ENGLISH COMMUNICATION IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: THE EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to explore the English communicative competency of management and supervisory level employees within the South African hospitality industry. The Prolit English Written Assessment, a competency-based assessment tool, was used to establish a relatively objective measure of the English communicative competency of nineteen managers and supervisors. Thereafter thirteen of these respondents were interviewed to determine their perceptions of their English communicative competency and the impact thereof on their work situation, as well as their perceptions of their learning needs and recommendations for intervention. The researcher selected a multi-method approach to the investigation and sought both quantitative and qualitative data.

The assessment revealed that the English reading and writing ability of the respondents is distinctly lower than their recorded education level and inadequate in relation to the tasks they are expected to perform at work. The interviews indicated that the respondents are not aware of their lack of English communicative competency or the implications thereof. However, the respondents expressed important insights into the factors that should be taken into account when planning an educational intervention in an organization. These included the need to incorporate English second language learning principles, to treat the learner as an individual, to involve the learner in the decision-making process, to consider the practical concerns of the learner and to ensure that the programme content is appropriate. Recommendations for human resource practices and research in the hospitality industry are presented.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The South African hospitality industry caters for several million local and international tourists and business people annually. Recently the industry has received attention from the national government and is now an important facet in the government's national economic strategy. It plays a major role in generating employment, growth and wealth in the nation's developing economy: its major stakeholders being government, business, organised labour, and community organisations (Moth, 1996).

The World Tourism Organisation has predicted that tourism to South Africa will grow at a steady seven percent per annum, three percent higher than in other destinations. The South African Ministry of Tourism predicts a 12 - 20 percent increase over the next five years. Income generation will be about 390-billion Rands, while at the same time, an additional one-million jobs will be created (Moth, 1996, Ross; 1997).

South African up-market hotels are anticipating noticeable growth. Johannesburg's northern suburbs are likely to see a 27 percent increase in four-star hotels and a 68 percent increase in five-star hotels over the next three years. In Cape Town there will be a 110 percent growth in the number of

four-star establishments and 116 percent increase in the five- star category by the year 2000 ("The hospitality industry: special focus", 1997).

The South African Tourism Board is predicting a total of two-million foreign visitors per annum by the year 2000 and it is hoped that tourism will become one of the country's biggest industries, biggest foreign exchange earner and employer in the future in South Africa (Connolly, 1996).

The hospitality industry, a key member of the service sector, delivers a product with three principal components: accommodation, food and beverage (Buttle, 1995). Success in this industry is dependent upon satisfying consumer needs (Buttle, 1995) and competitive advantage in the hotel business is closely connected with the standard of its human resources (Camisón, 1996). It is a labour-intensive service industry, dependant for survival on the availability of good quality personnel to deliver, operate and manage its products (Amoah & Baum, 1997).

Human resource issues in the hospitality industry are multi-dimensional. The International Hotel Association's report on the challenges facing hotels recommends that employers in the industry ensure adequate training at all levels including improving language tuition (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert & Wanhill, 1996). Amoah and Baum (1997) explain that the major area of concern in the industry is the quality and availability of skilled staff. Many of these problems may be directly linked to education and training (Amoah & Baum, 1997).

It is recognised that in a developing country where there is an expanding hospitality industry there will be problems of education and training for the industry (Medlik, 1994). McManus (1997) asserts that South Africa faces this problem as many of its hotel businesses provide mediocre products and services.

South Africa can only become internationally competitive in the hospitality industry when the levels of service become acceptable to foreign visitors. Foreign tourists and business executives demand top quality service. The industry can offer a better service only if it has a skilled and motivate workforce.

Service quality is directly related to an organisation's training policy (Camisón, 1996). Thus training should not be seen as cost to a company but as a vital tool to improve the company's productivity and service levels (Moth, 1997a). Nevertheless there is still a large segment of the hospitality industry that needs to understand that the cost of training is an investment. Many employers in the South African hospitality industry do not believe that they have to train their staff and contribute financially to it. A recent report disclosed that 43% of employers in the South African tourism industry do not have a training budget (Moth, 1997c). Management training is particularly neglected.

The researcher's experience suggests that many employees within the South African hospitality industry are not only poorly trained but also lack adequate

English literacy skills. Inadequate English literacy skills hinder an employee's ability to perform at the required level, to benefit from the training programmes that the employer implements and to progress within the organisation.

It is widely accepted within the South African hospitality industry that English is the language of communication. A certain level of English literacy is required for employees to communicate with their guests, superiors, subordinates and colleagues.

Many literacy studies in various industries have identified the need to improve the literacy skills of South African employees. Further, a number of projects have attempted to address adult literacy in various South African organisations with varying degrees of success (Hutton, 1992). These programmes predominantly have been top-down approaches with limited learner consultation and inadequate needs analyses (French, 1992). The focus has been on low level employees (see end note).

Consequently, there is a paucity of research on English literacy at a supervisory and management level. Within the South African hospitality industry supervisors and managers particularly, are presumed to be literate. Specifically, they are expected to be competent in all forms of English communication.

Managers rely more on language in accomplishing their day-to-day goals than they often acknowledge. As business becomes more complex, more global and more complicated by social and political pressures, managers are realising that their ability to work together with other people, to communicate with and to get things done through other people, represents a skill fundamental to business (Shaw & Weber, 1990).

Studies have repeatedly shown that managers spend most of their time in conversation with their subordinates, their peers, and their superiors. Estimates have varied from approximately 60% to 90%, but a great proportion of the time is spent in verbal communication. Management not only depends on conversation, management is conversation. All the activities regularly associated with management - setting goals, planning, organising, fostering teamwork, coaching, evaluating, leading, inspiring and controlling regularly take place in the acts of listening and speaking (Shaw & Weber, 1990). Furthermore, managers and supervisors are required to read and interpret reports and memoranda; to write reports to subordinates, colleagues and superiors; and to communicate orally to guests, colleagues, superiors and subordinates - all in English. In addition, supervisors and managers are expected to write and communicate training sessions, disciplinary documentation, job descriptions, performance appraisals and other related tasks in English.

Furthermore, in the hospitality industry, supervisors and managers are required to become assessors for the newly developed National Qualifications

programmes. They are required to read and understand guidance material and occupational standards, to fill in assessment forms and to access sources of information and learning resources for their candidates. To facilitate these duties the Hospitality Industries Training Board recommends that the supervisor or manager should have at least a Standard Eight English literacy level (Hospitality Industries Training Board, 1995).

Within the organisation in which this research was conducted there is no clear articulation of the standard of English communication required. However where supervisory or management employees are unable to communicate in English as expected, they are frequently labelled incompetent, uneducated or illiterate.

This research project aimed to explore the English communicative competency of supervisors and managers in two hotels within the South African hospitality industry. The researcher selected a multi-method approach to the investigation and sought both quantitative and qualitative data.

At the commencement of the research project the English communicative competency of the respondents was ascertained using a competency-based assessment tool. The respondents were then interviewed to determine their perspectives of their English communicative competency.

The following sub-issues were considered:

- the respondents' perceptions of their English communicative competency;
- the respondents' perceptions of how their English communicative competency impacts on their work situation;
- the respondents' perceptions of their learning needs;
- the respondents' recommendations for intervention.

It was expected that this study would provide insight into some of the issues surrounding English communicative competency in the South African hospitality industry. It was anticipated that recommendations emerging from this research may assist organisations in the industry in their attempts to address their education and training needs.

Note: For the purposes of this research *low level employees* refer to non-supervisory or management staff. The term *supervisors* refers to employees who personally direct the duties of others. They are seen as representing the lower and essentially operational levels of the management hierarchy. They are responsible for ensuring that plans are executed rather than developing plans, and for controlling subordinates through personal direction rather than through more removed administrative methods. The term *managers* refers to employees who represent a higher level of the management hierarchy, and although their duties are often similar to those of supervisors they spend more time in a co-ordinating function than a hands-on supervisor would. In reality the roles of managers and supervisors can be described in similar terms, the primary difference being that a gradual shift in emphasis occurs at each higher level of management (Barling, Fullagar and Bluen, 1986).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The concept of literacy

The concept of literacy has been the source of much definitional confusion and controversy (Ehringhaus, 1990). It has had a variety of definitions and meanings for different people in different contexts. Generally literacy is understood to mean the ability to read and write. One may question however: read and write what, how well, in what context, and for what purposes? People read and write for many reasons in a range of different contexts. Attempts to define literacy vary with questions of content, standard and context. Definitions range from attempts to define literacy as absolute to those that attempt to define literacy as relative (Lyster, 1992a).

In 1962 the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (1962, cited in Hunter & Harman, 1985) stated that a "basically literate" person can read and write, with understanding, a short simple statement on his everyday life. A later UNESCO definition emphasised that literacy needs to be defined in relation to its uses and purposes. Thus, a person is literate when he has the skills and knowledge that enable him to engage in those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his community (Hunter and Harman, 1985).

At the International Symposium for Literacy meeting in 1975, the focus was on the empowering and fundamentally political nature of literacy. Literacy was defined as:

> ... not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right (Bataille, 1976, p. 273).

The more recent definition from the International Symposium for Literacy incorporates reading, writing and numeracy as well as many other areas of skills, behaviour and knowledge such as participation, development and human relations (Lyster, 1992a).

Kazemek (1990) describes literacy as a relative phenomenon that can be determined only by individuals and cultural groups themselves. He asserts that 'literacy itself must be understood as a relative, personal, social, and contextual process' (Kazemek, 1990, p. 54). Lyster (1992a) explains that there is no simple, single competence that can be termed literacy. It is fundamentally a social activity; or primarily participation by a person in a set of socially

organised practices; a complex amalgam of social, linguistic and psychological processes (Levine, 1986).

> Literacy is a continuum ranging from the first hesitant formation of the letters of one's name to the ability to read and write abstract texts. It is as much about reading the label on a beer bottle as it is about reading *Great Expectations* (Lyster, 1992a, p. 11).

Describing literacy therefore should be seen as merely describing a cut-off point on a continuum. At the one end of the continuum a person may be considered literate because he can read and write simple sentences. At the other end of the continuum a person may be considered literate because he can read and understand Shakespeare or use and understand computers. The term literacy therefore should be used within a specific context.

Literacy definitions and standards also vary from country to country according to the literacy demands of that country and the resources available. A person defined as illiterate in a the USA for example, may pass as literate in a third world country that was trying to improve very basic literacy levels.

In South Africa definitions of literacy are complex because knowledge of a second language, mostly English, is as necessary for survival and development as the competence to read and write in an African language (Lyster, 1992a). Phillips & Wood (1992a) contend that being literate in a society like South Africa involves far more than being able to read and write in an indigenous

language or English. It entails:

- mastery of a full range of computational skills (incorporating number concept and numeracy);
- the cultural knowledge, in the broadest sense of the word, that enables the reader or writer to use the language and behaviours appropriate to a wide range of social situations;
- the integration of reading, writing, listening and speaking with reasoning and thinking;
- the flexibility to use language and computational skills to locate, organise and evaluate information from a variety of sources for the purpose of learning or interest; and
- the capacity to extend one's general knowledge base.

Literacy as a concept involves many disciplines and is viewed from different perspectives by the fields of industrial psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, linguistics and education. Academics within these disciplines focus on different aspects of literacy; for example: how literacy affects development and production, how literacy can be used to achieve liberation or modernisation, how thinking changes as a result of becoming literate and the processes involved in learning to read (Lyster, 1992a). There are many different ways of understanding literacy; these differences underlie various approaches to the field of literacy.

Three particular approaches to literacy described by Lyster (1992a) are the radical approach, the missionary approach and the functional approach. This

classification of literacy is by no means definitive or particularly discrete but is useful in presenting an understanding of how differently one can approach the concept of literacy. These approaches have all influenced each other and none has emerged in a vacuum. Each of them was a response to particular political, social and material conditions and developed in a particular historical context (Lyster, 1992a).

2.1.1 The missionary approach

In terms of this approach literacy is a means to salvation. Orality within a society means cognitive inferiority and illiterate people are seen as the unfortunate who need help (Lyster, 1992a). The emphasis in this approach is on the self-enhancing aspect of literacy. Literacy is seen as a state of grace (Kintgen, Kroll & Rose, 1988), and becoming literate is analogous with religious conversion (Morphet, 1992).

2.1.2 The radical approach

Within the radical approach (also referred to as the literacy for empowerment approach) illiterate people are regarded as dignified, competent, oppressed people for whom literacy is a tool in understanding and overcoming their oppression on a political and individual level. It rejects the notion that oral cultures or illiterate people are cognitively inferior (Lyster, 1992a). Within this approach literacy is seen as power and the emphasis is on the capacity of literacy to confer power on communities or individuals (Kintgen et al., 1988).

2.1.3 The functional approach

In this approach the emphasis is on the survival or pragmatic. Literacy is seen

as a form of adaptation (Kintgen et al., 1988) and as a requirement for modernisation and development (Lyster, 1992a).

Functional literacy originated in the United States army during the Second World War when it was realised that soldiers were more efficient if they could read instructions properly. The functional approach was thus based on the premise that individual and national productivity levels would be raised if literacy levels were raised. Literacy was seen as a capital investment in humans that had demonstrable social and economic returns (Lyster, 1992a).

The term functional literacy has since then been used much more loosely and has come to include almost any literacy work that attempts to link the process of reading and writing to needs in the real world. Most modern literacy approaches include a functional aspect in their work (Lyster, 1992a).

Functional literacy tasks have been conceptualised both as being limited to reading and writing (Valentine, 1986), and as including behaviours that are external to reading, such as supporting oneself (US Office of Education, 1969, cited in Kirsch & Guthrie, 1986). For example, according to Hunter and Harman (1979, p. 7) 'functional literacy' involves the 'possession of skills perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups to fulfil their own self-determined objectives ...'. Functional literacy has also been conceptualised as the application of reading and writing skills towards attaining goals that have survival value within specific cultures (Ehringhaus, 1990). What is relevant is the degree of literacy required for adequate functioning within a specific context in a specific culture or society.

In this study literacy is examined in a workplace that is, a real world setting where literacy relates to needs in the real world. Thus the functional approach that emphasises literacy for development and links literacy real world needs is adopted. This research does not focus on literacy in a religious or political sense hence the missionary and radical approaches to literacy are less relevant here.

Further, in this study the context in which literacy is examined is important. Literacy in this research, therefore, is viewed as a relative concept within a particular social context and entails a broad spectrum of skills as described by Kazemek (1990), Lyster (1992a) and Phillips and Wood (1992a).

2.2 English Second Language (ESL) Acquisition

In any country the use of language can be broadly divided into the following areas:

- Political: the language of government and administration, including health services and security forces.
- Legal: the language of the courts and of legal documents.
- Educational: the media of instruction.
- Science and technology: the language for access to international information.
- Trade and industry: the language of work places, trade unions, international and regional trade, local markets, domestic and farm services.

- Media: the language of the radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and advertisements.
- Social: the language of a community or cultural activities and of religion, sport and leisure, family and friends (Clifford and Kerfoot, 1992, p. 152).

In South Africa and internationally, English is generally considered a language of access (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992). Although the majority of South Africa's working population are African language speaking, English appears to have been adopted as the 'super official language' of the new South African government, local authorities and business (Price, 1997). English communication skills therefore, are crucial in all areas relating to political or economic power and particularly in the world of work.

2.2.1 Variables relating to ESL

ESL acquisition is a complex, multidimensional subject. There are a number of intervening variables that influence the success of second language learners. These relate primarily to the learners' motivation to learn, their opportunities for learning, or their ability to learn (Littlewood; 1984). Those variables researched and debated most extensively relate to first language literacy, affective, cognitive and cultural factors, as well as age.

2.2.1.1 First language literacy

For most South Africans English is learnt as a second language. Ideally learners should be relatively fluent readers and writers in their first language before learning to read and write in a second language such as English (Lyster,

1992b). Research indicates that strong first language literacy and schooling are the key factors in second language literacy acquisition. Although this is a widely accepted finding for children, it has been less widely accepted for adult literacy acquisition. Nevertheless, adult ESL literacy research indicates that it is equally relevant for adults. Adults who try to learn English without being literate in their first language experience many difficulties. Adults who start with becoming literate in their mother tongue experience positive consequences in the ESL literacy classroom. For example, it reduces affective barriers to English acquisition and thus allows for more rapid progress (Auerbach, 1996).

In South Africa learners usually have some literacy in their mother tongue from their early years of school. In most of the Department of Education and Training (DET) schools children were taught in their mother tongue or another vernacular for four years with English or Afrikaans as a subject (Smith, 1993). However, they very often moved on to learn English as a second language either at school or in order to survive in their daily lives, before they were sufficiently literate in their mother tongue (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992; Lyster, 1992b).

In addition, children were expected to move into the English medium understanding technical and scientific terms after limited experience of English (Smith, 1993). This was because English was seen as the language of education, power and work, and also because their mother tongue language teaching materials were often underdeveloped beyond a basic level (Lyster, 1992b).

The majority of children in DET schools were taught English through rote

learning and memorisation. This was partly due to their teachers lack of confidence in English and because many of the teachers had come through the same education system (Smith, 1993). As a result they mostly therefore had poor English reading and writing skills (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

2.2.1.2 Affective considerations

The affective domain of language includes many factors, for example, empathy, self-esteem, anxiety, attitudes, extroversion, inhibition, and tolerance for ambiguity (Brown, 1987; Littlewood, 1984). When learning a first language a young child is not aware that he is learning a language and is not inhibited or conscious of making mistakes whilst learning. This is quite different to the adult attempting to learn or improve his ability to speak a second language (Brown, 1987). For example, the struggle to make sense of print in an unfamiliar language is extremely demanding and usually discouraging (Clifford and Kerfoot, 1992).

In an environment where learners feel apprehensive or insecure there are likely to be psychological barriers to learning. In the typical language classroom learners are often asked to perform in a state of ignorance that may engender feelings of helplessness. The second language learning environment may cause learners to feel anxious and constrained (Littlewood, 1984).

Lightbown and Spada (1994) postulate that learners have an 'affective filter' that is an imaginary barrier that prevents learners from using or learning a new language. Thus, depending on the learner's state of mind or disposition, the filter limits what is attended to and what is acquired. The filter will be operating

when the learner is stressed, self-conscious, or unmotivated, and will be down when the learner is relaxed and motivated.

Katz (1996) reports that learning is more likely to occur in a supportive, positive learning environment. If learners fear being ridiculed or embarrassed, they focus more on self-protection than on learning. They hesitate to try out new skills, they pause and think before they answer questions especially if they are afraid the response might be criticised or, even worse, make them look stupid in front of their classmates. A sympathetic teacher and co-operative atmosphere has a supportive effect that has a significant impact on the learners' learning process (Littlewood, 1984).

2.2.1.3 Cognitive considerations

Learning a language is a cognitive process: it does not happen through imitation and repetition. Learners are active, they form their own ideas about how the language works, test these ideas out, and accept, reject or adapt to them (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

There have been a number of suggestions for cognitive factors that may influence success in second language learning, for example, general intelligence or more specifically language aptitude, or a person's strategy for learning. Learning success is also influenced by particular kinds of learning such as whether a person learns better from visual stimulus, from learning deductively (proceeding from rules to example) or inductively (discovering rules from examples) (Littlewood, 1984).

Cognitive psychologists view second language acquisition as the building up of knowledge systems that can eventually be called on automatically for speaking and understanding. At first learners have to pay attention to any aspect of the language that they are trying to understand or produce. Gradually through experience and practice learners become able to use certain parts of their knowledge so quickly and automatically that they are not aware that they are doing it. This frees them to focus on other aspects of the language that, in turn, gradually become automatic (McLaughlin, 1987).

In second language acquisition, receptive knowledge is usually greater than productive knowledge, that is, learners can understand and read more than they can say or write (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

2.2.1.4 Culture

Adult learning theory suggests that adults learn best when instruction is contextualised in their life experiences and related to their needs. A paradigm has emerged in which language is viewed not just as a set of isolated decoding skills to be aquired in an essentially similar universal process, but rather as a set of social practices that vary according to cultures and context, purposes and participants. Culture plays a role in learning in that learners' cultural familiarity with the learning content shapes their reading processes. Learners become proficient to the extent that instruction is connected to their background knowledge, life experiences and communicative processes (Auerbach, 1996).

Traditional approaches to language acquisition that focus on the learners'

acquisition of skills without consideration of culture disconnect language acquisition from the learners' knowledge and life experiences. Thus it is critical that language instruction is meaning-centred rather than mechanical and that content is relevant to the life experiences of the learners. Therefore culture-specific aspects of literacy must be taken into acount in language programming. Wherever possible teachers should be aware of culture-specific discourse practices, language uses and learners' cultures (Auerbach, 1996).

2.2.1.5 Age

Age is another well-established factor influencing second language learning. However, while for some it almost axiomatic that children learn a second language better than adults, a number of studies have shown otherwise (Littlewood, 1984).

2.2.2 Approaches to ESL

Clifford and Kerfoot (1992) describe a number of approaches to second language acquisition: the formalist structural approach, the functional approach, the competency-based approach, the natural growth approach, task-based process approaches and the popular education approach.

Those most relevant to this research are outlined briefly below. The formalist structural approach is relevant as it has been used in the education curriculum applied to schooling for the majority of South Africans including those who participated in this study. The functional approach and the competency-based approach are pertinent as they relate to the everyday lives and perceived needs of learners (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

2.2.2.1 The formalist structural approach

Within this approach language is defined as a system of sounds used for human communication. The sounds are arbitrarily assigned to objects, states and concepts to which they refer and these sounds are then combined to make sentences that form the main learning units of language (Brown, 1987).

This approach is applied to language teaching using behaviourist learning theory. Learning is characterised as habit formation, or the unconscious over-learning of language forms through meaningless, mechanical repetition based on stimulus-response, imitation and reinforcement. This theory is not concerned with how language expresses meaning (Brown, 1987). Oral techniques such as chorusing, language pattern drills, and pronunciation drills feature prominently. This approach was adopted by the Department of Education and Training in South Africa and as a result learning English for most South Africans has involved meaningless repetition through chorusing, pattern drills and substitution exercises (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

This approach has been strongly criticised particularly in relation to teaching adults. It is a mechanical approach that focuses on the acquisition of isolated skills without consideration for the social conditions of learners' lives. It disconnects the language acquisition from their knowledge, concerns and experiences (Auerbach, 1996). It is described as being demotivating and meaningless as learning does not take place within a context. It is also inappropriate for teaching a phonologically complex language such as English. Unfortunately in certain quarters in South Africa this approach is still being used extensively (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

2.2.2.2 The functional approach

The functional approach to adult learning is concerned with semantics (relating to meaning in language) and learners' needs, or what we use language for in real life (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992). It identifies as its key features: motivation, experience and learners' needs "... adult learners are profoundly influenced by past learning experience, present concerns and future prospects" (Nunan, 1988, p. 23).

This approach emphasises that for adults to learn effectively the content should be relevant. It should build on learners' experiences and it should be presented in ways that promote learning, reduce anxiety and enhance confidence. Learners' needs are thus an important consideration in devising programmes (Clifford & Kerfoot; 1992, Brown, 1987).

Within this approach the teacher is not seen as an unquestionable source of knowledge, authority and decision making. The teacher is expected to be a facilitator of learning who ensures a positive learning environment, who fosters learner participation and control, who is sensitive towards learners and ensures that content is relevant and accessible (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

While the functional approach was considered revolutionary when first introduced it has since been heavily criticised. It is seen to be a system that teaches according to learners' needs. It thereby avoids situating adult learning within a broader picture of power relations in society and obscures the role of other interest groups such as adult education programme providers, funders and teachers (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992). Nunan (1988) questions whether

functional literacy syllabi promote or restrict the ability to transfer learning as the syllabi are seen to fulfil a training function and result in restricted competence. He asserts that the functional approach with its narrowly prescriptive, non-negotiable syllabi has the potential to be too prescriptive. He further suggests that needs-based courses are seen to result in formulaic phrasebook English and do not develop learners' ability to generate spontaneous and communicative language (Nunan, 1988).

Despite the weaknesses of this approach it has succeeded in dramatically shifting the goal of language teaching from one of helping learners accumulate bits of grammar or rules to one of developing general communicative competence. It focuses on the development of underlying skills and knowledge needed for effective real-life communication (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

2.2.2.3 The competency-based approach

Like the functional approach the competency-based approach to language emerged in the United States in reaction to formalist structural approaches that were deemed inappropriate and ineffective for the needs of the country's immigrants and refugees. This approach attempted to make English second language courses more relevant to the everyday lives and perceived needs of these target groups (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

The competency-based approach views language in terms of how it can be used to carry out everyday tasks. It is semantically rather than linguistically based and focuses on what learners can do with language rather than what they know about it. The approach is based on the notion of competencies described in

section 2.3.

The principles for language teaching and learning underlying this approach are similar to those associated with the functional approach and include factors such as learner motivation and needs. Successful learning occurs when content is meaningful, useful and relevant to the learner. Context is considered vital and teaching items of grammar in isolation is avoided. Language is taught as and when it is needed in order to perform a specific task or competency (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

This approach does not advocate a particular method of teaching but allows the instructor freedom of choice over how competencies are tackled. This freedom allows the instructor to be eclectic and to adapt teaching to suit the pace and the needs of the individual learners (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992). According to the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) (1996), the competency-based approach emphasises core skills and their applications. It diminishes reliance on prescribed content and allows for curricular and programme variety. At the same time it helps clarify and establish standards for performance at different levels.

In South Africa increasing interest has been shown in the competency-based approach to language teaching for adults (Council of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), 1991).

It has a number of advantages:

- it presents learning in a meaningful way to teachers and students by stating

very clearly what will be learnt in terms of behavioural outcomes;

- the programmes are systematic and well organised, and the material is neatly packaged into modules; and
- assessment is uncomplicated as it is built into the performance of the competencies (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

However, the approach has also been criticised on ideological and linguistic grounds. From an ideological perspective the competency-based approach has been described as one that encourages passive, functional literacy rather than active, critical literacy; and that it prepares learners for limited, subservient roles in society. Linguists are concerned that the competency-based approach is concerned with the 'what' rather than the 'how', and that this will stifle language learning and instead engender mechanical, rote learning (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

The competency-based approach to language is still relatively new, particularly in the field of industrial psychology. The severe criticisms levelled at the approach suggest a need for caution.

2.3 English Communicative Competency

Within this study the researcher elected to focus on the communication skills of the participants rather than their general literacy. Thus instead of examining the broad perspective of literacy this study is concerned with communicating in English through reading, writing, speaking and listening. This will be referred to as *English communicative competency.*

Competence is however a contested area in industrial psychology, linguistic and educational circles and therefore will be defined and examined briefly.

A competency has been defined in numerous ways and is more than merely the correct performance of a task (Bellis, 1997). It has been described as:

- a task-oriented goal written in terms of behavioural objectives (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992);
- the capacity for sustained performance in a particular area (Hanrahan, 1996);.
- what people can do - that is, the outcomes of learning, or the ability to perform in different contexts and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to situations and tasks (IEB, 1996);
- a skill or cluster of skills executed within an indicated range or context, and to specific standards of performance, based on integrated knowledge and understanding and with the ability to transfer the skills to other related contexts (Bellis, 1997).

Different types of competencies are numerous and include various managerial competencies as well as competencies such as the ability to find, process and use information, the ability to solve complex problems, to use technology and to communicate. All are seen as essential for effective functioning in a modern economy (Meyer, 1995).

English communicative competence can be described as the ability to communicate in English in a variety of contexts (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992) or the

ability to use the language in its different forms in a variety of settings, taking into account relationships between speakers and differences in situations (Lightbown & Spada, 1994).

The assessment of competencies is a core area in Industrial Psychology. Training professionals have formulated training needs for organisations by assessing the level of competence of employees in a particular field, determining what the employee must be able to do to perform the task required of him, and then designing appropriate training programmes to address the skills' gap (Muchinsky, 1987). The field of psychometric testing for selection purposes has designed numerous way of measuring an individual's competencies and has used these results as selection criteria to predict a person's success in an organisation. For example:

- ability tests are used to measure a person's ability to perform skilled and semi-skilled mechanical jobs;
- tests of psychomotor ability have been devised to measure speed, co-ordination and other characteristics of physical responses; and
- performance tests have been used to measure the actual performance of a sample of work by an individual, for example, typing a letter (Barling et al., 1986).

2.4 Literacy education and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

Educational deficit in relation to White formal education is the condition of life for the majority of South Africans (Millar, 1991). The creation of the policy of a restrictive education system (in the form of 'Bantu education') deliberately

limited the participation of Black people in education at all levels (French, 1992). Consequently Black education has been characterised by overcrowding, poorly qualified teachers and insufficient resources. Coupled to this is the impoverished social climate (Van Niekerk, 1992) which includes poverty, high rates of malnutrition, poor health services, and sparse communication systems. As a result most Black students do not complete primary school; and those who do only acquire a very basic knowledge of reading and writing because the standard of teaching is so low (Council of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), 1991).

Recent estimates suggest that just under fifty percent of the South African adult population is functionally illiterate putting our literacy levels amongst the worst in the world (Andrews & Crow, 1993; South African Commercial and Catering Allied Workers' Union (SACCAWU), 1995). The latest World Competitiveness Report that compares fifteen emerging industrialised nations ranks South Africa twelfth in the category of adult literacy with an estimated rate of only 21,8 percent (Ryan, 1993). The recent National Training Strategy Initiative of South Africa Update (Eberlein, 1995) reports that currently two thirds of the South African workforce are illiterate and nearly ten percent of the population have no education at all. It is reported that 75 percent of people employed in industry in the Border-Kei area (the region in which this research took place) have a Standard 5 or below level of education and are functionally illiterate (Grenville, 1997; Hollands, 1996).

Over the past 45 years a number of non-government organisations have initiated projects to address the problems within the school system and to

educate adults whose education opportunities were severely limited. These projects experienced varying degrees of success although they did not by any means eliminate the education dilemma or skills shortage in South Africa (Hutton, 1992).

In 1995 a major initiative called the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was established to address the urgent reforms needed in South African education and training. One of the major challenges of the NQF is to create an equitable system of education and training. This will aim to accommodate those people who are in conventional schools, colleges and training programmes and will also include the many South Africans who have not enjoyed formal education and training (Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), 1995).

The NQF ensures that people are allowed to enter or access the education and training system at a point that depends on their prior learning. For example, a 35 year old woman who left school at age 12 with a Standard Five, and who now wants to study further, may not have to begin with a Standard Six. She will be assessed to see what she knows and what she can do and then she can enter the system at the point that suits her.

Existing education and training systems already have a number of generally recognised levels of achievement. For example, Standard 10 demarcates completion of high school. The NQF has established levels that can be equated to previously recognised qualifications from the existing education structures. Within the general education and training band, for example:

- Standard One is the equivalent of Adult Basic Training and Education (ABET) Level One;
- Standard Three is the equivalent of ABET Level Two;
- Standard Five is the equivalent of ABET Level Three; and
- Standard Seven is the equivalent of ABET Level Four (HSRC, 1995).

National Qualifications for the hospitality industry have been developed by the Hospitality Industries Training Board (HITB) in conjunction with industry. These qualifications provide a framework that outlines what employees at all levels in the hospitality industry should know and be able to do at work. This allows for the development of a workforce to nationally agreed standards (HITB, 1996).

Candidates are assessed against national competence standards. On achieving these standards candidates receive a National Qualification in Accommodation Services, Front of House, Food Preparation and Cooking, Food and Drink Service or General Service, at level one, two or three.

The HITB also trains managers and supervisors as assessors of National Qualifications candidates within their organisations. The assessor's primary role is to appraise the candidate's natural performance at work and judge whether or not the candidate has met the standards laid down in the National Qualifications. The assessors' responsibilities include:

- advising the candidates on National Qualifications;
- completing the necessary documentation;

- assessing the candidates against the laid down standard by collecting evidence of competent performance and knowledge, judging evidence and making a decision on competence;
- recording the assessment once competence is achieved; and
- providing feedback to the candidate (HITB, 1995).

In addition the assessor is required to read and understand the guidance material and occupational standards. He must fill in assessment forms and be able to access sources of National Qualifications information and learning resources for his candidate. To facilitate these duties it is recommended that the assessor has at least a Standard Eight English literacy level (HITB, 1995)

The HITB has reported good progress in its attempt to train managers and supervisors as assessors and in its number of National Qualifications certificates awarded to candidates in 1996.

2.5 ABET, ABE, Compensatory Education and Continuing Education

A number of terms are used for the interventions that attempt to address the education deficit of many South Africans. These include Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) or just Adult Basic Education (ABE), Compensatory Education and Continuing Education. Although descriptions and definitions differ, and the terms are used interchangeably, they can be explained as follows.

Adult Basic Education is the education of adults in areas of primary knowledge,

for example, literacy, numeracy, social and lifeskills, and the understanding of community life necessary to participation in society at a social, economic and political level (Elliot, 1997; Roup, 1994). At the one end of the spectrum ABE is supposed to include a number of essential subjects from History and Geography to Ethics and Spirituality. At the other end of the spectrum is the minimalist view that confines ABE programmes to the absolute minimum needed to enable learners to become functionally competent in terms of a core of literacy, language and computational competencies (Phillips & Wood, 1992b).

Compensatory Education for adults is the replacement of incomplete or missing initial education that is necessary because of disparities in educational provision. In South Africa these disparities have been largely across class and racial lines.

Continuing Education refers to specific educational programmes, both formal and non-formal, for adults who wish to continue their education beyond the point reached in the system of formal initial education during their youth; or to pursue education in new areas of skill or knowledge whilst maintaining the commitments of adulthood (Millar, 1991).

All of these approaches incorporate some form of literacy training and have as a core a balanced language programme. This includes activities that require the use of the four modes of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing; and the use of interpersonal, information and aesthetic language. In ABE, for example, the communication goals are central to a language and literacy programme and supersede other goals (Phillips & Wood, 1992b).

2.6 Workplace interventions

South Africa's education system has provided industry with poorly educated employees who are for the most part functionally illiterate. In a climate where Whites were groomed to lead while Blacks were groomed to follow, legislation ensured that the hiring, training, promoting and rewarding of employees favoured Whites resulting in a dearth of skilled Blacks. However poor basic skills among adults is a substantial and often unrecognised problem in industry and companies frequently disregard or are unaware of the impact of the associated consequences.

Furthermore, a recent world competitiveness report on nine factors identified as contributing to international competitiveness in 15 industrialising countries, South Africa was rated worst with regard to the management and development of people (Andrews & Crow, 1993).

Training at work in South Africa is generally provided for job-skills only while more than one in two workers do not have the basic general education needed to benefit from training programmes beyond a basic level. This inadequate education limits a person's capacity to improve his skills on the job (Grenville, 1997). Correspondingly training results are often disappointing (Kraak, 1988). Broad-based educational skills are not built into training programmes and such programmes do not make provision for second language learners or workers who are products of a highly inferior education system (SACCAWU, 1995).

The hospitality industry, for example, is a labour-intensive service industry,

dependent for survival on the availability of good quality employees to deliver, operate and manage its products (Amoah & Baum, 1997). However, many employers in this industry do not believe that they have to train their staff and contribute financially to it (Moth, 1997).

Employees are beginning to demand training and insist that company training programmes include basic education to ensure that they have the requisite levels of literacy, numeracy and general education to fulfil their career desires in the organisation (SACCAWU, 1995). However, companies are usually unwilling to pay for general education of the workforce in order to prepare them for training as they believe that this is the responsibility of the State (National Training Board, 1994).

Through necessity some organisations have recently examined the literacy levels of their employees and the statistics reveal that the averages are alarmingly low (Katz, 1994). Some employers have moved to replace illiterate employees with new employees who have several years of schooling, thus marginalising the problem. Other employers are accepting the responsibility to extend opportunities for self-development to the most disadvantaged members of their workforce and have introduced literacy training programmes (Phillips & Wood, 1992a).

However, there have been notable failures among such programmes implemented in South African industries. The most dramatic and expensive have been management-initiated programmes for employees (French, 1989). A number of researchers have detailed the reasons why ambitious industrial

literacy programmes have disappointed and have suggested a number of important issues that need to be considered.

2.6.1 Top down approaches

Literacy has traditionally been seen as a neutral skill that could be imparted to would-be learners to develop them, thus programmes have been imposed on learners in a paternalistic way. For example, a national literacy campaign initiated in Tanzania in 1971 was a top down measure: it focused entirely on enhancing productivity and integrating learners into the national political system. As evaluators noted, it never assessed or addressed the local needs of the learners (Mundy, 1993).

Lurie (1990) argues that it is not appropriate for management to test workers to establish their literacy levels and then to impose a programme on them. Problems associated with the failure of literacy programmes in industry are related to training management's ignorance about literacy issues, workers' literacy needs and effective practices (Hutton, 1992). It is necessary to move away from these paternalistic approaches. Top-down approaches to literacy projects have led to confusion, resentment and even resistance, and to a failure on the part of the learners to control their own learning (Hutton, 1992).

2.6.2 The adult learner

Teaching adults is a complex process and is not simply *doing-what-one-would-do-for-children-only-for-older-people.* The process is different, the process of teaching is different and the learners are different (HITB, 1996). The adult learner is typically very conscious of his own dignity but also rather intimidated

by the prospect of 'going to school'. Where a child is dependant on people, an adult is independent, capable of making decisions and managing his life (Knowles, 1980). However, many literacy courses are insulting to adults and bear little relation to workers' life and work situations (COSATU, 1991). A primary focus of literacy programmes should be to build the confidence, dignity and respect of the learners. The concerns, difficulties and interests of the individuals and communities in which they live should be taken into account (Lurie, 1990).

In industrial situations in South Africa employees are often not given recognition, respect, responsibility or opportunity to solve problems or be involved in decision making processes. In addition there has been limited trade union involvement in planning, implementing and monitoring many literacy courses. This has resulted in the failure of courses because workers have questioned the usefulness of participating in literacy programmes which they have been unable to influence (COSATU, 1991). COSATU (1991) now insists that trade unions are involved in the planning and running of literacy courses and other Adult Basic Education programmes.

2.6.3 Involving the learner

The provision of literacy instruction is a complex task and it is essential to recognise differences in types of literacy needs and types of learners (Hayes & Valentine, 1989). Most literacy needs analyses that have been conducted in the past have been quantitative and statistical. The advantage of this approach has been the relative ease of test administration. In addition the results appear to provide valid and reliable data for learner evaluation. However, Lurie (1990)

argues that, although useful, such analyses should be utilised sensitively and critically and in conjunction with a range of other approaches.

The literature suggests that:

- a needs assessment can be accurate only if information about literacy demands is obtained directly from the learners; and
- students themselves yield valuable information for the design of literacy instruction (Hayes & Valentine, 1989).

If a literacy programme contributes to a person being better able to function and improve the quality of his life it is essential to speak to those learners who are to receive literacy education to discover what their perceptions and feelings are. Adult educators are beginning to realise that dispassionately defining literacy skills has little to do with the way adults live and relate to their world (Dame, 1996; Lurie, 1990).

Adult education should be essentially consumer-driven and client responsive rather than producer driven. It should be characterised by flexibility and responsiveness to individual, group and community needs (Cooper, Velde and Gerber, 1995). Cooper *et al.* (1995) emphasise that course design and delivery should be based on consumer needs. Educators are able too easily to impose their personal perception of students through the design and management of instructional activities.

Hayes & Valentine (1989) assert that a person's need to learn represents a combination of demand (the requirement that a task be done by an individual

without assistance) and skill deficiency (the inability to do it). An overemphasis on the latter can lead to assumptions that usurp the learners' rights to define their own learning goals and cause the self-perceived needs of learners to go unmet. Only learners possess the information needed to complete the needs' equation and only learners are in a position to define functional literacy needs within the context of their own lives and aspirations.

> Providing learners with the opportunity to define their own functional literacy needs can promote an attitude among both learners and teachers that learners' concerns and experiences are of central importance in instruction, leading to greater mutual respect, enhanced learner self esteem, increased motivation, and, ultimately, improved literacy education (Hayes & Valentine, 1989, p.14).

Wedepohl (1984) explained that an important component in examining industrial training was the perspective of the student undergoing the courses. Future research of this aspect was strongly indicated.

A substantial amount of the research on participation in adult education has shown the lack of interest in education among adults, particularly those from low socio-economic classes (Ziegahn, 1992). However other research has emphasised the importance of interest and involvement of adults to the education process.

Ziegahn (1992) describes studies that suggest that adults were positive towards learning when:

- they successfully learned what they valued;
- they were interested in what they were learning;
- they had some form of personal control over what they were learning; and
- they found pleasure in what they were learning.

Katz (1996) argues that people learn only when they perceive a need to learn. It is essential therefore to find out what the learners think and feel if one is to embark on any form of adult education. Ziegahn (1992) recommends that further qualitative research should investigate how communities perceive and engage in literacy learning.

> Educators and learners together must construct a vision of literacy education that transcends the classroom and allows adults to pursue learning on their own terms (Ziegahn, 1992, p. 48).

In research conducted by Cooper, *et al.* (1995) adult educators suggested that adult courses should contain certain characteristics. They should:

- be flexible in course design and delivery;
- be multidisciplinary in nature;
- provide for the upgrading of knowledge and skills;
- recognise prior learning and experience;
- be tailored to meet the needs of particular client groups; and
- allow for appropriate field placements in a diverse range of government, industry and private institutions.

It was also emphasised that there was a need for adult educators to understand the different adult learning styles and to have an appreciation for the wide backgrounds that adult learners in an industry setting come from. Aulich (1992, cited in Cooper *et al.*, 1995) stressed that training programmes should accommodate the working conditions of potential clients with maximum flexibility in modes of study and forms of assessment.

The process of participative planning and decision making in a literacy programme can be tedious, frustrating and lengthy but tends to lead to successful outcomes. It is not worth taking a short cut to arrive more expediently at the product (Van Niekerk, 1996). Eberlein (1995) stresses that in South Africa today the manner in which an objective is striven for is often more important than its actual achievement. 'The importance of the process by which an objective is achieved to the acceptance of the new achievement cannot be over-emphasised' (Eberlein, 1995, p. 1).

This review of the literature has outlined the definitions, concepts and approaches referred to in this research, namely, English literacy, communicative competency and second language acquisition, Adult Basic Education and the National Qualifications Framework. It has also described the status of education and training in South Africa and attempts to address related problems at an organisational level.

This research focuses on English communicative competency: the ability to use the English language in all its forms in a variety of different settings. It is apparent from the literature that the ability to communicate in English is

crucial to employees in South African organisations, particularly within the management echelons. However, the majority of South African employees, for whom English is a second language, have poor English communication skills as a result of their highly inferior education.

Furthermore, as detailed above, the average employer has been reluctant to provide training for the workforce in areas other than job-specific skills, and literacy programmes that have been conducted have been predominantly unsuccessful. The literature shows that it is critical that literacy programmes should be consumer-driven, client-responsive and embrace the needs and perceptions of the learners.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore issues around the English communicative competency of supervisory and management employees within the South African hospitality industry. This research was primarily exploratory. An exploratory study is one in which the researcher attempts to find out what is happening, seeks new insights and asks questions or tries to assess a phenomenon in a new light (Robson, 1997).

The researcher sought to draw attention to some of the complexities involved in a real world or real life situation; in other words to conduct real world research that has real world value - to study a problem arising from the field leading to tangible and useful ideas (Robson, 1997). Robson asserts that most real world research produces data which call for quantitative and qualitative methods of study. The researcher selected such a multi-method approach and sought both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative methods involve data represented by numbers or data that can be transformed into numbers (Robson, 1997). In this study it was necessary to establish a relatively objective baseline measurement of the employees' English communicative competency. A quantitative assessment, the Prolit

English Written Assessment Test, was used for this purpose.

Qualitative methodology, in the broadest sense refers to 'research that produces descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour' (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 5). Qualitative methods involve a subjective approach that aims to understand behaviour and create new meanings from it. These methods are appropriate when exploring a phenomenon about which little is known. Within the South African hospitality industry there is a minimal amount of research and limited knowledge of employees' views and perceptions of their English communicative competency, particularly at a management and supervisory level. Qualitative research methods therefore are particularly appropriate to this study.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted yielding qualitative data. Robson (1997) explains that interviews lend themselves well to be used in combination with other methods in a multi-method approach. It was decided that the combination of interviews and tests would provide useful complementary information giving valuable insight into the issues the researcher wished to explore.

The main advantage of employing multiple methods is commonly cited as permitting triangulation (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; Robson, 1997), performed in social research by using multiple methods and different sources, investigators or theories. Multiple methods can help by addressing different but complementary questions within a study. Robson (1997) also suggests

that multiple methods can be used in a complementary fashion to enhance interpretability. For example, qualitative information may be the major outcome of a study but it can be enhanced by supportive or complementary quantitative data.

However, Robson (1997) cautions that taking a multi-method stance involving the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data is likely to antagonise both those of scientistic and humanistic persuasion. There are also strongly held views that the divide between qualitative and quantitative represents an ideological divide and that they should not be used together. However, according to Robson (1997) many of these differences are more apparent than real and that there is in practice a considerable underlying unity of purpose. There are situations where a quantitative approach is called for and others where a qualitative naturalistic study is appropriate. There are still others which "will even better served by a marriage of the two traditions" (Bryman, 1988, p. 173) thus enabling the enquirer to mix and match methods according to what best fits a particular study.

This study adopted this "marriage" in order to:

- establish a relatively objective baseline measurement of English communicative competency; and
- explore employees' views and perceptions of this competency.

3.1 Sample and Setting

The research was conducted with employees from two hotels within the former Border Region of the Eastern Cape. Both hotels are owned and managed by the same organization (hereafter referred to as "the Company"): a large international hotel group that owns and manages hotels and luxury resorts in Southern Africa and has approximately 7 400 hotel rooms throughout the region.

The hospitality industry was selected because the nature of the service it provides requires that the majority of the employees are competent in English communication. From the researcher's experience in this industry it is evident that despite this requirement, employees' level of English communicative competency is generally inadequate.

These two hotels were selected because they represented a typical example of a workplace in which literacy levels are low, communication limited and service standards inadequate. Further these two hotels were considering upgrading the education levels of their employees. This process provided an opportunity to explore English communicative competency in an appropriate setting.

Prior to the commencement of the study the researcher met with the Company management and shop stewards. It was explained that the Company was investigating the possibility of introducing a programme to improve the education of employees in the workplace, and that the first step in the process

was to assess the level of education of staff at all levels within the organization. Once agreement about the process had been reached, employees were approached individually and asked if they would volunteer for such an assessment. Forty-eight employees at various levels within the organization ranging from cleaner to manager volunteered to participate in the research. All forty-eight employees underwent the quantitative assessment. Of these forty-eight people, nineteen held a supervisory or management position. Thirteen people in this sub-group of nineteen supervisors and managers were interviewed: this included one General Manager, four managers and one supervisor from the Food and Beverage Department, two managers and two supervisors from the Rooms Department (Reception and Housekeeping), and three management trainees.

At the time when the assessments had been completed and thirteen interviews had been conducted, a wage dispute was declared between the Company and the Trade Union with which the Company has a recognition agreement. Industrial action that included several work stoppages and a lockout ensued. It was therefore decided not to continue with the interviews as it would have been insensitive to the staff and the Company to approach employees at this stage. Also, the context in which the interviews would have taken place would not have been usual and the resultant data would have been unreliable.

Bless and Kathuria (1993) caution that one of the pitfalls in research is biased sampling. It is very difficult to achieve representative sampling from a known

population in real world research and thereby generalise the results to the greater population, because of the practical and ethical problems involved (Robson, 1997). The researcher ensured that the employees were aware that they had the right to participate or not to participate in the study. While this may not eliminate bias completely, it prevented the researcher from selecting participants to meet her hypothesis. Further, from an ethical perspective the researcher ensured that no overt or covert penalties for non-participation existed (Robson, 1997).

The researcher acknowledges that the small sample size and variables such as the hotels' client base, geographical locations and the specific mother tongue of the participants limit the generalisability of the study. However, the purpose of the research was to explore the issues involved in English communicative competency and not to attempt to generalize the results to the greater population.

3.2 Quantitative assessment

To establish a relatively objective baseline measure of the English communicative competency of the participants, specifically in reading and writing, a quantitative assessment was conducted. The assessment was administered by two facilitators from the Siyaphambili Institute for Human Resource Development. This Institute is an independent Adult Education Institute that operates in conjunction with Project Literacy, a national Educational Trust.

The assessments took place in a conference setting in three groups over a period of two months. A total of forty-eight employees was assessed. It was recognised that employees might be afraid and embarrassed to reveal their education levels as this might hinder their opportunities for promotion and training, or their colleagues might ridicule them. To minimise any such psychological stress the facilitators assured the employees that the results of the assessment would remain confidential, that they would be entitled to see their results, but that their superiors would not see their individual results.

The assessment tool used was the Prolit English Written Assessment Test (a copy of the assessment is contained in Appendix I). The Institute uses the Prolit to establish the education level of employees so that they can be placed in a class appropriate to their needs in the Institute's Adult Basic Education programme.

The assessment was developed by the literacy organization Project Literacy in consultation with the Human Sciences Research Council, the National Literacy Cooperation and the Independent Examinations Board. It was developed specifically to evaluate the English competency of adult learners so that the learners could be placed at the correct entry level in literacy classes. The assessment was refined over a period of two years at the Project Literacy Centre in Pretoria. During this time the procedures were adapted a number of times to reaffirm which outcomes needed to be met for each level or module within the syllabus (J. Rabinowitz, personal communication, 7 October 1997).

Although information is not available on the technical validity of the assessment, the face validity of the assessment can be commented on. Face validity refers to whether the assessment looks valid to the administrators who decide on its use, the examinees who take the test and other technically untrained observers (Anastasi, 1988). It pertains to the degree to which the assessment appears, on the basis of subjective evaluation, to serve its purpose (Huysamen, 1987).

Face validity is a necessary feature for the purpose of gaining the rapport of the examinees. If an assessment appears to be irrelevant to them in terms of the stated purpose they may show signs of poor cooperation, negativism and resistance (Huysamen, 1987). Face validity is improved if test items appear relevant and plausible in the particular setting in which they will be used (Anastasi, 1988).

In the interviews the participants were asked what they thought about the assessment. Although most commented that it was difficult, none of them reported that they felt it was irrelevant or did not test what they expected it to test. It was evident from the items in the test that it not only tested their communicative competency but also related to the participants' experiences. The test items required the participants to respond to questions about their families, daily life, the New South Africa and equipment with which they should be familiar.

This assessment has been used by the Siyaphambile Institute to test

education levels of approximately 10 000 employees from various organizations in the Eastern Cape. The results of the tests have been used to place learners in literacy classes appropriate to their level of English. The test administrators and literacy class teachers have reported that the test is remarkably accurate in this regard.

For the purposes of this study the section of the assessment designed to establish the English reading and writing competency of the testees was used. It is aimed at people for whom English is a second or third language. The assessment is skills or competency based and assesses various outcomes at particular levels.

During the testing the test facilitators were not permitted to assist the participants with responding to answers. However, participants were encouraged to ask questions if they did not understand what was expected of them in any particular question. Where the participant was not able to complete the first page, the alternative assessment for first language proficiency (mother tongue) was given to him and subsequently completed. The tests were marked by facilitators from the Institute: two people marked the papers and a third person checked their marking to ensure that the scores were correct.

Literacy tests generally are criticised because they sample a very narrow range of skills, and the skills are often measured out of the context in which they are most used. The test used in this study can be criticised on these grounds.

The results of the assessment, however, were not intended to provide a complete and final measurement of the employees' English reading and writing abilities. The test results were used only to indicate the level of reading and writing competencies of the employees and an approximate general level of education.

3.3 Interviews

Over a period of three months the researcher interviewed thirteen management and supervisory employees. Armstrong (1988, p. 250) defines interviews as 'conversations with a purpose'. Interviews lend themselves well to be used in combination with other methods in a multi-method approach (Robson, 1997).

The study made use of a semi-structured or guided type of interview. With this style of interviewing the questions are prepared beforehand to aid the interviewer. However the interviewer is free to modify their order based upon her perception of what seems most appropriate in the context of the conversation (Robson, 1997). Set questions for an interview help to ensure responses to the same item from all cases and keep the investigator from collecting only the unique, exceptional or unusual facts particularly interesting to her (Flippo, 1984).

The interviews were conducted individually and in private. Shorthand notes were taken during each interview session with the respondents' permission.

The notes were transcribed immediately after the interview. The interviewer was also in a position to observe and note the non-verbal language of the interviewee, for example, a look of discomfort or a lengthy silence.

The interviews were conducted in a relaxed conversational manner where questions were asked in a non-directive, non-judgmental manner. It was indicated to the employees that their opinions and feelings about the subject were valued. The employees relaxed and appeared to speak with ease as the interviewer assured them that she wanted to find out their opinions and that she valued what they thought. All the people interviewed were assured that their responses to the questions would remain confidential.

The interview questions were designed to stimulate and elicit the participants' own insight and experience. In line with the proponents of qualitative research, the study relied on open-ended questions that have been found to yield more valid and reliable information than closed questions. Open-ended questions are also particularly suited to obtain information about what people know, intend to do or have done and about their explanations for these actions. Cohen and Manion (1989, p. 313) list the advantages of open-ended questions:

> they are flexible; they allow the interviewer to probe so that he may go into more depth if he chooses, or clear up any misunderstandings; they enable the interviewer to test the limits of a respondent's knowledge; they encourage co-operation and

> rapport; and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes. Open-ended situations can also result in unexpected or unanticipated answers that may suggest hitherto unthought-of relationships of hypotheses.

This qualitative approach to questioning elicited free and spontaneous answers from the respondents rather than forced or limited answers that may have resulted from closed questions or questions with alternative answers. Only where the employees seemed confused by the question did the interviewer restate the question. True-to-life examples were used wherever possible to help the employees relate to what was being asked. The interviewer also used probes to get the interviewee to expand on a response when it was felt she had more to give (Robson, 1997).

Interview questions generally followed a conventional sequence of questions for a semi-structured interview (Robson, 1997). First, in the introductory stage, the researcher introduced herself, explained the purpose of the interview, assured confidentiality and asked permission to make notes. Thereafter non-threatening questions about work were asked to put the employee at ease. The main body of the interview included questions covering the primary purpose of the interview. Specific questions about the person's English education were asked, for example, 'when did you first learn English?', and 'when did you first have to use English outside the school situation?' This was followed up by questions about how the employees perceived English and what they felt was the most difficult part of the language. At this point the

researcher asked in what ways they needed to use English at work and how easy or difficult they found these tasks requiring English to be. The employees were asked about the in-house training courses that they had attended and what difficulties they had experienced studying the course content in English.

The researcher then described a scenario to the employee that was relevant to their job, and asked questions relating to this. For example:

> You are asked to write a report motivating the need for two additional staff members in your department. What are your reactions when you are required to do this? What difficulties do you experience? Whom would you ask for help?

The researcher asked if the employees were studying part-time and if they would be interested in furthering their education. The employees were asked what they would study if given the opportunity; and if they would be interested in participating in an education programme organised by the Company. Finally they were asked how they suggested the Company should embark on such a programme.

By this stage of the interview most respondents had already volunteered information about their colleagues' perceptions of English and their interest in further education. If not, the researcher asked for this information directly.

The interviews were brought to a close with a few straight-forward questions to

defuse any tensions that might have built up. At the end of the interview the employees were given the opportunity to ask questions or comment about what had been discussed. Where respondents continued to introduce relevant information after the interviewer had indicated that the interview had ended, described by Robson (1997) as the 'hand on the door phenomenon', the interviewer allowed them to continue within reason so that further interesting material could be recorded.

The researcher was aware that 'any real world study must obviously take serious note of real world constraints' (Robson, 1997, p. 24). It was important to ensure the validity of the information obtained in the interviews. Cohen and Manion (1985) argue that the most practical way to achieving validity is to minimise the amount of bias. Guba and Lincoln (1981) assert that interviews are difficult to replicate since the data collection device is a human being and the techniques are also highly vulnerable to interviewer bias. In this research study there was only one interviewer which according to Miles (1979, cited in Schmitt, 1991) may increase the scope for a biased analysis of data collected. He further adds that the sole interviewer is nearly totally responsible for the validity, quality and accuracy of the data. With this is mind the interviewer avoided the tendency to seek answers that supported her preconceived notions. Misperceptions of what the employee said and misunderstandings by respondents of what was being asked were avoided as much as possible by clarifying questions and answers whenever either party felt unsure. In the formulation of the questions care was taken so that the question content was not biased or loaded in one direction without accompanying questions to

balance the emphasis.

Castle (1990) asserts that validity results from interpersonal sensitivity. The researcher was constantly aware of her position and the potential reactivity of participants in the research process. The researcher used as many strategies as possible to encourage frank participation, openness and honesty. The research was voluntary and people were free to participate. The participants were told the aims of the research and throughout the interviews the researcher was open about her own intentions, perceptions and feelings.

According to Schmitt (1991) the researcher should be aware that interviews are dynamic. Bearing this in mind the interviewer was mindful that the interview could take a new direction if not carefully monitored. Where the employee strayed to interesting information the interviewer allowed it, yet at the same time ensured that all planned questions were covered.

The participants were interviewed in English although English is not their first language. Because the interviews sought to explore the participants' views and perceptions of their English communicative competency the researcher consciously decided to use English as a mode of communication. The participants may have communicated more freely in their vernacular but translating the interview material may well have lost some of the information sought for an exploratory study of this nature.

3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained through measuring the English reading and writing levels of the respondents with the Prolit English Written Assessment Test was recorded and summarised in a histogram. This is presented as Figure 1 in Chapter Four.

The researcher's interview notes were rewritten immediately after each interview. During and after the data collection phase data analysis was performed as an ongoing process. The researcher familiarised herself with the verbatim interview data, reading as objectively as possible, and attempted to place herself in the participants' real world and view the interview data from their perspectives.

In order to identify respondents' views and perceptions major themes were derived from the interview notes and categorised. This method of analysis is described by Leicester (1987, in Cooper *et al.,* 1995) as a creative process used to uncover general patterns and themes that are then categorised in order to make careful considered judgements about what is really significant in the data. Robson (1997) describes this process as an issues analysis where the issues or themes can be used as a means of organising and selecting material.

Coding was used to identify the themes. Codes were developed from the research questions, the key concepts involved, and the themes identified in the data collection phase of the research.

Robson (1997) describes a code as a symbol applied to a group of words to classify or categorise them. Codes are organising devices that allow the researcher to find and then collect all instances of a particular kind. The researcher applied Miles and Huberman's (1984) first and second level coding strategies. First level coding was used to attach labels to groups of words in the interview transcripts. Thereafter second level coding grouped the initial codes into a smaller number of themes. After the data was made more manageable through coding, a two-dimensional matrix was drawn up to display the data in a form from which valid conclusions could be drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The researcher chose not to quantify the interview data for fear of losing the idiosyncrasies and nuances resulting from the interaction with the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The biographical data of the respondents and the results of the assessment test are presented first. Thereafter the qualitative results are reported under the major themes that emerged from the interviews with the respondents.

4.1 Biographical data

The respondents were aged between 25 and 44 years old with the average age being 33. Their length of service ranged between 1 and 14 years, with an average of 7.6 years. Seven women and six men were interviewed.

Of the thirteen respondents, three are employed at a supervisory level, seven at a middle-management level, and three as management trainees. The majority of the respondents joined the Company after leaving school and have worked through the ranks to their current management positions.

The recorded education level of the participants ranged from Standard Six to Standard Ten. It must be noted however that the recorded level of education is not always checked during the recruitment process, and therefore, as admitted by one of the employees in the interviews, is not always accurate.

4.2 English education of the respondents

All of the respondents were educated at Department of Education and Training schools in various villages in the Eastern Cape. The respondents said that they were first taught English as a school subject from Sub A, Sub B or Standard One; at this stage all other subjects were taught in Xhosa. From Standard Six, Seven or Eight they were taught all of their subjects in English. Most of the respondents explained that they never spoke English outside school as there were no English-speaking people in the rural areas where they lived. Two respondents had spent some time with English-speaking families when they were in High School. One person explained that she first spoke English outside the classroom when she participated in debating competitions with other schools. She declared that there was no time to practise English during class as the teacher spoke all the time and the students listened. She added that she now realises that the teacher did not speak very good English.

The first time the majority of the participants used English outside the classroom was in their first job. One respondent detailed how he was disadvantaged generally at school and that his Standard Ten was not equal to the researcher's Standard Ten. He emphasised that the teachers were not qualified; he realised this when his Sub A teachers joined him in Standard Ten. He also explained how his parents could not help him at school as he now helps his children, as his parents are illiterate.

4.3 Prolit English Written Assessment results

Figure I displays the recorded education levels and the English reading and writing levels of the respondents as measured by the Prolit English Written Assessment. Although the English reading and writing levels should be quoted according to the ABET level, for clarity the levels have been displayed according to the equivalent National Education school standard.

The levels referred to are:

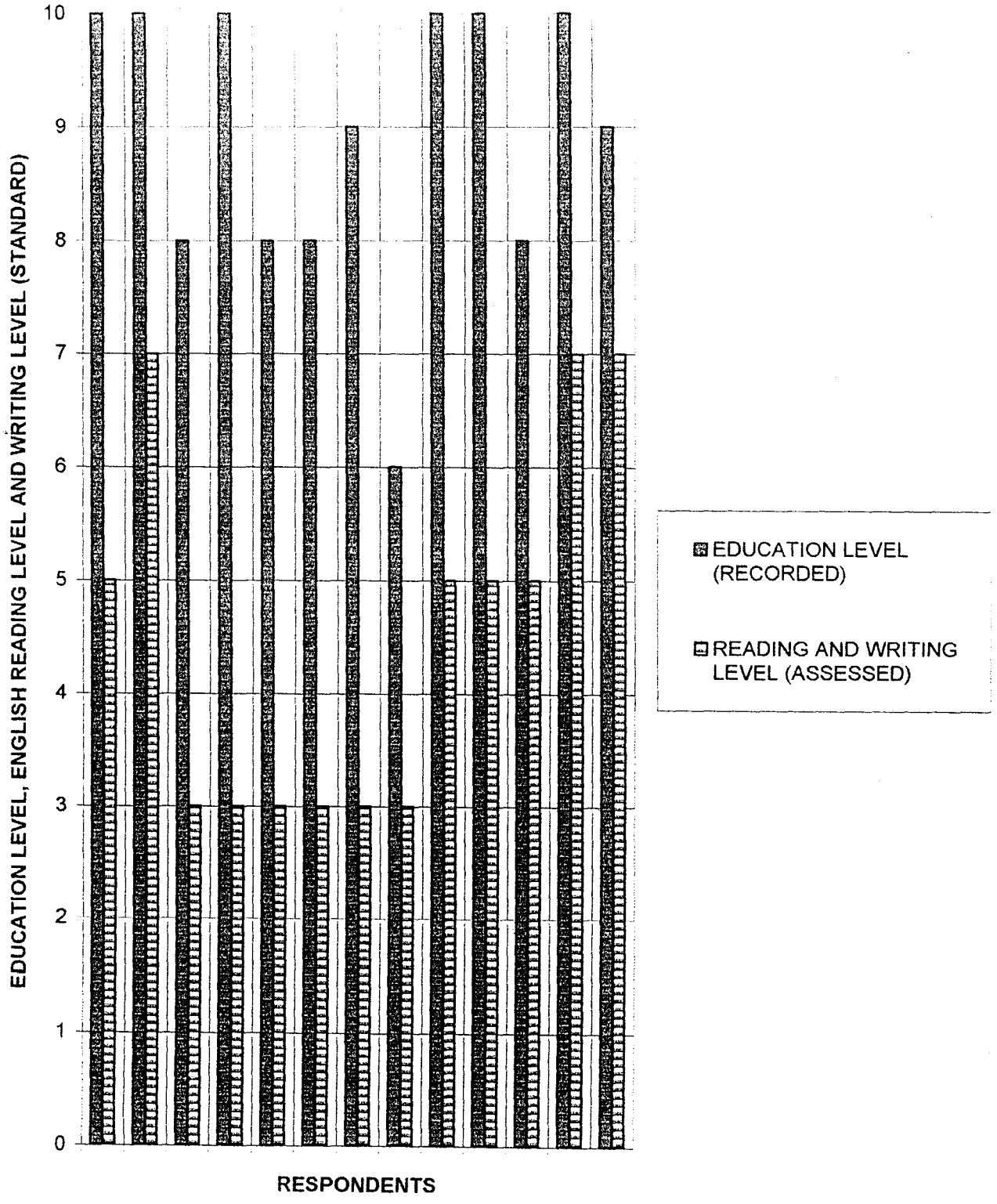
- ABET Level 2 = Standard 3 education level,
- ABET Level 3 = Standard 5 education level,
- ABET Level 4 = Standard 7 education level.

The results of the assessment illustrate that the English reading and writing competencies are lower than the recorded education level for all of the respondents. It is also evident that the lower the respondents' recorded education level, the lower their English reading and writing level.

4.4 Comparison between the written assessment and self assessment results

The results of the Prolit English Written Assessment were compared with the respondents' views of their own English communication abilities as expressed in the interviews.

FIGURE I
EDUCATION LEVEL, ENGLISH READING LEVEL AND WRITING LEVEL OF THE RESPONDENTS



All of the respondents who scored the lowest on the assessment, that is, Level Two, described their English as good. However, when asked specifically what they thought about writing in English, most of them admitted that it was difficult. They further explained that the difficulties they experienced involved spelling, grammar, tenses, sentence structure, and writing reports. The respondents who were evaluated as Level Three on the assessment all asserted that writing in English was easy but described either speaking or hearing English as the most difficult parts of the language. The highest scorers on the assessment, Level Four, explained that they had no concerns about writing in English, but found speaking the most difficult part of the English language. They also expressed an interest in improving their education and detailed a variety of subject preferences: these are explained in Section 4.8.

4.5 The respondents' perception of their English writing ability

The employees were asked about their experiences of writing in English. One third of the respondents indicated that writing in English was easy, of whom two said specifically that writing is the easiest part of English and one stated that writing reports in English is boring but easy. Three respondents said that writing is 'OK or no problem', but commented that spelling is troublesome and that they struggled more with achieving good content than good style. Another third of the respondents admitted that writing in English is difficult. One

person explained that it is because he thinks fast but cannot write fast, and that the tenses and grammar are a particular problem. Two respondents said they were not sure how good their English writing ability was.

4.6 English communication at work

The respondents described a wide variety of tasks they are expected to perform at work in which they are required to use English. The tasks common to all the respondents included:

- writing letters to guests;
- writing memoranda to staff and customers;
- completing forms;
- writing reports on staff, budgets and training;
- writing and communicating performance appraisals and counselling sessions for staff;
- writing allegations, findings and sanctions for disciplinary enquiries;
- writing notes in the hand-over book for the next person on duty;
- completing requisitions for maintenance or for the stores;
- writing statements for security related incidents and reports of incidents that occurred whilst on duty;
- recording meeting minutes;
- attending training courses; and
- conducting training sessions for their staff.

The management trainees added that they also wrote recipes and Hotel School examinations. The respondents from the Food and Beverage department noted that they regularly wrote banqueting correspondence such as quotations to guests for functions.

All of the respondents reported that they spoke to colleagues, superiors and guests in English on a daily basis and were also expected to read notices, reports and memoranda from their colleagues and superiors regularly.

Some of the respondents expressed their views about the tasks they were required to perform. The views were varied. The respondents who experienced some difficulties explained that:

> It was difficult in the beginning, now I get used to it. TV and reading the paper helps.
>
> The reports are not that difficult but not easy, I have to give extra effort.
>
> The minutes are not easy, I just do it myself. I've never been shown how to do minutes.

The respondents who expressed confidence about doing the tasks expected of them explained that:

It's no problem, you never told me there was a problem.

The quotations are easy, I just do it out of my head. I'm not sure if my manager checks it. Memos are not difficult, I do them often.

Writing front office reports is boring but easy.

4.7 The respondents' perceptions of their learning needs

Most the respondents were interested to a certain degree in furthering their education. Two of the low scorers were the only respondents who were clearly negative towards a suggestion that the company assist in furthering their education. Responses from the other low scorers varied and are explained in more detail in Sections 4.8. and 4.9.

The respondents were asked if it would interest them if the Company introduced programmes to help them improve their education. The replies ranged from eager to negative or concerned. The majority of the respondents however expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for self-improvement.

One person said that she would participate in any class even in addition to night school. Some of the respondents who did show an interest explained possible practical problems such as working shifts and not wanting to be in a class with old people. Others expressed emotional concerns such as feeling

threatened in class. Preference for a correspondence course was also raised.

Two respondents are currently furthering their education through part-time study: one is studying towards Standard Ten and the other is completing a Certificate in Management.

4.8 Education subjects preferred

The respondents were asked what aspect of their education they would like to improve if they were given the opportunity. The majority of the respondents said they would like to improve their English, particularly English writing skills. It was explained to the researcher that:

> You cannot speak if you cannot write.
> They must learn to write, most communication is through writing, people avoid writing and go to speak to the other person instead.

Several respondents also said that they would like to improve their spoken English and specified that they would like to be able to speak English using the correct tenses. One respondent explained that:

> You can't know how to write if you can't speak - in any language.

Only one person responded that English reading was most important to him. Another respondent stated that:

> In our culture and in our schools English was not taught properly. Even today we are not sure what is right and how to use words, certain words. I can do Afrikaans but we left that language in 1976.

Other subjects that were referred to by the respondents were industrial relations, economics, National Qualifications, computers, accounting for business, and something that could be useful at home, specifically knitting. One respondent said he would learn anything that would help him improve his career prospects. Two respondents said they would like to improve their qualifications and get a Standard Ten, while another explained that she would want to study something above Standard Ten level. One respondent was adamant that where computers, accounting and National Qualifications were essential subjects, English was not necessary. He alleged that:

> People can communicate, only journalists and interpreters need perfect English.

4.9 The respondents' perceptions of their colleagues' learning needs

The majority of the respondents replied positively to questions about their colleagues' educational aspirations and were more willing to talk about their colleagues' educational weaknesses and aspirations than their own. Their responses ranged from cautionary to enthusiastic and most respondents qualified their responses.

The positive respondents asserted that additional education with an emphasis on spoken English would definitely assist their colleagues. It was also explained that some staff cannot write their names, and that most cannot read the communication that comes from the Company. One respondent said that:

> They want to learn, it will help the staff who were disadvantaged, staff will be happy with further education, it will give the old people the light.

Another respondent admitted that:

> Some of us only went to school to Standard 3, some have passed Standard Ten but we can't do English; some of us have passed Standard Ten but all of us say we have 'though we have not - but even if we have, we can't do English. I can give you a example, I marked someone's test, a supervisor, in a training

> course and I can see she can't write. Staff know the word 'senior' verbally, but they don't know it in writing. They can only speak English from listening at work.

One respondent noted that:

> Fifty percent of blacks buy the newspaper for status but they can't read it.

One person highlighted the importance of education for supervisors and managers when he commented that managers and supervisors take decisions that can harm the Company. He believed that educated people think faster and more clearly. However, another person insisted that additional education was not necessary for managers.

In addition to these positive responses several concerns were pointed out to the interviewer. Three respondents raised practical concerns on behalf of their colleagues such as fitting classes in with other training courses, changes at work and changing shifts. It was explained that many people do not attend night school because of the shifts they have to work.

Two respondents mentioned that before people attend classes, they must first be assessed to see if they can learn. It was also suggested that the person's

background, problems at home, performance at work, and age are taken into account. It was emphasised that 'the initial assessment must be done very firmly'.

Most of the respondents indicated that introducing education at work was a very sensitive issue for their fellow employees. The sensitivities included jealousy, status, commitment, the style of teaching, as well as feeling stupid, threatened or shy.

One respondent expressed concerns with regard to the actual teaching involved and stressed that:

> The teacher must be a fully committed person who understands that they're adults.

Another respondent explained that:

> If we tell people they must have classes some will want but some will think you're saying that they're stupid and not well schooled, 'though it will help.

It was also described how some of the old managers feel threatened both by the management trainees who are being groomed by the Company as well as

by their children's level of education. One respondent stressed that:

> There will be a problem if some general staff have Standard Ten and the manager doesn't, how will the manager feel - inferior. The general staff will think it is funny for their manager to go for education.

Two respondents said that the staff would prefer it if the classes were offered privately. Their reasons were:

> If people here have the opportunity to do ABE they won't see it as an opportunity to improve, they will be critical of people doing it and will demoralise it. For example, if she (referring to an elderly member of staff) tries for her Standard Ten people will say 'what will you do with Standard Ten at your age?'

Another respondent doubted the commitment of his colleagues. He declared that one can provide a person with an opportunity but that if he did not have the necessary commitment and if he did not think that he needed help, further education would be a waste of time.

Only one respondent was particularly negative and cautious towards further education. He argued that:

> Extra education should be explained by the shop stewards, people don't understand it, it's something new, people are scared of it. The females are very difficult. It's not easy to study or assess her. They're always less interested, more complicated and talk a lot.

To the contrary another male respondent predicted that:

> In 15-20 years time the women will be in front, they're all going back to school. There're hardly any men amongst them.

4.10 The respondents as individuals

The information obtained from the interviews, referred to in the paragraphs above, has been grouped into themes and discussed accordingly. The researcher experienced however that the respondents were more than just a group of managers and supervisors and that the uniqueness of the perceptions and views of each respondent has not been adequately reflected. Some of the respondents expressed very particular views about English communicative competency that would be lost if recorded only in the themes already described. Some of the interviews also revealed information applicable to human resources practices in the industry and to supervisory and management training in general. The idiosyncratic nature of four of the

respondents' interviews is detailed below.

Mr W.

Mr W. has been employed in the hotel industry for his entire working career and has worked his way up to his current management position. He has completed Standard Ten yet his assessment results indicated that his level of reading and writing is at a Standard Three level. He described his ability to read, speak and understand English as good. However he acknowledged his writing difficulties. He explained with confidence that he can think very fast, but because he cannot write as fast, he has a problem with tenses and grammar. However although he struggled initially, he stated that he has mastered writing the reports and memos required of him at work. He explained that watching English TV and reading English newspapers had helped.

Mr W. became very defensive when the topic of training courses was raised. He explained that he did not go on training courses because he and the training manager were on bad terms. He said he was not concerned that he missed out on all the management development and skills training courses that other managers and supervisors attended. Mr W. remained defensive and negative when the concept of introducing further education to the workplace was discussed. He explained:

> I'm not at all interested, we have people who don't understand English, like the old people, it's for them. No, I'm very worried, it's a waste of time. I'm already studying, I can't also concentrate on that. My goal is a BComm.

Without prompting, Mr W. went on to praise the manner in which he was treated on the external course he is currently studying, comparing this to his training experiences in the Company.

> At that course the people [lecturers] are very intelligent; they care for us, they know we have responsibilities, they treat us like adults.

Mr W. also expressed concern towards further education at work for his colleagues. He said that although people who had passed Standard Eight would now like to study toward Standard Ten, they were scared, they did not understand the concept and required detailed explanations from their shop stewards.

Mrs V.

Mrs V. described her English as good but not excellent. In the interview she said that she had passed Standard Eight (her records indicated Standard Six only). On the assessment her English reading and writing ability was scored

as the equivalent of Standard Three.

Mrs V. explained that she was able to talk, read and understand English easily, but that writing in English was a bit difficult. When asked about her experiences of writing reports, job descriptions, performance appraisals or charges for disciplinary hearings she said in a surprised and defensive manner:

> It's no problem, you never told me there was a problem.

Mrs V. appeared satisfied with her English ability and level of education, and did not show any interest in self-improvement. Her view generally was that everything was all right as it is and that she was not enthusiastic towards anything that would upset the status quo. She explained:

> I'm not interested in studying now, I don't have a fresh mind with all my other problems.

Her reaction was neutral when asked about education for her colleagues. She said that she saw no reason why they should not benefit and added that it would help them to communicate better with non-Xhosa speakers. She added adamantly:

> But a person is not stupid because they don't understand English. Even Afrikaners can't speak or write English properly. I don't think you're stupid because you don't speak Xhosa. You're very excellent in your language.

Mr P.

Mr P.'s assessment results revealed that his reading and writing ability is of a Standard Seven Level. His formal level of education is Standard Ten. Mr P. was reluctant to speak in any detail about his own English abilities. He did concede that speaking English was the hardest for him, particularly pronunciation. He used the example that he was often embarrassed because he spoke about a "cartoon" instead of a "carton" of cigarettes. He was however forthcoming with information about what he believed was the attitude of his peers towards education in a manner that indicated that he felt removed from the problem.

He explained:

> Us Blacks are funny people. We all say we would like to improve our education but when we do people are jealous and make you feel empty, they attach a stigma to you. If people here have the opportunity to further their education they won't see it as an opportunity to improve, they will be critical of people doing it and

> will demoralise it. For example, if she (referring to an elderly employee) tries for her Standard Ten people will say 'what will you do with a Standard Ten at your age?

It was clear that Mr P. was concerned about the status and feelings of jealousy attached to the issue of education. He also described how he had been a management trainee and had suffered from the jealous attitudes of his peers during his training and his time spent as a manager. It was apparent from Mr P.'s discussion that he felt resentful and insecure about his own education. He stated three times during the interview that his Standard Ten was not equivalent to the Standard Ten of the interviewer. He also explained that:

> My kids are in Standard 1 and pre-school and I feel threatened. The level of education of their teachers is very high. I help my kids, my parents couldn't help me because they were illiterate. I feel intimidated as a parent because I didn't have that.

Mr P. explained that the older managers are concerned about new trainees who gain positions in the Company through training and not through experience He said:

> The old manager have worked hard through the ranks, people now take a short cut and get a piece of paper, this threatens

> them. There is nothing more demoralising to them than a person saying 'when I was at hotel school ...', it hurts them and those are very touchy issues. Therefore one must be very patient with the whole education story thing.

Mr P. elucidated that when people enter the hotel industry they have had no career counselling to recommend it to them, they just need a job. In his opinion this is one of the reasons for the poor standard of education and performance of people in the industry. He also explained how some people are employed and remain frustrated in positions they considered beneath them.

> If we go through employment forms including mine we say we want 'any job, as soon as possible' people are humble when they have nothing. Then they have a Standard Ten and are a bar-hand, it makes them panic. If you have a Standard Ten and work for the government in an office then you can boast and have status, though we know they do nothing. Then a bar-hand has Standard Ten and the supervisor Standard Eight because we have said we will take any job. Then someone has high ability and low responsibility, that equals mischief. Mother nature doesn't allow space therefore the person must do positive or negative to fill in the space. The person causes problems, points fingers, criticises management, complains about salaries,

> they're just trying to fill the vacuum. You also get the opposite, high responsibility, low ability.

The above analogy was described with great emotion and with hand gestures illustrating levels of ability and facial expressions demonstrating the extent to which people 'panic' when they find themselves in such situations. Mr P. further explained his theory of how some people are promoted beyond their level of competence. He expressed his frustration of having to work with supervisors reporting to him whose English was poor.

> The hotel industry has always been a dumping ground, it's a problem of the past. If you're not educated you be a waiter. You must perform right as a waiter regardless of your education. It looked as if we were being parented by Whites, for example, a waiter doesn't write, the order is taken by an Indian or a White. Then the Company needs a supervisor so he promotes a half-literate waiter. Then they can't change that because the person has been there a long time; then the person has to write a report and there's a problem. What do we do? We accept it.

He went on to explain his concern about a lack of standards in the industry:

> What is the standard? The standard is we assume a person who

> has Standard Ten can do it all, read, write, speak, hear and can feel free to do it all. Also we don't have a set standard. We just accept what we're given.

Mr P. explained how Xhosa-speaking people needed to be taught the ways in which the English language differed from the Xhosa language:

> We come from a culture that uses rough syllables. If you're serious you must use rough language. In English you say 'please, this must be done', it means nothing to me. In Xhosa you have to be hard. We come from a society where words sometimes mean nothing compared to corporal punishment. Words are inferior to action - this must be addressed in education. In classes we should do more writing than talking. We're used to harshness and repeating again and again.

Mr G.

This respondent was one of the most senior managers interviewed. His educational qualification is Standard Ten whereas he scored at the Standard Seven Level on the reading and writing assessment. Mr G. explained that he did not have a problem with his English writing skills. He felt that it did not really matter how good his writing was as long as the message was conveyed. He explained that when he was writing an important document he would

consult a book on English writing for correct formats. Mr G. acknowledged that head office people are irritated with his English writing and that of his managers, and agreed that some improvement was probably necessary.

The issue of further education for him and his colleagues was raised. Mr G. said he would like to improve his general skills through education but that he and his peers would feel very threatened doing it at work. He added that:

> People will feel threatened but there comes a time when people have to be honest to himself. I see married women in long school uniforms going back to school, that's the best way. People will feel threatened [taking classes] in the Company. Talking of management, we say we haven't been promoted because we are Black, but in an interview we don't bring our people with us, we are only ourselves, that's when we need education. The Sunday Times ads don't say 'those who toyi-toyed at Bisho Stadium can apply' they say 'BA required'. Qualifications count, people want qualifications, that piece of paper.

He concluded that:

> I would support it [education] here in the Company. It's

essential. Education is confidence, people judge you on your confidence. If I'm not here people cancel the function because the others don't have confidence. Education tells a lot of things about a person.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore the English communicative competency of supervisors and managers in two hotels within the hospitality industry in the Eastern Cape. An assessment tool was used to evaluate the level of English communicative competency. Semi-structure interviews were conducted to explore the respondents' perceptions of their English communicative competency.

The results confirmed that the English communicative competency of the supervisors and managers is inadequate and emphasised their need for further education. A number of the issues raised by the respondents confirm the data from the literature review and reinforce that providing education programmes within an organisation is a complex task. Recommendations emerging from this research are discussed.

5.1 Assessed level of English communicative competency

The results of the assessment reflect that the English reading and writing ability of the respondents is distinctly lower than their recorded education level. This is consistent with the literature that highlights the poor standard of

education to which most Black students in South Africa were subjected in the past. The respondents were educated at schools administered by the Department of Education and Training in which the formalist structural approach to English language teaching was practised. This approach involved learning English through meaningless repetition involving imitation, chorusing and pattern drills (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992). Furthermore, the teachers were poorly qualified (Van Niekerk, 1992), and, as COSATU (1991) reports, the reading and writing teaching materials in primary schools were of a very low standard.

The respondents acknowledged in the interviews that although they were taught English from the early years of their education, the language was taught poorly and limited opportunity was provided to practise the language. They were expected to learn to read and write English before they were fully literate in their first language. According to the literature this may hinder a person's ability to acquire a second language successfully (Auerbach, 1996; Lyster, 1992b).

5.2 The respondents' perceptions of their English communicative competency

The interviews revealed that supervisors and managers in the hospitality industry are expected to perform a vast array of duties in which English is required, most of which require reading and writing skills. None of the respondents directly attested to an overall concern with these tasks and most

of them gave the impression that they were not aware of any problems they had in accomplishing these tasks when required.

Although all the respondents scored below the standard expected of them, only the low scorers on the assessment admitted that they found writing in English difficult. The other respondents were comfortable with their writing skills.

Some of the respondents said that speaking or hearing English was the most difficult part of the language for them. Nevertheless in the interviews all the respondents were able to communicate successfully in English. They were easy to understand and were able to express themselves adequately. However the multiple errors in their spoken English were consistent with their writing errors. Their faulty use of tenses and sentences was particularly obvious as is illustrated in the quotations in Sections 4.6, 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10.

Clifford & Kerfoot (1992) state that in second language acquisition, receptive knowledge is usually greater than productive knowledge, that is, learners can understand and read more than they can say or write. One is neither able to confirm nor refute this statement with the results of this study as the sample was small and the subjects differed greatly in their perceptions of their ability to understand and read or speak and write.

The views of the respondents towards their English communicative competency are indicative of the lack of realisation of what is expected of

them. Most of the respondents thought that their English communication skills were adequate and that they were able to perform tasks involving English reading, writing, listening and speaking competently. It was evident that they had never been given any direct feedback about their English communication skills nor had they been made aware of an acceptable standard of English communicative competency. As Mrs V. stated '... you never told me there was a problem'.

During the interviews the respondents expressed frustration with other aspects of their work, for example, limited promotional and training opportunities. However, there was no cognisance that the problems and frustrations they experience at work may be a result of their lack of English communicative competency.

Mrs V.'s views were typical of employees who do not realise the extent to which they are disadvantaged by their lack of English communicative competency. Mrs V. was not interested in improving her education level or English communication skills in any way. There was no realisation that this would limit her career path in the organisation.

The respondents' inability to communicate adequately in English has serious implications for the organisation. For example, although there are a number of writing tasks required of the respondents, they do not write unless they have to. If they can find another means of communication they will. This causes a problem in an industry where communication between management, their

subordinates, superiors and colleagues is essential. Shaw and Weber (1990) assert that a manager's ability to work together with other people, to communicate with and to get things done through other people represents a skill fundamental to his performance. They suggest that managers rely more on language in accomplishing their day to day goals than they often acknowledge.

In a twenty-four hour operation management employees often do not overlap shifts and see each other irregularly. Writing, for example, in the handover book or writing memoranda to staff is the only workable means of communication. When the writing ability is poor and writing is avoided, communication breaks down.

Mr P.'s views provided insight into some of the reasons for the poor English communicative competency of supervisors and managers. He described how the hospitality industry is a dumping ground for poorly skilled people. These people then work their way through the organisation and by default are promoted into supervisory positions. He explained that although this has been realised by senior management, it is a situation that has been accepted. Problems however occur then in the inadequate performance of management level staff.

This is consistent with the views of Moth (1997c) who states that there is a tremendous lack of primary education in the hospitality industry. Cooper et al. (1996) note that the pattern of employment in the hospitality industry is

heavily weighted towards those with only a rudimentary education.

The potential communication problems of Xhosa-speakers speaking English were also elucidated by Mr P. He described how people need to learn not only English as a language but they need to learn the manner in which English is used. This view may explain one of the reasons for the miscommunication frequently experienced between English and Xhosa-speaking people, particularly those in a superior-subordinate relationship.

5.3 The respondents' perceptions of their learning needs

The managers and supervisors interviewed showed degrees of interest in improving their education. The respondents who were negative towards furthering themselves were the older people in the sample and were amongst those with the lowest education level.

The enthusiasm with which the other respondents expressed an interest in education indicated their desire for improvement. However, there was still no realisation of the extent of their lack of English communicative competency skills and the impact thereof.

Learners need to perceive a need to learn before they will learn (Katz, 1996) and the only way to determine if learners perceive a need is to ask them (Hayes & Valentine, 1989). It is therefore important to note that the respondents recognised their need to improve but not to the full extent. They

were not aware of the extent to which their lack of English communicative competency affected their performance at work or their careers within the organisation. Their need to improve would have to be realised more clearly if they were to benefit from any form of intervention to address their education needs.

Hayes and Valentine (1989) attest that an individual's need to learn is a combination of demand and skill deficiency. Skill deficiency is insufficient, particularly if this is not perceived by the learner. Adults are most positive towards learning when they learn what they are interested in, what they value and enjoy (Ziegahn, 1992). It is therefore essential to establish what the respondents want to learn before one can make any assumptions about their needs.

One respondent was adamant that improving English was unnecessary. It would therefore be futile to introduce English training for that person. Also, it was evident from Mr G.'s comments that he did not view writing in English as an important skill. Generally, however, the results show that English skills were the most valued by the majority of the respondents.

5.4 The respondents' recommendations for intervention

Most of the respondents were flattered by the suggestion that the researcher valued their input about training programmes. They commented unreservedly and with enthusiasm. Following the interviews several respondents asked the

researcher follow-up questions indicating their interest in the subject. It was apparent that the learners wanted to make a contribution and that they were able to raise valuable and meaningful insights.

The practical concerns raised by the respondents were worthy and substantial, and consistent with the issues raised in the literature. The respondents said that education classes at work must take into account their shiftwork and time constraints because they also had other issues in their day-to-day lives that they had to worry about. It was suggested that correspondence study would be appropriate. Aulich (1992, cited in Cooper *et al.,* 1995) confirms that it is necessary that the working conditions of clients are taken into account when designing education programmes. He advocates that a flexible approach is used and that learners must be treated as adults as they are learning in a situation that still requires them to continue with their adult responsibilities.

The respondents also explained that factors such as problems at home, performance at work, and age should be considered as this would influence their ability to learn. This was again consistent with Aulich (1992, cited in Cooper *et al.*, 1995) who emphasised the need for an appreciation of the wide backgrounds that adult learners in an industry will come from.

The emotional concerns raised by the respondents indicated that sensitivity should be shown towards learners as adults. The respondents emphasised the need to be treated as adults and expressed concerns about feeling stupid,

threatened or shy in class. Many of the participants were probably subjected to ridicule and disparaging comments from their teachers and peers at school. Most Black students harbour bad memories of their school experience that might have included corporal punishment, drills and extensive memorising (Hollands, 1996). Some of this may have continued in the workplace with inferior and impatient trainers. Lurie (1990) states that employers have been guilty of not giving employees the respect and recognition they deserve and that training programmes should build the confidence, dignity and respect of the learners.

The second language learning environment itself may also cause learners to feel anxious and constrained (Littlewood, 1984). Katz (1996) reports that successful learning is more likely to occur in a positive, supportive learning environment. If learners fear being embarrassed or ridiculed, they concentrate more on self-protection than on learning. Similarly, Lightbown & Spada (1993) assert that a learner of a second language has an 'affective filter' operating when stressed or self conscious thus hindering the learner's ability to learn the language.

Mr W., one of the older respondents whose English communicative competency was low, reported unpleasant learning experiences at school and in the workplace. He was extremely disparaging about the training he had received from his employer to the extent that he now refuses to attend training courses at work. However, he was positive about the course he was studying part-time at a tertiary institution and he highlighted the manner in which he

was treated as an adult with responsibilities. This issue stresses the damage that the school system and poor training in the workplace has done to people's motivation to learn further in an organisation.

One of the issues raised by the respondents that is not evident in the literature was that of feelings of jealousy and status. It was explained that people were so concerned about appearing educated that they will purchase a newspaper although they cannot read it. Concerns were raised about suggesting that people needed further education and therefore implying that they are stupid and not well schooled. Further concerns were brought forward about being ridiculed by subordinates who thought it peculiar that their superiors required further schooling. These issues were of greatest concern to the respondents.

Mr P. was particularly concerned about the status attached to education. He appeared quite insecure about the value of his Standard Ten qualification and how this affected him as a parent of school-going children. As one of the first Black management trainees in the Company he had experienced the disparaging comments and attitudes of his former peers about his training.

Any educational intervention would be affected by these concerns and an attempt to overcome or minimise feelings of jealousy, insecurity and status would be required. Further research would reveal more about this dynamic in the sphere of adult education.

5.5 Expectations of English communicative competency

During the period in which the research was conducted informal discussions were held with senior management to establish what they expected of their managers and supervisors. Although this was not a planned aspect of the study their comments were considered apposite and therefore have been included in this discussion.

The senior management maintained that all managers and supervisors should be able to communicate in a professional manner, at least at a Standard Ten level, in all forms of English, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening. They were not clear about what they consider a professional manner to be and it was apparent that there are no set standards. It appears that it is taken for granted that managers and supervisors should have certain skills, although the standards at which those skills should be performed were not defined. The senior management also assumed that the managers should be able to fulfil the role of assessor for their subordinates who were attempting to qualify for a National Qualification through the Hospitality Industries Training Board.

It was also evident that senior management is continuously disappointed by the lack of performance of their managers and supervisors. However they have not realised that it is very basic skills that are lacking. For example, one senior manager expressed her irritation and disappointment that the managers were not writing the laid down procedures expected of them when they train their subordinates. The assumption was made that if they have been taught how to do it they should be able to do it. She did not realise that

the people she refers to write so poorly that they are not able to do what she requires.

Because senior management does not realise the extent of the problem of poor English communicative competency, employees are frequently promoted into positions for which they lack the necessary communication skills and then are labelled as incompetent.

Further, some senior managers indicated that the poor communicative competency of the respondents prevented them from being promoted within the organisation. For example, a supervisor who has the support of her manager and the intelligence required to manage a more senior position has an inability to write competently. This prevents her from furthering herself in the organisation.

It appears from the results of this study that employers should not assume that their supervisory and management level employees are competent in basic English skills. Evidently from this discussion in this chapter senior management in this organisation expect their management level staff to be proficient in English communication. The managers and supervisors themselves perceive that their English communicative competency is adequate for the job they perform. The quantitative assessment reveals that the respondents' English communicative competency is well below their perceptions and the standard expected of them. Nonetheless the respondents were enthusiastic about improving their education, specifically their

communication skills. The discrepancy between what is expected by the organisation, perceived by the respondents and actually revealed by the assessment is problematic for the organisation. This has important implications for the human resources practices within the organisation.

5.6 Implications of this research

This exploratory study has revealed a number of interesting and useful findings for the state and the hospitality industry.

5.6.1 The state

Adult education should be a major part of the educational provision of all countries in the promotion of economic and social development. It is imperative that the state is concerned with the quality, breadth and depth of the skills base of South Africa's current and future workforce. The low English communicative competency of managers and supervisors evident from this study indicates that language education of children and adults in South Africa needs serious attention.

5.6.2 The hospitality industry

This study has implications for the Hospitality Industries Training Board (HITB). The HITB is required to assist in raising standards and providing a co-ordinated approach to training within the industry. Its mission is to motivate and facilitate the achievement of job performance and employer and employee development that meet agreed industry standards, and to formally

acknowledge the acquisition of those skills at national level (HITB, 1995). The performance and development of supervisors and managers is an integral part of this mission.

The HITB suggests that supervisors and managers who fulfil the role of assessors for the National Qualifications process should have at least a Standard Eight level of literacy (HITB, 1995). The results of this study suggest that many supervisors and managers would not be able to fulfil this role. For example, they may have difficulty reading and understanding guidance material and occupational standards, accessing resource material for candidates, completing the necessary documentation and recording the assessments once competence is achieved.

Low levels of English communicative competency may be a major obstacle to the National Qualifications programme. It is recommended that the HITB address this issue at industry level.

This study also has implications for organisations other than those in the hospitality industry. It is acknowledged that employees in the hotel industry are poorly educated and, as a respondent pointed out, the hotel industry has become a dumping ground for unskilled people. Nevertheless, if organisations in other industries assess their supervisors and managers, some may find that their results are similar to those found in this study.

The implications for the organisations within the hospitality industry are

discussed in Section 5.7.

5.7 Recommendations emerging from this research

It is recommended that organisations adopt a two-pronged approach to address the low level of English communicative competency of supervisors and managers: one that addresses the recruitment and selection process; and one that addresses training and development of staff.

5.7.1 Recruitment and selection

The employment of appropriate employees is critically important for the hospitality industry in that a major part of the product is service. Employers need to seek staff to manage the service encounter (Ross, 1997).

Currently organisations within the hospitality industry employ staff with limited skills and train them to perform the required job. As there is pressure to promote staff from within the organisation, supervisors and managers are recruited internally from the ranks of lower level employees. Companies should therefore implement an assessment of English communicative competency for the selection of staff at all levels. An assessment for selection at a lower level is necessary because it is from this group of employees that supervisors and managers are developed. It is also required at a supervisory and management level as English communicative competency is needed to perform the tasks expected at this level.

It is recommended that a comprehensive assessment be developed to test English communicative competency in industry. This should be designed specifically for adults and should incorporate a multi-method approach including for example, literacy tests and face-to-face interviews.

However this approach may not be realistic. As Katz (1993) contends: organisations are not able to recruit productive employees because there are not sufficient in the market - they have to make them.

5.7.2 Training and development

Cooper et al. (1996) report that the International Hotel Association has recommended that in the hospitality industry in general adequate training at all levels be addressed, including improving language tuition. The literature highlights that although the hospitality industry is a labour intensive industry that requires skilled employees to provide quality service to its customers, many employers in the industry do not train their staff adequately (Amoah & Baum, 1997; Moth, 1997b).

In addition to skills training this study indicates that organisations need to improve the English communicative competency of staff. Employers need to realise that their workforce has not received an adequate education and that the organisation needs to compensate for this.

Moreover, the demands on staff for English communication skills will become greater as the industry advances and the technology used becomes more

sophisticated. Price (1997) maintains that employers should empower all their employees with the skills to communicate proficiently in English. Proper communication is fundamental, especially in the light of the new Labour Relations Act of 1995 that requires a participatory approach to employment decisions.

The English communication skills of managers and supervisors particularly will have to be addressed so that they can perform the tasks expected of them. Most management tasks rely on communication with other people and getting things done through other people. As Shaw and Weber (1990) assert management depends on the art of good communication. Managers and supervisors also form the pool of people from which the Company will be expected to recruit senior management in the future.

However organisations are also under pressure to train their supervisors and managers in other aspects of their jobs such as technical skills, industrial relations, and basic management skills. One must question if this training should be put on hold or conducted simultaneously with English communication skills.

One should consider that one of the reasons for poor results from current training programmes is the learner's inability to understand the presented material (Kraak, 1988). Effective participation in most training is contingent on the learner's ability to comprehend and communicate in English (Price, 1997). As SACCAWU (1995) maintains, training programmes do not make

provision for second language learners who are products of a highly inferior education system. Organisations need to adapt their training methods to meet their employees' needs. Specialist trainers with an understanding of adult education in the South African context are required.

Furthermore, an affirmative action policy or programme implemented in an organisation should include a compensatory education programme that addresses the English communicative competency of supervisors and managers. Although this suggestion may be labelled unrealistic and expensive, the alternative may be a poorly trained management team unable to perform the management function effectively within the organisation.

5.7.3 Educational intervention at an organisational level

This study reveals that specific issues should be taken into account when an intervention is planned at a workplace. These include:

- incorporating English second language learning principles;
- treating the learners as individuals;
- involving the learners in the process;
- considering the learners' practical concerns; and
- ensuring that the programme content is appropriate.

5.7.3.1 Incorporating English second language (ESL) learning principles

Where an organisational intervention involves teaching English as a second language, established second language learning principles need to be

considered. The different approaches to second language acquisition detailed in Section 2.2.2 should be examined.

The formalist structural approach, for example, may be considered inappropriate as it is a mechanical approach to language teaching that focuses on the acquisition of isolated skills without consideration of the social conditions of learners' lives (Auerbach, 1996). The functional approach and competency-based approach, although criticised on some grounds, may be more useful as these approaches are concerned with semantics, learners' needs, and focus on teaching what is relevant for effective everyday real-life communication (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992).

Further, the variables relating to ESL teaching, such as first language literacy, affective and cognitive considerations, culture and age, examined in Section 2.2.1 are relevant. For example, adults who are learning English as a second language are more likely to succeed if they have first mastered literacy in their mother tongue. 'Literacy in the first language is an essential resource for the transition to second language for low-literate adults' (Auerbach, 1996, p. 15).

The learning process will be enhanced if a learning environment is created which is supportive, positive and relaxed (Katz, 1996; Lightbown & Spada, 1993; Littlewood, 1984). This will reduce adults' concerns such as those raised by the participants in this study including feeling stupid, threatened or shy in class.

Cognitive aspects of learning English as a second language need to be considered. Learning or improving a language is a process of creating and exchanging meaning and demands that learners be actively involved (Clifford & Kerfoot, 1992). This is developed further in Section 5.7.3.5.

Literacy instruction should incorporate culturally familiar literacy forms and practices (Auerbach, 1996). Wherever possible teachers should be aware of culture-specific discourse practices, language uses and forms of learners' cultures as learners become proficient to the extent that instruction is contextualised in their life experiences (Auerbach, 1996).

5.7.3.2 Treating the learners as individuals

The results emphasise that employees have different levels of English communicative competency, varying needs and learning styles. It is essential to recognise these differences as studies such of those of Hayes and Valentine (1989) have shown. Therefore the challenge in any education programme is to treat learners as individuals and address their individual needs and problems. Global concepts and programmes of mass education are unsuitable, particularly for a specialist group of people such as supervisors and managers.

Training designed and implemented to meet individual learner needs may be considered impractical and expensive. The alternative, however, is a poorly skilled workforce from which high standards of performance are expected. Recent teaching methods have begun to accommodate individual learning needs. For example, a facilitative approach allows learners to work at their

own pace with learning materials appropriate to their level of learning.

It is suggested that in the planning stages of any educational intervention, a pre-course assessment that places learners at their present level of competency is conducted (Price, 1997). The individual should also be interviewed to establish personal expectations as well as specific needs and desires in terms of long term career-pathing. The results of these interviews should be combined with the learner's pre-course assessment results to formulate a complete profile and development plan for each individual.

5.7.3.3 Involving the learners in the process

In this study the benefit of asking the learners for their views was evident. It is suggested that before any intervention in an organisation is attempted, the potential candidates are consulted thoroughly and the issues raised by them are considered. This confirms the view put forward by Hayes and Valentine (1989) and Lurie (1990) who suggest that the information that potential learners can provide is invaluable. Also, adults learn best when they are involved in determining instructional goals and content (Auerbach, 1996).

Further, the process of consultation is extremely important and the success of the intervention may depend upon it. Top-down approaches which are imposed upon employees have not proved successful and should be avoided (Hutton, 1992; Lurie, 1990). As Eberlein (1995) and Van Niekerk (1996) have stated, the importance of participative planning and decision making cannot be over-emphasised. The learners should be involved in curriculum

development at every stage of the process, from deciding the content, methods and processes of instruction to participating in evaluation (Auerbach, 1996).

5.7.3.4 Considering the learners' practical concerns

Practical arrangements for educational programmes for supervisors and managers should be developed around the learners' work patterns, and should be flexibly and imaginatively delivered. The organisation also needs to consider whether this form of training should be held at work or at a private venue. Concerns regarding status, jealousy and being ridiculed may be reduced if training programmes are held away from the workplace and apart from the learners' subordinates.

5.7.3.5 Programme content

The content of an educational intervention aimed at improving supervisors' and managers' English communicative competency must be carefully considered and should be based on sound second language learning principles.

One can argue that a generic approach that addresses an employee's general education is appropriate as this may develop the person in a balanced manner. It will provide the basic skills necessary on which further language skills may be based. This approach, however, may be more appropriate for lower level employees who have time to develop. Supervisors and managers need these skills now. They are expected to perform tasks that require a high level of English communicative competency every day. It may be more

appropriate to introduce a programme designed to address their exact needs. For example, this study identifies the need to learn competencies such as using grammar, spelling, pronunciation and report-writing. It also would be important to include the basic knowledge and understanding that underpins these competencies. Further, in line with second language learning theory the content of the programme must reflect students everyday reality (Auerbach, 1996)

Kazemek (1990) questions the purpose of adult literacy education. He asks whether it is to produce a literate workforce, that is, individuals with narrowly defined literacy skills who will meet the needs of corporate capitalism; or whether it is to develop imaginative, critical, thinking and reflective citizens that are necessary for the making of a democratic community. He argues that adult education programmes should be comprehensive in nature and avoid teaching job specific skills. Employees should be taught portable skills that will allow them to adapt to the changing workplace.

One may question that if one implements a programme to enhance the level of performance of supervisors and managers by improving their English communicative competency, is one thereby attempting to meet the needs of the organisation only? On the other hand it may be seen as the Company's social responsibility to improve the communication skills of its supervisors and managers.

Dame (1996) explains that effective adult education must be closely linked to

the actual roles a person fulfils in society, as an employee, parent and member of the community. He contends that adults must be educated in subject matter that is actual and useful to them. The organisation and its stakeholders must decide if an educational intervention should aim to achieve a productive workforce, to fulfil social responsibility requirements, or to meet the general educational needs of the learners.

One may argue that English communicative competency is a portable skill and a basic skill that will assist employees at a supervisory or managerial level with almost all day-to-day tasks, as well as further training that they are required to undergo. It will also assist them in their other roles in society, as parent and citizen.

5.7.4 Recommendations for future research

Academics in the fields of industrial psychology and education have been involved comparatively little in adult literacy and have not yet made the kind of direct contribution which universities abroad have made to adult literacy work - creating resources, training facilitators, evaluating and advising programmes and developing theory (French, 1992).

Walters (1994) contends that adult education policy research in South Africa has included little empirical investigation. It most often has been done in haste with relatively few resources. While the recent policy research processes have on the whole been strong on participation, they have been weak on the generation of new empirically based data. There is a need for very carefully

formulated research in order to dig much more deeply in all aspects of ALBE [adult literacy and basic education]' (Walters, 1994, p. 57).

The current controversies in the field of adult literacy make it very difficult for South African organisations to conduct the necessary education or literacy programmes successfully for their employees. This presents an opportunity for study in the field of adult literacy from the unique perspective of the industrial psychologist. From such research the industrial psychologist may be in a position to make a contribution to industry by developing the necessary diagnostic tools and programmes for organisations who wish to address for example, the English communicative competency of their employees.

Although this study has identified English communicative competency as an urgent learning need for supervisors and managers, it should not be seen as the only educational deficit of this group of employees. Future inquiry would be required to obtain a more comprehensive analysis of the learning needs of supervisors and managers in an organisation.

The value of the multi-method approach to this real world research was evident in this study. With the qualitative approach and open-ended questions used in the interviews, the respondents were in a position to express views, feelings and insights that have addressed a number of issues in the research question. These issues may not have been discovered through other methods.

Although the quantitative methods were necessary to establish a relatively objective baseline measurement of communicative competency, the usual quantitative approaches to literacy analyses are not sufficient on their own and other approaches should be used (Lurie, 1990). Additional research in this field incorporating qualitative methods is recommended.

There is a substantial amount of inquiry into English literacy amongst low level employees. However, although managers rely heavily on English language to accomplish their daily goals (Shaw & Weber, 1990), there is a limited amount of research on management and supervisory level staff. This study demonstrated the importance of investigating English communicative competency at this level. Further investigation in this area is therefore recommended.

The interviews with the respondents were conducted in English although this is not their first language. Every attempt was made to keep the wording of the questions as simple as possible. At no stage in any of the interviews did it appear as if the respondents were reluctant to communicate in English, did not understand the questions, or were not able to express themselves in English. Although the participants may have communicated more freely in their vernacular, translating the interview material may have lost some of the information sought for this study. Nonetheless, although care was taken to minimise the limitation this had on the research, information of a more detailed nature may result if interviews are conducted in the person's first language. This should be a consideration for further research.

The informal discussions with senior management provided some insight into their expectations of English communicative competency of managers and supervisors in the organisation. It was evident that the perspectives at this level of management need to be considered. However, additional investigation is required for a thorough and more accurate understanding of this aspect.

5.8 Conclusion

This research project aimed to explore the English communicative competency of supervisors and managers in two hotels within the South African hospitality industry. A competency-based assessment tool was used to establish a relatively objective measure of the English reading and writing ability of the respondents. The respondents were interviewed to determine their perceptions of their English communicative competency and the impact thereof on their work situation, as well as their perceptions of their learning needs and recommendations for intervention. This multi-method approach to the research was successful in that more valuable data was generated than if only qualitative or quantitative data had been sought.

This study has identified that the English communicative competency of the respondents is inadequate. It is also well below that of their recorded education level. The interviews indicated that the respondents were not aware of their lack of English communicative competency or the implications thereof. However, the respondents made important observations about the factors to be considered when planning an educational intervention in an organisation.

Although this study does not attempt to generalise the findings to a greater population, it highlights some important issues that are relevant to the fields of adult education, training and industrial psychology in the hospitality industry. The implications of these results have been discussed and a number of recommendations for human resource practices and research in the hospitality industry have been posited.

For the hospitality industry to reach its full potential and for South Africa to become a productive competitive nation, a renewed focus on training of employees is vital. Training in the industry has to become a business imperative (Ansara, 1996).

This research identifies English communicative competency as an urgent training need for supervisors and managers within the hospitality industry as clear communication in all forms is a necessity for managerial success. There is a heavy obligation on employers to begin cultivating a reasonable level of English language communication skills in the work environment. Managers and supervisors who can use their English communication skills flexibly according to their purpose are an asset to any community and any workplace.

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Appendix I

PROLIT ENGLISH WRITTEN ASSESSMENT

This assessment was developed and is used presently by the Siyaphambili Institute for Human Resource Development, East London.

PROLIT

ENGLISH WRITTEN ASSESSMENT

SECTION 1

Ask the learner to fill in this form. (5)

Today's date _____

Surname _____

First names _____

Date of birth _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Name of company _____

What is your job? _____

When did you start working here? _____

_____

What do you like doing? _____

_____

SECTION 2 (10)

Write 5 sentences about your family.

SECTION 3 (130 ÷ 2 = 65)

In this story some letters have been left out of some words.
You must fill in the missing letters in the spaces.
The first seven words have been done for you so that you can see how to do this.

Kulenganekwane zikhona izinhlamvu ezingabhalwanga. Sicela ukuthi uzigcwalise. Bheka isibonelo sethu.

Mo taodišong ye, re tlogetše ditlhaka tše dingwe, re kgopela gore o di tlatše. Lebelela mohlala wo re go diretsego, re tladitše ditlhaka tše di tlogetšwego.

Mo polelong e re tlogetse ditlhaka tse dingwe, re kopa gore o di tlatse. Lebella sekao sa rona, re tladitse ditlhaka tse ditlogetsweng.

My name is Lethabo Mabuza. My wife is Lindi. Our children are Jabulani, Thandi and Mandla. I am a truck driver. I work for Eskom. My wife runs our Spaza.

The shop is open from 6 o'clock until 9 o'clock in the evening. She sells candles, paraffin, sugar, sa__, mealie me__ and br___ in t__ shop. S__ buys h__ goods fr__ Metro.

A__ of u_ help i_ the sh__. The chil____ help the__ mother ev___ day af___ they co__ back fr__ school. I he__ her o_ Saturday a__ Sunday. (20)

At Chri_____ we vi___ my mot___'_ family o_ their fa__. The chil____ like go___ to t__ farm.

Mandla a__ Thandi fe__ the chic____. Jabulani he___ to fix bro___ things.

At ni___ we s__ and ta__ about t__ days wh__ my grandp_____ were yo___. (20)

When I w _ _ young I sta _ _ _ with m _ grandparents o _ their fa _ _. My mot _ _ _ worked i _ Johannesburg. S _ _ was a dom _ _ _ _ _ helper.

Some _ _ _ _ _ my grandf _ _ _ _ _ took m _ to vi _ _ _ my mo _ _ _ _ in to _ _. We trav _ _ _ _ _ by tr _ _ _ and ta _ _. It w _ _ a ve _ _ long w _ _!

Mother wor _ _ _ in a b _ _ house. S _ _ had h _ _ own bed _ _ _ _ and tele _ _ _ _ _ _. I li _ _ _ to wa _ _ _ the child _ _ _ '_ programmes. (30)

I wa _ _ my chil _ _ _ _ to ha _ _ a bet _ _ _ life th _ _ my par _ _ _ _ and I h _ _.

Jabulani, w _ _ helps h _ _ mother i _ the sh _ _, wa _ _ _ to b _ a busin _ _ _ _ _ _ when h _ has fini _ _ _ _ Matric. I ho _ _ he wi _ _ get a bur _ _ _ _ to g _ to unive _ _ _ _ _.

My daug _ _ _ _, Thandi, says s _ _ will b _ a doc _ _ _ and he _ _ the comm _ _ _ _ _. Mandla sa _ _ he wi _ _ be a tr _ _ _ driver! (30)

We a _ _ looking for _ _ _ _ to o _ _ retirement. We wi _ _ sit i _ the s _ _.

My wife will enj _ _ resting n _ _ that th _ Spaza sh _ _ has chan _ _ _ into a gi _ _ _ supermarket ch _ _ _ and I' _ _ talk ab _ _ _ my wo _ _ at Es _ _ _ and h _ _ we fin _ _ _ _ got elect _ _ _ _ _ _ .

Thandi's daug _ _ _ _ will he _ _ how h _ _ mother i _ helping t _ find a cu _ _ for AIDS. A _ _ I wi _ _ explain t _ Mandla's s _ _ that he, too, can be a train driver!

We will send our children to fetch our blankets and slippers and just enjoy sitting in the sun and remembering. (30)

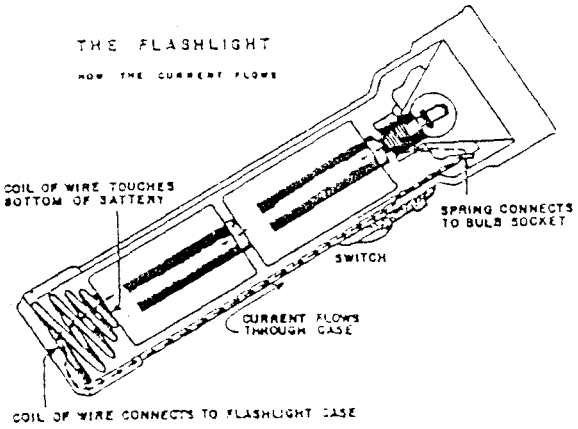
SECTION 4 (40)

Write an essay on 'The New South Africa'. You may use some of the ideas on the posters in your essay.

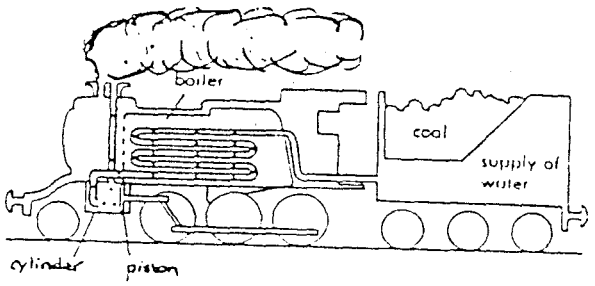
Write approximately one page.

SECTION 5

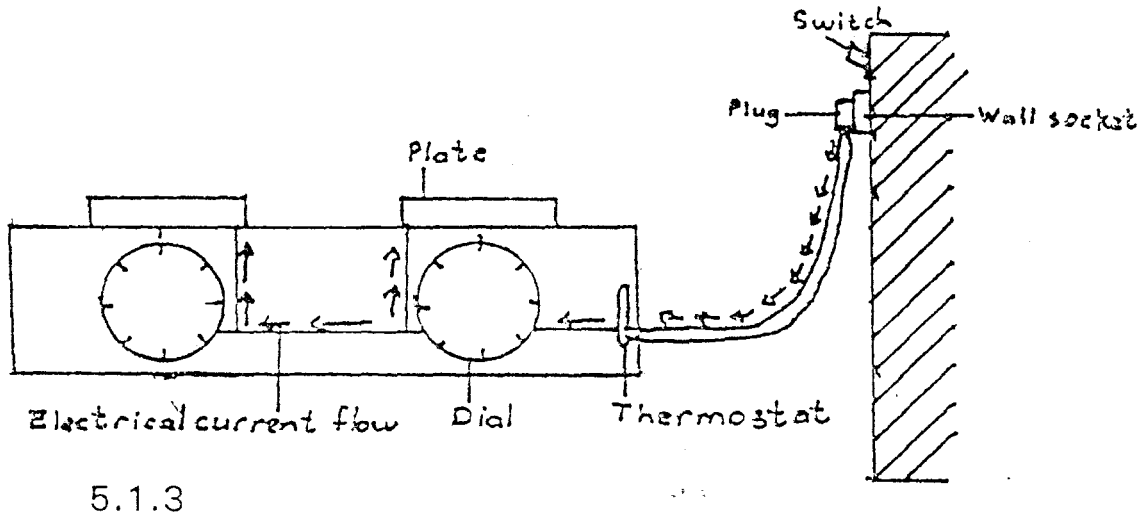
5.1 Choose **one** of the following drawings and explain how it operates.



5.1.1



5.1.2



5.1.3

Write your answer here. (20)