

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMMES
AT A TERTIARY INSTITUTION: A CASE STUDY OF WALTER
SISULU UNIVERSITY**

By

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DECLARATION

I, Khuzekazi Nonkuthalo Ntakana, declare that this dissertation on: **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMMES AT A TERTIARY INSTITUTION: A CASE STUDY OF WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY**, submitted towards an M.Ed degree at the University of Zululand, is my original and independent work, and has never been submitted to any other university/faculty for degree purposes. I further declare that all resources that I have used and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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Signature

October 2011

Date

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of student support programmes at a tertiary institution. The aims of the study were:

- To determine the students' perceptions about the existing support programmes.
- To determine the students' satisfactions about the existing support programmes.

In accordance with these aims, an investigation of students' perceptions of different student support programmes was undertaken. The participants were 198 full-time, trained undergraduates assisting in providing/rendering/offering the various student support programmes at different sites/campuses of Walter Sisulu University. Using purposive sampling to select the research respondents, data was collected. A quantitative data analysis was used in order to draw conclusions about the effectiveness and satisfaction of respondents with the existing student support programmes offered at Walter Sisulu University.

Research results indicated that:

- The objectives of the support programmes are clearly stated and that it is possible to achieve set objectives.
- The support programmes contribute to the holistic development of the students.
- The majority of the respondents were satisfied with the effectiveness of the support programmes.

On the basis of the findings, recommendations for enhancing or contributing to the holistic student support and development were put forward.

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DEDICATION

To all the disadvantaged students who positively take up the challenges of Higher Education as an opportunity to prove that God Wonderfully and Fearfully created each person for a PURPOSE.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

Higher education, at the global level, is on an unprecedented edge of development. The provision of university education has become big business and involves high-level negotiations about standards, quality of education provision, and trade agreements between nations (Andrews, 2006:5; Page, Loots & du Toit, 2005:5). Recently there has been comment from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) noting that foreign-based providers of education will have to meet standards required of national suppliers. (Andrews, 2006:5).

Agar and Knopfmacher (1995: 115) advocate for a need to have extensive support programmes in place to enhance academic performance, to positively contribute to the overall student experience and throughput rates. Botha, Brand, Cilliers, Davidow, De Jager and Smith (2005:84) reviewed both international and South African literature which concluded that there is widespread need to academically and socially support students during their tertiary education. Bourne-Bowie (2000: 36) asserts that student development models should pay attention to the success of all students.

The realizations by institutions of higher learning that graduates of quality have to be produced, has contributed to development of a variety of models of student support. All models are meant to accommodate a larger and more diverse student population, and to equip them with knowledge and skills that will enable them to succeed in their studies (Adams, 2006:15).

Developing student support programmes is directed to student services professionals with responsibility for programme design or administration which focuses on the practitioner's question, namely 'How can I ensure establishment of effective student services?' Although student services professionals in various institutions of Higher Education are at work developing, implementing, and maintaining student support programmes, little attention seems to be paid to the evaluation of their effectiveness (Barr & Keating, 1985: ix). According to Harrison, Edwards and Brown (2001: 200) the fact that educational institutions are facing escalating demands to demonstrate effectiveness in how they utilize public resources, student support services therefore need to show that they make a valuable contribution to the objectives of the institutions they serve. Morrison, Brand and Cilliers (2006: 658) maintain that tertiary institutions, particularly in South Africa, cannot function properly without the support capacity provided by counselling and development centres.

Evaluation of effectiveness is susceptible to various interpretations and agendas (Harrison, Edwards & Brown 2001: 200). This means that there may be different stakeholders with different outcome expectations from the same activity (Morrison, Brand and Cilliers 2006: 659). Antal, Dierkes,

MacMillan and Marz (2002: 35) emphasize the need to consult with stakeholders in formulating organizational goals, and to evaluate the effectiveness of activities in relation to the expectations of stakeholders. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) lays down key principles for effectiveness evaluation (HEFCE, 2004: 4):

- it should be a thorough and systematic process;
- it should be approached as a quality control mechanism;
- the process should be aimed at optimizing resources to best serve stakeholder needs; and
- it should be sensitive to any disparities in impact in respect of any particular group.

South Africa's graduation rate of 15% is one of the lowest in the world, according to the National Plan of Higher Education (NPHE) compiled by the Department of Education in 2001 (Letseka & Maile 2008:1). Broader steps to tackle students' success and improve throughput rates therefore place a specific emphasis on the need for laying down principles to evaluate effectiveness of student support programmes in South Africa.

The purpose of this study was to investigate from students who facilitate the provision of different student support programmes at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) if they perceive the support programmes to be making a valuable contribution to the objectives of the WSU. The principles laid down by HEFCE are relevant guidelines for evaluating the effectiveness of the WSU student support programmes.

1. 2 Analysis of the problem

The Counselling, Special Needs and Development Unit of Walter Sisulu University in collaboration with other Student Support Services provides a variety of support programmes. These programmes range from academic, emotional, social, cultural, and physical or health and wellness support services. These are provided with the aim of assisting students to attain their full potential.

During strategic meetings and end of the year evaluation sessions, students' success and throughput rates were critically evaluated by academic as well as student support services. There seemed to be no research done on this aspect at WSU. This motivated the researcher to evaluate students' responses towards the student support programmes offered at WSU.

Motivation to embark on this study were the assumptions that;

- not all students are aware of the range of support programmes offered;
- students do not make use of the programmes although they might be aware of them for the following reasons:
 - students' perceptions that attending a support programme will label/stigmatize them;
 - some support programmes are not part of the formal academic programme and thus offered after official lecture time;
 - students who do not stay on campus are experiencing financial constraints and therefore cannot attend support programmes during weekends;

- non-resident students experience challenges such as physical and sexual abuse if they leave campus late and walk to their residences in the nearby rural locations;
- attendance is on a voluntary basis even to students who are in need of the support and;

Researchers in other contexts concur with the provision and under-utilization of offered support programmes (Adams, 2006:16). Universities provide an extensive range of services such as counselling, academic skills advice, and welfare support to help students complete their chosen courses. However, these services are often under-utilized because of student reluctance and a lack of knowledge about them. As a consequence, students may withdraw, fail, and not achieve to their fullest potential, indicating a need for the development of supportive academic environments (Drew, Pike, Pooley, Young and Breen 2002:1). Walter Sisulu University shares the same experience. Offered student support programmes are under-utilized. That could probably form part of the reasons why many students withdraw, perform poorly and not achieve according to their potential.

In order to find out if the rendered support programmes make the intended effect, there is therefore a need to evaluate the programmes.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The problem that was investigated in the study pertains to the effectiveness of support programmes offered by Walter Sisulu University.

The South African government spends huge amounts of tax payers' funds through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme in order for all South African students to access Higher Education. Walter Sisulu University, like all funded institutions of higher learning, is required to provide access to all South African academically qualifying students. Some of the students need to be retained by the provision of support programmes that assist them succeed and graduate. It is therefore important that the effectiveness of the student support programmes be evaluated. The researcher's interest was in investigating the views of the students who assisted the various WSU departments in providing the support programmes.

The following are questions that the study sought to answer:

- What are the students' experiences of the support programmes?
- To what extent are facilitators adequately prepared to offer these programmes?

1.4 Aims of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the support programmes offered to students at the Walter Sisulu University. This was achieved by examining the following:

- Students' perceptions of existing support programmes.
- Students' satisfactions about the existing support programmes.

1.5 Definition of terms

For purposes of clarity, some concepts in this study need to be elucidated.

1.5.1 Support programmes

Barr and Keating (1985:227) describe a support programme as a theoretically based plan, under which action is taken toward a goal within the context of institutions of higher education. Wirzt and Magrath (1980) cited in Barr & Keating, 1985:2 define a support programme as a planned response toward an identified need for action.

Gardner and Jewler (1985:227) state that the objective of a university in providing education is not only to develop the student intellectually, but culturally, ethically, physically, and socially as well. Gardner and Jewler (1985:227) further advocate the emergence of the following goals:

- To help create a stimulating, creative, and enjoyable campus environment that supplements academic offerings.

- To provide opportunities for students to establish a practical base for learning experiences.
- To provide opportunities for students to participate in personal and interpersonal experiences that aid psychological and social growth.
- To provide a setting and programmes for increasing interaction and understanding among the many different ethnic groups on campus.

According to the researcher, WSU adheres to similar goals as these listed above.

For the purpose of this study, support programmes mean all programmes that are specifically designed to add value or enrich the core business of an institution for Higher Learning, that is, the formal academic component.

(1) Academic Support Programme

Adams (2006:10) defines academic support as programmes which attempt to optimize the academic performance of students disadvantaged by secondary education. Spencer (1994:528) advocates that academic support activities are viewed as peripheral to the main stream activities of institutions as opposed to academic development that focuses on mainstream activities.

(2) Peer Support Programme

This is a programme in which trained students help other students to make the most of their stay on or outside campus during their student life (De Jager, 2002:4). The peer support programme is there specifically to assist and facilitate the smooth running of the academic, counselling, development

and health services in learning institutions. The academically related peer support programmes enrich the formal academic teaching and learning. Socially, emotionally and physically related peer support programmes contribute to the social, emotional and physical empowerment of the students (Adams, 2006:26).

For the purpose of this study, Peer Helper programmes and Peer Support programmes will be used interchangeably. The following are the delineated peer support programmes:

- i) **Career resources peer programme** - students helping registered and prospective students with career information and job searching strategies
- ii) **Peer learning support programme/ Tutorship programme/ Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SIL)** - students helping other students with learning and academic orientation
- iii) **Peer education programme** - students helping students with health related issues and HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention, cure, care and support.
- iv) **Peer helping programme** - students empowered with basic attending and communication skills to assist students who experience personal, emotional, social challenges to resolve their problems
- v) **Student Representative Council/ Organizations/Student Executive Societies** - elected students advocating for students' needs.

1.6 Value of the study

It is hoped that the outcomes of the study will assist the Student Support Practitioners to better understand programmes relevant for registered students at Walter Sisulu University as well as other universities. Findings from the study will be used to further improve or develop more effective and efficient support programmes.

1.7 Method of investigation

1.7.1 Research design

The research took the form of a simple descriptive type of study. Descriptive research assesses the nature of existing conditions (Salkind, 2006: 11; Lauer, 2006:26; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:24).

Van Rensburg, Landman and Bodenstein (1994:355) say that descriptive studies do not set out with the idea of testing hypotheses about relationships, but want to find the distribution of variables. Due to the descriptive nature of this study, hypotheses were not formulated. Research with regard to this study was conducted as follows:

- A literature study of available, relevant literature
- An empirical survey comprising a self-structured questionnaire was completed by students trained in facilitating the different student support programmes.

1.7.2 Population

The target population was the registered undergraduate students of the Mthatha campus, the Butterworth campus, Buffalo City campus and the Queenstown campus of the Walter Sisulu University.

1.7.3 Sampling method

Convenience sampling was used because available and willing participants were requested to complete the questionnaire. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:69) state that convenience or haphazard sampling involves selecting haphazardly those cases that are easiest to obtain for a sample. The researcher selected this method because the total population constitutes undergraduate students. Students that are easiest to obtain and willing to complete the questionnaire will represent the research sample.

1.7.4 Method of data collection

A quantitative method of data collection was used. A self-structured questionnaire was used to collect data.

1.7.5 Method of data analysis

The quantitatively collected data was processed and analyzed with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency tables were used to analyze and discuss the results of the study.

1.8 Further course of this study

Chapter 2 is a literature review of the types of support programmes offered to tertiary students nationally and internationally. Empirical studies that sought to demonstrate the impacts of the various support programmes were reviewed.

Chapter 3 explains the research method followed in this study

Chapter 4 analyzes and interprets the research data

Chapter 5 is a summary, recommendations and conclusion

1.9 Summary

This chapter gave an introductory overview of the study. The problem was analyzed and stated. The aims of the study were presented. Certain concepts relevant for this particular study were elucidated. The value of the study was clarified and the research methodology and design were explained. The further course of the study was provided.

CHAPTER 2

EXAMINATION OF CATEGORIES OF STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter gave an orientation of the study. This chapter focuses on the theoretical examination of different support programmes. Empirical studies of the impact of a variety of globally offered support programmes are reviewed.

2.2 Categories of support programmes

There is a diversity of support programmes that different institutions of higher learning utilize in order to enhance students' throughput rates. Support systems, broadly described, range from those which provide specific support, such as help in choosing courses, orientation programmes at the start of study or peer tutoring and other academic support, through to institutional-level behaviours and organisational features that may support, or hinder, student outcomes (Prebble, Hargraves, Leach, Naidoo, Suddaby & Zepke 2004;1). The programmes may also be presented as bridging courses, foundation courses, orientation sessions, supplemental instruction, academic counselling, language support programmes, non-academic support programmes, study skills courses, mentoring programmes and peer support programmes. Some of these categories bear credits while others are non credit bearing. Some support programmes address identified needs such as

academic under-preparedness and some focus on social and emotional needs (Adams, 2006: 16).

An integrated presentation of support programmes has been diagrammatically illustrated by Prebble et al. (2004: 65) as follows:

STUDENT SUPPORT THAT HAVE INFLUENCE ON LEARNING OUTCOMES		
Institutional practices that:	Support Social/Emotional Needs	Support Academic Needs
Aid integration	Enrolment processes Social networks	Pre-enrolment advice Academic counselling Student/teacher relationships Quality of teaching Academic Success (GPA)
	Orientation/Induction Learning communities	
Provide services	Health & counselling Advisory services Recreational services Campus facilities Placement services	Supplemental instruction
	Peer tutoring Mentoring	
Adapt to accommodate student differences	Absence of discrimination Feeling safe Valuing minorities	Learning preferences
	Cultural capital Fairness	

FIGURE 2.1 Integrated student support matrix for content criteria

Figure 2.1 above proposes an integrated, collaborative provision of student support. WSU offer a variety of student support programmes, however, different student support services providers offer those programmes independently. Integrated collaborative student support programmes might

add value to the efforts that are already taking place in order to contribute to students' retention and improved throughput rates at WSU.

Although efficient and effective provision of support programmes requires collaboration and integration, for the purposes of this study, the researcher examined the various categories independently of each other. Because there are a variety of programmes offered to support students, this study included a limited number of them. Support programmes that target students at risk; assist students unleash their potential; and empower student leaders with life skills were given attention.

2.2.1 Student support programmes

For purposes of this study, the researcher focused on academic, emotional, physical, social/cultural and financial support programmes. The researcher was of the opinion that the study would be more relevant if it focused on the holistic students' support rather than focusing on isolated aspects such as either student's academic or emotional or social or financial support.

(1) Academic support programmes

If the higher education system is to promote effective learning and prevent learning breakdown, it is essential that mechanisms whose aim is to break down barriers to learning be structured into the education system. Such mechanisms must promote the development of an effective learning and teaching environment (Nqadala, 2007:1). According to the Department of

National Education (1997:246), the importance of early identification, assessment and intervention is crucial for learners who require support with learning and development.

Access to tertiary education has, since 1994, systematically transformed institutions (Page, Loots & du Toit, 2005:1). According to the CHE (2010: viii) the South African Higher Education system has expanded considerably the size of its enrolments. While in 1994 the total student enrolments in the system were 425 000, in 2007 the total enrolment had grown to 761 000 students. The distribution of enrolments across disciplinary fields has about met the set in the national plan for Higher Education (2001) of 40 % Humanities and Social Sciences, 30 % Science Engineering and Technology and 30% Business and Management. As the CHE's *State of Higher Education Report* (2009) has indicated, the system has made important gains. However, the overall performance of higher education is not totally satisfactory because the demographics of student participation that African students are still underrepresented in the total enrolments.

Overall, the higher education system still reflects the legacy of apartheid in terms of race groups, socio-economic status and in terms of who among the enrolled students finish their degrees on time and with good marks. Moreover, the quality of the degrees offered is still uneven and it is not certain that employers are satisfied with the range of knowledge, skills and competencies shown by higher education graduates (CHE, 2010: viii). This is why the researcher concurs with Page, Loots and du Toit (2005:1) who maintain that the development, implementation and perpetuation of a student

academic and social support system have become an imperative strategy at South African universities. The above fact therefore applies to WSU.

Adams (2006:17-29) discussed the following academic support programmes:

a) The Supplementary Tutorial Programmes (STP)

Warren (1999) in Adams (2006:17-18) states that, this kind of intervention is offered weekly on a voluntary basis. It is in a form of tutorials or workshops that run concurrently with the academic courses. The STP aims to assist students from under-privileged backgrounds to cope with mainstream courses; provide a separate, safe space for addressing their learning difficulties; develop study and writing skills; and clarify key concepts and elements of content.

Adams (2006:18) says that some challenges affect this academic intervention, namely:

- Erratic attendance and poor preparation for class, particularly when test, assignment or examination deadlines approached.
- Limited time for educational intervention in the STP, combined with the fast pace and heavy volume of mainstream work, inhibited deeper learning and real “development”.
- Does not provide time and space necessary for developing student’s cognitive and linguistic abilities.
- The already struggling students were overloaded with extra but non-credit-bearing tutorials, sometimes in several courses at once.

WSU also offers tutorials for students who seem academically challenged to cope with their studies. Identified students attend small group sessions under the supervision of trained tutors. Academic departments independently coordinate and facilitate tutorial programmes. The Centre for Learning and Teaching Development assist academic departments with capacity building for the volunteer academically excellent performing senior students who facilitate the tutorial sessions.

b) Supplemental Instruction (SI)

Blanc, De Buhr, and Martin (1983) cited in Barkley (2010:6) state that Supplemental Instruction is an academic support system that has used peer advising to facilitate review sessions to students in challenging courses. Supplemental instruction is more concerned with assisting students to learn course content as well as developing their competency in reasoning and study skills (Blanc, De Buhr & Martin, 1983: 81). Programs based on supplemental instruction are commonly conducted to provide students with the opportunity to discuss and process course information (Arendale 1997 cited in Kirkham & Ringelstein, 2008:41).

According to De Beer and Mostert (2008: 2), in recent times more people have voiced their opinion that less strict admission requirements should be applied at tertiary institutions so as to provide the opportunity to more prospective students to obtain a tertiary education. This could imply, as tertiary institutions have already experienced, an influx of inadequately

prepared (“underprepared”) students. To face this challenge an academic support programme was launched at Technikon Free State and Technikon South Africa. Instead of identifying risk learners and compelling them to attend, risk subjects are identified and all learners are invited to attend sessions, which are – incidentally – not remedial, but rather enriching. According to Martin, Blanc and De Buhr (1983:88) this type of support programme differs from the “traditional” programme in that:

- students are not evaluated before being invited to join – sessions start right from the very first lecture;
- the programme is open to all students – not only the potentially poor performers, but also the potentially better achievers; and
- the lecture is not repeated but discussed, uncertainties are elucidated; notes are compared and possible test questions are discussed .

The SI support programme is open to all students. The programme therefore eliminates the stigma that used to be attached to traditional support programmes that were specifically provided for weaker students. All students are invited to attend sessions, sessions are not compulsory, although an accurate record is kept of attendance in view of monitoring the progress of those attending. A further difference compared to the traditional programme is that sessions are not offered by the lecturer (or evaluator) but by experts from outside the institution, or post-graduate students (Barkley, 2010: 8). Students generally hesitate to be candid about academic concerns to course instructors for fear of demeaning themselves. They will, however, openly acknowledge their problems to the person whose duty it is to assist in such matters, and whose responsibility does not include assessment of

students' performance. In consequence of the exceptional nature of the SI programme, it is not seen as remedial, but rather as enriching. SI facilitators attend all formal lectures to get the "feeling" of the lecture room, to know what the lecturer says and what assignments are given. SI sessions during which the lecture – not the lecturer – is discussed, are scheduled on the official timetable.

De Beer and Mostert (2008: 2) maintain that after such a session all those attending should:

- have a good, complete set of notes/source references;
- have gone through the work at least once;
- have discussed the work with others (class-mates);
- have made sure that he/she understands the work and;
- have an idea of potential questions that can be asked on that specific part of the work.

In line with other universities, WSU through the Centre for Learning and Teaching Development offers the SI academic support programme. It is an academic support programme that caters for courses identified as risk courses. It is open to all students. Participation is voluntary. Volunteer senior students who academically excelled in their previous first and second year academic studies get trained on how to facilitate sessions with first year students. The SI leaders (as volunteer trained students are called) attend first year lectures in order to keep abreast with the curriculum content and to understand what is expected by the lecturer in order to be able to assist with course content and assignments given. Their responsibility is neither to

conduct tutoring sessions nor to repeat lectures but they provide participating students with the opportunity to discuss and process course information. Although supplemental instruction is not compulsory at WSU, an attendance register, to monitor the progress of those who attend is kept (SI coordinator, interviewed Aug 2011).

c) Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECP)

According to Taylor (2008:3) serious problems in student persistence, completion and meaningful learning still remain. Many students entering higher education experience problems resulting in high failure- repeater- and dropout-rates. This predicament is attributed to students not being fully prepared for studies in higher education. (Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development, 2008:1). That is why WSU, in line with other South African universities like the Cape Peninsula University of Technology that have large numbers of disadvantaged or underprepared students entering these institutions, have to provide extended curriculum programmes (CHE, 2011:7).

The results of under-preparedness and/or an inappropriate curriculum are that a much too high percentage of students across the country fail to complete their studies. This has adverse effects on both the students and their families and on national needs. Large amounts of their own or their parents' money, as well as public money is wasted as a result of students repeating or dropping out. Furthermore, the low number of graduates is contributing to the current skills shortage. In order to deal with this problem, the Department of Education sets aside special funding for

extended diploma and degree programmes at all the universities in South Africa. This is in line with the South African Constitution, the Education White Paper 3 and the National Plan for Higher Education (Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development, 2008:1).

Perry and Kennedy (2009) cited in Barkley (2010: 6) also reported a large and growing number of underprepared college students propose ways to address the increasing problem such as provision of course specific skills, tutoring and the extended curriculum programmes.

The Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) is aimed at addressing issues of access, equity, redress and social transformation in the higher education system of the country. The extended programmes focus on the first year of study because students experience most difficulty in moving from school to university. The purpose of the ECP is to equip under-prepared students with academic foundations that would enable them to successfully complete their studies in higher education institutions (Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development, 2008).

Warren (1999) cited in (Adams, 2006: 20) identifies positive features and drawbacks of extended curriculum programmes. Positive features are:

- they are credit-bearing;
- they offer students alternative access to disciplines;
- they cater for students from disadvantaged backgrounds without moving them entirely from the mainstream classes; and
- they create additional time and space to include essential background knowledge and develop necessary skills.

One of the drawbacks is that they prevent students from being able to major in a subject within the usual time since they imply an additional year of study.

To the researcher's knowledge, WSU also offers extended curriculum programmes for the majority of its students who come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and were therefore not fully prepared for study at university. The aim is to offer access to students who would otherwise have been unable to access certain study programmes. The extended curriculum programme also equips the underprepared students with academic foundations to successfully complete their studies at WSU.

d) Peer academic tutoring/mentoring

According to Ntombela, Ogram, Zinner et al. (1994:450), the student mentor programme starts from the premise that black students in general and those who come from deliberately deprived socio-economic backgrounds (especially the rural areas), find the university alienating in many ways. First they have to find their way around campus, often interacting with people belonging to other race and cultural groups and in foreign languages. Often nobody in the new student's family has ever been to a university and, therefore, they cannot use their families as a resource. Sometimes, most departments in tertiary institutions are not user friendly. It is for that reason that student mentoring becomes imperative (Adams, 2006:26).

Developing an effective tutor/mentor program at the Faculty of Health Sciences of Stellenbosch University has been an ongoing and daunting task extending over a six year period. The program has not remained static. Although it is currently dramatically different from its beginnings, further changes were implemented in 2005–6, and more would probably follow in the years ahead. There can be little doubt that tutor/mentoring, as it is practiced at this institution, plays an important role in the lives of students. The program success is ascribed to its dynamic nature and putting the emphasis on tutoring, which in the view of the program coordinators, ought to be the core function of educationally based peer support programs (Page, Loots & du Toit, 2005:16).

The WSU Faculty of Health Science also coordinates a similar ongoing peer mentoring programme in collaboration with the Student Counselling Unit. The programme makes a valuable contribution to both the Peer Mentors as well as the Mentees. Trained Peer Mentors gain a lot of skills such coaching, communication, lay-counselling, problem-solving, organization, time management, stress management and more. First year students (mentees) also gain skills such interpersonal, communication, problem solving skills while they gain access to tutoring with their academics. At the time of conducting the study, the researcher did not find published research into the effectiveness of the Health Sciences' peer mentoring support programme as offered at WSU.

Falchikov (2001) cited in Tariq (2005:1-2) defines four main categories of peer tutoring, namely:

- same-level peer tutoring, where participants within a cohort have equal status, e.g. in terms of their experience, skills and/or attainment levels;
- same-level peer tutoring, where unequal status is identified and introduced by the co-ordinator, e.g. students may be selected to assume the role of tutor on the basis of their higher level of skills and/or academic attainment;
- cross-level peer tutoring, involving a single institution, where unequal status derives from existing differences between student tutors and tutees (e.g. second- or third-year undergraduates tutoring first-year students).
- cross-level peer tutoring, involving two institutions, e.g. the UK's Community Service Volunteers (CSV) 'Learning Together' programme, in which volunteer undergraduate student tutors support pupils' learning by assisting teaching staff in local schools and colleges.

Cross-level peer tutoring programme is offered at WSU. The programme is called a Peer Assisted Learning (PAL). It is an academic programme coordinated by the Centre for Learning and Teaching Development. Second and third year students are trained in tutoring first year students.

Griffin and Griffin (1997: 203) and Topping (1996:322) say that peer tutoring has been conceptualized as a form of collaborative learning in

which “people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers help each other to learn, and learn themselves by teaching”. According to Duran and Monereo (2005:179-199) collaboration is the central core of peer tutoring explaining both inter- and intrapersonal advantages. In the literature, researchers investigating collaborative learning in general and peer support in particular frequently refer to theoretical frameworks building on Vygotsky’s social-constructivist theory. Vygotsky’s theory emphasizes that, at any given age, full cognitive development requires social interaction in terms of problem solving under adult assistance or in collaboration with more capable peers. More specifically, Vygotsky highlights knowledge to be interpersonal before it becomes intrapersonal. In order to foster interpersonal knowledge construction, social interaction is crucial. Consequently, the presence of peer collaboration and intensive and task-oriented social interaction can be regarded as an important benefit of collaborative learning in general and of peer tutoring in particular (Duran & Monereo, 2005:179-199).

Further, Vygotsky’s theory about the ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD) appears to be connected with the effectiveness of collaboration among peers (Jaramillo, 1996:139). The ZPD is “the distance between the actual developmental levels as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Jaramillo, 1996:139). The ZPD pertains to peer tutoring since this type of collaborative learning is characterized by specific role taking, where one partner is clearly taking a direct pedagogical role (McLuckie & Topping, 2004:564). More

specifically, a more capable, knowledgeable, and experienced peer with a supportive role is called the ‘tutor’, while less experienced students receiving help from a tutor are called ‘tutees’ (Topping, 1996:322). In this respect, the tutor is considered to adopt the role of facilitator, converting the collaboration into learning opportunities. Within the scope of this study, the fixed supportive role of peer tutors is the central point.

e) Technological support

In reference to Technological support, Isaacs (2007: 19) describes Current Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Initiatives and Projects offered by universities. He says that while references to ICTs in higher education are made in a host of historical policy documents on higher education, these policies are not co-ordinated and South Africa does not have a coherent policy that promotes ICTs in higher education explicitly. However, South Africa’s 24 state-funded tertiary institutions and private institutions do, in varying degrees, have policies, strategies, or programmes in place related to ICTs.

Cerniewicz, Ravjee and Mlitwa (2006) provide taxonomies of institutional policy approaches adopted by South Africa’s state universities which range from formal explicit policies on ICTs to the incorporation of ICT in existing policies to no policy frameworks to those who have structures in place but which are not supported by policy frameworks. They also point out that the use of technology is defined more by the nature of the institution than by policies, referencing the University of Stellenbosch’s E-Campus Strategy incorporating all e-learning business and the University of Pretoria’s

Telematic Learning and Education Innovation Strategic Plan 2002-2005, which outlines an integrated approach to the quality of teaching and learning practices (Isaacs, 2007:19).

WSU also offers technological support through the ICT department in collaboration with the Centre for Learning and Teaching Development (CLTD). E-learning is offered to all students but the challenge is computer illiteracy and access to computer laboratories for some students. Between the academic years 2009-2011, CLTD E-learning specialists coordinated and facilitated workshops for staff and students on e-learning. WSU ICT department alluded to an incorporation of ICT in existing policies.

(2) Emotional Support Programmes

According to Hyun, Quinn, Madon, and Lustig (2006:260) the prevalence of mental health needs among tertiary students is high. Almost half of the participants (49%) in a survey study conducted by Hyun et al. (2006:248) said that they had experienced a stress-related problem that significantly affected their emotional well-being and/or academic performance within the previous year. An additional 58% reported knowing of another graduate student who had experienced a stress-related problem within the previous year. These findings are consistent with previously published studies of student mental health needs and underscore the extent to which graduate students are coping with mental health issues.

Studies (Benton, 2003; Goldberg, 1998; Johnson & Huwe 2002) have also documented that graduate program characteristics are associated with students' emotional well-being and the likelihood of completing one's graduate program. These characteristics include a focus on professional versus academic degrees; a high level of administrative, social, and financial support provided by the department; a more democratic supervisory structure; mentoring; and utilization of counselling services are positive, protective factors in the psychological transition to and successful completion of graduate programs.

Researchers (Toews et al. 1997) found that graduate students had significantly higher frequency of thoughts on quitting their studies as a result of emotional instability. Untreated mental health problems are significant contributors to graduate student dropout (Turner & Berry, 2000; Wilson, Mason, & Ewing, 1997 cited in Hyun et al. 2006:248).

A second stressor that warrants examination is the finding on tertiary students' financial stability. Financial confidence in one's ability to finish graduate school is a significant contributor to the emotional well-being in graduate students. Higher socioeconomic status is generally recognized to contribute positively to mental health across ages and ethnic groups. Findings from this study corroborate those from other studies of graduate students, showing that financial stress contributes significantly to emotional distress (Toews et al., (1997).

According to Feldman, Smart, and Ethington, (2004: 528) research findings by Holland's theory of careers holds that human behaviour is explained by the interaction of individuals and their environments. Holland's theory of careers suggests that graduate student academic and social well-being is a function of students' ability to find an appropriate environment. The theory assumes that:

- people tend to choose environments compatible with their personality types;
- environments tend to reinforce and reward different patterns of abilities and interests; and
- people tend to flourish in environments that are congruent with their dominant personality types”

To this point, Feldman, Smart and Ethington (2004:528) state that academic environments can have an important effect on what and how students learn.

a) Peer Help Emotional Support Programme

The counselling centres train volunteer students in various skills that enable them to offer basic emotional support to their peers prior to referral for professional assistance. De Beer and Mostert (2008: 5) present an overview of Technikon South Africa (TSA) peer help programme. First year TSA students can also enrol for a service called the HELP programme. The aim of this free service is to equip the students with the study skills needed to succeed at a tertiary distance education institution. TSA has also started to train Peer Helpers. The aim is for students to support other students in their

counselling needs as well as to support the tutors in rendering academic support to peers. Marina de Jager, Senior Student Counsellor at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (former Port Elizabeth Technikon), developed the peer helper program at TSA. The students are trained in listening skills, empathy, questioning skills, roadblocks to communication and various other lay counselling techniques.

According to De Jager (2002:4), the rationale for using a peer helping programme is based on, amongst others, the following:

- The numbers of certified professional counsellors are limited while the needs of the students are more extensive than most professionals can meet.
- It is more cost effective than the traditional system.
- Research has indicated that the peer helpers can be as effective as professional counsellors.
- It is also less intimidating to provide information to a peer than to a professional counsellor.
- The peer counsellors can act as models within an educational setting.
- Learning is more efficient when students assist other students and accept more responsibility for creating the learning climate.
- "Training as treatment": the peer helper gains from being a facilitator to others.

WSU's Peer Help programme is coordinated in the Student Counselling Unit of the Student Affairs Department. Peer Help coordinators are trained on advanced train-the-trainer Peer Help programme at Nelson Mandela

Metropolitan University (NMMU). Coordinators in turn train volunteer students in self-awareness, communication skills, listening skills, attending skills empathy, questioning skills, roadblocks to communication, lay counselling techniques, ethics and confidentiality as well as referral. According to the researcher, at the time of this study, there seemed to be no research published into the effectiveness of WSU's Peer Help Programme.

b) Peer mentoring emotional support programme

Peer mentoring or tutoring might broadly be defined as more experienced or able students assisting less experienced students to adjust and successfully cope with a new environment or field of study. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development remains a cornerstone of peer assisted learning, and its many pedagogical advantages have been explored: more active and interactive learning, more open communication, immediate feedback, lowered anxiety and greater student ownership of the learning material and process (Topping, 1998:53). The more experienced peer provides the support in and knowledge of academic and social stumbling blocks.

Higher education institutions including WSU face many challenges, among others greater demands on accountability and effectiveness. However, quality entails more than having a good, even elite, reputation. Quality is enhanced by the development of a caring, supporting faculty that is vitally interested in students' welfare and able to minister to student needs in small classes (Subotzky, 1997:496).

In line with other South African higher education institutions, WSU faces many challenges, among which is effectiveness. The Student Counselling Unit (SCU) as well as the Centre for HIV/AIDS (CHA) at WSU provide various student emotional support programmes. SCU and CHA collaboratively provide Peer Help and Peer Education programmes. Both departments offer counselling, run support groups, coordinate awareness programmes as an endeavour to take care of the students' emotional and psychological well being while they pursue their studies. Research into the effectiveness of the emotional support programmes has not yet been documented.

(3) Physical Support Programmes

This section is a review of Peer Education support programmes which are rendered in order to keep the students healthy until they graduate at WSU.

Medley, Kennedy, O'Reilly and Sweat (2009: 182) define peer education interventions as the sharing of HIV/AIDS information in small groups or one to one by a peer matched, either demographically or through risk behaviour, to the target population. This definition distinguishes peer education from mass media programs that may be hosted by a peer, but where no interpersonal interaction occurs and information flows in only one direction.

According to Wagner (1982) cited in Turner & Shepherd (1999:236), the history of peer education can be traced back as far as Aristotle. There have been many peer education initiatives throughout history. More recently, peer

education has been utilized in health projects seeking to reduce the incidence of smoking among young people. There have also been education initiatives in the field of substance misuse

Currently peer education seems to be gaining popularity in relation to HIV prevention and sexual health promotion (Turner & Shepherd, 1999:236). HIV educators have had to draw on personal experiences, intuition and educated guesses to get education programmes under way. Over time, HIV educators have accumulated knowledge of what works in HIV/AIDS education through observation, especially observations that have been systematically applied. In other circumstances, assessments against the specific objectives of HIV/AIDS education programmes and demonstration projects have provided informative data on the outcomes of interventions (Van de Ven & Aggleton, 1999: 461).

Peer education, facilitation, and counselling programmes are commonly used in primary and secondary prevention programmes within colleges and universities. Ample evidence suggests that peers can be successful in reaching target populations (Butler, Hartzell & Sherwood-Puzzello, 2007:1).

Peer education for HIV prevention has been widely implemented in developing countries, yet the effectiveness of this intervention has not been systematically evaluated. Peer education interventions are a frequently utilized strategy for preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) worldwide. Such interventions select individuals who share demographic characteristics (e.g., age or gender) or risk behaviours with a target group (e.g., commercial sex work or intravenous drug use) and train

them to increase awareness, impart knowledge and encourage behaviour change among members of that same group. Peer education can be delivered formally in highly structured settings (such as classrooms) or informally during the course of everyday interactions (Medley et al. 2009: 181).

The methods applied to peer education vary considerably. Some forms of peer education apply very similar methods to formal tutoring, such as whole class teaching in schools or in group discussion in youth centres. Other methods include very informal tutoring in unstructured settings, one-to-one discussions and counselling. In some contexts, theatre, stalls and exhibitions have been undertaken by peer educators. The methods adopted depend to some extent on the intended outcomes of the project, whether it be passing on information, behavior change, skills development or community development. Methods also seem to be selected because they fit well with the context or culture of the target group (Turner & Shepherd, 1999: 236).

The Centre for HIV/AIDS (CHA) coordinates the Peer Education prevention, intervention, behavior change and management programmes for staff and students of WSU. Volunteer student peer educators, like peer helpers, get initial basic counselling skills and skills for educating other students in sexually transmitted infections, behavior change and referral. They are also trained to be positive role models while they pursue their studies. They have to continuously attend empowerment workshops so as to have relevant and recent research information so that they are always more informed than their peers as they are skilled to be the sources for information. Peer educators also participate in community outreach

programmes such as Hospices, abandoned children's homes, hospitals, community based organizations and many more health related community programmes.

(4) Social/ Cultural Support Programmes

Tertiary students arrive at an institution with particular cultural capital or 'familial habitus'. Where this is valued and fits with the existing institutional culture they are more likely to be congruent, accepted and to achieve, to be like a "fish in water" (Thomas, 2002:431).

Where it is not valued or accepted, where their cultural practices are deemed inappropriate, incongruent, deficient or invalidated, they are more likely to experience acculturative stress, discontinuity, to be unable to use their cognitive assets, to "feel more like 'a fish out of water', and thus to return to their familiar habitus", that is to leave (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino 1997:135; Thomas, 2002: 431).

According to Berger (2001:108), "those students who lack the requisite cultural capital may have a hard time or be unable to fully integrate because their frame of reference is just too different from the organizational habitus and the habitus of the dominant peer group on campus". Padilla et al. (1997:143) found that successful minority students possess both the theoretical knowledge, learned through coursework, and the heuristic

knowledge, which is acquired experientially. Arguably, institutional culture forms part of this untaught, heuristic knowledge.

Based on his major study of the college experience, Astin (1993:398) advocates that “the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years”. Reporting on a major Australian study, McInnis, James and McNaught (1995:47), note that, the social nature of the university experience has a potential to positively contribute to improved or excellent academic performance as well as generally influence the individual’s sense of competence.

In an American longitudinal study of emotional, social and academic adjustment of new arrivals at a university, Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994:7) found for new student that adjusted and integrated into the social fabric of campus life were retained and performed well academically. This is why WSU coordinates orientation and induction programmes for new students in collaboration with students and staff so that the new students might adjust and integrate well. Schwarz and Washington (1999) cited in Prebble et al., (2004:70), researching academic success in an American women’s university, found social adjustment was the best predictor of persistence out of 7 variables tested.

Findings from a largely qualitative study, Thomas (2002:435) report on an empirical research done in British that an aspect of the university experience that seems to be fundamental to the decision of students whether or not to stay was the extent to which they had good friendships and social networks. Answering the question ‘what made you decide not to leave then?’ one student answered: ‘I’ve got a lot of really good friends here. I think that’s one of the major things for most people that’ll keep them here’. Saenz, Marcoulides, Junn and Young (1999:203) found in an American study that how peers treat individuals is more important than personal attributes.

Saenz et al. (1999:204), in their study of factors leading to academic success among minority students, listed a raft of social interactions that may help students build social networks. These include attending performances on campus, participation in campus organisations, doing volunteer work and taking part in study groups. Of particular value in networking seems to be belonging to learning communities. According to Johnson (2000–2001:223), these offer opportunities for inclusion, continuity, connection, collaboration, and shared goals. Her study of the effect of belonging to learning communities in a north-eastern American university reveals that they have a significant effect on retention.

Rather than a model that assumes that students must fit into what is often an alien culture and that they leave their own cultures, Tierney (2000:219) argues that the challenge is to develop ways in which an individual’s identity is affirmed, honoured, and incorporated into the organization’s culture.

Prebble et al. (2004: 65-66) propose the following for improvement of student learning outcomes:

- (i) Institutional Integration – social/emotional support and academic support cells.
- (ii) Institutional Services – social/emotional support and academic support cells.
- (iii) Institutional Adaptation – social/emotional support and academic support cells.

In line with other institutions for higher education in South Africa, WSU Student Development Unit of Student Affairs coordinates student leadership programmes. Student leaders play an advocacy role for the student body. The Residence Development Unit also coordinates house committee student support and development programmes that enhance students' skills in leading and advocating for residence students.

(5) Financial Support Programmes

Education is a pre-condition to achieve sustainable economic growth. Human capital makes people more productive, and an educated workforce is needed to support technological change, both in terms of innovation by researchers and through adoption of existing knowledge. Access to higher education influences the growth potential of the economy. In many low and middle-income countries, barriers to higher education often hinder economic

development. Limited access to higher education may also be the result of credit market imperfections, i.e. students facing difficulties in receiving loans to finance the cost of their education. Public interventions to relax these credit market imperfections may yield substantial benefits in terms of accessibility to higher education, creation of human capital, and economic growth (Cantona & Blomb, 2004:2).

There are various reasons impacting on the demand for change, among others, greater access to Higher Education for a wider array of individuals and ‘the explosion of knowledge, the search for ways to increase economic competitiveness and new approaches to student learning (Murphy, 2003:58). According to Beaty and Cousin (2003:141) this context that the imperative to educate more people to the highest level has also impacted on university funding through bursaries and loans.

Medical Education for South African Blacks (MESAB) is an American based funding organization focusing on providing bursaries to mainly black students, although students from historically disadvantaged environments (including white, coloured and Indian) are not excluded. The aims of MESAB appear to be twofold. First, it has a long-standing (in excess of five years) annual mentoring workshop where program conveners (coordinators) from tertiary institutions receive training in designing, implementing, monitoring and sustaining a mentoring program. In addition delegates are able to interact with other institutions in order to workshop ideas to improve their own program. Second, MESAB requires bursary holders to participate

in a mentor program, initially as a mentee, and later (in their senior years) provide service to junior students as a mentor (Page et al, 2005:8).

A study by Cantona and Blomb (2004:29-30) on the impact of financial support revealed the following:

- i) **Impact on accessibility of higher education:** Using the Mexican household survey ENIGH 2000, it was found that students who receive some kind of financial support have a 24 percent higher chance of enrolment into a university program. This is a significant impact.
- ii) **Impact on academic performance:** Using both the SOFES survey (external margin) and the SOFES database (internal margin), findings suggest that SOFES recipients perform better in terms of grade point average (GPA).
- iii) **Impact on part-time job:** Exploring both the SOFES survey (external margin) and the SOFES database (internal margin), we find that SOFES recipients work more often than students without a loan.
- iv) **Impact on career choice:** There seems to be no clear direction of impact. The two estimation methods and data sources suggest different impacts and are not systematically statistically significant.

Walter Sisulu University services rural communities where the majority of academically deserving students aspiring to access higher education come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. MESAB as well as NSFAS therefore assist the majority of WSU students financially to access higher

education. An interview with the NSFAS officer at NMD site of Mthatha campus revealed that it is estimated that more than 80% of the WSU registered students register through NSFAS. Registered students, who do not have access to NSFAS or MESAB, because they perform below the required level, seek financial assistance from institutions like EDULOAN; the banks such as Standard Bank, FNB, ABSA, and Ned bank.

As was mentioned in the section on emotional support, students' financial instability is one of the sources of mental health distress. Financial confidence in one's ability to finish graduate school is a significant contributor to the emotional well-being in graduate students. Higher socioeconomic status is generally recognized to contribute positively to mental health across ages and ethnic groups. Findings from the above study corroborate those from other studies of graduate students, showing that financial stress contributes significantly to emotional distress (Hyun et al., 2006:248).

2.3. The importance of student support programmes

From the literature review that forms the basis of this chapter, it be deduced that some of the reasons why student support programmes are important are that they:

1. Enhance academic performance

According to Warren (1999) in Adams (2006:17-18) student support programmes:

- a) Assist students from under-privileged backgrounds to cope with mainstream courses;
- b) Provide a separate, safe space for addressing their learning difficulties;
- c) Develop study and writing skills; and
- d) Clarify key concepts and elements of content.

Nqadala (2007) states that student support programmes break down barriers to learning and promote effective learning.

2. Reduce attrition rates and increase retention and throughput rates

Kirkham and Ringelstein (2008:40) say that they are strategies to assist students in their learning process and thereby motivate them to remain committed to completing their higher education.

Martin and Arendale (1992) cited in Kirham and Ringelstein (2008:40) identified student attrition as a major concern and therefore endorsed the use of student support programmes to combat the problem. Martin and Arendale further advocate that supplemental instruction provides opportunities for students to be more involved in the learning and teaching process and thus get retained and succeed in their studies.

3. Help students acquire knowledge and develop life skills

Research by Kirkham & Ringelstein (2008:40) showed that student involvement has a motivating influence on performance. Researchers (Astin, 1984; Mallette & Cabrera 1991) reported that the level of student

involvement with on campus activities was positively correlated with retention at university. The greater the students' involvement in activities outside of the traditional lecture or tutorial, the greater their acquisition of knowledge, development of relevant skills and likelihood of remaining at university (Kirkham & Ringelstein, 2008).

4. Assist first year students to adjust at university

According to Calder (2004), peer interaction plays a central role in the successful transition process. Peer assisted learning involves an active or interactive mediation of learning by students with the support of other students (Topping & Ehly, 2001:113).

5. Peer Support programmes create a sense of community

Student to student interaction enhances networking which leads to formation of study groups; providing a non-threatening atmosphere which is conducive to learning; providing study and learning strategies can be applied in other areas of study; and avoiding the creation of a remedial programme that may carry negative connotations (Kirkham & Ringelstein, 2008)

Sandberg (1990) cited in Kirkham & Ringelstein (2008:43) advocates that collaborative learning does not only improve academic performance, but it also improves students' self-esteem. Self-esteem plays a major role towards motivation and making learning a fulfilling experience.

Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994:7) say that personal adjustment and integration into the social fabric of campus life play a significant role at least as academic factors in student retention.

2.4 Summary

The above literature review has revealed a variety of support strategies that are used in an endeavour to support students' learning outcomes. A review of various student support programmes was discussed. These included academic, emotional, physical, social/cultural and financial support programmes. The integration and collaborative implementation of support programmes would contribute to the holistic development of the student who aspires to be a globally competent candidate for the world of work as well as a citizen who contributes meaningfully to his or her purpose of existence.

Reasons why student support programmes are important were discussed. Coordination and target groups for the student support programmes at WSU were tabulated. There seemed to be no documented research into the effectiveness of the student support programmes at WSU during this study. The next chapter will provide a detailed description of the research design and methodology of the empirical study.

CHAPTER 3

PLANNING OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the literature on a variety of support strategies that are utilized in an endeavour to support students' learning outcomes were reviewed. The literature review revealed a global concern for the provision of different models of support programmes to enhance access, retention and throughput in most tertiary institutions.

This chapter deals with the research design, research instrument, pilot study, validity, reliability and data collection procedures. A self-structured questionnaire was utilized as research instrument.

3.2 Design of the research and methodology

3.2.1 The research design

The research design is the researcher's plan of inquiry (Bogdan & Knopp-Biklen, 2006:54) 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 and Razavieh 2002:426). The purpose of a research design is to provide, within an appropriate mode of inquiry, the most valid and accurate answers possible to the research

question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:22; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:31). An effective research design outlines the defined purpose in which there is coherence between the research questions and the methods or approaches proposed that generates data that is credible and verifiable (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:74). This research design encourages the process of strategic thinking and reflection (Mason, 2002: 25) from the start and continues throughout the whole research process which calls for constant review of decisions and approaches (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:47).

This study was based on simple descriptive research design. The study provided a summary of existing conditions of student support programmes of the research sample group and assessed the nature of prevalent student support programmes.

The research questions the researcher wanted to answer were:

- What are the students' experiences of the support programmes?
- To what extent are facilitators adequately prepared to offer these programmes?

3.2.2 Research methodology

The methodological design is the logic through which a researcher addresses the research questions (Mason, 2002:30) and gains data for the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:157). Research methodology encompasses the complete research process: the research approaches, procedures and data collection or sampling methods used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:74).

Therefore, the aim of research methodology is to understand the processes and not the product of scientific inquiry (Cohen & Manion, 1994:39).

Quantitative research methods were originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena. However examples of quantitative methods are now well accepted in the social sciences (Hohmann, 2006:1). A quantitative survey method, through a self structured questionnaire technique, was used.

3.2.3 Research sample

Convenience sampling was used because available and willing participants were requested to complete the questionnaire. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:69) state that convenience or haphazard sampling involves selecting haphazardly those cases that are easiest to obtain for a sample. Undergraduate students that were easiest to obtain and willing to complete the questionnaire represented the research sample.

The population of this study consisted of learners from four campuses of the Walter Sisulu University. These campuses are located in Buffalo city, Queenstown, Butterworth and Mthatha. The Mthatha campus has approximately 9000 students on two sites, i.e. Zamukulungisa Heights and Nelson Mandela Drive. Butterworth consists of approximately 5000 students. Buffalo city has approximately 6000 students and Queenstown which is the smallest campus has approximately 1200 students. Only the Butterworth campus is located in the most rural of the rural areas. Other

campuses are located in semi-urban areas. The average distance between campuses is approximately 130 kilometers. Questionnaires were posted to Queenstown, Buffalo city and Butterworth. In both sites at Mthatha, students were requested to collect and complete questionnaires at the Centre for Counselling, Special Needs and Development.

For the purpose of this study, trained second, third and fourth year students who participated as mentors in facilitating of the provision of the student support programmes were selected as the research sample. The total number of respondents who formed the research sample was 198.

3.3 The research instrument

3.3.1 The questionnaire as a research instrument

Tshiki (1994:79) asserts that the questionnaire is the technique whereby the researcher believes that an impersonal approach will suffice and according to which he/she puts his/her questions on paper and submits them to the respondents, asking them in turn to write their answers on paper. In the questionnaire the respondents complete the form without any outside influence.

Tshiki (1994:79) further mentions two types of questionnaires, namely the structured and unstructured questionnaires. For purposes of this study, the researcher used the self-administered, structured questionnaire.

3.3.2 Construction of the questionnaire

An ideal questionnaire must be clear, unambiguous and uniformly workable. The researcher should consult and seek advice of specialists and colleagues during the construction and design of the questionnaire (Van den Aardweg & Van den Aardweg, 1990: 198).

When designing the questionnaire for the purpose of this study, the researcher planned, thoroughly, studied other questionnaires and submitted the items to her colleagues and her supervisor who had more experience in questionnaire construction.

The aim of the questionnaire was to obtain information regarding the effectiveness of support programmes at Walter Sisulu University. The questionnaire was sub-divided into four sections as follows:

1. This part required demographic information about the students and included questions 1-8.
2. The second section gathered information about how participants viewed their training/induction which prepared them for participating in the support programmes. All questions were closed-ended.
3. This section obtained participant's opinions of the support programmes in which they participated. All questions were closed-ended.
4. The last section included both a closed-ended and an open-ended question. The closed-ended question gathered respondents' perception about satisfaction of the existing support programmes. The open-

ended question requested respondents' suggestions as to how they would like support programmes to be.

3.3.3 Characteristics of a good questionnaire

Wolhuter, Van der Merwe, Vermeulen and Vos (2003:15) identified the following as characteristics of a good questionnaire:

- The topic must be significant and relevant. The respondent should recognize it as important enough to warrant spending his or her time on responding. The significance should be clearly and carefully stated in the questionnaire and in the accompanying letter.
- Respondents must be competent to answer. It is important that the respondents are able to provide reliable information.
- It seeks only that information which cannot be obtained from other sources.
- Items must be clearly stated. An item achieves clarity when all respondents interpret it in the same way. Often the perspectives, words or phrases that make perfect sense to the researcher are unclear to the respondents.
- Simple items are the best. Long and complicated items should be avoided because they are more difficult to understand, and respondents may be unwilling to try to understand them. It must be as short as possible, but long enough to get essential data. Long questionnaires are normally not answered.
- Questions should be attractive in appearance and neatly arranged. It should be clearly duplicated or printed.

- Directions must be clear and complete and important terms defined.
- Avoid double-barreled questions. Each question should be limited to a single idea or concept and should be worded as simply and as straightforward as possible.
- Different categories should provide an opportunity for easy, accurate and unambiguous responses
- Objectively formulated questions with no leading suggestions should render the desired responses.

For purposes of this study, the researcher took into consideration the characteristics of a good questionnaire when preparing the questionnaire.

3.3.4 Advantages and disadvantages of the questionnaire

Mahlangu (1987) cited in Tshiki, (1994:83) mentions that since the questions are on paper and the interaction impersonal, the questionnaire has both advantages and disadvantages. According to Wolhuter et al. (2003:16), data can be gathered by means of a structured questionnaire in mainly three ways such as:

- a written questionnaire that is mailed, delivered, or handed out personally;
- personal interviews; and
- telephone interviews

Each form has specific advantages and disadvantages which the researcher need to evaluate for their suitability to the research question and the specific target population being studied, as well as the related cost.

(i) Advantages of the written questionnaire

According to Best (1987) cited in Boti, (1996:51) the questionnaire administered personally to groups of individuals has a number of advantages such as:

- The person administering the instrument has an opportunity to establish rapport, to explain the purpose of the study and to explain the measuring of items that may not be clear.
- The availability of a number of respondents in one place makes possible an economy of time and expense and provides a high proportion of usable responses.

Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1985:344) list the following as the advantages of a questionnaire:

- The instrument is less time-consuming and inexpensive.
- It is possible to include a large number of subjects as well as subjects in more diverse locations than is practical with the interview. This is made possible because a questionnaire is designed for self-administration and is often mailed.
- A questionnaire that can guarantee confidentiality may elicit more truthful responses.

Lunika (1994:43) postulates the following as some of the advantages of a questionnaire:

- The questionnaire permits well-considered and more thoughtful answers
- It enhances progress in many areas of educational research and brings to light information which would otherwise be lost.
- It obviates the influence the interviewer might have on the respondents.
- It allows for uniformity and ensures that answers are more comparable.

(ii) Disadvantages of the written questionnaire

According to Boti (1996:52):

- A disadvantage of the questionnaire is the possibility of misinterpretation of the questions by the respondents due to poor wording or different meaning of terms.
- Large segments of the population may not be able to read and respond to a mailed questionnaire. Only people with considerable academic background may be able to complete a very complex questionnaire.
- Questionnaires do not elicit as high a completion rate as the interview. It is easy for the individual who receives a questionnaire to lay it aside and simply forget to complete and return it.

Tshiki (1994:84) points out the following disadvantages of a questionnaire:

- Because of its apparent simplicity it appeals to the amateur investigator and may be abused.
- Members of lower intellectual and lower educational groups tend not to answer questionnaires and, if they do, they usually introduce an element of invalidity by their inability to interpret the questions and to express their responses clearly.
- The respondent may have little interest in a particular problem and therefore may answer the questionnaire indiscriminately.

3.3.5 Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

According to Huysamen (1989:1-3) validity and reliability are two concepts that are of critical importance in understanding issues of measurement in social science research. All too rarely do questionnaire designers deal consciously with the degree of validity and reliability of their instrument. This is one reason why so many questionnaires are lacking in these two qualities.

Kidder and Judd (1986: 53) advocate that although reliability and validity are two different characteristics of measurement, they shade into each other. They are two ends of a continuum but at points in the middle it is difficult to distinguish between them.

Researchers can never guarantee that an educational or psychological measuring instrument measures precisely and dependably what it is intended

to measure (Van den Aardweg & Van den Aardweg, 1990:198). It is therefore essential to assess the validity and reliability of these instruments

(i) Validity of the questionnaire

According to Tshiki (1994:85), the validity of the questionnaire as a research tool relates to its appropriateness for measuring what a questionnaire purports to measure.

Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1985) cited in Boti, (1996:54) identified the following two types of validity:

- Content validity may be assessed by having some competent colleagues who are familiar with the purpose of the survey examine the items to judge whether they are adequate for measuring what they are supposed to measure. Items are also judged whether they are a representative sample of the behavior domain under investigation.
- Criterion-related validity may be assessed by using direct observation of behavior. After responses have been obtained, observations are made to see whether the actual behavior of the subjects agrees with their expressed attitudes, opinions, or other answers.

Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1990:237), Mulder (1989:215-217) and Dane (1990:257-258) distinguish between three different types of validity:

- Construct validity, where the extent to which the test measures a specific trait or construct is concerned, for example, intelligence, reasoning ability, attitudes, etc.
- Content validity, where content and cognitive processes are included and can be measured. Topics, skills and abilities should be prepared and items from each category randomly drawn.
- Criterion validity, which refers to the relationship between scores on a measuring instrument and an independent variable (criterion) believed to measure directly the behavior or characteristic in question. The criterion should be relevant, reliable and free from bias and contamination.

Shaughness and Zechmeister (1994: 17) advocate that the validity of a measure is supported to the extent that subjects do as well on it as they do on independent measures that are presumed to measure the same concept. Best (1981: 179) maintains that basic to the validity of a questionnaire are the right questions phrased in the least ambiguous way.

Content validity applied to the study. The researcher's supervisor and a senior research associate at Walter Sisulu University who were familiar with the purpose of the survey examined the items to judge whether they were adequate for measuring what they were supposed to measure. Both experts independently agreed that the questionnaire was valid and questions were unambiguous.

(ii) Reliability of the questionnaire

According to Boti (1996:54) the reliability of a measure is its consistency. Dane (1990:256) advocates that consistency does not guarantee truthfulness. The reliability of the question is no proof that the answers given are a true reflection of the respondent's feelings. A demonstration of reliability is necessary but not conclusive evidence that an instrument is valid.

Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1990:194) and Kidder and Judd (1986:47-48) distinguish between the following three types of reliability:

- Test-retest reliability (coefficient of stability). This gives an indication of the dependability of a score on one occasion and on another occasion.
- Internal consistency reliability. This indicates how well the test items measure the same thing.
- Split-half reliability. By correlating the results obtained from the two halves of the same measuring instrument, the split-half reliability can be calculated.

Mulder (1989:209) and Kidder & Judd (1986:45) mention the following as some of the sources of error that affect reliability:

- Fluctuations in the mood or alertness of respondents because of illness, fatigue, recent good or bad experiences, or temporary differences amongst members of the group being measured.
- Variations in the conditions of administration between groups. These range from various distractions, such as unusual outside noise to

inconsistencies in the administration of measuring instrument such as omissions in verbal instructions.

- Differences in scoring or interpretation of results, chance differences in what the observer notices and errors in computing scores.

When designing the questionnaire for the purpose of this study, the researcher thoroughly planned, studied other questionnaires and submitted the items to her colleagues and her supervisor who had more experience in questionnaire construction to ensure that the questionnaire was valid and reliable.

To assure the validity and the reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher further made a pilot study giving the questionnaire to senior students who had participated in support programmes at Mthatha campus before the questionnaire was finalized. After unclear and ambiguous questions had been corrected, the questionnaire dissemination was conducted.

3.4 Permission

Permission to conduct this study was applied for and obtained from the Walter Sisulu University Research Department, the Student Affairs as well as Heads of campuses (*cf.* letters of permission in Appendices A, B, and C).

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethics are generally considered to deal with beliefs about what is wrong, proper or improper, good or bad (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:196). The researcher made sure that ethical standards were adhered to.

The following measures were taken while planning and conducting the study to ensure that the rights and welfare of each subject was protected, and that nobody was harmed in the process of conducting the study:

- Permission to conduct the study was applied for and obtained from Walter Sisulu Research Department, the Student Affairs Department and Heads of Campuses (*cf.* Appendices A, B, and C).
- The researcher assured the respondents of confidentiality. Information obtained from the respondents remained confidential (Seale, Gobo, Gubruim and Silverman, 2004:233).
- The researcher informed the respondents of the goals of the study and what the researcher hoped to achieve (Ary et al., 2002:438)
- Collecting of data was anonymous and confidential. The researcher linked no names or identity to the findings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 67-68).
- Care will be taken during dissemination of findings. Special attention will be paid to accuracy, and there will be no bias about the researcher's opinion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:140). Research findings will be made available.

- The study adheres to the ethical considerations of the Faculty of Education, University of Zululand.

3.6 Pilot study

De Vos (2000:158) says that it is essential the newly constructed questionnaires be thoroughly tested before being utilized in the main study. Boti (1996:55) maintains that many researchers emphasize the need of pre-testing a research instrument before it is finally put to operation.

According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:148), pilot studying entails administering a new measurement instrument that has been developed to a limited number of subjects from the same population as that for which the eventual project is intended. The pilot study is therefore a ‘dress rehearsal’ for the actual research investigation.

Borg (1987:109) maintains that it is impossible to predict how questionnaire items will be interpreted by respondents unless the researcher tries out the questionnaire and analyzes the responses of a small sample drawn from the same population that will be sampled in the main study. The results are used to refine the questionnaire and locate potential problems in interpretation or analysis of the results.

Bell (1993:84) states that data-gathering instruments should be pilot-tested to determine how long it takes recipients to complete them and to enable the researcher to remove items that do not yield usable data. Only after the

necessary modifications have been made following the pilot test should the questionnaire be presented to the full sample (De Vos, 2000:158).

For the purpose of this study the researcher conducted a pilot on randomly selected students at Zamukulungisa Heights at Mthatha campus (one of the sites from which the sample was selected). Communication notifying the university community about the purpose of the study and the need for volunteering participants were disseminated. Ten second and third year diploma students who attended orientation mentor training in December 2008 completed the questionnaire with the support and assistance of the researcher. The researcher was therefore able to determine how long it would take participants to complete the questionnaire. Unclear and ambiguous questions were corrected. The students that partook in the pilot study were not selected for the research sample.

3.7 Administration of the questionnaire

If properly administered the questionnaire is the best available instrument for obtaining information from widespread sources or large groups simultaneously (Cooper, 1989:39). The researcher posted the questionnaires to Queenstown, Buffalo city and Butterworth campuses. In both sites of Mthatha campus, i.e. Nelson Mandela and Zamukulungisa, students were requested to collect and complete questionnaires at the Counselling, Special Needs and Development Unit.

3.8 The processing of data

Once the data was collected, it was captured in a format that would permit analysis and interpretation. This involved the careful coding of the 198 questionnaires completed by the different student leaders. The coded data was submitted to the Research Centre at the University of Zululand where it was computer analyzed using the SPSS programme in order to interpret the results by means of inferential statistics.

3.8.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics is concerned with the description and /or summarization of the data obtained for a group of individuals. Data may be described or summarized by tabulating or graphically depicting them. The purpose of descriptive statistics is to reduce large amounts of data physically to facilitate the drawing of conclusions about them (Huysamen, 1989:4).

According to Van Den Aardweg and Van Den Aardweg (1990:65-76), frequency distribution is a method to organize data obtained from questionnaires in order to simplify statistical analysis. A frequency table provides the following information:

- It indicates how many times a particular response appears on the completed questionnaire
- It provides percentages that reflect the number of responses to a certain question in relation to the total number of responses.

3.8.2 Application of data

The questionnaire was designed to determine the effectiveness of support programmes at tertiary institutions with specific reference to Walter Sisulu University.

In order to obtain the information needed for the purpose of this study, the questionnaire was subdivided into four parts:

1. The first part required demographic information about the students and included eight items.
2. The second section gathered information about how participants viewed their training/induction which prepared them for participating in the support programmes.
3. The third part obtained participant's opinions of the support programmes in which they participated.
4. The last section included both a closed-ended and an open-ended question. The closed ended question gathered respondents' perceptions about satisfaction of the existing support programmes. The open-ended question that requested their suggestions as to how programmes should be.

3.9 Limitations of the investigation

This investigation was constrained by a number of factors. The following are likely factors that might have influenced the reliability and validity of the questionnaire:

- Although anonymity was required in the questionnaire the possibility exists that, because of the learner's cautiousness, they might not have been frank and truthful in their responses.
- To restrict the investigation to manageable proportions, the researcher limited the study to senior students who participated in student support programmes who were easily accessible.
- The formulation of the questions in English, which is not the mother-tongue of the respondents, might have resulted in the misinterpretation of questions which could have elicited incorrect responses.

Despite the limitations identified, the researcher believes the investigation will provide a much needed basis for future research regarding the effectiveness of student support programmes at institutions of higher learning.

3.10 Summary

In this chapter the research design and methodology of the empirical study was discussed and a comprehensive description of the questionnaire was given. Aspects such as characteristics of a good questionnaire, advantages and disadvantages of a questionnaire, validity, reliability, ethical consideration and pilot study were looked at. Administration of the questionnaire and the processing of the collected data were described. In the next chapter the data obtained will be analyzed, results will be tabulated and interpreted. Research findings will be discussed, deductions will be made and recommendations will be made accordingly.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the research design and methodology of the empirical study was discussed. Administration of the questionnaire and the processing of the collected data were described. In this chapter the data, which was collected from the questionnaires completed by 198 respondents, were analysed and interpreted and findings were discussed. The data comprised biographical information of the respondents and their perceptions about the effectiveness of student support programmes offered at the Walter Sisulu University.

4.2 Descriptive statistics

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:42) maintain that the purpose of research is to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person. Descriptive research is one of the methods of research used to study a person or persons scientifically in the educational situation. According to Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1990:59) the descriptive method in research seeks to describe the situation as it is; thus there is no intervention on the part of the researcher and therefore no control. Van Rensburg,

Landman and Bodenstein (1994:355) say that descriptive studies do not set out with the idea of testing hypotheses about relationships, but want to find the distribution of variables.

In this study, descriptive research (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995:42) was employed with the aim of describing senior students' perceptions pertaining to the effectiveness of students support programmes. The researcher was primarily concerned with the nature and degree of existing situation at Walter Sisulu University.

4.3 Presentation, interpretation and discussion of the results

The research findings are presented in a series of frequency tables with a short description following each table.

4.3.1. Gender of respondents

Table 1: Frequency distribution according to the gender of the respondents

	Gender	Frequency	%
1	Male	96	48%
2	Female	102	52%
	TOTAL	198	100%

According to Table 1, the research sample consisted of nearly equal frequencies. The sample was purposefully and not randomly selected. It was not representative and therefore could not be linked to the university population.

4.3.2. Age of respondents

Table 2: Frequency distribution according to the age of the respondents

	Age group	Frequency	%
1	18 – 20 years	30	15%
2	21 – 25 years	141	71%
3	26 – 30 years	19	9%
4	31 – 35 years	7	4%
5	Older than 35 years	1	1%
	TOTAL	198	100%

According to Table 2 the majority of the respondents (71%) in the research sample are in the age group 21-25 years followed by the age group 18-20 years. This might be because senior students who participated in student support programmes were targeted as informants.

4.3.3. Respondents' marital status

Table 3: Frequency distribution according to the respondents' marital status

	Marital status	Frequency	%
1	Single	191	96%
	Married	6	3%
3	Divorced	1	1%
4	Widowed	0	0%
	TOTAL	198	100%

From the sample of 198 students who answered the questionnaire, 96% were single (Table 3). This might imply that students prefer to focus on finishing their studies before considering committing themselves to getting married.

4.3.4. Respondents' academic classification

Table 4: Frequency distribution according to the academic classifications of the respondents

	Classification	Frequency	%
1	Full-time student	181	91%
2	Part-time student	17	9%
	TOTAL	198	100%

Table 4 shows that the majority of the respondents (91 %) that partook in the research are full-time students. This can be attributed to the fact that Walter Sisulu University is a full-time study university, although it has a component for part-time study opportunities. The full-time students would also be more readily available to participate in student support programmes either on a volunteer or a work-study capacity.

4.3.5. Year level of respondents

Table 5: Frequency distribution according to the year level of the respondents

	Year level	Frequency	%
1	1 st year	2	1%
2	2 nd year	59	30%
3	3 rd year	111	56%
4	4 th year	26	13%
5	Other please specify	0	0%
	TOTAL	198	100%

From table 5 it can be seen that the majority (86%) of the respondents in the research sample were second and third year students. The extended

programmes focus on the first year of study because students experience difficulty in transferring from school to university.

Possible reasons why students experience difficulty in transferring from school to university are:

- Large classes or programs that do not have a core curriculum to create shared purpose and identity, in combination with the financial and personal demands on students which have the potential to fragment their experiences of campus life, may contribute to making this transition difficult (Krause, (2005); McInnis & Hartley, (2001) cited in Burnett 2006).
- The teaching methods at university are different from that of school.
- At university students have to assume more responsibility for their learning than at school.
- The load of work is more at university than at school.
- The social environment of the university differs from school.

4.3.6. Faculty of respondents

Table 6: Frequency distribution according to the faculty of the respondents

	Faculty	Frequency	%
1	Business & Law	125	63%
2	Science & Engineering	25	13%
3	Health Sciences	3	2%
4	Education & Humanities	45	22%
5	Other, please specify	0	0%
		198	100%

Table 6 shows that most of the respondents (63%) that partook in the research are enrolled in the Faculty of Business and Law. The sample was purposive and therefore students who were available to respond to the research study were mostly from the Business and Law faculty.

4.3.7. Respondents' portfolio

Table 7: Frequency distribution according to the respondents' portfolios

	Portfolio	Frequency	%
1	SRC	8	4%
2	Academic Society	24	12%
3	Residence Committee	16	8%
4	Organizational Leader	16	8%
5	Peer Helper	31	15%
6	Peer Educator	35	18%
7	Orientation & Registration Assistant	20	10%
8	Supplemental Instruction Leader	9	4%
9	Class Representative	24	12%
10	Other, please specify	15	8%
	TOTAL	198	100%

According to Table 7, the larger percentage of respondents that formed part of the research sample are Peer Educators (18%) followed by Peer Helpers (15%). Peer Educators and Peer Helpers might have been more readily available than the other student portfolios.

4.3.8. Campus of the respondents

Table 8: Frequency distribution according to the campus of the respondents

	Campus	Frequency	%
1	Zamukulungisa	57	29%
2	NMD (Nelson Mandela Drive)	47	24%
3	Buffalo City	38	19%
4	Butterworth	53	26%
5	Queenstown	0	0%
6	Other, specify	3	2%
	TOTAL	198	100%

The larger percentage of respondents that partook in the research is from Zamukulungisa (29%) and Butterworth (26%) campuses (Table 8). This could be attributed to the fact that the researcher personally distributed and monitored the two campuses as they are serviced by the researcher.

4.3.9. Respondents' home language

Table 9: Frequency distribution according to the respondents' home language

	Home language	Frequency	%
1	SiXhosa	175	88%
2	SiZulu	16	8%
3	SiSwazi	0	0%
4	SeSotho	6	3%
5	SeTswana	0	0%
6	English	1	1%
7	Afrikaans	0	0%
8	Other, please specify	0	0%
	TOTAL	198	100%

The majority (88%) of the respondents' home language is IsiXhosa. This is because Walter Sisulu University is located in the Eastern Cape where the majority of people are Xhosa speakers. Walter Sisulu University draws the majority of its clientele from the surrounding communities.

4.4. Respondents' perceptions of the training/induction (section 2 of the questionnaire)

Table 10: Frequency distribution according to the respondents' views /opinions/ perceptions about how they are equipped for the service (support) they are rendering / have rendered.

		POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT	TOTAL %
2.1	Relevance of the content (e.g. does the content address the student's problems)	21 10%	52 26%	97 50%	28 14%	198 100%
2.2	Presentation style (e.g. are the methods of presentation effective)	21 10%	54 27%	99 51%	24 12%	198 100%
2.3	Participant interaction (e.g. do students actively take part in the programs)	25 12%	45 23%	91 46%	37 19%	198 100%
2.4	Relevance of materials provided (e.g. do the training materials address the problems)	34 17%	65 33%	71 36%	28 14%	198 100%
2.5	Competence of facilitators/trainers (e.g. are facilitators adequately equipped to offer support?)	17 9%	53 27%	81 41%	47 23%	198 100%
2.6	Relevance to your personal life/development (e.g. does training help you to know yourself, understand and accept who you are)	11 6%	32 16%	86 43%	69 35%	198 100%
2.7	Ability to apply your creativity (e.g. does the training encourage participants to use their strengths/potential to achieve support programmes objectives)	8 4%	32 16%	104 53%	54 27%	198 100%
2.8	Ability to work in a team (e.g. does the training empower participants with skills for interacting with one another)	8 4%	31 16%	94 47%	65 33%	198 100%
2.9	The duration of the training is sufficient	8 4%	64 32%	69 35%	30 15%	198 100%
2.10	Overall quality of training (e.g. does the training specifically empower/enrich participants to effectively contribute towards the goals of the programme)	6 3%	48 24%	109 55%	35 18%	198 100%

According to table 10, the majority of the respondents perceive their training /induction good.

Relevance of the content (2.1): More than sixty percent (64%) of the respondents in the research sample rated the content of the training as good and excellent because it addressed the student's problems. Senior students have an experience of various problems that are encountered during the first year at university, as they have encountered some of them.

Presentation style (2.2): Most of the respondents (51%) said that the presentation methods of the support programmes are effective. Good presentations of the programmes help to motivate the students in seeking assistance for problems.

Participant interaction (2.3): Close to half (46%) of the respondents in the research sample agreed that the training allowed participants to actively take part in the process. The finding concurs with the findings by Weimar (2002:88) that group work, most often under the collaborative or cooperative learning rubric, has gained considerable popularity.

Relevance of training material (2.4): Half of the respondents (50%) in the research sample acknowledged that the training materials of the support programmes are relevant to the students' problems (36% said good and 14% said excellent). This implies that the training material enabled participants to make sense of the content.

Competence of facilitators (2.5): The majority of the respondents (64%) in the research sample rated facilitators as good and excellently equipped to offer support programmes.

Relevance to personal development (2.6): The larger percentage of the respondents said that the training for support programmes helped them to better understand themselves and accept who they are (43% said good and 35% said excellent).

Opportunity to encourage participants' to apply their creativity (2.7): According to more than half (55%) of the respondents, the training is good for encouraging participants to use their strengths/potential to achieve support programmes' objectives, while (27%) viewed the programme as excellent in this regard.

The finding is in line with Gardner and Jewler (1985:227) who stated that the objective of the university in providing education does not only develop the student intellectually, but it also help create a stimulating, creative, and enjoyable campus environment that supplements academic offerings.

Ability to learn to work in a team (2.8): Most of the respondents (49%) agreed that the training empowered participants with skills for interacting with one another. Mostly, training programmes are experiential and they encourage participants to learn teamwork skills.

Duration of training (2.9): Although 35% of the respondents indicated that the duration of the training is good, nearly a third (32%) said it is fair. Medley, et al. (2009:188) say that training and supervision of peer educators is likely to be an important factor in intervention effectiveness. They further refer to different studies that reported that peer educators received a onetime training course that ranged in length from a few days to 2 months. This implies that the duration of training was determined by the trainers as was the case with Walter Sisulu University coordinators for different student support programmes.

Overall quality of the training (2.10): More than half (55%) of the respondents in the research sample rated the overall quality of the training as good. De Jager (2002:4) sees "training as treatment" when she maintains that peer helpers gain from being facilitators to others. Learning is more efficient when students assist other students and accept more responsibility for creating the learning climate.

4.5. Respondents' perceptions of the support programmes (section 3 of the questionnaire)

Table 11: Frequency distribution according to the respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of support programmes

		AGREE	UNCERTAIN	DISAGREE	TOTAL %
3.1	The objectives of the support programmes are clearly stated	142 72%	45 23%	11 5%	198 100%
3.2	It is possible to achieve the set objectives	127 64%	56 28%	15 8%	198 100%
3.3	Assist new students to adjust to university life (e.g. to orientate first years from school to university setting)	161 81%	27 14%	10 5%	198 100%
3.4	The programmes promote personal development (e.g. students learn to know, understand and accept themselves)	146 74%	44 22%	8 4%	198 100%
3.5	The programmes help with social development (e.g. students learn correct social behaviour)	124 63%	52 26%	22 11%	198 100%
3.6	Emotional development is provided by the programmes (e.g. students learn to identify, understand and deal with emotional problems)	122 62%	60 30%	16 8%	198 100%
3.7	The support programmes assist cognitive development (e.g. improvement of academic work)	120 61%	54 27%	24 12%	198 100%
3.8	Students' sense of accountability is improved (e.g. students take responsibility for their actions)	115 58%	55 28%	28 14%	198 100%
3.9	Students develop better planning and personal organization (e.g. planning time to study and time to relax)	107 54%	71 36%	20 10%	198 100%
3.10	Individual creativity is developed (e.g. identification and use of personal strengths)	122 62%	55 28%	21 10%	198 100%
3.11	Improves ability to interact well with different levels of people (fellow students, senior students, administrative and academic staff)	127 64%	52 26%	19 10%	198 100%
3.12	Develops communication skills (e.g. students are able to present themselves verbally and non-verbally)	140 71%	42 21%	16 8%	198 100%
3.13	Develops ability to resolve conflicts (e.g. to solve arguments by consultation and not violence)	117 59%	68 34%	13 7%	198 100%
3.14	The programmes provide feedback about students' performance (e.g. continuous evaluation and report back improves a student's performance)	114 58%	57 28%	27 14%	198 100%
3.15	Programmes prepare students to compete in the career world (e.g. more successful in job applications)	129 65%	50 25%	19 10%	198 100%

In Table 11 the majority of the respondents agreed with the statements regarding their perceptions of the support programmes.

Objectives of the support programmes (3.1): The majority of respondents (72 %) agreed that the objectives of the support programmes are clearly stated. It has emerged in the literature review that a variety of peer tutoring schemes exist. Although all are founded on a strong belief in the potent efficacy of peer learning, they differ in many respects, e.g. in terms of their primary objectives, their organisational characteristics, the nature and extent of the student-student interaction, the degree to which the participants are truly ‘peers’, and the role, if any, of staff co-ordinating the scheme (cf.2.2.1).

Set objectives (3.2): More than sixty percent (64%) of the respondents agreed that it is possible to achieve set objectives. Because educational institutions are facing escalating demands to demonstrate effectiveness in how they utilize public resources, student support services therefore need to show that they make a valuable contribution to the objectives of the institutions they serve (Morrison, Brand & Cilliers 2006:656). Evaluation of effectiveness is susceptible to various interpretations and agendas (Harrison, Edward & Brown, 2001:200) therefore need to consult with stakeholders in formulating organizational goals, and to evaluate the effectiveness of activities in relation to the expectations of stakeholders (Morrison, Brand & Cilliers, 2006:659).

Adjustment to university life (3.3): A large percentage (81%) of the respondents in the research sample said that the support programmes assist new students to adjust to university life.

Reynolds-Adkins (2008:20) performed a six-year longitudinal study surveying 387 students to assess anticipated and actual adjustment to college. They focused on three areas as potential predictors of attrition: emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and academic factors. The results indicate that students overestimated their ability to adjust socially and academically to college, and underestimated their ability to adjust personally and emotionally. The findings of the study, also indicate, that personal adjustment and integration into the social life of the university are as important, if not more important than academic factors in retention.

Personal development (3.4): Nearly three quarters (74%) of the respondents in the research sample agreed that the programmes promote personal development. On this aspect Adams (2006:6) says that academic support should, on the one hand, involve more than enhancing subject content. On the other hand, academic support practices must ensure that students receive the kind of support that will lead to holistic development which includes personal development.

Personal development is a process of individual self-development and the development of others. Aubrey (2010:9) states, that at the level of the individual, personal development includes goals, plans or actions oriented towards one or more of the following aims:

- improving self-awareness
- improving self-knowledge
- building or renewing identity
- developing strengths or talents

- identifying or improving potential
- building employability or human capital
- enhancing lifestyle or the quality of life
- fulfilling aspirations
- defining and executing personal development plans
- improving [social abilities]

Personal development also includes developing others. This may take place through roles such as those of a teacher or mentor, either through a personal competency (such as the skill of certain managers in developing the potential of employees) or a professional service (such as providing training, assessment or coaching) (Aubrey, 2010:9).

Social development (3.5.): The majority of the respondents (63%) said that the programmes help with social development. Van Rensburg, Landman and Bodenstein (1994: 53) describe socialising as the action that moulds the individual according to the norms and values which are accepted in the society of which he/she is a member; learning of customs and codes of conduct acceptable and customary in a particular society. According to Gouws & Kruger (1994:121) the peer group serves as a socialising agent and meets learners' needs for comradeship and friendship.

It has emerged in the literature (cf. 2.2.1) that peer tutoring, as a student support programme, has been conceptualized as a form of collaborative learning. Louw (1993:422) states that, within the peer group, peers to experiment with new roles, which help them to develop effective social

functioning. The peer group is an important agent for socialisation, and meets needs for friendship (Douvan & Adelson, 1996:52). Peer interaction also encourages the development of a value oriented personality and thus enables students to function as members of society with positive value system (Adams, 1998:80).

Emotional development (3.6): More than sixty percent (63%) of the respondents said that emotional development is provided by the support programmes. Prebble *et al.* (2005: 65-66) maintain that in institutional adaptation with social/emotional support and academic support cells, student outcomes are likely to be enhanced when:

- The institution ensures there is an absence of discrimination on campus, so students feel valued, fairly treated and safe.
- Institutional processes cater for diversity of learning preferences (cf. 2.2.1)

Researchers found that graduate students had significantly higher frequency of thoughts on quitting their studies as a result of emotional instability. Untreated mental health problems are significant contributors to graduate student dropout (cf. 2.2.1).

Cognitive development (3.7): Most of the respondents (61%) agree that the support programmes assist cognitive development. According to the empirical study, full cognitive development requires social interaction in terms of problem solving in collaboration with more capable peers (cf.

2.2.1). The findings also concur with Adams (2006:79) findings that most programmes that support students at tertiary institutions have as one of their aims, an intention to help students maximise their academic performance so that they become learners who are critical, independent, exploratory, creative, and effective in processing, organising and communicating facts.

Accountability (3.8): More than half (58%) of the respondents said that students' sense of accountability is improved by the support programmes. According to Merrifield (1999:1), in everyday life, accountability means responsibility; it means being answerable to someone else for one's actions.

Merrifield (1999: 2) further argues that an accountability system based in the concept of mutuality has several characteristics:

- It is negotiated between the stakeholders in a process that engages all the players in clarifying expectations, designing indicators of success, negotiating information flows, and building capacity.
- Each responsibility is matched with an equal, enabling right: the right to a program that meets one's learning needs with the responsibility to take learning seriously, for example.
- Every player knows clearly and agrees to what is expected of them.
- Every player has the capacity to be held and to hold others accountable.
- Efficient and effective information flows enable all players to hold others accountable.

To be accountable, you have to define what you are trying to do, then provide evidence to show that you have done it. You can't show improvement in something unless you have defined exactly what you were trying to improve. Frequently evaluating the tutor training format, evaluating the competencies in which we train tutors, and surveying tutor satisfaction are all ways in which we ensure that we are doing what we set out to do. Tutors are vital to our program; we use such means as periodic tutor refresher sessions, conversation groups, and follow-up phone calls to help them feel part of the team (Goethel & Gabler, 1999:1).

Planning and personal organization (3.9): More than half (54%) of the respondents said that students develop better planning and personal organization. Career planning includes a person's behaviours and activities about his career in his life, and it is the continual experiences about one person's life attitude, value view, and individual will in his life, and it is also one person's change of occupation and post and the realization of working ideal. If a university student wants to succeed, he/she should make concrete and feasible plan, which is the most important basic factor of his/her success. With the plan, university students will not act blindly, the students could concretely carry out and implement their plans and approach own target step by step, even realize and exceed the target. The establishment of the plan should refer to the target which should be scientific and feasible and proper (Meng, 2010:236). Meng further maintains that though not every college students will engage in the management work after they graduate, but everyone will need management skills in their future works. Modern society has shown that the organization and management ability is not the

ability for leaders and managers, but for all people. With the development of the times, university students no matter which specialty they belong should possess not only profound professional knowledge, but certain ability of organization and management, which is not only the demand of employment, but the objective demand of the times (Aubrey, 2010: 238).

Creativity (3.10): Most of the respondents (62%) agreed that individual creativity is developed. Creativity is defined as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others. Three reasons why people are motivated to be creative (Franken, 1994:396) :

1. Need for novel, varied, and complex stimulation.
2. Need to communicate ideas and values.
3. Need to solve problems.

In order to be creative, you need to be able to view things in new ways or from a different perspective. Among other things, you need to be able to generate new possibilities or new alternatives. Tests of creativity measure not only the number of alternatives that people can generate but the uniqueness of those alternatives. the ability to generate alternatives or to see things uniquely does not occur by change; it is linked to other, more fundamental qualities of thinking, such as flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity or unpredictability, and the enjoyment of things heretofore unknown (Franken, 1994: 394).

Ability to interact with different levels of people (3.11): More than sixty percent (64%) of the respondents that partook in the research agree that the support programme improves the ability to interact well with different levels of people. Interaction between students and lecturers and students play an important role because it promotes social networks. According to Visagie and de Villiers (2010:1) the culture of the student's environment is lately more socially orientated because of the emergence of online social networks amongst other technologies. Online social networks have pedagogical potential and the consideration of these tools should not be ignored. These networks enable increased interaction and knowledge sharing between peers.

Communication skills (3.12): More than seventy percent (71%) of the respondents said that the support programmes develop communication skills.

Good communication skills are skills that facilitate people to communicate effectively with one another. For effective communication, a sender transmits his or her message in a clear and organized form to maintain and promote the need and interest of the receivers. Importance of communication skills can never be ignored or neglected. These skills are key to executing good management skills. With good management skills, you can have a team of members who together create an ambience of open communication, concise messages, probe for clarifications, recognize nonverbal signals, and mutual understanding. Good communication involves a set of complex skills (goodcommunicationskills.net: retrieved 18 October 2010).

Academic professionals and employers acknowledge the development of students' communication skills during tertiary study as an important outcome of a degree course. The list of desirable communication skills at tertiary level varies, but usually includes written and oral communication in different modes with different audiences; graphic and electronic skills; small group, collaborative and interpersonal skills. Unfortunately, tertiary communication skills are often conflated with language, literacy and study skills, all of which are too often seen only in deficit terms (Tapper, 1999:1).

Some of the first year university students, particularly from rural areas, enter university with inadequate communication skills. The university teaching language is most of the time their second or sometimes their third language. That implies that students might be at risk of poor academic performance not because they lack potential, but because the language is the barrier. Participation in interactive student development programmes therefore enhances communication skills development.

Conflicts (3.13): Almost sixty percent (59%) of the respondents agreed that the support programmes develop the ability to resolve conflicts. Education is generally seen as heavily influenced by culture and hence values of that culture, but it also creates its own cultural practices so it is not surprising that when two educational systems meet, conflicts occur (Galligan, 2005:27). Different values/beliefs, expectations and student support programmes' rules might be possible causes for conflict.

Performance (3.14): The majority of the respondents (58%) said that the support programmes provided feedback about students' performance.

Provision of appropriate feedback in a timely, relevant and interpretable manner is critical to the use of student ratings as a formative evaluation tool in the improvement of teaching effectiveness (cf.2.2.1).

Career world (3.15): More than sixty percent of the respondents (65%) agreed that the programmes prepare students to compete in the career world. A good career choice is important because many times jobs are lost due to people being unhappy with three things: travel time, schedule, and dislike of certain job duties. In order to ensure that your career is something you will stick with, you should first take into consideration these three important issues (Higinbotham, 2002:1).

According to Reynolds-Adkins (2008:23-24), research indicates that the severity of client concerns is increasing. The primary goal of institutions is to foster student success. The higher an institution's level of commitment to students is (that is, how well the institution is able to provide help and support) the higher is retention. Students who are retained increase the revenue of the university and students who stay in school and graduate are more likely to find gainful employment.

4.6. Respondents' perception of satisfaction (section 4 of the questionnaire)

Table 4.12: Frequency distribution according to respondents' satisfaction with the effectiveness of the support programmes that are offered at their institution

		Frequency	%
1	Satisfied	132	67%
2	Not satisfied	66	33%
	TOTAL	198	100%

Table 4.12 depicts that the majority of the respondents (67%) were satisfied with the effectiveness of the support programmes. The effectiveness of institutional support programmes depend on developing and sustaining a framework of organisational behaviour. Berger (2000) cited in Prebble *et al.* (2004: 68) developed a framework of organisational behaviour that comprised five dimensions in which people in organisations interact with students. A collegial dimension focused on collaboration, equal participation and consensus. Berger's trawl through evidential literature enabled him to synthesise his five dimensions in 10 recommendations. Of these 7 appear relevant to this proposition:

- Provide students with information and clear lines of communication about campus goals, values, policies and procedures.
- Provide a campus environment characterised by fairness toward students.
- Provide a balance between structure and responsiveness.
- Provide students with advocates.

- Build shared meaning through authentic symbols that are used with integrity.
- Understand the nature of the organisational environment on campus.
- Assess student perceptions of organisational behaviour on campus
Berger (2000) cited in Prebble *et al.* (2004: 68).

A number of studies further explored organisational behaviour in relation to student outcomes, specifically their retention and persistence. A number of desirable behaviours were identified. A key behaviour is for institutions to establish and publicise their unique identity. Tinto (1993: 144), for example, basing a whole set of recommendations on empirical research, argued that “...institutions must not only ascertain the goals and commitments of entering students, they must also discern their own goals and commitments”.

4.7. Summary

This chapter focused on the presentation of results and the analysis of the data. The data was presented, analysed, interpreted and discussed. The next chapter presents conclusions, recommendations, limitations and the summary.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the results of the data were presented, analyzed, interpreted and discussed. In this final chapter a summary of the previous chapters will be given. Recommendations, limitations and a final remark that emanates from the study will be presented.

5.2 Summary

5.2.1. Statement of the problem

This study investigated the effectiveness of support programmes offered by universities with special reference to Walter Sisulu University. In the literature study and through the empirical research it was established that, for an effective and successful holistic student development, different student support programmes are necessary. Academic, social, emotional, physical and financial support need to be effectively addressed in order to meet students' needs. Student development practitioners require being adequately equipped for the efficient and effective provision of the student support programmes.

5.2.2 Literature review

The Higher education system is globally charged with a responsibility to promote effective learning and prevent learning breakdown. Some of the challenges faced by students who access the Higher education system are financial, emotional, social, cultural and academic under preparedness. It is therefore essential that support mechanisms which aim to break down the barriers to access, retention and success be developed and provided. Early identification, assessment and intervention are crucial for learners who need support with their learning and development.

Universities provide a variety of student support programmes. The provision of efficient and effective student support programmes requires collaborative approach in order to enhance throughput rates and prepare graduates who are ready for the workplace. The findings of this study show that students prefer support that involves more than enhancing academic skills. Financial support, personal support, resources as well as security while pursuing their studies ensure development in the fullest sense. Some of the examples of student support programmes include supplemental instruction, extended programmes, foundation programmes, academic counselling, language support programmes, study skills, mentoring programmes and peer helping/education programmes as well as many more.

Compulsory as well as voluntary academic support programmes aim to assist under-prepared students and students from poorly resourced senior secondary schools cope with university academic work. Less strict

admission requirements in order to provide opportunities for students who would otherwise not be able to access higher education demands that different academic support programmes be offered. Some academic support programmes, instead of identifying students at risk and compelling them to attend, identify risk courses and invite all students to take advantage of the prepared programmes for student retention and throughput.

The advantages of some of the academic support programmes like the extended curriculum programmes are that:

- they are credit bearing;
- they offer students alternative access to disciplines;
- they cater for students from disadvantaged backgrounds without moving them entirely from the mainstream;
- they create additional time and space to include essential background knowledge and develop the required skills.

Peer support programmes play an important role in assisting both the mentors and the mentees. While the mentees benefit from being assisted by their peers, the mentors also gain facilitation skills, leadership skills, communication skills, interpersonal as well as organizational skills that are relevant for the world of work. Without the peer mentoring programmes, first year students would find the university alienating in various ways. Some of the first year students, if they are the first generation from their families to access higher education, would experience:

- difficulty adjusting to tertiary;

- challenges interacting with fellow first year students, senior students and staff members; and
- challenges dealing with multicultural university environments.

Student mentoring therefore plays a crucial role in assisting first year students adapt and succeed at university.

Emotional support is essential to overcome the prevalence of mental health needs among students. Stress related problems significantly affect students' emotional well-being and therefore indirectly affect their academic performance. Emotional instability has been found to be one of the reasons for dropping out before finishing studying. Biases and stigma against using mental health services may contribute to lower utilization by tertiary students. Cultural factors may also serve as barriers against accessing these very crucial support services.

Social/cultural support programmes are important because when students arrive at university they sometimes find their socialization or cultural beliefs and values contrary to the university particular cultural habitat. Students who do not possess the requisite cultural capital might find difficulty integrating because of the different frame of reference. Institutional culture is therefore acquired experientially. The social support programmes assist with helping the students in need acquire the untaught, heuristic knowledge that forms part of the institutional culture. Social networks are important for achievement of successful student outcomes.

Financial support is crucial because it assures students' stability. Financial aid matters for university access. Financial confidence does not only contribute to one's ability to finish university studies, it also plays a vital role in the emotional well-being of the students' university life. Financial stress greatly contributes to emotional distress.

From the literature review conducted for this study, it can be deduced that, South Africa, as a global participant, expects the end product of the formal education system to be globally competent. If South African institutions for Higher Education strive to produce globally competent, holistically developed products for the world of work, they need to constantly evaluate their student support programmes. The outcomes would be support programmes that:

- Focus on quality service delivery.
- Sensitively address disparities among different groups.
- Enable students to achieve to their fullest potential.

5.2.3 Planning of the research

This study utilised a questionnaire, constructed by the researcher, as a data base. The questionnaire was aimed at the Walter Sisulu University senior students who assisted the programme coordinators in rendering the students support programmes. The information sought for in this investigation was not readily available from any other source and had to be acquired directly from the respondents. When this situation exists, the most appropriate source of data is the questionnaire, as it is easily adapted to a variety of situations.

The aim of the questionnaire was to obtain information regarding the participants' perceptions of the rendered students' support programmes at Walter Sisulu University concerning, *inter alia*, the following aspects:

- Students' perceptions of existing student support programmes.
- The extent to which facilitators are prepared to offer the student support programmes

5.2.4 Presentation and analysis of research data

The purpose of chapter 4 was to discuss the data collected from the questionnaire completed by 198 respondents who participated in the different support programmes and to offer comments and interpretations on the findings. At the outset, an explanation and description was provided as to the methods employed in the categorisation of the responses and the analysis of the data. This was followed by calculating the data in percentages, known as relative frequency distribution. This was done in order to clarify the presentation of data in that it indicates the proportion of the total number of cases which were observed for a particular question. The findings from the frequency distributions were analysed.

5.2.5 Aim of the study

The researcher formulated specific aims (cf. 1.4) to determine the course of the study. These aims were realised through the literature study, together with an empirical survey consisting of a structured questionnaire. Questions that the study sought to answer were answered. On that basis, certain recommendations are now offered.

5.3 Limitations of the study

- The fact that the study is a case study of Walter Sisulu University is a limitation because it is not generalizable.
- A second potential limitation of this study involves the sampling method used and the subsequent sample that was obtained. A convenience sample of trained students assisting in rendering the evaluated support was used. The majority of the student body, for whom such support programmes were rendered, were not included. It is possible that response bias was present such that the trained student assistants who responded would have been systematically different from the support programmes recipients, whose perceptions were not evaluated, resulting in a non-representative sample.
- Another limitation was the fact that the study utilized a questionnaire thus the data are limited to the respondent's responses to the questions

in the questionnaire. The questions might have been probably biased or loaded in one direction.

- A further limit relating to the questionnaire might have been that respondents understood questions differently. Conducting interviews with each respondent would have overcome the limitation of only using the questionnaire. However, for practical reasons (time and financially), interviewing each respondent would not have been possible.
- In section 4 of the questionnaire, the respondents who were not satisfied with the existing support programmes were requested to suggest how such programmes could be improved or suggest the introduction of new programmes. Responses were not relevant to questions and were therefore not considered.
- An additional limitation with this current study, as with most Social Science Research, is the potential of researcher bias. There is generally a risk that the attitudes or belief systems of the researcher might influence outcomes with regard to selection of variables.
- Time and financial constraints limited the study to the students who assisted in providing the support programmes instead of including both the recipients and the service providers, thus limiting a possibility for generalization.

- A lot of questionnaires were discarded for different reasons. Some respondents did not complete some sections of the questionnaire. Some respondents participated in more than two support programmes, the researcher had not anticipated for participation in different portfolios. Those questionnaires were therefore not included.
- Another limitation was that the study generally evaluated the effectiveness of support programmes rather than evaluating the effectiveness of a specific support programme.

5.4 Recommendations

In the light of the study conducted, the following recommendations can be made:

- The effectiveness of the support programmes should be individually evaluated. An example would be to evaluate the effectiveness of a Peer Wellness Mentoring Programme. That study would provide results specific to Peer Wellness Mentoring instead of generalizing on all student support programmes. This is probably because of the fact that different support programmes have different requirements.
- There is also a need to investigate the effectiveness of the student support programmes from the recipients. A comparison of different samples, for example, from a first year students groups versus a post

graduate student group would probably yield significantly different results from the outcomes of the present study.

- It would also be necessary to do an investigation where the service providers (coordinators of the different student support programmes) would reflect on the support programmes they provide.
- It would also be useful to do a comparative study using two or more institutions of higher learning to establish if there would be significant differences between the different student support programmes.
- A study to investigate preferred support programmes would also provide service providers with a better understanding of the students' needs.

5.5 Further research

(1) Motivation

The research has shown that the effectiveness and continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of student support programmes at university is crucial for the students' success. The collaborative effort of all the service providers is also very important. It is, however, common knowledge that many students

do not utilize the support programmes for a variety of reasons. Factors such as stigmatization and discrimination against some of the support programmes are factors that can cause non utilization which could lead to poor performance.

(2) Recommendation

The recommendation is that further research of a quantitative and qualitative nature be undertaken pertaining to the effectiveness of student support programmes at universities. Due to the diversity of conditions under which students find themselves at universities it is necessary that research studies be conducted to find suitable ways to assist students successfully orientate to university life, be retained and succeed.

5.6 Criticism

Criticism that emanates from this study includes the following:

- It can be presumed that some respondents in the research sample formed their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of support programmes at university from the media. The probability therefore exists that these respondents indicated what should be an effective support programme and not what is really happening at university.

- The purposively selected research sample comprised only senior students participating as mentors to the other students at Walter Sisulu University. Dissimilar responses might have been elicited from either the recipients of the student support programmes at Walter Sisulu University or from other universities.
- The non inclusion of consumers of the student support programmes.

5.7 Final remark

The aim of this study was to obtain the perceptions of trained students' facilitators on the effectiveness and level of preparedness for different student support programmes. It is hoped that this study will prove useful to the student development practitioners, providers of student support programmes, coordinators and facilitators thereof.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM THE DIRECTOR FOR RESEARCH

Walter Sisulu University
Centre for Counselling, Special Needs and Development
Zamukulungisa Heights Site
Private Bag X6030
Mthatha
5099

Tel: (047) 537 0001ext 214
Fax: (047) 537 0169
Cell: 082 528 7415
E-mail: kntakana@wsu.ac.za

01 October 2008

The Director for Research
Walter Sisulu University
Nelson Mandela Drive, Mthatha campus
Private Bag X1
Mthatha
5117

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS
AS SUBJECTS**

I ask permission to conduct research using student leaders as subjects. Student leaders who are willing and available from all WSU campuses, i.e. Mthatha, Butterworth, Buffalo City and Queenstown will be requested to complete the questionnaire. I am currently registered with the University of Zululand doing a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. One of the requirements for the qualification is a complete dissertation where I am expected to conduct research. My research topic is "Effectiveness of support programmes at a tertiary institution".

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your consideration of this matter.

Yours truly,



K.N. Ntakana (Mrs.)
(Counsellor)

APPENDIX B

**LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM STUDENT
AFFAIRS DIRECTORATE
[MTHATHA CAMPUS]**

Walter Sisulu University
Centre for Counselling, Special Needs and Development
Zamukulungisa Heights Site
Private Bag X6030
Mthatha
5099

Tel: (047) 537 0001ext 214
Fax: (047) 537 0169
Cell: 082 528 7415
E-mail: kntakana@wsu.ac.za

01 October 2008

The Acting Dean of Students
Student Development and Support Services
Walter Sisulu University
Nelson Mandela Drive, Mthatha campus
Private Bag X1
Mthatha
5117

Dear Mrs Mzwakali

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS
AS SUBJECTS**

I ask permission to conduct research using student leaders as subjects. Student leaders who are willing and available from all WSU campuses, i.e. Mthatha, Butterworth, Buffalo City and Queenstown will be requested to complete the questionnaire. I am currently registered with the University of Zululand doing a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. One of the requirements for the qualification is a complete dissertation where I am expected to conduct research. My research topic is "Effectiveness of support programmes at a tertiary institution".

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your consideration of this matter.

Yours truly,



K.N. Ntakana (Mrs.)
(Counsellor)

APPENDIX C

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM HEADS OF CAMPUSES [BUTTERWORTH, BUFFALO CITY, QUEENSTOWN]

Walter Sisulu University
Centre for Counselling, Special Needs and Development
Zamukulungisa Heights Site
Private Bag X6030
Mthatha
5099

Tel: (047) 537 0001 ext 214
Fax: (047) 537 0169
Cell: 082 528 7415
E-mail: kntakana@wsu.ac.za

01 October 2008

The Head of campus
Walter Sisulu University
Buffalo city campus
East London
5219

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS
AS SUBJECTS**

I ask permission to conduct research using student leaders as subjects. Student leaders who are willing and available from all WSU campuses, i.e. Mthatha, Butterworth, Buffalo City and Queenstown will be requested to complete the questionnaire. I am currently registered with the University of Zululand doing a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. One of the requirements for the qualification is a complete dissertation where I am expected to conduct research. My research topic is "Effectiveness of support programmes at a tertiary institution".

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your consideration of this matter.

Yours truly,



K.N. Ntakana (Mrs.)
(Counsellor)

Walter Sisulu University
Centre for Counselling, Special Needs and Development
Zamukulungisa Heights Site
Private Bag X6030
Mthatha
5099

Tel: (047) 537 0001ext 214
Fax: (047) 537 0169
Cell: 082 528 7415
E-mail: kntakana@wsu.ac.za

01 October 2008

The Head of campus
Walter Sisulu University
Queenstown campus
Queenstown

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS
AS SUBJECTS**

I ask permission to conduct research using student leaders as subjects. Student leaders who are willing and available from all WSU campuses, i.e. Mthatha, Butterworth, Buffalo City and Queenstown will be requested to complete the questionnaire. I am currently registered with the University of Zululand doing a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. One of the requirements for the qualification is a complete dissertation where I am expected to conduct research. My research topic is "Effectiveness of support programmes at a tertiary institution".

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your consideration of this matter.

Yours truly,



K.N. Ntakana (Mrs.)
(Counsellor)

Walter Sisulu University
Centre for Counselling, Special Needs and Development
Zamukulungisa Heights Site
Private Bag X6030
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5099

Tel: (047) 537 0001ext 214
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01 October 2008

The Head of campus
Walter Sisulu University
Butterworth campus
Butterworth
4960

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS
AS SUBJECTS**

I ask permission to conduct research using student leaders as subjects. Student leaders who are willing and available from all WSU campuses, i.e. Mthatha, Butterworth, Buffalo City and Queenstown will be requested to complete the questionnaire. I am currently registered with the University of Zululand doing a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. One of the requirements for the qualification is a complete dissertation where I am expected to conduct research. My research topic is "Effectiveness of support programmes at a tertiary institution".

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your consideration of this matter.

Yours truly,



K.N. Ntakana (Mrs.)
(Counsellor)

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

QUESTIONNAIRE

*The effectiveness of support programmes
at tertiary institution*

Mrs Ntakana
January 2009

Dear Respondent

At present I am engaged in a research project towards my MEd (Masters in Educational Psychology) degree at the University of Zululand under the supervision of Prof M S Vos and Dr S Govender. The research is concerned with the “Effectiveness of support programmes at University”

As student leaders in different portfolios, you participate in different support programmes where you promote the vision of the institution to produce globally competent graduates. I have therefore taken the liberty in asking you to please share your views about the effectiveness of the support programmes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information will be regarded as CONFIDENTIAL and no personal details of any respondent/student will be mentioned in the findings, nor will any of the results be related to any particular respondent.

We deeply appreciate your co-operation in this research project.

Yours sincerely



.....
Mrs Ntakana

.....
Date

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE RESPONDENT

1. Please read through each statement carefully before giving your opinion.
2. Please make sure that you do not omit a question or skip a page.
3. Please be totally frank when giving your opinion.
4. Please do not discuss the statements with anyone.
5. Please return the questionnaire after completion

Kindly answer all the questions by supplying the requested information in writing, or by making a cross (X) in the appropriate block

SECTION 1: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1.1 My gender is?

Code

Male		1
Female		2

1.2 My age in completed years as at 2008-12-31:

Code

Age group		
18 – 20 years		1
21 – 25 years		2
26 – 30 years		3
31 – 35 years		4
Older than 35 years		5

1.3 Marital status

Code

Marital status		
Single		1
Married		2
Divorced		3
Widowed		4

1.4 Academic classification

Code

Full time student		1
Part –time student		2

1.5 Year level

Code

Year level		
1 st year		1
2 nd year		2
3 rd year		3
4 th year		4
Other please specify		5

1.6 Faculty

	Code
Faculty	
Business & Law	1
Science & Engineering	2
Health Sciences	3
Education & Humanities	4
Other, please specify	5

1.7 Portfolio

	Code
SRC	1
Academic Society	2
Residence Committee	3
Organizational Leader	4
Peer Helper	5
Peer Educator	6
Orientation & Registration Assistant	7
Supplemental Instruction Leader	8
Class Representative	9
Other, please specify	10

1.8 Campus (site)

	Code
Zamukulungisa	1
NMD (Nelson Mandela Drive)	2
Buffalo City	3
Butterworth	4
Queenstown	5
Other, specify	6

1.9 Home language

SiXhosa	1
SiZulu	2
SiSwazi	3
SeSotho	4
SeTswana	5
English	6
Afrikaans	7
Other, please specify	8

SECTION 2: TRAINING (INDUCTION)

The questions in this section require your personal views/opinions/perceptions about how you were equipped for the service (support) you are rendering / have rendered.

		POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT
	Code	1	2	3	4
2.1	Relevance of the content (e.g. does the content address the student's needs and problems)				
2.2	Presentation style (e.g. are the methods of presentation effective)				
2.3	Participant interaction (e.g. do students actively take part in the training programmes)				
2.4	Relevance of materials provided (e.g. do the training materials address the problems)				
2.5	Competence of facilitators/trainers (e.g. are facilitators adequately equipped to offer the programmes?)				
2.6	Relevance to your personal life/ development (e.g. does the training help you to know yourself, understand and accept who you are).				
2.7	Ability to apply your creativity (e.g. does the training encourage participants to use their strengths/potential to achieve support programme objectives)				
2.8	Ability to work in a team (e.g. does the training empower participants with skills for interacting with one another)				
2.9	The duration of the training is sufficient				
2.10	Overall quality of training (e.g. does the training specifically empower/enrich participants to effectively contribute toward the goals of the support programme)				

Is there is any aspect of the support programme you feel that needed to be attended to? Please specify a maximum of three (3) only

.....

SECTION 3: EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

The questions in this section require your personal views/opinions/perceptions about the support programmes that are offered for the university students.

		AGREE	UNCERTAIN	DISAGREE
	Code	1	2	3
3.1	The objectives of the support programmes are clearly stated			
3.2	It is possible to achieve the set objectives			
3.3	Assist new students to adjust to university life (e.g. to orientate first years from school to university setting)			
3.4	The programmes promote personal development (e.g. students learn to know, understand and accept themselves)			
3.5	The programmes help with social development (e.g. students learn correct social behaviour)			
3.6	Emotional development is provided by the programmes (e.g. students learn to identify, understand and deal with their emotional problems)			
3.7	The support programmes assist cognitive development (e.g. improvement of academic work)			
3.8	Students sense of accountability is improved (e.g. students take responsibility for their actions)			
3.9	Students develop better planning and personal organization (e.g. planning time to study and time to relax)			
3.10	Individual creativity is developed (e.g. identification and use of personal strengths)			
3.11	Improves ability to interact well with different levels of people [fellow students, senior students, administrative and academic staff]			
3.12	Develops communication skills (e.g. students are able to present themselves verbally and non-verbally)			
3.13	Develops ability to resolve conflicts (e.g. to solve argument by consultation and not violence)			
3.14	The programmes provide feedback about student's performance (e.g. continuous evaluation and report back improves student's performance)			
3.15	Programmes prepare students to compete in the career world (e.g. more successful in job applications)			

SECTION 4:

Taking in consideration the support programmes that are offered at your institution please indicate if you are satisfied or not with the programmes.

	code
Satisfied	1
Not satisfied	2

If you are not satisfied please suggest:

- how the existing support programmes can be improved; and/or
- the introduction of new programmes.

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Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire