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Journal homepage: www.twistjournal.net

Mobile Learning as a Support System to the Challenges that Adult Learners Experience in the ABET Sector in South Africa

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore ways in which mobile learning could anchor adult learners to better deal with challenges they experience. The interpretivism paradigm was used, with the qualitative approach, as well as the focus group interview data collection methods. The theoretical framework of Ubuntu was used to support this research paper. The theory of Ubuntu highlights an aspect of social justice where equity and equality are encouraged among people in different societies. This theory was used to support that adult learners in their quest for education are not meant to be marginalised and rely only on teachers, face-to-face, for information, where mobile technologies could also be used. The research findings indicated that adult learners in the ABET sector are involved in the learning process willingly, with the hope of finding employment after their educational journey. Having to attend physically at the ABET centres posed a challenge for adult learners who have other life responsibilities, and the findings, therefore, indicated that mobile technologies could bring support and convenience in the learning process for adult learners. The study concluded that the support system should be in place where teaching and learning for adult learners could be supported using mobile technologies. The support system could ensure collaboration among learners and easy access to the teaching and learning material. It was recommended that m-learning be adopted to support face-to-face teaching and learning, to maximise chances of supporting adult learners in their educational journey.

Keywords

adult learners, mobile learning, support system, ubuntu

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of education, and that means how individual adults access education and the type of education they need to acquire, is changing all over the world, including in the country of South Africa. Accessing the relevant education is crucial for adults, including rural ones, as they can develop knowledge, skills, and deal with the challenges they face. Access to the relevant education is key for the livelihood of adults, and acquiring education cannot solely be from the classrooms of brick and mortar, where face-to-face teaching and learning are the norm. In the twenty-first century, teaching and learning are driven by technology, where the support system is held high and considered for the success of learners. An educational support system for adult learners means that, currently, where technology is used on a daily basis, mobile technologies need to be used in teaching and learning for adult learners. Support services such as career guidance, counselling, accessing the learning material, and so forth could be accessible via mobile devices. In this way, Criollo-C, Guerrero-Arias, Jaramillo-Alcazar and Lujan-Mora (2021) posit that technological devices are already in use daily and can be used in the process of acquiring skills and knowledge.

Therefore, mobile learning (m-learning) includes the use of different technologies and devices for teaching and learning. In comparison, mobile learning or online learning is viewed to be more potent than traditional face-to-face

learning because it provides time, freedom, and flexibility (Ahmed, 2022). To remedy challenges that adults face daily, including those related to their livelihoods or learning, the use of mobile technologies or mobile learning is needed, where access to education can be made easier, especially for adults who are in various locations. In this research, the key question stands: how can m-learning support challenges that adult learners face? In this way, the use of mobile or digital devices to enhance teaching and learning for adult learners is necessary to enable access to education, with the hope that their challenges can be dealt with. Adult learners need exposure to m-learning or the use of digital devices in learning for them to develop skills and acquire knowledge. According to Thompson (2011), adult learners, when they can use technologies, can have access to learning opportunities, professional development, and personal growth. These elements are meant not only to enable them to access education but also to prepare them for the desired skills of today, as well as to empower and support them in dealing with challenges they might be facing.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The context and focus of this study were on adult learners who never had the opportunity to learn during their childhood years and some with different challenges, had the opportunity to learn and along the way could no longer continue with their schooling. In South Africa, learners who are learning from the ABET centres are adult learners, and the ABET sector is there to offer them a second chance at schooling so that they can better their lives and attain certain educational levels. The involvement of adults in education is to seize the opportunity to learn and this is adult learning, and is different from children's education. According to the European Commission (2025), "adult learning refers to a range of formal and informal learning activities, both general and vocational, undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training". Unlike children, adults in their educational journey are mature and understanding (Svetina & Perme, 2004), which is the reason they come willingly to the learning process and are not forced. They have diverse life experiences, come from different backgrounds, and their learning is self-directed. The ABET sector in South Africa has learners who come from different backgrounds and speak different languages, and who are on their educational journey for various reasons. Myers, Conte and Rubenson (2014) state that the diverse backgrounds that adult learners come from include those who are employed and self-employed with an objective to learn, those who learn because of labour market reasons, and those who embark on learning mainly for non-labour market-related reasons and personal interests.

With a lack of job opportunities for those who have no relevant skills and knowledge, adult learning is important today in South Africa. Most adult learners in the ABET sector in South Africa are those who embark on the learning process because they want to get a certificate that they can use to find work, and this reason relates to the labour market. This is in line with Kapur (2019), who states that the primary objective of adult learners to start learning is to promote and enhance their well-being and that of their families, generate income and improve their prospects (Kapur, 2019).

Adult learners in South Africa can only have access to education when they enrol at the ABET centres as learners and start attending face-to-face classes. To attend classes at the ABET centres physically has limitations and poses a challenge to some adult learners, especially those who must juggle other life responsibilities, such as employment activities or even being actively looking for employment. Therefore, it is in this way that m-learning is sought to balance learning for adult learners and some common challenges, such as time constraints and lack of access to traditional education. When adult learners fail to balance between learning and their life responsibilities, then they are affected emotionally and psychologically. As a result, they become unmotivated to continue with their learning and are likely to drop out. Against these challenges, m-learning has the potential to be the support system for teaching and learning for adult learners in the ABET sector. Mobile learning has the potential to provide learning content that is easily accessible, tailored and flexible.

According to Brown and Mbathi (2015), there was an assumption, especially within the first world, that m-learning is impossible in Africa due to inadequate bandwidth. However, this assumption is no longer valid as adult learners engage unaware and informally in m-learning. There are successful m-learning projects in Africa, and with many people owning mobile devices, m-learning is even more likely to succeed as an alternative way where adult learners can acquire some form of education. For example, the m-learning pilot project, Mobiled, in South Africa was initiated to use mobile phones to introduce new opportunities for community-building and knowledge-sharing in the context of learning (Ford & Leinonen, 2009). The pilot project used a prototype Mobiled technology platform. It was an international collaborative project done over three years after the year 2000, using mobile phone services and technologies. It aimed to explore the advantages of mobile phones in Africa for m-learning (Ford & Botha, 2007). Previously, mobile devices such as smartphones continued to be "the only effective technology device in the hands of Africans" (Ford & Botha, 2007, p.2), and to date, this "mobile miracle" continues to provide access to telecommunication in Africa to low-income earners (Bornman, 2021), especially adult learners in the ABET sector in South Africa. In this regard, the context of this study was to explore the possibilities of m-learning as a support system for adult learners in the ABET centres who own mobile phones, yet face challenges in their learning journey.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In South Africa, it is a usual practice that adult learners who need education have to enrol at the educational centres called the ABET centres to acquire education. Adult learners who receive education at the ABET centres are non-traditional students who finish school and then go to college or university to further their studies. In these centres, adult learners learn and get taught from the face-to-face style of teaching and learning, where the use of digital devices is minimal to

non-existent. In this way, adult learners in the ABET sector in South Africa are not used to the use of digital devices in the educational process; therefore, they are not used to the concept of m-learning. Teachers do not teach adult learners online because it requires different skills from face-to-face teaching, which is an issue in online teaching because many teachers do not use or understand the pedagogy needed to teach online. The focus of this paper is on exposing adult learners to the concept of m-learning and how it can be used as an alternative method to acquire education and a support system to challenges they are experiencing, such as having to rely solely on the teachers for information. Challenges also include examples such as having to attend classes daily and having to balance that with their other adult responsibilities, such as working or actively in search of work. In the face-to-face contact sessions, learners tend to rely more on their teachers for information. Currently, relying solely on information from teachers could be a challenge. Therefore, teachers cannot be the only holders of information, where information can also be retrieved from online using devices such as smartphones, and so forth.

Therefore, different challenges remain for adult learners who never had the opportunity to learn, not even as traditional learners. Even with the availability of mobile devices, challenges persist where teachers of adult learners cannot use mobile devices to teach because they do not know how or because they do not have the authority to use them. This is in line with Crioll-C, et al. (2021), who state that with the nature of mobile technologies used in teaching and learning, where adult learners have challenges, learners may experience distractions in their learning and may have inadequate educational habits that may be perpetuated by inexperienced educators and educational organisations.

On the other hand, some teachers working within the ABET sector are unfamiliar with online learning and teaching methods. This aligns with an Indian study by Gurung (2021), who posits that most teacher participants indicated a lack of technical and software knowledge when conducting online classes.

A unique contribution to the body of knowledge in this study was to expose adult learners in the ABET sector to the concept of m-learning, revealing how it could be a support system to face-to-face learning. According to Traxler (2005), m-learning is somewhere on e-learning's spectrum of portability. In this way, mobile devices can be used by adult learners in classrooms or outside them at their convenience in their learning process.

The process of acquiring knowledge and skills is limited for adults with work pressures or a lack of time to attend the centres. In some parts of the world, especially the Western world, recent years have seen ICT development and online learning providing more adult learners with opportunities to access resources and educational opportunities conveniently and flexibly (Lu, Hong & Xiao, 2022). Distance learning, e-learning, or m-learning is flexible as it can be done anywhere, anytime. Flexible learning is convenient for individuals, especially adults, and examples of flexible learning include learning at any time and place, the use of technology, different learning strategies, a choice of instructions and assessments and increased learning contexts and experiences (Cassidy, Fu Valley, Lomas, Jorel & Riseman, 2017).

Roberts (2001, p.2) uses two terms, "flexible delivery" and "flexible learning", to describe courses taken remotely from campus and states that "the flexibility will be in location only; that is, the students are enabled to access the materials from anywhere with good internet connections". The researcher argues that flexibility is limited to the location only. Currently, there are many courses ranging from various kinds of short courses, some credited and some not, to various kinds of fully structured degree programmes. These courses offer individuals flexibility to suit their needs; therefore, flexibility is not always limited to location. Therefore, adult learners who can engage in the flexible learning style that is promoted by m-learning are more likely to have some of their challenges dealt with.

M-learning provides the needed skills for learners to live in the digital world and encourages and supports active learning. M-learning and e-learning are forms of distance education as they share similar characteristics, such as being done at a distance, being flexible, and convenient. Flexibility and convenience can encourage adult learners to engage with learning through compelling conditions such as violent student protests and pandemic diseases like Coronavirus (COVID-19) (Mpungose, 2020) because they can access their learning content outside of the traditional classroom, which is fixed in a particular location. Therefore, m-learning and e-learning can be associated with adult learners to help them learn "in a way that is affordable and accessible with advantages *such as learning anywhere, anytime* and to learn technology for the future" (Folinsbee, 2008, p. 4). M-learning emerged from e-learning (Ozuorcun & Tabak, 2012) due to the co-evaluation of e-learning and mobile informatics fields and the use of wireless technologies or mobile devices (Korucu & Alkan, 2011). Additionally, Ozuorcun and Tabak (2012) describe e-learning as providing teaching and learning material via electronic media such as satellite broadcasts, intranets, or the Internet.

According to Brown and Mbathi (2015), there was an assumption, especially within the first world, that m-learning is impossible in Africa due to inadequate bandwidth. However, this assumption is no longer valid as adult learners engage unaware and informally in m-learning. There are successful m-learning projects in Africa, and with many people owning mobile devices, m-learning is even more likely to succeed as an alternative way where adult learners can acquire some form of education.

Mobile technologies make it possible for m-learning to exist, be unique and have a significant role to play in the education sector. For example, teachers and learners can access the internet on their mobile devices, enabling them to access information centres such as an online library, the internet, and social media. According to Hussain (2009), the role of mobile technologies in education enhances collaborative work and dissemination of innovative ideas, concepts, knowledge and information, and this is all about the impact that m-learning can have on people.

The m-learning environment requires adult learners to have digital skills to develop knowledge and skills successfully. Digital skills include knowing how to use World Wide Web programs, the Internet, cloud services, computer basics, digital lifestyles, and computer security and privacy (Leahy & Wilson, 2016). Akintolu and Adedire (2016) posit that the usage of mobile devices among adult learners increases and encourages their interest in learning. Cornell Tech (2018) stipulates that although literacy rates worldwide are rising, millions of adults are illiterate. Although many of these people have access to mobile phones, they cannot read and write and consequently cannot use technology on devices to their full potential. In other words, the lack of digital skills among adult learners with access to mobile devices perpetuates their illiteracy and their inability to acquire knowledge and educational skills. This is concerning and clearly indicates that digital skills and understanding to use mobile devices are needed among adult learners. For example, they must know the features of their mobile devices to enable m-learning, have the skills to navigate their mobile devices and learning systems, have access to data and storage, and so forth.

Developing digital skills to use mobile devices can be elevated by a good connection to the network, because most activities on mobile devices are online. In South Africa, network coverage is often a problem in some areas. Beneke (2020) posits that many South Africans, especially in rural areas, do not benefit from internet coverage as many areas' bandwidth is slow or non-existent. Consequently, to avoid a lack of experience in m-learning among adult learners, proper network coverage is needed so that learners can access online learning material to learn.

Teaching and learning that is supported by the availability of resources can benefit adult learners and teachers. In order "to enhance adult learners' learning and experience, a wide range of support and resources are needed, such as instructional design and delivery, course scheduling, curriculum design, academic advising, institution vision and support" (Zhang & Zheng, 2013, p.13). Adult learners are more likely to succeed when they can get support from their teachers and other learners within the ABET sector because they are goal-oriented. In the m-learning environment, just like the ABET sector's planned delivery mode, learner support must play an essential part in learners' success, including the vulnerable. Support around the use of the internet and websites is one user-friendly strategy that can be adopted to allow learners to access information. According to Simpson (2004), distance institutions organise their learner support systems differently; some learners may need more support than others. In this way, teachers can create materials and support structures. They can develop inclusive educational centres and other sources where learners can seek help.

From the above, teachers can create course content to suit a diverse range of learners' needs. For example, reading material can be made available in audio format or supplemented by videos, animations, and graphics. This suggests that teachers must accommodate different options, as some learners are differently abled, while some struggle to learn or work in the environment in which they find themselves. With the above, the ABET sector's learner support must involve tuition, peer, administration, counselling, and guidance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents a theoretical framework that gives the study some theoretical grounding. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005, p.4), a theory can be defined as "an organised body of concepts and principles intended to explain a particular phenomenon". A theory can also be explained as interrelated concepts or definitions that predict or explain situations or events (Glanz, 2008). These concepts and ideas constitute a broad and deep knowledge base and can be defined as a theory (Kivunja, 2018). Then, "the theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study" (Swanson, 2013, p.122).

This study used the theoretical framework in which the researcher narrates and explains a theory used in investigating a research problem. In researching the study's problem, the researcher used the theory of Ubuntu. In South Africa, the Ubuntu term is derived from the Nguni language and called Botho in the Sotho-Tswana language. There are different Sub-Saharan languages known as Bantu, from which the Ubuntu concept comes (Battle, 2009). Ubuntu is a key theme in African philosophy as it highlights the importance of communal or group existence, which differs from the individual human rights or individualism that the West emphasises (Mangena, 2016). Literally, Ubuntu means "I am because you are – I can only be a person through others" (Mbigi, 2005, p.1). Translated into the Sotho-Tswana language, the statement means "motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe". In other words, Ubuntu does not promote competition as it is mainly concerned with the welfare of others (Letseka, 2016). In this study, the overarching value of Ubuntu is humanism or humaneness, where adult learners ought to be supported by the use of mobile technologies in their learning process, whether in a contact or distance mode. Therefore, Ubuntu teaching and learning should be more communal than individualistic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this study includes the research paradigm, research approach, population and sampling, data collection techniques and data analysis are presented in this section. According to O'Leary (2004), the word methodology is linked with a particular set of paradigmatic assumptions used to conduct research. "Research methodology is a systematic way to solve a problem, *and* research methods are the various procedures and steps in research" (Farooq, 2019, p.1).

According to Candy (1989), there are three main paradigms: positivism, interpretivism and critical theory, and this study followed the interpretivism paradigm. In the interpretivism paradigm, methods used to interpret knowledge and understanding related to social sciences are different to methods used in physical sciences because humans can interpret

the world, and the world cannot interpret humans (Hammersley, 2013). With the interpretivism paradigm, the plan in this study was to have it as it leads to a qualitative approach of the study.

This study followed the qualitative approach. This approach is interpretive, humanistic and descriptive due to the richness and detail of the discussion and understanding of human experiences and reflections (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Therefore, this study fits within the interpretative paradigm due to understanding human experiences and reflections related to m-learning.

A qualitative research approach was best suited for the phenomenon under investigation because of the provision of its detailed descriptions of complex concepts of looking at m-learning as a support system to challenges that adult learners experience in the ABET sector.

Included in the research plan was a target of people from the population to sample. A sample of targeted people was used to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, and a purposive sampling strategy was used. Purposive sampling is used to identify the possible scenarios or trends (Kira, 2014). The participants were studying at the ABET centres in South Africa and based on their experiences, were selected to provide information. The collection of data from the adult learner participants was done through the technique of using focus-group interviews and was meant to allow the researcher to explore how m-learning could be a support system to the challenges that adult learners experience. To reach certain conclusions and answer the research question, thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret data.

FINDINGS

The study aimed to explore m-learning as a support and to answer the research question: *how can m-learning be a support system to the challenges that adult learners experience?* The research question guided the focus-group interviews to yield the research findings. The research findings outlined here highlight the profile of participants as well as the analysis of the empirical data collected from research participants. The theoretical framework of Ubuntu and the literature review guided the interviews. In this way, Bowen (2009) stipulates that the literature is supported and aligns with the research findings.

The information given indicated that adult learner participants who participated in the focus-group interviews came from South Africa's two provinces of the North West and Gauteng, and from four different ABET centres. Five learner participants came from each centre. All adult learners were learning at ABET Level 4. In South Africa, adult education is provided at ABET Levels 1 to 4. Some adult learning centres offer the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 4 certificate, which is the Matric/Grade 12 certificate. From the focus-group interviews, most learners aimed to get the Matric/Grade 12 certificate after completing their ABET Level 4. Many learners use their Matric/Grade 12 certificates to apply for spaces at tertiary institutions to further their studies. ABET (2022) details ABET Level 4 as equivalent to Grade 9 at a school level and NQF Level 1.

The age and gender of adult learner participants varied, ranging from those who were eighteen years of age to those who were above the age of sixty.

This study explored the possibilities of m-learning as a support system to the challenges that adult learners in the ABET sector in South Africa experience. In their responses, adult learner participants talked about challenges related to learning and posed views about m-learning. The process involved ways to answer the research question: how can m-learning be a support system to the challenges that adult learners experience?

The responses from participants reflected the challenges they face, such as having to go to school with the hope of finding employment after completing certain educational levels. Having to commute daily to school and this commuting requires money that the adult learners do not have. To such an extent, the education that adult learners need can only be attainable if they can come to the physical ABET centres and rely on teachers. At that, adult learners attend classes differently from children in the sense that children get sent to school by their parents, whereas adults send themselves to school due to life situations they find themselves in. In this regard, they are forced to go to the ABET centres to get education, yet they need to work for survival. M-learning, therefore, has the potential to relieve this challenge.

It was clear that receiving a Grade 12 certificate or ABET Level 4 certificate was highly desired, as it was viewed as a ticket to secure a job. From the comments of Participants 2 and 3 of FG 1, it became clear that adult learners embark on the learning process because they want to survive in life. For the reason of sitting at home without a job, Participant 3 decided to come to the ABET centre to learn because he wants to succeed in life and be able to own cars and houses. All participants from FG 1 added that they can even start their own businesses with the learning.

The researcher picked up mixed messages from the participants regarding their learning of ABET Level 4. Many participants indicated they were happy with their ABET Level 4 as they were learning a lot, especially from subjects like Ancillary, Agriculture, Economic and Management Sciences (EMS), and Maths literacy. "With ABET Level 4, I can go and look for work or start a poultry business," said Participant 2. Participant 3 had the same sentiment as Participant 2 that in ABET Level 4, they learn a lot and that there is no need for them to pursue Grade 12 upon completing ABET Level 4. Contrary to Participants 2 and 3, other participants indicated that with ABET Level 4, they stand a chance to do Matric, start their own businesses or be employed primarily in the public sectors of health or defence as soldiers. Participants 14 and 15 of FG 3 stated that with ABET Level 4, they can secure jobs as soldiers or work at hospitals. In supporting the statement, Participant 5 further stated that he knows of his neighbour who did ABET Level 4 and is now working as a soldier. "I know of someone who was doing ABET Level 4 here and is now working in town sewing clothes for children, and the other one runs a bakery business," said Participant 20 of FG 4.

Conversely, only five participants indicated that ABET Level 4 was not good enough for them as they still needed to do Matric. They confirmed that most companies prefer to employ candidates with a Matric certificate. “I think ABET Level 4 is not good enough for us”, stated Participant 7 of FG 2. Participant 1 of FG 1 said, “ABET Level 4 won’t help – mostly, a Grade 12 certificate is needed. My plan is to do Grade 12 after this level”. Like this participant, Participant 16 of FG 4 stated that the Matric certificate is needed for those looking for jobs and that it is disappointing when one does not have it. This Participant continued to say: “Also, it depends on the job advertisement – for example, if it wants a person with the Matric certificate or ABET Level 4 certificate”.

It was clear that the use of mobile technologies like smartphones in teaching and learning in the ABET centres was not practised for the convenience of adults who are in need of work. Conversely, adult learners owned smartphones and had knowledge and skills on how to use them for communication in their daily lives. That means, the responses of participant from all groups showed that they can use their mobile devices mainly for communication. Apart from a 63-year-old participant from FG 3 who showed his cell phone and was unsure whether it was a smartphone or not, other participants were aware that they can use smartphones beyond making and receiving calls. These participants had knowledge and skills to download specific applications such as WhatsApp and, Music, Google; make phone calls and receive them; write emails and send them; write and read text messages; chat via chat applications or websites; connect to social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; research information for school work; search and apply for jobs using their mobile phones, read news and listen to music or audio files and watch videos. The knowledge and skills adult learners need in using mobile phones are viewed as general and not specific to m-learning. In contrast, knowledge and skills are transferable and can be quickly adopted by any adult learner who wants to do m-learning. Ta’amneh (2021, p.1) posits that smartphones have become instruments that most learners use daily. In this regard, when Participant 16 of FG 4 mentioned that she uses Google to search for information about different recipes, the researcher interjected to alert this participant that she was doing m-learning. This participant did not go to the brick-and-mortar library to get books and research different recipes, but used her phone.

All the adult learner participants pointed out that coming to school daily was hard for them. “I have a child who goes to school, and I need to give him pocket money. I also need to spare some for myself when I come to school. This m-learning was going to help because I could sit at home and learn from my phone,” said Participant 13. Participant 17 interjected and said: “Is it possible that you can ask the centre manager or government to allow us to do m-learning?”. The issue at hand here is that m-learning is not formalised by the Department of Higher Education (DHET) to be used in the ABET centres that these centres belong to. Lack of formalisation of m-learning in the ABET centres perpetuates challenges that adults have because they have other life responsibilities apart from learning. Related to the theory of Ubuntu that promotes compassion, togetherness and making life easier for all, the DHET is not open to other ways of learning for adult learners, such as flexible learning, that is needed for those juggling different aspects of life.

Some participants stated that challenges are associated with coming to the centre every day. Those challenges included commuting daily, not having enough money to commute daily, and spending some hours at the centre, which are seen as extended hours.

“I have a challenge to stay here from 8 am till 2 pm, and actually to come here every day, and you’d find that at times you haven’t studied anything,” said Participant 12.

In addition, Participant 1 said, “Some teachers do not come and teach us, and it is boring. It is the reason why I don’t want to come here every day”. Participant 13 added,

“My challenge is that I notice that I am an older person who will attend school, and sometimes I wonder and ask myself questions if it is worth it or if I am wasting my time. Maybe I should quit and go and look for work, plus one salary is not enough in our household. At the same time, I realise that learning might benefit me in the future”.

Challenges vary and go with specific responsibilities. Participant 16 said,

“I must do chores at home before coming to school, and that is challenging. At times, my son comes here crying, looking for me or something because our home is not far from this centre”.

Despite the above challenges that adult learners experience, they still must come to the contact centres for access to education. The disadvantage is that adult learners in the ABET sector, with different life responsibilities, depend on face-to-face contact sessions at the ABET centres to learn. In other words, these adult learners cannot learn “anytime, anywhere” unless they physically come to the ABET centres.

There were four adult learner participants who did not prefer m-learning, and they explained that they preferred a physical classroom set-up instead of using a mobile device for learning. They cited the reasons that the screen sizes of the mobile devices are too small for one to learn from. Other participants expressed a preference for the combination of m-learning and face-to-face learning. “Face-to-face learning needs to be supported by m-learning”, said Participant 4. Combining the two learning styles that Participant 4 talked about is blended learning, and it is beneficial. According to Shand and Farrelly (2018), blended learning allows learners to meet face-to-face, and with the online portion of blended learning, they have continuous access to online content resources, frequent communication, and grades.

M-learning has the potential to relieve challenges that adult learners experience in their quest for education. With the support structure at hand, adult learners could reach levels of success and be able to juggle learning and finding work or working at the same time.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was to explore how m-learning could be a support system for challenges that adult learners experience in the ABET centres in South Africa. The support system of integrating the use of mobile devices in teaching and learning was viewed to aid adult learners with the challenges they experience. Literature review and data collected helped identify the gap that adult learners could benefit from using mobile devices in their learning process, and do so flexibly while juggling other life responsibilities. The theoretical framework of Ubuntu was discussed, as well as the research methodology used in this study. The justification of using the theory of Ubuntu was viewed to be appropriate to support the idea that the learning journey of adult learners cannot be restricted only to face-to-face learning currently, but rather ought to be inclusive and convenient, just as Ubuntu stands for. The focus group interviews were conducted, where the research participants provided data, and the findings indicated that the integration of m-learning in learning was desired. M-learning was desired for its benefits of providing flexibility and convenience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this research study makes the following recommendations:

- The use of mobile technologies in the ABET sector in South Africa can be adopted as a support system in teaching and learning for adult learners. M-learning can be used to support face-to-face teaching and learning.
- Adult learners are allowed to use mobile devices to search for information related to their studies and submit assignments online.
- Adult learners are allowed to work collaboratively using mobile devices.
- Communication channels, such as the use of WhatsApp groups, should be made available and used to provide any type of support to adult learners.
- The ABET sector raises funds to make mobile devices and connections to the internet available to all adult learners in different ABET centres.

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