

**Exploring the Need for Academic Support
Programmes (ASPs) for Returning Undergraduates at Rhodes University**

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ABSTRACT

The overarching purpose of this thesis is to explore the need for Academic Support Programmes (ASPs) in higher education with specific reference to returning undergraduates in the Sociology Department at Rhodes University. The transformational agenda in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa in terms of expanding access to education, the promotion of accountability and efficiency in higher education, massification, the articulation gap between school and university, institutional culture, unpreparedness of universities and underpreparedness of students comprise the conceptual core of this study. I undertake to investigate the necessity and relevance of academic support offered to returning undergraduates at Rhodes University. I do this by exploring two main issues theoretically and in my fieldwork. The two main issues that form the basis of this research are students' perceptions regarding availability and accessibility of academic support programmes in the Sociology Department and students' perceived academic needs. Students' perceptions and attitudes towards Academic Support Programmes have been uncovered through both quantitative and qualitative fieldwork to gauge the extent to which literature is applicable when it comes to the above-mentioned conceptual frameworks. The study illustrated that academic support is not exclusive to first year students. It is also clear that improved, systematic academic support gives rise to improved student academic performance. Throughout the study, students perceive availability and accessibility of ASPs as a challenge.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Academic Development
ANC	African National Congress
AS	Academic Support
ASP	Academic Support Programme
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DET	Department of Education and Training
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ESP	Extended Studies Programme
EWP	Education White Paper
FET	Further Education and Training
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HAS	Historically Advantaged Schools
HBU	Historically Black Universities
HDS	Historically Disadvantaged Schools
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HWU	Historically White Institutions
NCHE	National Council on Higher Education
NEETs	Not in employment, Education or Training

NP	National Party
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
RDP	Reconstruction Development Programme
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RU	Rhodes University
SA	South Africa
STAts	SStatistics South Africa
SCE	Senior Certificate Examination
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The need for academic support (AS) in higher education is widely acknowledged (Bitzer, 2009; Boughey, 2010; Junio-Sabio, 2012; Jones et al, 2008; Letseka et al, 2009). Academic support is seen as part of the ongoing debate about meeting the students' varying academic and non-academic needs. Questions abound about the appropriate mix and ideological assumptions of academic support, mode of implementation, mechanisms, duration, the relevant delivery agencies, student profile and the appropriate study level. Similarly, a central line of argument is that successful support programmes require a confluence of academic, social, personal and other non-academic factors (Ntakana, 2011; Boylan et al., 1992; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). The commitment to academic support is, according to Bitzer (2003: 164), "a major contribution of higher education institutions towards benefitting societies, their potential to assist students in their academic progress as well as their progress in other spheres."

The primary goal of this study is to explore the need for academic support programmes in higher education with specific reference to returning undergraduates in the Sociology Department at Rhodes University. Previous research has focused mostly on first years and their lack of readiness to succeed in higher education. This research considers second and third year students (undergraduates). Academic support, it will be argued in this research, is for everyone. The fact that students are offered support in first year and expected to do it all by themselves from second year can be detrimental for many and lead to drop out.

The study is conducted against the backdrop of the transformation agenda in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa in terms of expanding access to education, the promotion of accountability and efficiency in higher education, massification, the articulation gap between school and university, institutional culture, unpreparedness of universities and underpreparedness of students (Ramapela, 2012; Nel, Troskie-de Bruin & Bitzer, 2009; Bitzer, 2009; Maphosa, 2014; Boughey, 2010; Warren, 1998; Frazer & Killen, 2003; Hay & Marais, 2004). The arguments, largely revolve around deficit assumptions "constructing students as lacking skills, experiencing gaps in conceptual knowledge areas, in need of language development and lacking the ability to think critically" (Boughey, 2010: 5). Equally important, the study is informed by the perennial problem of attrition, retention and throughput (Letseka et al, 2009).

According to van Schalkwyk (2007: 954) a third of all students entering higher education in South Africa drop out by the end of their first year of study, “accounting for forty percent drop-out rate in any given year” (Bitzer, 2009: 225), “estimated at R1 500m in taxpayers’ money” (Bitzer, 2003: 164). Also, “only 15% obtain their qualifications within the specified duration of study (Letseka et al., 2009; Tinto, 1993). Research evidence suggests that this trend is global. In response, institutions have established support mechanisms whose results have often been disappointing (van Schalkwyk, 2007: 955). Studies such as Maxakato (1999) and Jones et. al. (2008) question the readiness of university to deal with this challenge.

In South Africa the history of academic development is marked by three distinct yet overlapping phases (academic support, academic development and institutional development) (Boughey, 2010: 4). In the early 1980s, the “historically white, liberal universities began to admit small numbers of black students as a result of relaxed state apartheid policies” (Boughey, 2010: 4). The academic support phase rested on deficiency theory, which is still the reigning discourse (Boughey, 2010: 4; Jones et al., 2009; Letseka et al., 2009). Students were labelled as lacking in key primary skills and knowledge areas contributing to their stigmatisation. There was no effort on the part of the institutions to transform themselves. As Boughey (2010: 5) argues “they served in the context of an assurance about the ‘rightness’ of the practices which characterised the institutions to which they had been admitted.” With the focus on institutional transformation this phase is influenced by the existing policies in the South African higher education. The establishment of Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and institutional audits brought the formalisation of universities in accounting for the manner in which teaching and learning together with academic support are implemented. This has resulted in “the existence of teaching and learning centres in universities responsible for coordinating teaching and learning functions by implementing academic development programmes for staff and students”(Maphosa, 2014: 12).

Academic support occurs within the broader field of Academic Development (AD). AD is defined by the HEQC (2007: 74) as “a field of research and practice that aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning in higher education and to enable institutions and the higher education to meet key educational goals, particularly in relation to equity of access and outcomes.” Academic support definitions vary in emphasis. Broadly, AS is founded on the principle of fostering the development of students’ competencies, life skills and habits of academic excellence (Junio-Sabio, 2012:14). Generally, definitions stress the transformational potential of AS and the provision of equal learning opportunities in a

structured and controlled top-down professional setting (Warren, 1998; Todd, 2002). Definitions tend to eliminate the active role that students play in their own learning and are viewed as passive recipients.

Needs-based and target-oriented definitions, especially those grounded in the deficit skills/learning argument define AS as “the purposeful shaping of the instructional process to address the learning needs of students in particular teaching contexts” (Warren, 1998: 76) and as a “planned response toward an identified need for action” (Barr and Keating, 1985: 2). Defined in this way, AS interventions enables students from disadvantaged socio-economic and educational backgrounds to develop their literacy and study skills (Smith, 2009: 109). In contrast, Warren (1998: 77) provides a comprehensive definition of AS as an integrated intervention targeting ALL students. This is based on the recognition that “learning in higher education is a complex social and cognitive process of discovering and internalising which cannot be dealt with in a remedial fashion but constitutes the very means through which academic learning and knowledge construction occurs” (Warren, 1998: 77).

Warren’s (1998) study on unpreparedness of higher education institutions and underprepared students underpins this study. It concurs with Tanyanyiwa’s (2014: 261) observation that “under-preparedness is not peculiar to extended studies students but is widespread across the student body”. This view is emphasized by Drewett’s (1993: 93) contention that “academic difficulties which stem from the impoverished school education are not exclusively experienced by black students.” For the purposes of this study, AS excludes the range of institutional support programmes which fall under the broad category of social, psychological and medical services at Rhodes University.

Research trends on AS in South Africa overlap with international scholarship especially on at-risk, under-prepared students or under-represented minorities, first-generation students, retention and attrition rates, teaching and learning approaches, study of academic and non-academic factors that influence success or failure (Tinto, 1993; Bitzer, 2009; Boughey, 2010; Jones et al, 2008 ; Letseka et al, 2009; Nel, Troskie-de Bruin & Bitzer, 2009; Jones et. al, 2008 ; Cuseo, 2002; Fraser & Killen, 2003; Ramapela, 2012). There is general consensus that the first year of study is the most critical for student learning, adjustment and overall development and should be targeted as such to prevent early attrition and non-completion. Research highlights increasing participation and diversification of the student body who are ill-prepared for the demands of higher education. This is particularly so for first-generation

students. In South Africa the racial discourse and the articulation gap¹ dominates the debates. Lowe and Cook's (2003) study of first year students at the University of Ulster confirms the findings of van Schalkwyk (2007), Nel, Troskie-de Bruin and Bitzer (2009) and Maxakato (1999) regarding the difficulty in bridging the school-university gap. The relevance of matric examinations, A-levels, university entry standards and requirements and their predictive value for academic success at university point to competing views on the subject (Lowe & Cook, 2003; Fraser & Killen, 2003). There is limited data on the initial entry and induction stage for new students. Overall studies confirm the need for continuous rigorous contextually-bound research on various aspects of higher education, teaching and learning to better shape AS interventions (Boughey, 2010).

Studies on higher education have developed over time spanning both conceptual and pragmatic issues. Given the complexity of issues which academic support seeks to address; the study adopts a two-pronged approach to the conceptual framework. First, the seminal academic and social integration model by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993, 1997) is instructive. It puts emphasis on the "successful integration into the academic and social structures of the institution" (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004: 205). The model does not only explain factors determining students' early departure but also provides valuable insights into academic success. The model "assists in the interpretation of data gathered on student attributes but also clarifies students' goals and commitment" (Bitzer, 2003: 164). Modified by Louw (2005) the model has been used as an interpretive and holistic framework for first-year student support and development at institutions for agricultural studies (Bitzer, 2009:225). Louw's academic risk indicators (study goals, student perceptions of higher education, skills and knowledge gaps, academic adjustment, programme choices, language difficulties, course and learning materials and access granted to students who did not meet the required access requirements) provide a useful entry point for this study.

Secondly, the study draws on the voluminous literature on the nature of learning in higher education (Gibbs, 1992; Biggs, 1987; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Dison & Pinto, 2000: 169; Luckett & Sutherland (2000). Of importance here are students' conceptions of learning and teaching. Student learning is understood here as a complex multivariate phenomenon, with students exhibiting qualitatively different levels of understanding of what they have learned (Meyer and Scrivener, 1995). It can be argued that there is a correlation between the

¹Council on Higher Education (2013:60) defines this as "the mismatch or discontinuity between the exit level of secondary education and the entry level of higher education".

various approaches to learning and academic success, hence there is a need for an understanding of the nature of academic support practices. Combining the two conceptual frameworks adopted in this study provides the platform for studying the wider academic context within which students find themselves: socially, institutionally and academically.

1.2 GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

The primary goal of this study is to explore the need for academic support programmes in higher education with specific reference to returning undergraduates in the Sociology Department at Rhodes University. The study is informed by the following secondary goals:

- I. To identify students' academic needs.
- II. To gain students' perceptions about the availability and accessibility of academic support programmes in the Sociology Department

1.3 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Chapter Two critically analyses the South African higher education system with basic education forming the background discussion. The chapter will commence by giving a brief overview of South African basic education system (Grade R to 12). It will then focus on pre and post-apartheid educational systems to gauge the extent to which the South African education system has been radically transformed. This will be done by analysing higher education against the policies implemented post 1994.

Chapter Three looks at the transformational agenda in higher education institutions that gave rise to the introduction of Academic Support Programmes (ASPs). This chapter will discuss various definitions of ASPs, the history behind ASPs, their mode of implementation and target groups, appropriate mix and ideological assumptions. The chapter will also provide an overview of the history ASPs at Rhodes University. This chapter will conclude by analysing institutional ASPs

Chapter Four will discuss the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, namely, Tinto's integration model and the nature of learning in HE, Ramsden's learning to teach, Petocz' engaging with learning in HE, Martons' beyond quality and competence, Laurillard's rethinking university teaching.

Chapter Five discusses the procedure followed in conducting the current research. These include the research paradigm, method of data collection, case selection and sampling, data collection and ethical considerations.

Chapter Six provides the reader with the findings of the research. This is done by looking at the two sub goals that form the basis of this research: students' academic needs and their perceptions on the availability and accessibility of ASPs at Rhodes University. The findings are evaluated against the backdrop of the existing literature in the field. The chapter also offers concluding remarks on the research. This is done by giving an overview of what the study sought to achieve. This will be done by providing a summary of students' perceptions on the availability and accessibility of academic support programmes at Rhodes University together with their cited academic needs.

CHAPTER TWO

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Post-apartheid South Africa promised democratization and de-racialization of access to higher education. The extent to which the country has lived up to these standards remains questionable. The majority of South Africans continue to bear the brunt of apartheid legacy concerning education. Despite the notable reforms since 1994, it is evident that access to quality education is still differentiated across racial and class lines. With persisting inequalities, schools that serve the majority of black students inadequately prepare them for post-secondary education. This then places major challenges for higher education institutions as they are expected to cater to ‘under-prepared’ students, as a result of poor secondary schooling. Hence, the need for academic support by these institutions becomes a matter of urgency. This chapter aims to critically analyze South African higher education. This will be done by tracing first the history of apartheid in education in order to paint the continuities and discontinuities in the country’s higher education system. South African basic education system (Grade R to Grade 12) will form the background of this chapter. It is well documented that the quality of basic education falls short of expected outcomes and international standards, the effects of which are experienced in matric.

2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF BASIC EDUCATION (GRADE R -12).

Historically, scholars faced challenges based on their skin colour. Meier and Hartel (2009: 180) assert that “for more than a decade South African education has been characterized by desegregation in an effort to accommodate the diverse nature of society.” The inequalities in schooling during apartheid were legitimized through set laws and acts. The acts included Bantu Education Act No 47 of 1953 (later to become the Education and Training Act of 1978), the Christian National Education Act No of 1962 for white South Africans, the Education for Coloured People’s Act No 47 of 1965, Education for Indians Act No 73 of 1969. In each of these instances schools were placed in racially defined areas to cater for a specific race. During apartheid, it was pronounced by the ruling white government that Bantu education was designed to teach “African learners to be ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ for a white-run economy and society, regardless of an individual's abilities and aspirations” (Kallaway, 2002: 92).

The decentralized nature of schooling during apartheid offered racially defined “communities the legal means to preserve their privileges” (Meier & Hartel, 2009: 180). During apartheid black education was characterized by “an inequitable allocation of resources, overcrowded classrooms, high dropout rates, and an insufficient number of teachers, most of them poorly qualified” (Phendla, 2009: 57). The lack of libraries, laboratories, running water or functional toilets particularly in African schools, high teacher: pupil ratios, no textbooks and under and/or unqualified teachers characterized blacks’ schools (Letseka, 2013). The kind of education offered to black children did not prepare them for higher education (Boughey, 2011: 65). The newly elected government promised transformation of education. This centered around equality and quality education for everyone and necessitated the implementation of educational reforms post 1994.

According to Badat (2010: 3), the African National Congress (ANC) “inherited an education system profoundly shaped by social, political and economic inequalities of a ‘race’, class, gender, institutional, and geographical nature.” The democratic government were cognizant of this and prioritized education in the attempt to redress the past injustices (Republic of South Africa, 1996) through reforms and constitutional laws. Section 29(1) (a) of the Constitution states: “everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education.” It is worth noting however that although South African children aged 7 to 15 years have access to education, parents’ financial statuses determine the kind of education a child receives (Spaull 2013: 3). Ramdass and Kruger (2009: 1) note that there is a high percentage of school aged children who do not attend school beyond the primary level. There are also a large number of children who do not attend school because of financial constraints (Ramdass & Kruger, 2009:112).

Between the years 1994 and 1997, there was a confrontation of the three inter-related tasks: “dismantling apartheid structures and creating a unified education system, creating a more equitable system of financing in a context of huge demands on our limited financial resources, and creating a policy framework which gave concrete expression to the values that underpinned the post-apartheid state by the ministry of education” (DoE, 2001:1). The second task necessitated the establishment of a more equitable basis for the financing of education in particular, the extent and distribution of resources (DBE, 2011). With the aim of redressing the past injustices, issues around expenditure in education were reoriented around one budget, allocated on the basis of racial equity, and towards redress through funds made available from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (DBE, 2011:1).

The South African Schools Act (SASA) Act No 84 of 1996 ensured that the right of access to quality education of all learners is respected without any form of discrimination. The extent to which this is achieved is questionable in the sense that class determines the kind of education available to majority of South Africans (Spaull, 2013, Letseka, 2013). It is prevalent when one notes that most rural schools, catering for blacks are inadequate and therefore continue to disadvantage black children. The contrast in quality of education between non-paying schools and private schools illustrates that quality education as noted in the constitution is only a lip service. There are disparities in terms of resources and teacher-scholar-ratio amongst other things. In government schools, the environments are not conducive to effective learning. Despite a lot promised through the freedom charter, a lot is yet to be achieved.

The Freedom Charter (1955) noted that:

“The doors of learning and culture shall be opened, the aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace; education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit; adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan; teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens; the colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.”

The year 2015 marked the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Charter which called on us to reflect, celebrate and showcase the degree to which the doors of learning and culture have been opened in the post-apartheid South Africa. For the majority of South Africans democracy remains a pipedream. Despite the well-documented reforms, a lot is yet to be done in the South African education system. The disparity in schooling along racial and class lines is prevalent. For rural, black children getting a quality education remains a challenge. The infrastructural difficulties faced by rural schools continue to disadvantage learners.

The prevalence of poverty in communities is often quite sadly reflected in schools within these communities. Apart from many other concerns, it is true that close to half of South Africa's schools have a shortage of classrooms (almost 65 000 classrooms are needed) and 2,3 million learners attend schools without water being available within walking distance and 6.6 million learners attend schools without toilets. Only slightly more than 10% of primary schools and around a third of secondary schools have recreational and/or sports facilities (Spaull, 2013) Ramphela, 2012). HIV/AIDS is also causing havoc in the country as 12.7% of

all teachers had been infected with HIV/AIDS in 2004 (Mouton, Louw & Strydom 2012:1212). The influence of HIV/AIDS on human and social development is very profound. Increased illness and deaths, and reduced life expectancy affect developmental objectives. Many children in South Africa are not only heads of households, but face social problems including hunger, poverty, HIV/AIDS and violence (Spren & Vally, 2010). These socio-economic problems of necessity also have a devastating influence on academic achievement (Howie & van Staden, 2012).

Language in South Africa remains highly controversial and emotional. The South African Constitution, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) clearly states that everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of his or her choice. To cater for South Africa's diverse population, the Constitution provides for 11 official languages namely Afrikaans, English, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. In spite of this provision in the Constitution stating that all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem, and equal use where practicable, there is a marked move towards unilingualism in the public sector. In most government departments the medium of communication is English. This trend is also visible in official publications and documents of national importance. In educational terms, this means that mother-tongue education is increasingly sacrificed on the altar of English, often and sadly in the interests of upwards social mobility (Mouton, Louw, Strydom, 2012:1212).

One of the Millennium Development goals is the reduction of poverty. In the South African context of high unemployment, coupled with a widely recognized skills shortfall, reducing poverty is, to a large extent, a matter of giving South Africans a better educational start in life (DBE, 2011:24). Many people and their schools, particularly but not only in rural areas, struggle with real difficulties such as the lack of classrooms, poor access to services such as water and electricity, no landline telephones and hence no Internet, very few public or school libraries and the like (Spaull, 2013; Letseka, 2013). All these challenges in basic education results in learners being ill prepared for higher education.

2.3 THE HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Historically the apartheid government established five distinct separate legislative and geographic entities (the Republic of South Africa and four 'independent republics') which gave rise to an established 36 higher education institutions governed by eight different

government department (Bunting, 2006: 35). Higher education was differentiated and uncoordinated (Badat, 2010). By the beginning of 1985, 19 higher education institutions were designated exclusively for Whites, two for Coloureds', two for Indians, and six for Africans (Bunting, 2006: 36, Badat, 2010). The sharp racial division, language and culture differences characterized universities and technikons (Bunting, 2006: 35). The National Party prevented and constrained higher education institutions from enrolling students from any racial group not designated for that particular institution (Bunting, 2006: 37). Exceptions to enroll in an institution not designated for your race were only made provided the institution involved receives a permit from the education department to which it was accountable. Permits were only granted if there was a proof that the programme to be studied was not available in the students' designated university (or universities) (Bunting, 2006: 37).

In post-1994 South Africa a distinction is made between Historically White Institutions (HWI) and Historically Black Institutions (HWI). HWI consisted of institutions which had Afrikaans as a medium of instruction (which was the home language of most people in government) and those in which the medium of instruction was English (Bunting, 2006: 39). The first group of HWI (Afrikaans medium universities) was divided into six universities, five of which used Afrikaans as the official medium of communication and instruction: the University of the Orange Free State, Potchefstroom University, the University of Pretoria, the Rand Afrikaans University and the University of Stellenbosch (Bunting, 2006: 39-40). The sixth university was termed the dual-medium University of Port Elizabeth, which was "set up in the early 1960s as a way of bringing conservative white English-speaking students into the government fold" (Bunting, 2006: 40).

The English-medium universities comprised four historically white English-medium universities: the University of Cape Town, the University of Natal, Rhodes University and the University of the Witwatersrand (Bunting, 2006: 42). These institutions called themselves 'liberal universities' on the basis that they refused to adopt the apartheid government's notion that universities are merely 'creatures of the state' (Bunting, 2006: 42). This led to these institutions' development of highly ambiguous relationships with the government during the apartheid years. The institutions' ambiguity is illustrated the fact that they:

"Accepted that they were public institutions and that they were, as a consequence, entitled to government funding. However, they argued that by their very nature as universities, they were not servants of the state and thus that they would not accept

that their functions could be limited to those of serving the needs and implementing the policies of the government of the day” ((Bunting, 2006: 42).

The Historically Black Universities (HBW) constituted universities for Africans and universities for Indians. Four universities for Africans were under the control of the government’s Department of Education and Training. These were Medunsa University, the University of the North, Vista University and the University of Zululand. The second group had one university for Indians (the University of Durban-Westville) and one for Coloureds (the University of the Western Cape) (Bunting, 2006: 44). The historically black universities were established solely for political and instrumental agendas. Their establishment was not based on the need for academic institutions. “They were instrumental institutions in the sense of having been set up to train black people who would be useful to the apartheid state, and political in the sense that their existence played a role in the maintenance of the overall apartheid socio-political agenda” (Bunting, 2006:45).

The education policy during apartheid made it difficult for traditionally liberal universities to offer equal opportunities concerning education to all South Africans (Drewett, 1993: 68). The segregation in access to education was made possible through the enforcement of the Bantu Education Act (Act no.47 of 1953) and the Extension of University Education Act (Act no.45 of 1959). The 1953 Bantu Education Act gave rise to segregation in schools that managed to distribute resources in a skewed manner along racial lines (DBE, 2011: 17). This “legislation was intended to separate black South Africans from the main, comparatively very well-resourced education system for whites and to prevent Africans from receiving an education that would lead them to aspire to positions they would not be allowed to hold in society” (Christie & Collins, 1984: 162).

The Extension of University Education Act limited the chances of Black students from entering white liberal universities (Drewett, 1993:68-69; Fiske & Ladd, 2004a:46). According to the Act, “no non-white person who was not registered as a student of a university established by Act of parliament, other than the university of South Africa, on or before the said date, shall register with or attend any university as a student without the written consent of the Minister” (Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1959:506). The passing of the Bantu Education Act in 1953 legalised and enforced the segregation of public facilities and the separation of educational standards (Ali, 1955: 124). Evidently, Hendrik Verwoerd – the then Minister of Education – justified the Bantu education policy:

“There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live” (Quoted in Nkabinde, 1997:7).

2.4 ACCESSIBILITY AND SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Despite the cited increasing rate of enrolments in higher education, the challenges with regard success cannot be undermined. Students enrolling in universities are diverse in terms of their educational, socio-economic, cultural, language and life-experience backgrounds (Boughey, 2010). The degree of preparedness on the part of students for the demands of higher education has been an ongoing debate (Cliff, 2003a). Gladieux and Swali (2000) acknowledge the fact that inequalities concerning educational opportunities are deep, and therefore higher education on its own is unable to redress the social imbalances that appear to threaten the future of different countries. The socio-economic status of many South Africans deprive them of the opportunity to access higher education (Letseka, 2013; Spaul, 2013). According to Griesel (2003:1), although there is an improvement in the matric Senior Certificate pass rates, throughput, especially rates of participation in higher education, remain too low. Thus, given the “reality of vast disparities in provision and resources, the concern is that results reflect socio-economic inequalities and the legacy of apartheid rather than individual learners’ intellectual ability or the potential to succeed with further study” (Griesel, 2003:1).

A study by Dlamini (2016) notes that out of 100 people who started school in the year 2008 only 12 attended a university; of these 12, nine accessed university immediately and three at a later stage; of the 100, six got “some kind of qualification” within six years; and only four were able to get a degree within six years. What is worth noting however is the fact that despite the increased enrolment into post-secondary education over the past 25 years, there is a low attendance rate for low income 18-24 year olds compared to the high income ones. Thus, “it is evident that participation gaps still exist internationally regarding financial factors, and that much needs to be done to address the financial dimension of access” (Gladieux & Swail, 2000: 2). Bamaber and Telt (2000) note the existing correlation between an increase in the number of poor students’ enrolment in higher education and higher dropout rates. Although enrolments rates are improving in higher education, there is a mirroring of the

fact that higher education system is largely differentiated along racial lines (File, Saunders & Badsha, 1994).

In South Africa one's admission to higher education is largely dependent on the achievement in the Senior Certificate Examination (SCE). Only those who pass with exemption are then eligible to enroll in a university on top of the other requirements that designated universities may require. However, one needs to note that given inequalities in the educational sector, some students are unable to pass their matric with exemption and therefore be 'eligible' candidates for higher education. This is echoed by Ouma (2010:94) in her assertion that "access to higher education everywhere is limited by the level and quality of the secondary education". The so-called Historically Disadvantaged Schools (HDS) cater for disadvantaged students, and therefore continue to lessen their chances of enrolling in higher education. This is because these schools are known for the poor quality of education as a result of "inadequate learning facilities and poor managerial skills, to name a few" (Ouma, 2010: 94).

The socio-economic status of school has become a determinant of learners' enrolment in higher education (Net et al., 2009:8). Schools that are economically advanced are able to produce students who are ready for higher education given the quality of education they offer. "As the new higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQC), 2007) grants statutory rights to individual HEIs to set their own entry requirements (DoE 1997a in Scott and Yeld, 2008:7-8), students from poor public schools are either transferred to poor public HEIs, or face serious impediments in accessing Historically Advantaged Schools (HAS)". One of these impediments is under-preparedness for higher education. The Senior Certificate (SC) has been criticized on the criterion that it "skews the school curriculum; is not attained by sufficient numbers of learners; as minimum threshold is not a reliable predictor of success with degree study; is not a mechanism that allows for redress; and is restrictive and based on outdated school and technical college subject offerings" (Griesel, 2003: 5). When the senior certificate is used as a single criterion in the selection of who gets to higher education, talented students who were not able to show their potential for higher education study are excluded.

The National Plan (Department of Education, 2001) expressed how concerned it is about the existing rates of retention. This is because, in certain higher education institutions, retention rates were down by 10% while dropout rates were at an average of 20% for all students and

an average of 25% for first-time entering students. Despite the fact that other factors might have contributed to this, there is no doubt academic exclusion is central (Council on Higher Education, 2001). There is therefore a need ensure that equity access is matched with success rates. As the White Paper states, “equity of access must be complemented by a concern for equity of outcomes. Increased access must not lead to a ‘revolving door’ syndrome for students with high failure and drop-out rates” (DoE, 1997: 1). It is therefore imperative for access to be broadened “through defensible entrance testing procedures (selection and placement) and the enhancement of success rates’ through academic development (bridging and foundation programmes) (CHE, 2001)

The under-preparedness of students is explained using various factors that include students not possessing “the language proficiencies necessary for them to engage meaningfully in learning in a language that may not be their mother tongue, others may have come from a school-background that was characterised by under-resourcing, inappropriate approaches to learning and teaching, or socio-economic inadequacies” (Cliff, 2003: 1). It has also been found that “for students coming from families where schooling simply constitutes a heavy financial burden or where they are the first to attend post-secondary studies (Clercq, 1986: 58; Fischer & Scott, 2011), higher education appears to be out of their immediate grasp. The transition from high school to university places major challenges on these students and therefore impacts on their retention and throughput. This makes it a matter of urgency on the part of higher education institutions to put in place support mechanisms that could respond effectively to students’ needs.

2.5 TRANSFORMATIONAL AGENDA IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The history of apartheid and colonialism gave rise to “social inequalities embedded and reflected in all spheres of social life” (Badat, 2010: 2). The higher education system suffered and continues to suffer social, political and economic discrimination and inequalities of a class, race, gender, institutional and spatial nature (Badat, 2010: 2). Based on this, the newly elected democratic government of South Africa made a commitment in 1994 to transform higher education. According to Kioko (2010: 79), in South Africa, “the advent of democracy necessitated a radical transformation in education policy. Accordingly, the country's constitution enshrined everyone's right to human dignity, equity and freedom to participate in all of the political, socio-economic and cultural spheres of society of which education is one.”

However, as argued by the DoE (1996: 1), the country's ability to stimulate, direct and utilise its populations' creative intellectual energies remains lacking and questionable.

The transformational agenda in higher education was aimed at "developing an egalitarian and healthy society that can produce citizens with the skills necessary for South Africa to join a rapidly globalizing economy" (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001: 303). The South African government placed large emphasis on higher education mainly because higher education is "recognised not only as a key force for modernisation and development, but also a key force to the socio-economic wellbeing of a developing country" (Scott & Yeld, 2008: 2).

This transformational agenda in higher education necessitated the introduction of reforms that sought to abolish apartheid's discriminatory education system (Mlambo, 2005: 111). The focus was now on making sure that the previously marginalised and excluded are provided access to higher education. Thus, as Imenda (2005: 1406) puts it, the aim was to "address the imbalance of the previous fragmented higher education system in terms of access, equity, funding, resources and quality". Ensor (2003: 327) holds the same view in his assertion that in post-apartheid South Africa, one of the reasons for the adopted reforms in higher education was to make sure that "an education system that suffered decades of fragmentation along racial lines needed to be integrated, curricula reworked, teachers upgraded, schools built, management systems made more accountable and efficient, assessment systems overhauled as South Africans rightly demanded access to a decent higher education for all."

The South African constitution made a commitment to the state and institutions to assert "values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of non-sexism and non-racialism and the human rights and freedoms that the Bill of Rights proclaims; and to 'respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights' embodied in the Bill of Rights" (Republic of South Africa, 1996: 4). There was also a declaration by the Higher Education Act (1997) to create a single coordinated higher education system', restructuring and transforming programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs. The act aimed to:

"regulate higher education; to provide for the establishment, composition and functions of a Council on Higher Education; to provide for the establishment, governance and funding of public higher education institutions; to provide for the appointment and functions of an independent assessor; to provide for the registration

of private higher education institutions; to provide for quality assurance and quality promotion in higher education; to provide for transitional arrangements and the repeal of certain laws; and to provide for matters connected therewith” (HEA, 1997: 1).

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (1996:1) marks the crucial introduction to key issues, ideas and debates pertaining higher education in post 1994. According to Reddy (2006), its far-reaching mandate was giving advice to the minister of education on issues concerning restructuring education. NCHE made a huge contribution in offering a “detailed and extensive study of higher education, which informed the other documents that led to legislation regulating higher education” (Reddy, 2006). This in turn led to the endorsement of its recommendations in the Education White paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education (1997). The Education White Paper envisaged transformation of higher education as follows:

“South Africa’s transition from apartheid minority rule requires that existing practices and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for a new era. In South Africa today, the challenge is to address the past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities” (DoE, 1997: 7).

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) emphasized participation as well as diversification (DoE, 2001). It proposed that there was a need for South African higher education to be massified. Massification was aimed at resolving “equity-development tension since increased participation was supposed to provide greater opportunity for access (equity) while also producing more high-level skills that were necessary for economic growth” (Cloete et al. 2002: 97). The Education White Paper 3 was thought to be a step towards confronting this legacy. This is because it aimed to develop strategies that would promote “equity and redress, democratisation, development (including the building of human capacity), quality, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability” (DoE 1997).

The White Paper “sets out a vision for comprehensive reforms of the higher education system, address issues regarding quality assurance system for South African higher education”(Tumadottir, 2009: 17). The Education White Paper 3, issued in 1997, noted that increased participation in higher education was crucial for both economic and social reasons. Equity was also stressed as one of the guiding principles regarding transformation of South African higher education (Martin, 2010). As the White Paper put it:

“The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Applying the principle of equity implies, on one hand, a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination and disadvantage, and on the other, a programme of transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for the individuals and institutions” (DoE, 1997: 1.18).

The 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) committed to diversification in the South African higher education system. This was also emphasized by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in its report. In the report it was argued that there is a need for reconfiguration of higher education system as a differentiated and diverse system so that there can be effective responses from institutions to the varied social needs of the country (CHE 2000). The Green Paper emphasized the need for expansion and transformation in higher education. Redress was also viewed as crucial to the development of an effective expansion and transformation (DoE, 1996: 3). According to the Green Paper, “redress must operate partly in terms of access: it must ensure that no-one with the capacities to succeed in higher education is barred from doing so” (DoE, 1996:3).

2.6. AN EVALUATION SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Jansen (2004: 1) argues that although there are continuities from the apartheid educational system, “the higher education system does not resemble the distortion, upheaval and fragmentation that marked the sector at the start of the 1990s.” He cites the major transformations that have taken place in higher education since 1994. These include the change in size and shape of higher education. There was a reduction in the number of public higher education institutions (DoE, 2001: 87). The change in meaning and autonomy talks to the fact that much of the history of South African universities was preoccupied with asserting autonomy against the constant interventions of the apartheid state to regulate and maintain racially- and ethnically-separate universities (Jansen, 2004: 4). Institutions gained autonomy to decide who teaches, what is taught, how is done and to whom is taught (Jansen, 20004: 4).

Higher education also experienced a change in the character of student distribution and characteristic. Access to higher education, especially for Blacks, has been a problem in South Africa. Between the year 1990 and 1994 historically black universities expanded by 28 000 (37 per cent) and white universities by a total of 10 000 (or 8 per cent (Jansen, 2004: 8). There was also changing organisation of university management and governance (new

managerialism, councils); the changing roles of student politics and organisation; the changing models of delivery in higher education; the changing notion of higher education - between free trade and the public good; the changing value of higher education programmes (the rise of the economic sciences and the decline of the humanities); and the changing nature of the academic workplace (Jansen, 2004: 8).

Higher education now focused on the expansion of access for poor children. This is illustrated in the conversion of loans into bursaries for qualifying final year students (DoE, 1997). Significant progress has been made in turning around South Africa's adult education system with enrolment figures reaching 233 000 in 2011. "*The Mid Term Review Report*, released on 1 June 2012, also notes that the Department of Higher Education and Training had increased access to higher education programmes by expanding spaces and options available at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges and universities". The Minister of higher education, Blade Nzimande, in his 2012/13 Budget Vote Speech pronounced an amount of R499 million allocated to all universities for teaching development grants to help in the improvement of graduate outputs and R194 million for foundation programmes to see to it that the success rates of disadvantaged students is improved. Over the next two years, R3.8 billion was reserved for 'universities' overall infrastructure development, prioritising historically disadvantaged institutions. The National Development Plan 2030 [PDF], released on 15 August 2012, proposed among other things,

"Increasing the number of university graduates and the number of people doing their doctorates, building two new universities in Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape, building a new medical school in Limpopo and a number of new academic hospitals, extending the length of first degrees to four years on a voluntary basis, providing full funding assistance covering tuition, books, accommodation and living allowance (in the form of loans and bursaries) to deserving students, granting seven-year work permits to all foreigners who graduate from a registered South African university."

There has been increased and broadened participation within higher education to advance social equity and meet economic and social development needs, a crucial goal given the legacy of disadvantage of black and women South Africans, especially of working class and rural poor origins. There was a growth in the number of student enrolments 473 000 in 1993 to 799 388 in 2008. Deracialisation of the student body has taken place in many institutions. "Whereas in 1993 African students constituted 40% (191 000), and black students 52% of the student body, in 2008 they made up 64.4% (514 370) and over 75% respectively of overall

enrolments” (CHE, 2004; DHET, 2009). The progress in terms of gender equity is quite commendable. Women students’ enrolment saw an increase. In the year 1993 they made up 43% (202 000 out of 473 000), by 2008 they constituted 56.3 % (450 584 out of 799 388) of the student body (CHE, 2004; DHET, 2009).

White students made up 52% of Masters graduates and 59% of Doctoral graduates in the year 2005. Male students made up 55% of Masters graduates and 56% of Doctoral graduates while in 2008 black students made up 45% of doctoral graduates (CHE, 2008:32). Despite the fact that there has been an improvement in participation of black women at the doctoral level when compared with the end of the apartheid era, given that blacks constitute 91% of the South African population, black participation remains low compared to white student participation. The participation of women also remains low given that women make up 51% of the populations and constitute almost 55% of undergraduate enrolments (CHE, 2008). Overall in 2008, the inequalities remained stark. While black South Africans comprised almost 91% of the population they made up only 38% of academics; enjoyed only a 24% representation in the academic workforce, and women made up only 42% of academics (Statistics South Africa, 2008). Although there is an increase in the number of black students enrolling in higher education institutions since 1994, White South Africans’ participation rates remain high compared to the Africans and Coloured (CHE, 2004: 62; Scott e al, 2007: 10). In as much as there has been significant institutional change in higher education since 1994, there has not been radical transformation.

Although the radical shifts in policy content and direction are not questionable, there are persisting challenges within South Africa’s education system (Jansen & Sayed, 2001; Odhav, 2009, Spaull, 2013). It is prevalent that South Africa continues to endure the socio-economic and politico-geographic reality of apartheid (Jansen & Taylor, 2003:2). Letseka (2013: 74) asserts that “the fall of apartheid brought promises for education progress in South Africa, but much of it remains unrealized, especially in small and rural towns.” Despite the fact that the constitution(1996, (29) (1 a) enshrines the right to education for everyone, the country’s education remains highly differentiated.

Despite the slow but inevitable deracialisation of former white institutions, principally in the distribution of students, higher education remains visibly marked by racially skewed staffing patterns, resource disparities, differential research productivity, gross differences in student

pass and progression rates, and resilient symbols of dominance and traditions of exclusion” (DoE, 1996:3). According to Cloete (2009:8), for “African young adults, unfavourable school and home environments overshadow individual ability.” This is to say, for black children, ability alone is not sufficient to bridge the gap between secondary school and tertiary education. Their home and school backgrounds continue to place challenges on their personal abilities. Black students’ educational attainment continues to be heavily influenced and impacted by their financial circumstances.

Badat (2010: 7) argues that an “exclusive focus on economic development and quality and ‘standards’, (especially when considered to be timeless and invariant and attached to a single, a-historical and universal model of higher education) results in equality being retarded or delayed with limited erosion of the racial and gender character of the high-level occupational structure”. This illustrates that there is a tension between the governments’ goals and the means to achieve them. In South Africa “700,000 youths with matric who officially qualify for admission to higher education are part of the 2.8 million young people in the country that are currently not in employment, education, or training” (the so-called NEETs) (Cloete, 2009: 11). Despite there being an improvement in access, this are not matched by success. It has therefore been noted that despite the significant growth in higher education enrolments, “graduate output has not kept pace with the country’s needs due to the low graduation and high attrition rates” (CHE, 2013: 9).

For a country with “significant skills constraints at higher and intermediate levels, South Africa admits a relatively small proportion of its population to higher education. Its tertiary Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has remained stable at around 16 percent in previous years, yet the GER in countries at similar levels of economic development is at least 20 percent” (UNESCO, 2009). It has been noted that there is a need to understand the low participation rate in the context of a poorly performing school system, where high dropout and attrition rates are compounded by poor academic achievement. Of the students who entered grade 1 in 1995 (the first year of the post-apartheid era), two-thirds dropped out of school before reaching grade 12 (Scott, Yeld & Hendry 2007: 33). Just over one in five obtained a Senior Certificate, and only 5 percent obtained a Senior Certificate endorsement (which qualifies them for admission to higher education).

The key challenge facing the South African higher education system remains as outlined in the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (2001: 4) “to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities” South African higher education is therefore “fundamentally flawed by inequities, imbalances and distortions deriving from its history and present structure” (DoE, 1996: 1). What this then means is that higher education institutions need to be more responsive to the students. This can be done by putting into place support mechanisms that are cognizant of the distinct student demographics and therefore respond accordingly. One of the steps in that direction is through academic support programmes that are not ‘one size fits all’ but rather institution specific and student-centered. The next chapter will discuss these programmes in detail.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter has illustrated that although there is no denial that there has been a shift concerning policy content and direction from apartheid to post-apartheid society, higher education continues to be plagued with a number of problems that need urgent attention (Odhav, 2009:33). Democracy promised transformation but a lot is yet to be achieved. The weaknesses in policy when it comes to funding, redress and capacity building for both Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) and for students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds are yet to be addressed (Odhav, 2009:33). The extent to which policy is being implemented in various institutions has been found to be ‘half-hearted or weak’. The quality of education in basic education continues to suffer lack of resources conducive for learning as well as poor performance. Accessibility and success in higher education also proves how the country’s higher education system is still divided across racial and class lines. The transformation agenda that the reforms intended to administer seem to have only tinkered higher education as opposed to radically transforming it.

This chapter has shown that although there have been notable reforms since 1994, education is still in need of radical transformation. Race and class continue to determine the kind of education the majority of South Africans receive. These inequalities along class and racial lines therefore lead to many black students being inadequately prepared for higher education, which then necessitates the need for academic support if these students are to succeed.

CHAPTER THREE

SUPPORT PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the South African higher education system continues to carry the burden of apartheid legacy, one cannot underestimate the institutional transformation required in order to cater for students. The transition from secondary to tertiary institutions has been beset by challenges, of which learning is one (Tinto, 1999, 2003; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). Support is therefore urgent if students are to develop academic skills and enhance their achievement and progress (Blytham & Orr, 2002; Maphosa, 2014). This chapter aims to trace the history of Academic Support Programmes (ASPs), what ASPs are, who they target and the appropriate level of study at which they need to be offered. The chapter also offers a history of ASPs at Rhodes University.

3.2 THE HISTORY OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

In the early 1980s there was an increase in the number of black students entering higher education. The argument has been that these students are “less prepared for and unfamiliar with the rigorous of higher education” (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 1). Thus, as Akoojee and Nkomo (2007: 390) put it, “taken in the context of numbers that enter university from the schooling system, there appears enough evidence to doubt the extent of black student success”. The Commission on Higher Education (CHE) (2013: 60) asserts that despite that most South Africans are affected negatively by the articulation gap, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are the worst affected. Higher education institutions responded by transforming along the lines of academic development. This led to a change in the understanding of learning and teaching. This in turn necessitated a quick response from the concerned universities by introducing ASPs with the aim of redressing the imbalances of apartheid education (Boughey, 2010; Tanyanyiwa, 2014). The academic development initiative shifted the debate from how the “underdeveloped are developed to examining the basic underpinning of the institutions themselves” (Mehl 1988: 17).

According to Haggis (2008:10), “higher education has arguably focused most of its efforts until very recently upon attempting to shore up certainties in relation to knowledge of students as ‘other’, and has not been particularly good at examining its own cultures and ways of being.” This is problematic in the sense that institutions seem to advocate that the problem is with the students. The history of academic development is marked by three phases (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004: 11-12). These include academic support, academic

development and institutional development. These phases are said not to be “distinct from one another or actual periods of time but rather are indicative more of dominant discursive formulations in the field of Academic Development” (Boughey, 2004: 1).

The academic support phase materialized in the 1980s “when historically white universities first started admitting black students”(Boughey, 2010: 1). The belief held in this phase was that black students enrolling in higher education were underprepared for the demands of higher learning (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 1). Students were seen as lacking certain skills, knowledge and values which made it very difficult for them to cope with their studies. As a result, “academic support, usually in the form of ad hoc, or adjunct tutorials or workshops, was offered to students to help them acquire the skills which would fill conceptual gaps they arrived at university with, to improve their competence in English” (Boughey, 2004:1). In this phase students were seen as in need of academic support because of lack of skills, knowledge and values on their part which contributed to their failing. The purposes of academic support here was to “serve students’ needs; and especially the needs of those students who are underprepared or have difficulty adjusting to the academic environment” (Ntakana, 2011; Maphosa, 2014; Boughey, 2010). Academic support in this phase was seen in the light of addressing students’ deficiency.

The second phase, academic development, is defined as a “field of research and practice that aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning in higher education, and to enable institutions and the higher education system to meet key educational goals, particularly in relation to equity of access and outcomes”(HEQC 2007:74). This is in line with Volbrecht and Boughey’s (2004:58) definition of AD as “an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education.” In this phase there was a shift of focus from the individual behaviour and individual minds to a focus on social and cultural factors and the way they are implemented in power (Boughey, 2007; Boughey, 2010: 4). From this, it is argued that the diversity of students enrolling in higher education means that the majority of them require academic assistance and not the minority, as the academic support phase viewed (Boughey, 2010: 4; Maphosa, 2014). The academic development phase resulted in the “movement of AD work from the margins to the mainstream –a move away from seeing students as deficient to a critical examination of teaching and learning in the mainstream” (Boughey, 2004: 1).

The third phase in the historical development of academic development is the one marked by institutional development discourse (Boughey, 2010: 4). This phase is dated from the 1990s onwards and is influenced by the existing policies in the South African higher education (Boughey, 2010: 4). The establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and institutional audits introduced the formalisation of universities in accounting the manner in which teaching and learning together with academic support are implemented (HEQC, 2007).

3.3 CONCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

Academic support, also referred to as educational intervention refers to the “purposeful shaping of the instructional process to address the learning needs of students in particular teaching contexts” (Warren, 1998:76). Contrary to the assumption held that learning occurs automatically, according to this approach “academic practice requires high order thinking, interpretative and writing skills and familiarity with the concepts, theories and ground rules of specific disciplines or fields” (Warren, 1998:76). This correlates with Meyer and Scrivener’s (1995)’s notion that “student learning is a complex multivariate phenomenon, with students exhibiting qualitatively different levels of understanding of what they have learned.” This acknowledges that student learning is not an individual activity, whereby students are given responsibility to monitor their own learning. This kind of perception takes into account various factors that impact on learning. Thus, as asserted by Gibbs, 1995; Biggs, Saljo; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1992 (to mention a few), the nature of student learning is affected by a number of factors such as assessment/teaching practices, access to and availability of resources and the learning environment.

Academic support programs can be defined as “institutional programs, services, learning opportunities and interventions that: enrich supplemental learning and personal development, correct academic or personal knowledge shortfalls, prevent the occurrence of foreseeable personal or academic difficulties, and make the college experience more enjoyable” (Kramer, 2003:1). These programs are essential tools in the academic performance and degree attainment of students (Thompson, 2007: 2). Academic support programs are also defined as services offered by institutions to help students to complete their studies successfully (Thompson, 2007: 5). The term ‘academic support’ refers generally to educational institutions’ initiatives to offer supportive environments for students, the enhancement of “sense of community in the institution, and initiatives to improve academic performance and aim to offer early academic help to at risk students” (Adams, 2006: 10).

3.4. ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMMES AT RHODES UNIVERSITY

At Rhodes University, the foundation programmes came into being in the form of Academic Support Programmes, which were later renamed as Academic Skills Programmes (AD Evaluation Report, 1996: 3). The establishment of the Rhodes ASP in 1982 was a result of several years of deliberation “brought about by the plight of academically ‘at risk’ students at the university” (Drewett, 1993: 72). On their inception in 1982, ASPs were formalised with the initial aim of “...improving the quality and quantity of graduates who belong to the so-called Black, Coloured and Indian groups” (Walters, as cited in Drewett, 1993: 75). These groups of students were a minority in the numerical sense and were often portrayed as disadvantaged and lagging behind “in terms of academic background, skills and exposure to kinds of experiences enjoyed by more advantaged fellow students” (Nelson and Vorster, 1993: 20).

Unlike other universities that established the programme specifically for black students coming from poor education backgrounds, the Rhodes University programme was open to all students (Drewett, 1993:93). In fact, it was reported that 54.4% of ASP attenders in 1986 were white students, which indicated that inadequate schooling prior to entering university was not a black student only problem (Drewett, 1993: 93). Jefferay (1993: 6) argued, nevertheless, that although the university acknowledged the fact that under-preparedness was not a non-white student only problem, the support structures (e.g. support tutorials and language courses) at Rhodes University were designed with English second language students in mind.

The Academic Skills Programme provided support tutorials “in the Arts, Social Sciences, Law and Commerce Faculties” (Jefferay, 1993: 6). The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course was integrated into the support tutorials. EAP was underpinned by a skills discourse, which assumes that literacy skills are automatically transferable. As such, the ASP tutorials were offered separately from the institutional discipline structures (ASP Annual Report, 1989: 1). Specifically, students attended one ASP tutorial per week in any of the subjects in which they felt they needed help. These tutorials were aimed at imparting “a range of general study skills, communicative and language skills, and effective approaches to university life so as to develop confident and independent learners” (ASP Annual Report,

1989: 1). The support tutorials also covered “listening, note-making, reading, research, essay writing and exam skills” (Jefferay, 1993: 6).

A study conducted by Sutton (1992: 13) on “attitudes and perceptions of the problems encountered by English second language speakers also revealed the problems of separating knowledge and content”. The results of the study suggested that leaving the responsibility of language skills to ASPs would actually increase the problem, since it was considered “too vast an area to be dealt with successfully in isolation and without support from departments” (Sutton, 1992:13). Although students generally appreciated the support they got from ASPs, they also indicated some level of dissatisfaction with the fact that the support structures at that time had nothing to do with content covered in class (Drewett, 1993). A study conducted by Becker and Mqingwana (1983) on the experiences of black undergraduate students at Rhodes University highlighted the need for integrated approaches which introduce students to ways of writing and thinking within a discipline as opposed to mere language and study skills.

Academic Support at Rhodes University is also in the form of Extended Studies Program (ESP). Debates about integration seem to suggest that the unavailability of sufficient funding delayed the introduction of integrated programmes. Another consequence of the financial constraints was the “instability of the profession due to contractual employment conditions” (Jairam, 1996:85). At Rhodes university ESP is considered “a vital part of the university’s goal of widening access to include learners with potential from a more diverse range of educational, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, whose disadvantaged backgrounds may have hindered their school leaving performance” (Boughey as cited in TAI, 2012: 5). Extended Studies Programmes are also conceptualised as initiatives aimed at expanding the institutional culture of the university through inclusive practices that are “supportive of a diverse student body” (TAI Annual Report, 2012: 5).

The Audit Report on Rhodes University (HEQC, 2006: 51), for example, notes that, according to 2003 data, only about 30% of enrolments at the institution were black South African students. When the Extended Studies Unit was established, therefore, it was understood that its role in the university was related to the need to increase enrolments of black South Africans. The unit played this role by focusing on the construct of ‘educational disadvantage’ and most of the students recruited from its programmes came from former DET schools. Over time, the construct of ‘educational disadvantage’ has been contested as a

criterion for entrance to the programmes given the role of social class in determining access to and success in higher education. This has meant that programmes have been opened up to students from former Model C and even private schools.

In practice until now, Extended Programmes have only been open to black students. Given the problematic nature of the term 'educationally disadvantaged' consideration needs to be given to whether the programmes should, in fact, be open to students from all social groups including white students on the basis of social class. Students on Extended Programmes often complain of marginalisation, stigmatisation and even racism. If programmes were opened more widely to, say, students of working class origins regardless of racial group, these complaints could be expected to be minimalised.

With regard to admission, concerns have been raised around the fact that in the Humanities Faculty for instance, students are accepted unconditionally on their provisional results. While this probably works well for students from good schools with reliable assessment practices, many students placed on Extended Programmes come from schools where this is not the case. In some instances, this has led to students' final results being below even the minimum requirements for admission to an Extended Programme. It has also resulted in students who should be on an Extended Programme being admitted for a three-year degree programme.

In the past, the University has taken two different approaches to students who have gained admittance with lower than usual Swedish point scores because of the practice of using provisional results as criteria. Both of these have been problematic. Students are either i) put into mainstream (possibly on a limited curriculum) where they have little extra support and often become statistics of the revolving door syndrome or ii) they are told at registration that they have been placed onto an Extended Programme. Students are often angry about this latter option, not only because their expectations are dashed but also because an extra year has serious financial implications for them.

In addition to the tutorials that run weekly, Rhodes University undergraduates are offered mentoring. The mentorship programme involves senior students assisting new ones in their studies, social and other spheres. There are also residence group discussions for those who live on campus in addition to the formal mentoring arranged by the university. The library

workshops at the beginning of the year assist students in finding their way around the university facilities.

3.5. ANALYSIS OF IN INSTITUTIONAL ASPs

Irrespective of the amount of energy, enthusiasm and financial resources provided to student support, problems have been identified. The first area of concern is students' attendance of additional classes, tutorials and other teaching events. Many authors (including Yeld, 1986; Palazzo, 1987; Foggin, 1991; Dison & Selikow, 1992) note problems with student attendance, specifically during test times and assignment submission dates. When there is other work that needs to be done, students tend not to attend tutorials (Boughey, 2010). However, it is worth noting that some students show interest in attending tutorials closer to tests, exams or any other form of assessment. These is because students use this consultation opportunity time to seek assistance.

A lot of early support initiated for students was non-credit bearing and students considered to be in need of support were required to enroll in these additional courses and activities. The need to complete the courses then meant that the time taken to complete a course of study was lengthened and many students perceived this as discriminatory. In support of the notion of compulsion, Scott (1984) argued that students in need of support frequently failed courses, which meant that the time taken to complete a qualification was lengthened in any case.

A solution to students' reluctance to engage with academic support requirements was to allocate credits to this additional learning. As Yeld (1986) pointed out, however if developmental work is credited within the structure of a 'normal' qualification by replacing some 'qualification' credits with 'development' credits then the overall 'value' or 'standard' of the qualification is ultimately lowered. The only way to overcome this phenomenon is to extend the length of the time taken to complete the qualification.

As already noted, the idea that students should be required to enroll in additional courses has led to accusation of discrimination. Compulsory attendance at additional tutorials and enrolment in additional courses also means that students are 'marked' as different in the eyes of their peers who are not required to attend. This marking is discriminatory in that it constructs students as less able and less 'clever' and when the marking is overlaid with issues related to race and social class, problems with this sort of student support become very clear.

The earliest student support initiatives were directed at the small number of black students enrolling in the historically white liberal universities. Given this observation, it is not

surprising that funding for the work came mostly from donors and that a great deal of effort needed to be put into fundraising by AD practitioners. This reliance on soft funding then meant that AD practitioners were mostly employed on a temporary basis with no prospects for career advancement. Over the years this has had a profound effect on the development of capacity in the field (Boughey, 2010).

Higher education institutions have long operated with the philosophy that only those who are "fit" for higher education will be successful. Those students who possess the talents and skills cultivated by favourable or advantaged backgrounds will succeed and those who do not, will find something else to do. In an era of mass and increasingly expensive higher education, however, this philosophy does not hold well. Similarly, throughput or completion rates cannot be viewed as sole criteria of quality and hallmarks of high standards. A different view of what constitutes quality in higher education is needed — a view that not only accommodates increased diversity of students, but also asks questions about the processes that contribute to successful delivery in terms of the outcomes required of higher education.

This chapter traced the history of Academic Support Programmes (ASPs), what ASPs are, who they target and the appropriate level of study at which they need to be offered. The chapter also discussed various academic support initiatives offered at Rhodes University. These include Extended Studies Programmes, mentoring and tutorials. The chapter provided an analysis of ASPs as offered by different universities. It has been noted that students are reluctant to utilise provided academic support based on the stigma and mode of implementation. This necessitates the need for systematic academic support to cater for the needs of students. One step towards this, it can be argued, is shifting away from the clinical mode that depicts students as in need of a cure. This included transforming the nature of learning and teaching. The following chapter looks at this in detail.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORISING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The history of academic support in higher education has been marked by an attempt to ‘fix’ students problems. As such a deficient way of transforming higher education to better suit the needs of the ‘ill-prepared’ students has been at the forefront in many institutions. The aim has been to make students fit in the already existing institution as opposed to radically transforming higher education institutions. The need to shift away from the clinical, deficit model necessitated the debate around conceptions of teaching and learning in higher education. A concern has been that there is a disparity between what higher education institutions say about quality learning and what is being practiced. It is noted that despite higher education institutions’ emphasis on high cognitive skills and preparing students to engage in critical thinking, the teaching methods most commonly used and the assessment methods employed fail to align with the aims set. The argument is then that the solution lies not in providing teaching and assessment recipes but an integration of how we teach with how students learn. This chapter aims to provide a critical analysis of different theories of education and how they have an impact on the country’s higher education. This will be done by looking at policies on teaching and learning, teaching and learning strategies and various institutional understandings of teaching and learning.

4.2. CONCEPTION OF LEARNING

According to a study done by Saljo (1979) there are six distinct conceptions of learning as mentioned by students. These conceptions were confirmed by other studies (see also Marton and Ramsden, Alba and Beaty, 1993). The six conceptions are:

1. *A quantitative increase in knowledge.* Learning is seen as acquiring information in ‘knowing a lot’ or ‘knowing more’. This acquisition takes place as a result of absorbing and storing knowledge.
2. *Memorizing and reproduction.* Learning is seen as storing information that can be reproduced as isolated pieces of knowledge. This takes place through rote learning, repetition and memorizing
3. *Applying knowledge.* Learning is seen as acquiring facts, skills or procedure that can be retained and used as necessary. This takes place through the acquisition of knowledge that can be applied or used.

4. *Making sense or abstracting meaning.* Learning is seen as relating parts of the subject matter to other known parts and to the real world. This takes place through relating what is learned to other knowledge.
5. *Interpreting and relating knowledge in a different way.* Learning is seen as involving a change in understanding or comprehending the world by re-interpreting knowledge. This takes place when learners identify patterns in information and relate these to information from different contexts and situations. As a consequence of identifying relationships that have not previously been recognized, learners change their understanding in a qualitatively different way.
6. *Changing as a person.* Learning is seen as understanding the world differently and as a consequence learners change within themselves. This takes place through a deep involvement in learning and by being in charge of one's learning (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 5-6).

These conceptions are said to be hierarchical starting at the level whereby learning is perceived as merely the act of knowing more through to the perception of learning as the process of changing an individual (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 6). The first three conceptions are quantitative in the sense that the main focus is knowing more and treating learning as the process of acquiring more knowledge in order to reproduce (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 6). The last three are said to be qualitative in the sense that the learner is concerned with understanding and being able to corroborate and integrate what is learned as opposed to treating information in isolation. Contrary to the first three where the learner use lower levels of cognitive skills such as rote learning and repetition, the learner in the last three utilises higher level cognitive processes such as critical analysis and evaluation (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 6).

4.3. APPROACHES TO LEARNING

According to Boughey (2010: 2) there are two approaches to understanding learning in higher education. The first category holds the view that learning depends on factors that are inherent to the individual students such as intelligence, aptitude, cognition, motivation and the availability of various 'skills' including language 'skills'. This then paints the picture that only those who are intelligent and motivated will succeed. Failure on the other hand is attributed to a deficit in capacities, to the fact that learners have not managed to acquire appropriate 'skills' or a failure to exercise the agency to learn (Boughey, 2010: 2). Critics of

this approach argue that there is a need to pay attention to the socio-economic factors that impact on learning. The argument is that:

“failures in learning are due to the inferior educational experiences available to the majority of students and which have resulted in their failure to develop i) their cognitive capacities to the full, ii) the learning ‘skills’ and approaches necessary to succeed in higher education or iii) the understandings of the behaviours needed to succeed and which drive motivation” (Boughey, 2010: 2).

The second category in understanding learning acknowledges the socially constructed nature of learning and teaching. The argument is that the difference among students is the social privilege of various students that enable them to construct and access forms of knowledge in ways that are privileged by the university (Boughey, 2010: 2). This then puts middle class children at an advantage because their homes prepare them for university (Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Heath 1983)

According to Biggs (1987) the manner in which students tackle new learning tasks is generally similar to how they tackled previous learning tasks. (The approach that students adopt is said to be dependent on the “students’ goals, motives and strategies as well as their interpretation or perception of the demands and requirements of the learning task” (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 6). There are three distinct approaches that have been identified to describe the manner in which students approach their learning: surface, deep and achieving (Charmers & Fuller, 1996: 6).

4.3.1 Surface Approach

This approach is when students’ main focus is on “surface characteristics of the situation, on the very wording of a text being read, of the argument put forward, on figures in a problem, on formulas to be used for solving the problem (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 7). Students memorise texts and treat them as isolated items without understanding (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 7).

4.3.2. Deep Approach

A deep approach is when learners are focused on understanding the phenomenon as opposed to trying to recall (Bowden & Marton, 2004: 8; Entwistle & Peterson, 2004: 415).The

students here “involve in the transformation and restructuring of their knowledge to enable them to understand and interpret the material, and to view it from more than one perspective” (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 7). However, it is worth noting that students can adopt both of these approaches at different times in their studies (Bowden & Mouton, 2004: 8). We therefore do not have either deep or surface students. The kind of approach adopted by students is influenced by the: “nature of their project at university, what kind of meaning studying there carries for them, what their conception of teaching is and their understanding of what the institution want them to do and what view of learning its way of acting reflects” (Bowden & Marton, 2004: 8).

4.3.3. Achieving approach

This approach is similar to the surface approach in the sense that students’ intention is “external to the real purpose of the task” (Charmers & Fuller, 1996: 7). The students are concerned with achieving high marks for their own sake not because that indicates high level of learning (Charmers & Fuller, 1996: 7). The strategies used by students are dependent on the requirements of a given task. If the task requires them to reproduce information so as to obtain high marks, the students will adopt reproduction and recall strategies (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 7). “If engagement in the task is required to achieve high marks, then the student will use strategies in the same way as students who adopt a deep approach to their learning. The important difference is that students with an achieving approach will employ whatever strategies are seen as necessary to achieve high marks” (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 7). Chalmers and Fuller (1996: 8) assert that:

“It is important to recognize that it is not the particular strategies that are used to learn that indicate the approach or conception of learning, but the purpose or intention on the learner in using them. For example, it cannot be assumed that a student who is actively memorizing information has a surface approach to learning. The student may be memorizing in order to be able to remember details that will make it possible to think about the ideas and work with them”

4.4 THEORIES OF EDUCATION

4.4.1. Teaching as Telling or Transmission

According to Chalmers and Fuller (1996: 8), students’ beliefs about learning have an impact on the approach they adopt to learning. Similarly, the manner in which teachers perceive teaching influence how they go about teaching. A lot of university teaching is still premised on the notion that students will learn if there is transmission of information by lectures

(Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 9). This has been found problematic in the sense that student learning is impacted by different things (Wilson & Peterson, 2006: 9). According to Johns (1997: 3) “practitioners and students come to classes with theories about what is to be literate and how literacy is explored, despite the hidden and sometimes incomplete nature of their theories, they influence how we teach and learn.”

Teaching as telling ‘or transmission’ (Booth, 2003: 59; Ramsden, 1992; Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 9) illustrates how teachers in higher education “implicitly or explicitly define the task of teaching undergraduates as the transmission of authoritative content or the demonstration of procedures”(Ramsden, 1992: 111). The kind of knowledge that needs to be transmitted to these students is then perceived as unproblematic compared to the one needed in postgraduate levels (Ramsden, 1992: 111). This kind of theory rests on the notion that the subject content is ‘sui generis’ and therefore must be instilled in students (Ramsden, 1992: 111).

This kind of theory portrays the teacher as the source of ‘undistorted information’ while students are viewed as passive recipients of the teacher’s wisdom (Ramsden, 1992: 111; Rossin, 2010). The theory holds the view that problems and challenges faced by higher education institutions rest in the amount of information they are able to transmit to their students (Ramsden, 1992: 112). It is no wonder in such a situation that the solution to the problem is thought to be ‘technical fixes’ designed to transmit more information faster (typically nowadays some form of computer-assisted learning or sophisticated video presentation is one of them) (Ramsden, 1992: 112). The main focus in this view of teaching is what the teacher does to the student. Therefore, the idea that the teacher should be an expert is brought forward. This way of teaching is problematic in the sense that it views the knowledge of the subject content and the manner in which that is taught separately. The theory therefore “seems to be saying learning will occur as long as a quantity of information gets across to students” (Ramsden, 1992: 112).

The approach is premised on the idea that the sole aim of teaching is to transmit knowledge, skills and procedures from the teacher to the student (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 9). Classes therefore are constructed in a such a way that the teacher will issue information without critical engagement of the student (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 9). The teacher therefore is expected to accurately transmit information to the students; responsibility being to make sure that learning takes place (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 10). In this approach “students’ learning is assessed by determining how much, and how accurately, information is known, rather than

what is understood” (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 10). This kind of approach normally use multiple choice tests, short answer responses and comprehension task as form of assessment (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 10).

4.4.2 Teaching as Organising Student Activities

In this kind of theory the focus shifts away from the teacher to the student (Ramsden, 1992: 113, Rossin, 2010; Booth, 2003). Teaching is therefore “viewed as a supervision process involving the articulation of techniques designed to ensure that students learn”(Ramsden, 1992: 113). The theory brings forth the notion that there are certain rules that ought to be applied in order to see to it that students understand. The methods may include “ways of motivating students so that they are in the right psychological frame of mind to learn dull subject matter, simple rewards and punishments approaches to assessment (if you don’t learn this, you will fail the exam; if you do, it will be useful next year)” (Ramsden, 1992: 113). Teaching ceases to be perceived as the transmission of knowledge to students. It then constitutes the act of dealing with students and of making students busy through the use of efficient mechanisms. “Improving teaching from this point of view is about extending a lecturer’s repertoire of techniques rather than about changing his or her understanding”(Ramsden, 1992: 113). This theory then implies that teaching can be improved through learning teaching techniques. What is worth noting is that this theory holds the view that “if learning does not occur, something is wrong outside the learner as well as inside. Much student learning may still be seen as an additive process and different in kind at first year and postgraduate level, but is no longer seen simply as the individual learner’s responsibility” (Ramsden, 1992: 114).

4.4.3. Teaching as Making Learning Possible

Contrary to the first two theories that focus respectively on the teacher and the student, “theory three perceives teaching and learning as ‘two sides of a coin’ (Schratz, Schwarz & Westfall- Greiter, 2013: 59; Ramsden, 1992: 114). This theory argues that there is an interrelatedness of teaching, students and subject content to be learned. Teaching is therefore “comprehended as a process of working cooperatively with learners to help them change their understanding, it is making student learning possible” (Ramsden, 1992: 114). Teaching is also seen as “the act of finding students misunderstandings, intervening to change them, and creating a context of learning which encourages students actively to engage with the subject matter”(Ramsden, 1992: 114). The theory is concerned with what students are taught and the

manner in which that is done. Learning is viewed here as “something the student does, rather than something that is done to the student” (Ramsden, 1992: 114).

The theory also acknowledges various conditions that impact on student learning. It argues that there are “certain favourable conditions for learning which however need to be actively reinterpreted to fit specific circumstances, particular students, and the subject matter”(Ramsden, 1992: 116). Apart from theory two, theory three does not hold the view that there can be one solution or a set of rules that can ensure learning happens.

Wilson and Peterson (2006: 2) propose a benchmark for learning and teaching. The argument is that there is a need to move away from the perception of students as passive absorbers of information and viewing individual difference as a problem. It is rather advisable to move toward “active engagement with information and the depiction of individual differences as resources” (Wilson & Peterson, 2006: 2). He also argues that there is a need to move away from the ‘what’: facts and procedure of a discipline towards ‘what, how and why’: central ideas, concepts, and facts, process of inquiry and argument of a discipline’ (Wilson & Peterson, 2006:2). The idea that teachers talk and students listen (Capon, 1993: 1), therefore constructing students as ‘sponge’, empty vessels, blank slates, or passive observers is problematic.

According to Luckett and Sutherland (2000) the kind of assessment used in higher education determines the kind of learning approach adopted by students. This then makes assessment an important feature in higher education. The issue of assessment poses challenges on the part of higher education institutions in the sense that different stakeholders want distinct things from assessment (Makoni, 2000: 102). Thus as Makoni (2000: 102) puts it:

“Students want to know what is expected of them, how they will be judged, how they are progressing and they will want recognition of their achievements, lecturers want to know whether their students are mastering key concepts and skills, whether their teaching is effective and whether their assessment are comparable to that of their peers, educational institutions want to know whether their graduates are achieving high standards and how efficient their system is in terms of throughput rates, employers want to know what they can expect of graduates and governments want to know whether public institutions are providing value for the funding they receive.”

According to Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997: 6), “assessment defines for students what is important, what counts, how they will spend their time and how they will see themselves as learners. If you want to change student learning, then change the methods of assessment.”

Assessment is then grouped into three broad traditional purposes with the fourth purpose being recently added (Makoni, 2000: 101-102). These are:

Diagnostic assessment whereby the main focus is to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses so as to tell if a student is 'eligible' for a particular programme or to determine whether there are any form of remedial actions to be taken to help the student.

Formative assessment is determined to offer feedback to students concerning their progress so as to motivate them, help them improve their learning, "consolidate work done to date, and provide a profile of what a student has learnt."

Summative assessment "is used to provide judgement on students' achievement in order to establish a student's level of achievement at the end of a programme, grade, rank or certify students to proceed or exit from the education system, select students for further learning, employment, etc."

Quality assurance assessment is used to "provide judgement on the education system in order to provide feedback to staff on the effectiveness of their teaching, assess the extent to which the learning outcomes of a programme have been achieved, evaluate the effectiveness of the learning environment, monitor the quality of an education institution over time."

4.5 ANALYSING INSTITUTIONAL TEACHING AND LEARNING

Ramsden (1992: 6) asserts that teaching and learning can no longer be viewed separately. Thus, as he puts it, "to teach is to make an assumption about what and how the student learns; therefore, to teach well implies learning about students' learning" (Ramsden, 1992: 6). Learning and teaching are constantly interchanging activities. One learns by teaching; one cannot teach except by constantly learning (Ramsden, 1992: 6). It is also evident that 'good' teaching requires one to take into account students' perceptions of learning and therefore change his or her understanding of teaching. It is based on this that Ramsden (1992: 2-3) argues that:

"Institutions and governments deceive themselves if they think that the forces of accountability will automatically improve the standard of teaching and research, as students deceive themselves if they think that passing tomorrow's examination is what learning is all about."

Learning in educational institutions, therefore should be aimed at transforming learners' understanding, experience or their conceptualization of the world around them (Ramsden, 1992: 4). Understanding in this sense means students' ability to 'apprehend' and 'discern' phenomena pertaining to the subject matter as opposed to memorizing texts. The aim of teaching is to make student learning possible. Higher education teaching can be improved by taking into account the students' learning environment given that these environments have been found to have an impact on students' thoughts and actions (Bowden & Marton, 2004; Biggs, 1987). For example, students "react to the demands of teaching and assessment in ways that are difficult to predict: a lot of their learning is not about chemistry or history or economics, but about learning how to please lecturers and gain high marks" (Ramsden, 1992: 6). These kinds of strategies lead learners to strive towards recalling and reproducing information as opposed to altering their own understanding. It is therefore argued that, "an important part of good teaching is to try to understand these contextual effects and to adapt assessment and teaching strategies accordingly" (Ramsden, 1992: 6).

The dominant traditional views on students' attrition and performance maintains that the level of endurance on the part of students is impacted by "precollege characteristics such as student backgrounds, academic preparedness for college, and clear goals" (Astin, 1991: 1). On the contrary, some argue that "student persistence and growth depends on the degree of successful integration into the academic and social structures of the institution" (Tinto 1987, 1993). Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM) provides issues that affect a student's decision to leave higher education. Academic failure, voluntary withdrawal, permanent dropout, temporary dropout and transfer were amongst the kinds of leaving behavior (McCubbin, 2003: 1). According to Tinto (1993) students drop out because they are not sufficiently integrated into various aspects of university life. Bitzer (2013: 167) holds the same view in his assertion that "the lower the degree of student social and intellectual integration into academic and social communities in the institution, the greater the likelihood of student dropout and departure."

McKenna (2003:1) argues that "when learners come to the classroom they bring with them literacy practices that may or may not be considered appropriate. The overlap, or lack thereof, between these literacy practices and those expected by the disciplinary tribe to which they are seeking membership, is key to students' chances of success." This overlap has been found to be the most crucial determinant of students' success above hard work and language proficiency. This is to say, despite the fact that intellect, determination and good English are

of crucial value for success, students' performance is highly influenced by "the literacy practices s/he brings with to the university from school and home environments, and the extent to which these have commonalities with the literacy practices of his or her chosen discipline" (McKenna, 2003:1). This ties in with Brysen and Hand's (2007:1) argument about the "dynamic interplay between student engagement, the quality of student learning and the teaching and learning context." Thus, as put by Tinto (1997), "the more the student interacts with other students and staff, the more likely they are to persist." Reay et al (2001:1) echoes this view by asserting that "social and academic integration into a higher education institution have a positive impact on students' sense of belonging' and ultimately retention within that environment" (Thomas, 2002).

The students' and teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching have an impact on their view of their role in the learning process (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996:10). The student who perceives learning as knowing more will see his or her role as a learner and that of teacher in a different way from the student who view learning as understanding. (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996:10). The same applies to a teacher who perceives teaching as transmitting information, s/he will view the students' role in learning in a distinct way from a teacher who holds the view that teaching is a two-way process (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 10). Chalmers and Fuller (1996: 10) assert that "the practice of separating the roles and responsibilities of the student and the teacher reinforces a common misconception that teaching is something that occurs at one end of the room under the control of the teacher, and that learning takes place at the opposite end of the room under the control of the student."

It is therefore noted that teachers who view teaching as the transmission of knowledge commonly utilize teaching strategies that see to it that information is transmitted to students while there is little learning taking place (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 11). "Conversely, students who focus exclusively on the student role as receiver of knowledge will not actively seek new knowledge or understanding but will learn only what the teacher provides. In the first example, the teacher holds the students accountable for their learning, in the second, students hold the teacher accountable for their learning. Neither view is likely to lead to learning for understanding" (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 11). The view that enables learning is when there is shared responsibility for both teaching and learning between the teacher and the student. This requires both the teacher and the student to hold qualitative conceptions of teaching and learning and see the role of each as cooperative and facilitative (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996: 11).

4.6 CONCLUSION

The clinical model that underlies a lot of academic support programmes, depicting students as deficient and therefore in need of a cure is challenged. Radical transformation in higher education acknowledges that teaching and learning are two sides of a coin. This chapter has illustrated that the ideology that students listen while teachers speak ought to be reworked and altered if institutional provisioning is to take place. This is through acknowledging that the issue ought not to be fixing students so that they fit in the already existing institutions, but working collectively to make sure that students' needs are responded to and therefore transformation takes place.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A research design is defined by Bogdan and Knopp-Biklen (2006: 54) as the researcher's plan of inquiry that puts "paradigms of interpretation into motion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 22) on how to proceed in gaining an understanding of a phenomenon in its natural setting" (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh 2002: 426). A research design helps to provide the most valid and accurate answers possible to the research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 22; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001: 31). The effectiveness of a research design is said to be dependent on the researcher's ability to find coherence between the questions that the research seeks to address and the methods of data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001: 74).

This research explored the need for Academic Support Programmes in higher education with specific reference to returning undergraduates at Rhodes University. The objectives of the research were as follows:

- I. What are students' academic needs
- II. The availability and accessibility of ASPs at Rhodes University.

5.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology can be defined as the logic used in the process of addressing a given research question (Mason, 2002: 30). According to Cohen and Manion (1994: 39), research methodology aids the understanding of the process not the product of a scientific inquiry. This study used both qualitative and quantitative methodology with interviews and questionnaires as methods of data collection. This kind of triangulation avoids biases inherent

in single methods and guarantees reliability and validity (Bickman and Roj, 2009: 245; Babbie & Mouton, 1998: 275). It also allows one to gain a ‘thick’ understanding of the phenomenon (Babbie and Mouton, 1998: 270). This is because data collected using varied methods that help to make up for biases in one method.

5.3 SAMPLING OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

According to Miles and Huberman (1994: 27) “you cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything”. This then makes sampling crucial in research (Punch, 2005:50). Sampling refers to the selection process whereby a researcher selects the kind of people that he or she will ask questions through interviews or handing of questionnaires (Bloor & Wood, 2006: 153). At the end of June 2015 the number of undergraduates in the Sociology Department was 843 (Sociology One 483, Sociology Two 225 and Sociology Three 135). A 10 percent sample was drawn from each year of study, accounting for 22 second years and 13 third years. The study used stratified random sampling. This kind of sampling enables one to “divide the population into significant strata based on a number of attributes thereby ensuring that the resulting sample will be distributed in the same way as the population in terms of the stratifying criteria” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000:164).

5.4 DATA COLLECTION

Correct methods of data collection need to be implemented if we are to trust research results (Babbie & Mouton, 1998). Thus research can be thought of as a recipe; who will be asked, what kind of questions, how we will get hold of participants etc. Steps to follow are what distinguish research from other things – in other words, the logic of the approach – (getting the right things from the right people in the right way) (Moerdyk, 2009).

The primary unit of analysis was returning Sociology undergraduates at Rhodes University. Questionnaires were administered to second year students only to get a picture of students’ perceptions about ASPs at Rhodes University and their perceived academic needs. These were distributed during the tutorial periods with the tutors acting as intermediaries. Questionnaires are of great value when one needs to cover a lot of people at a relatively low cost (Mcleod, 2014). Given the large number of second year students in the Sociology Department, questionnaires were ideal to make sure that many students were reached in a short space of time. Data collected through questionnaires is also easy to be quantified either by the researcher or the use of software package (Mcleod, 2014). I also randomly selected interviewees from the second and third years of study. Key additional informants in this study were practitioners in the field tutors and mentors.

However, questionnaires can be disadvantageous in the sense that the researcher is unable to understand some of the information that might include emotions, behaviour and feelings of respondents (Popper, 2004). The fact that one is asked a limited amount of information without proper follow-up questions means that the validity of the data collected through questionnaires can be compromised. Again in questionnaires, varied questions can be read differently by people who therefore reply according to their own interpretation of the question (Ackroyd, 1981). There is a level of “researcher imposition, meaning that when developing the questionnaire, the researcher is making their own decisions and assumptions as to what is and is not important, therefore they may be missing something that is of importance” (Popper, 2004: 1).

For the questionnaires, I made the questions follow up from each other so as to assist the respondents. As a researcher I also avoided asking respondents ambiguous questions. I also attended second and third year classes so that the students are formally introduced to me and what my study is about. In sooth as a researcher I made sure that I used easily accessible language to lessen the chances of confusion. I made sure that my participants were at ease and feel comfortable around me, given that anxiety has been found to decrease performance level (Moerdyk, 2009). A welcoming environment was therefore set to see to it that the interview sessions were conversational so that interviewees could answer honestly and say things that they would say around their friends in everyday conversations.

5.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations in research promote the aims of the research, such as knowledge, truth and avoidance of error (Bryman, 2012) Research norms hold the researcher accountable to the public and offer the public support (Moerdyk, 2009). If people trust you and what you are doing, then they are likely to be willing to be part of the study. Ethical norms include a variety of things ranging from honesty (ability not to fabricate or falsify data), objectivity (not being bias in your study); integrity (being consistent); carefulness (avoiding negligence); openness (sharing data with participants) and so forth (Bryman, 2012). In conducting interviews and administering questionnaires, ethical issues were taken into consideration. The questionnaire cover page stipulated what the respondents were entitled to. For instance, research participants were told from the start that although they agreed to be part of the study, they could withdraw at any stage and were not obliged to answer all the questions, and ensured anonymity and confidentiality. The participants were told that their names would not

appear in the data analysis. To assure participants of anonymity and confidentiality, a consent form was issued stipulating what they were entitled to for the duration of the study and after.

5.6 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Matthews and Ross (2010: 320), “it is good to have collected data, but, on its own, data collection is only one stage in the process but you will need to begin to work with the data you have collected so that it can be used to find answers to your research questions or test your hypothesis.” This then means that one needs to think about the process of data analysis. Some of the steps to be followed in data analysis have been found to include thinking about what you are doing and what you were trying to find out when you were collecting data, and revisiting your research. One also needs to remember that the purpose of analysis is to “describe, discuss interpret, explain and evaluate the data and to reach a conclusion” (Matthews & Ross, 2010: 318).

The data needs to be collected through the use of analytical or logical reasoning so that each component of the collected data is examined thoroughly. I examined the data in a manner that reveals relationships, patterns and trends that could possibly be found within it. I compared my information to other people’s work, in this case the literature review so that conclusions could be drawn. In analysing the data collected in this study, interviewees’ responses on the two theoretical frameworks that form the basis of this study were grouped together under these two sections.

In quantitative research, the information acquired during the process of data collection is expressed in numerical forms. This study utilised pie charts as well as bar graphs to represent the data collected through questionnaires. Qualitatively, interviews focused on meanings which participants attach to themselves, other people and their environment (Morse & Field, 1995). Qualitative data analysis may constitute quoting interviewees to raise an issue pertaining to your study or to support the already stated fact. The initial step in analysing data is to transcribe the conducted interviews, then arrange the information to fit your research objectives. As a researcher, I then examined the information and compared it with other work done previously. Thereafter I provided concluding remarks.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions have a responsibility beyond opening the university gates (Boughey, 2010). This necessitates amongst many, the need for Academic Support Programmes (ASPs). The need for academic support (AS) in higher education is widely acknowledged by Bitzer, (2009; Boughey, 2010; Junio-Sabio, 2012; Jones et al, 2008; Letseka et al, 2009). It is seen as part of the ongoing debate about meeting the students' varying academic and non-academic needs. However, it is worth noting that questions abound about the appropriate mix and ideological assumptions of academic support, mode of implementation, mechanisms, duration, the relevant delivery agencies, student profile and the appropriate study level. Similarly, a central line of argument is that successful support programmes require a confluence of academic, social and personal and other non-academic factors (Ntakana, 2011; Boylan et al., 1992; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). The commitment to academic support is, according to Bitzer (2003:164), "a major contribution of higher education institutions towards benefitting societies, their potential to assist students in their academic progress as well as their progress in other spheres."

The respondents yield distinct as well as similar perspectives to what Academic Support Programmes (ASPs) are, who they should target, who should offer students with academic support as well as the level to which students should be offered academic support. With this in mind, this chapter aims to explore students' perceptions of academic support programmes as well as their perceived academic needs. The chapter will further analyse respondents' views of ASPs based on the two theoretical frameworks that form the basis of this study: 'students' academic needs as well as the availability and accessibility of Academic Support Programmes at Rhodes University.

6.1.1. RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

For all the respondents, the necessity and urgency of ASPs is recognized. Respondents strongly hold the view that the reason they all need academic support is because they come from different backgrounds. Thus, as put by interviewee 7 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) "we had different academic experiences so definitely that is very important and I am assuming that is why the institution had the Extended Studies Programme (ESP) in the first place, but even with the mainstream undergraduates, there is a dire need of support because there is no lie that one does get overwhelmed by university studies."

As argued by Letseka (2013), Spaul (2013), Bitzer (2003), amongst many, academic support is of great value if higher education institutions are to shift from the ‘revolving door’ syndrome of high failure and dropouts. Thus, as Soudien (2010:64) claims, “even after apartheid, the ‘revolving door’ syndrome of high drop-out and failure rates continued to be a feature of the higher education system in general, and for Africans in particular”. This then illustrates that students cannot be left without academic intervention. The conception of access as participation therefore needs to be replaced by a conception of ‘access as success’ (Griesel, 2003:3).

Students have varied perceptions about ASPs and its relevance. When asking a former Extended Studies (ES) student about her perception of the academic support programmes, especially (ES), she noted that during her first year, she felt like she lost a year. However, she asserted that after being in the programme, she started realising just how important and beneficial it was: as she puts it:

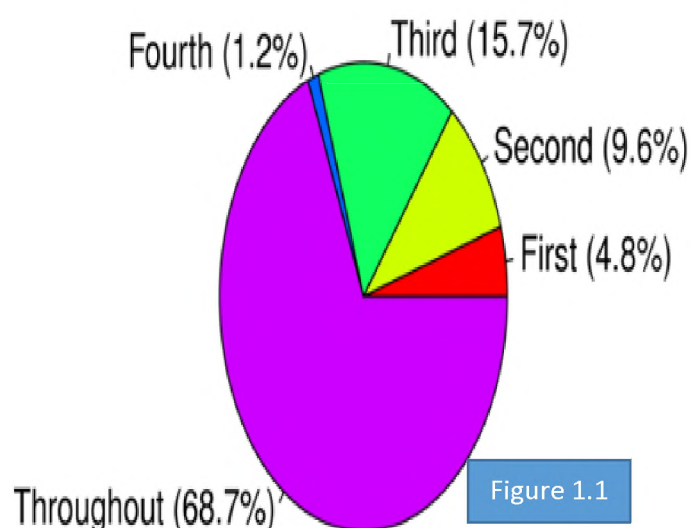
“Extended Studies helped you know, it helped because I was never exposed to library, I did not even know how that works, we did not have a library at school, secondly, just extra support from lecturers in the ES classes, knowing that I will go to mainstream class and if do not understand anything, in class again it will be repeated in ES that was nice and even that thing of small groups it helps (Interviewee 7, 3rd year Rhodes University, 2016).

Another former Extended Studies student shared this sentiment by noting that he would have struggled throughout first year without the support provided in ES. As he puts it, “the fact that we were not exposed to computers in my school, ES helped me a lot, we had computer literacy, the lecturers and tutors were friendly, approachable supportive” (Interviewee 6, 3rd year Rhodes University, 2016). This particular student strongly holds that the kind of school he went to did not offer him many opportunities, so if it was not for the Extended Studies Programme he would not have survived. This student went to a public, under-resourced school which he felt had a negative impact on his high school performance.

Respondents generally held the view that support should target every student and be offered throughout their studies. Thus as put by interviewee 5 (3rd year, Rhodes University, 2016), “academic support should be offered to all students, it does not matter which year of study, university is not easy, each year of study has its own challenges, we all need that support in

order to succeed”. Figure 1.1 illustrates respondents’ views on the level of study at which academic support should be offered.

Pie Chart Showing Distribution of Level of Study at which Academic Support is Required



In addition to students’ opinion that academic support should target all students, 10 out of 15 third year student also believed that support should target every course. As noted by Interviewee 1 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016), “I think all courses just need support in all honesty. Whether is language, or Science, or Maths, I think they just need support because they are quite difficult, is not something that we are used to, that we have learned throughout school for twelve years, it is something that you are expected to learn in a year and it is quite difficult to grasp all of that.” Interviewee 5 (2nd year Rhodes University 2016) shared this sentiment in her assertion that “as much as we are doing four courses that is less than school subjects but the amount of work that we are expected to put in and what to know we all need the academic support.”

Throughout the study, students emphasized that there is a need for academic support given that they regularly encounter academic challenges which they cannot easily deal with. Although responses were varied as to which courses should be given priority and who should offer support, students noted that with academic support, their academic achievement would change for the better. Although few students argued that their academic performance is purely based on their hard work, most of them strongly hold that they owe much to academic

support and they could do with extra help. As put by interviewee 8 (2nd year, Rhodes University, 2016) “you know I can study alone, but it only makes sense after I consult, or go for a tutorial, meet my mentor or anyone knowledgeable, I really do appreciate the support offered to us.”

Contrary to a majority of students arguing that academic support should be for everyone, some students hold the view that academic support should solely target first years. Thus, to these students, by second year a person should have a grip on what they should be doing. Contrary to this, some respondents hold the view that academic support should be offered throughout the academic journey. Thus as noted by interviewee 4 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) “every year is different with its own challenges, and you do need support in order to achieve better results in university”.

Studies have shown that successful support programmes require a confluence of academic, social and personal and other non-academic factors (Ntakana, 2011; Boylan et al., 1992; Roueche and Roueche, 1993). This view was shared by some respondents. According to these respondents, support should go beyond studies. This is because students argued that university was not what they expected. Apart from being a new experience, they felt left out and thrown in the deep end without guidance and support in other spheres of life. This ties with Tinto’s (1999, 2003; Yorke & Thomas, 2003) argument that the transition from secondary to tertiary is a challenging one. In South Africa the racial discourse and the articulation gap dominate the debates. A study by Lowe and Cook (2003) of first year students at the University of Ulster confirms the findings of van Schalkwyk (2007), Nel, Troskie-de Bruin and Bitzer (2009) and Maxakato (1999) of the difficulty in bridging the school-university gap.

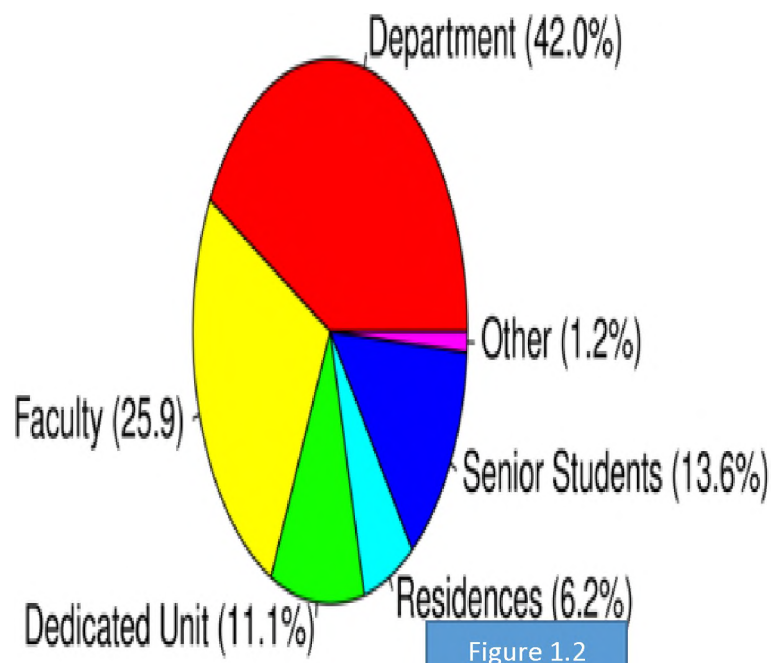
Interviewee 7 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) noted that “ you know it would have been nice if the university can have some sort of way to assist us in our emotional wellbeing, you know there are things that we struggle with, somewhere where you can have someone to talk to”. It can be argued therefore that higher education institutions have a responsibility to look at students holistically, instead of detaching the mind from the whole being. For some students the challenge is trying to fit in the university culture, which then impacts their studies. This relates to Tinto’s (1993) student integration model that states that students can leave school due to lack of integration in the institution they form part of. It then means the

university culture needs to be welcoming and considerate of all students if they are to make the most of their studies.

Given the alarming number of dropouts in higher education institutions, it is pivotal that academic support is administered with urgency. Research has shown dropout is perhaps the greatest problem facing institutions of higher education. As the number of students enrolling in tertiary education increases, so does the number of students who will be affected by dropping out (Snyder and Hoffman, 2002). Certainly, van Schalkwyk (2007:954) notes that one in every three students entering higher education in South Africa drop out by the end of their first year of study, “accounting for forty percent drop-out rate in any given year” (Bitzer, 2009:225), “estimated at R1 500m in taxpayers’ money” (Bitzer, 2003:164). Also, “only 15% obtain their qualifications within the specified duration of study (Letseka et al., 2009; Tinto, 1993). Research evidence suggests that this trend is global. It is therefore vital that higher education institutions respond to these issues, one step towards to achieving that, it can be argued, is through support programmes. As the number of students enrolling in tertiary education increases, so does the number of students who will be affected by dropout” (Snyder & Hoffman, 2002: 1).

There has been a debate about who should be at the forefront of academic support. Respondents views on who should offer academic support range from senior students to lecturers, faculties, residences and departments. However, the majority of students in this research hold strongly the view that departments should be at the forefront of academic support programmes. Figure 1.2 illustrates the statistical representation of the responses as to who should offer academic support.

Pie Chart Showing Distribution of Who Respondents Prefer to Provide Academic Support



Students who hold the view that departments should offer academic support based it on the notion that departments know their courses and curricula and so their support will be channelled in the appropriate direction. However, although students note that departments should be at the forefront of academic support, some assert that this should not entirely be the department's responsibility. Contrary to most students who feel the departments should provide reading and writing skills seminars, interviewee 6 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) strongly holds the view that the "department providing us with reading and writing skills would just make us more lazy, that is what I feel, because what I have discovered so far with Sociology like now, we do not have those lecture slides and really the fact that there are no lecture slides it pushes you, you have to go and read, you have to go and make some notes for yourself."

6.1.2 STUDENTS' PERCEIVED ACADEMIC NEEDS

An area of concern that has been raised by students is not being able to comprehend what lectures are teaching due to a language barrier, pace and for some students, accent. However,

some students argued that in addition to lecturers using sophisticated language, it is due to lack of preparation on their side. When asking students about the extent to which they study course materials before attending lectures, the majority said that they did not (see Figure 1.3 below)

Pie Chart Showing Distribution of Respondents Who Study Before a Lecture

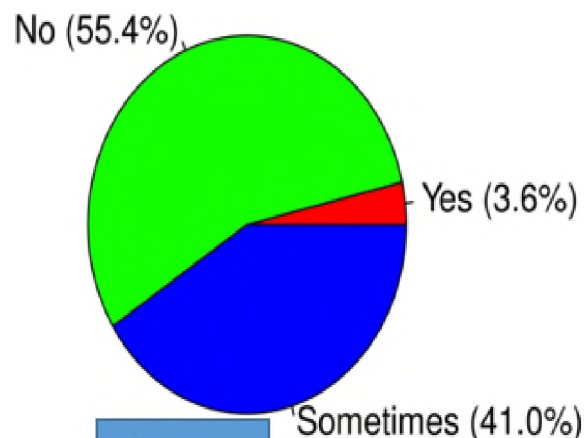


Figure 1.3

This then illustrates that students need to spend more time preparing for lectures before they attend them. Although support is crucial, students need to take responsibility for their studies if they are to make the most of their university education. Students noted that they would benefit if lecturers understood that university is different from secondary education and therefore not assume that students already know how to write academic essays. As Warren (1998:6) argues, “learning does not occur automatically, academic practice needs students to possess high order thinking, interpretative and writing skills, which sometimes are not offered in high school”. From this it is clear that students cannot be fully left alone to monitor their own learning, support is crucial and urgent. This also takes into consideration that there are varied elements that impact on learning, such as the learning environment and resources, to mention just two. Students therefore suggested that it would be of great help if they were taken through the process of academic writing. According to interviewee 2 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) “the university does not prepare or take us through the process of academic reading and writing, they assume we know, which is not true, as a result the university just launch us in the work without proper guidance and support.”

Students seemed concerned about the workload. For some of them they even reached a point of doubting whether they would pull through their undergraduate studies. Interviewee 1, (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) noted, “I regret coming here because I do not know, is the way that the course is structured, they are not structured in a way to accommodate the fact that we are doing other courses”. This feeling, it can be argued, can be the reason for the number of dropouts, given that when demotivated, students can end up giving up, as they are overwhelmed by the feeling of failure or something like this. Van Schalkwyk (2007:954) noted that one in every three students entering higher education in South Africa drops out by the end of their first year of study, higher education institutions therefore need to shift away from the clinical or deficiency model: the notion that the problem lies within the students. Higher education institutions can no longer afford to ‘fit’ students in the already existing system, but rather adjust it to accommodate and meet the needs of the students. As noted by tutor 1 (Rhodes University, 2016), “you know even culture adapts, the university cannot be stagnant, cannot continue to operate the way it did years ago, it needs to look at kinds of students, their needs, and do everything in its power to alter the system to accommodate the diverse student population.”

For some students their courses are rushed, given that they open late and therefore it looks like the university is pushing everything together while time does not allow. Thus, as put by interviewee 3(2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) “the fact that we are opening quite late, I feel very rushed every time I come back, if we are going to open in second or third week of February whereas other universities open first week of January. I feel as if they are just piling up the work, they are pushing everything together so that it could fit in that time”. The same sentiment was shared by interviewee 1 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) by asserting that what we are expected to do in a term is just a lot, they are piling everything in a short period of time, we are just not coping”. Interviewee 8 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) also asserted that his academic experience has not been an easy one, given he felt everything was going too fast. As he puts it, “what you are used to complete in three months in secondary, was done in three weeks at university” (Interviewee 1, 3rd year Rhodes University, 2016).

Some students also shared that their work ethic had to drastically shift, if not they find that they are drowning in submissions, tests and tutorials. Students therefore felt that if they were to have someone to help them through the issue of time management and working smart before things go wrong, they would have performed better. This is because students felt that

most of the time they only get ‘advised’ on what to do after failing. Students also struggled when it comes to what is expected from them in tutorials. For most students, the objectives of tutorials were not clear enough. Interviewee 4, 3rd year (Rhodes University, 2016) commented: “I passed tutorials, but when it comes to the test then I would fail because I felt like in tutorials, tests and assignments they require little effort and then you get relaxed, but (for) tests and assignments your tutorials seem irrelevant”.

All respondents, with the exception of two, attributed their academic performance to the lack of support on the part of the university. The remaining two thought that poor or good academic credits were due to individual efforts. For those who attributed their performance to extrinsic factors, the kind of school they previously went to was rated as the most significant factor. These students argued that public schools inadequately prepared them for university. As argued by Interviewee 6 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) “public schools do not really care as much as private schools do, they just work with what they have. If they do not have certain resources or teachers or whatever they just have to work with what they have, unlike private schools”. Below is the representation of the kinds of schools respondents attended.

Pie Chart Showing Distribution of Type of Schools Attended

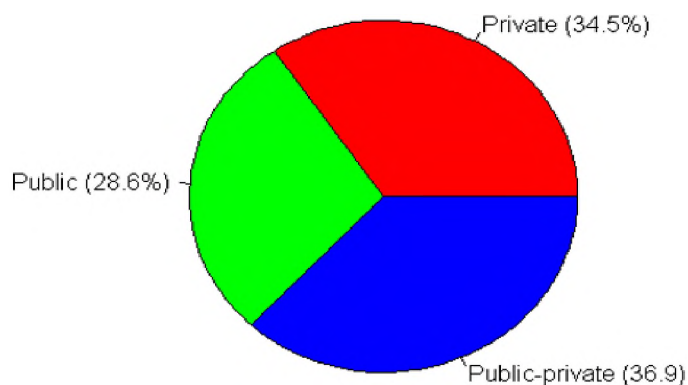


Figure 1.4

One particular area in which students seemed to struggle was writing academic work, essays or formal proposals. This was also attributed to the lack of preparation at school level. As Interviewee 8 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) explained:

“What I have learned is that there is a big difference between secondary and tertiary education, because with tertiary education the lecturers are just there to give you a

guideline, it is your responsibility to go maybe in the library to source some information from the textbook, they will just give you skeletons, okay you are supposed to do this but the rest of the burden you are supposed to bare it on yourself unlike in high school where you get all of your notes, all you need to do is read.”

Students commented on the challenge of reading for understanding. This illustrates the disparity between ‘learning to read and reading to learn’ as noted by Spaul (2013). Tertiary requires one to read for understanding and be able to debunk and critique a given text. This is a skill that students need to acquire. In high school sometimes teachers are concerned with the reproduction of a text, and therefore students ‘study’ with the motive of being able to reproduce the text or answer a given test or exam question. It is then imperative that students are guided and supported in this regard. As put by Interviewee 4 (3rd year, Rhodes University, 2016), “I feel like they should have like even writing classes like you can just go and write like they give you a thing to do, like a page like other than a tutorial so that you improve on your writing.”

Students’ challenge with regards to reading and writing was clear when they were asked to rank their reading and writing skills from a scale of 0 to 10, only few ranked themselves above 7. Interviewee 8 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) when asked to comment on why she rated herself 5 out of 10, she explained: “I say is a 5 because it is just enough to get by but is still not what they want, of which I do not know what they want because we were never told in high school what they want and here they expect you to know what they want.” Tutor (2, Rhodes University, 2016) shared this sentiment when she was asked to comment on her students’ performances and perceived academic needs, she noted that most of her students struggled with writing academic papers.

Some students argued that being the first to come to university in one’s family is a challenge. This is because these students believed that older siblings who preceded them would guide and support them. Thus, as interviewee 5 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) noted, “these people would know how to structure an essay, what is expected in academia and the type of jargon that you are supposed to use for a BA degree for example.” This ties with research trends on academic support in South Africa as well as international scholarship especially on at-risk, under-prepared students or under-represented minorities, first-generation students, retention and attrition rates, teaching and learning approaches, study of academic and non-academic factors that influence success or failure (Tinto, 1993; Bitzer, 2009; Boughey,

2010; Jones et al, 2008 ; Letseka et al, 2009; Nel, Troskie-de Bruin & Bitzer, 2009; Jones et. al, 2008 ; Cuseo, 2002; Fraser & Killen, 2003, Ramapela, 2012). It is worth noting however, that the majority of respondents in this study are not first generation students, they are from families where other family members have been to university. Below is a representation of the number of first generation students. ‘Yes’ refers to first generation students and ‘No’ to respondents who are not the first in their families to attend university.

Pie Chart Showing Distribution of Number of First Generation

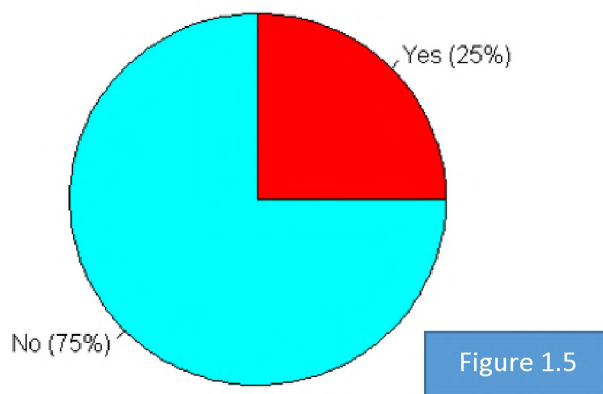


Figure 1.5

Students commented that they would benefit from a reduced number of visiting lecturers in some of their subjects. This is because students felt that one needs to have a relationship with lecturers if one is to succeed. As noted by Interviewee 3 (3rd year, Rhodes University, 2016), “now you are taught by this person, next week they are gone, come another one with a totally different approach and you get confused”. In general, students also thought that they would benefit if lecturers could avoid using overly sophisticated language in lectures. This is because students get lost in the material and in lectures. Thus prescribed materials that are easy to comprehend could be of great help. As noted by Interviewee 6 (3rd year, Rhodes University, 2016) “I cannot continue doing this because sometimes when you are trying to read something right, which is very difficult and you have no one to help you or assist you, you just become discouraged”. Lecture 1 (Rhodes University, 2016) also asserted that students are “lost in mainstream subjects because they do not hear even what the lecturer is saying because the lecturer speaks too fast or the lecturer uses words that they do not get and doesn’t try and make sure that everybody in class is understanding them. They are lost in the reading because the readings are intense”. Interviewee 5 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016)

also mentioned that “ I cannot take any notes because I do not even understand what the lecturer is saying.”

Students’ academic needs are clear in their response to their high school academic performance compared to the university one. When asked to rank their academic performance, with the exception of only 3 out of 15 third year students, they noted that their academic performances have dropped. As Interviewee 7 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) commented:

“my academic performance differs a lot. I think high school (I have obtained better marks, I was able to function better, I was able to catch up, I was able to make sense of what was going on because you had one teacher for one subject so it was easy to have the same person throughout the whole year because you would adopt their teaching style.”

Another challenge faced by students is fitting in with the university culture. Interviewee 4 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) noted that:

“it was really difficult for me to fit in the environment like Rhodes especially considering the fact that back home I am coming from a government school. Then now I am here at Rhodes, is more like a private institution that means my life needs to change somehow and especially in first year is common knowledge it would change, especially if you are coming from a public school, so it was a bit difficult for me to adapt.”

The majority of students questioned were black and most of them felt out of place in a historically white institution like Rhodes University. Below is the racial representation of the respondents.

Pie Chart Showing Race Distribution of Respondents

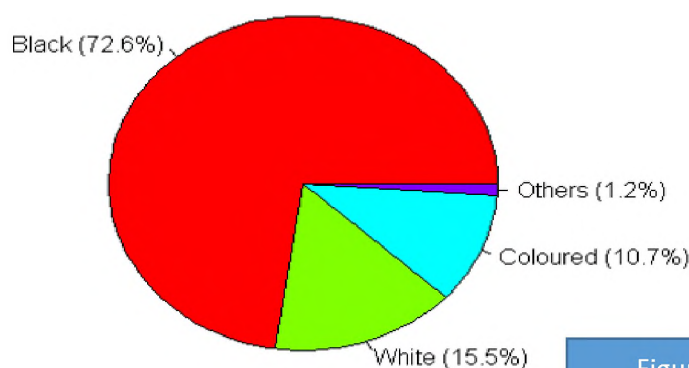


Figure 1.7

With the exception of a few students, university life has been a challenge. 10 out of 15 third year respondents attributed their success to group work. As asserted by Interviewee 8 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016):

“If it was not the group works which we used to do with my colleagues, I am telling you I would have failed because I struggle to join in things together: Sociology this, Politics that, Anthropology, those subjects especially when you are in first year they do not seem to connect. So you will be struggling to join the pieces. With group work I find it very easy for me to escape this trouble of struggling to join the pieces together.”

In addition to study groups independently formed by students, students mentioned that they could benefit from being divided into groups that are monitored by lecturers or anyone in the department, where you are given a topic to research and then report back to the group. This is because students felt this would force them to study and be up to date. Interviewee 2, (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) asserted:

“I have noticed that group works are very useful, right, such that you can develop this ability of you telling yourself I need to work, I need to prepare myself for the group discussion. So it gives you time to prepare your working in advance because you know you are going to present something to your colleagues and you don’t want to feed them with wrong information.”

Language appears to be a barrier for many students. “I tell you language plays a big part, I used to read English notes at school but I do not know – they were simplified but to come to varsity they are very difficult” (Interviewee 9, 2nd year Rhodes University, 2016). Similarly, Interviewee 8 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) explained:

“I remember in high school from the school where I went, there was a point where a teacher would just explain something in your mother tongue, a science or even an English lesson, the teacher will just explain some things in your vernacular and it makes it easier and then when you are here now, all you have to do is be a friend with Google so that you can understand some concepts”.

Interviewee 7 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) illustrating how language plays a huge role in one’s learning, noted “ in terms of self- confidence and stuff because some of us there are

times where we really want to say something but you have to think if you are to say something, you need to make sure it is right you see.”

6.1.3 ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED BY STUDENTS

Students also noted that they could benefit from extra classes. However, students are aware of the hindrances that might come with having extra classes. These involve clashes with students’ timetables while some students might not be keen to attend on weekends because they would like to rest.

Interviewee (8 2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) noted, “I think we would have to work around students’ timetables, students’ systems, students’ social activities and everything else in order to put extra classes in place”. In addition to this, students suggested that they would benefit from smaller classes. Interviewee 4 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) noted, “the big classes thing I think is intimidating for most people and they can have like a forum – some type of a way that people who are scared to go talk to the lecturer and maybe you are scared to even email but then if you do it in like a forum it is better”. For some students, exams are not a true reflection of someone’s capability. They thought they would benefit from having relaxed form of assessments like portfolios or any other means. “Exams are just not right, I panic” (Interviewee 3, 2nd year Rhodes University, 2016).

For some students the university was a more relaxed place compared to high school. As related by interviewee 6 (3rd year Rhodes university, 2016), “no one keep track of your attendance, performance, and if you are not disciplined you will fall behind and is hard to catch up” . Similarly, interviewee 1 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) noted, “university requires too much responsibility on our side without anyone adequately helping us. I feel like the responsibility is just put on you here, even if the lecturer sees that you are getting 20s out of 100, they never even say come see me, they are never interested in finding why, are you not getting the course, what is wrong or did you just not study you see, whereas in high school the teacher will follow up to find the root cause”. Interviewee 8 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) asserted, “I prefer high school because my school was an all-academic school. We focused on our academics, you had to get all As for you to proceed to another class. I get here people sleep too much, people do not go to the library”. These students felt if the bar could be raised it would be beneficial. These students hold strongly the notion that the requirements to proceed could be raised as opposed to aiming just for a pass.

Students also mentioned the challenge when it comes to internet access. For these students it is a challenge to work to the best of their abilities off campus due to no internet access. Interviewee 4 (3rd year, Rhodes University, 2016) explained:

“you know the university is doing the best it can for oppidans, we are offered transport so we can work until late on campus, but sometimes the work is just a lot, by the time the last trip of transport arrives, sometimes you are not done working, for some of us is a challenge because we do not have laptops, it is a challenge because we cannot say we will finish at home, it is just hard”.

Similarly, Interviewee 8 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) expressed that: “I know this year we have a lot of tutorials that we have to do online and I live at home because I moved out of residence because for my sister and I to both be in residence it was going to be very expensive”. This student mentioned that despite the fact that she and her sister have a modem, there are a lot of students who cannot access the internet off campus, and therefore this impacts their studies negatively. Interviewee 10 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) shared this by noting that “I feel like with this life that we live if you do not have access to the internet then is going to be so hard”.

Some students felt strongly that they needed help with subject choices at the beginning of the year. This is because one student felt that sometimes students randomly pick subjects that do not relate and end up being confused, having clashes and even dropping out. Interviewee (5th year Rhodes University, 2016) noted that:

“I thought you would have like subjects, like pharmacy type of thing where you like okay I want to study pharmacy. Then they give you subjects then you are done, now when I got here I was like okay, I want to do Psychology but you going to have to choose three more courses that you going take and I am like what am I supposed to take now because I just came for Psychology? I did not know what else to do”.

This illustrates the confusion that students have to deal with at the beginning of the year. It therefore can be argued that orientation week needs to be reviewed to dwell more on issues like these.

6.2 STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Students had an understanding of what Academic Support Programmes constitute. Interviewee 5 (Rhodes University, 2016), recognized that there were “programmes that are

there in university level to offer support and even guidance to undergraduates even postgraduate students.” Interviewees 7 (3rd year, Rhodes University, 2016) understands ASPs to be “support mechanisms put in place to assist struggling students”. However, despite the knowledge about ASPs, only a few seem to have accessed them fully. Thus, as noted by one interviewee, “in terms of academic support, I really do not know, the department apart from tutorials I do not really know” (Interviewee 4, 2nd Rhodes University, 2016).

Throughout the study, it was evident that although students demonstrated their knowledge about the available academic support, there has been hesitation to utilise them. In addition to the support offered through academic support programmes, students are also aware that lecturers, tutors and mentors are available should they need assistance. The challenge however is that student respondents seem to be hesitant to make appointments and ask for help. Interviewee 1 (2nd year, Rhodes University, 2016) noted, “I know that lecturers are available for assistance but obviously the whole notion of going to a lecturer is quite scary because he would be like were you not listening in class, were you not attending?”

Interviewee 4 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016), when asked to comment about his utilisation of the academic support offered by lecturers commented, “lecturers might ask that you cannot understand the whole terms’ work or whole three weeks’ work, if you are attending lectures why did you not ask in lectures and stuff like that”. This illustrates, as shown by research, how students who are in need of academic support, or rather the ones who are supposed to be utilising the provided academic programmes, are not. This ties with Yeld (1986) ; Palazzo, (1987) ; Foggin, (1991) ; Dison & Selikow (1992) amongst many, about problems with student attendance when academic support programmes are involved. For some students, they only access these programmes closer to submissions, exams as noted by Boughey (2010).

Reasons for not using the provided academic support programmes range from the stigma around academic support, being scared to look for help and not knowing where to go in times of need. When students were asked if they had an encounter where a lecturer would ask such questions like “why do you need support, where you not attending lectures and many more”, all students said no, it is just an assumption. What arose from this is that students feel intimidated by lecturers and therefore avoid having one-on-one consultations in times of need.

Students also raised a concern about the forums or Facebook pages that are not monitored or lecturers themselves are not part of. Thus as put by Interviewee 4 (3rd year, Rhodes University, 2016), “you know these Facebook pages where people put a question and you have five different answers and you actually do not know, this causes a lot of confusion and students end up misleading each other, and subsequently some students do not use the support at all”.

Tutor 2 (Rhodes University, 2016) argued that there is a need for tutors to be cognisant of their students and adjust their way of teaching to best suit them, Thus, as she puts it, “you have to look at your students, what are their interests now, so that you teach something that they can relate to because research has found that when you teach learners something they can relate to then learning takes place. In cases where the material is too abstract learning ceases to be engaging.” Tutors have all argued that ASPs can be effective provided there is a constant communication between lecturers and people who are offering academic support. Tutor 2 (Rhodes University, 2016) also holds strongly the view that academic support can operate better provided tutors are willing to go an extra mile in terms of assisting the students placed under their care. Thus, as she puts it, “we are entrusted with our students’ academics, sometimes just referring your students to the relevant person without actually following up to check if they contacted the person and how everything is going can be problematic”. She goes further to say, “this is not to say that we as tutors need to force our students to utilise the provided academic support, but they could do with little extra motivation and guidance”.

Students seem to be aware of the career centre, wellness group, tutorial system, and the Extended Studies Programme (ESP). However, it is worth noting that the only support programme that students are knowledgeable about is the tutorial system, one reason being they all are part of it as it is compulsory. Thus as put by interviewee 1 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016), “you know the tutorial you do not have a choice, you need to go, or else you will lose your Duly Performed (DP) (which is the requirement for students to sit for exams)”. When it comes to ESP and career centre, students are not knowledgeable about what they offer and their relevance. For these students, these support programmes are mentioned in passing. Only students who are themselves part of ESP showed some understanding of what the programme seeks to achieve.

Students in the ESP raise a concern about the stigma they have to deal with being part of this programme. Some students would rather not get that support because they think it is not a pleasant experience being ‘labelled’ as dumb because you are part of the ES. This kind of deficit thinking works to “strengthen stereotypes in the minds and thought of educators, policy makers and students themselves” (Smit, 2012:372). Thus, as put by Hunter (1990b) deficit thinking in ASPs allows generalisations about student ability to be made and this results in the labelling and stigmatisation of already disenfranchised students. It is worth noting that in addition to the stigmatisation between students when utilisation of ASPs, viewing students as disadvantaged or lacking certain skills has an impact on the manner in which institutions and staff interact with such students. According to Tisani (1993:3), “the students who are perceived as needing fixing have to bear the pain and stigma of being marginalised as they undergo a process of being ‘filled up’ or ‘remoulded’ into the accepted model of a student”. For such students, Tisani (1993:3) added, “dropping out is always an option”.

Interviewee 10 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) notes:

“people think that support is for stupid people, even when you tell someone that you are in the ES, they think you are special’ ‘dumb’, ‘not clever’, ‘not smart’, ‘slow’, ‘incompetent’, ‘incapable’, and ‘illiterate’, among other labels. People would be like “oh you are on Extended Studies, oh I’m on mainstream, so I’m going to have my three years and I’m going to leave here and you are going to stay longer. You are not smart enough that’s why they put you in Matric.”

For some former ES students, it is as though it is impossible to achieve better results than a student in the mainstream. Students therefore end up avoiding any other support programmes by the university given the bad experience they have of ES. However, some students strongly hold the view that without the ES they would not be able to cope with university. Interviewee 8 (2nd year , Rhodes University, 2016) notes, “some people say that we are in a day care centre but I don’t mind people’s opinions about Extended Studies, because the same person who says I’m in Extended Studies or day care centre will come to me and ask for help, so for me it’s better for me to be in the day care centre than to not know what I should do for my academics, I don’t mind those people.”

With regards to the career centre, interviewee 9 (2nd year Rhodes University, 2016) “it is useless going to the career centre, they tell you things you already know, like make study

groups, consult lecturers, make an exam timetable, this is general stuff". This interviewee also went further to say that:

“ there is no progression in the career centre. If you go next year they would still tell you the same thing, I need these sessions to be specific, it would be helpful to have people from different department, telling you for example, this is how you study journalism, start with definitions then everything will make sense” (Interviewee 9, 2nd year Rhodes University, 2016).

Of the interviewed 15 third year students, 3 argued that it is their responsibility as students to seek academic help whenever they need it. According to Interviewee 6 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) “there are tutors that are in place in this institution, your lecturers you can always talk to them. I know some students do not ask lecturers questions because they feel like they cannot articulate themselves. They do not even write emails etc, they need to know that these people are here to help us”. This interviewee also held strongly the view that students need to do their best to seek help in times of need because it is for their own benefit. The student also suggested that fellow students need to make friends in lectures who can help them and with whom they can form support groups in person or on social media. “If you feel like you cannot communicate with a lecturer ask friends, peers etc. There are many ways you can access information and seek for help and is always available” (Interviewee 6, 3rd year, Rhodes University, 2016).

11 out of 15 third year students were aware of the mentoring programme called Ncedana, amongst them were some who were part of the mentoring system. Similarly, 4 out of 5 second year students showed understanding of the mentoring system. The Ncedana Mentoring programme assigns a mentor to four first year students in any faculty. This is optional provided the student indicates in his or her application that he or she would need a mentor. Some students were also aware of the Trojan Academic Initiative (TAI) Mentoring programme. This mentoring targets students in the Extended Studies Programme. Again, a mentor is assigned four to five first year ES students. Unlike Ncedana, TAI is not optional, every student in the ES is automatically assigned a mentor. However, it is worth noting that once part of TAI, students are not forced to attend mentoring sessions. Although ES lecturers and coordinators emphasize that it is important to attend these sessions, there are no repercussions for students who do not attend. Therefore, it appears that is just as optional as Ncedana. As a former ES student, I saw this happening: we started the session with five of us but by the end of June there were only two people coming to the sessions. Again as a former

TAI mentor, I struggled to get students to come to the mentoring sessions. However, some students together with tutors noted that this is not sufficiently monitored and therefore can do more harm than good.

For lecturers, it seems like some mentors undertake the position for financial reasons. According to Lecturer 2 (Rhodes University, 2016), the

“criteria used to recruit mentors is questionable, you get mentors who are still in need of mentoring, not mature enough being trusted with younger students, they just apply for financial reasons, that is problematic and needs to be addressed urgently”.

Mentors themselves also raised a concern about the task offered to them. Mentor 2 (Rhodes University, 2016) noted:

“I feel like there is a little bit of confusion, as a mentor you are told not to be a tutor, you check on how your students are doing socially, getting them to adjust to the university life, but I feel it is nice having a big sister or brother but how does it help if that person is not involved in your studies?”.

As a former mentor, I also struggled with this because we were always told during workshops that we are not tutors, I found it hard to draw the line. What if during mentoring sessions students want to talk about a certain course? They are facing challenges? How do I shut them out and say leave that for your tutor? For some students, this was the reason they did not attend their mentoring sessions. Students therefore concluded that mentoring is good for people who are introverts and therefore find it hard to go out and make friends, who are by themselves and do not know anyone because it familiarises that person with other people. This emphasises that there is a need to revisit the mentoring system in order to avoid confusion amongst mentees themselves and mentors. Proper training therefore can be of great help. Normally the workshop for mentors runs for one day for few hours. Although mentors have meetings with facilitators every two weeks, sometimes the sessions are very brief and therefore cannot personally go in details on issues you as a mentor encounter with your mentees.

The tutorial system was also mentioned as a form of academic support. Some students however felt that tutorials should not be held once a week, because they need more regular tutorials than that. they asserted that there is a need to upgrade the tutorial system, it needs to be concrete. As put by interviewee 3 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016):

“I feel like if we start a module now we should have tutorials for that module every single week because some of the things we cover in a week, we have a tutorial for and then some of the things we cover we do not have, and then what if I get lost and then I cannot ask my tutor because we only have 45 minutes with our tutors and most of the tutors are like postgraduates so you do not want to bother them with your questions.”

In connection with the point the student made about tutors not willing to go the extra mile, tutor 1 (Rhodes University, 2016) noted that:

“ I felt like as a tutor my main responsibility is to be prepared for that session and then if someone wants an extra help which they never wanted it is my own time which I have a choice to say yes or no and bear in mind that whatever they are doing now I did them in 2010 so is not easy even to help the person or even the course I might not have understood it well myself”.

This illustrates how the tutorial system might fail the students and how tutors themselves are not well prepared for the responsibility put on them.

There is therefore a need to offer students support even outside tutorial sessions. This might be a challenge as mentioned by some students, tutors are themselves studying and need to focus on their studies. However, this can be something that the university can work around. Having resident tutors as it was done in the Sociology Department could solve this issue. In this department there was an assigned person who would meet with students and discuss the course outside lectures and tutorial venues. I myself utilised this support in my first year (2010) and I found it to be an informative, beneficial session.

One tutor noted that, “I have a problem with the tutorial system, my problem with that is that there is little follow-up, the relationship between tutors and lecturers is minimal or even tutors and the coordinator of the tutoring programme” (Tutor 1, Rhodes University 2016). Tutor 2 (Rhodes University, 2016) also mentioned that they would be able to assist students where they can if lectures could, for example, after students have written a test or a main assignment, discuss the feedback with tutors so that they know where the students are at and therefore be able to employ a strategy to support their students.

Almost all third year (12 out of 15) and second year students (4 Out of 5) questioned the preparedness of tutors. “I feel like, I do not know because I feel like the tutors that we get are

tutors or people that are just I don't know sometimes you get a tutor and you are like how did this person become a tutor because they... I do not know, they mark so weirdly and you are afraid to go complain about the marks they gave you" (Interviewee 8, 3rd year Rhodes University, 2016). Lecturer 3 (Rhodes University, 2016) noted that "our students face a lot of difficulties, for instance in tutorials they sometimes feel their tutors do not understand nor guide them. The tutor would point what is wrong without guiding the students on how to correct that". This was shared by another student in his assertion that "just being criticized without proper follow up creates a sense of incompetence, you just feel like you are not good enough" (Interviewee 2, 2nd year Rhodes University, 2016).

Students, especially those staying on campus, are aware of the support offered by various residences. They noted that in their residences they have a list of all people who did particular subjects, and then if you need help you would go to that particular person and ask for it. The problem with this form of support was raised by one of the mentors: "students sign up to be mentored but never come or only come a night before exam or a test. This then raises challenges for the mentors to give them all the support they might need" (Mentor 1, Rhodes University, 2016).

For third year students (5 out of 15), making support optional is problematic in itself, students do not realise how important this is because they do not even give it a try. This is because most of the time the people who utilise academic support are the ones who seem to be coping academically. "You know these things that are voluntary, some people do not go, is like revision classes some people go some people do not (interviewee 10, 2nd year Rhodes University, 2016). This student said that because she believes that optional things are always a problem because people do not use them, even though they should.

However, interviewee 3 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016) noted that "forcing people to utilise academic support programmes is problematic, you know tutorials are compulsory to secure you Duly Performed (DP), which is the requirement you need in order to qualify for exams, but you have people bringing a negative energy and destructing others". For these students, students should be given the opportunity to choose if they want academic support, just like the way the Ncedana Programme as discussed earlier.

Lecturer 1 (Rhodes University, 2016) asserted that, "I understand that students are not prepared for Higher Education (HE) but I also believe the university is not prepared for

students”. According to this lecturer, “Rhodes University for instance, since 1994 gradually the intake of black students has increased so that now is around 62% black and yet, and we call ourselves an African university and yet if we look at the curriculum, if we look at the course outline is still hasn’t shifted, is still the way lecturers lecture hasn’t changed the pedagogy is still the same”. For this lecturer, a lot is yet to be done along transformation of the curriculum and the university at large.

When lecturers were asked about the available support programmes at Rhodes University, they said there are no support systems: there are tutors, there is mentoring system and they all doubt that either of those are sufficiently trained. Lecturer 3 (Rhodes University, 2016) noted that “there is a counselling service but you know I think each department needs to have a system in place, each lecturer needs to firstly, especially first year lecturers, need to be very aware of who are our students and what they need and they can find that by asking” Overall, these lectures therefore hold the view that apart from ES there is no very helpful academic support programmes at Rhodes University.

6.3 CONCLUSION

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the need for Academic Support Programmes for returning undergraduates at Rhodes University. The transformation agenda in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa in terms of expanding access to education, the promotion of accountability and efficiency in higher education, massification, the articulation gap between school and university, institutional culture, unpreparedness of universities and underpreparedness of students comprise the conceptual core of this study. The study was both qualitative and quantitative, and utilised questionnaires and interviews as methods of data collection. This included 150 questionnaires and 5 in depth interviews from second year students. The study also interviewed 15 third year students, 3 lecturers, 3 tutors and 3 mentors.

In analysing the overall findings, respondents hold distinct yet similar views on the need for ASPs, the accessibility and availability. Throughout this chapter, it was evident that there is a dire need for academic support. In general, students believe that academic support should not be exclusively for first year students and students who went to public schools. Support is for everyone and should be offered throughout the academic journey. Thus as put by interviewee 8 (3rd year Rhodes University, 2016):

“as much as it might seem like people from private schools have got it all figured out, it is not always the case. You come to varsity is a different environment for everyone. Yes I agree they are often better than those who went to public school because they have been taught to think critically like I have seen that from my teaching practical that the way learners in private schools think is very different from the way learners in public schools think. They have extra information that they get from the internet, from reading or whatever, and they are encouraged to speak out and they are confident and I feel like they have this support going on. But not everyone is like that, so I am saying this should be opened to everyone who needs it. Everyone should have access to academic support programmes.”

Students, throughout the study, have noted that their academic performance would change for the better if academic support were to be offered. The issue of availability has been found not to be a problem, students agree that the university has available academic support options. These range from mentoring, Extended Studies Programme, Career Centre, Mentoring, However, accessibility is still a concern. The study has shown that students are reluctant to utilise support. Reasons for this range from stigma, intimidation, lack of knowledge and support on when and how they should access support. It has been noted throughout the study that ASPs are useful but the structure is a problem. “I feel like the way in which they are formed, the way in which they are developed needs to be changed, there needs to be some kind of a proper foundation that underlies them so that they can be accessible, they can be available to everyone who needs them at any time” (Interviewee 4, 3rd year Rhodes University, 2016).

Appendixes

Appendix A: copy of questionnaire administered to second year students

1. Race

Black	White	Indian	Coloured
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2. Gender

Female	Male
--------	------

3. Kind of school you went to

Public	Private
--------	---------

4. Is there anyone at home with a university degree?

Yes	No
-----	----

5. How is your first year experience?

Good	Satisfactory	Bad
------	--------------	-----

6. Are you getting what you expected from university?

Yes	Partly	No
-----	--------	----

7. Do you feel like you are coping academically?

Yes	Mostly	No
-----	--------	----

8. Do you think the support offered by the department is enough?

Yes	No
-----	----

9. I wish there was extra help offered to students by the Department?

Yes	No
-----	----

10. I am aware of various kinds of support offered by the Department

Yes	No
-----	----

11. I know where to go when I need help

Yes	No
-----	----

12. I need academic support

Yes	No
-----	----

13. My lecturers are a source of support

Yes	Sometimes	No
-----	-----------	----

14. My tutors are a source of support

Yes	Sometimes	No
-----	-----------	----

15. Tutorials help me with learning

Yes	Sometimes	No
-----	-----------	----

16. I have used the kinds of support offered by the Department?

Yes	No
-----	----

17. If yes to (16) how would you rate the support?

Good	Moderate	Bad
------	----------	-----

18. If No to (16) Why ?

19. It is the responsibility of the department to administer students' learning

Yes	No
-----	----

20. If yes to (19) could you please how you think the department can go about doing this?

21. If no to (19) why do you think it is not the department's responsibility?

22. Since the beginning of year, have you felt like you need help in any of these?

1= no, 2, a bit of help, 3 need help

- a) Getting the literature
- b) Taking notes in lectures
- c) Writing assignments
- d) Studying
- e) Understanding lectures
- f) Exam preparation and writing
- g) Managing time
- h) Other (specify)

23. Could you say the department has been helpful with the above?

24. IF yes to (23) could you rate its performance?

1=did not help, 2=partly helped, 3=helped

- a) Getting the literature
- b) Taking notes in lectures
- c) Writing assignments
- d) Studying
- e) Understanding lectures
- f) Exam preparation and writing
- g) Managing time
- h) Other (specify)

25. Is there anything you would like to change concerning the departments' support programmes?

26. If yes please explain

27. The following are opinions which have been expressed about ASP at Rhodes University. Please indicate whether you:

1. Strongly agree, 2. Agree, 3. Have no opinion, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly disagree

27.1 By not accounting for the weakness in South African schooling, the university is in effect blaming certain students for problems which are not of their own making

27.2 The university must maintain a high standard, and therefore is under no obligation to deal with problems which were caused by the school system

27.3 Students who experience difficulties with academic skills should deal with these in their own time

27.4 Because of the state of school education in South Africa, all students are underprepared for the demands of university, and therefore require some assistance with academic skills

27.5 Individual departments should build their teaching of relevant academic skills into their first year course partly through lectures but particularly through the tutorial system, in a way which is not separate to course content

27.6 course content and academic skills should be combined in a relevant way as far as possible

27.7 I think that I personally would benefit from a system which teaches academic skills along with course content

27.8 I would object to a system which teaches academic skills along with course content

27.9 Academic skills should only be taught in ASP, separately to departmental courses

27.10 ASP should try to change the university rather than change the student

Appendix B : Interview Sample for both second and third year students

Make sure 1-3 (4?) in the questionnaire is balanced here

How would you explain your second/ third year experience at university?

Are you part of support services offered by the university? (Department?)

If yes which ones? Reason (s)?

If no (Why not?)

Do you think the Sociology Department support you enough in your academics (skills required for the course?) please explain?

As a Sociology student what would you say is the most helpful service in the Department?

Is there any area that you would like the Department to improve or initiate concerning support given to students?

Would you say is the Department's responsibility to offer academic skills to students?
(yes/no explain

What academic difficulties have you encountered during your second/third year experience?

Has the Department been of any use in dealing with the above mentioned?

Would you say you need academic support?

Have you been in a position where you do not know where to go when you need help with your academics?

Do you think tutorials aid with your studies?

Would you rather go to your tutor instead of your lecturer or anyone in the department?

Are you aware of the various support programmes offered by the university?

Appendix C : Consent form

I (Ramathetse Belinda Matabane) hereby guarantee you that your identity will not be disclosed in the course of the study. Although you will be recorded, it is purely for transcribing purpose, therefore you are entitled to confidentiality and anonymity. In cases where you are quoted directly, student A, B or C will be used as opposed to stating your name. For ethical reasons, you are free to withdraw at any stage if you cannot continue. For the duration of the interview, you are free not to answer any question if you feel uncomfortable or find the question too personal. Your participation is highly appreciated. I do value you and your input.

The objectives and purpose of the research have been thoroughly stated. I hereby voluntarily agree to take part in a research project conducted by Ramathetse Belinda Matabane.

Name :

Signature :

Date :

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