recorded

I/We ..... give consent for \_\_\_\_\_ to completing  
a questionnaire in relation to this study

I/We understand that my/our real name will not be used in any public report, unless authorized by our/myself and that I/we are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences for my/our status at the university or in the community.

.....  
Signature

.....  
date