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# Open learning, educational development and empowerment: The case of the Open Learning Systems Education Trust (OLSET)



Adilia Suzette Feio Silva

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology) in the Humanities Faculty, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

December, 2007

# Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology (PhD) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Adilia S. F. Silva (Ms.)

____ day of _____, 2007.

# Abstract

At the time this research was conducted, OLSET's "English in Action" (EIA) programme worked with large numbers of foundation phase learners and teachers in seven of the nine provinces of South Africa, using interactive radio instruction. In addition, the programme provided in-service training for the teachers, and classroom support based on open learning principles.

This study focuses on the self-reports of teachers and principals in the programme, which have been examined in relation to educational development and empowerment theory. The researcher has attempted to establish whether the programme was meeting its objectives in terms of provision of radio lessons, classroom materials, in-service training and classroom-based support, and whether empowerment was taking place among teachers involved in the programme.

The first stage of the study involved the development of a database of schools involved in the programme, from which a convenience sample was drawn. The analyses then involved thematic content analysis of 541 teacher and principal questionnaires and 202 teacher and principal personal accounts obtained in 2001 and 2003. Prior to 2001, the programme had operated under severe financial constraints. A longitudinal design was used to establish whether there were differences in teacher perceptions under conditions of financial constraint in 2001 and adequate programme funding in 2003.

In vivo coding was used throughout the analyses to enable the content categories developed to reflect the words used by teachers in reporting their perceptions of the programme's work, the benefits they derived with respect to their teaching, and the difficulties experienced at school level with respect to both resourcing as well as consistent quality of programme delivery. Observation was then conducted in 36 classrooms in 2003, to assist in substantiation of the themes found in the 2001 and 2003 questionnaire and personal account data.

Recurring themes in the questionnaire and narrative data indicated that the EIA programme was meeting its objectives. Teachers were using the OLSET materials, and reported benefits in terms of improved classroom management and teaching practices. In the observations

conducted in classrooms in which the programme was implemented there was indication that the programme's methodology was being applied, and that teachers and learners were using English more than mother-tongue. Teachers also reported that they were empowered through the materials, workshops and classroom support provided by the programme. Quality of service delivery, however, varied across schools, dependent on donor finances, the radio broadcast delivery, quality of radios, the capacity of the programme to deliver sufficient materials to the schools, as well as the capacity of programme staff to reach all teachers and schools, particularly in the rural areas.

**Keywords:** interactive radio instruction, open learning, educational development, empowerment, OLSET, South Africa

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