Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.

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Contents

ABSTRACT

The worrying existence of incidences of student retention, poor pass rates and an increase in repetition rates is a cause for concern for institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The problem of student retention is not new in our institutions of higher learning. Support structures, strategies, and policies need to be developed for different academic and social challenges that students face daily.

This study explores the need for academic support at Rhodes University; it also explores the internal and external problems that students face, the perceptions and experiences of students on academic support available to them. The study implemented a narrative research approach implanted within a qualitative research framework. Data was collected through a questionnaire, and narrative interviews. Tinto's Student Integration Model was used to analyse the data in this study and was supplemented by Louw's conceptual framework model and Swail's Geometric Design of Student Persistence. These three models position the student experience as the foundation for academic support programmes and development.

The study argues that as long as effective and adequate academic support is lacking, students will continue to experience difficulties in completing their studies. The findings from the study reveal that at present, Rhodes University provides support to students who are in extended studies. However, this support system disadvantages many students, notably those not in the extended studies programme. As a result, such students are not supported through strategies and structures that extended studies students receive. Furthermore, the data generates internal and external problems that student face daily, as a result, the findings showed that there is a need for academic support at Rhodes. The study recommends that Rhodes University must establish an academic unit that will provide academic support to all students registered in the university.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This thesis examines the need for academic support programmes at Rhodes University It does this by examining the internal and external problems that students face. The perceptions and experiences of extended studies students on academic support services available to them. In addition, it explores the perception of the student body more broadly as well as academic staff, as to the need for academic support at Rhodes University. There is a specific focus on questions of redressing the apartheid legacy, issues of access and justice, higher education transformation and the articulation gap from basic education to higher education. Therefore, this thesis seeks to establish whether academic support programmes can be used as a tool for a successful academic career when every student is being given academic support instead of focusing on previously black disadvantage students.

The thesis also seeks to establish to what extent one stops needing academic support. To do this, the study will also consider Tinto's student integration model, Swail's geometric model of student persistence & achievement model and Louw's conceptual framework. These three models position the student experience as the foundation for programme needs assessment and programme development. The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief introduction to the thesis, including the broader context for the research, the thesis objectives, and methods.

1.2. Context of the research

The issue of student retention also referred to as persistence was addressed by student services advocate and educator Vincent Tinto. Tinto's ground-breaking article, written in 1975, *Dropout from Higher Education,* was the causal agent for more than 25 years of student retention dialogue among education professionals (Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto (1975), retention statistics have overwhelmed institutions of higher education for the last century. In South Africa, student retention statistics have been at the 50% mark, which means half of the students entering higher education fail to realise their dreams and aspiration (Tinto, 2012: 3). On the other hand, Watson Swail (2004), an inventor of a geometric framework for student retention, emphasised that low student retention rates in institutions of higher learning create a costly and problematic issue (Swail, 2004). Universities globally and in South Africa are struggling to recognise the problems associated with student retention. These universities are in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of a variety of current student support programmes, besides this university, leaders are also exploring different approaches to grow completion rates. Empirical

studies are important to justify and validate the utilisation of academic support programmes as one of the many areas that may increase student retention. Several academics and theoreticians, past and present, have expressed frustrations with the lack of a solution to solve this problem that has been investigated for some time. Endless research has been conducted to discover factors that affect student retention. Books, articles, and dissertations have been written, all to understand and improve programmes and policies to keep students moving in the direction of successful accomplishment of their academic goals, but still, in the 21st century, higher institutions of learning are facing issues of low graduation rate, and students dropping out.

Rhodes University is among the many universities in South Africa that provide academic support for previously disadvantaged students, in a form of extended studies (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 1). The programme has been providing academic support to students who do not have the initial points needed for mainstream programme and are from previously disadvantaged high schools. Studies show that not only previously disadvantaged students need assistance, but a large number of the student body require this academic support (Maphosa, 2014; Malehlohonolo, 2005; Mantsha, 2016; Prebble, 2004). Many students are left hanging because they do not necessarily come from disadvantaged schools but they find university challenging. These studies (Maphosa, 2014; Malehlohonolo, 2005; Mantsha, 2016; Prebble, 2004), have been conducted about the importance of this academic support programme. There is a lack of information concerning students who may not come from previously disadvantaged schools but are struggling academically and the impact of academic support programmes in assisting students in fulfilling their academic goals.

1.3. Significance of the study

This research may be of significance to academic support programme planners who need data to justify an existing programme or to validate programme development. It can also be of importance to many students who are struggling academically and do not know about academic support programmes available to them. The study will encourage and challenge the university to work together with other student service programmes to enhance the effectiveness of the student support programmes. Students who are part of the extended studies support programme at Rhodes University have not been effectively evaluated as to their perception of the programme; this might effectively provide a platform where students who are in the mainstream can collaborate with them on the student retention programmes. Furthermore breaking the dichotomy between students in the mainstream programme and extended studies

will bridge a divide of differing perceptions and work on the two groups' strengths and contact points. The study may offer insight and add to the body of knowledge as it relates to student's academic needs, retention, and attrition. The results may also be useful to student affairs programme planners who are considering initiatives to further meet students' academic needs. Furthermore, the findings of this research may be useful in the justification for funding of future academic support.

1.4. Goals of the research

In this context, the main objective of this thesis is to explore the need for academic support at Rhodes University. The study will be informed by the following secondary goals:

1. Exploring internal factors that affect students at Rhodes University.

2. Exploring external factors that affect students at Rhodes University.

1.5. Research Methods

The fieldwork required deep engagement with Rhodes university students and lecturers to understand their perceptions of academic support programmes at Rhodes University, because of this; a qualitative research methodology was used mainly involving semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire as the main instruments of data collection. A qualitative framework requires a study of phenomena in their natural surroundings, attempts to make sense of and understand experiences in terms of the meaning that people bring to them (Moen, 2008: 56).

Narrative research is the study of how human beings experience the world. Narrative researchers gather these stories and write narratives of experiences (Moen, 2008: 56). Data analysis included the creation of codes and concepts from the raw data (from interview tapes/transcripts) with an 'open' mind. The analysis of data included continuously matching the evolving codes and groups with the data and with new data precisely collected to make an understanding of the phenomenon that was carefully grounded in the data (Denscombe, 2010: 106). The data was obtained from questionnaires and recorded interviews, which were transcribed, analysed and coded. A coding system was used to group the findings into themes for analysis and interpretation. Transcription for conversation analysis and interpretation method was used. The researcher wrote up the results.

A Self-administered questionnaire survey was used with a random sample of 26 mainstream students majoring in sociology. The random sampling method assisted the researcher to cull a smaller sample size, as the number of sociology students would have made it impossible to administer questionnaires to every student. Furthermore, fifty-one (51) individuals were interviewed, and the groups of interviewees were as follows:

1) Interviews were conducted with 45 students who were in the extended studies programme, these student were spread across commerce, humanities and science faculties. Semi-structured questions (see Appendix C) were formulated which specifically addressed the issues that the students were experiencing. A random sample was drawn from each faculty, with fifteen (15) students per stream. This method was used to cull a smaller sample size from the larger group of the extended studies students. The extended studies students spoke about their own experiences and provided their perspectives on the extended studies programme and the academic support they are receiving from the programme.

2) Interviews were also conducted with 3 lecturers and 3 tutors from each of the faculties referred to above. Again, semi-structured interviews were formulated (see Appendix D and E) that specifically addressed the perspective of lecturers and tutors on the need of academic support at Rhodes University. Purposive sampling was used to sample 3 lecturers and 3 tutors. This method was used because it's a form of a non-probability in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria, which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research.

This diverse sample is important to capture the sheer diversity in the perceptions of students who are part of an academic support programme, those who are not and lecturers who offer these academic support programmes. The interviews were conducted mostly in English. All the interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and typed out in English. The data analysis involved qualitative thematic analysis, including coding and categorising the empirical evidence and then identifying themes pertinent to addressing the main and secondary objectives.

In terms of research ethics, I explained the purpose and the content of my research to participants and all the participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B). All the

interviews were voluntary, and no one was coerced to address any question asked. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that all writings that emanated from the study within this application would ensure the anonymity of the participants, and that student identities would be protected in the sharing of the data collected. Anonymity is guaranteed in that the participants' student names and student numbers will not be used in any writings arising from the study. Interviewees could withdraw from the interview any time without reasons given. The interviews took place at the sociology department and permission to conduct these interviews was first granted by the office of the Registrar and the Human Resources Office at Rhodes University.

1.6. Thesis Outlines

Chapter 2, of this thesis is the contextual chapter for the study of academic support programmes. Using literature on academic support in institutions of higher learning, this chapter presents the crisis in the department of basic education, and an overview of the higher education. Academic support globally and in South Africa is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3, focuses on analysing the narrative interviews and questionnaires and expressing a discussion. This chapter confirms my objective for doing a narrative study of understanding students' academic experiences, through passing on the voices of student experiences that are not told. This study may afford a sense of hope to those reading it. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research goals and sub-goals namely: To explore the need for academic support at Rhodes University. To explore the internal problems that affect students at Rhodes University. To explore the external problems that students face at Rhodes University. This is done by exploring the perceptions and experiences of extended studies students on academic support available to them. Exploring the perceptions that academic staff in the extended studies programme and tutors have concerning academic support at Rhodes University. How students suggest the current student support programmes at the institution be improved as a strategy decrease failure and dropouts rates.

Chapter 4, the findings are synthesised in order to respond to the research question and the aim and objective of the study. I first summarise the findings and interpretations from the analysis of the data. Thereafter, I relate the findings to previous research findings, as discussed in Chapter 3. This is followed by recommendations for future research and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY: FORGOTTEN PROMISES.

2.1. Introduction

Academic readiness and academic support are topical issues in higher education. The study is conducted against the backdrop of under-preparedness of students, high attrition rate, the notion of first-generation students, admission of minorities in institutions of higher learning and massification in higher education. In South Africa, specific key factors that inform this study include redressing the apartheid legacy, issues of access and justice, higher education transformation and the articulation gap from basic education to higher education. The argument that this thesis is putting forward is that academic support programmes ignore quite a number of students who are susceptible to several forms of unpreparedness and adaptability. Such students are not supported through conformist support approaches and structures and consequently feel excluded from ordinary support services. Students in mainstream who are at risk when it comes to their studies use services accessible to them in so far as they are aware of these, regardless of doubt about the success of these support services. Students experiencing other types of risk deal with their problems through relationships with acquaintances', family and religious support. This kind of support contributes to retention and throughput.

As soon as a student leaves school and enters institutions of higher learning, they must be given support to succeed, which institutions of higher learning are in many instances failing to do. Using literature on academic support in institutions of higher learning, this chapter presents the crisis in the department of basic education, and an overview of the higher education landscape in South Africa. The chapter engages with different definitions of academic support and literature that is more specific to academic support globally and in South Africa. Finally, Tinto's student integration model, Louw's conceptual framework and Swail's geometric design of student persistence and achievement are discussed. These are frameworks that will inform this thesis and how it relates to the academic support in higher institutions of learning.

2.2. The Education System in South Africa

A broad overview of the education landscape in South Africa is discussed in this section, starting from basic education to higher education. The reason why basic education is discussed is because of the arguments that the crisis in the South African basic education system is affecting the progress of students who enter higher education institutions. The argument is that

the department of basic education in South Africa is not preparing students for higher education, as a result there is an articulation gap between the department of basic education and institutions of higher learning. Students are not fully equipped with the necessary skills that are needed in higher education institutions. These students face problems in institutions of higher learning. Problems that are faced by the department of basic education are discussed below.

2.3. Basic Education in South Africa

2.3.1. Internal Problems in Basic Education

Frequently termed as 'dysfunctional', South Africa's educational landscape still suffers from the enduring effect of the apartheid system which systematically excluded the majority the of Black people to the point of creating a substandard academic system (Bantu education) that prevented them from attaining quality education (Bloch, 2009; Chisholm, 2011; Maddock & Maroun, 2018; Spaull, 2013. Spaull (2013: 6) categorizes the system of basic education as entailing two sub-systems, the dysfunctional system' which is responsible for 75-80% of the population and the 'functional system' which is responsible for 20-25% of the population.

According to Spaull (2013: 436) the dysfunctional system which is comprised of black schools is characterised by poor school management and accountability. The absence of a culture of learning, high teacher absenteeism, inadequate learner-teacher support materials, slow curriculum coverage, poor learner performance and extensive grade repetition which is often a precursor to high drop-out rates. The functional system, mostly white model C schools, however, consists of good school management, adequate infrastructure, and resources, discipline, a strong culture of learning as well as high levels of learner performance and retention (Spaull, 2013: 437).

Van der Berg (2008; 145) agrees with several academics who write that policies aimed at operationalising resource equity on a national and provincial level have, unfortunately not transformed to a reasonable development in the performance of students in mostly black schools. This is supported by the work of Taylor & Yu (2009: 54), which confirmed that while the accessibility of resources can do much to relieve the pressure brought about by socio-economic circumstances on education outputs, the administration of these resources can have more of an influence on school performance. In this regard, Taylor & Yu (2009: 55), suggest that the distribution of resources on its own can do little to overcome other limitations which

bring about the performance and resource inequity among schools and in the wider society. Also, Sheperd (2011: 8) has suggested that, even in light of the "increase in the resources transferred to the historically disadvantaged schools, inequalities in South Africa's education system persist". In the democratic South Africa, the government has focused on developing an education system that recognizes and caters for the diversity of all learners in terms of race, class, language, gender, ethnicity and religion (De Clercq, 1997; Broom, 2004; Probyn, 2006; Lazarus, Daniels & Engelbrecht, 2007; Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2014;) in reality we see a different scenario. Modisaotsile (2012: 1) insists that it is apparent that more attention must be dedicated to the quality of education. Quantity should, however, also be well-thought-out when most of those learners who pass matric do not meet the minimum requirements for university entry.

A study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2015 ranked the South African basic education system the 75th worst education system in the world (Reddy, 2006: xiv). In another study Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the authors conducted a quadrennial test which was written by 580,000 pupils in 57 countries, that test had South Africa at the bottom of its various rankings. South African children are behind those in poorer parts of the continent. A shocking 27% of pupils who have attended school for six years cannot read, compared with 4% in Tanzania and 19% in Zimbabwe. After five years of school, about half cannot work out that 24 divided by 3 is 8. Only 37% of children starting school go on to pass the matriculation exam, and just 4% earn a degree (Reddy, 2006: 19).

The department of basic education in South Africa is still in crisis, even though the government is allocating a huge portion of the national budget to the education sector. Education spending has been on the increase for years, from R31.1 billion in 1995 to R59.6 billion in 2002, and to R105.5 billion in 2007. In 2019 Minister of Higher Education Naledi Pandor welcomed Finance Minister Tito Mboweni's announcement that the department of education will continue to get the biggest share of South Africa's 2019 budget, with the department of basic education assigned R262.4 billion in the next financial year (The Citizen, 2019). Despite this the department of basic education is still facing problems and the quality of education is very low compared to other countries in Africa (Modisaotsile, 2012: 2). Some of the problems that the department of basic education is facing include unskilled teachers, a shortage of resources in education, despite the fact the government is allocating a huge portion of the money to the

sector. These problems continue to affect the standard of education. Without resources and qualified teachers, it is impossible to have a fully functional sector (Modisaotsile, 2012: 2).

Education analyst such as Jonathan Jansen and Mamphele Ramphele raised concerns about the pass mark requirement set for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) qualification; these concerns are raised against the background of the quality of the education system (Wedekind, 2013: 1). There is a view that the pass mark is 30% and that it is too low because it indicates that learners have only understood 30% of the material. That the expectations are poorer than they used to be, or that low minimum pass marks set lower expectations. From 2011 up to now, the criticism has shifted from the focus on the pass mark, with public academics such as Jonathan Jansen and Mamphele Ramphele and others proposing that the 30% pass needed in most subjects is too low, and that this engrained weaknesses into the education system (Wedekind, 2013: 11). Jansen, talking at the Umalusi Conference in 2012, went on to suggest that the pass mark be raised to 50%. This call has been constantly resonated, frequently justified on the basis that this is the level required at university (Wedekind, 2013: 11).

2.3.2. External Problems in Basic Education

Taylor & Yu (2009) reminds us that a student's background, their socio-economic status, level of distraction and the amount of help they receive at home, all play a significant part in their reading attainment and general performance in school. Shepherd (2011: 26) agrees when he writes "parent's education, parent employment, household socio-economic status and language spoken at home were the most important factors influencing performance in English/Afrikaans testing schools". These findings have been supported by various other scholars (Jukuda, et al., 2011; Modisaotsile, 2012; Grace, 2013; Spaull, 2013; Ncanywa, 2014). Spaull (2013: 436) emphasised that viewing the averages in South African education is exclusively misrepresentative and overemphasizes the educational achievement of the majority of students.

Community features such as safety and substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, for example, have been found to hinder learner outcomes (Johnstone, 2015; 9). Pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, in particular, are considered important factors limiting learner performance and, especially, learner retention (Modisaotsile, 2012: 5). In a study done by Gustafsson (2011: 15), findings demonstrated that 27% of respondents listed pregnancy as the reason for learners dropping out with 37% listing financial constraints. Various studies confirm that school violence is increasing regardless of the procedures put in place to address the problem by the

Department of Education (Fishbaugh, Berkeley & Schroth, 2003; Human Rights Commission, 2006).

The atmosphere and environment essential for active teaching and learning are more and more weakened by a culture of school-based violence and this is becoming a serious matter in the country. This suggests that teachers devote most of their time focusing on resolving problems related to school violence instead of concentrating on active teaching and learning. Other studies (Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000; Prinsloo & Neser, 2007) also demonstrate that the extent and effects of violence on teaching and learning are a nationwide burden, this is even more disturbing because school violence is ever-increasing regardless of the methods that have been introduced by the department of basic education. Harber & Muthukrishna (2000: 424) are insisting that violence is a problem in South African schools and that South Africa is a violent society. The problems related to school violence paints a bleak picture of the safety of pupils and teachers in South African schools (Prinsloo, 2008: 3).

According to Harber & Muthukrishna (2000: 424), schools in township areas are frequently targeted by gangsterism, poverty, unemployment, rural-urban drift, the accessibility of guns and the overall inheritance of violence has generated a situation where gangsters steal from schools, kill and rape teachers and students in the process. At this point, I would like to raise some objections that have been inspired by the sceptic in me. Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that the crisis in the department of basic education is a result of apartheid. The fact is the is a huge difference between historically privileged former white schools and the majority of deprived black learners who have to walk kilometres to reach school.

We are talking about students who are still subjected to mud schools, students for whom poverty is a daily reality and students who are subjected to violence. When they get to school, they are subject to poor learning materials, overcrowding, and absenteeism of teachers. The very same students are the same students we find in our institutions of higher learning and suddenly we expect better results from them. Many of these students have never been exposed to a computer and they are suddenly expected to write long comprehensive assignments, which meet the required standards, without any assistance provided by the university. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that there are black students who went through the problems discussed above and yet became successful people in our communities despite these problems.

2.4. An overview of the higher education landscape in South Africa.

The end of apartheid that resulted in South Africa becoming a democratic country played a very important role in addressing issues of social justice and creating dialogues on a range of issues. The newly elected government saturated its public policies, and particularly education policies, with the language of social justice. Social justice has always created a-significant political obligation in the long history of education struggles in South Africa (National Education Policy Investigation, NEPI, 1992).

The challenges that institutions of higher learning in South Africa are facing are not new Tinto (1975; 1987; 2005; 2006; 2014) wrote extensively about these challenges. The South African higher education was ranked 140th out of 144 countries in terms of the low quality of education system (Smith, 2013: 1009). A lack of basic resources, for example, inadequate infrastructure, and the poor socio-economic status in our communities contributes to the crisis in higher education institutions as well as in basic education. Students in universities continue to face difficulties, and what is commendable is the commitment of these students to their academic goals, in spite of significant difficulties encountered, regardless of whether they are undergraduate or postgraduate students. South African higher education is in a shocking state, with its problems of reduced stages of student retention, poor pass rate, ever-increasing dropout and repetition rates (DHET, 2012; Jansen, 2011; Van Zly, 2007). Even though importance is placed on students' support in universities, such support does not have the anticipated outcome in the face of the many problems encountered by students.

At the realm of the problems that students encounter are the socio-economic position and the basic education, which does little to prepare students for tertiary education. Students in higher learning institutions experience helplessness, due to both external and internal issues, and this frequently has had undesirable effects on the accomplishment of their academic goals (Van Zly, 2007). Letseka & Maile (2008: 2) emphasizes that "in 2005 the department of education testified that of the 120 000 students who registered in higher education in 2000, 36 000 (30%) dropped out in their first year of study. A further 24 000 (20%) dropped out during their second and third years. Of the remaining 60 000, 22% graduated within the specified three-year duration for a generic bachelor's degree". The Council on Higher Education (CHE) reports (2010; 2014; 2018) reflect similar trends as in 2000. Zoch (2013: 1) argues that students raised in poor societies by poor parents who are not educated are less likely to succeed in university as compared to students coming from wealthy communities and who have parents who are educated. CHE (2013: 33) reported that 69% of the graduates in 2010 in the historically black

universities had parents with post-matric education and 45% had no matric education. Hence, it is evident that the parent's education level and financial resources will influence the student's performance in higher education.

Confronted with deficiencies and inequalities, the basic education system is the most important contributor to the poor and racially twisted performance in higher education. (Smith, 2013; 1010) conducted a study to try to understand the preparedness of learners who are going to university, a space that is competitive and technological. Research shows that the problem is not with students themselves, but somewhat due to systematic and historically shaped features. Carrim & Wangenge-Ouma (2013: 38) believes that for higher education to work successfully in South Africa, the department of basic education has to be effective. Pandor (2006; 1) acknowledged as far back as 2006 that South Africa can no longer lose half of its students in institutions of higher learning and South Africa can no longer afford to look at the number of unemployed graduates without alarm.

South Africa has broadened access to institutions of higher learning. What is lacking is to make sure that those young men and women, whose parents struggled to send them to these institutions of higher learning, succeed at university (Pandor, 2006; Van Zyl, 2007). Scott (2012: 31) acknowledges that even though the government has invested billions of rands in increasing student's admission and in providing financial assistance, performance patterns reveal a poor return in terms of graduates. What is happening in higher institutions of learning shows the important need for the provision of student support programmes and strategies. This is in line with institutions of higher learning across the world, as revealed in policy official papers that give emphasis to the planned significance of such academic support programmes (Ogude et al, 2012: 26), and as a result, the exact circumstantial and social needs of South African students need to be taken into consideration in such programmes. There is no doubt about the impact that such programmes pose for institutions of higher learning, and this is evident in studies that express the calls of academics (Letseka et al., 2019; Ogude et al., 2012; Swail, Kuh & Seidman, 2006a; Tinto 2006).

The most important problem with the implementation of student' support is its inability to address adequately the problems leading to a lack of retention and to take into consideration the concerns of students themselves around this issue. Research developments to date on constructing student support, have a tendency of addressing the widespread "supposed" needs of students produced by an inclination to concentrate on quantitative judgments of students'

experiences rather than using qualitative research methods (Scott et al, 2007: 5). Institutions of higher learning continue to be a site of struggle, a constant reminder of how poor you are. Many students are struggling in these institutions, and academic support intervention is needed to address concerns that are identified and faced by the students.

2.5. Defining Academic Support

Numerous scholars have differing opinions on what constitutes academic support. Warren (1998) defines academic support as educational interventions with the focus of shaping the instructional process to address the learning needs of students in specific teaching circumstances (Warren, 1998: 77). Academic support programmes can be defined as institutional programmes, services, learning opportunities and interferences that: (a) enhance additional learning and personal development, (b) correct academic or personal knowledge shortfalls, (c) stop the incidence of predictable personal or academic problems, and (d) make the university experience more enjoyable (Kramer, 2003: 16). Thompson (2007: 5), adds that academic support programmes are defined as services offered by institutions to help students to complete their studies successfully. Academic support programmes are plans that are used by institutions of higher education to grow the academic attainment of students, predominantly for students who may be at risk of not finishing their academic programmes.

Numerous approaches have been established to make available extra support to students. These approaches can be applied to all levels of study (Brophy, 1998: 53). The most evident academic support programme might be tutoring. Tutoring programmes afford motivation, individual attention, direct instruction, and mistake improvement to increase students' academic skills. Mentoring programmes are a common foundation of tutoring that may also offer motivational support to students. Some students have developed small learning communities among themselves within a university for a better understanding of individual student needs. Lastly, there are some Internet-based instructional support programmes which students do on their own, to provide directed additional or remedial instruction. Irrespective of the form the extra help takes, the objective is to raise achievement and success for the students (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010).

According to Todd, who focussed on legal education (2002: 189), academic Support Programmes (ASPs) "fill a gap in the legal education system. While legal education was once a 'one size fits all' programme of instruction that paid little attention to the art of teaching and the science of learning, academic support has brought learning theory, individualised

instruction, compassion, and diverse teaching methods into the law school". Academic support programmes do differ in the sense that they can play different roles and take various forms (Todd, 2002: 192). However, what is shared amongst them is the mission of supporting and promoting social, racial, and economic diversity (Todd, 2002: 192).

These programmes are also beneficial in the creation of a supportive working community, helping students maintain their confidence, values, and self-worth in the rigorous and often alienating environment (Todd, 2002: 192). It has been noted by Todd (2002: 192) that many programmes structure their ASPs around the delivery of support to individual students particularly those students with low predictors or those facing academic difficulties. Focusing solely on those students at the bottom who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, unfortunately, tends to marginalise them. I will discuss this issue later in the dissertation.

2.6. Academic Support Globally

Student's lack of commitment to academic programmes is the leading factor of student's withdrawal from universities, especially the first year of study, which continues to be an area of concern and constant research for international institutions of higher learning. Tinto (2005: 1) demonstrates that 47% of American students do not complete their tertiary studies and that 56% leave during their first year. Currently, about 72% of Australian students complete their degree programmes. However, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (2010) also concedes that, in 2009, in Australian higher education, almost a third of all students (30.1% in the first year and 29.9% in later-year) contemplate leaving their institutions before graduation.

Academic support programmes are implemented in various universities. Globally, research on the impact of these academic support programmes are generally positive and corresponds to scholarly debates that are currently happening. Junio-Sabio (2012) completed a study where he attempted to access the relative importance of academic support services provided by the Gulf College, the outcomes of the study discovered that students find academic support programmes provided by the Gulf College to be vital. Learning depends on individual and external factors. Students are not only faced with determining their future careers, but they also must develop their individual and academic skills. Providing academic support to students has an important role in their academic success (Junio-Sabio, 2012: 19). However, Tinto (2005: 5) argues that many universities speak of the importance of increasing student retention, of promoting student success, but only a few invest in academic support programmes designed to achieve that end.

Universities must be committed for students to be successful. Universities that are committed to the goal of increasing student success, especially previously disadvantaged students seem to find a way to achieve that end, but commitment is more than just words. It is a willingness to invest the resources and provide support needed to enhance student success (Tinto, 2005: 1). I've always believed that academic support should not only be viewed as a mechanism that is designed for previously disadvantaged students only, but for all students who are struggling in different ways. Todd (2002: 190) confirms this view by stating, "Academic support programmes potentially perpetuate social, racial and economic barriers rather than performing an inclusionary role, they potentially entrench an exclusionary hierarchy. Academic support programmes continue functioning in the traditional manner that historically caused people of certain social, racial, and economic backgrounds to be excluded from academic success".

There is much evidence to suggest that there is a positive relationship between students' academic performance and the effective use of academic support systems. However, it is a matter of concern that many students either choose not to make optimum use of some or all these services or do not know how to use them effectively (Kaur, 2016: 126). Kaur's (2016: 127) makes two primary observations regarding academic support in India: students do not only require support on academic issues, but the emotional and social sides must be a priority and that academic support programmes are ignored in higher education institutions in India. The primary objective of his study was to examine student's perceptions about student support services in curriculum, infrastructure, teaching-learning process, library facilities, hostel facilities, examination and quality factors in higher education.

The findings indicated that sufficient facilities such as the library, new technologies, teaching-learning materials, methods of teaching, examination pattern should be ensured for the students to maintain the quality in higher education (Kaur, 2016: 127). In addition, Kaur (2016) emphasised that most students do not use the available resources optimally and were not satisfied with the academic support programmes available to them. This particular study shows that in some instances, students do not use the available resources and my experience confirms it. Kaur (2016) is surely right about that, but he may not be aware that in some instances students do not even know about the resources that are available to them or those resources may not exist at all. Troiano *et al* (2010) conducted a study to examine the link between college success and learning support between college students with learning disabilities. The assumption that academic support does not predict college success, was used to test the assumption that support programmes intended to support students with learning disabilities

contribute to student success. Results indicated that students who regularly attended academic support centre appointments had higher rates of success than those who did not attend or who did not attend regularly. Therefore, the assumption was rejected. These students tended to have higher grade point averages and continue to graduate (Troiano *et al*, 2010: 40). Although I support Troiano's (2010) up to a certain point, however I cannot accept his overall assumption that academic support programmes are perfect or the fact that if you are fully committed to them you are going to succeed. At some point, especially after the first year, the support may no longer be available and students still face the same problems.

This study fully endorses Tinto's (2005: 1) observation that concerns about student retention have not decreased but have grown in the past few years. Academic support programmes have developed to include resources such as advising, tutoring, and peer mentoring and academic talks for first years. While these academic support programmes have assisted some students to complete their qualifications, their long-term impact has been limited. Maybe the real significance is that most academic support programmes have done little to transform the significance quality of the academic experience for most students, especially during the critical first year of university (Tinto 2005: 1).

In addition, a study conducted by Tamuliene (2014) in Lithuanian colleges, suggests that there two kinds of student support services namely academic and non-academic. The outcomes of the study discovered first-year students' orientation programmes and language training as the most important support services for students. It was also noted that university students need psychological counselling and accommodation services. Furthermore, the results did not show any relationship between the demand for student support services among academic and vocational types of students (TimeLine, 2014: 438).

A study conducted by Thompson (2007) to determine the extent to which academically successful first-generation university students, compared to academically successful non-first-generation university students who used academic support programmes provided by the University of North Texas and to measure their perception of the benefit of these programmes. The findings of the study showed that there was no statistical significance between the use and perception of academic support programmes between the two groups, both groups used the academic support programmes provided by the university and they benefited from it. First-generation university students in this study were successful in graduation from the University of North Texas (Thompson, 2007: 46). Thompson (2007) raises what the thesis considers to be

a significant point especially in regard to the assumption that first-generation university students, especially black students are incapable of completing their studies, or the fact that when they are given access to institutions of higher learning they are bound to fail because no one in their families has a university qualification. This study rejects this assumption, families who do not have any qualifications continue to support their children in more ways than we can imagine.

Hodge's (2017) study observed the role of Student Support Services (SSS) programmes for students who persevere in college. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the services provided to participants in SSS assisted them to achieve higher grade-point averages (GPA), retention rates, and graduation rates. Student Support Services programmes are intended to support first-generation college-going, low-income, and students with disabilities, with gaining the academic and self-advocacy skills essential to persevere towards an educational goal, two-year degree completion, transfer to a four-year university, and accomplishment of a certificate programme. Services provided to students who participated in the programme included: academic tutoring, academic advising, financial and economic counseling, financial aid counseling, transfer counseling, cultural enrichment activities, workshops, mentoring, individualized personal and academic counseling, resources for underrepresented students, and disability services, to appropriate students.

This study was established upon the assumption that Student Support Service programmes affect the graduation rates, retention rates, and GPA of students. This study did show that student who uses support services do better throughout their college experience (Hodge, 2017: 76). The Guardian, (2019: 1) acknowledged that universities in England have been cautioned, they need to advance their treatment of students, after new data discovered unambiguous gaps in achievement for black students and higher drop-out rates for students with mental health difficulties or from disadvantaged backgrounds. The statistics released by the Office for Students, the higher education regulator for England, marks a change in the direction on how students from different backgrounds manage with university life, what class of degree they come out with and what they go on to do after completing their studies (The Guardian, 2019: 1). The five years of data collected by the University of Gloucestershire displays enormous differences in how universities in England admit, retain and award degrees to their students based on their sex, economic background and ethnicity, with the statistics displaying especially wide gaps in accomplishment for black students compared with other ethnicities (The Guardian, 2019: 1). While in general white students were much more likely to be awarded first-

class or upper second class degrees than black students, the office for students statistics showed that at approximately half of the universities in England, the gap between the two groups soared to 20 percentage points or more (The Guardian, 2019: 1). Among the worst offenders were Canterbury Christ Church University, where the accomplishment gap was 41 points, followed by the University of Gloucestershire, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of the West of England, with gaps of 30 points or more (The Guardian, 2019: 1). Academic support programmes continue to be researched globally because nothing has changed. Let us see what is happening in South Africa.

2.7. Academic Support in South Africa

In South African institutions of higher learning, the history of academic development (AD) is marked by three distinct yet overlapping phases; academic support, academic development and institutional development (Boughey, 2010: 4; Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004: 57). Beginning in the 1980s the academic support field was a response of universities for not producing enough black graduates in historically white institutions (Boughey, 2010: 5). This phase rested on deficiency theory, which is still the reigning discourse (Boughey, 2010; Jones *et al*., 2008; Letseka *et al*., 2009). Students were labelled as lacking in key primary skills and knowledge areas contributing to their stigmatization. Academic support was used to refer to a well-thought-out teaching activity, which was additional to the mainstream with departments setting up lectures, tutorials, and practical's, language support, foundation and skill courses (Boughey, 2010: 7). The second phase of AD was marked by academic development debates among practitioners. Here the focus became "part of the institutional transformational agenda" (Maphosa, 2014: 12). Vilakazi & Tema (1985: 30) argued "it was not the students who needed development but the universities themselves".

The academic development approach took a holistic approach in which student support was integrated "into mainstream teaching and learning through staff and curriculum development" (Boughey, 2010: 11). The third phase of AD is referred to as institutional development (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004: 57). This reflects attempts by the post-apartheid government to transform higher education in line with the demand for access, equity, and social justice. Various policies and programmes have been implemented in this regard. Some universities have since established deputy Vice-Chancellor portfolios, teaching and learning centers responsible for coordinating teaching and learning functions by implementing academic development programmes for staff and students (Maphosa, 2014: 12). Almost one in every

three students entering higher education in South Africa will have dropped out by the end of their first year of study. Under-preparedness has frequently been mentioned as one of the most shared foundations, with academics suggesting that many students lack the reading and writing skills needed to be successful in an institution of higher learning (Van Schalkwyk, 2007: 954). The number of students getting access to institutions of higher learning is increasing around the world and that has created a shift from universities being this elite structure that has to serve only a few, to a complex multi-layered diversity (Van Schalkwyk, 2007: 954).

In this regard, universities have responded by executing support mechanisms, such as tutoring, mentoring and extended studies programmes, for 'at-risk' students. Contemporary research challenges numerous assumptions on which the setting up of such academic support interventions are characteristically established (Van Schalkwyk, 2007: 954). It is one of the argument of this study that if universities focus on providing academic support to 'at-risk' students only, they are leaving a lot of students behind, and affirm what Todd (2002) argues that if this is the case academic support programmes potentially perpetuate social, racial and economic barriers rather than performing an inclusionary role (Todd, 2002: 190).

Academic development programmes have been in existence for some time now as they were introduced as additions to the mainstream curriculum (Maphosa, 2014: 11). Students who need academic support have been identified and support programmes which do not form part of the mainstream curriculum were structured and executed for these students (Maphosa, 2014: 11). There are numerous challenges with the execution of these programmes, for one the identification of a student who 'needs' support can be problematic. It can be asked, what if everyone 'needs' academic support, regardless of educational background? Academic support programmes should be an integral part of the mainstream academic curriculum in a university and should cater to everyone registered in that institution (Maphosa, 2014: 11). Academic support programmes have a significant and positive impact on universities (Prebble, 2004: 12).

The goal of academic support units is to assist students who are not prepared for higher education. Teaching and learning development units must be established in universities to support academic staff (lecturers). Such programmes must focus on the development of critical thinking skills, for both the lecturer and the student (Prebble, 2004: 12). It must be noted however, that academic support should not be limited to black students only but should be available to all students having trouble in their studies. Academic support programmes are implemented in various universities across faculties such as medicine, science, commerce, and

law. In South Africa's research on the impact of this academic support, programmes are generally positive and correspond to scholarly debates and research globally.

2.8. Academic support programmes in South Africa

Smith (2013: 1009) used a multivariate study to determine the impact of educational interventions in the first-year chemistry course at the University of Cape Town. The results suggest that educational interventions in the first year had a positive impact on students' performance compared to mainstream students in both the first and second year of study (Smith, 2013: 1009). Mokgokong (2007) undertook a study to determine the academic needs of and strategies for remedial academic support to first-year dental therapy students at Medunsa.

The findings of the study corroborate the results of other studies in medical faculties in the country, that foundation programmes had positive results for first-year students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who could not be admitted to mainstream (Mokgokong, 2007: 162). Similarly, a study conducted by McGhie (2012) on factors affecting first-year academic progress at the University of Western Cape, reinforced the study by Mokgokong (2007). The research findings were that the so-called 'disadvantaged' and 'underprepared' students benefit from academic support programmes. McGhie (2012: iii) also proposes a socially situated supportive and holistic learning approach that could help higher education institutions.

Boughey (2010: 5) argues that in the academic support phase the leading hypothesis was the element of 'disadvantage' and could be addressed independently of mainstream learning by means of special classes, for example, extended studies are there to assist previously disadvantaged students, and it so happens that almost ninety-five percent of those students are black students. A lot of literature suggests that academic support programmes are mechanisms to assist black, underprepared students. This study argues that scholars who hold this view for example Boughey (2010) and others are mistaken because this suggests that only black students are under-prepared and need support to succeed in university, which is not the case, as students have different academic struggles. This study disagrees with this view because research shows that students have different challenges, and even students from private schools struggle academically. This assertion was proved by a study conducted by Tanyanyiwa (2014: 261) who completed a sociological analysis of the provision of the extended studies programme as a means of addressing transformation at Rhodes University. This study evaluated the extent to which the Rhodes University Humanities extended studies programme is achieving its

objectives from a transformation perspective, specifically the broadening of successful participation in higher education. Specifically, the following dimensions were considered in the evaluation of the programme: assumptions underpinning the design and purpose of the programme, teaching and learning practices in the programme, student and staff perceptions of the programme, students' experiences of the programme, the validity of the programme in the broader institution, and the measurable outcomes of the programme that is retention and graduation rates of students enrolled in the programme (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 1).

The triangulation of qualitative data collection techniques provided access into the different layers of institutional relations, processes and structures, which not only affect teaching and learning in the programme, but also determine students' engagement with different academic and social aspects of the broader university. The study concluded that under-preparedness is not peculiar to extended studies students only but is common across the student body (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 1). This finding was supported by an earlier study by Drewett (1993: 93) that academic challenges which are a result of a poor basic education are not only experienced by black students. Drewett (1993) used multiple triangulations as an attempt to offer a critical evaluation of the integration strategy, which was being pursued by the Rhodes University ASP. The first stage of this process of integration involves the combination of study skills and course content, in a way that avoids the teaching of skills in a vacuum. The results were that many students and staff have expressed an awareness of the need for an integrated academic development strategy that will cater for every student (Drewett, 1993: 93).

Bitzer (2009) also used Louw's (2005) framework to establish whether there might be any indications of risk factors pointing towards academic support programmes. This was done by asking students enrolled in the three first-year modules at Stellenbosch University. The results of the study were that first-year students' level of academic and social integration has a positive influence on integration levels in other years of study (Bitzer, 2009: 226). The study further concluded that Louw's (2005) framework that accounts for students dropout at four colleges of agriculture applied to all the groups of participants in the study (Bitzer, 2009: 239). As was shown earlier, a great number of students tend to experience failure and dropout in their first year at university. Universities can and should assist first-year students to succeed (Malehlohonolo. 2005: ii). Malehlohonolo (2005) conducted a study to explore protective factors that could foster resilience amongst first-year students enrolled at the University of Western Cape. The outcomes discovered that (a) there were no important signs of difference between successful and unsuccessful students concerning overall university support (b)

students were not getting sufficient support from the university as compared to other external settings (c) the university has to place more effort into improving significant participation and high expectations for students (d) students scored high percentages on internal assets despite low external assets percentages.

The results, therefore, provide information on areas that can be further developed to enhance protective factors for all students, and thereby increase resilience and successive success (Malehlohonolo. 2005: ii). Scholars have recently articulated that institutions for higher learning seem to face numerous challenges of dealing with under-preparedness of students who register for the first time for higher education studies. The transition between school level and post-school level of the study, therefore, presents numerous academic challenges for those students. A similar study by (Ramapela, 2012) supports the argument made by Malehlohonolo (2005). In this study, Ramapela (2012) also demonstrates that universities appear to face numerous challenges of dealing with under-preparedness of students who enter universities for the first time. The change from high school to university presents various academic challenges for these students. Ramapela (2012) adds that there is a significant need to increase awareness on the current academic support programmes for students and academic departments and to implement a tracing and follow-up system of students who successfully finished these programmes, to provide further support for senior levels of study.

This study is included in the literature review because it addresses a significant part of this study, which is finding out, at what level one stops needing academic support since almost all these academic support programmes focus on undergraduate students who enter university for the first time and leaving post-graduates to find a way for themselves. Cameron *et al* (2011) conducted a study to identify student characteristics and strategies in research studies investigating retention (why students stay) as opposed to attrition (why students leave) nursing and midwifery pre-registration programmes. Academic support was significant in allowing students to continue the programme. Personal tutors were mentioned as being supportive in providing academic support (Cameron *et al*, 2011: 1375).

Students in the study described feeling speechless by the demands of academia, mostly on producing academic assignments. Students with non-traditional credentials were more likely to express distress over this phase of the programme and found support from their tutor instrumental in allowing them to cope with the demands. In the study by Colalillo (2007), students who attended academic mentoring sessions directed by members of academic staff

were more probable to stay on programme and register as nurses. Similar results occurred from the study by Sutherland *et al*. (2007) which found that students from minority groups who were provided with professional academic support were more probable to complete their programme than those without such support.

One of the mistakes that scholars make by focusing on a certain kind of students who are deemed needing academic support and others who are 'capable' of succeeding without any support is that , a lot of students are left behind. A study by (Mantsha, 2016) looking at the educational support of students with disabilities at the institutions of higher learning in South Africa, emphasised that student's educational needs still exist. There is a lack of information about the programmes that the University of Venda is offering, physical infrastructure barriers and lack of disability knowledge. This study recommends the establishment of a forum in which students with disabilities can discuss and address their educational needs on campus. Other recommendations include the following: lecturers' training, disability awareness, the setting up of an online communicating portal to increase communication between students and the university, and an online investigation evaluating lecturers' approaches and knowledge (Mantsha, 2016: iv).

2.9. Theoretical Framework

This study draws from an extensive body of literature on teaching and learning in higher education in general and in particular on academic readiness and academic support. Specifically, the study will use Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975; 1987; 2005; 2006; 2014) and is supplemented by Louw's conceptual framework model (2005) and Swail's Geometric Design of Student Persistence (Swail, 2004). These three models position the student experience as the foundation for programme needs assessment and programme development. Theoretical lenses that inform this study are discussed below.

2.10. Tinto's Student Integration Model

Tinto (1975, 1987) established an explanatory, longitudinal model of the persistence process, known as the Student Integration Model, which is founded mainly on the adaptation between the individual student and the institutional environment. The three common aspects of this model include: (a) students enter university with diverse levels of academic preparation and qualities; (b) they develop different levels of integration when it comes to social systems of the university, together with marks and approaches about their academic progress; and (c) they develop different levels of integration into a social system of the university, including how they

cooperate with peers through formal, semi-formal, and informal occurrences. Tinto suggested that if academic and social integration is positive, commitment and inspiration to continue in getting a degree are improved, and high levels of integration might counterbalance low levels of the other type for determining persistence.

Tinto (1975: 93) insists that students who persevered in institutions of higher learning did not have the same reasons for attending university compared to those who did not persevere. For example, students who attended university to look for more vocational training tended to leave the institution unsuccessful compared to those students who attend university to obtain more knowledge or arrange for a specialised profession. Tinto's model initially demonstrates that integration of a student both academically and socially were indicators of his or her ability to persist. To be successful in the search of a degree, students need to accomplish a level of commitment to their career, academic goals, and the institution (Tinto, 1975: 93). Lacking this integration, the failure to persist is to be expected.

Tinto ultimately lengthened his model of integration to include phases such as separation, transition, adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, incorporation, finances, learning, and external obligations for commitments. An article written by him (1975), opened debates in higher education for more than twenty-five years on student retention and persistence in higher education. Even his framework has been criticised and reviewed by Tinto himself, and his framework remains the foremost sociological theory of how students navigate through higher education institutions. More than a century later students are still experiencing issues of retention and persistence, as they were when Tinto first published his student integration model.

Tinto's (1975: 95) student integration model consists of six characteristics: (a). Pre-entry attributes (how the student develops before matriculation to post-secondary education, about family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling); (b). The student's intentions, goals, and commitment; (c). How the student experiences the institutional system (academic performance, interaction with staff and faculty) and the social system (extra-curricular activities and peer group interaction); (d). How integration is taking place (both academic and social integration); (e). The student's intentions, goals, institutional commitment and external commitments and (f). The outcome (decision by the student to remain or to depart).

Figure 1.Tinto's Student Integration Model (Adapted from Tinto: 1975; 95).
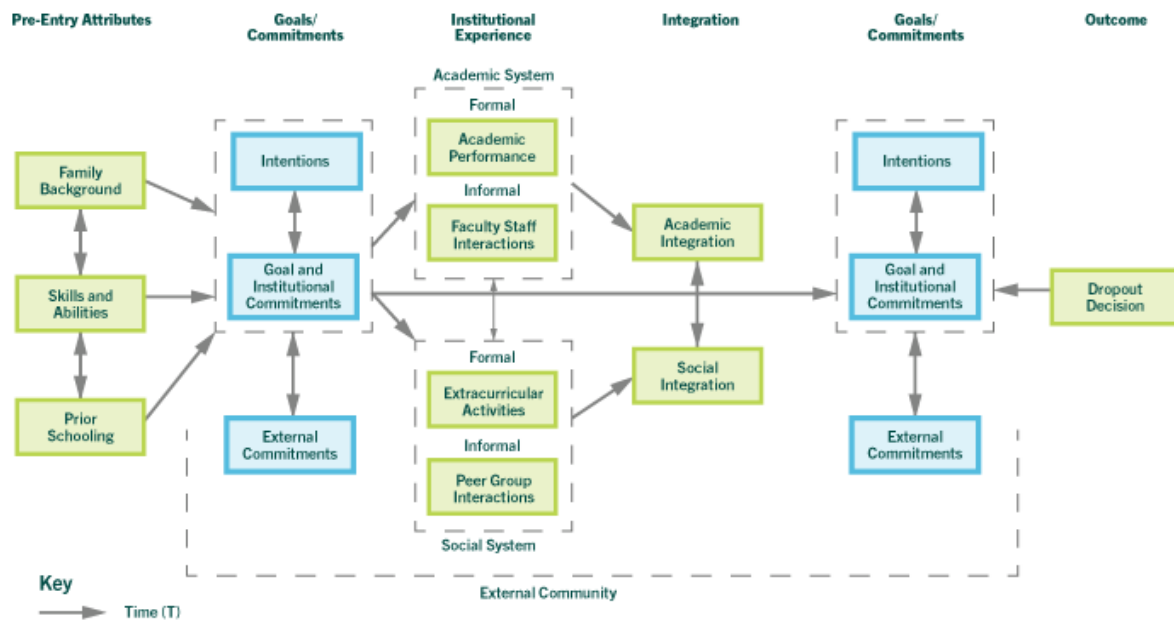
The model advocates that students come to institutions of higher learning with background qualities (e.g. race, secondary school achievement, and academic aptitude, family educational, and financial contexts). The characteristics lead to initial commitments, to both the goal of graduation from university and the precise institution attended. These initial commitments are assumed as manipulating academic performance and interactions that affect the student's integration. The greater the individual's integration, the greater his or her commitment to the institution and goals of graduation (Tinto, 1975: 89).

Tinto bemoans universities approach to addressing issues of academic readiness and support He argues:

> 'Many colleges speak of the importance of increasing student retention, and promoting student success, yet quite a few invest substantial resources in programmes designed to achieve that end. They treat student success as one more item to add to the list of issues to be addressed by the institution, what Parker refers to as the 'add a course' strategy. They have done little to change the essential character of the university, to alter the prevailing character of student educational experience and address the deeper roots of student attrition' (Tinto, 2005: 1).

Tinto (2005: 2014) and McCubbin (2003) advance the notion of developing learning communities, particularly in the first year of study, to teach and provide support, thereby promoting student learning to succeed. Tinto is of the view that the match between student's individualities and the institution outlines student's goals and commitments, which, in turn,

25

encourage persistence (Tinto, 2014: 6). Tinto (1975; 1987) adds value to understanding the importance and applicability to developing appropriate academic support interventions. In this sense, therefore, academic support becomes an important tool for student's success. Tinto states that providing access to students without support is not opportunity. Without academic, social and financial support, many students do not complete their programmes of study (Tinto, 2014: 6). If institutions of higher learning admit students, they become obligated to provide as best as they can, the support needed to translate the opportunity access provide to success. Building on this Tinto postulated that, it is the responsibility of institutions to shape students' success (Tinto, 2014: 6).

Tinto's model remains one of the most influential models that have been revised beyond its original. Despite the fact that Tinto's integration model has improved understanding about integration and persistence, one of the weaknesses of the model, is its lack of ability to predict possible dropouts at an early stage (Webb, 1988: 215), as a result, it has not supported researchers and other officers in instigating early intervention approaches. Another criticism is the fact that, the model did not take the interaction of students who stay off-campus into consideration, for examples academic and social factors such as finance, family obligations, and external peer groups. Some scholars argued that academic integration does not play a very important part of the success rate of students. This study argues that the critiques that these academics are levelling are addressed by Tinto's model, for example Tinto's integration model does mention how students experience the institution about the academic system and the social system (extra-curricular activities and peer group interactions and he also mentions the student's intentions, goals, institutional commitment, and external commitments.

Finally, Tinto does not categorise students according to their accommodation status (whether they stay off-campus or on-campus). The argument that this study makes is that social integration into academic life is a very significant aspect of the learning process based on the social nature of learning. The most significant contribution for me is that Tinto's model is based not only on the connection between the student and the institution but also recognises the social embeddedness of learning. Tinto's (1975: 95) student integration model's six characteristics also supports the point that this thesis is putting forward. That learning is socially constructed and comprises a multifaceted and self-motivated process.

2.11. Louw's conceptual framework model

Louw (2005) conducted a study in four different universities in South Africa where he looked at discontinuation of studies at agricultural training institutions in the Western Cape and the probable causes and possible strategies for student support. His study pointed to several fundamental factors that contribute to first-year students' isolation and their leaving of higher education without achieving much, at least not academically. Louw (2005) supports Tinto's (1975) student integration model, as the model that gives an all-inclusive view of students learning and dropout rate, which is also the conceptual framework that this study draws upon. Tinto's model assisted Louw (2005) to arrive at a more developed framework of the causes that influence student's failure and dropout rate. Louw (2005) uses Tinto's model as an explanatory framework in his study on first-year student dropout rates at four South African higher institutions of learning. Building on Tinto's model, his study recognizes eight pointers in the academic dimension and four social dimensions that might affect student leaving institutions of higher learning.

The academic indicators are:

(a). Unclear study goals of students and, related to this, lowered levels of motivation; (b). Unrealistic student perceptions of what higher education studies require; (c). Substantial gaps in students 'foundational and declarative knowledge; (d). Inability of students to adjust academically, mainly due to the difference between expectations at the schooling and higher education levels of study; (e). Perceived wrong programme choices, mainly related to poor information or weak student counselling; (f). Language difficulties, particularly in cases where the language of instruction was different from the students home or school language; (g). The level of difficulty or complexity concerning the course and learning materials; and (h). Access granted to students who did not meet the required access requirements (Louw 2005: 267).

Indicators in the social dimension are:

(a). Inadequate financial provision, accommodation, and facilities; (b). Institutional information to students that was inadequate or was seen as inadequate; (c). Student involvement in unhealthy social activities, such as excessive drinking and partying; and (d). Student's inability to manage their time effectively and efficiently. Based on these risk indicators, Louw proposes a conceptual framework (presented below in Table which points to three sets of factors that could potentially contribute to early student departure (Louw, 2005: 267).

Figure 2. Louw's conceptual framework model (Adapted in Louw: 2005: 267-270).

Student background factors	Student factors	Institutional factors
Self-perceptions of competence Historical experiences School support Academic support Self-confidence Learning style Study skills Options and choices	**Academic factors:** Perceived low level of academic integration Learning backlogs Heavy workload Inadequate study skills Lacking foundational knowledge Lack of commitment Lack of confidence **Social factors:** Perceived low level of social integration Academic/social imbalance Language difficulties Financial constraints Lack of family support	**Academic factors:** Inadequate learning support Inadequate language and communication in classes Large classes Inadequate facilities Inefficient administration Skewed access measures Inadequate teaching Type of assessment Inadequate/wrong course information **Social factors:** Limited opportunities Limited facilities Inadequate accommodation

Louw (2005: 267) concludes his study by proposing that proper consideration to these risk pointers could decrease the dropout rates and early departure from institutions of higher learning in the future. Where Tinto's student integration model did not recognize some factors clearly, and in some instances the features overlapped. Louw's conceptual framework not only acknowledged and made clear the issues that could be a challenge to students in the learning process, but he also gathered the features that are connected in a way that recognises the social nature of learning by classifying the social dimension for the student and the institution. At this point, Louw's conceptual framework supplements Tinto's model, and it represents the factors that could efficiently inspire student learning.

2.12. Swail's Geometric Design of Student Persistence and Achievement

Swail's Geometric Design of Student Persistence and Achievement Model makes use of Tinto's model of Student Integration to demonstrate, in a geometrical design, factors, which affect the student, experience. The model allows us to discuss the dynamics between cognitive, social and institutional factors, all of which take place within the student. This model works to help describe the persistence process and the delicate balance between student resources (what the student brings to campus) and the institutional resources (what the campus provides for the student). The strength of this model is its ability to help institutions work proactively to support student persistence and achievement (Swail, 2004: 13).

The model situates student experiences in the epicenter of a triangle with numerous impacting factors at each side and at the base of the triangle (Swail, 2004: 13). Cognitive and Social factors are on each side of the triangle of student experience with institutional factors at the base of the model. Cognitive factors include academic rigor, quality of learning, aptitude,

content knowledge, critical thinking ability, technical ability, study skills, learning skills, time management, and academic-related extracurricular activities (Swail, 2004: 14). Social factors include financial issues, educational legacy, attitude toward learning, religious background, maturity, social prior qualifications; drop out decisions, individual attributes social integration debt, counseling, medical, events, etc. Family attributes, coping skills, communication skills, attitude toward others, cultural values, expectations, goal commitment, family influence, peer influence, and social lifestyle (Swail, 2004: 14). At the base or foundation of the model are various institutional service components, namely, financial aid, student services, recruitment and admissions, academic services, and curriculum and instruction (Swail, 2004: 22).

Figure 3.The Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement (Adapted in Swail: 2004)
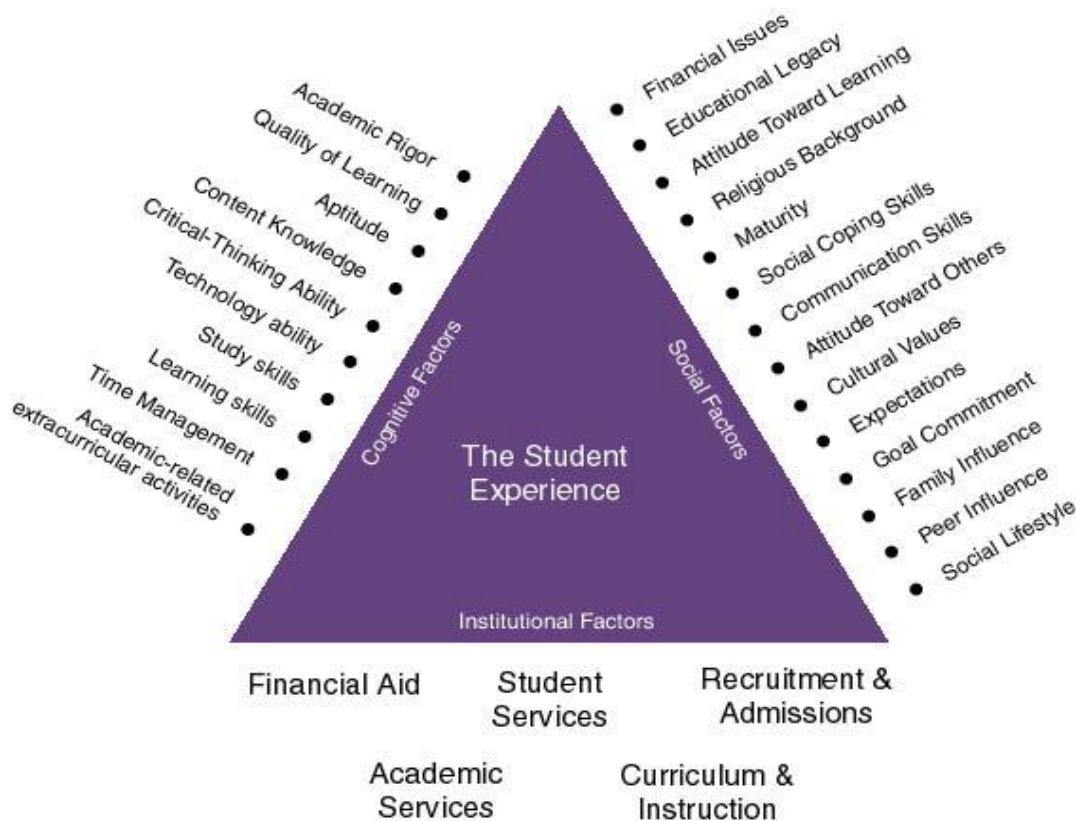
The geometric model is different from others by placing the student at the centre of the model, rather than an unresponsive component to a flow chart or structural equation model. Based on Swail's (2004) model, not often does a student come to an institution of higher learning with a well-adjusted triangle. It is likely for a student to arrive as having two sides of equal length. Students frequently need support programmes to transform into the regular student by the end

of their university careers. As a result, the consistency of a student's triangle is based on, the ability of the institution to deliver the appropriate level of support services to counter the strengths and weaknesses of the student (Swail, 2004: 18). These types of institutional services are comprehensively detailed in figure 3 and emphasise the important role of several services on campus, including financial aid, student services, recruitment and admissions, academic services, and curriculum and instruction (Swail, 2004: 18). The triangle is a reminder to the academic staff of their part in supporting students and highlights the significance of supporting students in joining all three factors together.

Drawing from Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975), Louw's conceptual framework model (2005), Swail's Geometric Design of Student Persistence (Swail, 2004) and literature on academic support, the study generates internal and external problems that affect students at Rhodes University. The internal problems included language capabilities, academic skills, academic performance, under-preparedness, poor time management, student's workload, consultation with lecturers, student goal commitment. External challenges, which included socio-economic factors, parent's education level, parent's income and employment status. These factors are used in the study. According to the three theorists above these internal and external problems can be used as a determinant of student's success.

2.13. CONCLUSION

From this chapter, it can be established that academic support programmes play a very important role in the success of students in institutions of higher learning. It was also evident that these academic support programmes do not cater for every student but is only limited to students perceived to be coming from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a need for academic support programmes that will cater to every student regardless of their backgrounds because students' have different challenges. I have outlined my preferred theoretical framework which is Tintos student integration model (1975) supported by Louw's (2005) conceptual framework model and Swail's (2004) Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement because these models provide internal and external factors that affect students' academic performance in universities. By implementing these models, this does not suggest that I have come to any foregone conclusions about the academic support programmes. Rather, the critical framing opens up for a line of question which does not take academic support programmes as a given.

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, data collected from students and academic staff at Rhodes University was analysed. The qualitative result were analysed in thematic sequence and reported thematically according to the following themes: At the outset, demographics of student's profiles, internal problems which included language capabilities, academic skills, academic performance, under-preparedness, poor time management, student's workload, consultation with lecturers, student goal commitment. External challenges, which included socio-economic factors, parent's education level, parent's income, employment status. Other themes that were evident and are also discussed in this chapter are: tutors perspectives; the extended studies programme; the first impression of the extended class; experiences of the extended studies students; lecturer's perspectives; academic support at Rhodes University and the assistance required by the students.

3.1.1. Students Demographics Profile

First year students	60%
Extended studies students	40%
First generation students	60%
Students who attended public schools	70%
Students who attended semi-private schools	50%
Students who attended private schools	20%
Parents employed	50%
Parent unemployed	50%
Students who depend on social grant	30%
Students who are funded by NSFAS	70%
Students financing their studies	20%

All the participants who participated in this study are in the Humanities faculty and are all doing Sociology as their Major subject. 60% of the participants are first-year students and forty percent are second years and up to honours. 60% of the first years include students who are in

the extended studies programme. 70% of the students who took part in the study stated that they are the first in their families to come to institutions of higher learning, which make them first-generation students. 50% of the participants attended public schooling which are schools were learners do not pay school fees and usually the school were located in rural areas or townships, 30% attended semi-private schools which are government schools, such as Victoria Girls high school or Graham College in formally white (and largely still) suburbs, subsidised by the state, but which charge substantial fees which enable them to hire extra staff and provide facilities 20% of the learners who participated in the study were from private schools which are schools like St Andrews or Kingswood, where the parents pay for everything. The lack of facilities, good teachers, and a curriculum that does not prepare learners for university is illustrated by one interviewee:

> "The work is very different from high school, the pressure and workload and adjusting are very difficult. Without lack of guidance, back to back tutorials, too many assignments and different tests in a single day this is difficult me as a student who attended public school and was never prepared enough" (interview, Sakhile, 2019).

Fifty percent (50%) of the participants stated that their parents are employed and 50% stated that their parents are not employed. However, it is evident that although parents are employed, their income ranges from R 5000-R200000 monthly and this is attributed to the type of job and level of education the parents have. Thirty percent (30%) stated that they rely on social grants as a way to survive which is the only income the household receives every month. Seventy percent (70%) of the students stated that NSFAS pays for their fees while 20% have bursaries and the ten percent are financing their studies through their parents. There is no guarantee that students who are financed by their parents are necessarily better off than those on bursaries. As Busi (Interview, 2019) says:

> "My parents are paying for my studies and I am not happy because like we have to compromise some things like a lot of things at home. For instance, at home, we only eat twice. Like, eat breakfast and supper. We do not have lunch. In addition, because my mom is a hall warden we eat at the dining hall. So we like and there is some stuff like in terms of toiletries and stuff. You have to wait for the end of the month. Like even if my stuff is finished we have to share".

Contrasted with Abongile (Interview, 2019):

> "I don't want to sound negative or anything, honestly I feel like I am privileged because there are people that are not on NSFAS and they are not getting an allowance, they probably have other bursaries that doesn't pay for the toiletries R 275 is not a lot (both laughing). However, I make use of it. It helps".

3.2. Internal Problems

Internal challenges are usually contained within the individual. These challenges may be obstacles to learning, they cannot be recognized easily when a student registers for a course, but traces of the obstacle can be identified when students underperform. Tinto (1975; 1987; 2005; 2006; 2014), Swail (2004) and Louw (2005) raise this challenges, for example language capabilities, academic skills, academic performance, under-preparedness, poor time management, student workload, consultation with lecturers and student commitment. The theorists mentioned these problems above as issues that may have a huge impact on students' academic success at an institution of higher learning. These challenges are discussed below with reference to the theorists mentioned and literature that is discussed in the previous chapter.

3.2.1. Language capabilities

Language skills have been recognised as an important internal factor that poses a challenge that influences academic success. Louw (2005: 270), argues that language difficulty, particularly in the case where the language of instruction is different from the students home language can negatively affect the student in institutions of higher learning were English is the language of instruction. The language skills needed in universities are very influential especially the language of instruction and the language of the specific discipline, the capability to communicate the meaning constructed from text reading and writing skills are significant, especially when completing an assignment. Most students, who come from areas where language development was not improved at school, face challenges when it comes to performing well and succeeding in their studies. Since students do not read English texts for leisure or academic purposes, their writing ability is affected. Almost all students said they find tertiary level reading and writing very difficult.

According to the findings, students of a different race went to different schools and were taught in different languages 60% of the students stated that English was the most dominant language of instruction and 40% of the students stated that they were taught everything in their mother language. This was evident when most Nguni speaking students said they face challenges regarding firstly, understanding English as a language and reading and writing the language, it is not that they are not intelligent or do not possess the academic acumen, but rather they are struggling with the interpretation of the language. They must first translate English to their home language for them to understand, and then reply which takes up time. Some of the

students can read and write from excellently to fair, although the majority are struggling. Interviews with students who were taught in their home language expressed it as follows:

> "It's not that I don't understand the school work at times, but the big words used in the coursework, do not only make it difficult for us to read but also understand, and this leads to some of us failing" (Interview, Sibu, 2019).

> "Coming from disadvantaged school also has an impact on the level of reading, writing and thinking critically, I can say so myself as I'm struggling to read my weekly required readings, I get lost within a reading, and on, the essays I have been getting lower marks due to my poor writing and linking of coursework, I really struggle" (Interview, Lucky, 2019).

Contrasted with a student who was taught in English and had this to say:

> "Having to be around different language speaking people and the subjects being taught in only English forces one to know and understand the language and be able to think critically, but I still struggle when it comes to writing in English even though it was a language of instruction at school" (Interview, Busi, 2019).

In this study, it was evident that both sets of students who used English as the language of instruction in high school and those students who used the home languages as a language of instruction, were also struggling when it comes to language skill, because there is no longer a culture of reading in our society. People spend hours on their phones and social media instead of reading books. Furthermore, language barriers are experienced by most first-year students who come from backgrounds and high schools that did not encourage language skills. The language skills needed in higher education are reading, writing and speaking (Mgqwashu, 2009: 736).

Jackson (2005: 205) argues that the language skills needed in higher education are confidence in the language of instruction, including the language of specific disciplines, the ability to construct meaning from text and the ability to communicate the meaning being built from the text. Due to a lack of understanding of the language of instruction at an institution, a student can encounter reasoning challenges. This is because of the student's incapability of understanding information due to unfamiliar concepts presented in a language they cannot understand (Mgqwashu, 2009: 736). Academic reading and writing skills should be presented during orientation. The need to support students' academic language skills in university, in different courses should be introduced and managed by the course-lecturer. Lecturers who lecture first-year students must be involved in discussions and develop academic literacy in their course and present it in their lectures and tutorials. Currently first and second-year students that participated in the study are not exposed to a general academic literacy course established by the university, except for students who are in the extended studies programme,

of which there are a few of them. The majority of the students specifically first and second-year students need workshops or courses that will equip them with mastering the language of instruction when it comes to reading and writing it in an academic manner. These workshops must be provided by the university.

3.2.2. Academic skills

Swail's (2004: 13), model situates student experiences in the epicenter of a triangle with numerous impacting factors at each side and at the base of the triangle, one of those factors is academic skill. Swail argues that students must have the academic skills to succeed in university, those skills include reading, writing and reasoning skills. Students can receive academic support from external people and within the environment, they find themselves in. In an institution of higher learning, academic support can come from lecturers, tutors, and the department. In the interviews conducted, students were asked if lecturers provided them with the required academic skills for example, reading, writing and reasoning skills. It was also noted that students enter institutions of higher learning without the basic academic skills needed for higher education learning. Some feel like the lecturers do not provide them with the necessary required academic skills. These were their responses:

> "Lecturers think that high school teachers have already given us academic skills for the hectic fast-paced life of the university which is not the case. That we are capable enough to go through university which is not true because a lot of students are struggling" (Interview, Bongani, 2019).

> "Lecturers will tell you which prescribed readings to complete, they assume that we already know everything and therefore just briefly explain, so they don't give us any academic skills" (Interview, James, 2019).

Findings show that out of the 70 students that were interviewed 45 students were not adequately prepared by the department of basic education. All the 45 students responded in similar way as those quoted above. University demands good writing skills so that students can submit assignments and write examinations. Schofield & Sackville (2010) argue that the teaching space should make students conscious of thinking like an academic in a specific discipline, how to access information through reading and how to write thoughts on paper in an academic manner. The academic staff will then need to perfect the anticipated academic process in their field by encouraging students to read and construct clear writing pieces.

Students showed great concern about their academic skills and stated that lecturers do not equip them with any academic skill, but they just explain their lecturer slides and expect students to

go and do the necessary readings, not taking into consideration the different abilities of students when it comes to reading an academic text and understanding them. In the opinion of many of the students, lecturers just assume that because students are at Rhodes University they have the skills needed to succeed which is not usually the case. Students stated that writing is the most difficult part because they are expected to write long essays from the first year of and for many of them that is the first time they are exposed to writing an essay because they never wrote essays in high school.

3.2.3. Academic performance

According to Kaur (2016: 126), the first term of academic learning during the adjustment period is significant in retaining students this is because during the first term students are not yet familiar with the structurers of the university and the support that is available to them. Kaur (2016: 126) emphasizes that many student students are not even aware of support mechanisms that the university provides. Louw (2005: 45) argues that when students have substantial gaps in their foundational and declarative knowledge that affects their academic performance. The inability of students to adjust academically is mainly due to the differences between high school and university, and this affects the academic performance of students.

Students ranked themselves according to performance comparing their high school performance and their performance at Rhodes University. It was then evident that the majority of the students are underperforming at Rhodes University as compared to high school, and their scores have dropped drastically. First-generation students are not familiar with the new learning environment, academic progress or administration processes. I refer to first-generation students because these students are usually the first students to attend universities in their respective families. Interviews were conducted with students who had parents that have formal education contrasted with students with parents who have no educational background. This was done to establish the impact family education background has on their academic performance. This is how student with family members that had formal education responded:

> "My mother has a diploma, no father present, brothers are still in school, and the rest of the extended family never had money for varsity, they went to college, every time I experience challenges when it comes to my academics my mother assists me" (Interview ,Vusi, 2019).

> "Yes, Parents and most family members got the opportunity to attend college, hence I don't struggle a lot when it comes my studies. I sometimes send my assignments to my brother to check them" (Interview, Mbonisi, 2019).

Contrasted with students who their parents have no education background:

Both my parents grew up in a big family that was not able to send them to tertiary. They grew up in the township, and as much as one would like to study further, there had to be someone that worked to provide for the family, and mom was that person, don't know the dad's side, So I have to learn everything as I go" (Sanele).

"Yes, I am the only child in the family and the only one to attend university. For this encourages me to work hard, even though it is difficult, I sometimes have to ask my friends to help me with assignments" (Interview, Sihle, 2019).

Findings showed that there is a difference when it comes to students whom the families have gone through the higher education system. Those students ranked themselves high when it comes to academic performance compared to students who are first to attend university in the families who ranked themselves as average. This was because students who had family members that went through institutions of higher learning received academic support from them, especially when it came to assignments and the first-generation students had to rely on themselves and that was evident in how they ranked themselves academically.

3.2.4. Under-preparedness

A number of studies have confirmed that students from previously disadvantaged schools are still not fully prepared for higher education (Zaaiman, 1998; Taylor, Fleisch, & Shindler, 2007). Even though the Apartheid laws were ended after South Africa became a democratic state, many previously disadvantaged schools still lack infrastructure and resources to produce students sufficiently prepared for higher education. These schools are still under-resourced schools, and under-qualified, inexperienced teachers are still seen as the primary cause for the lack of skills and poor performance of students at university (Essack & Quale, 2007; Taylor, Fleisch, & Shindler, 2007). Most of these students end up having to drop courses for various reasons such as workload, bad career choices, lack of guidance, loss of interest, personal family issues, performance, and financial constraints. Poor basic education leads to the student to experience problems in their higher education studies (Tinto, 1975: 126).

These were responses when they were asked if they had dropped any subjects or course since the beginning of the year:

"I dropped English because the workload was too much and I was never fully prepared at school on how to deal with heavy workload so I had to drop the subject" (Interview, Jack, 2019).

"I had to drop Linguistics, it was very difficult, and a bad choice and I couldn't cope with the workload, it was too much compared to high school and our teachers never told us that university will be this hectic" (Interview, Usivile, 2019).

> "I took Sociology as one of my subjects, I had to drop it due to the readings we had, they were a lot, and in high school we hardly had reading exercises, due to shortage of textbooks in the school" (Interview, Sihle, 2019).

The findings showed that poor basic education results in students' under-preparedness for the academic demands in university. According to Nel *et al* (2009), under-prepared students are those who do not have the required information and capabilities on which a university course is designed. Most schools in South Africa, especially in the rural areas or townships, are underperforming; this leads to most students entering universities unprepared. First and second-year sociology students have a challenge because of their disadvantaged educational backgrounds, and this should be addressed in the first-year modules, especially during orientation.

Under-preparedness can be reduced when lecturers provide a well-structured orientation programme. A programme that will equip the student with information about different courses. Other internal factors can lead one to not only failing but also dropping the subjects, these can also include lecture attendance, lecture consultations and studying before their lectures. Many lecturers constantly emphasise the need for reading and preparedness in order to get the most out lectures and the findings show that the majority of the students attend lectures every day, sometimes consult lectures to enhance their understanding but the are some who do not. Very few students attempt to study before lectures. This showed that these students are not prepared for higher education, because a student who is prepared for higher education knows that attending lecturers, and studying are important in the academic project.

3.2.5. Poor Time Management

Time management was recognised as a problem to learning by the students in the studies conducted by Louw (2005). This suggests that, even though students are anticipated to apply effective planning and time management methods, in reality the contrary is happening. It seem as if the students (especially new first-year students) are not capable or they do not know how to plan and management their time effectively. Time management is one of the required skills that one must have in an institution of higher learning. A large number of students come to Universities lacking this skill (Trueman & Hartley, 1996: 199). Lack of time management results in them losing sight of their academic goals and spending time on unnecessary activities on campus. Students tend to have no working plan and end up studying to pass. Some memorize the work and not learn to understand but rather to pass and move on with life. Swail (2004: 18), argues that time management is one of the problem that students come across in institutions

of higher learning. Students find it hard to balance their social life and their academic life and that affects their academic performance (Swail, 2004:18). The majority of the students wait for the work to pile up and end up studying under pressure and that affects their academic performance.

Time management skills are essential skills to be successful in any institution of higher learning. The absence of these skills can result in students losing motivation in their academic goals and spending time on pointless activities on campus. Boughey (2002) recognised a skill such as time management, as one of the skills first-year students are missing when they enter universities. Participants pointed out during the interviews how the lack of time management skills is a challenge to them. Being a full-time student, assisting, working on weekends to support with fees can influence academic performance. The non-academic events are time-consuming and can be a problem, causing students to not focus on their studies at the university. These were some of the responses from the students:

> "Time management and like structuring a proper schedule for my everyday life is a challenge, because when I was in school everything was structured for me.Now I can watch a movie even when I have school work to do" (Interview, John, 2019).

> "For me is procrastination sometimes I can procrastinate for a long time I can sit there and look at my work and be like okay let me take a 20 min break then it goes to 3 hours and is affecting my studies, because I spend more time on social media rather than on my books" (Interview, Sihle, 2019).

> "University is overwhelming for me, with independence that I have; it's hard for me to balance, my social life and my academic life" (Interview, Sibu, 2019).

It is evident that there is a serious need for time management workshops at Rhodes University. Students feel overwhelmed by the new environment and find it hard to balance their studies with their social life and that affects their academic performance. For example, 80% of the students interviewed for this study, said that time management is one of the main reasons as to why they struggle academically. This is of great concern because most of the students who drops out, fail due to the inability to manage their time. If the university does not provide this skill, students will continue to face challenges academically and that will affect the graduation rates.

3.2.6. Student's workload

The transition from high school to varsity is never easy. The amount of work that was covered in high school and what the students are experiencing in higher education institutions is overwhelming, this workload is affecting students' academic performance (Louw, 2005: 267).

The level of difficulty or complexity concerning the learning material can affect the academic performance of the students (Louw, 2005: 267). The amount of work that took a year to do in high school takes three weeks in some modules, and students were not expecting that when coming to the university. The students feel like there is too much work in a short period, hence they struggle to cope, and too many modules need to be completed at the same time. Students expressed the following concerns:

> "The work is very different from high school, the pressure and workload and adjusting are very difficult without lack of guidance. Back to back tutorials, too many assignments and different tests in a single day or a day in between is too much along with the readings that are difficult to comprehend" (Interview, Karry, 2019).

> "It is a difficult process from being taught in public school to going to attend university. Lack of interest is caused by not understanding the content making it difficult to engage in them and the readings are long and they are difficult" (Interview, Sihle, 2019).

> "Wow it's a drastic change, like here in varsity you cannot get away with not reading, with not doing your assignments, with not preparing for tests and in high school, you could do that because in high school you decide to study and remember what is there and go put it on paper. Here you have to apply your critical thinking, your knowledge, and your own opinions" (Interview, Bongani, 2019).

> "Often the workload is heavy and course content is difficult. When we come to varsity, it is assumed that we all have prior knowledge of what university is like. School does not prepare you at all. Lecturers consist of slides, it is not creative. Feedback is not always understandable if any at all" (Interview, Viwe, 2019).

According to Kurata *et al* (2015: 3365), a high level of workload in institutions of higher learning needs awareness. Departments need to consider the effects of workload on academic performance including physical and psychosocial factors in making the most of the student's potential in learning. Consequently, assessment and evaluation of the moderating factors must be considered to correctly address the issue of students dropping subjects. With this, the number of quality graduates every year may grow.

3.2.7. Consultation with lecturers

In any institution of higher learning, there is diversity when it comes to socio-cultural, political, religious and racial backgrounds between students and lecturers. This diversity can create an environment that prepares students and lecturers to live and work amicably in a diverse society, all it takes is an appropriate lecturer-student relationship (Chepchieng *et al*, 2006: 80). Generally, a strong association between the lecturers and students does affect students' academic, personal and social integration into higher education. This could be accredited to the

fact that the lecturer's interaction with students in and out of the classroom is very significant in student motivation and involvement in all aspects of life (Chepchieng *et al*, 2006: 80).

In this study it was evident that students do not consult with their lecturers, and that was mainly because students could not relate to some of their lecturers, for example 60% of the black students, stated that they never related to white lecturers that taught them so they never consulted with them regarding their studies, because they would be expected to speak in English which was a challenge to them. Interestingly, White students felt more comfortable consulting with White female lecturers instead of White male lecturers or Black. I think it is a cultural issue. Students feel more comfortable with lecturers who understands their culture, language, gender etc. These were their responses when asked about consulting with their lecturers:

> "I don't consult with my lecturer because, I am not confident in expressing myself in English and my lecturers is a White female, so I will have to explain what I don't understand in English which would make things worse" (Interview, Kele, 2019).
>
> "I feel like the problem is within me because I have always felt more comfortable consulting with my lecturers who were females, now that I have white male lecturers I find it difficult to consult" (Interview, Jane, 2019).
>
> "I don't consult with lecturers because I never related to them, I think it's because of my culture, I don't know. Its better if it's a female lecturer who is black, I feel they understand me, not all of them though" (Interview, Sihle, 2019).

A lecturer-student relationship is seen as an assisting hand in which the student sees that the lecturer has his or her best interest at heart. This generally prevents students from undesirable feelings towards the campus; therefore, the student persists in the university. Research on student persistence or attrition has proposed that a student's judgment to withdraw or persist in a university is more a function of what happens after admission into that institution than what goes before it (Chepchieng *et al*, 2006: 80). Most lecturers have an open-door policy and always help students who are suffering academically but it is evident that students do not use this provision. There is always a big dichotomy between students and their lecturers and this is usually caused by the students who have reasons to not consult with their lecturers but I am strongly of the view that distance can be narrowed to help the students have a relationship with the lecturer. Lack of relationship with the lecturer also causes some sort of a lower performance. Academics should also step up and try to narrow the distance that exists between them and their students.

3.2.8. Student goal commitment

Goal commitment, family influence, and levels of motivation can affect one's academic performance, especially if the student does not have social coping skills. Higher levels of institutional commitment and commitment to obtaining a bachelor's degree are important predictors of degree completion (Tinto, 1975: 102). According to Tinto (1975: 102), Students goal commitment whether measured in terms of educational plans, educational expectations or career expectations, the higher the level of plans the more likely the student is to remain in university and do well. Students were asked if they think they will finish their current degree programmes, this was done to test their levels of commitment to their goal. Most students are confident that they will finish their degree on time through hard work and dedication, because they are forced by circumstances and pressure from back home. A portion also said that they do not see themselves finishing on time, due to workload and other issues that need to be unpacked. Students who stated that they will finish their degree programmes had this to say:

> "Yes, I am the eldest at home which makes it very stressful to such an extent that I have to finish this degree in record time so that I can be able to take care my two siblings" (Interview, Usivile, 2019).

> "Yes, I have passed all of my first semester courses and don't foresee any major obstacles that could obstruct my path in the near or far future, because I am a hard worker and committed to my studies" (Interview, Vuyo, 2019).

> "Yes, because I believe I can and am working hard so that I can complete my degree in record time and make myself and family proud, plus I have a great support system. My intentions are not to fail, I will complete in record time" (Interview, Kate, 2019).

These students were sure that they will complete their degree programmes, because they were committed to their studies, and had a good support system in terms of academic assistance. Some students were motivated by their socio-economic background and complementing their degree programmes is the only way to escape poverty for them.

Contrasted with students who do not see themselves completing their degree programmes:

> "No, I am not exactly sure as the courses I chose are just becoming difficult for me, and therefore forcing me to make changes on my modules" (Interview, Siyavuya, 2019).

> "No, because I did not do well in my mid-exam so then I will add another year as I will be changing my major" (Interview, Kate, 2019).

> "I am doing this degree not because I love it, but I got 41% in mathematics so I was rejected in my field that is commerce but still applying in other universities because this is not my field" (Interview, John, 2019).

These students are not sure that they will complete their studies because of bad career choices, poor performance in their exams and must add another year in their studies. Even though one gets to decide the degree they want to pursue, in other cases, family get to influence that decision and this can lead to a negative impact on the students' academic performance as some student do the degree to impress their parents and they do not have any passion for what they are studying. Tinto's (1975: 47) model of student attrition includes goal and institutional commitment as factors that may affect students' decisions to stay or leave the institution of higher learning. Tinto wrote that "movements from varying degrees of certainty to uncertainty and back again may be quite characteristic of the longitudinal process of goal clarification which occurs during the college years" (Tinto, 1975: 47).

3.3. Tutors perspectives on internal factors affecting student performance

Alongside a background of increasing numbers of first-year students arriving in institutions of higher learning, a record of poor academic performance, an absence of success and the low graduation rates presently being experienced at most South African universities (Layton, 2015: 199). Tutorials are compulsory in several faculties at Rhodes University. The tutorial system has been introduced in place at Rhodes University since the 1970s, as a direct result of a tremendously low throughput rate for students and has thus been perceived as a significant intervention concerning teaching and learning, to give academic support and to openly increase student success rates. Rhodes University introduced tutorials as a plan to facilitate academic success. These tutorials are comprised of small groups of students who meet with the guidance of a tutor to engage more in their course work so that academic success can be increased. Interviews were conducted with Tutors at Rhodes University and among other questions, the following questions were asked:

1. Which areas do you think students experience academic difficulties in?

"I have mentioned computer literacy and I think maybe study tips, how to find resources in the library. The importance of not using Wikipedia those are the stuff that as a first-year you will struggle with because in high school you not really required to reference much but then the moment you come into the university you might not know how to reference but at least know how to access information" (Interview, Siphesihle, 2019).

"I think the area that students experience difficulties in is when it comes to assessments for example assignments and tests. My department has a great thing that they give the questions beforehand so that the student can engage with the question and deal with what needs to be done before they write the exam. So I feel like that's where it's needed the most especially with exams and tests because what happens is that it's very hard to retain a lot of information however if you engage questions prior to writing it gives you

better standing chances not just in understanding but also retaining the information that you were taught in class" (Interview, Siyanda, 2019).

"Writing is the most difficult thing especially in our faculty everything that you say you have to back it up with a theory and sometimes there are things that we want to say but there is not enough literature. Another area is critical thinking students cannot think critically" (Interview, Mpho, 2019).

From what the tutors said it was evident that students have problems when it comes to using a computer. This affects the students who are not on the extended studies the most because they are not doing any computer literacy course of which it's the opposite when it comes to students who are on the extended studies programme who have computer literacy as one of their compulsory course. Students also face challenges when it comes to assessments for example assignment and tests. Another challenge that was mentioned by the tutors was that students cannot think critically, which is the challenge that students mentioned when interviewed.

2. What is the role of the tutorial system in academic support?

"The tutorial system is mainly to help students understand the concepts outside of the lecture because the lecturer just gives out information then we try to help them engage more with the literature but then still if the student is unable to type or if the student does not know how to engage with the material then there is a problem" (Interview, Siphesihle, 2019).

"The tutorial system is mainly supposed to explain concepts. Just to remove any form of confusion that students may be facing and also it also helps in taking the load off the actual academics because they have a lot of pressure as well so they don't have to mark tutorials and assignments and the tutorial are meant to help students, because after they wrote the assignments and got feedback from the tutor they will be familiar with the information before they write the bigger assignment or test" (Interview, Siyanda, 2019).

"Based on my understanding and experience basically what the tutorial system does is to discuss what was discussed in the lecture in a smaller scale and also to as a tutor provoke the thinking that the turtling's have because in the lecture form not everyone wants to make a contribution so with tutorials everyone gets a chance to speak their mind and without having pressure of being in a big venue with a lot of students and also with tutorial that's where tutlings get a chance to ask questions if they have questions, clarity on things that they don't understand and also amongst themselves like get what other students are getting from the course" (Interview, Mpho, 2019).

There was a general agreement between the tutors about the role of the tutorial system. Tutors explained that the role of the tutorial system is to assist students to engage more with literature, to explain concepts to students in a smaller group and provoke thinking. As Layton (2015: 199) explained that tutorials are a form of academic support that is there is ensure academic success, tutors also agreed that students who generally attend tutorial tend to perform better than students who are not attending tutorials at all.

3. Do students fully use the tutorial system as part of academic support?

"No they do not particularly first years I really don't think so especially if the tutorial does not count for marks they just think it's a burden they don't see the importance of it because it's not counting towards their D.P. so they don't think it's that important and in fact they need it because it does affect their outcomes, students who participate in tutorials perform better because they are getting like extra input. The most important thing about the tutorials is we are stimulating their academics we are not responsible for their computer literacy that's outside of work and that is where the need is" (Interview, Siphesihle, 2019).

"No they don't take it seriously that's the only problem and it also shows in their assessments and their marks but not taking the opportunity of having someone explain certain concepts on the get-go affects their academic performance" (Interview, Siyanda, 2019).

"No. Let me tell you I am supposed to be having 12 students in my group but only 5 attend the tutorial since the beginning of the year and I think with our department particularly. There is not much that is done for students who don't attend there is no punishment for them but if you don't attend tutorials it's not like you going to lose your D.P or anything and I think tutlings have a negative attitude towards tutorials. They say if they don't count for marks then why to bother to attend and they forget that the discussions help in one way or the other. Students don't understand the importance of tutorials that is the problem if tutorials are not compulsory you won't see them" (Interview, Mpho, 2019).

It was evident through the interviews conducted with the tutors that students do not take the tutorial system seriously. Students only come to tutorials if they are going to benefit, for example one of the tutors mentioned that when students are close to writing a test, they will come to the tutorial in numbers, thinking that they are going to get some sort of revision, but when there is no test scheduled students tend not to attend the tutorials. It becomes worse when students have nothing to lose by not attending, because students know that at the end departments will do nothing. This affects the performance of students. This is a concern because tutorials are regarded as one of the support programme that students have and if students are not utilizing the tutorials, and then there is a problem. The university must address this problem through measures that will force the students to attend.

3.4. Extended studies programme.

The extended studies programmes core purpose is to support throughput rates in higher education institutions. The need for the programmes developed due to a low pass rate amongst students who frequently came from poor educational backgrounds (Malherbe, 1977; Mgqwashu, 2009; McKenzie & Kioko, 2010). Boughey (2010) states that the extended curriculum programmes consist of all subjects, which are recognized by the university. It is extending the course by an extra year of study to support students registered in the programme.

Boughey (2005) also clarifies that the extended curriculum programmes should, therefore, have a combined foundation phase to support students registered in science, technology, and commerce. A foundation phase would focus on skills to complete your studies on time.

3.4.1. The first impression of the extended studies class.

After the application process, many students know if they are placed on extended studies or not. A large number of students who are placed on the extended studies programme do not know anything about what the programme entails up until they arrive at Rhodes University. Interviews with students in the extended studies programme discovered that there is a high level of doubt and misunderstanding around the purpose of the programme and why there were on that programme. Some students appreciated the opportunity given to them to be part of the programme. Their experiences are captured in the following quotes.

> "The first thing that I noticed in the extended studies class is that we were all black, no white student was there, and I was like ok! It was black kids, who went to disadvantaged schools. (Interview, Anita, 2019)

> "I went to Extended Studies on the first day and we had no choice of subjects, our subjects were chosen for us, so it was hard to accept" (Interview, Ayanda, 2019).

> "I knew from the start that Rhodes University is a white university, so it wouldn't undermine white people by putting them to extended studies, therefore I was not surprised to see that the majority of the class was black students" (Interview, Asavela, 2019).

> "My first impression of the class was fine, I wanted to be at Rhodes I didn't care whether I was in extended studies or not it was better than sitting in the location" (Interview, Lutho, 2019).

> "I chose to be in the extended studies programme, I had good points for my course of study but I knew that I was not ready for mainstream so I asked to be placed on the extended studies programme. So I had no expectations I just wanted to learn" (Interview, Tshepo, 2019).

> "When I found out that I was on extended studies I was furious. I tried to understand it but I felt like I am stupid. In that class, they give extra English classes, but I went to private school and obviously, I know how to speak English properly but after a couple of classes I saw the importance of the extended studies programme" (Interview, Palesa, 2019).

Extended studies lecturers were asked about the issues that were raised by the students and they said that in the first introductory class they try to explain what is extended studies and why there are placed on the programme and how the programme would help them with the transition from high school to an institution of higher learning. It was evident that students' first impression was race the fact that the majority of the students were black.

3.4.2. The Experiences of extended studies students

Universities have a very diverse student body, students who come from different backgrounds. Rhodes University has an extended studies programme that gives an alternative access route to university study at Rhodes University. A limited number of students who show potential to succeed and are from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds are exposed to a carefully designed supportive learning environment, which enhances their ability to succeed at Rhodes University. The programmes have lower entrance requirements and include an additional year of study that will enhance students' basic knowledge. These students receive computer literacy skills, mentoring and academic support. The data revealed that students in the extended studies have one on one meeting with lecturer every week. They have support that includes tutorials with other mainstream students, and they have mentors who guide them with academic issues or personal issues. Students were asked about the relationship between the academic support they are receiving in the extended studies unit and their academic performance.

> "Because of the support I am getting in the extended studies I can pass all my subjects above 50% and without this support, I would not be able to pass" (Interview, Lunga, 2019).

> "Yes, there is because we receive a massive amount of support in our extended studies class. Things are explained thoroughly and are explained in different ways for us to understand" (Interview, Masi, 2019).

> "I guess there is. There are times where I feel overwhelmed by my schoolwork and I seek for assistance. However, seeing that I am not comfortable with neither of tutors and my warden, I give up on looking for assistance due to hesitance and self-restraint, but when I get to my extended studies class, I have a lot of questions and I know I will the answers" (Interview, Sabelo, 2019).

> "I wanted to be in extended studies so I had two options its either politics and sociology or Anthropology and Journalism, so I didn't like Journalism so I chose politics and Sociology. I chose to be in the extended studies because I felt like I am not ready for mainstream" (Interview, Sakhile, 2019).

The findings show that the extended studies programme is helping many students by providing the necessary support. Moreover, the relationship between support and outcomes is complex, multifaceted, and different learning environments impact student success in unique ways (Prebble et al. 2004: 51). What was evident was the fact that students in extended studies are exposed to a different style of teaching and they use that to their advantage.

3.5. Lecturer's perspective

The lecturers expressed this when they were asked about the teaching methods that underpin the extended studies, this was done to try to understand the teaching methods they used in the extended studies:

> "The teaching methods that are used in the extended studies are similar to what students have been exposed to high school. Therefore, for me, I try to use teaching methods that the students are familiar with so that they can adapt quickly. My approach has always been that we are co-constructors of knowledge together and that I may be an expert in some things but not in everything. Part of the expertise resides in the fact that students learn more when they feel that they are helping to build it than when they are being told and learning it by heart. I believe that knowledge is co-constructed and that is vital to how I behave in class" (Interview, Masixole, 2019).

> "I would not call them assumptions, but the teaching methods that I use and I am sure that even my colleagues use the same methods. We turn the lecture into a classroom setting where students are responsible for learning. I do not just stand and lecturer but we learn together, engage on topics together, and find solutions together. What we are trying to do with strategy is to show students that as a lecturer I don't have all the answers but everyone has the answer" (Interview, Vuyokazi, 2019).

> "In the extended studies classes, we use what students are familiar with, the teaching methods that they were exposed to from high school. We don't lecture but we teach and learn as a class. Student goes and do given readings and come back and discuss amongst themselves and with the lecturer" (Interview, Sally, 2019).

Lecturers in the extended studies programme use different teaching styles of teaching compared to mainstream lecturers. It was evident that they adopt the same approach of teaching, teaching like high school teachers teach, and in that way they know their students' strengths and weaknesses and can easily point out if a student is struggling academically. Lecturers in the extended studies programme were further asked the following questions:

1. **Is there a relationship between students' academic performance and lecture attendance?**

> "Even though it's not something that we experience in the extended studies because attendance is compulsory. Students who do not attend lecturers tend to not perform very well, but it is not all students some students can just do their readings that are on the course outline and still do very well. So it depends on the students" (Interview, Masixole, 2019)

> "Yes, students who do not attend their lectures are sometimes the very same students who are not performing very well academically, but that is not the case when it comes to my lectures because my students must attend unless they are sick of they have to provide an LOA" (Interview, Sally, 2019).

> "It depends on a student I know students who just study on their own without attending a lecture and they perform very well and you have students who are not attending but

their academic performance is very bad. Even though that is not an issue when it comes to the extended studies lectures because they are compulsory and small so you can easily see when a student is not attending" (Interview, Vuyokazi, 2019).

Student lecture attendance or non-attendance is one of many factors influencing students' performance in higher education institutions worldwide that is not something new. In an attempt to increase students' academic performance and eventually, the throughput rate, it is vital to explore the factors that affect student's marks (Papageorgiou, 2019: 277). The extended studies lecturers seem to share the same point of view that there is a relationship between student's academic performance and lecturer attendance. Students who attend lectures do well compared to students who do not attend lectures. Even though as mentioned that attendance is not an issue in the extended studies programme. Their lectures are compulsory and students attend unless they are sick of which they have to provide a leave of absence form. In a study conducted by Papageorgiou (2019: 277). It was evident that excellent to good lecture attendance is one of many factors influencing academic performance, in higher education that contributes to students' academic performance. Furthermore, the results reported that lecture attendance applies a significant influence on first-year students' academic marks and eventually the throughput rate (Papageorgiou, 2019: 277).

2. **What is the average pass rate for Extended Studies students in any academic year?**

"I would say 70 % of the students who are in extended studies complete their degree within four years and the remaining 30% its either they take five years to complete or the dropout" (Interview, Sally, 2019).

The extended studies lecturers had said that since they started teaching in the extended studies programme seventy percent of the students complete their degrees in the four years that they have. The remaining thirty percent dropout due to various reasons one being academically exclusion and some continue to be in university for a longer period.

3. **What is the relationship between the Extended Studies programme with students who have exited the programme?**

"Relationships that are formed in the extended studies exist even after students have exited the programme, I still have postgrad students who come to me for assistance, whether its academic or personal, I have students who were part of extended studies programme and are now working in big industries, and we still have that relationship. So the relations continue" (Interview, Masixole, 2019).

"With the students that complete the programme and graduate relationships are well maintained. I have a student who completed extended studies in 2016 and is doing

masters this year and I am still assisting her with the masters, I also have students who are now working but we still communicate" (Interview, Vuyokazi, 2019).

The relationship between the students and lecturers including myself is amazing, I am still in contact with students who were in the programme in 2014 some of them are working abroad some are doing their postgrad studies and some are lecturing (Interview, Sally, 2019).

It was evident that the relationship between the former extended studies students and their lecturers continue to be strong. Communication is still being maintained by both parties. The relationship goes beyond Rhodes University this is what the lecturers had said. According to Hershkovitz (2017: 37), a strong, supportive relationship between a student and a lecturer might encourage student's feelings of safety, security, and belongingness, and may at the end of the day lead the student to perform well academically. However, a bad relationship between the lecturer and the student may put the students in a situation where the student is not connected to their academic and emotional resources and may lead them to failure. It was evident that a strong relationship between the extended studies lecturers and their students was a strong one since the students are still in contact with their lecturers.

3.6. Academic support at Rhodes University

Academic support is a crucial part of one's academic career, a lack of academic support can result in poor academic performance, low retention rates, and high dropout rates. Institutions of higher learning must provide academic support to every student that is enrolled in that institution. As Tinto, (2014: 6) states that as soon as a university accepts the students then the institution must provide necessary academic support to students so that the students can complete his/her study. Students, tutors, and lecturers were asked if there was a need for academic support at Rhodes university, all the students who participated in the study said that there is a need for academic support at Rhodes university students were asked the following questions:

1. Is there a need for academic support at Rhodes?

"For me definitely because I mean a lot of students are stressing and that can lead to depression and anxiety-like I suffered from anxiety last semester I remember I couldn't even walk out of my room and this time when I was on my way to an Anthropology lecture when I passed Eden Grove and when I saw a crowd of people I was like what the hell is happening. So I feel like academic support is needed" (Interview, Sipho, 2019).

"Yes, I think so because I mean there is a lot of pressure that comes with academics especially here at Rhodes University the younger students who don't exactly understand the pressures and demands that come with University and also the high quality of

information that the university brings. So I feel like there is a need for academic support to help those students transition from high school into university and once they enter university to also maintain good performance throughout the university career" (Interview, Siyavuya, 2019).

"Me personally for varsity students who are new and are trying to adapt I think it's not just academic support that is required, emotional, social because as I said people find it hard to work around the area and adapt to the culture and how things are done" (Interview, Palesa, 2019).

It was evident that Rhodes university students, tutors, and lecturers think that there is a need for academic support at Rhodes University. They all agree that university is a different environment and students need assistance to adapt to the university. It was also evident that emotional support is also needed because you can provide academic support but without emotional support then there is a problem. First-year students contended that the transition from high school to Rhodes University was the most difficult part. Things are different from high school, its either you adapt or you face challenges.

2. Who should be targeted academic support?

"First years I feel like from second year and third year this is university I understand that you really need to work on your own you have to read for your degree and you have to be independent you cannot spoon-feed information but for first years there should be that support and I don't think it needs to be an option or negotiable for example in some universities even here in South Africa everyone has to enroll for a computer literacy course and this will also remove the connotations of a burden of embarrassment that some students may feel about the fact that they don't know how to use a computer so if it is catered for everyone then the will be no segregation or any bias against getting the training" (Interview, Sinethemba, 2019).

"I am going to be a bit bias here but Black students have to be targeted for academic support because the fact that historically Black people have been underprivileged and when they come to university they have not been given quality education in high school and the intense academic demand that comes with university can be a bit hectic and daunting for them so I think our main focus should be given to black students especially in historically white institutions because the teaching techniques are different how they were taught in high school and how they are taught at Rhodes University is completely different. So I feel like mainly black students need academic support to succeed in at Rhodes University" (Interview, Thembinkosi, 2019).

"First years and second years should be targeted because that is where many students think or start dropping out of University. If academic support is provided at that stage then students will continue to be successful and complete their degree. Also Black students should be targeted because for example here at Rhodes University the highest percentage of students who are being excluded academically are black students and this is often because of the transition from high school to university, they start experiencing things like computers for the first time and if that is the case how do the university expect you to pass if they do not provide support" (Interview, Masuku, 2019).

What was evident here was the fact that all participants said first-year black students should be targeted for academic support and this was because they come from a previously disadvantaged background and Rhodes University does not cater for them. It was also evident through the interviews that black students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds at Rhodes University find it difficult to adjust. Another point that was raised was the fact that Rhodes University used or is still a White university and students who come from townships school find it difficult to adjust to the culture of the university.

3. Up to what level is academic support required?

> "I think academic support should be available to every student at any level because students face different struggles at any level for first years it could be a thing of language and writing but also when it comes to postgraduate level also the is a thing of doing research, for example, you have never done research before and also trying to do your research and trying to put everything together is very difficult. So academic support should be provided for every student enrolled in the university" (Interview, Usivile, 2019).

> "I think up to third-year because when you get to postgrad, but also postgrad as well can be hectic so I feel like academic support should be given up until honors because I mean for me after doing my honors it was a lot of pressure and academic support was needed and I was fortunate enough to have lecturers who were open and that helped me" (Interview, Bongani, 2019).

> "I think it could be open to undergrad the entire undergrad as in they could have access to like writing centers and students can submit their assignments if they want to. At the University of Pretoria, there is a writing center that is open to everyone students can submit an assignment with the question so they are not helped with the writing of the assignment they just help them with the editing from the course support. These are not lecturers there is a unit specifically for that so the students who submitted they fix the errors when it comes to structure and grammar and when students submit to the lecturer they will submit a report from the unit the lecturer will understand that the student tried to work on the assignment" (Interview, Gugu, 2019).

Students also expressed that they think that the department, faculty, residence for those staying on campus, senior students and dedicated unit in the department. The faculty was the most selected one followed by the department, a specialized group in the university and older students should provide the academic supports. There was one student who stated that there could be others that provided academic support:

> "RU page must be designed accordingly. We are a technology generation that needs videos; we do not like the old ways of teaching that they are using" (Interview, Luzuko, 2019).

The findings show that there is a desperate need for academic support at Rhodes University because students come from different backgrounds. Different factors include language. Time

management, heavy workload, Academic skills, and Socio-economic factors are affecting many students a Rhodes University. The finding further showed that there is a need for academic support particularly among undergraduates. There is a huge transition from high school to university and I feel like students are not catered for when it comes to that. Students are expected to do well regardless of their backgrounds, for example, the student body has changed at Rhodes university from what is was back then in the past. There are many middle class, white students who are enrolled but black students are dominating. Due to the historical background of this country, most of these black students come from improvised backgrounds or schools that did not have facilities so it is new for them to have the independence. It is a bit unfair to expect them to be at the same capacity as someone who went to private schooling or high school.

Most of the students that were interviewed complained of the same subjects that they feel the academic support should target. Legal theory was dominating, as students are struggling with the subject. Fifty-eight percent of the interviewed participants that are above half of the students are failing the course, and this is concerning. Interestingly not only were they struggling with legal theory but Politics, Sociology, Psychology. According to Boughey (2002: 295), disadvantaged students usually come from poor backgrounds. Institutions of higher learning should democratize the learning material. This means that the curriculum must change and adopt an African identity (Bawa, 2001). Academic development programs have a significant and positive impact on universities (Prebble, 2004: 12). The goal of academic development units is to assist students who are not prepared for higher education. Teaching and learning development units must be established in universities to support academic staff (lecturers). Such a program will focus on the development of critical thinking skills, for both the lecturer and the student (Prebble, 2004: 12).

3.7. Assistance required by students

According to the student's responses, mentoring, more tutorials if possible should be conducted, and the content be translated into one's language as well as more resource made available and easily accessible by all the students. The programme must support students with their written assignments. Post-graduate students should be employed at the writing center to support undergraduate students with academic writing skills, while the program uses visual teaching methods to stimulate writing. The interviewed students also stated what they feel like they need assistance from the lecturers, tutors, and the department. The participants contended

that well-developed essay writing skills were not taught at schools. The department must start a writing center program to assist the students. The program must support students with their written assignments and prepare them for tests and exams. Students had this to say:

> "Printing charges need to go down either that or the need to have printed information should be reduced. Like you are indirectly robbing us" (Bongani).

> "Perhaps, introduction lectures to sub\jects (during O week) should focus on the nature of the course to be studied and the culture of the department rather than aim to persuade students to enroll in their various departments" (Interview, Sibusiso, 2019).

> "They should be more clearance from a few lectures regarding what is expected of us in things such as tutorial work" (Interview, Usivile, 2019).

> "I think students can be more informed about what is required and what needs to be done. We should also be more adequately prepared for the transition from high school to university as the workload can get intense" (Interview, Palesa, 2019).

> "Having tutorials is by far the best and most useful support I have received and it works out perfectly if both the tutor and tutlings are fully engaged with the course" (Interview, Thembinkosi, 2019).

> "Lectures to have time to explain adequately to us students and not rely on tutors as tutors cannot explain that much" (Siyavuya).

> "The university must do better. This might simply be a business but it is often the gateway to the bread and butter of many who come here. We come with the intention of bettering ourselves grabbing the opportunity to actually have a degree but we end up even worse than before" (Sihle).

The university should be more considerate of students as we all have different ways of learning. Some students take longer to understand the concept taught than others, therefore, ways on how to cater to different students must be developed. That way we are all guaranteed success and degrees at the end. It would also be mindful of the fact that we are all subjects to different environments, some take the pressure that comes with university and some crumble under pressure. At the end of the day, it is not all about books and studying, you cannot excel in education if you continue stressing on what you are going to eat the moment you step off campus, what your family, back home, is eating. If the university looks close enough, it might find that many students are going hungry. Yes, there are dining halls but what about those living off-campus and those who have to go back to res.

3.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, it was evident that the student's way of learning can be determined by the university mode of teaching. If the university is overwhelming for students as a new environment, therefore adjusting is the first problem. It is also evident that the university fails

to guide courses to help students improve, as many already struggle with understanding the basics that is the prescribed readings, and some are limited, as they do not have access to prescribed books due to financial constraints.

In addition, if the workload is heavy then students are not able to manage their time efficiently as all the courses are demanding. In overall, the university must guide students and provide extra classes for students in mainstream, as not everyone is on extended. The tutorials are not enough for the students as the time is limited. It was also evident in this chapter that there is a serious need for academic support at Rhodes University and for these support strategies to be effective, they need to be viewed and implemented correctly. There is a need to develop a policy, a structure and strategies around mentorship and coaching, to be implemented, monitored and revised regularly for students to do well and complete their studies. This argument is developed more fully in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

3.9. External Problems

Tinto (1975; 2004; 2005) and Louw (2005: 270) emphasizes that external factors for example family background and financial constraints of parents have an impact on their children in institutions of higher learning. These external problems often come from home, school, and community. The local community should be a safe place for students to travel from home to university. The external factors to be discussed in this section are the socio-economic factors and education support. The external barriers to learning experienced by the students include teaching and learning challenges. These barriers to learning are the socio-economic circumstances they must deal with daily and the fact that they are first-generation students trying to deal with their parent's expectations. The challenges that came out are the parent's education level, parent's income, and employment status.

3.9.1. Socio-economic factors

Low socio-economic circumstances influence students' academic performance. Due to the parents' inappropriate working conditions and low income, they have trouble in catering to their children's basic needs (Tinto, 1975: 99). The economic conditions of any individual are influenced by the socio-economic statuses. The economic status has three important pointers, and these are parental income, parental education and parental occupation, the income of the parent can mirror the social and financial resources accessible to the student. Parental education is also linked to a parent's income. Occupation is categorized based on the qualification needed to earn an individual income in a profession.

3.9.2. Parent's education level

Machebe, *et al*, (2017: 1614), stated that children from parents that are more active in the process of imparting educational knowledge excel in their academic career and are often more productive in society. With adequate care, tutelage and active participation of parents in the child's educational activities like monitoring of homework, participation in extracurricular activities, parent-teacher association, and other school-related activities, the child is more likely to be courageous and as such do well at school. Tinto (1975: 100) emphasizes that students who persist and do well in institutions of higher learning are likely to come from families whose parents are more educated. According to the interviews conducted, it was evident that 60% of the students' parents has primary and secondary education, and 40% had a diploma and or degree.

Findings suggest that the students, who are going through difficulties, have high anticipations from their parents. 60 % of the students who were interviewed stated that their parents expect them to pass, without entirely understanding the daily challenges that they are experiencing. This lack of understanding and sympathy can be due to them not having finished their schooling and are now expecting their children to fulfill their dreams. This places pressure on the students as they feel the need to perform academically to keep their parents happy. Students who their parents have only attended primary school responded in the following way:

> "My parents don't understand the pressure I have because they never attended university, ,all they want is for me to pass without understanding the pressure they are putting on me" (Interview, Sive, 2019).

> "My parents finished standard two or even standard one. They do not understand the pressure of the amount of work I have and I cannot even ask them for assistance because they wouldn't understand anything" (Interview, John, 2019).

> "My parents do not have a degree, so they want me to obtain one at all cost, so I am under a lot of pressure to not disappoint them" (Interview, Buhle, 2019)

According to these interviews it was evident that students who their parents attended primary and secondary school only, put pressure on their children to complete their studies. They do not understand the amount of workload their children have. Students cannot even ask them for help when it comes to their studies. Some of the students stated that their parents do not have higher qualifications so they want them to obtain a degree at all costs. The student is thus under so much pressure to do well and obtain their qualification. The student is thus under so much pressure to do well and obtain their qualification.

Contrasted with students who their parents have a diploma or and a degree:

> "Both my parents have degrees, it's sort of a culture in my family to go to university, My parents advised me on which subjects to take and they always support me with my assignments" (Interview, Jacob, 2019).

> "My mother has degrees, and she advised me about the importance of having a degree, she always calls me to check if doing well, and she wants me to send her my results every semester, my progress is always monitored and she assist me when I struggle" (Interview, koketso, 2019).

According to the interviews, these students received career guidance from their families. Their parents understands the pressure of university, and they support their children with their studies. The parents educational background is important as Tinto (1975: 2004: 2005) and Louw (2005) emphasized. I was evident in the study that parents who had primary and secondary educational level, wanted their children to obtain degrees at all cost. Contrasted with parents who had degrees who gave their children career guidance and are in a position to help their children with their studies.

3.9.3. Employment Status

According to Tinto (1975), family background affects the progress of the students in institution of higher learning, for example, the employment status of parents can have a negative impact on the academic performance of the student. This is because when parents are not employed they cannot give their children financial assistance. Student then look for alternative ways to get some allowance, so they do part-time work, which has negative impact on their studies. Although 50% of the parents were unemployed, it was quite evident that these parents cannot provide financial support and that affected the performance of the students. It was noted in a few students who mentioned the following:

> "Mom is unemployed, so she cannot send me any allowance I always stress about siblings back at home and that affect my studies, as I was recently depressed" (Interview, Sihle, 2019).

> "My guardian left school at primary level, and she is currently not working, it's hard for me because I always share my NSFAS allowance with her so that at least they can have something to eat, It affect my studies because that money is meant for books, so I constantly borrow from books from friends" (Interview, Usivile, 2019).

The findings discovered how socio-economic issues play an essential role in the academic performance of students. This proved Tinto's (1975) point about family background affecting the performance of students. The underachievement and lack of financial support affect stress levels, which have a straight influence on students' self-esteem (Bojuwoye, 2002: 285). The

only support the government offers is in the form of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which only covers living expenses. Students are then indirectly required to find part-time employment to pay for costs at university, and some still send some money home to their parents whose household income is frequently not more than R3500pm (Breier,2010: 659). When students are struggling financially, they struggle to focus on their academics and will often consider dropping-out from their academics (Tinto, 2005: 15). It is no secret that students who come from poor homes are struggling in institutions of higher learning. Rhodes University students are experiencing the same, from having no food to eat to not having proper accommodation. Rhodes University prides itself on accepting students from the most impoverished backgrounds in South Africa, but when students arrive in the institution, they have to find ways to survive.

3.9.4. Parent's income

Tinto (1975: 100) argues that family income alone is becoming more and more a contributing factor that affects students when it comes to their academic progress. Family income can contribute to students dropping out of university. Ranges of parental incomes were provided for the student to select as to which category range their parent's income fall under. These ranges were from R0 -300 up to R10 000 plus. As aforementioned that most of their parents had diploma and or degrees that was evident by the level of income the majority chose which was Rl0 000 plus and minority falling below R5000. The income level of these parents as varying as it is, it will vary regarding addressing the student's academic needs. Most students whom their parents earn R10000 and can get financial support from their parents unlike those whom their parents earn less and fall under the minority. As seen in the findings and as aforementioned that these students are struggling to cope in higher institutions of learning. Students whose parents are unemployed or earn less money were asked about how finances affect their studies:

> "I work 14 hours a week from Friday to Sunday because I don't receive any allowance from home. It does affect my studies, but at the same time, I do need the money" (Interview, James, 2019).

> "I work at the bakery, I don't have to go every day, it does affect my studies as I to go in the morning and I would have to skip a class and don't go and sometime I am always behind with school work" (Interview, Karry, 2019).

Parent's income played an important role in this regard, the fact that if their parents do not earn a lot of money, they will not be able to send money to the student and the student tends to look

for part-time work to survive the university life, and this may affect their studies in the process. This proved Tinto's point, that family income can affect students.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

4.1. Introduction

This section aims to give a general overview and conclusion of the whole thesis. Firstly, this section will look at the goals of the thesis and explain how the thesis has managed to achieve those goals. In other words, it will consider whether the aims that were set out in the research were achieved. Furthermore, looking at how these aims were achieved throughout the thesis. What this means is looking at the theory of the thesis and seeing whether it speaks directly to the main objective or main goal of the thesis. Lastly, this section will look at the limitations of this research and areas for further research. In other words, it will recommend possible areas of research around this research subject to other scholars. Furthermore, it will also consider the areas of limitation for this particular research paper.

4.2. Addressing the goals of the study

This part considers the main goal of this thesis. To establish how it has been achieved through the research that was done. The main objective of this thesis is *to explore the need for academic support at Rhodes University.* This goal was achieved through two sections the literature review and the empirical chapter. The literature review set out to examine the education system in South Africa focusing on the external and internal challenges in the department of basic education. An overview of the higher education landscape in South Africa and academic support globally. Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975) Louw's conceptual framework model (2005) and Swail's Geometric Design of Student Persistence (Swail, 2004) were used to address the main goal.

Participants expressed concern when it came to their academics. Internal problems that students are struggling with were discovered. Internal problems that students faced included language capabilities, academic skills, academic performance, under-preparedness, poor-time management, students' workload, and consultations with lecturers and students' goal commitment. Looking at the results of the aforementioned internal challenges it was evident enough that there is a need for academic support at Rhodes University. Students emphasised that the only form of support they receive at Rhodes University is through tutorials, which sometimes are not helping at all, because they receive them once a week. At times, you find that the tutor is clueless when it comes to content and that forces them not to attend the tutorials, which leaves them with no other form of support provided by the university. Students who are part of the extended studies programme receive mentoring, academic and computer literacy

workshops, which is something that the larger student body is not receiving. This further acknowledges the fact that academic support at Rhodes is seen as a programme that assists disadvantaged students since every student in the extended studies is viewed as disadvantaged and not ready for mainstream studies. This raises many concerns on its own, for example, it assumes that only black students are disadvantaged.

Many students who do not come from disadvantaged high school or backgrounds and find university challenging and are left to navigate their academics alone, which is not fair. As soon as the student receives an acceptance letter and that students registers in the university, the university is therefore obligated to provide academic and social support for the students to be able to complete their studies. This is lacking at Rhodes University. Only a few students receive such academic and social support and these are students in the extended studies programme. Students who participated in the study further raised external problems that affect their academics and these were socio-economic factors, parents' education level, parents' income, and parents' employment status. Students insisted that socio-economic factors contribute to their academic success; these factors are usually financial.

Some student stated that they are forced to work part-time to get money for food, or to afford a place that suitable for studying. This is because their parents are not working and therefore they are not able to send them money, leading their studies to be affected. Therefore, in answering this research question, there is a serious need for academic support at Rhodes University. Academic support must be provided to every student who needs support, not only a few students who are regarded as disadvantaged. Students face different challenges, you may come from a model c school but still experience problems in an institution of higher learning.

The thesis looked at the first impression of the extended studies class by the students, and it was evident that almost all the students observed that the majority of the students in the class were black. Some of the students appreciated the opportunity of being part of the extended studies programme, with some students stating that they chose to be part of the programme, although they received good marks from high school and qualified for mainstream studies. They wanted to be in the extended studies because they thought that they are not ready for university, and the extended studies programme will equip them with the necessary skills to be ready and excel in the following year. These students were informed by the friends who were in extended studies and had graduated and left the institution. The thesis further explored the experience of extended studies students. Students displayed a tendency to emphasise that the

support that they get from the extended studies is very helpful, some students even emphasising that if it were not for this support they would have dropped out in June. The extended studies students are exposed to different support mechanism and they are very happy.

The relationship that extended studies students have with the lecturers was overwhelming, the students stated that they are not comfortable with approaching another lecturer in the mainstream but when it comes to their extended studies lecturers, they are more comfortable and can share anything with them since they are more comfortable. It was evident that the extended studies students receive more support than the students who are in the mainstream. Students in the extended studies also expressed that they are partnered with a mentor who is senior students who were once part of the programme and they met every week to discuss academic and social challenges. They find this to be useful because they can communicate their mentor at any time to discuss their challenges. They can even talk about social challenges that they would not talk about with the lecturer. Students are happy with the support there are receiving, and they are doing well academically because of this support, but we cannot say the same with the majority of the students who are in the mainstream and are really in need of such support. These students find themselves in tough situations and have nothing but their commitment to their goals.

Interviews that were conducted with the Lecturers and Tutors. From these interviews, both lecturers and tutors agreed that there is a need for academic support at Rhodes University. Lecturers in the extended studies programme shared their different teaching styles to emphasise that students have different learning approaches, and that is what a lot of lecturers in the mainstream are not realising. The extended studies classes are small and attention is given to every individual. Lecturers further emphasised that there is a relationship between students' academic performance and lecture attendance even though this was not the case in the extended studies programme because all the lectures are compulsory, but students who do not attend lectures tend to perform less compared to students who attended lectures.

Another interesting point was the relationship between the extended studies lecturers with the students who exited the programme. Lecturers insisted that the relationship they form continues even after students have graduated and left Rhodes University. This shows the important need of this support across the student body. Lecturers stated that 60-70 % of the students in the extended studies programme continue to graduate in record time. If the university develops a programme such as the extended studies and opens it to every student then students will

complete the degrees and enjoy being in university. Academic support is part of one's academic career, the lecturers emphasised and every student deserves to be supported by the institution throughout the academic journey. Tutors emphasised that students experience difficulties in computer literacy, assessments for example test and assignments, writing. These are important skills to have as a university student, so there is a need for academic support since students are lacking such skills. Tutors showed concern because students do not attend tutorials and tutorials are the main forms of support that the university is proving and the student are not utilizing it to the best of their ability.

Students emphasised that more tutorials should be available and postgraduate students must be employed to mentor undergrad students. Another that was raised in answering this goal was the fact that the university must take into consideration the fact that students are different and therefore different teaching techniques must be developed. The university must not only focus on academic issues but social issues are a problem in our universities across the country especially issues like depression, the university must find ways to address such problems, even though Rhodes university does have a counselling centre only a few students utilize this service.

An academic support unit that will be open to undergrad and postgraduate must be established, where students can have access to writing centers and students can submit their assignments if they want to, for example at the University of Pretoria there is like a writing center that is open to everyone. Students can submit an assignment with the question, they are not assisted with the writing of the assignment but receive assistance when it comes to editing. The individual who offer this support are not lecturers, rather it is a unit specifically for that. Students who submit their assignments receives support when it comes to addressing grammatical errors and structure. Then the students will submit a report from the unit to the lecturer and the assignment, which has already been assessed by the unit. A unit like this can be established here at Rhodes University. The computer literacy is a module at The University of Pretoria. You are not allowed to graduate if you have not done the computer literacy course, this should not be offered to extended studies students only, but throughout the student body, and it must be compulsory. This is what the students suggested. Therefore, from the data collected for this thesis, the third goal has been achieved.

4.4. Recommendations

Taking the data analysis of this research into consideration, recommendations will be made to assist in addressing these challenges. The following recommendations are made:

1. The research identified that most first-year students who are not part of the extended studies programme are facing challenges when it comes to their academics. The University must provide the same academic support students in the extended studies are receiving to the entire student body.

2. Writing opportunities must be available to assist students with reading, writing, analysing, interpreting and evaluating information. Rhodes University must establish an academic unit that will provide academic support to all students registered in the university.

3. Apart from the orientation week and tutorials, Academic writing and basic computer courses must be compulsory for all students to register in the university.

4.5. Limitations and areas for future research

The study has offered a perspective on the challenges that students face daily. However, the findings of this study should be considered in light of its limitations. At the outset of the study, I was confident in the use of a questionnaire to investigate the study. However, with the overwhelming response from respondents willing to participate and some not answering some of the questions on the questionnaire, I had to revise my plans and methods for data collection to add in-depth interviews and focus group interviews to acquire more information. One of the limitations was the sample size of this research, with a small sample size of narrative interviews, caution must be applied, as the findings may not be transferable to the larger student body. It would have been ideal to interview more students and academic staff from different faculties to get different and varying opinions and experiences on the need for academic support and what Rhodes University is giving to the students.

In concluding this thesis, the areas I would recommend as areas for future research would be to conduct, a more detailed investigation that will evaluate the institution's academic support structures. This would have to include students' perceptions and experience of such structures so that interventions could be revised or adapted to suit the changing needs of the student body. In addition, the findings of this study made me realised how vital is the preparation of learners at the high school level is (especially in public schools) for successful university studies. In the future, I would, therefore, want to investigate what is happening in high schools concerning

the preparation of learners for higher education. Findings from such an investigation would assist in identifying and addressing learning problems at the start of an academic year. Because this study was limited in that, it focused only on the students who are already in higher education.

> "Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity". Adichie (2009).

As Adichie, offers advise above, stories do matter. The story of this research was not intended to expose problems students experience at Rhodes University but to find solutions to such problems through understanding the voices of those generally not considered in the development of academic support systems and retention strategies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
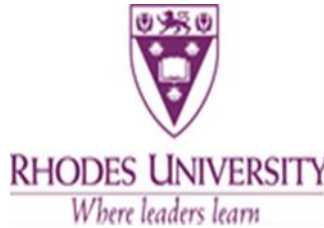
Invitation Letter

Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.

Dear student

We are conducting interviews as part of a research study to t explore the need for academic support at Rhodes University. To explore the perceptions and experiences of students on academic support services available to them and to explore the need for academic support among the student body at Rhodes University.

The interview takes around 30 minutes and is very informal. We are simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on being a student at Rhodes your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and. If you are willing to participate please suggest a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available.

For any queries, you are welcome to contact the following:

Project Id: 0548

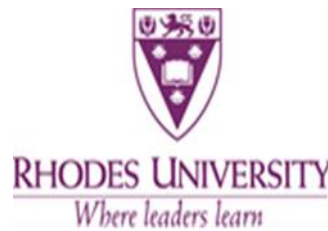Sociology Department: 0466038361

Ms. Babalwa Sishuta: B.Sishuta@ru.ac.za   (Supervisor)

Mr. Lebogang Khoza: Khozalebogang27@gmail.com   (Researcher)

Mr Siyanda Manqele: S.Manqele@ru.ac.za (Rhodes University Ethics Coordinator

Appendix B

<u>**CONSENT LETTER**</u>

Dear Student.

Topic: **Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.**

Project Id: 0548

<u>For any queries, you are welcome to contact the following:</u>

Sociology Department: 0466038361

Ms. Babalwa Sishuta: <u>B.Sishuta@ru.ac.za</u>

Mr. Lebogang Khoza: <u>Khozalebogang27@gmail.com</u>

Mr Siyanda Manqele: <u>S.Manqele@ru.ac.za</u>

I am currently undertaking a Masters Research in the Sociology Department that seeks to explore students' perceptions of academic support at Rhodes University.

To this end, I kindly request that you participate in the interview. It will take no longer than 15 minutes of your time. Participation is very important to this study; however, it is completed on a voluntary basis. Respondents can opt out at any stage during the research study. Furthermore this interview will not affect your class marks.
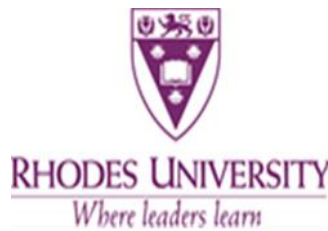
This interview remains anonymous and all the information provided remains confidential and will be reported in the form of a summarised version based on all respondents.Please do not say any personal/identifying information in the interview (i.e. name, surname, student number, etc.).

By signing this consent form I certify that I agree to participate in this research study

_____   _____

 Name   Signature

Appendix C

Students Interview Guide

Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.

For any queries, you are welcome to contact the following:

Project Id: 0548

Sociology Department: 0466038361

Ms. Babalwa Sishuta: B.Sishuta@ru.ac.za   (Supervisor)

Mr. Lebogang Khoza: Khozalebogang27@gmail.com   (Researcher)

Mr Siyanda Manqele: S.Manqele@ru.ac.za (Rhodes University Ethics Coordinator)

Purpose: This document is designed to guide discussions with research participants before, during and after formal interviews. The document is to be used flexibly as a tool to facilitate semi-structured discussions with participants in line with the aims and objectives of the study. The purpose of these engagements is to explore the perceptions, experiences held by participants of the need for academic support at Rhodes University.

Objectives:

1. To explore the perceptions and experiences of extended studies students on academic support services available to them.
2. To explore the need for academic support among the student body (other than extended studies) and academic staff at Rhodes University.

Form of data recording: (1) Audio-recording of all talk from "Preamble" to "Closing". (2) Notes of key points handwritten by the facilitator. (3) Any handwritten notes by participants during the discussion.

Expected interview duration: 30-50 minutes

Thank you for your time and for agreeing to participate in this discussion. The aim of this discussion is to hear your opinions and perceptions on the need for academic support at Rhodes University. Please feel free to be as open and honest as you would like. I would like to remind you that I will be audio recording this discussion and taking some notes but please remember

that all information collected here will be recorded and documented anonymously. Do you have any questions before we begin?

<u>**Questions**</u>

Depending on my evaluation of the richness of the narrative, such that it may not be full of description, I may use the following probing Questions to elicit further details.

Draft: Probing Student interview Schedule.

A Focus on student's background

1. Please tell me more about yourself? Where you come from. Can you tell me about the school you attended and why Rhodes university?

2. Qualification: What Degree are registered for? Why did you choose this degree?
3. How did you get to be here at this university? Why this university?
4. Describe a typical day for you on campus/at home/residence?

Accommodation

5. Where do you stay and are you happy with your living conditions?
6. What are the problems and benefits associated with staying there? Would you move if you had a choice? Why?
7. How would you describe a good living environment for you as a student?
8. Describe the place where you prefer to study after lectures
9. How does your living environment impact on your studies?
10. Who pays for your studies? Are you happy with this arrangement?

Finance

11. Have you had any financial problems? How have you addressed them? Has anybody helped you?
12. Do you feel that your financial problems interfere with your studies?
13. Do you work, or have you worked throughout your studies? If yes kindly elaborate on what kind of work and how many hours a week?

Adaption/ Transition School to Campus

What was your first impression of the extended studies class?

14. Have you had to change anything about yourself to adjust to campus life at this university? What and Why?
15. What does it mean for you to be a student at this university? Do you see yourself as a member of the university community? How would you describe this university community?
16. What kind of challenges do you face as a member of the university community?

If the student is an international student

1. Have you been to Grahamstown before you started studying at this university?
2. What was difficult about coming here?
3. Do you feel like an outsider or is it easy to fit in? Explain
4. How has the international office helped you in your enrollment and adjustment to university life?
5. How could they help you further?
6. What other types of support do you need to enable you to have a better experience at this university?

**Focus on the students' academic experience**

1. What sort of content and skills have you encountered so far?
2. How would you describe the level of the work you have encountered so far?
3. Can you describe any experience of new learning on the course so far?
4. To what extent would you say you have enjoyed the course so far?
5. To what extent have you found the course useful so far?
6. What do you think of the courses you are doing?
7. Are they interesting, relevant to your context, is the knowledge important to you?
8. What conditioned the choice of your course?
9. What is your experience in the lectures (interesting/ boring/ irrelevant/difficult to follow/confusing/ helpful)
10. Do you participate in lectures or just listen?
11. And what about tutorials?
12. Who do you turn to for help with your studies and why (lecturers/ tutors/fellow students/others)
13. Do you consult directly with your lecturers in their office? Explain
14. Is there a lecturer that left a big impression (good or bad) on you? Tell us about him/her
15. What makes the environment in which you learn a positive or negative environment
16. What are your academic challenges and why?

17. Any suggestion on how to overcome the challenges?
18. Do you see a need for academic support at Rhodes and Why?
19. At what level of study do you think academic support should not be given?
20. What kind of support makes or will make your academic experience worthwhile?

<u>Closing</u>

Thank you again for you time and for sharing your views with me today. Are you comfortable with me contacting you again should I require clarification on today's conversation or if I would like to ask you some more questions?

As mentioned previously, this study is part of a master's project and as such, I hope that you will be able to avail yourself again in the future, should I need your insights again. Thank you again for you time.

Appendix D
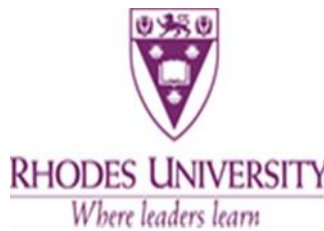
Lecturers (Academic Staff) Interview Guide

Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.

For any queries, you are welcome to contact the following:

Project Id: 0548

Sociology Department: 0466038361

Ms. Babalwa Sishuta: B.Sishuta@ru.ac.za   (Supervisor)

Mr. Lebogang Khoza: Khozalebogang27@gmail.com   (Researcher)

Mr Siyanda Manqele: S.Manqele@ru.ac.za (Rhodes University Ethics Coordinator)

Purpose: This document is designed to guide discussions with research participants before, during and after formal interviews. The document is to be used flexibly as a tool to facilitate semi-structured discussions with participants in line with the aims and objectives of the study. The purpose of these engagements is to explore the perceptions, experiences held by participants of the need for academic support at Rhodes University.

Objectives:

3. To explore the perceptions and experiences of extended studies students on academic support services available to them.
4. To explore the need for academic support among the student body (other than extended studies) and academic staff at Rhodes University.

Form of data recording: (1) Audio-recording of all talk from "Preamble" to "Closing". (2) Notes of key points handwritten by the facilitator. (3) Any handwritten notes by participants during the discussion.

Expected interview duration: 30-50 minutes

Thank you for your time and for agreeing to participate in this discussion. The aim of this discussion is to hear your opinions and perceptions on the need for academic support at Rhodes University. Please feel free to be as open and honest as you would like. I would like to remind you that I will be audio recording this discussion and taking some notes but please remember that all information collected here will be recorded and documented anonymously. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Depending on my evaluation of the richness of the narrative, such that it may not be full of description, I may use the following probing Questions to elicit further details.

Draft: Probing Lecturer (Academic Staff) interview Schedule.

1. Is there a need for academic support at Rhodes University?
2. What are the key areas that academic support should target?
3. Who should be targeted for academic support?
4. Up to what academic level academic support should be provided?
5. Who should assume responsibility for academic support?
6. Which areas do you think students experience academic difficulties in?
7. What format should academic support take?
8. What is the role of the tutorial system in academic support?
9. Should lecturers play a role in academic support?
10. Is there a relationship between students' academic performance and lecture attendance?
11. What are the assumptions underpinning the teaching methods used in Extended studies classes?
12. What are the learning philosophies underpinning teaching in Extended Studies?
13. To what extent do Extended Studies students utilize the academic support available to them under this programme?
14. What is the average pass rate for Extended Studies students in any academic year?
15. Do they complete their degree in record time after completing the Extended Studies Programme?
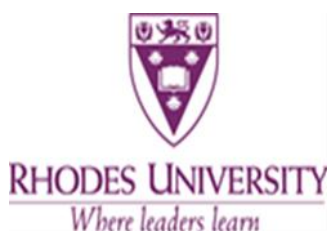16. What is the relationship between the Extended Studies programme with students who have exited the programme?

Closing

Thank you again for you time and for sharing your views with me today. Are you comfortable with me contacting you again should I require clarification on today's conversation or if I would like to ask you some more questions?

As mentioned previously, this study is part of a master's project and as such, I hope that you will be able to avail yourself again in the future, should I need your insights again. Thank you again for you time.

Appendix E

Tutors Interview Guide

Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.

For any queries, you are welcome to contact the following:

Project Id: 0548

Sociology Department: 0466038361

Ms. Babalwa Sishuta: B.Sishuta@ru.ac.za   (Supervisor)

Mr. Lebogang Khoza: Khozalebogang27@gmail.com   (Researcher)

Mr Siyanda Manqele: S.Manqele@ru.ac.za (Rhodes University Ethics Coordinator)

Purpose: This document is designed to guide discussions with research participants before, during and after formal interviews. The document is to be used flexibly as a tool to facilitate semi-structured discussions with participants in line with the aims and objectives of the study. The purpose of these engagements is to explore the perceptions, experiences held by participants of the need for academic support at Rhodes University.

Objectives:

5. To explore the perceptions and experiences of extended studies students on academic support services available to them.
6. To explore the need for academic support among the student body (other than extended studies) and academic staff at Rhodes University.

Form of data recording: (1) Audio-recording of all talk from "Preamble" to "Closing". (2) Notes of key points handwritten by the facilitator. (3) Any handwritten notes by participants during the discussion.

Expected interview duration: 30-50 minutes

Thank you for your time and for agreeing to participate in this discussion. The aim of this discussion is to hear your opinions and perceptions on the need for academic support at Rhodes University. Please feel free to be as open and honest as you would like. I would like to remind you that I will be audio recording this discussion and taking some notes but please remember

that all information collected here will be recorded and documented anonymously. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions

Depending on my evaluation of the richness of the narrative, such that it may not be full of description, I may use the following probing Questions to elicit further details.

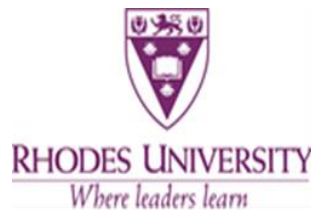**Draft: Probing Tutors interview Schedule.**

17. Is there a need for academic support at Rhodes University?

18. What are the key areas that academic support should target?

19. Who should be targeted for academic support?

20. Which areas do you think students experience academic difficulties in?

21. What is the role of the tutorial system in academic support?

22. Do students fully use the tutorial system as part of academic support in terms of attendance and participating or coming prepared

23. Should lecturers play a role in academic support?

24. Up to what academic level academic support should be provided?

Closing

Thank you again for you time and for sharing your views with me today. Are you comfortable with me contacting you again should I require clarification on today's conversation or if I would like to ask you some more questions?

As mentioned previously, this study is part of a master's project and as such, I hope that you will be able to avail yourself again in the future, should I need your insights again. Thank you again for you time.

Appendix F

Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University

This survey is aimed at exploring the need for academic support at Rhodes University, focusing on both undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as academics and practitioners. The study is conducted under the auspices of the Sociology Department with Ms. Babalwa Sishuta as the supervisor. For the purpose of this study, participants have been selected randomly. The study adheres to research ethics as detailed in the Rhodes University Higher Degree's Guide. You will be guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, voluntary participation, and freedom to withdraw at any stage.

Your participation in this survey is greatly appreciated. We request you to answer all the questions and elaborate where possible.

For any queries, you are welcome to contact the following:

Project Id: 0548

Sociology Department: 0466038361

Ms. Babalwa Sishuta: B.Sishuta@ru.ac.za   (Supervisor)

Mr. Lebogang Khoza: Khozalebogang27@gmail.com   (Researcher)

Mr Siyanda Manqele: S.Manqele@ru.ac.za (Rhodes University Ethics Coordinator)

Please tick the most appropriate option for you

1. **Gender**
    - ☐ Female
    - ☐ Male
    - ☐ Other

2. **Race**
    - ☐ Black
    - ☐ White
    - ☐ Indian
    - ☐ Coloured
    - ☐ Other (specify

3. **Kind of school you went to**
    - ☐ Private
    - ☐ Public
    - ☐ Public/private
    - ☐ Other (specify)

4. Language of instruction at previous school

5. Proficiency in English

- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Bad
- ☐ Very bad

6. Please tick the skill(s) you acquired in high school
- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Critical thinking
- ☐ Writing
- ☐ Computer skills
- ☐ Language proficiency
- ☐ Note taking
- ☐ Presentation skills
- ☐ Team work
- ☐ Self-Confidence
- ☐ Other (specify)

7. Which of the skills in (question 6) do you find useful to your studies now? Why?

8. Please rank your abilities with regards to:

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Weak
Reading					
Writing					
Critical thinking					

9. Are you the first one in your family to attend university?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. Please complete the table below about your family

Number of siblings	Primary		Secondary	Tertiary

Parents level of education		Father	Mother	Guardian
	Primary			
	Secondary			
	Diploma			
	Degree			

Parents income per month	☐ 0-R300 ☐ R301-R5000 ☐ R5001-R10000 ☐ R10000 – R20000	Any other specify

Parents employment status	☐ Employed	☐ Unemployed	☐ Self-employed ☐ Social grants (pension, child, disability etc)

11. Did you register at any university prior to coming to Rhodes? If yes, please explain.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

12. Faculty at Rhodes
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Law
- ☐ Commerce
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Humanities
- ☐ Education

13. Who informed your decision about your degree choice?
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Myself
- ☐ School
- ☐ **Other (specify)**

14. What kind of funding is available to you?
- ☐ NSFAS
- ☐ Bank loan
- ☐ Bursary
- ☐ Scholarship
- ☐ Self –financing
- ☐ Other (specify)

15. Do you see yourself completing your degree in record time? Please explain

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

16. **Please complete the table below**

Courses registered for 2019	Courses to be registered for in 2020	Courses to be registered for in 2021

17. Have you dropped any subject(s) since the beginning of the year? Please explain.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18. What are the reason(s) for dropping? Tick relevant options below.
- ☐ Workload
- ☐ Loss of interest
- ☐ Academic performance
- ☐ Did not enjoy the course
- ☐ Bad career choice
- ☐ Poor time management
- ☐ Home sickness
- ☐ Financial constraints
- ☐ Personal family issues

☐ Lack of guidance
☐ Other (specify)
☐

19. Please rank your academic performance. Tick the relevant option.

	High school	University
80 -100%		
70-79%		
60-69%		
50-59%		
40-49%		
30-39%		
0-29%		

20. What would you say are the reason(s) for your academic performance? Please tick relevant option(s)

Personal issues	University's mode of teaching	Student's learning	Financial constraints
Hectic social life	Foreign teaching environment	Foreign learning environment	Lack of access to prescribed books
Poor time management	University overwhelming	Hard work	No printing credit for readings
Laziness and lack of interest in my studies	Difficult course content	Study groups	No photocopying credit
Health problems	Heavy workload	Sending drafts to lecturers	Can't afford stationery
Loss of DP	Not understanding feedback and acting on it	Consultations with lecturers	Live far from campus
Loss of marks due to late submissions	Lack of guidance	Poor understanding of the readings	Any other reason(s)?

Ps elaborate on the reasons given above in the space provided below.

21. Please tick the type(s) of academic support available to you at Rhodes University
☐ Extended Studies
☐ Tutorials
☐ Mentoring
☐ Peer learning
☐ Warden
☐ House Committee
☐ Personal librarian
☐ All of the above
☐ Any other (specify)

22. Is there a relationship between this level of academic support and your academic performance now? Please explain.

23. **Is there a need for academic support at Rhodes University? Please explain**.
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Unsure
☐ Do not know
☐ Other (specify)

24. What kind of academic support would best meet your academic needs? Please elaborate.

25. Which of the subjects you are registered for now should academic support target? Why?

26. Who should provide academic support?
- ☐ Departments
- ☐ Faculty
- ☐ Dedicated unit in the university
- ☐ Residences
- ☐ Senior students
- ☐ Other (specify)

27. Up to what academic level do you think academic support should be provided? Please explain
- ☐ First
- ☐ Second
- ☐ Third
- ☐ Fourth
- ☐ Throughout academic career

28. Do you think your lecturers provide you with required academic skills? Please explain.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Do not know

29. Do you attend your lectures?
- ☐ Everyday
- ☐ 2-3 times a week
- ☐ 3-4 times a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Never

30. Do you study before attending lectures?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

31. Do you consult your lecturers with regard to your studies? Please elaborate
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

32. Please complete the table below regarding the tutorial system

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Help understand the course				
Welcoming environment				
Help understand the readings				
Tutor knowledgeable and engaging				
Students' level of engagement				
Students' preparation prior to attending				

Help with academic skills				
Duration of the tutorial				

33. Do you experience difficulties in any of the following areas? Please tick
    1= no difficulty   2= minor difficulties   3= major difficulties

	No difficulty	**Minor difficulties**	**Major difficulties**
Taking notes in lectures			
Writing assignments			
Studying			
Getting the literature			
Understanding lectures			
Critical thinking			
Exam preparation and writing			
Time management			
Other (specify)			

34. What action have you taken to address the issues mentioned in question 33 above?

35. **Any additional comments that could assist us in understanding students' learning needs and academic support at Rhodes University?**

THANK YOU! WE APPRECIATE YOUR COOPERATION

Appendix G

Gate keeper invitation and consent Form

Research Project: Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.

Re: Request of "gate-keeper permission" to undertake research within my faculty

I, (full name) …………………………………………………………………….Do hereby agree to participate in the research project: Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.

Lebogang Khoza has my permission to interview students and staff and permission to make contact with students regarding the scheduling of interviews.

Lebogang also has my permission to request my faculty administrators to forward his invitation letter and consent form to…………………………………. Students via email.

I understand that students will be interviewed and that the interviews will be tape-recorded and that tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet by the researcher. I also understand that the research will use anonymous responses in the project and will be treated confidentially. The students will not be identified in any way on the transcript of the interview or in any of the published results of the study.

I understand that my student's participation is voluntary, there is no penalty for not participating and that they may widraw from the project at any time by contacting the researcher.

Lebogang can be contacted via: Email……… Or cell:

I have not been coerced or persuaded into signing this consent form.

Signature: …………………..   Date:

For any queries, you are welcome to contact the following:
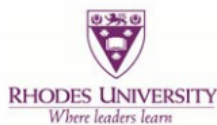
Project Id: 0548

Sociology Department: 0466038361

Ms. Babalwa Sishuta: B.Sishuta@ru.ac.za (Supervisor)

Mr. Lebogang Khoza: Khozalebogang27@gmail.com (Researcher)

Mr Siyanda Manqele: S.Manqele@ru.ac.za (Rhodes University Ethics Coordinator)

Appendix H

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

19 September 2019

Lebogang Khoza

Review Reference: 2019-0548-913

Email: g14K3167@campus.ru.ac.za

Dear lebogang khoza

Re: Academic readiness of students for higher education: A case for academic support at Rhodes University.

Principal Investigator: Ms Babalwa Sishuta

Collaborators: Mr Lebogang Khoza ,

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) – Human Ethics (HE) sub-committee.

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely

Prof Joanna Dames

Chair: Human Ethics sub-committee, RUESC- HE