**The Research Methodology**

**Research Objectives**

1. Identify dropout youths’ individual perceptions of their future.
2. Mapping the occupational aspirations of dropout youth handled by the Youth Advancement Units.
3. Define the sociological factors influencing the occupational aspirations of dropout youth.
4. Developing a conceptual model and theoretical framework for understanding the occupational aspirations of dropout youth.

**Research Questions**

1. How do dropout youth perceive their future?

2. What are the occupational aspirations of dropout youth?

3. Are there factors that affect the occupational aspirations of dropout youth?

If so, what are they?

**Research Paradigm**

The term “research approach” refers to the research paradigm. What set of beliefs and assumptions is used to shape the overall plan of the research: formulation of problems, suitability and justification of research tools, ways and methods for data collection and analysis? Research approaches are based on systems of beliefs and insights about the world: how we understand the ontological, epistemological, and methodological issues (Shkedy, 2014). One can distinguish between three types of research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method. Quantitative research examines preliminary hypotheses by examining the relationships between the different variables. It is carried out with structured questionnaires that enable the measurement of numerical data and its analysis using statistical tools. Qualitative research is designed to discover and understand social phenomena at the individual or group level. The research tools include interaction with the research population through personal interviews, observations, focus groups, etc. The analysis of the data is done by analyzing the categories and themes that arise from applying these tools. Quantitative and qualitative research should not be perceived as opposite or dichotomous but as different approaches to research. Mixed-method research enables the integration of both quantitative and qualitative research into one study. This approach supports the belief that the integration will enable a broadening and deepening of the research topic (Creswell, 2009).

The choice of one research approach over another has to do with the personal and research worldview of the researcher and the area being studied. The distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is often a material one—between numbers and words or between the use of closed questions, as in quantitative research, and the use of open questions, as in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The methodological paradigm chosen for this study is qualitative. Due to the unique context of the research population and the frame of the study, i.e., dropout youth treated by Youth Advancement Units, the case-study approach was chosen as the basis of the research, and the research practice chosen was grounded theory.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a method that yields information about people, groups, and even ourselves in reference to a given social reality. It is an accepted research method for various disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences, through which social phenomena are studied, discovered, exposed, described, or explained. The qualitative approach in research is a broad umbrella for numerous and diverse research methods and tools that combine various areas of life and different research fields (Leavy, 2014). In qualitative research, the meaning that people ascribe to social problems is immensely important. In the course of the research, questions are raised and data are gathered from the specific point of view of the research participants. The data are analyzed inductively and are built up from the personal point of view into general themes. The researcher formulates an interpretation of the findings and produces a flexibly structured final product. Those who choose this research approach respect the individual’s way of life and focus on the subjective meanings that the individual imparts to the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Every world-picture is based on fundamental assumptions about the nature of the reality that it represents. In the positivist paradigm, assumptions about the essence of reality are predicated on belief in the existence of a single and absolute objective reality. This reality is independent of time and context and may be reduced to simple and statistically related components. In the constructivist paradigm, in contrast, reality is seen as a human structure shaped by the cultural and human conditions of those being researched. Reality is constructed from interpretations provided by both the participants and the researcher. Qualitative research probes several interpretations concurrently and uses several research tools—interviews, observations, photographs, films, documents, and so on (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016)—to attain deeper understanding and establish a basis for the credibility of its findings. Qualitative research began in the late nineteenth century with the development of social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Its most meaningful growth, however, took place in the 1960s and 1970s as social movements such as those for civil rights, women, the gay community, and peace advanced steadily. These movements emphasized the place of the individual relative to society, stressing his or her free will and influence over his or her fate and surroundings as an individual or as a member of the collective. These outlooks affected the field of research by offering an alternative to the traditional modes of investigation that had prevailed until then (Leavy, 2014). The methodological struggle that typified the twentieth century, in which the qualitative approach had to fight for its validity and existence, has persisted in the twenty-first century. Young researchers still have to justify their choice of the qualitative approach in their studies vis-à-vis an academic establishment that criticizes qualitative research as not scientific enough. Just the same, the twenty-first century has seen the development of many diverse theories and spheres of research, such as feminist theory and queer theory, gender studies, critical ethnic theories, and the like. These theories promote a ramified research discourse that entails maneuvering between positivism and post-positivism, constructivism and post-structuralism, critical theory and participant research. Researchers who wish to investigate these fields find the qualitative approach best suited to their work. Although it has undergone many changes and accommodated multiple evolving attitudes, qualitative research has managed to uphold the integrity of its basic principles and its essence, attesting to its acceptance as a legitimate and valid research method around the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

**Case Study**

Generally speaking, one may say that any group that shares a common culture may serve as a case study. However, a case study is instructive of a social phenomenon or problem by means of one or more events in a specific context and within a clear and demarcated system. In a case study, information and data are collected by means of diverse research tools that the researcher puts into play. The case-study approach is widely used in the social sciences, psychology, social work, counseling, medicine, law, education, and sociology. Qualitative case studies come in several forms differentiated by size, depending on whether the study covers a single case, multiple cases, a group, a program, or an activity. In a single-case study, the researcher chooses a topic and examines it through the lens of one clearly demarcated event that he or she uses as an example of the matter at hand. In a multi-participant case study, one specific topic is still examined but multiple research subjects are used as an example. This method promotes the principle of replication, through which one may generalize the phenomenon being studied. Several procedures are followed in a case study. First, the case-study approach is tested for its propriety and suitability to the research goals and questions and the social problem presented. The case-study method is found suitable when the research object is clear and set within a given frame and when the study or comparison of cases may yield a deep understanding of the phenomenon in question. After the research framework is selected, specific research participants are chosen on the basis of criteria that are tailored to the sampling method and that optimally promote the purposes of the research. The process of gathering data from the participants is a rich one that may be performed with the help of several research tools. Data analysis yields a holistic test of the case or cases studied, along with specific analysis of various aspects such as historical background, chronology of events, or daily life, in reference to the relevant research topics (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007).

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is based on research that draws its theoretical subjects from a direct encounter with the field. The theory methodology is anchored in a clear, structured field. Yet, it incorporates the necessary flexibility in collecting and analyzing the data to allow creation of the theories out of the data itself. The data shape the basic assumptions of the theory and generate the central concepts of the research. Researchers who base their work on this method collect data and develop the theory from start to finish of the study. There is give and take of the data being built by the theory and the theory being built against the analysis of the data.

The rationale behind the grounded-theory approach says that the social sciences require a research method that will explain social phenomena from the bottom up, i.e., theories that start by contemplating the field and practice. This method has been found suitable for research in various disciplines, mainly in the social sciences, such as nursing, sociology, education, and sociology (Shimoni, 2016).

Grounded theory was founded by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) and developed on the basis of their experience in research with terminally ill patients. From this work, they created research strategies for understanding the phenomena that are derived from establishing the theories based on the data. This was a groundbreaking concept in the period when qualitative research was considered among scientists to be inferior to quantitative research and when studies attempted to corroborate social phenomena around existing theories rather than formulate theories in response to analysis of phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) claimed that attempts to corroborate phenomena on the basis of grand theories thwarted the development of new theories and that, therefore, new theories should be evolved that would restore authentic observation of the research field. Separate studies of social phenomena that have a common denominator and interrelations, they claimed, may produce a solid foundation for the development of new theories in the same field of content. Strauss and Glaser called them “disciplinary theories”—the kind that have similarities that may attest to the formation of an overarching interdisciplinary theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, in Shimoni, 2016). A grounded theory is based on several important and essential principles, one of which is the researcher’s positionality in the research field. Glaser (1978) strongly emphasizes the importance of “remaining open”; namely, researchers should narrow their views, background, and theoretical knowledge to the extent possible when they reach the research field and, in particular, when they analyze their data. Thus users of grounded theory may be surprised by the process in which their data take shape and discover new angles of observation (Glaser, 1978, in Holton, 2017).

The processes of gathering the data, analyzing the data, and substantiating the findings take place concurrently and throughout the course of the research. One may define the process by reducing it to several stages. First, the research question is asked and examined in a general way immediately as the collection of data begins. Analysis also takes place at this stage to detect initial products from the data to divide the data into units of analysis—a word, sentence, paragraph, statement, reply, or even an entire interview. The themes that emerge in the first stage steer the researcher toward the construction of initial categories, whence the research continues with the selection of a theoretical method of sampling the research subjects. “Theoretical memos” that link the finding, link the categories, or link the findings and the categories are written. In the second stage, analysis takes place on the axis of the categories that have been detected and phrased and a more exact definition of the categories and mapping of the criteria for each category are produced. The entire body of material is coded into the categories and if any categories are missing, they are added to those already existing. In the third stage, in view of the categories formed, the researcher amasses additional data until saturation and repeatability are attained. In the fourth stage, the categories are linked and the core categories—those that are central to the study—are identified. In the fifth and final stage, the theory is constructed and is written on the basis of a connection with the essence of the findings, the core categories, the research literature, and prior theories in the field researched (Gibton, 2001).

Grounded theory has been criticized by quantitative researchers and qualitative researchers alike. The former claim that one cannot generalize about a phenomenon insofar as the data from the field are acutely parochial, very specific, and dependent on a socio-cultural context that itself is dependent on time and place. The research results rely on the researcher’s subjective interpretation. Quantitative researchers argue that the data-coding method invented by Glaser and Strauss to make the data objective is incompatible with the basic principle of qualitative research, which dismisses the ability of research and researcher to be objective. This criticism and the resulting tension created a split between the founders of this method. Glaser, who came from a quantitative background, set out to reinforce the method by systematizing the data coding and continual comparison of statement with statement, topic with topic, grouping of categories and subcategories, comparison of categories until the theory is formed, and specification of a full set of “coding families” by which the data may be grouped. Strauss and Corbin (1990), in contrast, considered grounded theory closer to constructivist if not postmodern thinking and did not believe that methods of data analysis could yield an absolute or universal matrix; instead, he posited, each researcher should analyze his or her own data in accordance with the time and place of the research being done (Shimoni, 2016).

In their book *The Basis of Qualitative Research: Ground Theory Procedures and Techniques* (1990), Strauss and Corbin propose a way of their own to produce a grounded theory on the basis of their perception of the generic dynamic that may be typical of social phenomena and the way one may use meta-theory to understand a social phenomenon and its structure. The meta-theory is constructed atop a three-stage coding method: (1) open coding, in which meaningful categories are extracted from the data; (2) axial coding, in which main categories and subcategories are identified and the contexts between them are revealed; and (3) selective coding, in which the “story” of the researched phenomenon, i.e., a grounded theory, is constructed (Shimoni, 2016).

Criticism from the direction of quantitative research made it necessary to digitize the data collection and coding processes and to make the research more objective. For this purpose, software such as ATLAS.ti was developed and introduced in research in 1993, as was Narralizer in 2004. Criticism from the direction of qualitative research resulted in the creation of two new sub-paradigms: Constructivist Grounded Theory, led by Charmaz and Bryant (Bryant & Charmaz, 2017; Charmaz, 2006, 2008) and Postmodern Grounded Theory, spearheaded by Clarke (2005).

Charmaz (2008) defines grounded theory as the kind that relates both to the research outcome and to the process itself. When such a theory takes a constructivist approach she states, both the researcher and his or her subjects can participate actively in constructing knowledge. Data analysis is based on a subjective interpretation that originates in the researcher’s background, education, origin, and prior knowledge. In classical grounded theory, in contrast, the researcher maintains distance from the data and has no connection with them. The constructivist approach makes it possible to elucidate the reason and the question of “why” as to complex social phenomena by means of innovative research strategies that allow researchers to develop new understandings and interpretations of existing theories. This approach also tests researchers’ subjective attitudes and asks how they dialogue with the social problem being researched (Charmaz, 2008).

Clarke (2005) took grounded theory another step: adjusting it to postmodern processes in contemporary research by linking it to a new analytical approach called “Situational Analysis.” This approach urges researchers to analyze data in a comprehensive and systemic way that integrates text and discourse, action, and the structure created in order to understand a complete situation. It proposes three points of reference that may help researchers to analyze a situation: (1) mapping all points of reference associated with the research—e.g., social, political, historical, cultural, symbolic—and analyzing contexts that they share. Ideally, this mapping takes place at the beginning of the research and may lend the data collection greater depth. (2) mapping the social arenas that overarch all “players” in the research—people, organizations, institutions, classes, or even non-human components (such as objects or a technology) or physical places. Analysis of relationships and interactions among the various players, as well as discourse analysis among them, facilitates a broad observation of social processes that construct or deconstruct a society and the effect on the individuals of whom it is composed, the research participants. (3) mapping positions taken or not taken in the research context, both by the research participants and by the researcher, as well as the research tools. Analysis of different ways of relating to issues that arise from the situation researched allows the attainment of thorough understanding of the range of complexities that the research brings to light. This innovative approach fits well with postmodern developments in contemporary research, which contemplate the individual relative to the entirety of her or his life and not only from the angle of one isolated situation. According to this outlook, research cannot base its data on a single interview only; instead, it must take a broad look at the participants’ lives, the connections among the elements that make up these lives, and social effects of a given social construction and its meaning for interpretation by both the researcher and his or her subjects (Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al., 2015).

The developers of these new approaches (Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Clarke, 2005) consider themselves “the second generation of grounded theory” (Shimoni, 2016).

The justification for choosing the research method for this study was the fact that the field of research—educational-therapeutic work with dropouts—is essentially interdisciplinary, drawing knowledge and concepts from many sources. In addition, grounded theory is suited to small case studies (8-20). Furthermore, the gap in knowledge and small number of theories concerning the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth in Israel necessitates formulating the theory based on the data, rather than the method of analyzing the parameters based on earlier theoretical hypotheses. Finally, the researcher's expertise and experience with the characteristics of the research population, his great familiarity with the educational-therapeutic system (Youth Advancement Units) to which the research population belongs, and his high accessibility to them facilitated innovation in the construction of a model and theoretical framework for the phenomenon.

**Table: The Research Matrix**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Step | Aim | Research Tool | Research Population | Data Analysis  Methods |
| Step 1 | Gathering Data | Semi-Structured  In-depth Interviews | 16 dropout youth  Age 16-18. | Coding Categories |
| Step 2 | Reflections on the findings. | Focus Group | 8 youth advancement's  Supervisors | Content Analysis |
| Step 3 | To deepen the Data in another research tool. | Documents Analysis | ------ | Content Analysis |

The study was carried out in three steps:

**Step 1** involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with dropout adolescents who were treated by the Youth Advancement Units—aged 16-18, nonimmigrant members of the Jewish sector, secular or traditional. The sampling method used in choosing the youngsters was e based on the most common sampling method in grounded theory: analysis of initial interviews and identification of initial categories as a basis for continued selection of ensuing interviewees.

**Step 2** took place after the interviews and analysis of the findings: a focus group composed of educational/therapeutic facilitators who stewarded the professional teams at the Youth Advancement Units. The purpose of the focus group was to create further understanding of the goals of the study and to lend greater depth to the contents by subjecting the findings to a reflective process.

**Step 3** involved analysis of documents that described a range of perceptions of the future and occupational aspirations of dropout youth. These documents came from two employment programs (Reshatot and Shehakim) that the Youth Advancement Units has run in the past decade. In them, the participants were asked to imagine and picture themselves in the future and to choose and plan out their occupational aspirations:

**Step 1**

Part A—Approvals and Procedures

To conduct this study on adolescents, special approval from the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education was sought and obtained under the accepted rules of research and ethics. In addition to said approval, approval was obtained from the director of the Youth Advancement Department of the Ministry of Education. After both approvals were procured, several directors of Youth Advancement Units were asked for their consent to research at their units and for assistance in identifying relevant adolescents for the study. These young people were picked out on the basis of specific criteria that the researcher provided, in accordance with progress in the research and the need for theoretical sampling of various kinds.

Before the interviews, the participants’ parents were asked to sign their consent.

Part B—Conducting Interviews

The procedure for the interviews proposed for this study was based on a process in which interviews are conducted with a small number of interviewees. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then the content of the texts was analyzed and the categories were formed from this analysis. The next interviewees were selected according to the categories that emerged. The process was repeated until saturation regarding the content was reached and the categories were identified.

Interviews

Transcription

Content

Analysis

Coding

Categories

Theoretical Sampling

**Research Population**

The Youth Advancement Department, part of the Division for the Education of Children and At-Risk Youth, currently treats more than 15,000 at-risk youth, of whom about two-thirds are defined as “disconnected youth”: youth who dropped out of the education system and are not in any alternative framework. 70% of the youths being treated are boys and 30% are girls. In Israel there are about 170 Youth Advancement Units that encompass the entire spectrum of populations in Israel: veteran Israelis, new immigrants, ultra-orthodox, national religious, Arab, Bedouin and Druze (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Among all the population groups that the Youth Advancement Units treat, adolescents who totally dropped out of school and supplemented their studies under the auspices of the units were chosen to participate in the study. They belonged to the nonimmigrant Jewish population only (i.e., were not recent immigrants). They were secular or traditional (not ultra-orthodox)—members of the plurality among those treated by the Youth Advancement Units (37 percent). Among them, those aged 16–18, under the care of Youth Advancement Units in central Israel and on the (geographical or social) periphery), and living in various kinds of localities—urban vs. rural, large vs. small— were chosen for the study.

**Sampling Method**

In qualitative research based on the practice of grounded theory, participants are chosen on the basis of a circular process of selection of interviewee for data-collection purposes. In this process, the first cluster of interviewees is chosen, an initial content analysis takes place, and open coding of categories amid continual comparison among them guides the research to the selection of the next interviewees. The process is repeated by means of another cluster of interviews in which the theories take shape with greater precision, and so on until saturation is attained and the final theory is developed. To understand the process, one may consult Glaser and Strauss’ definition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, in Flick, 2007):

*Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory (1967, p. 45).*

Patton (1990) broadened the concept of theoretical sampling and defined it as “Purposeful Sampling” in order to emphasize the importance of an analyzed, precise choice rather than a random or spontaneous one. The goal of purposeful sampling is to select interviewees who will provide the richest, most extensive information for the research purposes. There are a number of ways to choose the purposeful sample: from cases that represent a uniqueness or extreme of the phenomenon through to a choice that encompasses the most possibilities. Such a sampling would be broad and would provide a great variety of information yet would also be a challenge, since people are diverse and may deviate from research goals and hypotheses. In its opposite form, purposeful sampling can also be very narrow, focused and homogeneous. The goal of a homogeneous sample is to enrich the data through identification of a very specific group of subjects (Patton, 1990).

The sampling method in this study was based on the same principles. After the first cluster of interviews, an initial analysis determined the choice of the next interviewees and the rephrasing of the questions. The process went through seven iterations of interview clusters.

**Research Tools**

The research tool chosen for this stage was the semi-structured in-depth interview. It was selected in order to allow a direct and authentic conversation with the interviewees and to hone the answers given in the interview using additional questions arising from the conversation itself. A semi-structured, in-depth interview facilitates the construction of the reality of the interviewees—as it is perceived by them—and the attribution of meaning to this reality. The qualitative research interview has become a popular if not an essential tool in a wide range of research areas and is suitable for a variety of research populations. It is therefore important to match the interview structure and technique to the specific research population, as well as the researcher's approach to the interviewees.

This study, focusing on interviews with dropout youth, created challenges and dilemmas that do not occur in research on adults. Although children and youth have long been objects of research, only in recent years have direct studies on children and youth been performed, as against research on this population via surrounding adult figures such as teachers or parents. The reason for the upturn in direct research is the “otherness” of children and youth in society and the realization that children have rights as human beings, i.e., to express their distinctive, authentic, and unmediated voice as to their lives, opinions, and experience. It is understood with growing acuity that children and youth are not unknowing and passive beings, as they had once been perceived, but part of the human whole and partners in, and even influencers of, the social structure. However, research on children and youth poses many ethical and logistical challenges and complexities. For example, there is concern that they may be exploited and harmed if their confidentiality is unprotected, manipulated into taking part in the study; pressured to deliver answers, and so on. From the logistic standpoint, the venue of the interview has to be taken into account, the interview items must be kept simple and clear, and all relevant approvals, particularly from the participants’ guardians, must be obtained. In addition, the interview presents challenges related to cognitive, affective, or verbal proficiencies and, generally speaking, the ability to picture the realities of life and the social phenomenon being examined from a broad perspective (Schelbe et al., 2016).

The literature has very little to say about interviewing adolescents, let alone at-risk youth. In a study involving adolescent girls (Dixon, 2015), several principles were enunciated that may be helpful to researchers who wish to study this specific population group. They include providing a clear, suitable, detailed explanation regarding the study, its goals and stages; obtaining informed consent to participate in the research, free of feelings of pressure that the researcher might create; carefully respecting the confidentiality of the interviewees and obscuring their personal details as minors; and being mindful of the researcher's position of power as an adult as against the interviewees’ status as adolescents (Dixon, 2015). The manner and physical location of the interview also have meaningful effects on interviews with adolescents. In the natural order of things, adolescents speak minimally with adults in general and with unfamiliar adults in particular. Thus, the researcher's skill in establishing initial contact and building trust with the adolescent interviewee is crucial and essential for creating an open atmosphere that promotes dialogue. Techniques that further this goal include referring to topics related to adolescence, re-using the adolescents’ expressions, knowing about their cultural world, and understanding the characteristics of adolescence (Bassett et al., 2008).

**Data Analysis—Coding**

In grounded theory, the data are analyzed as they are collected and at all stages of the research. These processes enrich each other for the goal of placing the phenomenon being researched in a theoretical frame. In grounded theory, there are clear if flexible guidelines for the process of inductive analysis that yields the theory and the conceptual categories. Alongside induction, an abductive process is undertaken, i.e., a “bright” idea is chosen and the initial construction of assumptions that explain the data takes place.

Data analysis is performed through a process of coding the data. In other words, the researcher applies meaning to raw data by assigning keywords or phrases according to the themes that emerge from the text (transcripts of the recorded interviews), thereby creating categories that are as broad as possible. A map of categories is thus created. The map divides and subdivides as the data grows and the text is coded into the categories. The first phase of the data analysis involves gaining familiarity with the data through rereading of the text, thereby identifying the framework of subjects according to the objectives of the study. The data analysis ends when there is saturation of the material and the topics begin to repeat (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

In this study, too, the material was subjected to a coding process. Initially, the first cluster of interviews (N=2) was analyzed. After the text was read several times, initial categories that formed the basis for the next cluster of interviews (N=2) were identified and coded. Analysis of the two additional interviews yielded further categories. Accordingly, an additional coding of the interviews from the first cluster and from the second cluster took place, and so on for all the clusters, as Figure 1 shows:

**Step B**

Step B of the study was carried out after the participants were interviewed and the findings were analyzed. Its purpose was to set two processes in motion: reflecting on the findings and understanding them. For the purpose of this step, a focus group was chosen as the research tool, in which the participants were 6–8 educational-therapy facilitators who stewarded the Youth Advancement Units on a daily basis and were thoroughly familiar with the characteristics of the youngsters who were interviewed in Step A of the study.

**Research population**

Each of the Youth Advancement Units, accompanied on a regular daily basis by an educational-therapy facilitator. It was the facilitator’s role to assimilate and implement the Ministry of Education’s youth-advancement policy at the level of municipal Youth Advancement Units in respect of the schooling, education, and care of the population of disconnected and at-risk youths. The facilitator’s function is to promote professional and organizational processes among directors of youth-advancement units and youth-advancement personnel who deal with the young people directly. As a central feature of their work, they hold symposia on the treatment itself; it is here that they become thoroughly acquainted with the characteristics of the young people being treated. The facilitators have relevant schooling in the disciplines that contribute to treatment (psychology, criminology, social work, art therapy); each also has a master’s degree and at least five years of experience in educational-therapy work.

To perform the study, 6–8 educational-therapy facilitators, male and female, were chosen. They facilitated the units in which adolescents received treatment in accordance with the profile of the research population in Step A.

**Research Tool—Focus Group**

A focus group is one of the items in the qualitative-research toolkit. Its name alludes to its principle: the creation of a group interview or discussion that focuses on one specific topic (Hennik, 2014). The focus group as a research method was pioneered in the 1940s at the Social Research Bureau of Columbia University in New York. In a study dealing with the response of listeners to a radio program, the listeners were invited to discuss questions and very fact of the encounter allowed a group interview to evolve. At first, focus groups were set up to gather information on marketing topics and were used in the private business sector. Over the years and particularly in recent decades, however, they have become instrumental in academic research (Bloor et al., 2001). Focus groups are used for various purposes and may be suitable for several goals, e.g., as an additional tool for the interpretation of findings or to compare data gathered by means of other research methods with contents expressed by the focus group, allowing triangulation of the entire study to take place. The main purpose of a focus group is to elicit a wide variety of views, perspectives, thoughts, or associations on the research topic. The idea is not to create a consensus among the group members but to allow them to express a broad if not clashing range of views. A focus group is different from other research tools due to its goals, the methods of its use, and the way its data are gathered, and is based on several principles:

* A focus group usually has 6–8 members; sometimes, however, it may have 5–10 participants, depending on the purpose of the study.
* The group atmosphere and the participants’ ability to feel free to express their views are immensely important.
* Those chosen to take part in the focus group are selected in advance and purposively. It is important that they come from a similar background—ethnic origin, gender, social class, peer group, or other commonality—in order to keep them from developing undesirable power relations that would affect their ability to express themselves freely.
* The discussion in the focus group should center on one clear and specific target so that it will attain quality and depth within a limited amount of time. The interview itself is built on a small number of questions and is time-limited so that all participants can express themselves.
* A focus group is run by a group facilitator (interviewer/researcher) and the questions presented to it are predetermined. However, the discussion surrounding the question has to be developed flexibly due to its value in drawing out and enriching the participants’ responses.
* The optimal length of a focus group is 60–90 minutes.

The most substantive advantage of a focus group is the copious and diverse data that it may elicit within a short period of time (Hennick, 2014).

**Data Analysis—Qualitative Content Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is a relatively new analytical approach. Based on interpreting the text and focusing on the research question, it seeks to develop specific categories that emerge repeatedly in feedback in order to assure the credibility and utility of the analytical process. The process is carried out by identifying continual blocs of text and defining them as units of analysis through which basic categories may be identified as a frame for the coding of the material. To launch an analysis of this kind, the researcher needs to examine each and every segment of the data that are relevant to the research question without being drawn into specific and biased observation. Through systematic coding, the researcher creates a set of categories and subcategories that combine to form the frame of the analysis. The textual analysis involves both inductive definition of the categories and deductive implementation of the categories for the continuation of the analysis. After the frame is constructed, the data are reviewed again, but this time in accordance with the categories. This iteration makes it possible to test the correctness of the categories and determine whether the categories are clear and unequivocal. As the qualitative content analysis proceeds, categories identified through the data are combined with categories identified through conceptualization of the entirety of the material in the context of the research question. A quantitatively oriented researcher emphasizes, in the content analysis, the reliability, objectivity, and validity of the data. A researcher whose orientation is qualitative emphasizes in the content analysis the repeatability, transparency, and validation of the data. Either way, the essence of a content analysis lies in the ability of the reader of the study to understand how the data were gathered, coded, and analyzed (Schreier, 2014; Drisko & Maschi, 2016).

**Step C**

In this step of the study, the analysis of documents was used as another way of understanding the data and an additional research tool with which to answer the research questions—particularly the second question, which proposes to draw a map of dropout youths’ occupational aspirations. The documents chosen for the analysis were harvested from two preparatory programs for the world of work that were run by the Youth Advancement Units.

The first program was Reshatot (2009-2015). The program underlines the development and strengthening of network connections, long-term planning, understanding the barriers that dropout youth face when they join the labor market, providing tools and competencies for best integration in this world. It was initially developed for girls and has a strong gender orientation, assuming that women integrate in a discriminatory and unequal world, especially dropout girls lacking basic skills, with low self-image and low sense of personal capability. The program was developed by Professor Orly Benjamin of the Gender Course at Bar-Ilan University, Ashalim Association, JDC Israel, and the Youth Advancement Service, and was part of the curriculum of the Youth Advancement Service (Paol et al., 2013).

The second program is Shehakim (2015–present). The program directed the youth to look at their future and imparted deep understanding of the structure of the employment world in the 21st century. The program enables youth to examine the necessary skills for the employment world in the 21st century while experiencing and making acquaintance with technological tools, and forms their occupational aspirations (Ministry of Education, 2019).

In both of these programs, the young participants were asked, by means of structured exercises, to envision themselves in the future in various areas of life, define their occupational aspirations, and construct a path along which they may realize them.

**Research Tool—Analysis of Documents**

Document-based data are another qualitative research tool that is used in various research disciplines. Many research questions cannot be fully investigated without reference to documents. Documents are the “social facts” of a researched reality; they mirror the way of life, culture, language, heritage, or history of the society in question. Language is the mediating instrument in documents; it serves as an instrument for symbolic representations of the social phenomenon at issue and restructures its reality. Documents may speak in formal or informal, high-register or vernacular, planned out or authentic language. The documents that may be analyzed in research are diverse and may include diaries, letters, newspapers, records, biographies, autobiographies, event logs, field notes, memoranda, technical papers, postal items, email messages, work plans, brochures, archives materials, stories, and curricula (Cohen et al., 2007; Hendry, 2005).

**Data Analysis—Content Analysis**

In this step, the data were analyzed on the basis of a content analysis, as described in Step B.

**Criteria of Research Quality—Triangulation**

The term “triangulation” traces to the fields of mapping and navigation, in which the location of a desired point is determined by two known independent points and the angles between them, creating a triangle. In research, triangulation means the use of more than one research approach or research tool to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings. The term is used in several variants and may find expression in the use of multiple theories, sources of data, research methods, or research tools. The most common triangulation in research merges several research tools under one methodological approach or a combination of methodological approaches, as in mixed-method research ( Heale & Forbes, 2013).

**The Researcher’s Positionality**

The aims in qualitative research are to identify the characteristics, thoughts, and emotions of the other, become deeply acquainted with the participants, observe the phenomenon researched through their eyes, and develop empathy toward them. Shkedy (2014) claims that qualitative researchers do not flinch from importing their value perspectives into their research and relying on their intuitive characteristics as a research tool in itself. Researchers’ ability to develop deeper relations with their respondents and observe phenomena through their eyes makes them research tools of their own accord. This researcher mobilizes for the research process his natural traits as an inquisitive, benevolent person who has good interpersonal communication skills. In qualitative research, the researcher is the main research tool, one that cannot be replaced with distant and objective external tools. He/she is also the only tool that is flexible enough to comprehend and grasp the complexity and the continual variability of human social phenomena (Shkedy, 2014).

**Ethical Issues Associated with This Study**

Research includes dilemmas, conflicts and concerns that arise from the intention to conduct research. Research ethics help to define what is forbidden and what is permitted during the research. Ethical issues in research require the researcher to find the balance between wanting to establish knowledge and enrich the world of science and preserving human rights and liberties. Research in the social sciences in general and qualitative research in particular requires the researcher to be especially cautious about ethical issues and to employ a heightened awareness of possible harm to morality and overstepping the boundaries of ethics. This is due to the unique nature of qualitative research, where the researcher encounters the subjects in their natural environment, oftentimes informally, and gains direct access to their private lives and life stories that include feelings, pains, fears, struggles and challenges, while building a relationship with his subject (Neuman, 2007).

The following ethical issues were raised in this research:

1. Preserving the privacy and confidentiality of the interviewees.

2. Coping with ‘double confidentiality’ – both as under 18 adolescents and as patients.

3. My dual role as researcher and as a national counselor for youth occupational

development and as a part of the program headquarters.