


Responses of farm managers pertaining the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme as part of Christian formation with farm workers: A qualitative study

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Equipping Programme by employing a qualitative research pattern, namely, structured interviews with managers. These managers were from various farms in the Christiana district (North-West Province, South Africa), who also participated in the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme and in the research project. An exploratory, interpretive and descriptive qualitative contextual design was followed. The results from this qualitative pattern indicated that managers felt positive that their farm workers had a life-changing experience through the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme. Managers indicated that the LIFEPLAN® programme made a huge impact on and difference in the lives of farm workers. Significant to this research is the fact that more than 50% of farm workers showed a high interest in Christianity and to practice Christian values, and this significance was very positive for farm managers in the Christiana district.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: Socio-economic environment and destructive behavioural patterns lead to many lives destroyed. Preliminary results suggested behavioural modifications linked to biblio-moral intervention. LIFEPLAN® has a transdisciplinary approach comprising three main disciplines and constituencies: theology, education and health. It seeks creative solutions to inspire and equip the youth to become responsible citizens in their communities.

Introduction and background

This article describes part of the empirical process from a bigger study (Freeks 2018) to make specific deductions by using a qualitative research pattern. The empirical data were interpreted considering the holistic missional outreach to the contemporary youth of South Africa by evaluating the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme. The most suitable and recognised design for this research was found to be the model of Osmer (2008). This model provides clear methods for moving from an existing to a new praxis based on a theological and situational analysis. In the present study, the new praxis focused on the role of a missional vision in youth ministry in previously disadvantaged communities. Farm workers are struggling with challenges of poverty, unemployment, immorality and criminality among young people. The objective of the empirical research was to evaluate the LIFEPLAN® programme (see Freeks 2017) and its impact and effectiveness as a tool for churches to reach the youth and their communities facing the mentioned multiple challenges. This purpose forms part of the descriptive-empirical task of Osmer (2008:31). The empirical research was regarded as closely connected to theological theories. Therefore, it was essential to utilise other empirical sources in addition to the literature, namely, structured interviews. The aim of this article is to describe the research process and the research results measured against the aim and objectives of the mentioned study. The first part of the article discusses how a qualitative research design is structured. From the research method that was used, a discussion follows where the research results are explained.

Qualitative research design

In the qualitative research approach, an exploratory, interpretive and descriptive contextual design was used (cf. Thorne 2008). An exploratory approach investigates the experience of the participants (farm managers). This research was necessary seeing that, to date, this context has not been explored yet. The researcher attempted to gauge the experiences of participants (farm managers) by using structured interviews.

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Typically, a descriptive approach is not only used for quantitative research, but can also be employed for qualitative research (Vyhmeister 2008:151). According to Evans (2014:107, cf. Burns & Grove 2005:29), it is preferable that research on a phenomenon takes place within the relevant context. Therefore, by conducting the present research, the feedbacks of managers of the various farms were examined within the unique context of their farm workers (participants) who attended the LIFEPLAN® programme.

Linked to this approach, the model of Osmer (2008) was used. This model offers four distinctive steps or tasks to missiology as a model, whose guides can be used to interpret incidents, situations and events in which a situation may unfold. These four steps provide an answer to a specific question:

- **Descriptive-empirical task – *What is going on?*** This step analysed the current situations and contexts of the youth in rural areas in South Africa. The researcher had to be able to describe and understand their condition. This task was conducted through qualitative (structured interviews and naive sketches) targeting youth as well as the farm managers from the rural areas.
- **Interpretive task – *Why is this going on?*** This implied finding reasons for the state of affairs, for example, interpreting why the present situation exists and how it impacts participants through a specific training and equipping programme such as LIFEPLAN®.
- **Normative task – *What ought to be going on?*** The researcher accepts the Bible as the authoritative and the normative standard, providing the basis to evaluate what is going on and suggesting appropriate responses and feedback. Relevant biblical principles were applied to the youth in rural areas and communities in South Africa.
- **Pragmatic task – *How might we respond?*** The situational and normative data were interpreted to propose a tool for churches that would help them reach the youth and rural communities who are struggling with the mentioned challenges. It is envisaged that this will impact and influence the current situation and lead towards desirable outcomes for the youth and communities of the targeted investigation.

The focus of this article will be on the normative as well as the pragmatic task. Such a model (Osmer 2008) helps missionaries and practical theologians to understand and have insight into the lives of people (cf. Lotter 2007:2–7).

The phenomenon explored and described according to the model of Osmer was the LIFEPLAN® programme. This programme was evaluated from a missiological perspective to determine its impact and effectiveness as a possible tool for churches to help them reach the youth and communities in rural areas (cf. Freeks 2017:1–4, 2018). The context of the present study was the Christiana district in the North-West Province, South Africa, with the participants (farm workers) who attended the LIFEPLAN® training as well as the managers of the various farms in the district (cf. Freeks 2018).

Research method

A qualitative research method was used to gather data. This involved participants (farm managers) through structured interviews.

Permission to conduct the research

Permission to conduct the qualitative research with farm managers was granted by the following institutions and individuals: research committee of the university as well as the individual managers who participated in the study. Permission was obtained from the individual managers through informed consent (Botma et al. 2010:12, 16–17). Letters were written to the 10 managers whose workers participated in the LIFEPLAN® programme in the broader Christiana district explaining the purpose of the study. This was followed by each manager signing a consent form, confirming that they would participate in the research voluntarily.

Sample

Population

For the qualitative research, the population consisted of farm managers (structured interviews). All farm managers in the research were selected from the broader Christiana district. The demographic layout of this district is black and mixed-race people (farm workers) and white people (farm managers).

Sampling

Farm managers were selected as participants because most of them (75%) attended the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme, and farm managers acquired the training and equipping programme for their farm workers.

Sample size

Structured interviews were used for a total of nine participants (farm managers) (90% from the actual 10 managers in the Christiana district whose workers participated in the LIFEPLAN® programme).

The following inclusion criteria were used for the farm managers (Strydom 2005):

- Farm managers should be part of and familiar with the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme.
- Farm managers must ensure effective communication.
- They should be Christians that can include Apostolic Faith Mission, Pentecostal, Protestant, Roman Catholic, United Reformed Church, Methodist and so forth and must be involved in the LIFEPLAN® project and intervention.
- Farm managers must provide informed consent to participate in the study.
- Farm managers must be able to communicate in Afrikaans or English. (p. 206)

Data gathering

The researcher together with the coordinator for the various farms in the Christiana district identified farm managers. Farm managers were contacted telephonically and an appointment was arranged for the time and place where structured interviews were to be conducted. Research factors were discussed with the participants, namely, anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, risks, withdrawal and even possible termination (Botma et al. 2010:13–14). The physical setting where the structured interviews took place included the private offices of farm managers. These settings were private, pleasant and comfortable holding little or no distractions (Pinkoane 2005:293).

Data analysis

For data analysis, the researcher formulated 10 questions for farm managers by moving from descriptive to interpretive analysis (Botma et al. 2010:2–4). Several conclusions and a general conclusion were drawn that give significance to this article.

Trustworthiness of the research process

Trustworthiness of this research was ensured by using Lincoln and Guba's model (as cited in Botma et al. 2010). Truth value was ensured by prolonged engagement with the farm managers during the intervention, the LIFEPLAN® training project and structured interviews. Reflectivity was achieved by guiding and conducting structured interviews with farm managers. Regular discussions with the coordinator and managers from the various farms improved the credibility of the research.

Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the qualitative research with farm managers was granted by the following institutions and individuals: Research Committee of the Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, Institutional Research Ethics Committee as well as the individual managers who participated in the study. Permission from the individual managers was obtained through informed consent (Botma et al. 2010:12, 16–17). Letters were written to each manager in the broader Christiana district explaining the purpose of the study. This was followed by each manager signing a consent form, confirming that they would participate in the research on a voluntary basis.

Informed consent

Before the research commenced, the researcher approached the various farms and farm managers. The significance of their involvement and participation in the study was explained. Thereafter, the researcher held different meetings with the farm managers, explaining the letter and consent as proof of their permission to participate in the study (Freeks 2018). The researcher also explained the ethical considerations and provided farm workers with information

about the purpose of the research, its procedure and general details concerning the protection of confidentiality.

Right to self-determination

The right to self-determination is based on the ethical principle of respect. In this regard, the researcher treated all participants as autonomous agents enjoying personal freedom and rights. The researcher also informed the co-researchers about the proposed study and stressed that their participation was fully voluntary. Participants had also the right to withdraw from the study at any time without further repercussions (Brink 2007:32).

Anonymity and confidentiality

The researcher dealt with farm workers' information confidentially. This was done by protecting their anonymity, with their consent that the researcher may use and disclose their personal information (Strydom & Delpont 2004:61).

Privacy

The researcher respected each farm manager's right to privacy, especially the personal information. He also ensured that the farm managers' names were not mentioned in their information. Farm managers' information was treated confidentially by protecting their anonymity after they had given authorisation that the researcher may use and disclose such information (Strydom & Delpont 2004:61).

Right to fair treatment

The researcher treated all farm managers fairly and with dignity, whether they were young or older (Burns & Grove 2005:107).

Results of the study

Results obtained from the qualitative research (structured interviews) were from farm managers. The data were presented by forming impressions, comments, opinions and suggestions from the structured interviews from farm managers. Furthermore, feedback was given by making a summary. Based on the findings from structured interviews, this article gives a summary and conclusion of farm manager's responses pertaining the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme. This article used a qualitative approach involving farm managers from the various farms in the Christiana district.

Results from the structured interviews of farm managers

For the qualitative research (posed to farm managers), 10 open-ended questions were formulated to ensure similar exploration of farm managers' lived experience (Botma et al. 2010:134–135). Feedbacks were given in the form of a summary. The open-ended questions were first evaluated by experts in the field of missiology and pastoral theology to determine whether these questions were clear, understandable and appropriate. The questions were refined and adjusted

by applying the feedback (Botma et al. 2010:207–208). The researcher also conducted a pilot study by testing the structured interviews with one participant in each of the identified populations. The data were found to be usable and were included in the total data set.

Subsequently, the open-ended questions are presented and discussed under the following subsections:

- Question 1: What are your general impressions and comments with regard to the LIFEPLAN® programme?

Most of the farm managers (78%) responded highly positively to Question 1. They confirmed that the LIFEPLAN® is an effective course for achieving its aims and they will recommend it to any institution. However, a small percentage of farm managers (11%) remarked that the programme discriminates against farm workers (participants). Overall, farm managers were convinced that farm workers were enriched through the programme, especially in the way these workers learnt to care for themselves and others. Managers (67%) also mentioned the fact that LIFEPLAN® is an informative programme because workers learnt important values such as positive attitude, positive self-image, respect and appreciation. The managers (89%) also indicated that the LIFEPLAN® programme impacted and made a major difference in the daily lives of numerous farm workers.

- Question 2: What behavioural changes were you able to observe in workers during the presenting of the LIFEPLAN® programme?

To this question, three out of nine managers indicated that they observed no behavioural changes in workers whatsoever during the presenting of the LIFEPLAN® programme. The reason was that certain workers were not interested in the programme because of poor motivation and lack of knowledge. The other managers, however, indicated that most of the workers were very keen, interested and participative in the programme. Managers observed that most workers applied the majority of the themes they learnt during the presentation of the programme. They mentioned especially crucial points such as politeness, friendliness, positivity at work, good communication, acceptance of responsibilities and budget control that emerged in the behaviour of workers. Managers further indicated that workers are less negative, especially towards their employers, and behave more responsible than before.

- Question 3: What behavioural changes were you able to observe in workers after the LIFEPLAN® programme?

In response to Question 3, the managers responded with different answers. Four managers indicated that they observed no changes in the workers, while the rest of the managers mentioned that change began developing slowly and it was observed in the workers' lifestyle. The managers affirmed that workers showed more interest in their work and were conscious of their health, improved relationships

between themselves and managers, and their behaviour towards others. The managers also found that farm workers improved themselves by practising sound Christian values. The managers further observed that their workers functioned more effectively in a group and show a positive outlook in life. They worked hard to improve their life and aim to give their children a better future and education.

The managers mentioned that not only did these farm workers' lifestyle change but also the majority of them (56% of the trained workers) have become more respectful individuals. They developed self-confidence and became more responsible after undergoing the LIFEPLAN® programme (67%). The managers also indicated that the programme was for the workers' own benefit. For example, the use of alcohol decreased because this scenario was observed in the Monday situation where most of the workers were previously absent because of this problem. The programme also had a huge influence on the worker's family because workers shared the excitement and knowledge of what they learnt in the LIFEPLAN® programme. Significantly, in answer to the question above, a manager observed that one specific family began to attend church services regularly.

- Question 4: Did the LIFEPLAN® programme, according to you, make a significant difference in the life of the workers and their families?

To this specific question, three managers indicated that there were no significant differences. The reasons they provided were as follows: the farm workers did not take the LIFEPLAN® training seriously, the programme was too difficult to understand and workers are still negative towards their managers after the training. However, seven managers answered 'Yes' to the question. They affirmed that the LIFEPLAN® programme made a significant difference. These farm managers found a significant difference in the positive behaviour of the workers.

Linked to positive behaviour of farm workers was the principle of appreciation and respect for their work and love for their families. The managers indicated that 44% of the trained workers are deeply concerned about the welfare of their families. A number of families enjoy a high standard of living after the programme, which is increasing, and was not the case previously. Currently, personal hygiene, handling of stress, alcohol use, budgeting, better communication, respect for others, religion, church attendance and God are some important aspects of daily lives. The managers also mentioned that workers started to read and write to improve their education and skills level. It was further mentioned that the programme motivated workers to such an extent that they began to believe in themselves and in their abilities.

- Question 5: Have you seen any participants in this programme becoming more interested in Christianity?

In response to this question, all the participating farm managers answered 'Yes'. Their responses indicated that 90%

of a group of 90 participants from a specific farm showed high interest in Christianity. From another farm, one participant out of five practices and exercises Christian values. The interest in Christianity was noticed by managers during the Monday morning prayer and scripture reading by participants. It was evident that participants became more involved in Christianity, with the main focus on reading Bible regularly and praying for one another. The managers also indicated that the programme depicts morality in humanity. It is further mentioned that farm workers indicated that the 'biblical part' of the LIFEPLAN® programme made them more interested in Christianity. One worker, for example, was baptised in the Apostolic Faith Mission Church and became a born-again Christian.

- Question 6: Have you seen any participants who have not been believers in Christ before coming to faith in Christ through this programme?

In response to Question 6, there were only two cases where managers indicated 'No' and explained that they were unaware of any participants coming to faith in Christ through this programme. It was indicated from a certain farm that, for the past 2 years, three out of five participants attended less church services. However, the overall feedback from farm managers indicated that workers were not believers before, but were coming to faith in Christ through this programme.

It was also mentioned that 30% of participants have joined churches and regularly attend Sunday morning services. The managers also indicated that three out of 23 participants from a certain farm currently are more involved in Christianity because of the initiatives of the LIFEPLAN® programme. Participants have come to realise the true nature of sin and its consequences. Other participants, for example, quit smoking and reduced the use of alcohol. Certain workers were baptised and they accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. Others were participating in evening prayers, attending church worship and praised God for the work of Christ in their life.

- Question 7: Do you know about any participants becoming more involved and active in Christian churches through their involvement in this programme?

All the farm managers answered with a definite 'Yes' to this question. They indicated that 80% of the participants (farm workers) have joined Christian churches because of their involvement in this programme. The participants were becoming more engaged in Christian practices to such an extent that certain individuals even took the initiative to preach at funerals. It was found that other participants are involved fully in church life that they raised money to buy musical instruments for the worship part in the church. Furthermore, it was mentioned that farm workers participate in sensible conversations about the wrong and right paths of life and are reading the Bible to one another. It was further indicated that almost 40% of the farm workers frequently

testify in their conversations with one another about their deliverance from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ.

- Question 8: Is there a possibility that this programme may be used by churches to strengthen their missional outreach to communities?

All farm managers responded positively to this question. They affirmed that there is a huge possibility for the LIFEPLAN® programme to be used by churches. The managers mentioned that there are approximately 59 Christian churches in the specific area and the programme can be adapted for preaching. Managers were fully convinced that churches could benefit from the programme because it has the potential to change people's wrong lifestyles into improved ones. It was confirmed that the programme can teach people how to accept Jesus Christ as Redeemer in their lives. The managers proposed that members of the different Christian churches should get involved and pay regular visits at farms because they believe that this programme has the ability to transform lives.

During group discussions with participants, the managers indicated clearly that churches could use certain modules of the programme. Therefore, it is possible that the programme can impact strongly churches and help them strengthen their missional outreach to communities.

- Question 9: How do you see this programme being used by churches?

To this question, the managers indicated that churches can incorporate this programme in their Bible study sessions and prayer meetings to teach the members of the church about the love of God and the essence of prayer. Bible studies provide the best opportunity to teach church members about certain Christian moral values, for example, respect, love and caring for the poor. The programme can be used for the spiritual growth of church members and to help motivate them to trust and believe in God. Other managers suggested that small parts or sections of the LIFEPLAN® programme can be used in public worship to educate church members.

- Question 10: How did you personally benefit from the LIFEPLAN® programme? Motivate.

Out of the 10 farm managers, two indicated that they learnt nothing from the LIFEPLAN® programme and did not benefit at all from the programme. In contrast, the other eight managers indicated that they benefited tremendously. They explained that LIFEPLAN® taught them to know who they are, and to appreciate, respect and love themselves and others. The managers also indicated that they can better manage their time as well as their finances. Most of them attested that the programme helped them forge better relations with their workers. They can also refer to the LIFEPLAN® programme to address unacceptable behaviour among workers.

Certain managers mentioned that they benefit for the mere fact that their workers are more motivated, skilful

and developed. They expressed their feelings through responses such as 'the uplifting of people is very close to my heart'; 'if it goes well with my workers, it goes well with me'; and 'it is nice to see the joy, happiness and excitement among my workers'.

Managers even allowed an 'open-door' policy to farm workers by allowing the discussion of problems or issues with them. They explained that this type of openness between them and the workers leads to a more positive attitude among the workers, which can make them more productive.

Summary of the managers' responses pertaining the LIFEPLAN® programme

Overall, it must be mentioned, firstly, that not all the farm managers agreed on all the open-ended questions. For example, regarding Question 2 about the behavioural changes, three out of the 10 managers did not observe any behavioural changes or significance during their training. Thus, the feedback and results received from the LIFEPLAN® programme were not all positive. For example, certain participants responded totally negatively, such as 'LIFEPLAN® taught me nothing' and 'I learn nothing from the programme'. However, this type of response was the exception rather than the rule.

Secondly, it was evident that the rest of the managers observed a definite change in the life of farm workers. From the sample size of 151 participants, 90% and more indicated a positive impact of LIFEPLAN® on their daily lives. Therefore, most of the managers are of the opinion that the LIFEPLAN® programme made a significant impact on and difference in the lives of numerous farm workers. The managers mentioned that workers can improve themselves by practising good Christian values.

It is, furthermore, striking to note that 90% of a group of 90 participants from one specific farm showed a keen interest in Christianity where prayer meetings and scripture readings became the order of the day. Other participants were so convinced by the LIFEPLAN® programme that they decided to be baptised and become born-again Christians. Certain managers indicated no behavioural changes among participants and pointed out that participants rather attend less church meetings. Nevertheless, significant to this study, 80% of the participants joined and attended church services regularly, especially Sunday morning services. These participants attested that presently aspects such as religion, church attendance and the essence of God are vital in their daily lives.

Managers even advised churches in their area to use this programme during their Bible studies, as well as prayer and worship meetings. The programme was found as a motivation and inspiration not only to managers but also to workers. The overall opinion of the managers was that they benefited from the programme because of improved and sound relationship with workers. Workers, on the other

hand, were more positive towards managers because of the 'open-door' policy the managers implemented. This policy changed workers' attitude, which made them more positive and productive.

Conclusion

Practical theology's principles permeate this research in its role of mediation between the world and the church, between that which is outside (without scripture) and that which is inside (with scripture). It seeks to bring religious and moral meanings to bear on the needs, problems and activities of *everyday human experience* to interpret their significance, understand their aetiologies and guide appropriate and healing interventions. The interdisciplinary and practical aim of the theology, and its task, is to make informed interventions about the lives of people who are facing life transitions, stresses and crises. To accomplish its task, it must take into consideration wider cultural issues that impact the lives of people, including racial and ethnic traditions, inter-racial conflict, gender, equality, discrimination against people because of sexual preference, and issues related to technological and post-industrial economic changes. Furthermore, it promotes the flourishing of all, and by all, one may ask: who are included into the 'all', would that be only church-focused or people in general, or also those 'outside' the church? In this research, it is clear that 90% of all the farm managers had agreed on the impact and significance of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme and the difference the programme made in their own lives and the lives of their workers. They indicated that the programme may function as a *buffer* against the challenges and problematic issues that most of the farm workers face and it may be of service to churches and Christian ministries helping them enhance more outreach in the present South African society.

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Competing interests

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