Ethical Dilemmas in Qualitative Research Methodology: Researcher's Reflections

Nomazulu Ngozwana *
University of Swaziland, SWAZILAND

Abstract: This article examines the ethical dilemmas that are specific to qualitative research methodology. These dilemmas concern the issues of withdrawal from the study, anonymity and confidentiality, which are discussed. Each aspect examines how it was dealt with using the researcher's reflections. The research was positioned within an interpretive paradigm and used the small scale qualitative research design in one rural and one urban contexts of Lesotho. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select the participants from the larger population. Using a semi-structured interview guide, participants were interviewed individually while others were engaged in focus group discussions. A lesson learnt is that ethics in methodology, when conducting research in an African context, do not always follow what is proposed in the Western literature. It is recommended that a context should be considered when applying ethics in qualitative research studies in Africa since some ethics in research are context-specific.

Keywords: *Ethical dilemmas, qualitative research methodology, withdrawal, anonymity, confidentiality.*

Introduction

Research in social science has paid consideration to ethical features of qualitative research. Research ethics committees (RECs) have to establish that research proposals follow the appropriate ethics guidelines (DHSA, 2015). However, research has consistently shown that there are several ethical dilemmas (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016; Anthony & Danaher, 2016) that have implications for qualitative research, which often arise from various methodology used. The ethical challenges that the researcher encountered in qualitative research are withdrawal from the study, anonymity and confidentiality. The aim of this article is to discuss these ethical issues and illustrate how the researcher resolved the matter during a study that was conducted in 2013. The latter study explored how citizens understood the concepts of democracy and citizenship as implications for civic education. Data were collected through in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions. The study employed semi-structured interview guide with participants that included community leaders, civic education providers and ordinary citizens.

The African way of knowing has been through action learning or performing an activity, which involved social interaction and interconnection either in research or any knowledge generation platforms. African is used to highlight the positioning of the study within the African perspective (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). The authors also note that the African Indigenous Learning (AIL) is embedded in the practices, cultures and means of knowing of many Africans. This is in view of the effects of imperialism on African people through suppression and objectification of the 'African being' (Ndaba, n.d.) in different African countries including Lesotho. The following section briefly outlines Lesotho's context as a reader's guide of where the study was conducted.

Lesotho Context

The small, mountainous Kingdom of Lesotho is situated in the Southeast of Africa and part of the Southern African region (Ministry of Health & Social Welfare, [MoHSW] 2009). The country has an area of 30,355km square and completely landlocked by South Africa. The total Basotho (population of Lesotho) are estimated at three quarters (76%) comprises the rural economically disadvantaged members of society (MoHSW, 2009). Lesotho's capital city is

---
* **Correspondence:**
Nomazulu Ngozwana, University of Swaziland, Department of Adult Education, Swaziland,
E-mail: nomazulungozwana@gmail.com

Maseru. There are two official languages, Sesotho and English (UNESCO, 2009). Lesotho's climate remains cool all year round, with heavy rains in summer and cold winters with snow, especially in the highlands.

Agriculture is the main source of income for the country. Additionally, the country receives small remittances from South Africa due to migrant workers in the mining industry. The study was conducted in Qacha's Nek, one of the Southern districts of Lesotho, which represented the rural communities. The district was chosen due to the high prevalence of tensions between the traditional and modern leadership structures (Preece et al., 2009). The study also extended to Maseru, (capital city), where parliamentary infrastructure is located. This represents urban communities where there is rapid modernisation. An interpretive paradigm was used and is discussed in the following section.

Interpretive Paradigm

Interpretive paradigm recognises that truth is subjective because the researcher is part of the world under review and its organisations and institutions are viewed as a constructed social reality (Cohen et al., 2009). That is, reality is constructed by people who live in their different social worlds. The role of social science is to discover how different people interpret the world in which they live, whether they act singly or in groups. Interpretive paradigm uses methods of understanding by interpreting the subjective meanings which individuals place upon their actions. Moreover interpretive paradigm is used for understanding peoples' experiences in their natural setting (Chilisa & Preece, 2005) as knowledge is dependent on the human experience and guided by the culture, history, and context in which people live. It is usually conducted in a small scale research and does not use numerical data.

Interpretive paradigm has received critiques, for example, the suggestion that it abandons scientific procedures for verification and has given up hope of generalizing about human behaviour; research in this paradigm is said to be less accurate in less controlled structures that are flexible, and therefore, results may be incomplete and misleading (Cohen et al., 2009). However, interpretive paradigm was considered to be the most relevant paradigm for qualitative research undertaken, because of the focus on the subjective beliefs of the participants which needed to be understood in relation to the local context.

Qualitative research is based on a constructivist philosophy that assumes that reality is an interactive, shared social experience, which is interpreted by individuals (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In other words, peoples' perceptions are what they consider real and they, direct their actions, thoughts and feelings accordingly (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In its endeavour, interpretive paradigm contributes to the generation of a theory rather than testing hypotheses in order to correct or confirm a specific theory.

Qualitative Research Design and Methodology

Research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. Methodology is part of the overall epistemological approach that was adopted by the study (Gray, 2003). A small scale qualitative design was used in the two contexts of a rural and urban represented by Qacha's Nek District and Maseru District respectively. This approach enabled a focus on the natural settings in the different communities living under different social contexts. Data were analysed using words, which were derived from field work instead of numbers, as a sense making process (Jackson, 2008). This is in line with McMillan & Schumacher's (2006) notion that a qualitative research design is concerned with understanding the social phenomena from the participants' perspectives. The research was conducted with the intention of finding out how people understand the concepts of democracy and citizenship, and to explore the nature of civic education for adults in Lesotho. Therefore, a qualitative design was used on a small scale basis where the comments of participants from a rural context of Qacha's Nek District were compared with those from anurban context of Maseru District.

Qualitative research design served as a guideline that connected the interpretive paradigm, and the strategies for investigations and data collection methods. This is where community leaders, civic educators and ordinary citizens were investigated in order to ascertain their understanding of the concepts of democracy and citizenship using narratives collected through individual or group interviews.

Narrative Research

Trahar (2006) outlines narrative research as a particular form of qualitative research, where the focus is on the experiences of the participants and how they make meaning of those experiences. Narrative research expects thick, rich data, stories and examples of how meaning is constructed. The importance of narrative research is postulated by Trahar (2006, p. 28) as follows:

- It focuses on participant's experiences and meanings given by them to that experience.
- It is concerned with representation and voice.
- It observes the personal human qualities of participants and researchers.
- It allows for the exploration of the research activity itself as a story.

Qualitative researchers emphasize on studying of participants' perspectives using interactive strategies such as in-depth interviews, artefacts, and focus groups (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), all of which were used. As a researcher I employed flexibility in the data collection strategies during the onset of field work (see data collection section below). The use of multiple research strategies allowed for triangulation of the participants' assertions about the nature of democracy and citizenship in Lesotho; enabled for the recommendation of some strategies for use in civic education for adults, which were drawn from the implications of the findings.

Sampling and Sample

Identifying the place and the people to participate in a study is done through sampling. This study followed what Cohen et al. (2009) describe as purposive and snowball sampling under the category of a non-probability sample. The sample constitutes a manageable number of people that could reasonably be engaged with at locations and within a timeframe that would allow for the generation of adequate data. The purpose for selecting the two different contexts was to compare the perceptions and understandings of democracy and citizenship in people living in a remote rural area with those living in a rapidly modernised urban area.

In this regard a subjective selection of Qacha's Nek District was made, simply because the geographical location was far from the country hub of Maseru, it was very rural, and therefore provided a good contrast to the city centre. Since I was also residing in this location at the start of the study and was already known in such a small community, gatekeepers were more easily contactable. It might have taken longer to obtain access to a rural community elsewhere, and would have taken more time building rapport with key personnel (gatekeepers). This place was chosen to avoid the issues of bureaucracy or red tape that has to be observed as protocol before meeting the gatekeepers.

In contrast, Maseru central constituency (a political boundary) is found within the central business area of Maseru District, where all government infrastructures are found, including the Lesotho parliament and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Therefore, purposive sampling was found to be suitable because the researcher intentionally wanted to learn from the perspectives of people who live in the two differing districts in terms of the phenomena under investigation. I selected three identified categories of people within the constituencies of the two districts. These were community leaders, civic education providers and ordinary citizens who were strategically sampled.

Community Leaders

In the district of Qacha's Nek, representing the rural context, five participants were purposely selected who represented community leaders. They were two active politicians (candidates for national assembly elections, a male and a female), two chiefs (male and female), and a male councillor. In Maseru District, representing the urban context, four active community leaders were selected as follows: one female mayor (councillor), one male chief and two politicians (candidates for national assembly elections). All community leaders made a total of nine participants. They were purposely selected because of their quality of being community leaders knowledgeable in issues of democracy and citizenship. Another reason was that their status of being leaders enabled them to receive information that is channelled to different communities by experts in the field of democracy and citizenship.

However, I experienced a challenge of accessing an equal number of community leaders in both districts, as opposed to how the data collection process had been initially planned. In Maseru, for instance, people were busy and difficult to contact: for instance, the deputy speaker for the national assembly, although he had originally shown willingness to participate, was difficult to contact. The second category sampled was that of the education providers for civic education.

Civic educators

Civic education providers were purposely sampled because of their typical characteristics of being educators. In Qacha's Nek District one focus group that was selected consisted of civic education providers made up of six participants (three males and three females) working for the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), an organisation that is constitutionally mandated to provide civic education in Lesotho. In Maseru District a proposed focus group was intended for six people. Ultimately, the group only involved two females and a male educator. The other participants did not turn up. In fact as mentioned earlier, it was a big challenge to get people together in a group in Maseru District. Participants explained how busy they were and presented demanding time constraints. As a result, I approached the other three educators and arranged for individual interviews, at their convenience. Therefore, one male and two female IEC educators were additionally interviewed separately, thus making the total of twelve participants in both districts, as initially planned.

In addition to the IEC educators, the initial plan was to select two focus groups of ten civic educators from two other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), with five participants from each. I only managed to select and conduct individual interviews with three educators, each from three different NGOs: Lesotho Council for Non-governmental

organisations (LCN), Transformation Resource Centre (TRC) and Development for Peace Education (DPE) respectively. I purposely selected the interviewees on the basis of their work that is connected directly with civic education and democracy. During the initial stage when I sought permission and access to conduct the study, at the first organisation, the TRC, the educator was initially supplied probably because he was a focal person dealing with democracy programmes in that organisation. The other two educators were selected through snowball sampling, where a TRC educator referred me to other educators from DPE and LCN organisations. However, it was difficult to gain access to the LCN educator, but was eventually contacted. These difficulties persisted with the DPE, after several unsuccessful attempts to get hold of the identified knowledgeable participant, but I finally got one person to interview. Fifteen civic educators participated for the entire study.

Ordinary Citizens

Snowball sampling is the selection of some participants for a study, through recommendations from other participants who bear similar characteristics and possess relevant knowledge (Cohen et al., 2009; Welman & Kruger, 2001). De Vos (2001) calls this chain reference sampling, because one participant provides a lead to the next participant. Snowball sampling was used to select the focus group of other key informants who were categorised as ordinary citizens, where one person referred me to another active and knowledgeable person. In Qacha's Nek District, there were two focus groups for ordinary citizens, one made up of young citizens, aged 20 to 30, and one for older citizens aged 40 to 60, which totalled twelve participants for both groups. The choice of these groups was in order to provide a cross section of different age groups and political roles, to get different perceptions on how they understand democracy and citizenship as implications for civic education.

Maseru District participants were too busy to be brought together as a group, therefore, I selected three males and two females as adult citizens and they were interviewed individually. These participants were also selected through snowball sampling. A youth focus group of six males and two females of ages between 18 and 30 years were also gathered together. This group was purposely chosen from the civic education workshop that was conducted by the TRC educator. The reason for using young adults and elderly people was that their views and opinions were likely to differ according to their different wisdoms and experiences of life. Another reason was their different exposure to education in relation to rights and responsibilities and democracy. A total of 25 citizens were interviewed. Data was collected from the homes, and workplaces of these participants.

Data Collection Process

The fieldwork data collection process took place between February and November 2013 in both Qacha's Nek and Maseru Districts. This process for collecting data involved multiple strategies (McMillan & Schumacher 2006) using interactive methods of interviews, focus group discussion among others. I interacted with the participants, kept a field notebook to reflect on the ideas and experiences of different participants and at the same time wrote reflections concerning the process. An interview guide, which served as a data collection tool, was developed prior to conducting the study and attached to the ethical clearance application. The data collection methods are discussed below, starting with individual interviews.

Individual Interviews

In-depth interviews were employed with participants that were selected from ordinary citizens, community leaders and civic educators in both Qacha's Nek and Maseru Districts, using a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews are explained by Rozakis (2004) as personal meetings with individuals or groups. Interviews were done in order to ascertain what the individuals understood about democracy and citizenship and the means by which they came to understand it, how they were brought up, with what values, how they had learnt about those values, and how they viewed their values to be relevant in their current experiences. All the interviews were conducted in Sesotho, which is a local and mother-tongue language for the participants. At the end of each interview, I transcribed the data and translated into English.

The key informants were nine community leaders who were chosen and interviewed in both Qacha's Nek and Maseru Districts. These individuals are often atypical within the communities and, as leaders; they were purposely sampled from the two districts. The interviews were suitable for this research because of the individuals' lived experiences and perceptions regarding what and how they understand democracy and citizenship. McMillan & Schumacher (2006) have noted the importance of probing and pausing in the questioning format for the researcher to hear and connect with the person and elicit more valid data. Similarly, Rozakis (2004) encourages the researcher to make a telephone call to confirm a face to face interview in case the participant may have changed the plan for the appointment, which I did before going for an appointment. But despite calling to confirm meetings, some participants still changed the appointment time. For instance, one female educator in Maseru called and postponed the interview meeting while I was

in a taxi only twenty minutes from her office. She apologized, saying she had forgotten another meeting that she needed to attend.

Although the interviews were satisfactory, they often required more than one session. This was because I had to make a telephonic communication with a few participants in order to follow up what they had said in the responses they provided. As a novice interviewer, I learnt that it was not always easy, at first, to know the breadth and depth of what to ask and probe for. This was simply because the participants did not mention certain information, making the assumption that some issues are common knowledge. For example, in most cases participants kept on saying "in the past", and they assumed that I would simply know what the past was all about. It was not until the analysis phase that I realised that more probing had been required in order to understand better about the past, that is, the different phases of historical and political events that they elaborated. As a researcher, I was also learning, and the need to have to return to some respondents later for clarification on some answers added the time taken to analyse the data.

I learnt that interviews needed a well prepared setting (location of interview). The young citizens' focus group was held in a shack that was situated near the bus stop area, therefore it was noisy and customers were disturbing the session – and one customer was carrying a baby who cried a great deal. A place was chosen to secure the two ladies who were active in politics (key informants) and were also working as informal traders, one as a hairdresser and one selling fast food. This also ensured that participants were not removed from their natural world; instead I had to personally go to their environments.

Chilisa & Preece (2005) have noted the limitations of power relationships between the researcher and the interviewee, meaning that it appears as if the researcher plays a dominant role by asking questions with his or her own agenda, while the interviewee becomes passive by providing answers. In one particular case, I was the one who experienced a dilemma regarding issues of power in an interview with a dominant male chief in Maseru (see ethical issues section below). Nevertheless, I counteracted by being calm and trying to build a rapport with the chief, emphasising the need to get his perceptions about the concepts under investigation, which was the purpose of the study.

Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussions were used as the key methods for the collection of data. Focus group discussion is described by De Vos (2001) as a purposive discussion on a specific topic that takes place between a selected number of individuals who have a common background or interest. Focus groups served as a confirmation technique, which increased the validity and credibility of the entire research. Focus groups are important because they facilitate natural, spontaneous discussion of events or experiences by the participants (De Vos, 2001). Participants may or may not reach consensus in the discussion, and emphasis is placed on finding out as much as possible about the participants' experiences, knowledge and feelings about a specific aspect of social reality, event, topic, programme, service or product (De Vos, 2001). Furthermore, focus groups allowed for more interaction and relationship building between the researcher and the participants.

According to Chilisa & Preece (2005), focus group discussions are similar to a normal way of communication in a natural setting, especially when people address a certain problem in a dialogue. In these groups, there was a great deal of interaction among members, and that allowed for real discussion of the concepts of democracy and citizenship, because information that was given was interjected and corroborated by others. As a result, rich data was produced within a short period of time, which stimulated new ideas and opinions and further built on the experiences of members, while at the same time members learnt from each other (Barbour, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Focus groups provided a free, relaxed environment because of the exchange of information between the participants. This was evident in the focus groups that were held in Qacha's Nek with young citizens as well as with a group of youths in Maseru District.

I learnt that, indeed, qualitative research is flexible and that what is written in literature in terms of the flexibility was also practically applicable. Even in the field, asking questions was done in a flexible manner allowing for the discussions to flow from the participants' responses. This flexibility extended to the individual interviews with education providers and adult citizens in Maseru, who did not have available time to join the other members to form a focus group to discuss their mutual understanding of democracy and citizenship in Lesotho.

The focus groups enabled me to realise that, as McMillan & Schumacher (2006) note, recruiting the right people to participate was not a simple task. I realised that even people who seemed knowledgeable about democracy and citizenship did not always find it easy to discuss these issues in a group. It was evident that some people do not open up easily in a group; that focus groups seemed to have a constraining atmosphere for some people who would only open up freely when interviewed alone or when with a few people, such as their friends. This was illustrated by one IEC female educator, who soon after the focus group dispersed, talked freely to elaborate on the misinformation of a former political party leader who had lost his status after the Lesotho's national assembly elections of 2012. This is what she said:

> Mr. M. is continuing to tell his followers that he has been cheated in the last elections; he keeps on saying that he won more constituencies but then these [other political parties] stole his government. He is busy mentioning that [the] IEC is going to hold fresh elections very soon. Mme, just imagine the rural people who do not understand what is happening, they take him seriously and think that indeed he has been cheated! (Female educator, focus group Qacha's Nek).

The constraining space difficulty was also noted in a certain situation in which a few members in a focus group with the elderly in Qacha's Nek kept silent and remained quiet even when I tried to invite them to speak. The few members who spoke were commonly known active members of the Basotho National Party (BNP) party that was then part of the coalition government. Others were not comfortable speaking out in the group and this reminded me of the assumptions made that some people were not comfortable about articulating their concerns about the coalition of the three political parties: the All Basotho Convention (ABC), BNP and Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD). This was because they were afraid that Lesotho's past political history (during authoritarian rule by the military when citizens were not allowed to talk about political issues) was likely to repeat itself. It became evident that some people were still socialised into the expectations of a post-colonial authoritarian system that had kept people silent and inactive as a result of oppression.

Transcribing was also a challenge (Kiyimba & O'Reilly, 2016) because I had recorded the participants' voices using my cellular phone; therefore I could only listen to the words spoken, while non-verbal cues could not be captured. Then the issues of punctuation and constructing paragraphs were my responsibility to ensure the smooth presentation of data. Some issues were not fully articulated because of the assumption by participants that certain issues are common knowledge, yet my responsibility was to make sure that the direct quotations would be easily understood by readers. This occasionally required the insertion of words and phrases to make the meaning clear from what was spoken. Transcribing was time consuming and needed to be done accurately. Although the issue of recording voices is important, transcribing the discussions failed to capture all the non-verbal cues and postures, which form an important means of communication. When translating, the same challenges of having to ensure good spelling, grammar and punctuation were experienced. However, the field notes assisted, where I noted some of the interesting issues even though writing down all that transpired in the interviews; was not possible because I used my cellular phone to record the participants' voices during the interviews and focus group discussions.

Furthermore, I realised that if data were not analysed immediately, it easily became distorted because the context for some issues that were raised were forgotten, hence the likelihood of incorrect interpretation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

I also learnt that focus groups need thorough preparation regarding the venue, the correct timing when people can be available and incentives for meals, transport and time. Almost all the participants conveyed the point that their 'time is money' because they had left their important tasks just to help with information that benefitted me as the researcher. Therefore I gave all participants incentives a few months after I received the research scholarship, to show gratitude for the valuable time and information they gave which made the study successful.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is described as:

> the 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 (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p 327).

The above interpretation is supported by Chilisa & Preece (2005, p. 168), who suggest that "reflexivity is a strategy to help ensure that the over-involvement of the researcher is not a threat to the credibility of the study". Reflexivity is a way of ensuring that the researcher does not influence the study through the strong held perceptions, feelings and experiences while conducting a research, perhaps from over interaction with the participants or otherwise (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). As a researcher I had acknowledged the following: firstly, my epistemological position from planning and choosing the topic; secondly, designing the data collection instruments; thirdly, the manner of asking or avoiding questions in the field; and fourthly, how the specific categories of citizens that served as participants in this study were selected including in the two districts, because all these were part of my subjectivity. Secondly, I would like to explain my personal reflexivity by indicating that the motivation to conduct the study, which this article is based on, came from the experience that arose while I was working temporarily at the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in Qacha's Nek District during the local government and national assembly elections. During my part-time placement, it became apparent that Lesotho citizens (Basotho) were confused about the role of democracy in Lesotho and that many electors were demotivated about taking part in the elections and, therefore, the voter turnout was low. That stimulated me to undertake research that would investigate how civic education for adults could be improved to provide more informed and critical education programmes about the role of democracy and citizenship. I recorded all the fieldwork processes in my field notebook, starting with the date, place, names and codes given to the participants. I ensured that whatever

happened was noted separately and actions taken were specified in a field notebook, so that my views were clearly evident without being confused and mixed with the views of participants during data analysis and interpretation.

Reflexivity is a continuous self-scrutiny by the researcher throughout the entire process that is inescapable in research. It is clear that reflexivity assists in the maintenance of credibility as it portrays the views and opinions felt by the researcher as against those that were felt by the participants. Reflexivity is closely linked to trustworthiness as an indicator of research quality.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is often explored in terms of credibility, dependability and transferability (Rule & John, 2011). Trustworthiness for qualitative research, as explained by Rule & John (2011), Patton (2002), Patton (1990), McMillan & Schumacher (2006), Rakotsoane & Rakotsoane (2006) and Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight (2006) can be enhanced by using a combination of strategies: prolonged fieldwork, multi method strategies, participant verbatim language, multiple researchers, member checking, to mention a few.

This study used prolonged fieldwork, over 11 months, where in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in a natural setting (locations: in Qacha's Nek and Maseru Districts) to reflect the lived experiences of the participants. Transferability in this study was enhanced by comparing the similarities and differences of the findings from the two locations of Maseru and Qacha's Nek, which bear different contexts, meaning situations, participants, groups and institutions (Patton, 2002; Rule & John, 2011). Moreover, there is a likelihood that similar findings would be obtained if the study were repeated in the same context or replicated to other areas. The lengthy data collection period provided an opportunity for thematic analysis, preliminary comparisons and corroborations to refine ideas and to ensure the match between evidence-based categories and participant reality, which increases credibility and promotes trustworthiness in a study (Patton, 2002; Rule & John, 2011). The multi method strategy permitted triangulation of data across all the inquiry techniques.

Ethical Issues

In January 2013 I piloted my research instrument in Quthing (–one of the Southern Districts of Lesotho). At that time, I had already informed the Reserve Chief, the District Administrator and IEC District Electoral Officer who managed the district, with respect to my intention to conduct research in Qacha's Nek District. This intention was influenced by my previous part-time employment with IEC during the Local Government and the General National Assembly elections that took place during my first year of study. The Ethical Clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal was granted, which stated the ethical issues that I had to observe during data collection. Ethics pertains to morally good or correct practice and avoiding any harm that may emanate during the study. Examples of ethics that I considered in a qualitative small scale study were: informed consent, withdrawal from the study, confidentiality and anonymity.

Informed Consent

The first step that I took after receiving the ethical clearance was to contact all the people that I had already negotiated with as participants of my research to remind them about the study. I went to the same gatekeepers for the district of Qacha's Nek, the District Administrator and the Chief to receive their consent to conduct the study, which was granted. I went to Basotho Enterprise Development Corporation (BEDCO) building in the Qacha's Nek District where I had informally asked for the venue to hold the discussions with my research participants. I met one of the employees at Trade Offices to report that I had arrived and was waiting for the participants to come. I was granted consent for the venue in the form of a written official letter. I also went to the IEC office to communicate with the District Electoral Officer and formally negotiated to hold the focus group discussions in those offices, using the same official letter. I had earlier informally secured the participation of some of the IEC staff in my study.

In another instance, I went to the bus stop market area where I had negotiated with two females to participate in a young citizens' focus group discussion. I negotiate for a venue in one of the shacks that was used as a hair salon and access was granted. The rest of the participants who stayed far from Qacha's Nek camp town, but were selected to participate in focus groups, were contacted telephonically to set the exact dates and times. For other identified selected individuals I went to their homes for one to one individual interviews. On all occasions that I met with participants of the study for data collection, I requested each member to fill in an informed consent form that followed a dialogue that I had earlier held when asking for their participation in the study. In a dialogue that I held with different participants, my emphasis was to explain the purpose of the study and all the ethical principles at first contact with the participants. I also assured the participants about their freedom to withdraw from the study. The dialogue was held in Sesotho, which is a local language that was understood by all the participants of the study. The consent form was translated into Sesotho language and filled in by participants.

At the time of data collection, I did not have cash to reimburse participants for transport and meals, so I asked them to fill out a form that reflected their names, where they reside, contact details and the amount they had spent to attend the focus group discussions. I clearly stated that the form was for the purpose of reimbursing their expenses. I also explained to the participants that the consent forms filled out were only to show that they had granted me their informed consent. I therefore emphasised that their names would not be revealed anywhere and that the information they provided was confidential as it was intended for learning purposes. However, some were not happy that they could not receive their transport reimbursement immediately after participating in a focus group discussion.

Withdrawal from the Study

I tried to build rapport and credibility with individuals by communicating with them at their normal areas of work or their homes personally during interviews. During the data collection I often told the participants about their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time they felt like doing so. This is what Cohen et al. (2009) termed freedom to withdraw without consequences. Most participants that were involved in snowball sampling were interested to know why I had chosen them instead of others, and I explained the sampling procedure that selected them, that it was based on the information and knowledge that they have regarding democracy and citizenship.

However, I did encounter a challenge under the issue of free withdrawal from the discussion in respect of my first focus group with elderly citizens. The group was continually active for about 50 minutes, but later on, they went in and out to the bathroom or to answer their cell phones, while others checked their hand watches regularly. One male participant even made a comment saying that, "remember that the taxis shall go out at around lunch, therefore we also need to buy a few things from the shops before we can go." I acknowledged that message and told them that I would release them once we were through with the discussions. Two participants whispered to each other and they stood up and left the venue and never returned. I felt uncomfortable but continued the discussions with the remaining and I was in fear that if I allowed for a break, they might not come back. They became less participative, but were still giving out their views and opinions. The discussions went on for one hour and twenty minutes and thereafter I thanked them for their participation.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity, as described by McMillan & Schumacher (2006), simply means that the setting and participants should not be identifiable in all reporting. To maintain confidentiality, I gave the participants codes (numbers) when transcribing and translating the data. Prior to conducting any interviews and discussions, I sought their permission to record their voices, which was granted by all the participants in Qacha's Nek, while in Maseru District one participant refused to be recorded, but instead, insisted that I capture the data through writing. To establish rapport, I started by talking about general issues regarding the new political dispensation (coalition government) that was the first of its kind in Lesotho. Once the rapport was established, I then started getting useful information, moving at their pace and remaining calm and pragmatic in order to keep the relationship stable.

The issue of confidentiality became an ethical dilemma in one instance when I interviewed a male chief in Qacha's Nek District. In April 2013 I went to the chief's office to conduct an individual interview. His office is situated inside the District Administrator's yard. It is one of the old block offices that are behind the DA's office. I found him with three male citizens. He was still assisting one of them writing a letter. I greeted them and the chief asked me to take a seat. He issued the man with the letter and the man left, while the two remained. The chief told me that he was expecting me, as I had made an appointment earlier, and, therefore, I should start with the interview. I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study and the ethics, including the maintenance of confidentiality. He agreed to participate and then filled in the consent form. I asked for permission to record the interview. He asked if my intention was to have him openly broadcast over the radio and I told him that the recording was for the purpose of helping me to transcribe the data later, otherwise I would not broadcast the voices over the radio. He then granted me permission to do the recording.

I felt uneasy because of the presence of the other two men. However, I started asking questions at about 11h20. He answered very quickly, without making an effort to think. There were constant interruptions with people knocking on the door and the chief allowing them to enter. I stopped, thinking that he needed to help them and that we could continue later. But he told me to continue asking him questions, saying the people had to wait. People kept arriving until all the chairs were filled with about twelve people (including the two that I had found with him). When others knocked he said: "It is full!" I felt very uncomfortable because I saw that people were looking and listening while they waited for service. I stopped for a while to see what he would do. He said: "Mme continue because you had an appointment, these people will never stop coming, they will wait until I finish." What made me uneasy was that before responding to some of the questions, he would say to the waiting people: "You see, she is asking me questions, why don't you respond to her!" The situation was very uncomfortable for me. Before they attempted to provide answers I emphasised that the questions required the views and opinions of a leader such as a chief, and, therefore, they should

not answer on his behalf. I attempted to show him that his responses were correct and would be useful for my study. However, the questions were not answered well because he was too quick in providing answers and, in addition, he did not appear temperate. At about 12:00 pm, I ended the session and thanked him for his participation.

The lesson learnt is that a chief is a public figure who serves all people openly, meaning that, what is discussed at a chief's place is not a secret, but it is open and accessible for public consumption. This is an African way of dealing with issues in a community. Traditionally, chiefs operated with the assistance of opinions from adult male councillors who listened and gave advice pertaining to all issues that involved decisions to be taken by a chief. As a result, I found two other men in the chief's place, whereas, I had expected a private interview with him. Furthermore, the rest of the community members who came for services witnessed the discussions between a chief and a stranger, (-myself in this case). It is standard in an African society for people to seek witnesses when they are engaged in discussions about any issues and before any decision making. This aligns with what Waghid (2014, p. 57) says: "collective decision making through consensus was not alien to traditional African society." This behaviour reflects the notions of *ubuntu* and *botho* [Translated as humanity] through which people show concern and care for others. It is, therefore, noted that confidentiality is a Western concept that seems inapplicable in all situations in African contexts such as in Lesotho when dealing with traditional authorities. Therefore, when conducting research in an African context, ethics in methodology, do not always follow what is proposed in the Western literature.

In a second instance, I was caught in a dilemma during an interview with a male chief in Maseru District in September 2013. On my arrival at the chief's office I found two males who worked with him. I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the visit and showed that I needed to interview a chief, or either one of them who worked with the chief. They both refused to be interviewed, but told me to wait for Chief Samson (pseudonym).

Towards lunch I was told to go through to the chief's office. On entering, greeting him and introducing myself, I could not finish because he interrupted and told me to ask him questions quickly because he was going for lunch. He was standing and looking at the time on his wrist watch. I could not explain the purpose of the study, including the ethics. I, therefore, started asking him the first question, deciding to omit some of them.

He responded by asking me the same questions that I asked; I waited, tried to explain that I wanted answers from him and was conducting a study for which I wanted different people's perceptions. I started writing down his responses, but he impatiently asked me what I was writing and who had told me to write. Also, as I was interviewing him a few people entered and made themselves comfortable on the chairs. When a fourth person came, the chief said: "You keep on coming but you see that this is lunch time! I am going for lunch. Even this lady has just hijacked me on my way out!"

I kept on asking questions, which he repeatedly interrupted by also asking for my opinion on the same questions that I was asking. He said: "You know the answers better because you are learning and have read a lot about these issues, so you better tell us what all these mean." For one moment I kept quiet and looked at him, not knowing whether to continue or stop asking the questions. He, therefore, said: "Have you finished? I am going for lunch, if there are no more questions. Just continue and never mind, I am famously renowned for my humorous persona" while he in fact, looked serious to me. I asked a few more questions, but then stopped, because even before I could finish he was approaching the door. I quickly gave him a consent form to fill in while I explained that it was needed as proof that he had given his consent. He then said: "I don't even know your name, but you ask me questions." I gave him my student identification card, so that he could see where I attend school. He filled in the form and then told his visitors to leave because he was going for lunch. I thanked him and then left.

I later learnt that there was a likelihood that these traditional authorities, because of their status as chiefs, might have been experiencing 'research fatigue', because almost all researchers need input from the traditional authorities for different studies. This assumption is supported by the manner in which the chief seemed impatient. He even tried to use his power and authority to frighten me. However, he answered the questions that I asked well, showing that he knew about the phenomena under investigation and was a key informant. Nevertheless, I could not manage to ask all the questions as I had intended. These are the challenges which one faces in fieldwork. Fortunately, I did not encounter too many of these situations and was satisfied with the quantity and quality of data generated in the fieldwork. I was also able to honour my commitments in terms of ethical research conduct in the field.

Conclusion

This article has outlined the challenges of ethics in methodology when conducting qualitative research, a general approach of conducting research in order to create social knowledge. The study was positioned within the interpretive paradigm, while it used a small scale qualitative research design. The investigations happened in the two contexts of Qacha's Nek, representing the rural, and Maseru District, representing the urban area. Sampling, particularly purposive and snowball sampling were used to choose the sample of community leaders, civic education providers and citizens, both young and the elderly, in both districts. Ethical issues and how to access the participants through their granting of informed consent, confirming they were free to withdraw from the study and issues of confidentiality and anonymity

were discussed with dilemmas encountered. The limitations and what was learnt as a result thereof were elaborated in different sections. However, the qualitative research approach used in this study was deemed appropriate for the sample size and the phenomena under investigation. Lessons learned from the study are as follows: ethics in research methodology, in an African context, do not always follow the research protocol as proposed in the Western literature. Therefore a recommendation made is that a context should be considered when applying ethics in qualitative research studies in Africa since some ethics in research are context-specific.

References

Anthony, A.K. and Danaher, W.F. (2016). Rules of the road: doing fieldwork and negotiating interactions with hesitant public figures. *Qualitative Research*, *16*(4), 392-410.

Barbour, R. (2009). *Doing Focus Groups*. London: Sage Publications.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., and Tight, M. (2006). *How to Research*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Chilisa, B., and Preece, J. (2005). *Research Methods for Adult Educators in Africa. African Perspectives on Adult Learning*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2009). *Research Methods in Education*. New York: Routledge.

De Vos, A. S. (2001). *Research at Grass Roots: A primer for the caring professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Department of Health, South Africa (2015). *Ethics in research: principles, processes, structures*. Pretoria: National Health Research Ethics Council, 9 – 17.

Gray, A. (2003). *Research Practice for Cultural Studies*. London: Sage Publications.

Jackson, L. S. (2008). *Research Methods. A Modular Approach*. Belmont CA: Thomson Wadworth.

Kiyimba, N. and O'Reilly, M. (2016). The risk of secondary traumatic stress in the qualitative transcription process: a research note. *Qualitative Research*, Vol 16(4), 468-476.

Lekoko, R., and Modise, O. M. (2011). An insight into an African Perspective on Lifelong Learning: Towards promoting functional compensatory programmes. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 30*(1), 5 - 18.

McMillan, J. H., and Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in Education: Evidence-based Inquiry* (6th ed.). Cape Town: Pearson.

MoHSW (2009). Lesotho demographic and health survey. Maseru: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation Research Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Preece, J., Lekhetho,M., Rantekoa,M., &Makau,M. (2009). Non-formal education and vocational skills: Two case studies of Lesotho. Roma: National University of Lesotho.

Rakotsoane, F. C. L., and Rakotsoane, M. A. (2006). *The ABC of Research Project Dissertation and Thesis Proposal Writing*. Maseru: Choice Publishing Company.

Rozakis, L. E. (2004). *Research Methods*. New York: Alpha.

Rule, P., and John, V. (2011). *Your Guide to Case Study Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Singh, S. and Wassenaar, D.R. (2016). Contextualising the role of the gatekeeper in social science research. *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law, 9*(1), 42 – 46.

Trahar, S. (2006). *Narrative Research on Learning: comparative and international perspectives*. London: Symposium Books.

UNESCO. (2009). Global Report on adult learning and education. Paris, France: UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning.

Waghid, Y. (2014). *African Philosophy of Education Reconsidered on being human*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

Welman, J. C., and Kruger, S. J. (2001). *Research Methodology: For the business and administrative sciences.* (2 ed.). Cape Town: Oxford University Press.