



Adults who learn: Evaluating the social impact of an adult literacy project in rural South Africa



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ABSTRACT

In this phenomenological study, 30 past learners of South Africa's Kha Ri Gude (KRG) Literacy Project were selected from a rural community to share their experiences on the impact of the programme on their personal and communal lives. The participants had limited literacy skills prior to their participation in the programme which had to some extent adversely affected their livelihood. The study is premised on Mezirow's transformative learning theory. By explicating the data generated from focus group discussions with the participants, it came to light that the programme had facilitated significant changes in their personal and communal lives as evidenced in an enhancement in their 1. literacy skills; 2. health awareness; 3. community involvement/decision making; and 4. contribution to community development. This study concludes with some recommendations for the design and implementation of future adult literacy programmes.

1. Introduction

Worldwide, many countries invest hugely in education due to the acknowledgement that it promotes development both at the personal and community levels. Fundamental to education is the ability to read and write for people at all ages. It is widely recognized that the dominant approach to learning to read (and write) is to see literacy as a basic skill that an individual either has or does not have (Street, 2016, p. 335). For adults, literacy skills are relevant due to the urgency of application in their daily activities. There is no denying that:

Low-level literacy negatively affects a person's level of income, ability to access to employment and institutions, and sense of self-worth. It also represents a barrier to participation in community affairs in general, and community development in particular. On one hand, limited literacy is a stigma that can curtail resident input in community discussions and decisions (Subban, 2007, p. 68).

In Africa, newly independent states identified adult literacy as a critical skill in their socio-economic development aspirations and impelled an 'educational revolution' by embarking on massive literacy, numeracy and skills development campaigns. Similarly, since the attainment of constitutional change in 1994, South Africa has demonstrated commitment to making education accessible to the entire citizenry. For many decades prior to the creation of the 'Rainbow Nation', many discriminatory policies by the apartheid regime limited access to

quality education to a section of the population notably black people in the country. This created a situation where many black people lacked the requisite knowledge and skills to participate meaningfully in the socio-economic life of the country. In response to the high rate of illiteracy, political organizations (e.g. African National Congress), churches, and non-governmental organizations established night schools and literacy classes in many parts of the country (Sibiya, 2005, p. 2). However, attempts by such organizations to provide adult literacy programmes for black people were often crushed by the government. According to Bhola (2004), 'black people who were illiterate and untrained were kept in the lowest rungs of the economy' (p. 77).

At the onset of democracy, Nelson Mandela's government inherited a country with a high rate of illiteracy especially amongst black people. There was an urgent need to explore avenues for redress. Following this, the 'new nation' 'promulgated a suite of policies and legislative frameworks to support adult basic education and affirm its role in the process of social change and development' (McKay & Romm, 2015). The Department of Education [DoE] (1996, 1997, 2000) and Ministerial Committee on Literacy (MCL) (2006) recognise literacy and adult basic education as essential enablers for development and the expansion of life choices for South Africa's poor (McKay, 2020). Consequently, the government moved to enshrine in the 1996 constitution, guarantee to access to education for all South Africans at all levels of the educational ladder. This resulted in a number of initiatives aimed at achieving an appreciable level of literacy and numeracy among the youth and adult populations

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including the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) which was set up in 2000 to oversee the establishment of a voluntary service to reach the 3, 2 million illiterate adults in South Africa (DoE, 2000). However, illiteracy was still persistent in the country and presented a potent obstacle to the development drive of the country. Therefore, in 2006, a Ministerial Committee on Literacy was established by the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor tasked with developing strategic plans for a mass literacy campaign to enable about 4.7 million illiterates, who had never been to school, to achieve a level of basic literacy (Dichaba & Dhlamini, 2013). The work of the committee culminated in the formation of the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign in 2008. This article explores the social value of the Kha Ri Gude Literacy programme in the lives of its 'graduates'. In 2016, David Post in his paper titled '*Adult literacy benefits? New opportunities for research into sustainable development*' saw at first glance as retrograde the question pertaining to the 'benefits' of adult literacy in this day and age. The justification for this question rests in the view that Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by focusing on the social consequences of education, and on education as a prerequisite for progress towards other goals could renew a research agenda on the impact of literacy (Post, 2016, p. 752). Four years down the line, this paper poses a similar question; what is the social impact of the Kha Ri Gude Adult Literacy programme on selected graduates in a rural community in South Africa? Like Post, this question might seem otiose at best since literature in that regard is at the point of saturation (e.g. Chadha & Wadhwa, 2018; McKay, 2020; McKay & Romm, 2015; Trudell, Chefy & Trudell, 2019). However, the SDGs raise old types of questions which are newly researchable [today] (Post, p. 752). Hence, the focus of this paper transcends a mere examination of literacy and numeracy skills. In fact, this paper attempts to analyse the social impact of the Kha Ri Gude Adult Literacy programme in the lives of learners who had completed the programme in a rural community in South Africa. Specifically, the paper poses this overarching question: in what ways have the benefits of the programme been manifested in the personal and social lives of previous beneficiaries? It is widely acknowledged that low literacy level has negative social and economic effects on individuals. But one may ask; how enduring is the impact of the programme in the lives of the 'graduates', their families and the community at large. Knowledge of such benefits could serve as an evidence base for the development of policy on future adult literacy programmes not only in South Africa, but the rest of the world. The study was therefore undertaken to achieve the following specific objectives:

- a) To examine the impact of the programme at the personal level;
- b) To ascertain how the programme had impacted the community as a whole.

It is the contention of this paper that, literacy programmes impact not only the individual but the community at large. Literate people do not only enhance their lives, they also act to bring changes in their communities. This is in line with Gee's (2000, p. 181) view of literacy serving the dual purpose of cognitive and sociocultural enhancement and that literacy is not just a mental process but rather something done in society. To adequately address these objectives, this paper is divided into seven different sections. First, an introduction has been provided followed a snapshot of the Kha Ri Gude Adult Literacy programme in South Africa highlighting previous efforts to enhance adult literacy levels in the country. In the third section, I provide an exposition of the theoretical grounding of the study. I then frame the study in relevant literature in the fourth section of the paper. The methodology, results and discussion and the conclusion sections follow in that order.

1.1. Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Programme – an overview

It had been noted in the previous section that even prior to the attainment of freedom in 1994, there had been some attempts at enhancing adult literacy skills among the many disadvantaged black

people in South Africa. Churches, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Political Organizations established night schools in many townships to facilitate the education and training of black people. However, the government managed to systematically close down every night school for black adults including those which had managed to gain some form of registration with the help of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Aitchison, 2003). To be fair, the Bureau of Literacy and Literature (of the 50's and 60's) and subsequently Operation Upgrade (around the 60's and 70's) were notable initiatives which survived the exigencies of the time and managed to promote adult literacy among black people through training of teachers for the mines and production of primers and readers in many African languages respectively (Aitchison, 2003).

Post-apartheid South Africa prioritized the provision of adult literacy education due to the inherited large illiteracy rate among the historically disadvantaged black people. I have made mention of SANLI in the previous section as one of the conscious efforts to promote the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills among black people. Despite these efforts, it can be argued that the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign is the most ambitious and formidable adult literacy programme ever implemented in the country's history. The phrase Kha Ri Gude is derived from Tshivenda meaning 'let us read'. The programme was targeted at 4.7 million illiterate adults, focusing on women, rural inhabitants, out-of-school youth, the unemployed, prisoners and adults with disabilities (McKay, 2012, p. 5). Arko-Achemfuor (2019) maintains that after going through six months of Kha Ri Gude, the learners should be able to read, write and calculate in their mother tongue in line with the Unit Standards for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) level 1 or Grade 3 of the General Education system and also to learn spoken English. By 2016, over 2.5 million people had benefited from the programme (Govender, 2016).

McKay (2020) asserts that in conceptualizing the Kha Ri Gude literacy programme, it was recognized that it needed to be more than just a cognitive activity—but a social, cultural, and political activity as well (p. 2). It is supported by the view that adult literacy goes beyond mere cognitive benefits; literacy impacts both personal and community development. The programme relies on approximately 40000 volunteer facilitators who have been encouraged to 'explore and address learners' individual learning needs (based on the specificity of their contexts) which may not be sufficiently dealt within the core materials' (McKay, p. 2). The Kha Ri Gude curriculum included the use of authentic materials from ecumenical bodies, unions and government departments such as Department of Home Affairs, Health and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and required facilitators to make their lessons responsive to the needs of individual learners. As claimed by McKay (2020), in preparing the materials, it was imperative to include Freire's idea of codes or problem-posing materials to stimulate discussion in the learning groups, with each lesson starting with a carefully designed picture presenting a concrete experience of the theme to stimulate discussion. She further states that 'the campaign materials were designed to make explicit links between literacy and the MDG/SDG-inspired developmental objectives, immersing the teaching of reading, writing and numeracy in the development-related themes to accentuate the social, economic and developmental possibilities afforded by literacy acquisition' (p. 4). Given this type of curriculum, it is anticipated that aside the main goal of reading and writing, the learners could achieve other social benefits from the programme.

1.2. Theoretical framework –transformative learning

It has been previously pointed out that the discriminatory policies of the apartheid regime in South Africa excluded many black people from participating in educational programmes. To stem the tide, post-apartheid governments have been impelled to implement education and training programmes which would equip the marginalized sections of the population with the knowledge and skills required to function meaningfully in the new South Africa. Recognising the need for people to embark on learning that facilitates changes in their lives, Illeris (2014, p.

573) argues that 'we live in a time of constant change—in liquid modernity—and this has created a rapidly growing need for Transformative Learning (TL): we must be able to constantly change and develop ourselves in order to keep pace with the changes in our environment and life situation'. Transformation, as used by Mezirow (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978; Mezirow, 1978, 1991), is synonymous with consciousness-raising, improving, becoming free from the past, undoing twisted views of the world, transcending self-limitations, being future-oriented, becoming enlightened, unfolding spiritually, inner awakening, creating a stirring of discontent that generates a drive in a person to enlarge their understanding and appreciation of life (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). This means that transformation doesn't only effect changes in the individual but also society at large. As Moore (1984, p. 21) has noted, transformation is "a reforming of persons, of societies, and of historical tradition itself. It is rooted in our historical tradition, in the dynamics of our present social situation, and in our vision. This means that we cannot hope for transformation if we deny our past or ignore our present situation or future hope". In the same vein, Clark (1993, p. 47 cited in Hobson & Welbourne, 1998, p. 79) notes that:

Transformation is about change, so transformational learning must be related to learning that produces ... more far-reaching changes in the learners than does learning in general and that these changes have a significant impact on the learners' subsequent experiences ... Transformational learning shapes people; they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognise.

The fact that the goal of TL is to facilitate change in an individual's life and of societies makes it pertinent to this study since its goal is to explore how the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Programme has transformed the socio-economic lives of its 'graduates'. As such this paper is guided by the theory of Transformative Learning. According to Taylor, Duveskog, and Friis-Hansen (2012, p. 725), within the field of adult education, TL theory is the most established theory of adult learning. It has been around for over three decades and continues to be the most researched and discussed theory in the study of adult learning. The theory of TL which was initially labelled 'perspective transformation' (*defined as the process by which adults come to recognize culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and take action to overcome them*) was introduced by Jack Mezirow and Victoria Marsick in 1978 (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978 cited in; Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 816). However, the theory is now largely attributed to the former due to his extensive writings on it. Mezirow (2009, p. 92) defines transformative learning as:

... the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change. Such frames are better because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action.

While Mezirow's definition takes into account the psychological aspect of learning, Knud Illeris in his article titled "Transformative Learning re-defined: as changes in elements of the identity" published in 2014, proposed a more psycho-social definition of transformative learning as follows:

The concept of transformative learning comprises all learning which implies changes in the identity of the learner (Illeris, 2014, p. 40).

Despite the fact that both definitions differ in many respects, they agree on a fundamental aspect of transformative learning – change. Hobson and Welbourne (1998) assert that transformation comprises both change and continuity from the perspective that neither the individual nor society is the ultimate and unrelated cause of disparity in the power–knowledge relationship. As such, transformation will take place through dialogue where individuals and institutions actively interact to recreate both the person and the tradition. The dialogic process entailed

in transformative learning is a significant shift from instructional learning where learners accept dogmas and traditions without question.

An analysis of Mezirow's definition of transformative learning highlights the essentiality of frames of reference which can be conceived as a subset of one's identity. According to Clark and Wilson (1991), Mezirow's own orientation toward autonomy uncritically reflected the values of the dominant culture in our society—masculine, white, and middle class—and that autonomy and independence were particularly Western values (in Merriam & Ntseane, 2008, p. 185). Such an observation is contextually significant in this study since the culture of race has historically shaped social relationships in South Africa. In response to Clark and Wilson's critique, Mezirow (2009) asserts that frames of reference are the structures of culture and language through which we understand meaning by ascribing coherence and significance to our experience. He goes on to say that those frames of reference 'selectively shape and delimit our perception, cognition and feelings by predisposing our intentions, beliefs, expectations and purposes. These preconceptions set our *line of action*. Once set or programmed, we automatically move from one specific mental or behavioural activity to another, and we have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions' (Mezirow, 2009, p. 92). Therefore, for one to engage in transformative learning the individual must essentially effect a change in his/her frame of reference. For this to occur the individual must be engaged in activities that cause a *disorienting dilemma* leading them to modify or shift one of their meaning schemas or meaning perspectives, which are part of their frame of reference (Mezirow, 1991). Disorienting dilemma entails information, situation, or event which gives rise to a sense of conflict in an individual because the individual fails to reconcile present with past experiences. This view is further explained by O'Sullivan, Morrell, and O'Connor (2002, p. 11) as follows:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and the natural world; our understanding of the relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of the possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

According to Mezirow (2009, p. 94), there are two major elements of transformative learning which are - first, critical reflection or critical self-reflection on assumptions, that is, critical assessment of the sources, nature and consequences of our habits of mind; and second, participating fully and freely in dialectical discourse to validate a best reflective judgement. King and Kitchener (1994, p. 12) define the second element as the "process an individual evokes to monitor the epistemic nature of problems and the truth value of alternative solutions". Critical self-reflection is personal and unique to an individual and "is the means by which we work through beliefs and assumptions, assessing their validity in the light of new experiences or knowledge, considering their sources, and examining underlying premises" (Cranton, 2002, p. 65). This happens when the individual is confronted with a dilemma and recognises the conflict and applies careful and systematic thought to the problem. Here the individual compares the old habits of the mind with those evoked to address the new situation. However in order to confirm a point of view about the situation, the individual forms and evaluates opposing points of view about the given situation.

The theory of TL is particularly useful in the context of this study where due to hitherto oppressive governments, many black people have been marginalized. As such education and training and *ipso facto* adult education programmes designed to provide people with requisite knowledge and skills in order to make significant contribution to the nation's socio-economic development should essentially be transformative in nature, to raise their consciousness, awaken them from their

unfavourable circumstances and to redirect their paths towards a better and freer life. According to [Mezirow \(2009\)](#), transformative learning theory holds that the goal of adult education should be to facilitate, modify oppressive practices, norms, institutions and socio-economic structures; to allow everyone to participate more fully and freely in reflective discourse; and to promote critical and reflective judgement. [Freire's \(2000\)](#) notion of emancipatory education is crucial to this point. While working with poor illiterate people in Brazil, Freire realized that the "banking method" of education which emphasizes passive listening and acceptance of facts kept his students disenfranchised (Freire, 2000, p. 53 in [Baumgartner, 2001](#), p. 16). Having the belief that education promotes liberation, Freire engaged his students in discussions and reflections on relevant issues such as their working conditions. This process enabled his students to recognize the larger oppressive societal structures and how they can overcome them. The learners were able to see the world differently through "conscientisation" (p. 17 in [Baumgartner, 2001](#), p. 16). Using the Freirian approach, the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Programme, helps adult learners to come to terms with their unfavourable living conditions and armed with the requisite knowledge and skills, it is believed that they will act to change them. It would be fatal for illiterate adults in South Africa to subscribe to an 'intransitive thought' ([Kitchenham, 2008](#), p. 108) where they have a feeling "that their lives are out of their control and that change is up to fate or God. They fatalistically believe that their actions cannot change their conditions and feel disempowered with little hope for the future" (p. 108). Such a feeling would slow socio-economic growth and impede national development.

1.3. Framing the study in literature

Many African countries are saddled with an onerous task of eradicating illiteracy and its concomitant vices from their societies. In South Africa, various post-apartheid governments have made significant strides towards promoting literacy among the people; however, there is still a long way to go to fully eradicate illiteracy from the country. Adult non-formal education has emerged as a viable strategy to enable hitherto illiterate adults to acquire literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge of their human rights in order to function meaningfully in the society. [Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed \(1973\)](#) define non-formal education (NFE) as any organised educational activity that takes place outside the formal educational system for the purpose of serving identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives. Non-formal education provides people with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills, which would, amongst other things, enable them to function meaningfully in their communities. The notion that non-formal education helps people to function meaningfully in their societies brings to the fore the element of empowerment within the context of education. As has been noted by [Freire \(2000\)](#), education possesses a liberating power. To be liberated is to be empowered. [Inglis \(1997\)](#) sees empowerment as involving people developing capacities to function successfully within the existing system and structures. [Whitmore's \(1988, pp. 294–877\)](#) definition of empowerment provides a more detailed explanation of the term. According to Whitmore, empowerment is 'an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live' (p.13). In the same vein, [Wallerstein \(1992\)](#) in [Lord and Hutchison \(1993:4\)](#) states that, empowerment is a social-action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities towards the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life, and social justice. Being personally empowered is a precursor to social change – change in the social and contextual structures which serves to oppress people. [Mezirow \(2000\)](#) argues that:

The process of self-empowerment, acquiring greater control of one's life as a liberated learner, is of course, always limited by social, historical, and cultural conditions. . . . Our identity is formed in webs of

affiliation within a shared life world. Human reality is intersubjective; our life histories and language are bound up with those of others. It is within the context of these relationships, governed by existing and changing cultural paradigms, that we become the persons we are. (p. 27).

[Hur \(2006\)](#) contends that, there exist some issues relevant to the understanding of empowerment. In the first instance, 'empowerment is multidimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, political, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community' (Hur, p. 524). Hur goes further to say that empowerment is both a process and an outcome. As a process, empowerment does not occur on its own; in fact it occurs in relation to others ([Page & Czuba, 1999](#); [Peterson, Lowe, Aquilino, & Schneider, 2005](#)). On the other hand empowerment as a product means that it is subject to measurement against expected accomplishments ([Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2003](#)). The concept of empowerment is conceived as the idea of power, because empowerment is closely related to changing power: gaining, expending, diminishing, and losing ([Page & Czuba, 1999](#) in; [Hur, 2006](#), p. 524). [Rappaport's \(1987\)](#) conception of empowerment 'conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights' (p.121).

It is evident that empowerment connotes a change in hitherto held beliefs, habits and unfavourable living conditions. In the words of [Perkins and Zimmerman \(1995\)](#):

Empowerment suggests that participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources and some critical understandings of the sociopolitical environment ... At the community level empowerment refers to collective action to improve the quality of life in a community and to the connections among community organisations (p, 571).

While empowerment is seen as change in the life of individuals and communities, the fundamental issue of interest at this point is whether adult non-formal education promotes empowerment. [Stromquist \(2009\)](#) asserts that 'assessment of literacy programme's impact is particularly difficult given the irregular attendance and duration of enrollment of participants as well as the significant variation in levels of acquaintance with print that participants bring with them. Also, the content and intensity of literacy programmes vary, making the aggregation of findings across programs difficult' (p, 2). However, there are quite a significant number of studies which have sought to study the link between literacy and empowerment. Before delving into such studies it is important to note that [Paulo Freire \(1973\)](#) conceived that education and for that matter adult education should be a tool in the quest for empowerment of the masses. This makes adult education and indispensable instrument in empowerment of adults. The dominant, functional approach posits a linear, causal relationship between literacy and development indicators such as economic productivity, health and fertility rates ([King & Hill, 1993](#) in [Prins, 2008](#), p. 24). [Stacki and Monkman \(2003\)](#) contend that 'education focused on social justice and equity attempts to change institutions and the distribution of power, promoting new behaviours, relations, and ways of viewing the world' (p. 173). Adult literacy programmes as has been noted, has as its core function to promote the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills. Embedded in the acquisition of such skills is helping adult learners to view the world in a new way – they are able to understand their prevailing unfavourable conditions. Such an awakening coupled with the acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills become tools for individual and social change.

[Carron, Mwiria & Righa's \(1989\)](#) in [Stromquist \(2009\)](#) study of the impact of a national literacy programme in Kenya is relevant to this discussion. In that study, they compared literate graduates (those who obtained a literacy certificate) to non-literate persons. The study, found that literates did much better than non-literates in political knowledge (e.g., identification of the ruling party and understanding of elections)

and political behaviors (participating in elections and becoming a member of a local association). The findings from Prins' (2008) study of literacy programmes in El Salvador also need mention. Prins found that women and men participants reported changes in the direction of greater self-confidence, self-esteem, the ability to participate in and influence new spaces, the ability to formulate and express ideas, and improved relationships with partners, parents, children, or other family members (In Stromquist, 2009, p. 3). In a review of 43 programmes with literacy component, it was documented that participants expressed willingness to send their children to school (Abadzi, 2003a). One study that stands out of the lot is Romm and Dichaba's (2015) evaluation of the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Programme in selected Provinces in South Africa. In that study, it was found that through their involvement in the programme, the learners have experienced an increased involvement in their communities and also a sense of self-reliance. These studies are all indicative of the empowerment potential that education has. A case can be made for the influence of non-formal adult education on the empowerment of illiterate adults. It is evident from the foregoing that by engaging in non-formal adult education programmes, adults acquire power previously not possessed. They are also able to make life changing choices which they were not in a position to make prior to their participation in such programmes. Also by engaging in community activities, literate adults are able to effect change in their communities.

2. Method

2.1. Context

The study was carried out in Khujwana, a village located in the Mopani District of the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Gyekye and Akinboade (2003) claim that the Limpopo Province is one of the least developed provinces in the country, and although it has the highest population growth rate, economic and social development is behind the rest of the country. There are high illiteracy and unemployment rates in the province. Khujwana is one of the many communities where the University of South Africa's community engagement projects are being undertaken. The Department of Adult Basic Education and Youth Development of the University is partnering with the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign to implement adult literacy, numeracy and skills development initiatives in the Khujwana community. This study emanated from the department-initiated large-scale evaluation of the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign in various communities in the country including Khujwana. The following process was followed to select Khujwana for this study:

- There was an initial decision by the Department of Adult Basic Education and Youth Development to conduct an evaluation of the impact of the Kha Ri Gude in some provinces of the country;
- The Kwazulu Natal, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo provinces were purposively chosen for evaluation due to the relatively high participation rates among learners;
- In consultation with the monitors and coordinators of Kha Ri Gude in the Limpopo province, Khujwana was identified as having one of the highest rates of learner participation among three villages purposively selected.

2.2. Approach and design

In order to gain a deeper insight into the lives of the participants post-programme participation, this study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist inquiry, Smith (2008) writes, focuses on understanding (interpreting) the meanings, purposes, and intentions (interpretations) people assign to their own actions and interactions with others. In line with such paradigmatic inclination, an empirical investigation using the qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. According to Given (2008), qualitative research explores the human

elements of a given topic, where specific methods are employed to examine how individuals see and experience the world. The way in which the people being studied understand and interpret their social reality is one of the central goals of qualitative research (Bryman, 1988). Such an approach is particularly ideal for this study as this paper sought to explore the lived experiences of persons who had previously participated in the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Programme in terms of their personal and social lives. Deriving from the German word *elerbnis*, lived experience refers to experience as we live through it and recognize it as a particular type of experience (Adams & van Manen, 2008). In line with the aim of this study, Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938), descriptive phenomenological research method was employed as design. The type of phenomenology adopted for this study is descriptive in the sense that 'through this methodology disclosure of a realm of being which presented itself with absolute certainty, arising from experience, seemed possible' (Laverty, 2003, p. 23). Its emphasis is on the world as lived by a person, not the world or reality as something separate from the person (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). In this study, it was opined that a deeper understanding of the transformative element of Kha Ri Gude in the lives previous participants could be gained by zooming into their current experiences hence the need for the specific research design.

2.3. Participants

The selection of participants for this study for data collection purposes was one of the major decision making aspects of this inquiry. I sought to select participants who had been personally and socially impacted by the programme. Identifying such people was not an easy task due to the fact that such impact could not be universally defined; realistically, social impact of a literacy programme can only be judged subjectively by the beneficiaries themselves. As has been noted by Browne (2005):

Recruiting research participants can be problematic when research focuses upon specific individuals, groups or experiences which are not validated by society. These individuals and groups are often 'hidden' ... (pp. 47–48).

Therefore to identify individuals who have benefited at the personal and social levels from the programme and who would help address the central research problem, the snowball sampling technique – created through a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know each other (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 151) – was employed for this study. The selection of the participants was initiated through a consultation with the monitors and coordinators of KRG in the Khujwana community to identify few individuals were perceived to have benefited socially (in response to the indicators adduced in the objectives of this study) from the programme. This consultation led to the identification of two past learners. After meeting these individuals, I was then directed to other participants who they believed had similar benefits from the programme. In all, 30 participants were contacted and informed of the purpose of the study after which they indicated their willingness to participate in the study.

2.4. Data collection

To generate rich data for the study, the focus-group discussion guide was employed. Focus-group discussions 'involve several - usually somewhere between four and ten - respondents brought together to discuss the research topic as a group' (Ritchie, 2003, p. 37). In line with Ritchie's view, I conducted 3 focus group discussions with 10 participants in each group. The focus-group discussions enabled the various participants to shed light on their lived experiences after their participation in the programme.

2.5. Data explication

To make sense of the data generated through the focus-group discussions there was the need to explicate the data. The heading 'data analysis' is deliberately avoided here because Hycner (1999) cautions that 'analysis' has dangerous connotations for phenomenology (In Groenewald, 2004, p. 17). Hycner in explaining the reason for such caution maintains that the 'term [analysis] usually means a "breaking into parts" and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon ... [whereas "explication" implies an] ... investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole' (1999, p. 161). This study adopted Hycner's steps in data explication. First of all data generated had to be reduced in order to condense the large volume of data. Reduction seeks to bring the aspects of meaning that belong to the phenomena of our lifeworld into nearness (Adams & van Manen, 2008). Secondly, I delineated units of meaning from the data. Here statements that were seen to illuminate the phenomenon under investigation were extracted or 'isolated' (Creswell, 1998; Groenewald, 2004; Holloway, 1997; Hycner, 1999). The units of meaning were then clustered to form themes followed a summary of each interview, which are then validated and modified. At this point the researcher conducts a 'validity check' by returning to the informant to determine if the essence of the interview has been correctly 'captured' (Hycner, 1999, p. 154). Related data were then grouped under the salient themes. The various accounts from the participants were provided verbatim. Borrowing the words of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 462), I felt the need to keep the flavour of the original data, so I reported direct phrases and sentences, not only because they are often more illuminative and direct than our own words, but also because I was of the opinion that it is important to be faithful to the exact words used.

3. Results and discussion

In this section, the results of the study are presented and discussed. The presentation and discussion of results are done in line with the objectives of the study and the salient themes that emerged during the explication of the data. The social impact of the KRG programme on the participants was identified at two levels; personal and community with corresponding sub-themes. These levels concur with Boughton's (2013) position that literacy campaigns work to produce change simultaneously at the level of the individual and their social context or what Freire refers to as literacy of hope (in McKay, 2020, p. 4). The levels and their related sub-themes are as follows:

- a. Personal level
 - Impact on literacy skills;
 - Impact on health awareness.
- b. Community level
 - Impact on participation in decision making in the community;
 - Impact on participation in community wellbeing initiatives.

3.1. Personal level

Participation in adult literacy programmes presents some personal benefits to the learners. One of the key aspects of this present study was to ascertain how the programme had impacted on the lives of the participants. During the interviews, it was revealed that the programme had impacted on the literacy skills and the health awareness of the participants.

3.1.1. Impact on literacy skills

The main aim of any adult literacy programme is to enhance the literacy skills of the participants. This is important because functional illiteracy implies that a person is unable to use reading, writing, and calculation skills for his/her own and the community's development

(Vágvölgyi R, Coldea, Dresler, Schrader & Nuerk, 2016). The Kha Ri Gude Literacy programme's main goal is to enhance the literacy skills of the participants in all the official South African languages. In keeping with this goal, this study revealed that the impact of the programme on the literacy skills of the participants was palpable. The ability to read and write is manifest in various aspects of the participants' lives. First, one participant related the impact of the programme in her religious life as follows:

People are amazed when I read from the Bible in church. I now read my Bible every evening. When we go to burials, we can quote verses from the Bible and comfort the bereaved families.

With respect to the financial aspects of the lives of illiterates, there is no doubt that some illiterate persons do not have bank accounts and if they do, they need the help of family/community members to assist with their bank transactions. This may lead to fraudulent bank transactions which the account holder (illiterate person) might not be aware of. In this study, it was disclosed by a participant that the literacy skills acquired through the programme had facilitated her ability to open a bank account on her own without anyone's assistance. She said:

We are the generation that said girls don't go to school, but our facilitator asked us "Don't you want to go to school?" Kha Ri Gude has helped me a lot. I could not write because I didn't go to school. But since the start of Kha Ri Gude, I can write now and I have opened my own secret banking account and can sign for my withdrawals.

In South Africa, the role played by the elderly in the lives of their grandchildren cannot be underemphasized because in most cases they are the primary caregivers of the latter. Due to the exodus of many young people to the urban centres in the country to engage in economic activities, many children are left in the care of their grandparents. One of the participants disclosed that she is now able to help her grandchildren with their homework. She specifically made this comment:

I am now able to understand the assignments my grandchildren bring home. I am able to help them to solve the problems given by their teachers. I couldn't do this before. I am glad I participated in the programme.

The revelation from this participant is significant with respect to the programme putting the participants in a position to contribute to the academic achievements of grandchildren. Also, in the area of communicating to the health professionals at the local clinic on health related issues, one participant averred that: *when I go to the doctor, I am now able to communicate directly with him without needing an interpreter.*

It is clear from the foregoing that there has been a profound impact of the programme in the participants' ability to read and write which has enhanced their functionality in the community. Sen (2003) maintains that

... illiteracy and innumeracy are forms of insecurity in themselves. Not to be able to read or write or count or communicate is itself a tremendous deprivation. And if a person is thus reduced by illiteracy and innumeracy, we can not only see that the person is insecure to whom something terrible could happen, but more immediately, that to him or her something terrible has actually happened. (p. 22).

In this study such insecurity is overcome by the shift in the self-concept of the participants leading to a renewed confidence in themselves. McKay's (2020) nationwide study of the impact of the KRG in the lives of the learners found that majority of the learners felt more confident at the end of the learning programme. This is a positive indication of the impact of the KRG in changing the self-concepts of the participants. There appears to be a significant shift in the way these participants see themselves and their place in their community. From the various narratives from the participants, it is noticeable that their 'habits of the mind' which informs their self-conceptualisation have been 'shaken, questioned

and rejected' (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015, p. 16) leading to new perspective formation. They have become aware of their assumptions which have resulted in their self-concepts of illiterate, less confident and shy people which have curtailed their effective functioning in society. Maddox (2008) contends that:

... literacy capabilities indicate the set of available functionings available to a person. In that sense, literacy capabilities are future oriented, as they relate to people's potential uses of literacy, and how that enhances their wider freedoms and agency. The values that people associate with literacy may be associated with the enhancement of these potentials, as well as specific functionings (p. 191).

Literacy therefore is fundamental to the one's 'being and doing' (Maddox, 2008) and a necessary condition for enhancing quality of life.

3.1.2. Impact on health awareness

Good health of people is a precondition for the development of any country in the world, since healthy people can be productive and innovative in their occupations. Education and indeed [Adult Learning and Education] can contribute to equipping citizens with life skills that are critical for improving and maintaining their health and well-being (Lopes & McKay, 2020, p. 582). There is enough evidence linking adult education to improved health and wellbeing (Desjardins, 2008a, 2008b; Feinstein & Budge, 2007; Manninen, 2010). Like these studies, this study revealed that the participants had become more aware of issues pertaining to their health and that of their families. These excerpts of the experiences of participants post-participation in KRG give clear indication of the impact of the programme on the health awareness of the participants:

I now know how several diseases are spread like HIV and TB. We learnt these things in Kha Ri Gude.

I can now read and understand my prescriptions.

I now tell my neighbours to clean their environment so that the dirt will not cause some diseases.

It is evident from these narratives that in addition to enhancing the awareness of the participants on health related issues, the programme has had a transformative learning effect on them. At this point, I refer to Keegan's (2000) crucial question – what transforms in transformative learning? – to elucidate my position. As has been noted earlier on in this paper, the preoccupation of Mezirow's transformative learning theory is the idea of perspective transformation in the learner. Ntiri and Stewart (2009) argues that:

This theory is particularly applicable to the health care environment where empowering the patient to understand the significance of self-management is important to an individual's well-being. Patients currently have greater personal responsibility and treatment decisions for various health problems (p. 381–382).

In this study, the participants expressed a change in their level of consciousness with regard to issues pertaining to their health and that of their community. They have learned a lot about various illnesses—e.g. HIV and AIDS and TB and also the value of cleanliness (Romm & Dichaba, 2015, p. 233). Another aspect of health awareness was ensuring the health of other members in the community. A participant shared her experience as follows:

Kha Ri Gude has helped me so much, my neighbour's child was sick. I could assist my neighbour's child through Vuka Uzenzele (Do it for yourself) to get help at the hospital. The child is now in hospital.

Vuka Uzenzele is an activity within the programme which seeks to promote self-help initiatives among the participants. Therefore this participant's ability to help the child in her neighborhood is indicative of how aspects of the programme which might not be directly literacy-

oriented, help to enhance their contribution to the health and well-being of others in the community. To ensure the health and wellbeing of community members, there is need to promote healthy eating lifestyles. In this respect, one of the participants indicated that:

We have also started vegetable gardens to sell vegetables to our community members so that they also can be healthy.

By walking to the KRG meeting centre in the community, one of the participants intimated that his health had improved considerable and now knows the value of exercising in his health and wellbeing. *Since being at Kha Ri Gude, my life has importance. I am using a walking stick but going to Kha Ri Gude classes has helped me a lot with exercising. Walking is good for me.* Such a realisation by this participant is proof of the transformative learning potential embedded in the KRG. There seems to have been a shift in the perspective of this participant with regard to his understanding of the health implications of his actions.

3.2. Community level

Also important in this study was the need to know how the participants' participation in community activities had been impacted through their participation in the programme. It came up during the discussions with the participants that at the level of community, the programme had impacted on the participants' involvement in decision making and community development initiatives.

3.2.1. Impact on community involvement/decision making

Stromquist (2008) contends that 'the connection between literacy and political engagement assumes that as individuals become more exposed to information about their environment, particularly the public institutions and government, they will be more prepared and willing to intervene to make such bodies equitable and just' (p. 88). As people become more informed, they become conscientised leading to an increased sense of agency. They come to see their prevailing state of affairs – in this case the reality of marginalization – as unfavourable and become aware of their crucial role in changing their lives and that of their societies. At the community level, the participants indicated that their participation in the KRG has boosted their confidence and made them participate fully in matters affecting their communities. One of the participants for instance reported that:

Due to Kha Ri Gude, I am part of the SGB (School Governing Board) of the school in our community. It has really helped me to contribute to the development of the school and our children. I can even converse in English and with that comes a lot of confidence.

This view was also shared by other participants as follows:

Kha Ri Gude has given us life, I am now a member of School Governing Body of my children's school.

School governing bodies play a significant role in the management of basic schools in South Africa. They are an embodiment of various stakeholders (parents, teaching and non-teaching staff and the student body) in steering the affairs of schools. They are part of the decision making processes on various issues including the appointment of principals and teachers for schools. Therefore, to be elected into this group is an achievement in itself in the community and the fact that the participants in question allude to the programme's instrumentality in such an achievement is indeed momentous. This finding points to the fact that these participants have become politically aware as a result of their participation in the programme. This corroborates the findings of Burchfield, Hua, Baral, and Rocha (2002) in their study of the political impact of literacy on Nepali women which found that the women in the literacy programme demonstrated more political knowledge than those not in the programme and thought they could serve as political representatives (In Stromquist, 2008). Other participants indicated that the

programme had impacted on their participation in community meetings. The expositions below are evidence of the impact of the KRG programme on the participants' involvement in community meetings.

I am now able to contribute to the discussions during community meetings.

During community meetings I am able to participate very well in the discussions.

For these participants, the programme had made them active in community meetings. It can be argued that people with basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic are 'better equipped to make more informed decisions for their lives and for their communities ...' (Lind, 2008 in; Adewale, Abideen, & Adeola, 2013, p. 386). Romm and Dichaba (2015, p. 233) in their assessment of the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign also found that since the participants joined the programme, their confidence and self-esteem have improved, and they can participate in leadership positions in their communities. The findings of Martinez and Fernandez (2010, p. 8) and Adewale et al. (2013, p. 384) are also relevant here. They reported that generally illiteracy limits full development of individuals and their participation in society. They further found that illiterate people suffered low self-esteem, displayed little autonomy and possessed little ability for critical thinking, while literate people had high self-esteem. In fact, community development requires the involvement of all affected people in decision making processes. However, limited literacy is a stigma that can curtail people's input in community discussions and decisions (Subban, 2007). It is important to state that a democratic society is where people can participate consciously and critically in national and community decision-making and initiatives. Dighe (1995) posit that in order for literacy not to domesticate but instead empower, it should not only focus on acquisition of reading and writing skills. In that case it will be disempowering. Literacy programmes that empower people should combine reading and writing skills with consciousness raising and participation. It is only through this that people can realize their unfavourable socio-economic situations and armed with the desired knowledge and skills act to bring about changes.

3.2.2. Impact on community development

Engagement of community members in community development initiatives is crucial to promoting the sustained improvement in the quality of life of the community. According to Estes (1997), 'community development emphasizes self-help and voluntary cooperation among members or residents of disadvantaged communities or sectors of society. Working on behalf of disadvantaged citizens, community development strives to further the acquisition or redistribution of resources' (p. 43). In order to achieve effective community development, community members must be engaged in community work. Community work seeks to mobilize hitherto unorganized people into effective groups and coalitions that work together in pursuit of a shared social agenda including improved schools, safer neighborhoods and representation in political affairs (Estes, 1997). In terms of the impact of the programme on the participants' involvement in community development initiatives, the impact was further felt in two specific areas; community wellbeing and community welfare. These areas of change are indicative of an increased sense of agency on the part of the participants which is crucial in Mezirow's transformative learning theory which can be likened to Freire's idea of conscientisation. By increased sense of agency, I mean that the KRG had helped the participants to realize that they have taken for granted their prevailing state of affairs and that they have come to see themselves as 'having options for controlling their own lives and dealing with constraints which had before been perceived as given and beyond their control' (Mezirow, 1978b, p. 103).

3.2.2.1. *Community wellbeing.* Pertaining to community wellbeing, this study revealed that through their involvement in the KRG, the participants were more involved in the community development initiatives.

Some of the participants specifically intimated that they were now engaged in ensuring the wellbeing of vulnerable people in the community. These narratives are examples of such efforts:

We care for the needy, the sick and the elderly in the community. We show Ubuntu (an IsiZulu word which literally means 'humanity').

We now help the school in my community by distributing food parcels from our farms. This we do because we have been taught the need to show Ubuntu to others.

Community welfare is crucial to enhancing the standard of living of community members. By ensuring the welfare of disadvantaged groups, the community's wellbeing could be assured. As stated by Merriam and Kee (2014) community wellbeing is a function of many factors working in concert to promote an optimal quality of life for all members of a community. Field (2009) argued that although we tend to focus on the economic benefits of adult learning, "the evidence that learning promotes well-being is overwhelming" (p. 5). In South Africa, the government has made strides in ensuring the welfare of disadvantaged people in the country. The provision of financial grants to such people is one of government's strategies for sustaining their livelihoods. Therefore, the fact that some of the participants indicated that their participation in the programme has impacted their contribution to their community's welfare is highly commendable since it augments the efforts of the government.

3.2.2.2. *Community welfare.* Another key issue that came up during the discussions was how the programme had impacted on the participants' involvement in community welfare initiatives. In this study community welfare is operationalized as the situation where the various segments of a community unite to address the felt needs of its members. Even though there is an obvious ambiguity in what welfare entails, Jonassen's (1960) classical definition sheds more light on the concept. Jonassen defines welfare as:

a community condition that conforms to the value system, such as a presence of good health, happiness, prosperity, social control and good housing, and the absence of undesirable conditions such as illness, poverty, vice, delinquency and crime, child neglect, ignorance, and unemployment (p. 112)

Some of the participants in this study indicated that by virtue of their participation in the KRG, they are now able to contribute meaningfully to promoting the welfare of community members. This means that these graduates were complementing the efforts of government to provide social development services in all communities in the country. Regarding his contribution to helping people in distress, one of the participant had this to say:

We patrol the community and take children who are roaming the streets to school.

It has been pointed out by Estes (1997) that the cardinal aspects of developmental social work practice is the provision of personal social services to people in distress and efforts to promote adherence to internationally guaranteed human rights. Participation in KRG has promoted a heightened awareness among the participants of the rights of all South Africans which has informed their decision to ensure that all children in the community have access to education. Also related to this effort is partnership between some of the graduates of the programme and the Community Works Programme (CWP). The CWP 'is a programme that is founded on the acceptance of state responsibility for the socio-economic well-being of citizens in historically disadvantaged communities across South Africa' (van der Merwe & Langa, 2019, p. 50). Through the CWP, some of the participants were able to contribute to the safety of school children by managing the traffic around the schools in the community. For instance one participant had this to say:

Through the involvement of the Community Works Programme (CWP) we manage traffic in the mornings and after school hours for the children's safety.

To ensure the sustainability of their efforts of managing traffic in the community, it was revealed that some of the participants were engaged in the selling of tomatoes for profit making purposes which was in turn used to acquire some items to motivate the members of the 'traffic management team'. The

We are also selling tomatoes to make profit and that profit is invested. We use the profits to help buy some items for those who help to manage the traffic in the community.

Aside their engagement in the CWP, this participant's revelation also points to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among some of the participants. Romm and Dichaba (2015) also found in their study of past learners of the KRG in the Kwazulu Natal province found that they had 'learned the value of starting their own gardens as ways of sustaining themselves. This was alluded to by this participant: we sell our vegetables to schools in the community and sell seeds among interested community members. This aligns with Arko-Achemfuor's (2019) study of beneficiaries of the KRG in the Limpopo province which found that the intervention had helped the graduates to start and run Small Medium and Micro-sized Enterprises (SMME) effectively.

4. In closing

This study explored how Kha Ri Gude Literacy Programme had impacted the personal and communal lives of its graduates. Positioned within the transformative learning theory, this study has shown that there is an enduring shift in the perspectives of the participants as a result of their participation in the KRG which has positively affected their personal and communal lives. Specifically, the programme had impacted the literacy skills development and health awareness of the participants, while their participation in community decision making and contribution to community wellbeing had improved since their participation in the programme. This demonstrates the social value of adult literacy programmes in personal and community development.

In the light of the findings, the study recommends that the programme should regularly monitor its graduates in order to know how beneficial the programme has been to them as this could ultimately inform future programme design and development. It is crucial for educational institutions involved in adult education programmes including adult literacy programmes not to determine their success only by outputs or number of adult learners who complete the programmes as this is a common practice. The extent to which these programmes transform the lives of the participants should be the main determining factor of success. The completion of studies should not be the end of the relationship between the literacy programme and the participants. The programme should track and trace the products (graduates) to see how the knowledge acquired has transformed their lives and how those who were participants help to transform the lives of others in their communities.

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