

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



Adilia Suzette Feio Silva

---

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

# Table of contents

	Page
<b>Declaration.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of contents.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of figures.....</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>List of tables.....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>xix</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Focuses of this study.....	1
1.2. Focuses of the programme.....	1
1.3. Focuses of the evaluation.....	2
1.4. Rationale and research aims.....	3
1.5. Research questions.....	5
1.6. Organisation of the remainder of the thesis.....	5
1.7. Glossary of terms .....	6
1.7.1. General terms.....	6
1.7.2. Programme evaluation terms.....	6
1.7.3. Educational development terms.....	7
1.7.4. Community terms.....	8
1.7.5. Multimethod research terms.....	9
<b>Chapter 2: The context of education in South Africa.....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1. The educational and language context in South African schooling.....	11

2.1.1. The South African context.....	11
2.1.2. The South African education system.....	13
2.1.3. The South African education and language context.....	16
2.1.4. Bilingual educational models.....	19
2.1.4.1. The pull-out model.....	20
2.1.4.2. The structured immersion model.....	20
2.1.4.3. The transitional bilingual model.....	20
2.1.4.4. The maintenance model.....	21
2.1.4.5. The dual language model.....	21
2.2. The role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in educational development.....	22
2.3. The Open Learning Systems Education Trust (OLSET).....	24
2.3.1. The development of the English in Action (EIA) programme.....	27
2.3.2. Formative and summative evaluation in the programme's development.....	29
2.3.3. The programme's current form.....	31
2.3.4. Funding and sustainability.....	32
2.3.4. Funding support for implementation at large scale.....	34
2.4. Summary and implications.....	38
<b>Chapter 3: Educational development, open learning and distance education...</b>	<b>40</b>
3.1. Education and learning.....	40
3.2. Educational development.....	40
3.3. Challenges to educational development.....	44
3.4. Educational effectiveness and improvement.....	45

3.5.	INSET.....	48
	3.3.1. INSET models.....	49
	3.3.2. Limitations of research related to INSET.....	50
	3.3.3. INSET in South Africa.....	51
3.6.	Multi-channel learning.....	54
3.7.	Open learning.....	54
3.8.	Distance education.....	55
3.9.	Interactive radio instruction (IRI).....	58
3.10.	Summary.....	60
<b>Chapter 4: Community development and empowerment.....</b>		<b>62</b>
4.1.	Community psychology.....	62
	4.1.1. The meaning of community.....	62
	4.1.2. Community psychology defined.....	62
	4.1.3. Community psychology in South Africa.....	65
	4.1.4. Criticism of community psychology.....	66
4.2.	Research in community psychology.....	66
4.3.	Social programme evaluation.....	68
4.4.	Community development.....	70
4.5.	Power and powerlessness.....	73
4.6.	Empowerment.....	74
	4.6.1. Limitations of empowerment.....	76
	4.6.2. Empowerment in South Africa.....	76
	4.6.3. Zimmerman's model of empowerment.....	77
	4.6.3.1. Individual/psychological empowerment.....	79

4.6.3.2. Organisational empowerment.....	83
4.6.3.3. Community empowerment.....	85
4.7. Summary and conclusion.....	86
<b>Chapter 5: Methods.....</b>	<b>88</b>
5.1. Programme evaluation .....	88
5.1.1. Chen and Rossi's theory-driven approach.....	88
5.1.2. Logic models of evaluation.....	90
5.1.3. The logical-framework theory of implementation evaluation approach .....	91
5.1.4. The operationalisation of the evaluation model used in this study.....	93
5.1.4.1. Dependent variable one: Evidence of educational development outcomes in relation to the programme's objectives...	94
5.1.4.2. Dependent variable two: Evidence of empowerment outcomes in relation to the programme's implementation .....	95
5.2. Research Design.....	98
5.3. Paradigmatic assumptions.....	101
5.4. Sample.....	106
5.5. Data sources.....	113
5.5.1. Database.....	114
5.5.2. Teachers' and principals' questionnaires.....	115
5.5.3. Personal accounts.....	116
5.5.4. Classroom observations.....	116
5.5.4.1. The first pilot study.....	117
5.5.4.2. The second pilot study.....	118



5.4.4.3. The third pilot study.....	119
5.6. Procedure.....	119
5.7. Ethics.....	121
5.8. Triangulation and validity.....	121
5.9. Data analysis.....	125
5.9.1. Thematic content analysis.....	125
5.9.2. Categorisation of data.....	127
5.9.3. Procedures used to reduce and analyse the qualitative data.....	134
5.9.4. Statistical analysis.....	135
5.9.4.1. Descriptive statistics of the observation schedule categories	136
5.9.9.2. Chi-square and contingency analysis; use of English in the classroom.....	136
5.10. Summary.....	137
<b>Chapter 6: Results.....</b>	<b>139</b>
6.1. Database.....	139
6.2. Comparison within and across data.....	140
6.2.1. Combination of data.....	140
6.2.1.1. Teachers' and principals' questionnaires.....	140
6.2.1.2. Personal accounts.....	142
6.2.2. Comparison of the 2001 and 2003 teachers' and principals' questionnaires.....	143
6.2.2.1. Research question one: Is the EIA programme achieving its objectives?.....	144

6.2.2.2 Research question two: Are the teachers and learners of the EIA programme being empowered through taking part in the EIA programme and, if so, how is this taking place?.....	145
6.2.3. Comparison of the 2001 and 2003 personal accounts .....	146
6.2.3.1. Research question one: Is the EIA programme achieving its objectives?.....	147
6.2.3.2. Research question two: Are the teachers and learners of the EIA programme being empowered through taking part in the EIA programme and, if so, how is this taking place?.....	148
6.2.4. Comparison of the 2001 and 2003 questionnaire and personal account data.....	149
6.2.4.1. Research question one: Is the EIA programme achieving its objectives?.....	149
6.2.4.2 Research question two: Are the teachers and learners of the EIA programme being empowered through taking part in the EIA programme and, if so, how is this taking place?.....	153
6.3. Research question one: Is the EIA programme achieving its objectives?.....	156
6.3.1. Short-term outcomes.....	159
6.3.1.1. Themes relevant to the outcome of equal access to quality education.....	159
6.3.1.2. Themes relevant to the outcome of material provision.....	160
6.3.1.3. Themes relevant to the outcome of opportunities.....	160
6.3.1.4. Themes relevant to the outcome of skills development.....	161
6.3.1.5. Themes relevant to the outcome of teacher support and teacher support group provision.....	161

6.3.2. Medium-term outcomes.....	162
6.3.2.1. Themes relevant to the outcome of improvement of education quality.....	162
6.3.2.2. Themes relevant to the outcome of working in unison.....	162
6.3.3. Themes relevant to the short- and medium-term outcome of unexpected outcomes.....	163
6.3.4. Summary and evaluation.....	163
6.4. Research question two: Are the teachers and learners of the EIA programme being empowered through taking part in the EIA programme and, if so, how is this taking place?.....	165
6.4.1 Themes relevant to the short-term outcome of abilities.....	166
6.4.2. Medium-term outcomes.....	167
6.4.2.1. Themes relevant to the outcome of action.....	167
6.4.2.2. Themes relevant to the outcome of independence.....	167
6.4.2.3. Themes relevant to the outcome of participation in the community.....	168
6.4.2.4. Themes relevant to the outcome of power sharing.....	168
6.4.3. Themes relevant to the short- and medium-term outcome of external factors.....	168
6.4.4. Outcomes that arose from the data.....	169
6.4.4.1. Themes relevant to the outcome of multiuse of OLSET resources.....	169
6.4.4.2. Themes relevant to the outcome of participation.....	169
6.4.5. Summary and evaluation.....	169
6.5. Classroom observations.....	171

6.5.1.1. Descriptive statistics of the observation schedule categories	171
6.5.1.2. Chi-square and contingency analysis: use of English in the classroom .....	172
6.6. Summary .....	174
<b>Chapter 7: The effectiveness of the programme.....</b>	<b>176</b>
7.1. Research question one .....	176
7.1.1. Short-term outcomes.....	176
7.1.1.1. Themes relevant to the outcome of equal access to quality education.....	176
7.1.1.2. Themes relevant to the outcome of material provision.....	180
7.1.1.3. Themes relevant to the outcome of opportunities.....	182
7.1.1.4. Themes relevant to the outcome of skills development.....	185
7.1.1.5. Themes relevant to the outcome of teacher support and teacher support group provision.....	187
7.1.2. Medium-term outcomes.....	193
7.1.2.1. Themes relevant to the outcome of improvement of education quality.....	193
7.1.2.2. Themes relevant to the outcome of working in unison.....	196
7.1.3. Themes relevant to the short- and medium outcome of unexpected outcomes.....	198
7.2. Conclusion.....	200

<b>Chapter 8: The empowerment of the targeted communities of teachers and learners .....</b>	<b>203</b>
8.1. Research question two.....	203
8.1.1 Themes relevant to the short-term outcome of abilities.....	204
8.1.2. Medium-term outcomes.....	206
8.1.2.1. Themes relevant to the outcome of action.....	206
8.1.2.2. Themes relevant to the outcome of independence.....	208
8.1.2.3. Themes relevant to the outcome of participation in the community.....	210
8.1.2.4. Themes relevant to the outcome of power sharing.....	210
8.1.3. Themes relevant to the short- and medium-term outcome of external factors.....	210
8.1.4. Outcomes that arose from the data.....	213
8.1.4.1. Themes relevant to the outcome of multiuse of OLSET resources.....	213
8.1.4.2. Themes relevant to the outcome of participation.....	214
8.1.5. English vs. mother tongue usage.....	215
8.2. Conclusion .....	216
 <b>Chapter 9: Synopsis, implications, recommendations and limitations.....</b>	<b>220</b>
9.1. Introduction.....	220
9.2. Synopsis.....	220
9.3. Concluding comments, implications and recommendations.....	222
9.3.1. Recommendations for the programme.....	225
9.3.2. Recommendations for future research.....	225

9.4. Limitations of this study.....	226
<b>Reference List.....</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>259</b>
Appendix A – Further descriptors of the participants	
Appendix B – OLSET teacher and principal 2001 and 2003 questionnaires	
Appendix C – Development of the OLSET teacher and principal questionnaires from 2001 to 2003	
Appendix D – Classroom observation schedule	
Appendix E – Ethics clearance	
Appendix F – Examples of a principal’s and teachers’ personal accounts as drawn from case studies of project schools (Potter & Silva, 2002, p. 30-31)	

## List of Figures

	<i>Page</i>
Figure 1: Distribution of the South African population per province.....	12
Figure 2: Organisational structure of OLSET.....	24
Figure 3: Map of South Africa showing its nine provinces together with where OLSET was operating and had offices in 2003.....	25
Figure 4: South African radio learning project instructional system.....	30
Figure 5: Scope of values of community psychology.....	64
Figure 6: Diagrammatic representation of Zimmerman's (2000) model of empowerment.....	78
Figure 7: Diagrammatic representation of the three components of psychological empowerment.....	82
Figure 8: An example of a logic model.....	91
Figure 9: Indicators of short- and medium-term outcomes, relative to the EIA programme's objectives.....	95
Figure 10: Indicators of short- and medium-term outcomes, relative to empowerment of programme beneficiaries.....	96
Figure 11: The evaluation model followed in this study.....	98
Figure 12: The detailed evaluation model followed in this study.....	100
Figure 13: Diagrammatic comparison of the methods used for quantitative and qualitative approaches.....	103
Figure 14: Total number of schools in which questionnaires were administered in 2001.....	109
Figure 15: Total number of schools in which questionnaires were administered in 2003.....	109
Figure 16: Total number of schools that provided personal accounts in 2001.....	110
Figure 17: Total number of schools that provided personal accounts in 2003.....	110
Figure 18: Data sources in the investigation.....	114
Figure 19: Data and time model for triangulation.....	123
Figure 20: Outcomes relevant to research question one present in the data.....	164

Figure 21: Outcomes relevant to research question two present in the data..... 170



## List of Tables

	<i>Page</i>
Table 1: Number of learners, educators and schools and learner-to-educator and learner-to-school ratios in the public and independent sector by province and school type in 2004.....	14
Table 2: Logical framework for the implementation and evaluation of the EIA programme.....	36
Table 3: A comparison of empowering processes and outcomes across levels of analysis.....	79
Table 4: Distinguishing characteristics of quantitative and qualitative approaches..	102
Table 5: Number of schools and participants returning OLSET questionnaires in 2001 and 2003.....	107
Table 6: Number of schools and participants providing personal accounts in 2001 and 2003.....	105
Table 7: Themes/Categories and their descriptions relevant to educational development.....	130
Table 8: Themes/Categories and their descriptions relevant to empowerment.....	132
Table 9: Number of teachers and learners using the EIA programme in 2001 and 2003.....	135
Table 10: Frequency of themes/categories coded in the questionnaire data for teachers and principals/HODs .....	141
Table 11: Chi-square statistics of the questionnaires.....	141
Table 12: Frequency of themes/categories coded in the personal accounts data for teachers, principals/HODs and OLSET coordinators.....	142
Table 13: Chi-square statistics of the personal accounts.....	143
Table 14: Number of phrases coded for each outcome relevant to educational development for the 2001 and 2003 questionnaires.....	145
Table 15: Number of phrases coded for each outcome relevant to empowerment for the 2001 and 2003 questionnaires.....	146

Table 16: Number of phrases coded for each outcome relevant to educational development for the 2001 and 2003 personal accounts.....	148
Table 17: Number of phrases coded for each outcome relevant to empowerment for the 2001 and 2003 personal accounts.....	149
Table 18: Comparison of the number of phrases coded for each outcome relevant to educational development for the 2001 questionnaires and personal accounts and the 2003 questionnaires and personal accounts.....	150
Table 19: Chi-square statistics relevant to educational development for the 2001 questionnaires and personal accounts and the 2003 questionnaires and personal accounts.....	151
Table 20: Similar phrases stated by the same teachers/principals from the same school relevant to educational development for the 2001 questionnaires and narratives and the 2003 questionnaires and personal accounts.....	151
Table 21: Comparison of the number of phrases coded for each outcome relevant to empowerment for the 2001 questionnaires and personal accounts and the 2003 questionnaires and personal accounts.....	154
Table 22: Chi-square statistics relevant to empowerment for the 2001 questionnaires and personal accounts and the 2003 questionnaires and personal accounts.....	155
Table 23: Similar phrases stated by the same teachers/principals from the same school relevant to empowerment for the 2001 questionnaires and narratives and the 2003 questionnaires and personal accounts.....	155
Table 24: Themes relating to short- and medium-term outcomes relative to the EIA programme objectives.....	157
Table 25: Themes relating to short- and medium-term outcomes relevant to the empowerment of the EIA programme's beneficiaries.....	165
Table 26: Descriptive statistics of the classroom observations.....	171
Table 27: Chi-square statistics of the classroom observations.....	172
Table 28: Contingency analysis of the classroom observations in terms of the use of English vs. mother tongue.....	173

## Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank the many individuals who helped her achieve this work. First and foremost the great being who looks after us all God. He/She has provided me with the inner strength to continue with this project when giving up seemed like the wise choice.

Secondly, I would like to thank my patient and always present mother, Mrs. Maria A. F. Silva. Mommy your support and constant encouragement has helped me be all that I am. Thank-you mommy for giving me the space to reach my goals and for always offering me a hand when I fall. I would also like to thank my father Mr. Antonio M. S. Silva for his championship during the years. Thank-you daddy for the support and for offering me a strong base.

I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Charles Potter for his caution and advice in focusing and presenting this thesis. To my great editor and friend, Ms. Nicky Israel, I extend a very warm appreciation for all the support and help.

To the organisation featured within these pages, the Open Learning Systems Education Trust (OLSET) I extend a very hearty appreciation for opening your doors for me.

To all the participants of this project I wish to extend my most sincere gratitude for your time, honesty and willingness to participate. Without your eagerness, this endeavour would not have been possible.

To the various colleagues and researchers that helped me throughout, I extend a very warm thank you. Especially to Kate Robertson for trudging along to observe endless radio lessons with me.

Inadvertently I have forgotten to mention certain individuals for their help in the completion of this thesis. First, I apologise for my forgetfulness, and secondly I thank you.