CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

To study the lived experiences of HIV and AIDS in the education workplace, I have chosen to use a qualitative approach. Schratz (1993) convincingly argued that to elicit deeper patterns of practices and get at the voices of research subjects in order to present a broader view of their social reality, it is necessary to do in-depth, open-ended study. The approach draws on qualitative research design recognised now as a well-established research tradition that has been gaining ground in the field of HIV and AIDS in recent years (Merriam, 1998; Weinreich, 2003).

First, this chapter provides a rationale for my use of a qualitative approach for the study of HIV/AIDS lived experiences in the education workplace. I locate this rationale within the wider debates in the education research field, and in the growing literature on HIV/AIDS in the education workplace. Second, it describes the specific method that was adopted; what I have called a modified case study approach. Third, it discusses some of the specific details related to case study site selection and decisions related to the choices of key informants. Fourth, the chapter describes the multiple data-collection methods, recording and analysis. Finally, the chapter comments on the validity, trustworthiness, limitations and ethical issues relating to the study.
One of the key themes in this chapter suggests that a study of this kind requires regular and constant reflection on research design. Inevitably, in research of this kind, it was important for me to be attuned to the difficulties and challenges emanating from the field work itself. What was not anticipated was the extent to which key informants would in some instances be profoundly threatened by the research process and at the same time, found solace and support from a process that was not designed for such purposes.

**Why a Qualitative Approach?**

This study explores the decisions, actions and beliefs of individuals around HIV/AIDS in South Africa’s education work places. As an exploratory study, it took a holistic look at HIV/AIDS in South African public schools, paying specific attention to how cultural and gender patterns influence or shape the individuals’ responses to the pandemic. On account of the open-ended nature, I began with no presuppositions, assumptions or hypotheses. I was however informed by the extant literature on the importance of paying close attention to the informal processes: that which is not said publicly or officially. While I went into the field without any framed hypothesis, I did bring with me expectations embedded in the official policy documents on HIV and AIDS in schools.

The decision to use a qualitative research approach was motivated primarily by the nature of this study. I adopted the key philosophical assumption according to Merriam (2001) that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their
social worlds. This qualitative design enabled me to develop my interest in understanding the meaning these public school members attach to HIV/AIDS and PLHIV. It helped me unpack how they make sense of their HIV/AIDS-related challenges and their lived experiences of the disease within their school environments. In the words of Sherman & Webb (1988: 89) this research paradigm “implies a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’.

The key concern of this study was to understand the lived experiences of these public school members from the participants’ perspectives. This is what Merriam (2001) referred to as the *emic*, or insider’s perspective versus *etic*, or outsider’s view. The participants come from various cultural backgrounds, have different educational and work histories and have diverse family economic circumstances. On account of their background, the actors in this education workplace respond in specific ways to the disease. However, the study was designed to enable me, who is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, to interact effectively with the participants to elicit the required data.

Another reason for adopting the qualitative research approach is that the study involved field work (Merriam, 2001). I went to people (members of the public schools) in their diverse settings, sites and institutions to observe conversations about their HIV/AIDS lived experiences in their natural settings. Qualitative research enables researchers to understand behaviour as being fluid, dynamic,
situational, social, contextual and personal, (Merriam, 1998; Johnson, 1995; & Neuman, 2000). In addition, Merriam (1998) and Johnson (1995) have convincingly made the case that qualitative methods enable the generation of rich and detailed data and provide contextual meaning. This approach is significant in dealing with lived experiences.

The qualitative approach employs an inductive research strategy. Merriam (2001) explains that this type of research builds abstractions, concepts, hypothesis, or theories rather than testing existing ones. There are no hypotheses for me to deduce from theory to guide the investigations. I, however, built towards theory from my observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field. Also, given that qualitative research approaches have entered the mainstream of education research, it is no longer necessary to rehearse the entire epistemological debate. What can and should be said however, is that in a study that has as its aim, to develop hypotheses, rather than test them, it is necessary to gather evidence in multiple places, in multiple instances, be sensitive to the meanings that informants ascribe to the evidence, understand how that evidence fits within the wider frame, both institutional, community and cultural, and be open to phenomena or meanings that could not have been anticipated (Weinreich, 2003).

I borrowed from qualitative research designs to present my research findings in the form of themes, categories, concepts and even theory, which I inductively derived from the data (Merriam, 2001). Finally, since my study focuses on
meaning and understanding, the product of this qualitative study became richly
descriptive. I used words rather than numbers to convey what I learnt about the
HIV/AIDS lived experiences of the participants. I described the context, the
participants involved, their activities and many salient events that informed the
analysis of the data. I also used the participants’ own words, and included direct
citations from South Africa’s National policy on HIV/AIDS to support my findings.
All these made the design of my study flexible and responsive to the changing
conditions I encountered during the research progress.

Modified Case Study
Within the broad qualitative research approach, there are many research
designs. For purposes of gathering dependable data that effectively addressed
this research question, I chose what I call ‘a modified case study’ research
design. Although the suitability of a simple case study to comprehend the
intricacies of combining cultural constructs with elements such as gender is
justified by Johnson (1995), I realised that when it came to the issue of HIV/AIDS
experiences, a case study approach would not generate rich data. I therefore
combined it with some ethnographic research approaches. I am aware that a
case study is normally local to a particular area and concentrated in its coverage.
In the case of this very sensitive and complex research, a combination of some
sort would boost the trustworthiness of the research. The focus was on
appreciating what informed the understandings and responses of the members of
the public school to the epidemic and PLHIV.
Based on familiarity with the extant literature, I employed my modified case study approach to address the critical research questions (see Appendices 1 & 2). My reasons for designing this unique approach are to upgrade the conventional case study research to accommodate the complex nature of my research area. Also, I realised that an ordinary case study research approach would be inefficient in collecting rich and descriptive data considering the sensitive characteristics associated with HIV/AIDS and cultural issues (relating to research) as in this study. I designed this modified case study with some characteristics of ethnography to penetrate the HIV/AIDS experiences of the participants and be able to identify and highlight the cultural influences. These characteristics include, extending interactions with the participants beyond the boundaries of the case study, and recreate for the readers the shared beliefs, practices, and behaviours (Merriam, 2001). Based on these, I endeavoured to work mostly with people; teachers, learners, principals including the members of the school governing board for a period of six months in their natural school settings.

This section began with the introduction of the two qualitative research approaches on which this modified case study is rooted. I then proceeded to discuss the similarities between this modified case study and these research types. Further, I showed the peculiar characteristics of this modified case study. I borrowed some attributes of ethnography which according to McMillan & Schumacher (2006) is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system. It involves prolonged field work, typically paying close attention
to both verbal and non-verbal communications, and casual interviews with participants of a shared group activity and collecting group artefacts. The final product is a comprehensive, holistic narrative description and interpretation that integrates many aspects of group life and illustrates its complexity (ibid). By ‘descriptive’, I mean that the end product of this modified case study provides a rich, ‘thick’ (complete and literal) description of the HIV/AIDS lived experiences of the public school members. Through collection of ethnographic data, I am able to develop an interpretative description or construction of participants’ symbolic meanings and patterns.

The differences between my modified case study and a typical ethnographic research approach are as follows: While ethnographic studies are conducted in an indigenous environment, this study was conducted in some selected urban schools. Whereas ethnographic study seeks to describe a group or culture, this case study seeks to describe a process within a cultural setting (Public Schools) of various individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds (such as found in South Africa).

One of the similarities between an ordinary case study and this modified case study can be found in the definition of a case study by Robson (1993). Robson states that case study is ‘a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon with its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (p 54)’. This study falls within the
category of such because it engaged multiple data collection tools. Again, Robson believes that a case study is the situation, individual, group, organisation or whatever it is that we are interested in. This modified case study established the case of HIV/AIDS lived experiences of the members of the five selected public schools in Johannesburg. The combination of some characteristics from ethnography and case study research in this study modified this case study research and strengthened the data collection processes and results.

A case study examines a bounded system, or a case, over a specific time in detail, employing multiple sources of data found in the setting. The case may be a programme, an event, an activity, or a set of individuals bounded in time and place. A case can be selected because of its uniqueness or used to illustrate an issue. Case studies may focus on one entity (within single-site study) or several entities (multi-site study) (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Merriam, 2001). Part of the exceptional characteristic of this modified case study is that the case under investigation goes beyond the boundaries of a case; in other words, I went beyond the bounded system that characterises case study research to solicit for information. While collecting the data, especially through the use of the semi-structured interviews, the research broke the boundary of the school classrooms to interviews out of the classroom. Some of the interviews happened in restaurants, shebeens, my office, and the participant’s homes.
My area of interest could be described as intrinsically bounded. This means that much of the information that will explain how these public school stakeholders experience HIV/AIDS could not be comprehended on a superficial level; it required more than the ordinary case study research methods could provide. That is why I attempted to integrate some ethnographic research approaches. This modified case study therefore, motivated my choice to seek a modification of this research data collection method to enhance understanding of the HIV/AIDS lived experiences of these members of the public schools as much as possible. A modified case study became appropriate for this study because it offered the necessary empirical means of investigating a complex phenomenon such as HIV/AIDS, affected by other multiple variables such as, culture and gender in a very complicated environment such as public schools in Gauteng. These are of potential importance in understanding how education institutions in Gauteng should maintain its effectiveness and efficiencies in this HIV/AIDS era.

One of the purposes of using this modified case study was to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of the individual public school stakeholders towards HIV/AIDS and PLHIV. The modified case study design assisted me to reveal the knowledge of existing implementation gaps which may be culturally influenced and which educators or policy makers would not otherwise have access to (Merriam, 2001). I was able to explore these using some very unconventional research approaches such as rumours and gossip, vignettes and extensive discussion at all levels in public
schools. Through these methods, I managed to collect information which I would not have been able to collect using formal and conventional data collection tools, ethnographic or case study research method.

Leap (1991) and Rodlach (2006) observed that the sensitive nature of HIV/AIDS-related issues imposes certain constraints on discourses that could compromise the validity of data and the success of a study such as this. It is therefore important to also state that this modified case study was unique in that it required intense attention to trust from both me and the participants. I need to have the confidence that what I hear and see reflect what the HIV/AIDS lived experiences of these public school members are like. This type of study therefore necessitates a framework of trust and confidentiality (Abramson, 1992). Based on that, I made multiple visits to the schools and the participants to authenticate the data collected. Instituting trustworthy relationships with respondents became very vital for studying issues such as HIV/AIDS.

Several insights into the challenges of HIV/AIDS-related and culture and gender related research such as this study emanated from the ongoing discussions. Some of these insights present diverse and critical concerns that will need further clarification. Most of them are as a result of the multifaceted and obscured nature of HIV/AIDS and culture related research. These include: informing the research participants about the progress in the research after leaving their various schools, trying to address power inequalities among male and female
participants, negotiating the methodological directions and mechanics of the research procedures, being alert to the participant’s experiences in relation to their social realities beyond the public school boundary, taking account of the various cultural backgrounds of the participants, being sensitive to the effects of the epidemic at individual levels and being constrained by these constructs in the critical analysis of my study. All these issues mean that neither ethnographic nor ordinary case study research design alone would be effective in collecting intense data that would make an impact in the current crisis of education in the face of HIV/AIDS. These strengthen the overall need for adopting a modified case study design.

**Study Site Selection**

South Africa, which socially defines the study territory, was the centre of focus. The study sampled some selected public schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng province. The choice of the townships to sample for the study was one of the most difficult aspects of this study. The research had the advantage of its sites being unfamiliar to me and therefore being suitable for gathering data that are unfamiliar and completely new. These benefits therefore encouraged unbiased information for the research. The choice of which public schools should constitute the study site was also very challenging. This was partly because I was new to the environment and partly because at the time of the study, there was a scandal in a public school in Soweto over HIV/AIDS related issues that were mismanaged
(see the Lillian case cited in chapter one). That and other internal complications surrounding HIV/AIDS made it complicated to choose schools.

To avert these challenges, I consulted an expert informant (District official) in making a guided selection of appropriate schools that would yield reliable data for analysis. The expert informant was conversant with the peculiarities of the public schools around Gauteng province and therefore in a proper position to provide excellent advice for the study sites selected. Although I did not get clear explanations to what informed her choice, the only reason according to the expert informant was; ‘The type of data you are looking for will only be possible in township public schools.’ However, I understood why there was the addition of; ‘do not go to Soweto public schools, they will not be willing to talk about your topic’. Details of the schools and emerging discussions on them are analysed in-depth in the ‘Context of Schools’ chapter.

Other criteria considered included the distance from the University of the Witwatersrand, schools with the possibility of having adult learners, the environment hosting the school, and safety for me. This helped in selecting cases that were intense but not extreme illustrations of how HIV/AIDS is experienced in all South African public schools.

The following table represents the sample of schools visited. For the purposes of anonymity, schools and suburbs are named alphabetically according to the order
in which they were visited (Table 4.1). They are all public schools with mostly Black, Coloured and very few Indian learners.

Table 1  Location of the selected research sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Johannesburg City (Hillbrow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Auckland Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>Johannesburg City (Jeppes Town)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>Alexandra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>Thembisa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection of Participants

Because of the delicate nature of the research topic, I began with a pilot study. I designed tentative research questions and solicited data from participants by talking to everyone about the research questions. This sampling approach ensured that the research had a wide angle on how HIV/AIDS was being experienced in the community and on what informs the understanding of the public school members generally, before conducting the detailed study of how the epidemic is being dealt with in public schools. This helped in re-framing the research questions and also in familiarizing myself with the type of responses and information expected during the actual data collection. Findings from this
pilot study led to a final research interview guide and scenarios for the vignette-interviews.

As the study progressed, I introduced a purposeful sampling technique. I chose this method because it would assure me of a high participation rate and receipt of needed information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Since I intended to base the findings on the unique characteristics of the sample (public school members), I had more confidence in using this method. In doing this, I selected particular elements from the population that would be representative of or informative about the lived HIV/AIDS experiences in public schools. At this point therefore, the focus became narrowed to the members of public schools. The use of informal conversation became the strategy of data collection in the field. Further efforts were made to select the most appropriate respondents with particular emphasis on selecting teachers and mature learners, involved in dealing with HIV/AIDS in these schools.

Eventually, I introduced ‘network sampling’ also called ‘snowball sampling’ because I was interested in a larger pool and in-depth interviews in addition to paying closer attention to verbal and non-verbal communication. According to McMillan & Schumacher (2006), it is a strategy in which each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual. Participant’s referrals became very vital for choosing part of my sample because many participants consider the topic private and confidential. I evolved this method by
developing a profile of the attributes or particular traits I was interested in such as the fact that informants must be working in public schools in Gauteng and may have experience in dealing with HIV/AIDS and PLHIV in these schools. However, I stated upfront that the study is not interested in those whose HIV/AIDS status is positive. I requested the educators who volunteered to participate to suggest others who fit the profile or had these attributes.

At the Department of Education in Gauteng, during the visit to the expert informant for interviews, she made introductory phone calls to one of the schools recommended. I was asked to present the consent letter and then remind the principals of the phone call. Apart from this assistance, I personally approached some educators especially those that come for in-service training at the University of the Witwatersrand. They also introduced me to some of their colleagues who they believed would be willing to respond to my interviews. This was useful in that it provided an avenue for more interaction with Gauteng educators with fairly good knowledge about HIV/AIDS, culture and gender issues. Most of them sat with me in the canteen and around the campus. Some chose to discuss with me in my office. I was intrigued that almost all that I asked for interviews were willing to talk with me. The only snag was that most of them were not willing to have their interviews recorded.

For wider coverage of the experiences sought for in this study, I concentrated on interacting with members of the public schools who make decisions especially
those related to HIV/AIDS. The school members in this study consisted of the learners, educators, principals, and members of school governing boards. These groups were selected because the data collected from them could be judged as representing direct reflections of how HIV/AIDS was experienced in South African public schools.

In summary, during the eight months of data collection, a total of 99 adults (42 males, 57 females), aged 18 to 55, voluntarily participated in the data collection processes (Table 4.2). Details and breakdowns of the participants are shown in the table on the next page;

**Table 2 Classification of the research participants (n=99)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert informant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult learners</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals/Deputies</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools governing board members</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>99</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants responded to open-ended questions. Some of their comments were tape recorded and some were handwritten in cases where the participant did not approve of voice recording. To represent the diverse cultures of the
participants, the racial representations noted were Black African, White, Indian and Coloured. Religious belief systems were denoted as Atheist, Hindu, Moslem, African traditional beliefs, or Christian. Almost all the participants, especially the educators (teachers), had attended HIV/AIDS counselling training or workshops with non-governmental organizations or the South African-based Treatment Action Campaign (TAC).

A superficial look at the category of the research participants however initiated the question: how can we wholly understand the experiences of HIV/AIDS of the public school members from schools in townships? In order to clarify why I used schools that were attended mostly by children from working class homes, I specifically looked at the magnitude of the impact the school environment has when dealing with HIV/AIDS in these cross sectional public schools. First, the social status of the residents in most of these areas (with the exception of Auckland Park), suggests that many of them may not be economically stable. They also suffer the crisis of migrating to South Africa without their families and have poor academic backgrounds. (See chapter five ‘Context of schools’).

**Data Collection**

To harness as much information as possible, data was collected from respondents using both formal and informal methods. The essence of this was to compare and contrast experiences and narratives. Information could also be
clarified, confirmed or opposed when both methods were used to solicit data. Comprehensive illustrations of how data were triangulated and complimented are discussed in the section on research tools. Having identified the study sites of five public schools and management team participants, I developed the following major research tools for data collection; informal conversation, rumours and gossip, documentary evidence, semi-structured interviews (SSI) and focus group discussions (FGD). I used Vignettes to elicit further views and perspectives from some members during the SSI and FGD.

The use of documentary evidence served as a background for examining the experiences of some of the participants in the study. Since I directly conducted all FGD and semi-structured interviews with the help of an interpreter in some cases, the use of observation of both verbal and non-verbal skills became important. According to Putton (1999), such observation allows for data analysis that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the products of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations. It combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data. The observations were done during the researcher-researched interactions and reports were discussed accordingly.

During the field work, I also collected data in the form of common rumours and gossip within and around the school environments. Fragments of information
which emanated from these rumours and gossip were quickly written down (This was to prevent the participants from noticing that I was taking note of the information) before leaving the school environment.

For triangulation purposes, the information collected using the Vignettes, in focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, observation and informal conversation were verified or confirmed through the documentary evidence under study. Documents such as the National Policy on HIV AND AIDS for Learners and Educators in Public Schools and Students and Educators in Further Education and Training Institutions (Department of Education, 1999), were used to examine the experiences of these public school members. Employing documentary evidence enhanced the data collection in giving a detailed background of what is expected of the South African public school members in terms of dealing with HIV/AIDS and PLHIV. It also brought to light the implementation gaps that may have emanated as a result of some cultural or gender beliefs, perceptions and practices in public schools’ HIV/AIDS management.

In the subsequent discussion, I present detailed descriptions and production processes of the research tools, that is; informal conversation/rumours and gossip, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and vignette interviews. I also remark on the data recording and transcription and challenges encountered during the data collection.
Informal Conversations and Observations: Rumours and Gossip

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2006), participant conversations and observations enable me to obtain people’s perceptions of events and processes and their reactions expressed as feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. This section is entitled ‘Informal Conversations and Observations’ because while I engaged members in informal conversation, I was at the same time informally observing their non-verbal actions, objects and any other thing that could facilitate data collection. This became necessary because it was very difficult to collect the intense data (verbal and non-verbal cues) that I was seeking in this study. I labelled this method as informal because I did not seek formal permission from the participants to observe them. Most of them were not aware that I was observing what they said and did. Not only was I interested in ‘intense information’, but I also concentrated on tacit knowledge to collect raw data from the respondents on the HIV/AIDS lived experiences of the public school members. Tacit knowledge is personal, intuitive knowledge that is difficult or impossible for the individual to articulate; instead, the person demonstrates this knowledge by actions or by created objects (ibid). Listening to their rumours and gossip on the school compound enhanced the quality of data collected.

According to Stadler (2003), rumours and gossip are related but with distinct emic categories. Rumour implies a lack of certainty in the truth of the story. It is a popular, public account that circulates widely, but has not been proven true. Although rumours are rich in details, the characters remain mysterious and the
location murky. In contrast, the objects of gossip are known. In some, it could imply telling a secret that has been told in confidence (Ibid). Stadler said that in rumours, people’s behaviour is observed and moral judgements are made while gossip is a gendered conversational form. By implication, it is a female thing although men also engage in gossip.

Rumours and gossip are not simply conventional storytelling, even though they report on events, evaluate reputations and reveal contradictions (White, 2000). Early anthropological writings often saw gossip as a means of maintaining boundaries, reinforcing cultural identities and creating social cohesion (Gluckman, 1963). Gossip and rumours have been viewed as a prime site of political resistance due to their mundane setting and apparently innocuous nature (Besnier, 1994). Gossip has immense social power; it is almost impossible to trace the source of a story and control its flow (Andreassen, 1998). In this study, it was suggested that gossip and rumours of HIV/AIDS constructed moral texts which shaped some responses to the epidemic (Stadler, 2003). Gossip and rumours in this study did not only describe, but also prescribed. They created moral readings of behaviours, linking HIV/AIDS to the discourses of culture, gender, and generally relationships. Despite the silence that surrounds HIV/AIDS, gossip and rumours identified who was dying, how the members of these public schools dealt with individuals with HIV/AIDS and why. Thus, I considered it an informative way of eliciting data that could have been misguided by emotions and bureaucracy.
During informal conversation, I listened to rumours and gossip around the school environments. These methods were used by Stadler in his work entitled ‘Rumour, Gossip and Blame: Implications for HIV/AIDS Prevention in the South African Lowveld’ (2003). Listening to rumours and gossip was adopted as a method because the literature seems to assert that the crux of the meaning is revealed by the way in which people talk about AIDS in South Africa. Although my respondents are able to recite some of the biomedical discourses, the use of rumours and gossip enabled me to get to their alternative beliefs about the epidemic and PLHIV.

The data that were collected using rumours and gossip revealed more than the formal methods of enquiry about the knowledge, practice, perception and attitudes of the school stakeholders towards people living with AIDS (PLHIV). One of the ways I made sense of the rumour and gossip data was to place the information collected in categories that mediated meanings such as morals, taboos, sacred, dirt, curses, culture, management and gender. These data assisted in understanding some indigenous beliefs about rules connected with defilement as it relates to HIV/AIDS. Most importantly, the data that were collected using rumours and gossip highlighted some ambiguity and anomaly in understanding the myths and perceptions associated with the origin and transmission of HIV/AIDS, and attitudes towards PLHIV among these cultural groups.
During the data collection, I stayed within the school environment, chatting with the educators, and adult learners. Conversations were reconstructed about HIV/AIDS and how members of the public school deal with PLHIV. Some conversations were recorded according to the dictates of the respondents. In most cases, especially where recording was not allowed, I quickly moved away from the sites of the discussion to a more secluded place and wrote down the proceeds from the discussions before instituting another. The purpose of writing down information as soon as possible was to capture accurate data without missing out any details. Moving away from the scene allowed freedom of discussion for both the participants and researcher. It also served as a relief for both as most participants display evidence of discomfort in talking about HIV/AIDS and death. Also, considering that the informal discussions were designed in such a way that participants were not conscious that they were being interviewed, being seen transferring data would have discouraged participants. Transcription of the data ran concurrently to avoid losing data. Till the time of writing up this thesis, visits for confirmation or clarification of data were still going on though no new information came up.

Rumours about the epidemic also have the power to construct a moral panic: ‘the construction of a social problem as something more serious than the routine issue of social control’ (La Fontein, 1998). Although the threat of HIV/AIDS is certainly real, rumours about the epidemic construct it as a social danger that is out of proportion to the actual threat offered. This study posits that rumours and
gossip about HIV/AIDS construct moral texts that shape responses to the epidemic within the school environment. This was made manifest when the findings revealed some of the policy implementation gaps, beliefs, knowledge and practices that would ordinarily be very difficult to discover using formal interviews or other formal data collection methods.

A total of 58 rumours and gossip fragments were collected within the compounds of the five schools visited. About fifty percent was from among the learners while at the tuck shops and playgrounds during the break periods. Not all the rumours and gossip listened to were documented for analysis. Some information was repeated, and so was ignored. It was a bit complicated collating rumours and gossip from teachers during breaks and outside the school compound. Some of these teachers attend upgrade classes at the University of Johannesburg and the University of the Witwatersrand. I had to follow them there for conversations. The rumours and gossip from the support staff were the easiest to collect while at the schools. Support staff groups were considered part of the public school stakeholders. I started the days at each school with them as she waited for other respondents and usually went back to them after chatting with the educators or adult learners while waiting for either time for another break or scheduled interview.

These informal conversations were used to solicit for unconventional data. These interactions were aimed at finding out how HIV/AIDS is understood and dealt with
by the individual public school members. Geertz (1979) argues that understanding comes more from the act of looking over the shoulders of the actors and trying to figure out (both by observing and by conversing) what the actors think they are up to. By using informal discussions, I was able to observe beyond what was officially presented during interviews. Detailed and peculiar narratives of the actual HIV/AIDS experiences in schools, which formal data collection methods (such as interviews, FGD) may not have otherwise provided, were collected in these casual discussions.

Table 3 Informal conversations: Rumours and Gossip

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Staff</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-structured Interview

A semi structured interview guide (Appendix 2) was designed and used to solicit data from the educators, members of the school’s governing body, and adult learners (between 18-21 years) for analysis. Merriam (1998: 45) described it as a ‘conversation with a purpose; mix of more and less-structured questions’. The
aim of this interview was to get a special kind of information and in this research, I intended to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind about HIV/AIDS and PLHIV. This helped in capturing the subjects’ own words and allowed the analysis to emerge. Putton in Merriam (1998:45) illustrates that, ‘we interview people to find out from them, those things we cannot directly observe.’ Such ‘things’ as feelings, thoughts and intentions, noted in Putton’s argument, are characteristics of the concepts under examination in this study. HIV/AIDS, culture and gender provoke lots of contention in the society and participants' voices during the interviews, help illustrate their experiences. It also allowed for open-ended responses that were flexible enough to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic (ibid). According to Putton in Merriam (1998:46);

\[
\textit{We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective.}
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Pulling from the principles of semi-structured interview, opportunities to probe the participants on issues that were not very clearly responded to became possible (Putton in Merriam, 1998). Educators were expected to react to the questions in three capacities; first they responded in their individual capacities as teachers who may be infected or affected by the epidemic. And they responded as those that have to deal with learners who are also either affected or infected. They also
responded as individuals who have cultures that may or may not influence their responses to, or understanding of, HIV/AIDS. During these interviews, there were instances which drew me to critically observe the non-verbal communication that may be displayed by the participants. Data collected here inductively offered possible explanations to the research questions.

Most of the semi-structured interviews took place outside the school environment. Places like homes, canteens and restaurants constituted their preferred interview venues. Only a significant few were interviewed in the school halls. The head teachers and deputies were interviewed in their offices. I did not send the copy of the interview guide to the respondents beforehand but they were given an opportunity to read through the questions before the interview. Some participants declined after going through the questions. According to Lather (1991) interviews may necessitate self-disclosure, collaboration, reciprocity, and negotiation of meaning. Realising that issues of interest in this study breed the characteristics detailed by Lather, I made a conscious effort to provide an interactive and conversational atmosphere for the interviews. I did this by sharing my own experiences at times, nodding in agreement, and giving constant smiles for encouragement. Participants who responded to the semi structured interview were the educators, expert informant, members of the school governing board and adult learners.
I employed the services of a trained research assistant who reconstructed conversations in some local languages, participated in interpreting some concepts to the respondents and back to me during some interviews. She also assisted in transcribing the recorded conversations into English. These interactions explored the impacts of culture and gender in the knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of school members in dealing with HIV/AIDS.

Vignettes (Appendix 3) as part of the semi-structured interview were used to seek data from the school principals. A series of cases, scenarios or stories were designed for them to respond to. They were given the preference of either written or oral interviews. They all opted for oral forms of response irrespective of the length of time taken. The possible explanation for their choice according to one of them was; ‘I may forget to respond to them. But when you come for discussion, I will not forget that I have an interview with you.’ Appointments were made with them and dates and time were scheduled for the interviews. I worked according to their schedule and all interviews took place in their offices, within the school compound. They were asked to respond to a series of stories or cases on what they would do in a particular situation or how they thought a third person should respond.

The designed scenarios took the form of a ‘moral dilemma’ and ‘ignorance of and/or knowledge’ of the National Policy strategic plan for HIV/AIDS. The intention was to shift their focus off the routine formal responses peculiar to
administrators. I recognise that using vignettes may attract responses that may not be real but acknowledges that it may also provide emotionally rich responses which could either reveal the existing managerial gaps or cultural influences. The scenarios in the vignettes were created to respond to the research questions as follow: scenarios 1-5 responded to question 1; scenarios 6, 7, 8 & 9 for question 2; scenarios 5, 6, 7, 10-11 for question 3. Some scenarios responded to one or more questions but care was taken to vividly provide the link in analysis of data (See appendix 3 for the vignettes).

The content of the vignettes provided respondents with an opportunity to discuss issues arising from the stories from a non-personal point of view and therefore a less threatening perspective (Hughes, 1998). It also provided a useful way of discussing complicated and complex variables such as, culture, gender and HIV/AIDS and also a means of introducing personal experiences they have shared or witnessed in their individual schools. This method highlighted some selected parts of the real attitudes and/or practices that can un-pack individual school member’s perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes to HIV/AIDS issues in South Africa’s public schools.

Issues such as producing unrealistic results because they are not comparable to real life (Hughes, 1998) were taken care of by exercising caution in case of doubts that vignette-based experiences are different from real life. The rationale highlighted above for using vignettes makes it a suitable research tool for
collecting data that participants are reluctant to discuss e.g. death and sex. Vignettes were therefore used not to attempt to match real life experiences of how HIV/AIDS is experienced but to provide an interpretation of how and why the epidemic is experienced in whatever way/s in public schools (ibid).

Efforts were made to present the scenarios in a way that provided the school members with a situated context in which to respond to HIV/AIDS in public schools. Three (3) principals and two (2) deputy principals participated in the oral vignette guided interview. The vignette data complemented other forms of data collection to provide a more balanced picture of the culture and gender interplay in dealing with HIV/AIDS in South African public schools. The semi-structured interview respondents are presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moslems</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Traditional Religion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>99</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Semi-structured Interview respondents by religion \((n = 99)\)
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

To harness the direct and in-depth responses to the research concepts from the learners, a focus group discussion was developed. Vignettes were also used in conducting the focus group discussion. It also enhanced focusing the research among participants. Considering that cultural constructs are dynamic and that HIV/AIDS issues have become quite controversial, using FGD provided me with the opportunity to explore and to formulate appropriate questions for more structured discussions.

Learners who live in government established shelters but attend some of the selected schools for the study constitute the participants here. I was a mentor in a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) that serves as au pair to the learners in the shelters. That way, I gained their confidence and trust to discuss openly with the supervision of a teacher assigned from the school to be with us. The FGD consisted of between 6-10 members in a group of two different groups of learners. This division was intended to capture the formal and representative understandings, responses and perceptions of the members of HIV/AIDS and PLHIV.

I was careful to involve everyone in the discussion and not allow some to dominate the meeting. All data collection took place within and around the school compound and some learners’ shelters (Government or Non-government-
provided accommodation for homeless children). I considered the venue appropriate because the school environment is a public, neutral and convenient place for all respondents to freely express themselves in the matters concerning school. Also, it was convenient to relax and talk with them in their residential sitting room. This encouraged more learners to get involved. These group discussions were held on weekends. Considering the interactive process involved in FGD, I arranged the discussions such that each FGD builds on the previous one, with a slightly elaborated or better focused set of themes for discussion. On the whole, we had three sessions with each group.

Given that the topics under discussion were sensitive, I was careful to mix the learners from different schools (those from the participating schools, resident in the same shelter) to avoid hesitation in sharing opinions, feelings and experiences freely. This also helped in maintaining confidentiality among learners. Spontaneous information was obtained within the short period of time that the discussion took place. Data collected were used to complement other data already discussed.

**Documentary Evidence**

I examined the National Policy on HIV AND AIDS for Learners and Educators in Public Schools and Students and Educators in Further Education and Training Institutions (1999) for the purposes of establishing the findings and the study within the confines of the education policy and leadership division of the school.
While in the schools, I examined the contents of the life orientation lessons with emphasis on the areas that cover HIV/AIDS.

**Recording**

In this section, I attempt to narrate how the recording of the data obtained from the various research tools was done. I began with the few semi-structured interviews, followed by the FGD. Finally I narrated the recordings of the fragments of the rumours and gossip collected.

Recording the interview on the tape recorder was a challenge. Most participants did not want me to record their voices. However, a very few participants gave their consent to be recorded. In transcribing the conversations conducted through the interviews and focus group discussions, I made a conscious effort to transcribe the few tape-recorded conversations and interviews in their exact phonic representations. I attempted to transcribe the speeches of the respondents to represent a feeling for the types of English language spoken and the reflections of their emotions/feelings towards HIV/AIDS as expressed using their languages and facial expressions.

There was no intention of degrading any respondents by virtue of their class or English language spoken or degree of emotion displayed as represented in the verbatim transcription of the ‘broken English’. There are visible expressions of their feelings from their tone and voice levels. The majority of the respondents
used a combination of English with the vernacular. The languages used were in full recognition that respondents were free and more comfortable expressing their practices and feelings towards the epidemic using their preferred vernacular.

There seemed to be consistency in the type of English language spoken by most of the respondents. Some explanation may be required for the consistencies in the broken English used by the respondents in all the visited public schools in Gauteng province. Participants were more comfortable combining their broken English with an African language. Only a handful of the respondents were able to express themselves fluently in English. The school governing Board members who participated were also more comfortable using their vernacular in this case. An expert translator was employed to write their responses as they were spoken. Then, these responses were translated into the English language before analysis.

In the main text, the respondents’ actual utterances are presented in quotation marks as they are direct quotations. The use of exact repetitions and exclamations are as they were expressed and used by the respondents. Efforts have been made to translate some of the vernacular used into their closest English matches, while some significant words have been left in their vernacular forms to maintain originality. The English translations have been put in brackets. In the situations where I was not allowed to tape-record the conversations, notes were taken and the respondents read through to ascertain that what was noted
was a true record or representation of what was spoken. Some clarifications by way of additions or subtractions were made by the respondents.

By trying to appreciate and make meaning of the contextualisation, understanding and interpretation of the study participants, I also considered that comprehending the situations and emotions of the participants through words and not figures is more appropriate. This is because these participants’ worlds were created through words and some people defend their arguments and actions, using words and not numbers as are the case with the quantitative research approach (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Neuman, 2000).

The realisations appearing from the discourse of using words to contextualise, interpret and understand the participant’s experiences and emotions made me replicate facets in my research process that would sharpen the use of this salient quality of culture and gender research methodology. For instance, in most of my data collection tools, I employed the use of words in all my interactions with the participants. I personally engaged them in the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, informal conversations and vignette facilitated interviews. I was therefore able to probe, guided not only by their expressions but even by objects brought in during the discussions. This involvement enabled me to translate their emotions and expressions, visible in the non-verbal communications, into words. This is illustrated in the following extracts from Teacher A’s (my Key informant) interview:
Researcher: Your tea is cold, why are you not pouring from the kettle? The water is still burning hot.

Teacher A: *I can only pour from my flask. I will tell you more about the flask later. I know you want to know because you have been watching me and I know you have questions.*

(She brings out a tea bag from her hand bag, throws it into the flask’s lead and pours her tepid water inside the cup. I watched in amazement. The winter is biting and drinking tepid tea would have different reasons.)

Researcher: And what about the tea bag? You seem to have yours while there are many free ones here and they are also Rooibos just like yours (South African tea brand)?

Teacher A: *since you have become more curious, the tea and water I am using are blessed. That is what I take because of my sickness. It is from my Ufundisi. We shall talk about that when the time comes.*

Fragments of data collected via rumours and gossip were immediately written down before I left the venue. In most cases, I sneaked into a quiet place to avoid participants noticing that I was writing down some of the information from the discussion. These fragmented data were eventually typed and grouped into themes for analysis.
Data Analysis

I adopted the strategies peculiar to the qualitative research approach in analysing the data. Content, linguistic analysis and discourse analysis were combined with the qualitative analytical strategies (narratives and descriptive approaches). Data collected were first inspected theoretically to help visualise patterns and frames. Details differing from one individual to another at random were omitted to enable the general lines of data to be discerned easily. It is the contents of the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, informal observation (rumours and gossip), documentary evidence that were analysed.

The next phase of the analysis involved finding out the relationships between rumours and gossip, and cases/scenarios (vignettes) by comparing and classifying the data thematically. The goal of doing this was not only for easy appreciation of the research analysis but also to find a general rule or model that is valid in all or most of the data collection tools used. These data were discussed using content analysis. By implication, the participants’ comments were examined within a range of texts and that enabled me to make inferences about the philosophical assumptions of what was being said by them (Palmquist, in Mouton, 2001). Efforts were made to use the existing literature in the field, in describing, narrating and analysing the data collected to give a comprehensive analysis of the data.
The narrative style of data analysis began as soon as the first set of data was gathered and ran parallel to data collection because each data collection approach was expected to inform and drive the other data collection activities. Data at this stage moved from descriptive or narrative to meaningful interpretation giving a more comprehensive analysis. The basic perspective through which I interpreted the data was to generate themes and/or trends, and develop common patterns that were seen in the data collected. Finally, through the use of theoretical frames, researcher’s motives, presuppositions, and subsequent findings, this study’s inquiry became more comprehensive.

Data were organised into categories or codes and patterns were identified for relationships among the categories for plausible explanations. Neuman (2000) called these codes “open and axial codes”. Although the cases or story guides for the vignettes were designed according to the categories or codes emanating from the research questions and objectives, some categories and patterns such as located in the narrative descriptions emerged from the data collected. The use of axial codes which was aimed at making connections between the categories and sub-categories (ibid) assisted in integrating the emerging categories.

The analysis of the data was broken down by presenting first the cultural and gender related narratives that informed the content analysis. These narratives were highlights of how HIV/AIDS and PLHIV are being experienced by the members of South African public schools. Finally, the examination and linguistic
analysis of the official document was done. I looked at these participants’ meanings through their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the epidemic and people infected or affected. The analysis chapters present how the research findings contribute to educational management research and HIV/AIDS, culture and gender related research in education.

In conclusion, I adopted the theories of content and linguistics analysis to discuss the data collected. I used Perumal’s (2004) intra and inter-comparative process of analysis which lends itself to combining discourse and content analysis. I investigated participant’s responses individually and collated these responses into themes. This meant looking for similarities, differences, repeated information, commonalities and variances in the data collected and grouping them into specific themes. This is possible because the participants in semi-structured interviews responded to the same questions and those that responded to vignettes reacted to the same scenarios or stories. Finally, I employed a theory-data analysis (ibid) where I analysed data against the literature reviews presented in Chapters two and three. The aim was to investigate how the data confirmed or challenged existing opinions, and/or stimulated new ideologies on the arguments around HIV/AIDS, culture and gender constructs.

From these discussions, it is obvious that these analysis patterns are suitable for descriptive and narrative research such as this. These analytical theories are consistent with Yeh’s (2007) views that people from their subjective views;
establish an inter-subjective world, which becomes a foundation of knowledge in everyday life. We need to investigate the recipients of the policies in schools to understand why we have not attained behavioural changes towards the risky HIV/AIDS related socialisation practices, and why the HIV/AIDS related stigma merely changes face instead of being eradicated. Conclusive policy implementation theory cannot be actualised without these experiences.

Other Research Issues

Limitations

Research into HIV/AIDS is complex and multi-faceted and when it is combined with culture and gender concepts, it becomes extremely sensitive and more complicated. Efforts were made to consider the characteristics (life styles, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs) of the South African public schools’ community especially in the Gauteng Township areas where the research was conducted. A lot of educators declined the interview at the onset of my request. This is because Gauteng province at the beginning of the data collection (2006) was in the spotlight in a national television broadcast, for alleged poor management of an incident involving a teacher living with HIV/AIDS. This situation made data collection cumbersome because some respondents feared being linked to the same HIV/AIDS scandals.

The implications of the strained relationship between the media and public schools (See chapter 1) rubbed off on the data collection. Many head teachers
were not willing to discuss any HIV/AIDS related topic. This situation was further stretched by the cultural issue with its inadvertent bias or cultural insensitivity on the part of some learners, educators and some head teachers. The end product of this was a long quiet interactive confrontation with the respondents which revealed several misconceptions and misunderstandings of cultural issues or rather denial of cultural practices. This was compounded by the silent attitudes of respondents on HIV/AIDS. As lightly put by one of the respondents,

*I really do not want to hear or talk about that disease. Watching my brother and family die of it is enough torture. Made worse by the fact that I am not sure if am not the next in line. It is very scary and full of bad memories. Why talk about anything of that sort?*

The hurdles provided challenging metaphors not only for the complex and complicated nature of the study, but to some extent, a compelling one towards the challenges of cultural issues in the HIV/AIDS experiences in public schools. Access to educators and adult learners for the purposes of interviews required not only very sensitive and subtle negotiations of the hurdles but also a clear appreciation of the issue of the HIV/AIDS status of the respondents. Another challenge was from the ‘timing’ allocated for research by the Department of Education’s policy. My interactions with the learners and education managers were not allowed by the Department until the second term of the school’s calendar. This caused a delay in data collection.
Xenophobia was a visible challenge. Being a foreign student from an internationally renowned and one of the most prestigious universities in South Africa was to some extent disadvantageous. Most of the respondents’ first questions after reading the permission letter in the words of one were, ‘where are you from?’ Diplomatic responses to the question did not provide entrée to the responses though it made some responses possible. The academic gap between me and the respondents was also intimidating. This was compounded by the fact that the interview was conducted in English. Lack of fluency in the English language, however, limited the extent to which I interacted with most of the participants until the research assistant took over. This is because most of them did not want their poor linguistic capabilities to be exposed.

Another obstacle was the direct or indirect request for appreciation by some respondents. One of the respondents was quick to comment jokingly, ‘If you really want my input in your research, you have to shake my hands with 200rands. Nigeria is a rich country and I know you have lots of money as a Nigerian.’ Another respondent ordered a bottle of beer before the interview started and said, ‘this beer is on you researcher. Your topic is such that I need to calm myself down before we can open the discussions.’ A third person referring to his experiences of previous researchers to his school, said that he has resolved not to speak to researchers without any remuneration because the researcher will get a well paying job after the research. This contractual
relationship according to Adjibolosoo (2000) is embedded in a situation where salaries are excessively low and yet, people have to survive and to do so will require alternative income sources. Although MacBeath (2003) believes that being granted an interview through some form of exchange will establish a contractual bond between the researcher and the researched, thereby making the subject of the research feel obliged to please the researcher, it represents breaking the ethical bond of my research. Paying for the information may dilute or censor the quality of the data to be collected from that respondent. I paid for the beer after the interviews but I did not give the money.

However, although the participants had no problems consenting to the interviews, most of them did not want me to record the interview on tape. The majority of the respondents refused to be recorded but on realising that my inquiry was scientific, one suggested ‘I will go through what you have written down and if you want, I will sign for you but I do not want my voice recorded not for any price.’ This contributed to making the data collection more tasking because I had to write what was said in English and my research assistant had to write down the interviews in local languages. The research assistant was paid more to transcribe and translate the data into English for me.

None of the educators interviewed was comfortable to talk with me in the staff room. With the exception of the key informant whose interview was conducted in the staff room after the other educators had gone home, the rest gave me
appointments either in the restaurant/Shebeens (for the males) or their homes (for the females). A few of them trying to indirectly investigate me said, ‘you said you are at Wits, give us your office number, we shall be at Wits and then we shall be in your office for the interviews. Whatever you want us to tell you, we shall.’ Their interviews took place in my office as they requested but on the same condition that they did not get recorded.

The most challenging and embarrassing hurdle was the dramatic expression of male superiority or dominance towards a female as I noted in the following conversation:

Researcher: In your own words, how does culture and gender influence the management of HIV/AIDS in your school?

Respondent:

‘Culture and gender is not separable in this HIV/AIDS thing. You see, this is not the kind of discussion I want to engage a woman in. As a man who believes strongly in his culture, I believe I can have as many women as I desire. As I am looking at you now, so charming and beautiful, the topic of our discussion is making me a man already.’

He pointed at his waist for me and continues,
‘That is why I said, it is better for a man to discuss this type of thing with his fellow man and the women to women to avoid this thing they call sexual harassment. I hope I am not harassing you?’

Although I envisaged some dramatic responses during data collection, the gravity of the accompanying challenges was underestimated. Though this made me extremely uncomfortable, the behaviour of this respondent may be tied to Resnicow, Baranowski, Ahluwalia & Braithwaite’s (1999: 126) definition of cultural sensitivity as the extent to which ethnic/cultural characteristics, experiences, norms, values, behavioural patterns and beliefs of a target population as well as relevant historical, environmental, and social forces are incorporated in the design, delivery, and evaluation of targeted health promotion materials and programmes. This definition presents a model for understanding and appreciating what this respondent values as his cultural masculine benefits.

A more dynamic and tasking obstacle was in the complexities of the key concepts of this study; culture, gender and HIV/AIDS. After introducing the research topic to the individual respondents, it was observed that some of the respondents withdrew and started avoiding me. Efforts to reach those educators again proved abortive. The key respondent explained: ‘They think you are interested also in knowing their HIV/AIDS status. People truly do not want to talk about HIV/AIDS. You have to convince them as you did to me orally not just with your letter that you are not interested in their status. Insist that they should go
through the questions first. Maybe that will help you get their attention.' From this, the magnitude of the cultural, social, historical, environmental and psychological forces that influenced the target population became more explicit. It revealed the factors that made this study critical to participants, those that caused HIV/AIDS implementation gaps to resonate and suggests that educational institutions should also take into account cultural influences when dealing with HIV/AIDS.

Language barriers strained the data collection because I did not speak any of the local South African languages. However, the use of a research assistant who was knowledgeable in the local languages abated the situation. The use of a modified case study to collect data posed its own challenges to the study. First, it required me to be very sensitive since I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. I also encountered unusual problems of ethics since there were sensitive and complex variables involved.

**Trustworthiness**

The cultural and gender related research studies that have been reviewed employ a variety of data collection tools to ensure 'trustworthiness' (Villenas, 2000). To enhance trustworthiness (roughly equivalent to validity and reliability in quantitative research), scholars have increasingly made use of triangulation. By triangulation, scholars mean the systematic cross-checking of information from three or more independent data collection processes. This study has been
influenced by Johnson (1995) and Merriam (1998) who have written extensively about the processes of triangulation.

To ensure trustworthiness through triangulation, taking a participant’s experience intact and focusing on both experiences and meaning, I made use of a number of research tools. These included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, vignettes, informal conversations, rumours and gossip. But as I discussed earlier, using only the conventional semi-structured interviews, which have increasingly became the major method of data collection in qualitative studies proved to be problematic in this study. I therefore became very sensitive to both verbal and non-verbal communication skills to enrich the data collected.

Reflexivity is a broad concept that includes rigorous examination of one’s personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as resources for selecting a qualitative approach, framing the research problem, generating particular data, relating to participants, and developing specific interpretations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The importance of reflexivity, especially during the report writing process is also considered critical in strengthening trustworthiness in this study. Hammersley & Atkinson (in Measor & Sikes, 1992) accentuated that researchers are not dispassionate observers. They proposed that research accounts should include the ‘reflexive, subject-object dynamics of researcher-researched relations’ (Ibid: p. 53).
Ethical Issues

This research was conducted with the approval of the ethics committee in the School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and the Gauteng Department of Education. This research operated within the principles of honesty and ethics of respect for the knowledge, democratic values, quality of educational research in South African Universities, educational management team in the selected public schools for the research and academic freedom in the country. The participants in this research were both the active and passive subjects of observations and conversations, Vignette, Rumours and Gossip. Voluntary consent was sought first, in which the participants having read and understood the essence of the research, agreed to their participation without duress prior to the research.

No false promises were made to the participants. The schools and respondents’ identities were treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity was assured. The consent letter (Appendix 4) written to the participants clarified how they would be engaged in the study, why their participation was necessary, how it would be used, and how and to whom it would be reported. I complied with legal requirements in relation to working with school children (18 years and above) and young adults. Measures to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put the participants at ease were put in place by adopting a relaxed atmosphere and provision of some light refreshments (biscuits and soft drinks e.g. coca cola) especially during the Focus group discussions.
A critical ethical issue peculiar to HIV/AIDS is identifying who is positive and who is not. I had to state upfront (in the introductory chapter and the letters of consent to participants and schools) that this study is not interested in the status of the participants. It is rather interested in finding out how individuals, whether positive or not, experience the epidemic in public schools. Considering the research topic, a counsellor was present in the case of any psychological impact. I also reiterated that participants were not victims and that they had the right to stop the interview or withdraw from participating at any point in time.

Considering that the study involved vulnerable groups of those who may be infected or affected with HIV/AIDS, I was very sensitive in dealing with respondents. Questions that tended towards revealing HIV/AIDS status were avoided and the use of a trained counsellor was available to assist any respondent who felt uneasy. This research was not aimed at obtaining information on the HIV status of any participant. I was aware of the sensitivity associated with HIV/AIDS research and the possible emotional/psychological reaction(s) that may be elicited during the course of an interview. Of all the participants, only one (1) educator became emotional during the interview having lost a partner to the infection. In that situation, the participant was referred to a trained and registered counsellor or social service provider for the school.

From Weinreich (2003), the study took on the need to leave the participants’ perspectives intact and be non-judgemental about the behaviours of participants
during the data collection procedure. Putton (1999) makes an important point when he argues that the focus of qualitative study is not on identifying discrete variables, but rather on the whole experience and more importantly the meanings or interpretations that informants give to these experiences. The fundamental concern of interpretative research such as this is meaning. While seeking to understand social actors like the school members in the case of this study, understanding of the situation as well as an endeavour to create descriptive analyses that emphasise deep, interpretative understanding of social phenomena become central.