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An assessment of the implementation of peer academic support programmes at higher education institutions in South Africa: a case study of one University

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to assess the implementation of peer academic support programmes which are Language and Writing Advancement and Supplemental Instruction programmes in one University in South Africa. The study adopted a qualitative approach that used face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis to collect data. Purposive sampling was used to select those who participated in the study. The participants were two coordinators of the programmes, ten facilitators working in the programmes for in-depth interviews and ten students who have been receiving services from the programmes for two focus group discussions.

The study revealed that there was a general trend whereby peer facilitators of the programmes were recruited and trained. However, it was found that some facilitators abandoned the position immediately after the training which made it difficult for coordinators and Human Resource Staff (HR) to start the process of recruitment and re-training. In this regard, Teaching and Learning Centre, (TLC) and HR simply appointed other untrained facilitators to replace those who had deserted the positions. Also, some facilitators were unable to attend some of the regular trainings because of clashes with their classes. All these have a negative impact on the implementation of the programmes.

The results also reveal that some of the facilitators were frustrated with students' poor attendance in the sessions, and even those who attended their sessions, did not participate much in the discussions. It was found that most lecturers and students did not know the differences between supplemental instruction (SI) and tutorials. Neither did lecturers encourage their students to seek help from the TLC services. Reviewing of assignments from different disciplines by TLC facilitators was another burning issue that came up. Some facilitators reviewed assignments from different disciplines, because the disciplines were not represented and this is because they want to claim for more hours, which affects the quality of the programmes. The findings also show that some students did not like to take their assignment to the TLC for review because facilitators

make unnecessary and harsh comments. On the contrary, some students acknowledged that they were fine with the way facilitators review assignments because it involves one-on-one consultation, and they always pass the assignments reviewed by PASS facilitators. The study also revealed that the coordinators monitored and evaluated facilitators through observation and the checking of attendance registers. Coordinators ware also monitored by senior colleagues of the department such as the manager of the TLC. Furthermore TLC has instituted a mentorship programme whereby senior facilitators mentor newly recruited facilitators. However not every facilitator had a mentor. The study also exposed the fact that the TLC venue was usually closed during examination periods to allow facilitators to prepare for their examinations.

The findings show that some departments were not represented by facilitators and to remedy this situation, it is recommended that all departments be represented and lecturers encourage the students to get help from TLC. Most facilitators were undergraduate students, but they needed to be replaced by post graduates who did not have course work that will clash with PASS activities. The strategies used by facilitators were fairly good but more should be done to encourage students to participate in sessions. Finally, the monitoring and support mechanisms put in place were very functional but the TLC should make sure every facilitator is being monitored especially concerning the review of assignments. The significance of the findings of this study cannot be overemphasised. The strengths and challenges regarding the implementation of these programmes at this particular university have been revealed. Through the recommendations, it is hoped that the institution and the TLC would effect some changes in the implementation of these peer academic support programmes in order to better serve the students so as to achieve satisfactory throughput and retention rates.

KEY WORDS: Academic support, programmes, peer support, higher education, South Africa, previously disadvantaged students.

DECLARATION

I, Magdaline Nji Tangwe student number 201006732 hereby declare that I am aware of the University of Fort Hare's policy on plagiarism and I have taken every precaution to comply with the regulations.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

LWAP   Language and Writing Advancement Programmes

LWC   Language and Writing Consultant

SI   Supplemental Instruction

SIL   Supplemental Instruction Leader

TLC   Teaching and Learning Centre

LKA   Life Knowledge Action

PASS   Peer Assisted Students' Service

CHE   Council on Higher Education

SAQA   South African Qualification Authority

HEQC   Higher Education Quality Control

DoE   Department of Education

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background to the study

South African education during the apartheid era was structured along racial lines. The apartheid regime brought about a fragmentation of the education sector leading to the current inequalities which are prevalent in the higher education sector. (Kraak, 2001). In order to ensure equity and redress in the higher education sector after 1994 democratic elections, the new government introduced new policies (Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2003). These include the White Paper on Higher Education (Act 101 of 1997), the Higher Education Quality Control Institutional Audit Framework education for South Africans (HEQC, 2004), the CHE (2003), the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) (2001) among others. These policies have ensured increased access and admission of previously disadvantaged students to higher education (CHE, 2003). The policies also embraced inclusivity, diversity and multi-culturalism in the South African higher education sector and they are also based on what Verieva (2006:105) termed "constitutionalism" that is committed to redressing past inequalities and discrimination in the sector.

The policies were effected after 1994 and highlight the need to increase participation of blacks, the disabled and women in tertiary education so as to reflect the demographic reality of South African Society (DoE,1997). These policies have made a remarkable improvement in the enrolment and participation of these previously disadvantaged groups in higher education institutions in the country. This has been confirmed by many writers such as Chabaya .; Rembe, ; Wadesango & Muhuro, (2010) who reveal that there has been a considerable increase in black African students in tertiary education in South Africa. However, the OECD (2008) states that the situation has not been the same in terms of performance and retention. According to Van Schalkwyk, (2007), cited in Chabaya et al (2010), one in every three students entering higher education will have dropped out by the end of their first year of study, in terms of retention in South Africa. The White Paper on Higher Education (Act No: 101 of 1997) outlines a comprehensive set of initiatives for the transformation of higher education through the development of a

single co-ordinated system (Department of Higher Education, 1997). The Department of Education (1997) in a White Paper on Higher Education spelt out the challenge facing higher education in South Africa today and what it aims to achieve.

In South Africa today, the challenge is to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities. It must lay the foundations for the development of a learning society which can stimulate, direct and mobilize the creative and intellectual energies of all the people towards meeting the challenges of reconstruction and development (DoE, 1997 pg. 3).

These policies have led to the admission of students who are under-prepared for university study (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012). It is argued that the traditional student market for the previously disadvantaged universities is the provinces that are characterized by poor socio-economic development, poor performance in Matriculation over the years, high poverty levels as well as poor infrastructure (Makura, Skead & Nhundu, 2011:15). These historical factors have impacted negatively on student throughput and retention rates at the university level with about 34% of students failing to complete their programmes in the stipulated time (Matomela, 2010). Using English as a second language and a lack of a solid foundation in secondary education are some of the reasons advanced for this poor academic performance (Skead, 2006).

Many institutions at the tertiary level have instituted measures and programmes to redress the inequalities of the past as reflected in the White Paper (1997) to help students cope with and succeed in higher education/university learning. Some higher education institutions, in attempts to reach this goal of redressing the past educational imbalances and transform the higher educational sector, opted for a Senate Discretionary Exemption Policy and a Recognition of Prior Learning Policy, particularly in previously disadvantaged universities (Department of Higher Education Training, 2012). These policies enable students who do not meet the entry requirements for a degree to be deliberately admitted irrespective of their weak Matriculation results (Makura, Skead & Nhundu, 2011). The aim of these policies is to increase academic access to higher education or what is commonly called massification of higher education (Cloete &

Bunting, 2000). In addition, most universities in South Africa have also established a foundation programme to assist students with poor Matriculation results to later gain access to degree programmes of the universities. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2012:1), the primary aim of foundation provision commonly known as the foundation programme "is to improve the academic performance of students who are at risk due to their educational background." Therefore, the aim of foundation provision is to provide support to educationally disadvantaged students entering university for the first-time and who are seen as underprepared.

In an attempt to increase student retention and throughput rates, most universities in South Africa (particularly historically disadvantaged universities) have established academic support programmes within centres of learning or Teaching and Learning Centres (TLCs). Different universities have adopted different name for such programmes (e.g. Language and Writing Advancement Programme and Supplemental Instruction). As McInnis et al. (2000) stress, students entering a system of higher education for the first time, particularly those whose previous school performance is poor, need help and support with the transition and enculturation process. Reyes (2007) concludes that academic support programmes are vital resources in assisting students to overcome obstacles and aid in student retention. Reyes (2007:221) emphasized that such programmes occupy a unique place in the structure of institutions because of their "mandate to address the needs and interests of the entire academic community in support of the education of students."

Peer academic support programmes are based on "supplemental instruction principles and processes that integrate academic initiatives" whose aim is to provide academic support to students in the areas of language and writing as well as subject matter seen as difficult (Skead, 2006 cited in Makura, Skead & Nhundu, 2011:16). The model adopted for these programmes is a peer collaborative and active learning one. According to Martin and Arendale (1994), SI was developed in 1970s at the University of Missouri-Kansa City, USA and now serves as an international model of SI programming. In South Africa, SI was established in the early 1980s in response to the need of some black students seeking admission into previously white universities and these programmes were then

known by different names such as 'Academic Support', 'Academic Development', 'Institutional Development' (Boughey, 2010:4). Peer facilitators are selected students with potential knowledge from different faculties and a willingness to assist their peers in various areas of difficulties. The selection is based on oral and written interviews (Cuseo, 2002). Those who are successful are trained on a regular basis by the centre housing the peer academic support programmes.

According to Twalo (2008:3) the aim of Supplemental Instruction (SI) is to provide support to students on historically difficult subjects such as natural sciences, accounting and others through focusing on helping the students to understand the subject content and enable students to be involved in process of learning. SI peer facilitators are called Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SIL). They are senior undergraduate students. These facilitators support students facing problems in their subject areas. The facilitators work hand-in-hand with lecturers whose students bring problems to the programme and attend the lecturers' classes and agree on what issues the facilitators should help students with (Martin & Arendale, 1994).

 SI sessions are organized weekly and this is where students share ideas with their peers through questioning, re-directing questions, summarizing, anecdote, and so forth. Facilitators concentrate on students as individuals as well as groups (Skead, 2006). It is believed that this idea will help the students co-operate and share ideas, as Fisher (1995) indicates that learning with a partner, sometimes called peer tutoring or with a group can extend opportunities to students, especially with less able and more able students, when they learn and teach each other. Hence, SI is non-remedial, proactive, peer-collaborative and active learning whose quality is assured by staff and peer observations. Peer facilitators are provided with extensive ongoing training sessions to ensure that they provide quality guardianship to their peers. The Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SILs) are also expected to keep a portfolio of activities for their self-evaluation and reflection (Makura, Skead & Nhundu, 2011).

Another programme based in the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) is the Language and Writing Advancement Programme (LWAP) with facilitators known as Language and Writing Consultants (LWCs). These facilitators are postgraduate students who are trained

in how to review students' assignments as aptly stipulated by Cuseo (2002). The peer facilitators are trained in how to write an academic essay focusing on different areas such as introduction, body and conclusion. The facilitators also learn other essential aspects of academic writing such as referencing and plagiarism which Makura et al (2011) view as critical for them to master. In a nutshell, the facilitators make sure that the general structure of the essay is well-presented before the student submits to the lecturer. Therefore, peer academic support programmes are expected to play a key role as change agents and provide support to the learning activities of students.

However, despite the attempts to implement these peer academic support programmes to ensure retention and throughput, there are still concerns from stakeholders about retention and throughput rates (Jansen, 2012). According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2012:1), "the high drop-out rate of students in their first year of study revealed through an analysis of specific cohorts is disconcerting." Students who enrolled in 2005 in the university sector were tracked by the Department of Higher Education and Training (2012) throughout their studies until they graduated or dropped-out. The study revealed startling statistics. The "drop-out rates for first time entering students in a 3 year qualification are on average 26% in the first year, with a further 9% in the second year and 6% in the third year, while for a 4-year qualification, the average drop-out rates for first time entering students are 15% in the first year, with a further 7% in the second year, 4% in the third year and 3% in the fourth year" (Department of Education and Training, 2012:1).

 It is further indicated that the high drop-out and repetition rates "result in universities losing potential state income within the teaching output sub-block grants, from where students in undergraduate programmes are funded. The Department's bid to Treasury for additional state funds for the university sector is weakened by the low student success and graduation rates" (Department of Education and Training, 2012:2).

It has also been noted that there have been poor levels of adjustment and low performance particularly by students from previously disadvantaged and marginalized groups (OECD, 2008 cited in Chabaya, Wadesango, Rembe and Muhuro, 2010). This category of students are those that have not in the past gained access or benefited from

higher education institutions because of their socio-economic background, (Jones, 2002). Low performance of this group of students has led to their taking a longer time to complete a degree, as well as high repetition and drop-out rates among those students (OECD, 2008 cited in Chabaya et al, 2010). In addition, only a third of students who enroll at universities complete in the stipulated time and 48 percent of students who get loans and bursaries never complete their studies. This means that deserving students are denied access (Jansen, 2012). Hence, there is concern that intervention programmes, such as peer academic support have not attained the required results.

Dyk, Zybrands, Cillia and Coetzee (2009) state that since intervention programmes are still new in most universities in South Africa, it is important to look at the implementation on this type of intervention. The fact that these programmes have been established and are being implemented in many universities and are not yielding the required results, there is a need to examine how they are being implemented. This study looked at the implementation of peer academic support programmes in one university in South Africa. Intake and throughput rate of the university under study in 2007 to 2011 are shown in Table 1 (appendix).

Table 1 in the appendix shows that in 2007, at one of the previously disadvantage universities, it was assumed that the normal number of students who were supposed to graduate in the University under study stood at 1633 but only 668 representing 40.9 percent graduated. 483 took one more year to graduate and another 231 and 108 students respectively took two and three additional years to graduate while the rest took more years. It should also be noted that in the Faculty of Education, the intake was 401 (admitted in 2004 plus repeaters) only 93 students successfully graduated in 2007 giving a mere percentage of 23.2 percent. Only one hundred and fifty one (151) students graduated after having added one year while 124 spent two extra years to graduate and the rest used longer than two years. In 2008, of a total of 1683 students who were expected to graduate, only 802 graduated which gave a percentage of 47.6, while 881 took more than the normal number of years to graduate. Similarly, in 2009, 2124 students could have graduated with various qualifications but only 1079 did graduate representing 50.8 percent. The rest took more than the normal number of years to graduate. Two

thousand three hundred and six (2306) students were to graduate in 2010, if all went well, but only 1165 graduated as required and this gives 50.5 percent while 1141 students took more time than required to graduate with various qualifications at this particular university. Finally, in 2011, 2415 students could have graduated from this previously disadvantaged university from the five faculties but only 1278 graduated within the stipulated number of years for their qualifications and this represent 52.9 percent. However, other students (1137) took more years than the usual number to graduate.

In summary, the throughput rates for the past five years are as follows: 2007 40.9 percent, 2008 47.6 percent, 2009 50.8 percent, 2010 50.5 percent and 2011 52.9 percent. Despite the small increase in the pass rates from 2007 to 2009, a small drop in the percentage was observed in 2010 while in 2011, there was another insignificant increase in the graduation rate. Therefore, it can be concluded that the graduation or throughput rate has not been satisfactory, with the highest rate being 52.9 percent. Hence throughput rate in the University under study is not satisfactory despite the fact that intervention programmes are being implemented.

1.2   Statement of the research problem

The overall aim of peer academic support programme implementation is to improve students' academic performance through the provision of the necessary academic support, which in turn, will lead to increased throughput and retention rates. However, these programmes have failed to yield the expected results because the number of students who drop out remains high, and there is a high failure rate (OECD, 2008 cited in Chabaya et al, 2010; Letseka & Maile, 2008 cited in Kaburise, 2010; Bally, 2007; Matomela, 2010). This is characterized by poor academic writing and performance in tests, assignments and examinations with only 34% of students being able to complete their programmes within the stipulated time (Bally, 2007). Hence, there is a need to examine how peer academic support programmes aimed at supporting students academically to improve academic performance and to ensure retention and throughput at are being implemented in one University in South Africa.

1.3 Research questions

The main research question of this study is:

1.3.1 How are peer academic support programmes implemented in one university in South Africa?

This study is guided by the following sub-research questions:

1.3.1.1 How are facilitators trained to enable them implement peer academic support programmes?

1.3.1.2 What are the strategies/methods used in implementing these programmes?

1.3.1.3 How are peer academic support programmes monitored and evaluated?

1.3.1.4 What are the perceptions of students on the implementation of these programmes?

1.3.1.5 What are the challenges facing the implementation of the programmes?

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of peer academic support programmes. The specific objectives of this study include the following:

1.4.1 To examine how peer facilitators are trained to enhance the implementation of the programmes.

1.4.2 To explore the different implementation strategies/methods used in peer academic support programmes.

1.4.3 To find out students' perceptions of the implementation of the programmes.

1.4.4 To examine how academic support peer programmes are monitored and evaluated.

1.4.5 To explore the challenges which militate against the proper implementation of these programmes.

1.5 Assumptions of the study

This study is based on the overall assumption that there is poor implementation of peer academic support programmes which is leading to persistently low retention and throughput rates at universities in South Africa. Therefore, this study postulates the following assumptions:

1.5.1 Peer facilitators need more training to implement peer academic support programmes.

1.5.2 There are a variety of methods/strategies used by peer facilitators in the implementation of these programmes.

1.5.2 There is need for rigorous monitoring and evaluation of peer academic support programmes.

1.5.3 Most students tend to show a negative impression of peer academic support programmes.

1.6 Significance of the study

The study would be of significance to students, peer facilitators and staff of the programmes, coordinators and as a contribution to the literature. First, students would benefit from the study as the findings and recommendations might lead to improvements in the implementation of the programmes. Secondly, the findings and recommendations would be useful to the staff of peer academic support programmes, coordinators and peer facilitators. Therefore, this might enhance a re-appraisal of their strategies or interventions toward improving the implementation of these programmes. Furthermore, the study should contribute to the existing body of literature on students' learning and support programmes. Finally, the study might also stimulate other researches to carry out further studies which foster student's learning and support programmes.

1.7 Delimitations/Scope of study

This study was limited to only one university which is running the peer academic support programme in South Africa. It was also limited to undergraduate students who mostly are affected by the issues of retention and throughput. Therefore, postgraduate students did not take part in this study.

1.8 Definition of key terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

1.8.1 Writing Problems

From a pedagogical point of view, writing is one of the four basic language skills, namely: speaking, listening, reading and writing, which the teacher, as an instructor, ought to

know. Unlike speaking, writing is not a natural activity. While speaking is acquired by all normally endowed human beings without explicit instruction, writing, on the other hand, has to be taught (Msahjila, 2005). According to this study, the term writing problems refers to the difficulties students have in writing assignments, tests and examinations using the English language. The writing problems include construction of sentences, punctuation, referencing, paragraphing, and the structuring of academic essays (Msahjila, 2005).

1.8.2 Programmes

A programme is a series of steps to be carried out or goals to be accomplished. It could also be defined as a plan of action resulting from a strategy or intended to accomplish a specific goal (Free online dictionary, n.d). For the purpose of this study, programmes refer to the different interventions that are implemented by universities, in order to assist students with learning difficulties, especially students from previously disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

1.8.3 Poor socio-economic background

Socio-economic disadvantage is generally associated with factors such as low-quality living environments, mobility, family unemployment or underemployment, lack of access to resources that stimulate learning such as books and pre-school programs, poor health and social discrimination. These circumstances equate with poor attendance, lower retention rates, less readiness for schooling and poorer average outcomes at school (The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, n.d). However, this study sees poor socio-economic background as a situation of students whose parents are not wealthy and are living mostly in townships in the Eastern Cape. Therefore, the students were not privileged to attend 'good' schools because of financial and other reasons.

1.8.4 Retention

This is sometimes referred to as persistence and it is defined as measures of trying to improve graduate rates and decrease loss of tuition revenue from students that either drop out or transfer to another similar institution (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2010; Engstrom & Tinto, 2001)). In this study, retention refers to the act of retaining students within the university, thereby avoiding drop-out.

1.8.5 Throughput

This study adopts the definition of throughput from Peterson and Arends (2009:107) who state that throughput is "the number of years a student or cohort of students takes to complete the learning programmes or the qualification for which they were registered… therefore, a graduation rate will be calculated and used as a proxy for throughput" (Department of Education and Training, 2012:2).

1.8.6 Implementation

Techtarget (online) defines implementation as "the carrying out, execution, or practice of a plan, a method, or any design for doing something. As such, implementation is the action that must follow any preliminary thinking in order for something to actually happen." This definition is therefore adopted for purpose of this study.

1.8.7   Previously disadvantaged student

According to Jones (2002), this is the group of students in South Africa that have not in the past gained access or benefited from higher education institutions due to their socio-economic background.

1.9   Chapter layout

This dissertation is made up of five chapters as follows:

Chapter one: Introduction. This chapter covers the background of the study, where the implementation of peer academic support programmes in one higher education institution in South Africa is being investigated. This section further discusses the problem statement, objectives of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study and the definitions of terms.

Chapter two: Review of Related Literature.
This chapter discusses the theoretical framework as well as the review of related literature. The literature focuses on the following headings: the historical perspectives of academic support programmes in South Africa, retention and throughput rates and poor academic performance, programmes to help poor academic performing students in

higher education, problems with the implementation of academic programmes, and strategies used in implementing academic support programmes. It also focuses on the monitoring and support mechanisms used to implement these programmes, learners' perceptions of the implementation of the programmes and the professional training of peer facilitators.

Chapter three: Research Methodology.

This chapter presents and justifies the research methodology used in the study. It also discusses the philosophical assumption underlying various methodologies and the interpretivist paradigm on which the study is based. The research design, population and sampling procedures, research instruments used in data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Chapter four: Presentation, analysis and discussion of findings.

In this chapter, the researcher presents the data collected through interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis using thematic analyses. The chapter also discusses the findings that emerged from the study. The discussion is presented in light of the current literature.

Chapter five: Summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

A summary of the main findings based on the research questions; the conclusions that were arrived at from the findings and the recommendations as well as limitations of the study and suggestions for further studies, constitutes chapter five.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1   Introduction

The previous chapter presented a general overview of the background of the study. This chapter presents the theoretical underpinnings of the study and reviews the related literature pertaining to different aspects of academic support programmes. There is a large body of international literature exploring various social and organizational factors which impact on students' retention of knowledge in higher education (Tinto, 1993; Johnes, 1990). Much of this literature suggests that there is a wide range of interacting personal and social attributes as well as institutional practices which impact on both retention rates and performance. The biggest challenge in public education is no longer determining which schools need help; rather it is determining how to help those that do, and when to decide that no amount of help will do (Manwaring, 2010).

The review of literature is presented in the following order: historical perspectives of academic support programmes, retention, throughput rates, and poor academic performance. The review also deals with programmes initiated to address students' learning problems, problems plaguing the implementation of intervention programmes, monitoring and support of these programmes, learner's perceptions, professional training provided to facilitators, and the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

2.2   Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is Vincent Tinto's interactionalist theory which is about retention (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1998, 2002). According to Tinto, a student will most likely retain or continue studies if there is a match between his/her motivation and academic goals as well as a favourable prevailing academic and social environment in the institution or organization. He provides a conceptual scheme that explains retention as an outcome of student success,   where he notes that the chances of successful students completing a

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course are obviously increased, especially if the student also feels valued and supported.

Despite the well-founded, empirically grounded criticism of his work, the main reason for using his views relates to the high status of his work on students integration. Also, his theory seeks to explain departure from an institution before graduation as a result of institutions norms rather than on account of the higher education system. The key element of this model is integration. The student integration model (SIM) argues that students who strongly identify with the internal characteristics of an institution will succeed and those who do not will leave (Tinto, 1998). The student who succeeds enjoys the course, achieves good marks and feels that the study is contributing to his/her goals. As a result, the student is academically integrated. It is worth mentioning that social integration through friendships and enjoyment of the university experiences equally important. Tinto (2000) outlines the following five conditions that best promote retention:

(i)   Having high expectations of students

(ii)   Clearly explaining institutional requirements and providing good advice on academic choices

(iii)   Providing academic social and personal support; particularly in and before the first year

(iv)   Showing students that they are valued

(v)   Active involvement in learning.

Tinto's interactionalist theory also emphasizes that, to take retention seriously, is to take education seriously (Tinto 1975, 1993, 1997). As far as student retention in higher education is concerned,   Tinto's interactionalist theory views retention as a function of the match between the student's academic capabilities and motivation, and the institution's academic and social characteristics. That is to say, all other things being equal, the fit between the individual's capabilities and the institution's characteristics strongly influence the student's commitment to obtaining a degree, or diploma (Berger & Braxton, 1998). Tinto's theory, cited in Koen (2007:62) also stresses the importance of viewing the classroom as the "crossroads where the social

and the academic meet." He also reiterates that collaborative learning is good for achieving social integration. The basic message is that an institution that invests in student welfare will be rewarded with a good throughput rate (Braxton, 2003).

The function of universities according to Durkheim (1952), cited in Tinto (1975), is to inculcate sufficient homogeneity with respect to shared norms, values and beliefs so as to create social solidarity among groups. He continues by further stating that, where society fails to integrate individuals into social groups and to regulate their behaviour, a dysfunctional outcomes, such as suicide and failure are possible. Tinto in this regard uses the concept of integration in the same way. He describes integration as the extent to which an individual shares the norms, attitudes and values of peers and academics (Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto, looking at the school context, a student might fail or drop out if he or she doesn't relate well to the norms beliefs and values of the institution and with those of their peers. He links dropout to institutional rejection (experiences of insufficient integration). Therefore, the implementation of support programmes in higher education institutions should take into consideration student-student influences, academic-student influences and the relationship between an individual's beliefs and the beliefs, values and norms of the academic system (Tinto, 1975).

In revising Tinto's interactionalist theory, Berger and Braxton (1998) present more specific explanations and examples supporting those of Tinto by saying what Tinto's work and other researchers have done. The idea is that the more students interact with other students and staff, the more likely they are to persist with their studies (Astin, 1984; Tinto 1997). Therefore, every staff member and peer educator involved in students support programmes should endeavour to include this aspect (students' interaction among themselves) in the implementation of the programmes.

Thomas (2002) draws on Tinto's work theory to develop her own concept of 'institutional habitus', which she relates to research she did at the University of Keele in the United Kingdom. She explains that 'institutional habitus' may be seen as the cultural norms and practices embodied in an institution. Thomas grafts the concept of

institutional habitus into a description of academic and social experiences which the University of Keele attempts to create, showing how the favourable impression created assists retention. Another aspect in which she supports of Tinto's theory is the emphasis on social experience, such as friendship, mutual support and social networks. Universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) can facilitate friendships by providing appropriate living arrangements (student accommodation such as shared student houses) and designing the teaching process to foster team building and group learning. In view of Tinto's theory (Tinto 1975, 1993, 1997) and Thomas' concept of institutional habitus' Thomas (2002), different learning styles should be supported and the diversity of backgrounds needs to be appreciated.

Vincent Tinto's interactionalist theory is important to this present study as it helps explain the issue of retention which has been a bone of contention in both public and academic circles. The implementation of programmes must take cognizance of the integration of academic goals and the motivation of students as well as the academic and social involvement of students in order to achieve academic success and retention. Tinto refers to this as collaborative learning and social integration. **Tinto**'s theory shows a strong link between faculty support and student **retention.** A Longwell and Grice (2007) study suggests that colleges need to be more strategic and systematic in finding ways to develop faculty-student interactions for first generation, working-class college students. Tinto's model has long been cited as the major theory in explaining dropout behaviour.

2.3   Historical perspectives of academic support programmes in South Africa

After the first democratic election of 1994, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) came up with a proposition which aimed at addressing the need for equity and skills (CHE, 1996). It projected a greater participation of disadvantaged students in higher education and accordingly, the number of previously disadvantaged students that were admitted into higher education increased tremendously and has continued till the present. This proposition involved the provision of increased access for black students into higher education institutions, which was still greatly limited at the time (Cloete, 2002:11). Pavlich and Orkin (1993) reiterated that as a result of relaxed state

apartheid policies in the early 1980s, historically white universities began to admit small numbers of black students. In an attempt to improve the quality of the increased number of students that were admitted, academic support programmes were formed (Boughey, 2005).

Torr (1991) stated that academic support programmes in South Africa were formed to assist students without the necessary background to be able to benefit immediately from lectures and tutorials. This early initiative was therefore liberal in that it focused on attempting to give black students equal opportunity by filling the gap between their poor socio-economic and educational backgrounds and the university standards (Boughey, 2005). The experience of those working in academic support programmes which have been set up on historically black campuses is that under-preparedness would eventually be a majority phenomenon (Mehl, 1988; Moulder, 1991).

Boughey (2005) identified a number of activities as key characteristics of early academic support work, some of which have continued to date. They include boosting access and admission and attempting to identify students with the potential to succeed in higher education in spite of their poor scores on matriculation examinations. Most universities in South Africa have instituted academic support programmes by putting in place programmes like language and writing programmes, supplemental instruction programmes, peer tutoring, peer mentoring, life skills and curriculum programmes. This shows that the implementation and enhancement of programmes that place peers in leadership roles in the academic domain are on the rise (Keup & Mulins, 2010). Latino (2008) concluded that such peer influence can lead to a positive outcome on retention and throughput for the students receiving the support as well as the peers performing the roles.

2.4   Retention, throughput rates, and poor academic performance

The review in this section is divided into three subsections, namely; retention, throughput and poor academic performance of students at higher education institutions.

2.4.1 Retention

Student retention refers to the extent to which learners remain within a higher education institution, and complete a programme of study in a pre-determined time-period (Quinn et al, 2005). According to Moll (2004), one of the key factors contributing to student attrition in South Africa has been shown to be school leavers under-preparedness for higher education study. Similarly, Scott et al. (2007) concluded that the reason students fail to complete or take longer to complete master's degree requirements is their lack of academic preparedness resulting both from their social class and the inadequate high school curriculum. According to Tinto (1997), academic preparedness is interpreted as the extent to which students feel they are ready to study at higher education level, and the ways in which the institution provides academic support if it is needed. Viewed like this, the problem in learning is considered to be caused by both a shortage of individual skills and by institutional deficits. These can be addressed by learners improving their language skills, grammar and spelling (Gibbs, 2006). The author concluded that learners are enrolled as full-time students but are in reality studying part-time, which seriously affects academic performance at the university level. According to Tinto (1975, 1993); Benn (1982); Astin (1984); Johnes (1990); Pascarella and Terenzini (1991); Moortgat (1997); Ozga et al. (1998), seven areas were identified that influence students retention in higher education. These include academic experience (including assessment); academic and social match; finance and employment; family support and commitments**;** institutional expectations and commitment; academic preparedness; university support services. These are discussed below.

Tinto (1993) states that academic experience encompasses curricula, teaching and learning issues, accessibility of and relationship with staff, flexibility (e.g. timetable and deadlines) and both modes of assessment and opportunities for re-taking courses. Theories around academic experience gives good reasons for implementing peer academic support programmes. This is because they assume that most students do not have a good relationship with lecturers and can't open up to them. In this case, Kimmo, Rosenthal and Shelly (2010) conceive that students can maintain regular and

ongoing contact with their peer facilitators who can be more flexible and accessible than faculty members. In addition, peers can address issues such as homesickness, roommate conflict and test anxiety that students may not wish to broach with their regular lecturers. It is also maintained that institutional expectations and commitment affect retention (Berger & Braxton, 1998). These authors state that commitment arises from, and is reinforced by the very strong traditions of these universities that enable their graduates to enter prestigious areas of employment. It is therefore believed that implementation of academic support programmes should depend solely on the institutional expectations and commitment in order to yield a better outcome.

The second area that influences students' retention in higher education is academic and social match between students and the University which relates to the degree of academic and social integration with the institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1995). The fit between the individual and the institution's characteristics, strongly influences the student's commitment to obtaining a degree. Bean and Metzner's (1985) critique of Tinto's theory clearly indicates that part-time and commuter students tend to be less involved in general institutional activities. In this regard, they are less likely to be integrated into the institution they belong to. It may be assumed that it will be difficult for peer support programmes to function smoothly with this type of students since they are not always around.

Thirdly, finance and employment also affect retention of students in higher education institutions in South Africa. Skead (2006), and Hlalele and Alexander (2012) also reported that most merged institutions of higher learning in South Africa are faced with a host of problems including students financial exclusions, a lack of access for many and under-preparedness for higher learning (cited in Napier & Makura (2013)). It is also revealed that the House of Commons Select Committee in South Africa's report on student retention found finance and part-time employment to be contributing factors to early withdrawal of students (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1997). Analyzing the above statements, it can be perceived that there are other aspects that can affect dropout rates besides the manner in which support programmes are being implemented. Most students engage in part-time employment in order to generate supplementary income.

This category of students may find it hard to study as well as others do since they may miss many lectures and might not have time to attend support programmes at all if they are pressed with work.   It is therefore difficult to get hold of them even for peer facilitators who are willing to help. Thus, implementation of support programmes becomes difficult since implementation cannot take place in a vacuum.

Family Support and commitment is one of the areas that determine student retention and is the most common problem in society. "Families or communities with little or no experience of higher education may be less supportive" of students. This needs to be addressed to enhance retention and completion of enrolled programmes of study (Moortgat, 1997:11-12). In addition, family responsibilities, especially for women with children, have been shown to have a negative effect on retention. In addition, institutional expectations and commitment have also been identified as areas that influence student retention in higher education in South Africa. Morrow (2003) maintains that when we talk of low academic standards one should consider the heart of institutional discourse and reflect on institutional values and priorities which cause change and vie for dominant position,. This discourse includes what is said and done in lecture theatres, seminar and tutorial rooms and residences. Some examples of institutional discourse include official university statements, numerous policy documents relating to various subjects, choices of textbooks, the construction of curricula and pedagogical preferences. This is why Boughey (2010) suggested that any recommendations for academic development will inevitably involve work in what might be termed 'the domain of culture as dominant discourse.'

Furthermore, academic preparedness is an area that affects retention of students in South African higher education institutions. The problem of poorly prepared students for university education is not unique to South Africa but is widespread in both developed and developing countries. This situation prevails even in the most developed countries, the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Happen & Therriault, 2008). In the US, African Americans and people of Latin descent are often within this category of disadvantaged students. For example, Francis, Rivera and Lesaux (2006) noted that English Language Learners present a unique set of

challenges to educators in the US because of the central role played by academic language proficiency in the acquisition and assessment of content-area knowledge. According to them, a significant proportion of English Language learners are receiving support services for language development. Furthermore, Dougherty (2010) indicates that there is ample evidence that most African American and Hispanic students do not graduate from universities because they are not adequately prepared academically. Consequently, these students create great challenges for institutions to ensure that they succeed academically (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Fairclough (1994) suggested that the language problem experienced by students in South Africa is a far cry from the one identified and described by many academics. It reaches way beyond the realm of grammar and syntax into the complexities and values of disciplinary discourses and knowledge bases. Fairclough concludes that these challenges can only be addressed by working alongside disciplinary specialists; people who are fluent in the language and can make it explicit to the disciplinary novice student. It is only then that we can develop interventions which can result in students acquiring the secondary discourses such as peer academic support programmes that they need to succeed at the university. According to Leaver, Ehrman and Shekhtman (2005) writing has been reported by many high level language users as being one of the most difficult skills to acquire. Therefore if students who speak English as a second language experience difficulties in writing assignments during their first year of studies, it is likely to be more difficult for them as they proceed to higher levels. This might thus leads to drop-out if no extra support is given.

Finally, university services provided to students also determine the rate of student retention in higher education institutions. Many institutions attempt to keep students from dropping out of school through continuous support in various areas of study (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Heppen & Therriault, 2008). Most Universities in South Africa do this by tracking students when they start their first year of study. Tracking students only helps the institution know the number of students who have dropped out within a certain cohort. Often there is no support offered to those on the verge of dropping out from the institution except in response to the students' own initiative to seek for help from support programmes. According to Karoylor and Flores (2007),

students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have lower rates of high school graduation and university attendance. This category of disadvantaged students is being assisted by peer facilitators in most of the universities considered previously historically black universities in South Africa.

2.4.2 Throughput

This refers to the number of years a student or cohort of students takes to complete the learning programmes or the qualification for which they were registered (Peterson & Arends, 2009). Therefore, it will be reflected in the number of students that graduate every year in relation to the intake. According to the CHE's State of Higher Education Report (2009), the educational system has made important gains in terms of student participation. There was a need to increase the participation of blacks and other disadvantaged groups so as to reflect the demographic realities of the South African society in terms of educational representation. Despite gains, the overall performance of higher education is not totally satisfactory. The policies initiated after 1994 caused a considerable increase in   the representation of formerly disadvantaged groups, but has not been as successful in addressing performance and retention (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD, 2008). From the end of apartheid in 1990 to the present day, there has been a steady growth in the number of students entering higher educational institutions in South Africa. This increase has been remarkable with students from all corners of the country according to Chabaya, Rembe, Wadesango and Muhuro (2010).

However, the main concern has been student retention and progression because higher participation has brought unwanted consequences of increased student dropout rates that some have referred to as the 'students departure puzzle' (Braxton, 2000 cited in Chabaya, Rembe, Wadesango & Muhuro, 2010). The Department of Education (2001) noted that the retention rate in higher education institutions has decreased and the dropout rate has increased. It has also been noted that because of the persistent stress of migration, the retention and graduation rate of migrant students is affected negatively (Bean et al, 2003). The low performance of students has led to them taking a longer time to complete their degree programmes. This has been

particularly noted in South African institutions (Agar, 1990; OECD, 2008). Perhaps the reason most South African Universities suffer from low graduation rates is that most of them, especially the previously disadvantaged Universities, are characterized by this category of students. Similarly, van **Schalkwyk** et al (1987) concluded that while the number of students registered in some South African universities increased from 1970–1980 with a corresponding increase in the number of degrees awarded. Unfortunately the number of female graduates declined as the level of study rose. This confirms the OECD (2008) claim that many female students are hampered in their study by family responsibilities. This is an indication that beside the implementation of academic support programmes, there are other factors that impact on retention. This is also a point of concern in this study.

Graduation rates for Black South African students are shockingly low and most institutions have significantly lower graduation rates for black students than for white students (Agar, 1990; OECD, 2008). It is estimated that one in every three students entering higher education in South Africa will drop out of school by the end of the first year of study; seven out of ten of these drop outs are women (OECD, 2008). According to this author, the high student dropout rate in higher education is bad for the students who drop out, for the institutions involved and for the public in general. Therefore, it is a central policy issue that needs active consideration by policy makers as well as higher education authorities (Longden, 2004). Carey (2008) revealed that despite the trend, some institutions are graduating black students at a higher rate than white students because they monitor year-to-year changes, study the impact of different interventions on student outcomes, break down the numbers among different student populations, and continuously ask themselves how they could improve the situation.

According to CHE Report (2000) on the National Plan for Higher Education, higher education institutions in South Africa are not successful when judged in terms of efficiency, retention, throughput and graduation of students. Also, Motala (2001) cited in Hassan (2011), reinforces the view that educational transformation and change in South Africa have emphasized form, structures and the use of legislation to put

systems in place while neglecting the actual principles and process of teaching and learning. Here one can assume that the problem of low retention and throughput rates can be traced back to teaching and the learning process used by peer facilitators and lecturers. That being said, the problems of access, retention and throughput are by no means clearly defined or easy to solve. There is still confusion about how to achieve stated targets and goals (CHE Monitor 2010). This is because as Scott et al, (2007) cited in CHE Monitor (2010), students do not follow linear paths through higher education. A student may complete one year of a course and then move to a different course or to a different institution. From this it may be assumed that academic support programmes are failing to achieve their intended outcome since students are dropping out from higher education institutions. This recorded drop-out of a course or institution may be misleading because the student may go on to become a successful graduate.

Koen (2007) gives an example that some students who drop-out perceive that they can transfer between institutions to increase their chances of success. Thus, while dropping-out is often viewed as negative, it may actually be a means to some level of success. This also applies to some degree in cases where students leave due to a job conflicts or the need to raise money. As a result there is a need to develop useful indicators to investigate the process of teaching and learning as well as how students' readiness, socioeconomic factors, lecturers' pedagogical resources combine to produce different academic results (Scott et al, 2007). Students' choices may portray a negative impression of the implementation of academic support programmes. It might generally be observed that students are dropping out due to poor implementation of academic support; the exact reason for this study. This is one of the reasons that this study intends to find out students' perceptions of the academic support programmes offered at one specific university in South Africa.

CHE Monitor (2010) indicated that South African universities do not pay sufficient attention to improving the quality of learners and that they instead tend to celebrate success indicators like high recruitment and graduation numbers. They do little to address students' dropout and to promote student retention. Huysamen (2000: 146-151) pointed out that although schools were integrated in 1995 and have since then

experienced a level of transformation, deficiencies in the former Department of Education (DET) schools have not been addressed as yet. Also, inadequate conditions at schools will continue to disadvantage certain students for some time going forward. For example, the number of subjects a student registers for per year can affect performance. in addition, cognitive factors such as language proficiency, as well as non-cognitive factors such as the locus of control and study habits, should be taken into consideration (De Beer, 2000).

Matomela (2010), writing on the declining pass rate of first year students, quoted the Rhodes University spokesperson Kerry Peter as saying that one factor that could possibly determine the drop in pass rate was that the intake from the crop of National Senior Certificate pupils was unusually high. He said in the Education Faculty, the pass rate was 93.27 percent in 2008 and 88.74 percent in 2009. At the University of Fort Hare, the throughput rate between 2006 and 2009 has steadily decreasing. He explains that in 2009 there is a small increase this is most likely from the increase in the yearly student intake (University of Fort Hare, 2012). The problem faced by returning students is that they are less likely to return to an institution at which they failed. This is especially true when they blame the institution for their failure and when they doubt their own academic abilities. This suggests that economic, psychological and other factors play a great role in students dropping out (Koen, 2007). Access and throughput are paramount for deserving students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds because South Africa needs highly skilled workers for the labour market to help address equity according to CHE (1997). De Beer (2000) reiterated the fact that the increasing pressure to select students from disadvantaged background necessitates the consideration of dynamic psychometric tests measuring potential educational and economic background. There are concerns however that these tests could be disadvantageous to students who are from weak, unsuccessful or under-resourced schools.

A counter argument is that poorly prepared students with potential to learn will normally be provided with extra help and support so can succeed academically (Balfanz, Legters & Jordan, 2004). Most of the student's enrolled at Universities in

South Africa, especially those at historically disadvantaged universities, fall within the disadvantaged group referred to. This has necessitated the establishment of academic programmes with specialized interventions to support these students and to enable them to succeed academically.

2.4.3. Poor Academic performance

This is a situation where there is an inability to produce successful results immediately (Johnson, 2002). It is obvious that there will be poor academic performance when students in higher education institutions do not respond well to the teaching methods stipulated by Tinto (2006). Brown (2010) investigated experiences of dropout in rural secondary schools in the Eastern Cape using focus group discussions. The study found out that the main cause of dropout was that students failed to adapt to the demands of higher education. It further stated that this was related to the school system not preparing students adequately. This resulted in some students finding the adjustment to the demands of higher education difficult. The second reason for students dropping out had partly to do with institutions. The authors attributed student failure to the admission policies of universities not functioning effectively in excluding students who lacked the necessary intellectual capacity. Particular policies such as the third Education White Paper have been applied from its inception till the present as a means of accommodating students who were previously disadvantaged. According to this policy, increased access should lead to improved success and graduation rates, especially for black and female students (RSA DoE, 1992: 29). In trying to make this work, many programmes have been put in place to improve retention and throughput rates.

Despite the implementation of retention programmes like peer academic support programmes, there are still complains from various stake holders that the retention rates in higher education institutions have decreased and that dropout rates have increased (RSA DoE, 2005). Apart from external factors, Brown (2010) maintains that those who drop out live with the inner conflict, self –doubt and 'scars' that are associated with their reasons for dropping out of school. It is therefore important to look at the implementation of peer academic support programmes in a specific

university in South Africa. This study selected the University of Fort Hare. Some of the objectives of this study are to examine how these programmes are monitored, supported and evaluated so as to determine their effectiveness in helping academically struggling students as well as to examine students' perceptions about these programmes.

2.5 Programmes to help poor academic performing students in higher education

Academic support has been defined as a condition that promotes success (Tinto, 2003). Tinto reiterates that the availability of academic support, for instance in the form of developmental education courses, tutoring, study groups and other programmes such as supplemental instruction, is an important condition for students' continuation in the university. 'Peer mentoring' as some universities call it, is a programme whereby an experienced student provides support and guidance to a student who is having academic or personal difficulties. (Freedman, 1993; Johnson, 2002; McLean, 2004; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2002; Terrion,Philion & Leonard, 2007). Many academic support programmes have incorporated mentoring. Mentoring according to Kitchin and Frame (1991:302) is defined as a process whereby "the student being mentored is integrated into the university and equipped to realize his /her potentials as a successful and productive individual." This peer tutoring or mentorship has generated great interest among administrators in higher education as an intervention strategy to improve retention, academic success and the educational experience of their students (Terrion, Philion,& Leonard, 2007). That is why most universities in South Africa, especially the previously disadvantaged universities, have established peer academic support programmes to help students improve their academic performance. Research has shown that support is most effective when it is connected to the learning environment (Bowles & Jones, 2003). Despite these programmes, the dropout and failure rates are still high in South African universities. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the strategies used in the implementation of these programmes as well as the training provided to the peer facilitators.

According to Tinto (2003), there are three types of support that promote success at school: academic, social and financial support. The most important of these is academic support because most students enter the university insufficiently prepared for the rigours of university study. Mckeachie, Pintrich, Lin and Smith (1986:3) concluded after completing an extensive review of higher education research on teaching and learning that "the best answer to the question of what is the most effective method of teaching is that it depends on the goal, the student, the content and the teachers. In continuation, the next best answer is students teaching other students. Peer collaboration also serves to develop the key social skills that are essential for success in life after schooling." These are the expectations of peer academic support programmes in South African higher education institutions. The fact that there have been, and that there continue to be problems with retention and throughput, is an indication that there are challenges with the way these programmes are being implemented.

Boughey (2010) suggests that the ability to place students accurately is dependent on available information about the students being admitted. If this placement information is available and if the programmes are well aligned, this has the potential to impact on success, throughput and graduation rates (Boughey, 2010). According to Boughey (2009, 2010), at an institutional level, this has resulted in the development of quality assurance mechanisms including policies relating to teaching and learning as well as attempts to use feedbacks to enhance teaching and course design. Boughey concludes that quality assurance frameworks and mechanisms have been put in place to a greater or lesser extent at most institutions while also conceding that the extent to which they are implemented in relation to teaching and learning varies enormously. This shows that academic support programmes that have been put in place to improve academic performance are being implemented differently at different Universities. Most universities in South Africa have also to a great extent promoted this aspect of quality assurance mechanism through the implementation of various programmes. Examples of such programmes include supplemental instruction, peer tutoring, peer study groups and writing programmes.. The most commonly used programmes in most South African higher education institutions are supplemental instruction and

language and writing programmes (Makura, Skead & Nhundu, 2011). These have yielded meagre results.

2.5.1 Supplemental Instruction Programme

According to Boughey (2010) supplemental instruction programmes aim at providing support to students in historically difficult subjects such as natural sciences and accounting by focusing on helping the students to understand the subject content and enabling the students to be involved in process of learning.   Jacob, Hurley and Unite (2008) pointed out that mentoring SI sessions should be done one-on-one at schools. Supplemental instruction programmes can be traced back to Vygotsky's theory of learning which is based on the idea of zones of proximal development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1986) a student is able to perform tasks that they do on their own by collaborating with more capable peers. Therefore learning occurs in this zone when the student is being guided from one stage of learning to another by his or her peers. This is a kind of mentorship that falls under peer support programmes. This peer support strategy has a more holistic focus than peer tutoring because the peer mentor often provides social and emotional support to the student in addition to academic assistance (Guon, 1988). Packam et al (2000) stated that Peer assisted support schemes can also be invaluable in judging the level and type of learning difficulties faced by students because they can provide invaluable feedback on issues such as students' motivation and understanding of subject matter. Therefore this study will also investigate how the programmes are being monitored and evaluated to ensure success as well as determining what students' perceptions about these programmes are.   Bowles and Jones (2003) confirmed that interaction between students has long been known to have a positive impact on student retention because it promotes collaboration among students. Bowles and Jones (2003) maintain that supplemental instruction provides academic support which is directly attached to a specific class, in order to help students succeed and SI Leaders are facilitators within the process.

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a 'widely implemented academic- support programme designed to provide optional, informal, peer-mentored learning support to students in

large, survey, or general education courses' (International Center for Supplemental Instruction, 2006:4). Peer Assisted Student Services (PASS) is based on "Supplemental Instruction principles and processes that integrate academic initiatives" whose aim is to provide academic support to students in the areas of language and writing as well as subject matter seen as difficult (Skead, 2006 cited in Makura, Skead & Nhundu, 2011:16). Packam et al, (2001) state that SI is different from traditional tutoring in that it does not use didactic teaching methods. In SI sessions, students attend sessions and are encouraged to find answers to problems themselves. The model adopted here is a peer collaborative and active learning one. As already acknowledged, these programmes do exist in most universities in South Africa with different ways and methods of implementation, which has yielded different results. This study intends to examine the strategies/methods of implementation as well as challenges facing the implementation of these programmes at one university in South Africa,

Peer facilitators, in most South African Universities, are selected students with potential knowledge from different faculties, with a willingness to assist their peers (undergraduate and postgraduate students) in various areas of difficulties (Makura , Skead & Nhundu 2011). According to Twalo (2008:3) the aim of Supplemental Instruction (SI) is to provide support to students in historically difficult subjects such as natural sciences and accounting. It focuses on helping the students to understand the subject content and enable students to be involved in process learning. SI peer facilitators are called Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SIL) who are senior undergraduate students. These facilitators support students facing problems in their subject areas. The facilitators work hand-in-hand with lecturers whose students take problems to the programme. The facilitators attend the lecturers classes and agree on what issues the facilitators should help students with (Packam & Miller, 2000).

In a nut shell the overriding philosophy for SI is "Tell me, I forget, show me, I remember, I do, I understand." This is extracted from Edger Dale's *Cone of Learning* (1969) which states that we remember when we see. SI sessions are supposed to be conducted at least three to five times per week (Arendale, 2005) and this is where

students share ideas with their peers through questioning, re-directing questions, summarizing, anecdotes, etc. This is an indication that some universities give more time for peer facilitators while others give less time to support students, which may be challenge to the effective implementation of these programmes. Facilitators concentrate on students as individuals as well as in groups. It is believed that this idea will help the students to co-operate and share ideas (Twalo, 2008).

Fisher (1995) aptly indicates that learning with peer tutoring or with a group can extend opportunities in students especially with less-able and more-able students, learning and teaching each other. Hence, SI is non-remedial, proactive, peer-collaborative and active learning whose quality is assured by staff and peer observations. This shows that monitoring, support and evaluation are important ingredients in the proper implementation of peer support programmes at universities. It is also important to note that peer facilitators are provided with extensive ongoing training sessions to ensure that they provide quality guardianship to their peers. They are expected to keep a portfolio of activities for their self-evaluation and reflection (Makura, Skead & Nhundu, 2011). It is not just training of peer facilitators that is required to enhance the effective implementation of these programmes but also how they are trained.

2.5.2 Language and Writing Advancement Programme

This is an academic literacy programme meant to produce knowledgeable students in most previously disadvantaged universities in South Africa (Nepier & Makura (2013).The Academic Writing Programme (AWP), according to Archer (2010), targets historically disadvantaged students in most South African higher education institutions, who are in need of academic assistance with writing so as to gain discipline specific conventions. In support of this, Cuseo (2002) asserts that this academic support strategy function is 'writing across the curriculum' whereby upper-division students with strong writing skills are recruited, provided with extensive peer teaching training and deployed to an undergraduate class (particularly large introductory courses) where they read and respond to students' written work. The peer facilitators called

'upper-division' students are postgraduate students who have been trained in how to review students' assignments.

Kaburise (2010) noted that the level of language sophistication demonstrated in writing samples by potential university students is below the threshold considered basic for successful tertiary level education. Fourie and Alt (2000:117) indicate that this is "because many of the 'new' students are first-generation university students" who are from deprived socio-economic circumstances and find it difficult to cope with the demands of the university life. This is the reason why academic support programmes have been put in place and are being implemented to improve on students' academic performance (Fourie & Alt, 2000). Irrespective of these programmes, it has been noticed that, in some institutions, the dropout rate is as high as 80% (Letseka & Maile, 2008 cited in Kaburise, 2010). Definitely, this is a pointer to how these programmes are implemented at some universities in South Africa.

A review of the literature found that academic support programmes (ASP) are vital resources in assisting students to overcome obstacles and aid in student retention (Reyes, 2007). There are many debates on the most promising and cost-effective strategies to address the problem of the achievement gap between children from different race/ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds. Using available evidence on the benefits and costs of early childhood education, Johnson and Maynard (2007) conclude that early, vigorous interventions targeted at disadvantaged children offer the best chance of substantially reducing gaps in school readiness and increase the productivity of educational systems. Kendall, Straw and Jones (2007:7-8) reviewed the best evidence on what works in narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups and came out with the following recommendations:

1)   Strategies promoting children's health, safety and economic stability all help to provide the necessary conditions to support effective and enjoyable learning and raises achievement;

2)   Interventions to remediate disadvantage and narrow the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups need a long-term focus;

3) Interventions which adopt a holistic and joined-up approach dealing with the range of obstacles and negative influences holding children back are the most effective;

4) Interventions that focus on the whole family and involve children learning and working with their parents/careers are some of the most effective; and

5) Interventions need to build upon the positive elements and experiences of children's family lives and take account of their value and belief systems.

The literature on the South African peer academic support programmes shows a very limited support focus on only the academic aspects of the students' lives without taking into account the family, parents as well as other aspects, as recommended by Kendall, Straw and Jones (2007). This is an indication that there are challenges facing the implementation of these programmes in some South African universities. In order words, the assumption is that the intervention programmes that are implemented by some universities in South Africa towards assisting underprepared and weak academic students do not resemble what has been described by Kendall, Straw and Jones (2007). They are aimed solely at students' educational problems without involving their families (Heath et al 2004).

Chabaya, Rembe, Wadesango and Muhuro (2010) recommend that group work should be encouraged as well as cooperative learning during the first year of study and also the provision of thorough career guidance and emotional support. Van **Schalkwyk** (2010) describes the implementation of a university-wide initiative aimed at providing a holistic view of a student's' academic standing through conducting early formative assessment for all first-year students. Van **Schalkwyk** notes that early focus on student success and the establishment of dedicated structures to facilitate such focus would definitely serve as a catalyst for dialogue around issues of teaching and learning. Although these structures are in place to assist academically weak students at most universities, the problem of low retention and throughput continue to persist. This calls for the examination of how these programmes are implemented, which are failing to yield the desired results for which they were established.

2.6   Problems with the implementation of academic support programmes

In spite of the enormous energy, enthusiasm and financial resources committed to early student support work in most higher education institutions in South Africa, it was not long before problems began to be identified again (Boughey, 2010). One of the first areas of concern relates to students attendance at tutorials, SI sessions, workshop presentations and other teaching events (Foggin, 1991; Dison & Selikow, 1992 cited in Boughey, 2010). Dison and Selikow (1992) emphasize that the problem with intervention programmes is that, students do not attend classes, especially when they are pressed with too much workload such as test times and assignment submission dates. Perhaps this is one of the problems faced by most academic support programmes, especially when students fail to attend sessions. Hodgson (2010, 2011) reiterated that the major problem with most first year students at the university is what to read and how to manage their time. Gibbs (2006) claimed that there is a problem with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they usually feel inferior when they get to the university and this leads to a lack of self-confidence. Most first year students shy away from speaking in English because they are not confident of themselves as far as English is concerned.

 A study by Webb (2002) in South Africa highlights the necessity of ensuring that students receive adequate support to enable them become proficient in English. Archer, 2012 cited in Napier and Makura (2013) explored the visual and verbal nature of reflective writing. The study confirms that some academic problems are rooted in the apartheid legacy and the problematic nature of pre-tertiary education where students develop and bring into higher education undesirable behaviours such as rote learning and uncritical reliance on teachers and textbooks. It is in this light that one can assume that language is a big problem as far as the implementation of peer support programmes is concerned. The high failure rate characterized by poor writing and dismal performance in tests, assignments and examinations raises a question on the implementation of peer support programmes at universities.

However, Woollacott et al. (2012) observes that most isiXhosa- speaking students understand the importance of English and desire to improve their use of it. Therefore,

this problem can be solved. Davies (2007) maintains that, in addressing the problem of students' lack of English language proficiency internationally, universities have instituted various support services to mitigate academic challenges. These include the Academic Literacy course, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) programmes. It is believed that most of these programmes face implementation challenges, as they are relatively new. One peer facilitator commented in a study that was carried out by Heath et al (2004:25) in the State University of New Jersey that "I feel it is difficult to balance a variety of activities and programmes and effectively maintain the role of a peer instructor". Another one said what doesn't work is "creating a classroom environment that is productive and comfortable for all students", as this is an ongoing challenge". This is an indication that academic support programmes face challenges when it comes to implementation by peer facilitators. Some scholars have noted that peer facilitators face problems with their teaching experience and also that science peer facilitators were ineffective at promoting higher level thinking skills during class activities (Rodriques & Bond-Robinson, 2006). In addition, Buskist (2000) reviewed 10 common mistakes made by facilitators, ranging from presentational issues (e.g. standing with one's back to the class) to more significant problems, such as fostering positive classroom dynamics (e.g. failing to reinforce students' contributions. The strategies used by facilitators to help solve students' academic problems are an aspect of concern that this study investigated.

According to Lee, Jung, Tran and Bahrassa (2009), among students who face numerous challenges and responsibilities in addition to adjustment difficulties while transiting from high school to University, they also face heavy family obligations and family conflict as a result of cultural and generational gaps. According to Thomas (2002), some people link this trend with the fact that many students come to the university ill-equipped with the requisite study skills. This is mostly seen from vulnerable students; that is those students from families without background knowledge in higher education. In addition, those that stop using the programmes complained that they lacked time and perceived a negative environment at academic support programmes (Lee et al, 2009). This is a problem that can lead to poor

attendance. Students in this case can have a negative attitude to the programmes and decide not to attend, especially when there is an unsupportive and unwelcoming environment. In addition, Levin and Levin (1991) indicated that at-risk students in particular, have trouble recognizing that they are experiencing academic difficulty and are often reluctant to seek help even if they do recognize their difficulty. It is in this regard that this study investigated the perceptions of students of the implementation of these programmes.

The persistent achievement gaps among students of different race/ethnicity and socioeconomic groups in universities is an issue of concern to the public, policy, and research attention and it is now at the forefront of policy-making agendas (Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Thomas (2004) maintains that there has been significant growth in the number of school improvement programmes and in the accompanying efforts to evaluate such programmes. However, Oakes (1986) argues that evaluation studies of reform efforts did not attach particular importance to the fact that schools fail to serve all students equally well. This assertion has been confirmed by Thomas (2004) because according to him, traditional school reform efforts fail to address such issues as the unequal quality of school facilities, programmes, curricula, counselling, expectations, and instruction. Thomas concludes that recent school reforms should be aimed at raising student achievement, responding to demands from the general public as well as policymakers. Also, special attention has to be paid to students who are most often placed at risk for academic failure; that is students from low-income families and minority groups. The continuous failure rate of students in written assignments, tests and examinations as well as the low retention and poor throughput rates is an indication that there are challenges facing the implementation peer support programmes in South African universities. Therefore, this warrants an investigation of the strategies/methods used in the implementation of these programmes as well as the challenges facing their implementation.

The factors that are associated with economic discrepancies between disadvantaged and advantaged groups include economic level, home environment and culture. Parent and infant training programmes as well as compensatory education can

effectively improve the chances of students to succeed academically if there is incorporation of the components of early intervention and instructional variables (Murphy, 1986). Mckenna (2004) concluded that the English Language plays a role in student's success but the real key to whether a student will pass or fail relates to the literacy practices he or she brings with her to the university from his or her school and home environments. Regarding the implementation of reforms in some schools in England, the Council of the Great City Schools (2009) revealed that these efforts do not seem to be accompanied by monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness and that there are discrepancies between student academic needs and available interventions for students who are struggling. Monitoring and evaluation are important ingredients in the success of the implementation of programmes to support students from poor socio-economic backgrounds in South African universities. Monitoring and evaluation are worth investigating to determine the reasons for the continuous students' poor academic performance.

2.7   Strategies used in implementing academic support programmes

A strategy is the method and techniques used to facilitate the teaching and learning process. There are a great range of approaches to retention, most of which are geared towards fully integrating the student into the university environment (Tinto, 2000). According to Thomas (2002), in order for the induction process to be successful, it should not be limited to the first week, but should last from pre-entry to the end of the first semester. Thomas further said that a number of UK Higher Education Institutions are doing this, with a programme that includes skill development modules, personal tutors and an explanation of the assessment process. The fact that students might complain of ignorance on academic support programmes should be an opportunity for the programmes to be included in the induction process. Thomas (2002) explains that when students come, they are given a personal tutor, who takes them to the library and the computer facilities. The literature on the implementation of peer support programmes in South Africa does not emphasize personal tutors or taking students to the library and computer facilities. Students' perceptions were sought regarding peer

support programmes to determine whether students are satisfied with their implementation and need further assistance such as computer and library services.

Concerning the aspect of the monitoring of the attendance of students in academic support programmes, the University of Ulster (2008) uses a strategy where, when students start skipping classes or sessions early on, or not turning up for induction sessions, there is a flashing red light for a potential problem later. Many organizations have put systems in place to monitor attendance. For example, the University of Sunderland sends students who miss sessions early on a post card saying 'we miss you'. This study also investigated the strategies/methods used by facilitators in order to motivate students to attend their sessions and to achieve the overall aim of the peer support programmes.

Another strategy that can be used in the identification of students at risk is an early warning system (Rosenthal, 2008). Some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) make a special point of identifying at-risk students so that they can give them additional support. Rosenthal (2008) presented an example from the New York university Dental school, which has an intervention programme for students who perform poorly in their mid-term assessment grades, as well as class observations. High risk students then have a series of meetings with retention and learning specialists as well as an upper class man peer mentor and in extreme cases with the Dean of student affairs. Rosenthal concluded that it has really been effective and now attrition is down to 1-2 per cent. One way in which universities can improve both the academic performance and retention of first year students is by increasing their utilization of campus support services (Smith, Walter & Hoey, 1992). Smith et al, (1992) suggested that there is a strong relationship between utilization of campus support services and persistence to programme or degree completion. Most students do not have time for support programmes at universities even though they face academic difficulties. Smith et al. (1992) strongly suggested that institutions should deliver academic support intrusively by initiating contact with students and aggressively bringing support services to them, rather than offering services passively and hoping that students will come and take advantage of them on their own accord.

According to Smith et al (1992), students should be forced through the use of different strategies to enable them attend academic support programmes which are meant to improve their academic performance. Therefore, this study assumes that in examining the strategies used by facilitators of academic support programmes, loopholes that have given rise to the continuous students' poor academic performance will be identified; thus giving room for some pertinent recommendations to reverse the situation.

Again institutional support should be delivered proactively-early in the first year of studies in order to intercept potential first year attrition, rather than responding reactively to students' difficulties after they occur (Smith et al, 1992). Tobolowsky and Associates (2012) assert that this is done in a variety of ways such as extended orientation seminars, academic seminars, professional or discipline based seminars focused on basic study skills and those that draw from all approaches to create a hybrid. Here, upper level undergraduate students play a role as peer facilitators representing the various programmes (Padgett & Keup, 2012). Cuseo (2010) stipulates that peer educators can complement the role of seminar instructors by informing new students about the many services and opportunities available on campus. Furthermore, first year students can also take their cues from experienced peers. Such peer facilitators should be models who can share concerns with the students, rather than a faculty member. It can therefore be regarded, that most peer academic support programmes should focus on first year students. The key to effective academic support for first year includes collaboration between students (peer collaboration) (Tinto, 1993; Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997).

A comprehensive academic support programme for first year students needs to focus on the student as a "whole person" and address the full range of academic and non-academic factors that affect student success (Tinto, 1993). Also, research repeatedly demonstrates that ASP which includes different programmes, features and targets different student needs is more effective than a single programme that is restricted solely to the academic or cognitive domain. This is an indication that most peer

academic support programmes will have some setback due to the lack of non-academic support factors like finance and emotional support.

Again, academic support for the first year capitalizes on the power of peers, in that, they feel free to express themselves if they meet people of their own category, even though most of them still shy away from speaking English. Batchelor (2006) claims that the deficiency of language as a problem can be cured when learners are ready to improve their language skills by communicating using the language, grammar and spelling. Therefore according to this statement students should be made to use the language in speaking and writing in oder to acquaint them with the language. Lea and Street (1998) suggested that teachers should take note of the key differences in the kind of writing required by different academic disciplines. Lea and Street conclude that some university teachers do not see this as their role or may indeed lack the knowledge to intervene effectively. This is the reason why Mckenna (2003), Nesi and Gardner (2007) and Elton (2010) confirm that, in order for students to master writing an essay in an appropriate manner, they should learn the epistemology of the subject and of the professional discourse surrounding it in class and their study groups. This will create a positive impact on student retention and internationally fostering collaboration among students and represent an effective strategy for promoting retention because it fosters students' social integration into the institution. A significant review of the literature has indicated that first year students should be given an important place in the implementation of peer support programmes. At one of the South African universities where peer support programmes have been established, this study examined whether the strategies used by facilitators focus more on first year than other students.

2.8   Monitoring and support mechanisms

 Monitoring is defined as a continuing function that aims primarily to provide the management and main stakeholders of an ongoing intervention with early indications of progress, or lack thereof in the achievements of results (Wilkerson, 2007 cited in Merten, 2010). According to Fullan (1992:123), "the monitoring theme is not evaluation in the narrow sense of the term. It involves information systems, resources and acting

on the results through problem- coping and problem- solving." Therefore it can be observed that monitoring the process of the implementation of peer support programmes is as important as measuring the outcome. It becomes a problem if support is not given to facilitators of academic support prgrammes during monitoring.

Arendale (2005) states that, at times it may be difficult for the programme coordinator to conduct observation sessions. This is seen especially when collaborative learning programmes are large and have 20 or more leaders, and when the programme coordinator has other assigned responsibilities. In addition, Kuh et al (2005) confirm that it is the responsibility of the faculty or staff members of the university to advise peer facilitators; hence, providing the necessary support they need. However, a large advising load often makes it difficult for advisors to build a strong relationship with all of their peer facilitators. This could mean that the much needed support from coordinators of the programmes can be difficult to get.

However, a study by Ruth et al (2001), states that at the University level, another option is for the programme coordinator to arrange for peer observations where peer educators observe the sessions of each other. They stated further that an advantage of this option is that, the peer educators have direct experience in the role and can share suggestions from their experience. For instance Rosenthal (2008) maintained that, at the University of Manchester, support is given to facilitators in the form of personal, financial, employment and childcare provision. This is done to enable the facilitators have a means to make the students aware of the support services available. This shows that monitoring and support is a crucial aspect in any peer support programme implementation. Nonetheless, it is for this reason that programmes have systems in place for monitoring and reporting purposes, which this study also investigated.

Arendale (2004) stipulated that a wide range of campus resources are required to begin a new programme. These include textbooks, access to electronic course management systems (e.g. Blackboard). Also, the support of other offices is an important resource as well. For example, Colvin (2007) stated that in the University of Macquarie in Australia, peer academic programmes are also supported by the

University executive. Accordingly, over the years, the programmes have forged an open dialogue with Faculty's Executive Deans as well as the DVC Social Inclusion. Involvement of other offices and support should be considered in the implementation of peer support programmes. It is believed that faculty support cannot guarantee the success of the aims of the programmes, yet their lack of support can sabotage even the most well- planned reforms (Rambiyana, 2001). It is, therefore, important to involve other offices in the implementation process. It was necessary to investigate in the course of this study whether other departments and services were involved in the peer support programmes so as to enhance their effectiveness.

The implementation of peer academic support programmes in higher education institutions is being monitored and evaluated by co-coordinators and other stakeholders to ensure successful learning (Ruth et al, 2001). Mertens (2010:51) defines evaluation as a "selective exercise that attempts to systematically and objectively assess progress towards the achievement of an outcome." Latino and Ashcraft (2012) pointed out that the final programme component that is often given too little attention during the monitoring process is the evaluation of the work of peer educators. Latino and Ashcraft further state that evaluation efforts must be diverse and multifaceted to capture the many aspects of the peer-to-peer learning experience. This is in support of what Wang and Reeves (2007) suggested that learning is contextual, effortful and developmental and as such should be evaluated through the triangulation of assessments. This suggests that the implementation of peer academic support programmes should be monitored and evaluated using different methods that is, using various data collection strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes. This will help co-coordinators and other stakeholders of the programmes to "have a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation" (Altrichter, Felgman, Posch & Somekh, 2008:52).

Latino (2008) also recommends that programme administrators should look for evidence of success in three areas. The first is the impact of the peer educator on the students served. The second represents the impact of the peer education experience on the peer educators themselves. The third is the impact that the peer education

programme has on the overall success of the academic programme. Therefore monitoring and evaluation should be an integral component of any reform process (Wilson, 1996). It is important to note that the key to the effective implementation of peer support programmes depends on monitoring and evaluation which lead to the provision of support to peer facilitators; an aspect that was investigated by this study.

Patton (2008) revealed that the evaluation of programmes can be used to reduce uncertainty about decisions that have to be made, even though sometimes, evaluations are done, no big decisions are made from the results. Richardson (1994) argued that the traditional module monitoring and evaluation exercise performed within higher education is a questionnaire, usually administered to students at the end of a module or a course. In this regard, McClelland (1994) and Marsh (1987) assert that questionnaires are often simple in structure and are relatively standardized, often ignoring specific issues relating to content and delivery. Marsh, (1987) considered that time constraints can often lead to poorly articulated and inaccurate feedback, since the administration of the module evaluation questionnaire does not provide adequate time for a response. This further raises questions of validity and relevance (Tanner, 1989). It is in this regard that the study assumes that most peer academic support programmes in South Africa use some of these methods of evaluation. This study examined how the programmes of one specific university (University of Fort Hare) are being monitored and evaluated and subsequently supported.

According to Human Resource and Skill Development Canada (2010), programme objectives and activities should be revised to more accurately reflect the direction and scope of the programme and to ensure that outcomes are achievable and measurable. Therefore, it is believed that the implementation of these programmes should consider monitoring and evaluation to be the core in the successful implementation of the programmes. Hadley and Mitchell (1995) postulated that monitoring and evaluation is not a onetime event, but an exercise involving assessment at differing scopes and depths carried out at several points in time in response to the evolving need for evaluative knowledge and learning during the effort to achieve an outcome. This idea ties in with what Wang and Reeves (2007)

suggested earlier that learning is developmental and should be evaluated through triangulation at all times. The study assumes that peer academic support programmes have co-coordinators to oversee their smooth functioning through monitoring, support and evaluation. The concern is how effective the monitoring, support and evaluation process is as far as implementation of these programmes is concerned.

Van Dyk, Zybrands, Cillie and Coetzee (2009) reiterated that since intervention programmes are new in most South African universities, it is important to look at the impact of the implementation in this type of intervention. This confirms that assessing the impact of implementation on peer academic support programmes is a point of concern. An evaluation study was conducted by Blatchford, Webster and Russell (2012) on Teaching Assistants' failure to develop strategies that ensure success at the California state University, United State of America. The study recommended certain changes to ensure successful implementation and include the following.

- Teachers' deployment of peer facilitators should be in terms of which students were supported and students' ability should be taken into consideration. Also, the context in which peer facilitation takes place; whether it is one-on-one or in groups.
- Teachers' role relative to peer facilitators should take into account which students were supported and in which contexts; whether one-on-one or in groups.
- The time provided to peer facilitators and the quality of peer facilitators' pre-lesson preparation and feedback.
- Peer facilitators' subject and instructional knowledge.
- The nature and quality of Teaching Assistants' interaction with students.

All the above issues affect implementation in most universities in South Africa. Boughey (2007) asserts that these problems lie not in the students but rather in the institutions to which those students have been admitted. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation and support of these programmes should be a continuous process to improve implementation. According to Makura (2012) as cited in the TLC News Letter, many lecturers from the university of Fort Hare shared their experiences of working with the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) facilitators. One professor confessed

that working with Language and Writing Consultants (LWCs) on assignment writing was gratifying though the evaluation process needed to be improved. This is an indication that the implementation of peer support programmes needs to be monitored, re-examined and evaluated so that appropriate support would be provided to peer facilitators and the challenges facing the programmes would be addressed. One of the objectives of this study is to determine how these programmes are monitored and evaluated.

2.9   Learners' perception on the implementation of peer academic support programmes.

It may be difficult for facilitators of academic support programmes to deal with students who have negative attitudes towards the programmes. As a result, the implementation of the programmes in higher education institutions may encounter problems. It is thus important to become aware of the perception of the students, as they are the focus and reason for the existence of the programmes. This can provide unique insights, opinions and experiences that shed light on the current practice and effectiveness of the programmes. According to a study by Sutton (2009) based on Critical and Reflective Practice in Education in the UK, some second year students were interviewed. Their responses were that they disliked the feedback criticism given by peer facilitators of peer academic support programmes because they were always negative. This is an indication that the comments or feedbacks usually given by some facilitators are cruel and that some students can handle them while others cannot. Sutton and Gill (2010) also suggest that emotions can play an important part in feedback literacy. Therefore, some feedbacks can cause learners to act either positively or negatively. Students' perceptions regarding their feedback from peer facilitators were gauged by this study.

A study on student's awareness, usage, and perception of academic support programmes in a large public University in Washington D.C was carried out by Hmong National Development and Hmong Cultural and Resource Center (2004). The perceptions of 55 selected students were examined on academic support programmes. Twenty-eight students participated in one or more academic support

programmes while twenty- seven students did not. Those who participated found the programmes to be supportive, with an average rating of 7.39 out of 10. The students who did not participate reported that they were not aware of academic support programmes and their services. Those who stopped using the programmes complained of a lack of time and perceived a negative environment (Hmong National Development and Hmong Cultural and Resource Center (2004)). This is an indication that some students are not aware of the university programmes meant to help them. Also it is likely that some students have a negative impression of the programmes for one reason or the other. It is for this reason, therefore, that this study investigated students' perceptions of academic support programmes in a South African University.

According to Packham and Miller (2000), many students are reluctant to seek additional assistance and find it difficult to attend the required meetings; sessions and workshops. In addition, some students feel that the environment in which academic support programmes are based, is unwelcoming and unsupportive. This is in line with what Heath et al (2004) found in their study in Rutger College in New Jersey. According to their study, one peer facilitator said creating a classroom environment that is productive and comfortable for all students is an ongoing challenge. The student further suggested that most students do not take peer facilitators seriously because they lack methods and techniques that will help them manage their sessions. This study examined the strategies/methods used by peer facilitators in one South African university, the University of Fort Hare and also students' perceptions of the implementation of these programmes established to help them but which seem to be failing.

However, Cuseo (2010) argues that some students also believe that peers in the classroom can be less intimidating than professors, and students will share concerns with peer educators more willingly than with a faculty member. Griffin and Romm (2008) also confirmed that peer facilitators in academic support programmes serve as a bridge between the instructor and the students. Most first year students see peer facilitators as their role models for academic, curricular and leadership behaviours. These assertions were tested during this study.

2.10   Professional training for peer academic support programmes facilitators

The importance of in-service training, education and continuing professional development for the teaching profession in general is increasingly acknowledged in countries throughout the world (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid & Mckinney, 2007). However because peer educators are neither professional no student development specialists, they need to receive some form of training to fulfill the responsibilities of their positions (Arendale, 2001). Budge (2006) stated that the most important aspect of the peer support programmes is training which goes beyond the selection process. In addition, students with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.4 or higher apply and are required to write an essay explaining why they wish to be peer facilitators. Intentional and ongoing training is perhaps the most important aspect of a successful peer education programme (Latino & Ashcraft, 2012). In this case, programme administrators should devote as much time to the training of peer educators as they do to faculty development. A study by Maxwell (2001) revealed that training for peer educators who support academic functions should be intentionally designed to adequately prepare students for their responsibilities in and around the classroom and to help them develop the necessary helping skills to mentor and support students. This is an aspect which was explored in this study to see the effectiveness of training in the implementation of the programme in one South Africa institution of higher learning.

Regardless of the type of programme, formal training of facilitators is considered critical to the success of the facilitation relationship (Anucha, Regehr & Dacuik, 2001; Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent, 2004; Garvey & Alfred, 2000; Mee Lee & Bush, 2003; Terrion, Philion & Leonard, 2007; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Materniak (1984) suggests that the training of peer facilitators should include

- Instruction on the peer educator's role in the learning centre as well as process and content skills.
- Receiving adequate instruction in the boundaries of the role of peer educator.
- A full awareness of the instructor's role relative to the peer educator and the coordinator's role.

- Understand the greater responsibility of the role relative to other students enrolled in the course. For this to occur, peer educators must realize that while they are no longer merely students learning the materiel neither are they instructors of the course.
- Learning the established policies and procedures of the programmes, ethical considerations, how to make proper referrals and administrative items.

For this reason, facilitator's training is indispensable in providing tools and techniques that facilitators will use in their facilitation functions, such as knowledge of the learning strategies relevant to university studies, how to establish a helping relationship, and knowledge of university resources in order to direct students toward services. It is under such circumstances that Arendale (2005) asserts that although the peer educator may have some basic disciplinary knowledge and possibly insight into their own learning, they need support from both the instructors and learners.

Ruth, Goldstein and Marcus (2001) maintained that the format for training and education of the peer leader varies by institution. Commonly, programmes include a pre-service for peer educators, which is most likely conducted by the programme coordinators, and possibly senior peer educators from the programmes (Ruth et al, 2001). This is an indication that every University in South Africa has its own way of training peer facilitators in how to help students, depending on the nature of the students. Coordinators' preparation of facilitators of academic support programmes is a crucial factor in improving the quality of instruction in higher education (Hendrix, 1995; Johnson & McCarthy, 2000). Branstter and Handelsment (2000), Buerkel-Rothfuss and Gray (1990) also add that although more programmes today offer some form of peer support training than in decades past, assessment of the implementation of such training remains a pressing need. According to Svinicki (1995), it is important to design training programmes according to specific objectives and then to assess the programmes' effectiveness in achieving them. Therefore it is important to assess the effectiveness of training of the facilitators of the programmes as well as the content of the training.

Bandura (1997) claims that the key to effective assessment of peer support programme preparation efforts are the clarification of the needs of peer facilitators in

higher education institutions. Also the design and implementation of training programmes to address these needs and the measuring of the degree to which the training has accomplished those needs, is another aspect. This is an indication that facilitators of academic support programmes should have a good knowledge of what to do and how to do it. This study assumes that It can only be accomplished through continuous training, which is an aspect that the study is also investigating, especially as there are trainings conducted but the programmes are not yielding the expected results.

Andrews and Morreale (2001) indicated that training programmes can range in length from a few hours to several semesters. It can be noted that, for the successful implementation of any peer academic support programmes, facilitators need to receive professional development assistance which could be in the form of continuous training by co-coordinators. Kennedy et al (2010) stipulate that the first thing is to select and train the facilitators, using a team of professional staff and former peer instructors. Heath, Boice-Pardee, Daniel and Shirvanian (2004) also assert that peer facilitators are selected based on the quality of their course proposal, the quality of their interview and a letter of recommendation. It is believed that facilitators should be role models and as such room is given to the best students in academic performance to be selected. Training of peer facilitators in this regard should be acknowledged as important to the delivery and most importantly for the successful implementation of the programmes. It can be seen that the facilitators have to go through serious and continuous training to be able to successfully implement the programmes. The importance of training to the effective implementation of these programmes cannot be overemphasized and this study will scrutinize the training received by peer facilitators as well as their contents.

It can be noticed that although common difficulties are discussed during training, each student has to develop methods that will work best for him/her (Heath et al, 2004). McKenna and French (2010) added that in the school of Nursing, Ankara in Turkey, the peer tutors receive five-weeks of tutoring training. These trainings of peer tutoring include the nature of peer tutoring and implementation of peer tutoring. Friedman and

Philips (2004) indicated that the legitimacy of professional development activities is often perceived in terms of formal training courses linked to work or in terms of gaining suitable qualifications. However, an emerging paradigm is moving professional development away from the practice of attending courses and training days to the concept of lifelong or continuing learning. For instance, Middlewood et al (2005) in their examination of the educational context argue that professional development is an ongoing process of reflection and review that articulates development planning which meets corporate, departmental and individual needs. They also argue that learning is a process of self-development leading to personal growth as well as the development of skills and knowledge that facilitate the education of young people. This is why Heath et al (2004) conclude that despite the training, each facilitator has to develop methods that will work best for them through focusing on concepts of personal leadership, including the development of self-confidence, personal awareness and growth. In this light, the study will attempt to highlight the benefits of training not only to students but also to the personal development of peer facilitators.

2.11   Summary and gaps in the literature

The literature review shows that the world is plagued by differences in the academic performance of students from different race/ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The historical review of the literature shows that after apartheid, there was a need to increase the number of black South Africans in higher education institutions. This necessitated the establishment of academic support programmes to help underprepared or academically weak students in higher education institutions. These programmes have been widely established in South African universities, especially previously disadvantaged universities with the ever increasing numbers of South African black students. The most common of these programmes is supplemental instruction which is a worldwide programme. According to the literature, these programmes are aimed at increasing retention, throughput as well as the increased academic performance of students. Unfortunately, these programmes have not been able to achieve the goals for which they were intended and this has become a worry

for many policy makers, educationists and other stakeholders. A number of factors that affect retention, throughput and academic performance were reviewed.

The literature reveals that attention has mostly been focused on academic support while ignoring other important elements, such as family, parents, financial, emotional and social support and other environmental factors. The use of the English language is found to be a huge problem that warrants help for students in South African universities. Furthermore, most supplemental instruction sessions dwell on academic problems without taking into account personal, library and computer assistance, or paying particular attention to first year students. However, the literature points to a lack of attendance at supplemental instruction sessions for a variety of reasons including the negative and unwelcoming environment and constant or continuous negative feedback amongst others.   The literature review also shows that continuous professional training should be geared towards subject contents, tutoring as well as the personal growth and development of peer facilitators. Monitoring and evaluation as well as support have been reviewed and their importance is emphasized in the success of any academic support programmes.

Finally, Tinto's theory of retention has also been reviewed. This theory states the reasons why students drop from higher education institutions. Generally, the literature shows a big gap between programmes that are implemented in the developed countries and those in South Africa. However, despite these programmes, there is little accomplishment of the goals (increase retention, throughput and academic performance). Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to closing this gap through the investigation of how these programmes are implemented in a South African university.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research methodology and design that was used to answer the research questions. It consists of the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling technique, data collection instruments and their credibility and trustworthiness. The chapter also explains the methods of data analysis and ethical issues that were considered in the course of the study. This study looked at the implementation of peer academic support programmes to ensure retention and throughput in one South African University.

3.2   Research paradigm: Interpretive

Creswell (1998:74) suggests that qualitative researchers carryout their studies with a particular paradigm or world view, which is a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their inquiries. According to Creswell (2007), a paradigm is as a set of assumptions, values or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which give rise to a particular world view and serve as the lenses or organizing principles through which researchers perceive and interpret reality. Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1994) cited in Mertens (2010) maintained that paradigms are the conceptual lenses through which researchers perceive reality; hence they represent what we think about the world. Considering the above definitions, it can be seen that a paradigm is an anchor that underpins the researcher's underlying logic and guides one's views to follow well why individuals differ in the way they view reality (Kuhn, 1962). Most researchers define the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions, which include ontology, epistemology and methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1994)).

Ontology specifies the nature of the reality that is to be studied and what is to be known about it whereas epistemology postulates the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known (Terre, Blanche and Durrheim, 1999). Regarding methodology as a dimension followed by researchers, Terre, Blanche and Durrheim (1999) maintain that methodology involves how a researcher can go about

studying practically what he believes can be known. Therefore, the choice of a paradigm is guided by the objectives of the research. In this regard, this study assessed, from the participants' point of view, the implementation of peer academic support programmes that ensure retention and throughput in one university in South Africa, the University of Fort Hare. There are four basic research paradigms, which can be used in research. They are: positivism, post-positivism interpretivist/constructivist, and critical science (Cantrell, 2006). In order to effectively answer the research questions of this study, an interpretivist paradigm was used.

Neiwenhuis (2007) claims that the interpretive paradigm views the world as having multiple realities which can be observed through evidence detailed by those who inhabit the setting. Similarly, Durrheim (1999:6) argues that the interpretive paradigm provides relevant information to the researcher in terms of "subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social activities. With the interpretivist paradigm, efforts are made to get inside the person and understand from within and this is done to retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated. Pring (2000:96) suggests that "we need to know their intentions and their motives…" The central endeavour in the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. In addition, there is a need to make an effort to get 'inside the person's head' and to understand issues from within (Clegg & Slife, 2009 cited in (Mertens, 2010). Mertens (2010) also asserts that the basic assumptions guiding the constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm are that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it. Terre-Blanche and Durrheim (1999:127) describe an interpretive researcher as a person who wants "to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomena as they occur in the real world and therefore wants to study them in their natural setting".

The interpretive paradigm seeks to gain insights through discovering meanings by improving peoples' comprehension of the whole (O' Brian, 2006). The underlying assumption of the interpretive paradigm is that the whole needs to be examined in order to understand a phenomenon. It also proposes that there are multiple realities,

not a single reality of a phenomenon, and that these realities can differ across time and place (O'Brien, 2006). According to Creswell (2003:9) an interpretive / constructivist researcher tends to rely on 'the participants' views of the situation being studied and recognizes the impact on the research of their own background and experiences. In this regard, they generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings throughout the research process. That is why Gibbons and Sanderson (2002) assert that interpretive researchers use constructs such as culture, social context and language to build their views about the world and that social reality is shaped through social interactions. They reiterate that the interpretive paradigm is a term that is usually associated with qualitative methods for education and social sciences (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2005).

Located within the interpretivist paradigm, the study explored, from the perspectives of participants, their experiences and concerns regarding the implementation of student academic support services at the University of Fort Hare. Therefore, the goal of this study was to have insight into how peer academic support programmes were implemented from a variety of stakeholders. According to the interpretivist paradigm, due consideration was given to subjective meanings of the participants, that is, different understandings and interpretations which they brought with them to the situation of the implementation of student academic support programmes at the University of Fort Hare. A significant relevance of this paradigm to this study is that it enhanced a holistic understanding of the views, feelings, perceptions among other things of undergraduate students, programme facilitators as well as co-ordinators of the programmes. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm being qualitative in nature, required data collection through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. Finally, this paradigm enabled the researcher to be involved in describing, interpreting and making sense of feelings, experiences and perceptions of students, facilitators and coordinators of the programmes.

3.3   Research Approach: Qualitative Approach.

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2005) explains that the aim of the qualitative research approach is to explore and understand a central

phenomenon. This has to do with understanding the processes, social and cultural contexts which work in line with various behavioural patterns. The behavioural patterns are mostly concerned with exploring the 'Why' 'How' and 'What' questions of research (Maree, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative inquiry employs human actions from the perspective of social actors themselves.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) maintain that the qualitative method asks mostly open-ended questions that are not necessarily worded in exactly the same way with each participant. This, accordingly, will enable participants to respond freely using their own words. Also, these types of open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally silent from the participant and unanticipated by the researcher, and which are rich and explanatory in nature (Bernard, 1995). Qualitative study enables participants to have the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail without any fear or delay. This is because the method allows the researcher to be flexible and to probe initial participant's responses; that is to ask why or how a particular thing happened (Pope & Mays, 2000).

This approach is more suitable than the quantitative approach for this study because it derives interpretation from the perspective of those working directly with the programmes such as students, facilitators and coordinators of the programmes. This is unlike quantitative researchers who seek to quantify the problem and understand its prevalence by looking for projectable results to a larger population (Drew, Hardman & Hosp, 2008). Qualitative researchers seek instead to explore a phenomenon in which one has no prior knowledge of what to expect (Surveygizmo, 2010). This, then, enables the researcher to ask participants broad general questions and collect detailed views of participants in the form of words and then analyse the information for description and themes. Also, the qualitative approach according to De Vos (2005:269) differs from the quantitative approach in that, it does not usually provide the researcher with a step by step plan or a fixed recipe flow, which means participants are free to express themselves in a relaxed mood rather than being tied down with fixed questions to respond to. De vos (2005) concludes that this situation is intentional and creative which can be easily explained but not predicted.

A qualitative research approach was important for this study because it enabled the researcher to establish how facilitators of the programmes were being trained and the perceptions of students of the implementation of the programmes. Also, it was important to investigate the strategies used by the facilitators as well as how their work is being monitored and evaluated in order to achieve the overall goal of retention and high throughput rates. Furthermore, the qualitative approach also helped in the understanding of the challenges faced by both facilitators and coordinators in the implementation of these peer academic support programmes. Finally, the qualitative approach adopted for this study enhanced the sharing with the researcher of participants' views and experiences as well as other perceptions regarding the implementation of these programmes.

3.4   Research Design: Case study

Research design is defined as a strategic framework for action which guides the conditions for the collection and analysis of data (De Vos, 2005). It, therefore, provides a plan specifying the execution of the research which allows for the answering of the research questions. According to Blanche and Durkheim (1999), a research design involves mutliple decisions vis-à-vis the way data were collected and analysed as well as ensuring that the final dissertation answers the initial research questions. Creswell (2008) holds that once the researcher has developed an understanding of the rationale behind the choice of engaging in any form of research (either   qualitative or quantitative) he/she designs the study. Creswell (2008) defines a research design as plans and procedures for research that span the decision from broad assumptions to a detailed method of data collection and analysis. In the same vein, Denzin and Lincoln (2002) define a research design as a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing research problems. This study adopted a case study design.

A case study design is regarded as a building block for data collection frequently associated with qualitative research (Burton, 2000). Therefore, a case study usually generates qualitative data which must be interpreted by the researcher. According to

Yin (2003:23), case study research is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used". This definition ties with Cohen's (2000) view that a case study design is an in-depth, intensive enquiry reflecting a rich and lively reality and exploration of a bounded system. There are differences in opinion as to whether the case study is a method or a research design. Mertens (2010) opted for the view that a case study is one option in a qualitative research strategy choice where a variety of methods are used to collect data. Therefore, data on the implementation of peer academic support programmes were collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis in the participants' physical and natural setting where these services are provided to them; that is, at the Teaching and Learning Centre.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:445), there are three types of case studies. The first one is the "intrinsic case study", which they describe as a study undertaken, first and last, in order to get a better understanding of a particular case. In other words, the study is undertaken because of the intrinsic interest of the case, not for generalisation or theory formation. The second one is the "instrumental case study", where a case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or generalisation. Here the case is of secondary interest, and it facilitates an understanding of something else. The last category of case study is the multiple collective case study. In this type of case study, a number of cases are studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition. In other words, Stake (1994) concludes that collective case studies deal with groups of individual studies that are undertaken to gain a fuller picture. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them would lead to a better understanding of, and perhaps better theorising about, a larger collection of cases (Stake, 1994).

The present study is located within the multiple collective case study category. The purpose of multiple collective study according to Cohen et al (2000) is not to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation or to develop law-like

generalisations based on the findings, but to provide insight into the phenomenon or the general condition of that particular phenomenon; in this case, the implementation of peer academic support programmes in South Africa. The multiple collective case study facilitated the researcher's acquisition of an in-depth view of the implementation of peer academic support programmes at the University of Fort Hare, since the study was dealing with participants directly involved in the programmes. Furthermore, the preference for a multiple collective case study in this study was because it permitted the researcher to get detailed information about the implementation of these programmes. This is relevant especially as it focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events as pointed out by Cohen et al (2000). As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) also reiterate, this is possible because the study is capable of serving multiple audiences and that their insights are directly interpreted and put to use; for staff or individual self-development and for within-institution feedback. Therefore case studies, considered as products, may form an archive of descriptive material sufficiently rich to admit subsequent reinterpretation as stated in the significance of the study (Cohen et al, 2000). To achieve this, the study was carried out through close collaboration between the researcher and participants while enabling participants to tell their stories as suggested by Lather (1992). This also helped to explain the success rate of the implementation of peer academic support programmes as perceived by students, facilitators and coordinators of the programmes.

3.5   Population

A population is defined as a collection of items of interest in research and it represents a group that a researcher wishes to generalise the research findings to (De Vos, 2005). It is usually a set of people or events from which a sample is selected. Generally, a population is regarded in terms of time, occupation, demography and care requirements. When the data are partial and used to characterize the whole, the subset is called a sample, and the whole is called a population. A population is the total quantity of things or cases of the type which is the subject of a study (Walliman, 2006). Seaberg (1998) cited in De Vos (2005) defines a population as the total set from which the individuals or units of the study are chosen. From these definitions, it is

clear that a population generally refers to a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific inquiry. It is a well- defined collection of individuals or objects within a certain population usually having common characteristics or traits (Castillo, 2009).

Therefore, the population of this study is constituted of one university in South Africa offering peer academic support programmes. It also includes all undergraduate students of this university making use of these peer services, all peer facilitators and all the coordinators of these programmes. Since it is difficult to interview every member of the study population, there is need for a sample selection which is explained in the paragraphs following.

3.6   Sample and sampling procedure

A sample according to Arkava and Lane cited in De Vos (2005:194) comprises of "elements of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study or simply a subset of measurements drawn from a population in which one is interested". It is useful in explaining some facet of the population. Strydom (2005) gives a similar definition; which according to him are elements of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. Furthermore, De Vos (2005) states that a sample comprises of a group of people or events and these are drawn from a population and the goal of the sample is to find out the true facts about that particular sample that are also true of the population. Therefore, the sample for this study was limited to some undergraduate students benefiting from these peers academic support programmes, some facilitators as well as all the coordinators of the programmes.

There are two major groups of sampling procedures which are probability and non-probability sampling. While the former is based on randomization the latter is carried out without randomization (De Vos, 2005). Engaging in sampling means selecting individual units to measure from a larger population (De Vos; 2005). Sampling is necessary due to the fact that getting data from all population elements is close to impossible and can be very expensive to undertake. For the purpose of this study, the non- probability procedure was used. This study utilized a purposive non-probability

sampling technique in the selection of the sample. According to De Vos (2005), purposive sampling is based on the judgment of the researcher that a sample has typical elements which contain the most typical attributes of the population. Similarly, purposive is also called known group which is the selection of the target population based on knowledge about the objectives of the study (DuPlooy, 2009).

Bless et al (2007) maintain that a sample is chosen according to what the investigator considers to be typical units in order to obtain rich data. The aim is to select participants that are judged to be the most common in the population under study. Purposive sampling enhances an investigator's ability to select cases or participants that best enable the investigator to answer the research questions as well as meet the objectives of the study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 1997). Saunder et al (1997) also maintain that purposive sampling is a common strategy called heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling which ensures that data is collected to describe and explain the key themes under investigation. Similarly, Neuman (1997) also agrees that purposive sampling is used when the research is informative and the sample is small in nature. Therefore, since this study adopted a qualitative approach, purposive sampling was used so that individuals were selected because of some defining characteristics that make them holders of the data needed for the study as maintained by Maree (2007).

This allowed the researcher to select participants who fit a certain profile; viz undergraduate students from all faculties making use of the peer academic support programmes, peer facilitators and coordinators of the programmes. Another advantage of purposive sampling is that the researcher was able to reach the targeted sample quicker, especially where sampling for proportionality was not a primary concern. However, one problem with purposive sampling is that since it is the responsibility of the researcher to choose participants, there is a possibility of bias or the likelihood of a subgroup in the population that is more readily accessible (William, 2006). Nonetheless, the researcher ensured that this was avoided by using gatekeepers such as the co-ordinators to identify the most experienced facilitators who had enough information on the programmes. Also, peer facilitators of the programmes

as gatekeepers recommended undergraduate students whom they felt could provide the necessary information for this study.

One university in South Africa was purposively selected for the study from where a sample of facilitators, students and all coordinators of these programmes were sampled. This sampling technique was appropriate because it assisted the researcher in choosing only one university from among many others that are offering peer academic support services. Hence, information about the implementation of these programmes was obtained from sampled individuals such as facilitators, students and co-ordinators. These were participants who shared sufficient common information and experiences about the implementation of these programmes.

A total of 22 participants were selected for this study, made up of ten facilitators and two coordinators for in-depth interviews and ten undergraduate students for focus group discussions. These participants were selected on the basis of their greater experience with the implementation issues of the programmes as stated by Patton (2002) cited in Maree (2007). It was ensured that all faculties and genders were represented in the sample. The data that were generated were strictly of a qualitative nature, except the demographic characteristics of the participants.

3.7   Instruments of data collection and data collection procedures

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions and evaluate outcomes (Drew, Hardman & Hosp, 2008). Using a qualitative approach allowed for the use of different kinds of data collection instruments to gather information, such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis, as held by Drew, Hardman and Hosp (2008). It assisted in making a reasonable assessment and evaluation of the information gathered. Three types of data collection instruments were used for this study. They included in-depth interviews for programme co-ordinators and facilitators, focus group discussions for undergraduate students who had been receiving services from the programmes on a regular basis and document analyses.

3.7.1   Semi-structured (in-depth) interviews

Bell (2005) defines an interview as a research technique which is normally considered as one of a range of methods in qualitative research. An interview is viewed as a two-person conversation which is initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information (Creswell, 2007).   According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), there are six types of interviews: (a) standardized interviews (b) in-depth interviews (c) ethnographic interviews (d) elite interviews (e) life history interviews and (f) focus groups. Gratton and Jones (2004) also put forward the fact that interviews can be classified under four categories: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured and focus group interviews.

Under the broad categories by LeCompte and Preissle (1993), this study used semi-structured interviews, which enhanced the production of in-depth data on the implementation of peer academic support programmes at the University of Fort Hare. According to Gratton and Jone (2004), this type of interview that was used in collecting in-depth data falls under what they called in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview is a one-to-one method of data collection involving an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in-depth (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). It is a conversation with a purpose which is to gain insight into the implementation of peer academic support programmes.

Semi-structured interviews have been defined as those interviews that encourage the capturing of respondents' perceptions in their own words (Babbie and Mouton, 2005). Cote and Ericssion (2005) also stipulate that this type of interview is a social interaction between people which can also enable further probing by the interviewer in order to get detail and rich information from the participants. Nkwei, Nyamongo and Ryan (2001) also state that this type of interview is optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives and experiences; particularly when sensitive topics are being explored. Therefore, the authors suggest that semi-structured interviews should be flexible and friendly since they are more useful to examine perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and values of participants. As a data gathering technique, the semi-structured interview's flexibility and adaptability permits the

researcher to probe for deeper responses, follow up leads, elaborate on original responses, obtain additional and more detailed data, and clarify answers (Borg & Gall, 1996).

In line with Fontana and Frey (2005) who postulate that an interview is a widely used tool to access people's experiences and their inner perceptions, attitudes and feelings of reality, this study also gained all of these attributes from peer facilitators and programme coordinators concerning the implementation of the programmes at the University under study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two programme coordinators and with ten peer facilitators. Information that was sought from peer facilitators included training that they received, strategies and methods of facilitation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes and overall, the challenges they faced in implementing the programmes. The coordinators of the programmes were asked questions about monitoring and evaluation, challenges faced in implementing the programmes and their perceptions on students' satisfaction on the implementation of these programmes amongst others.

These interviews were conducted using interview guides with all the participants of the study, and this enabled the researcher to get all questions answered on time. This also helped the researcher to probe and follow-up in order to get more of the information that was needed to answer the study research questions. This type of interview facilitated direct interaction between the researcher and peer academic programmes facilitators and co-ordinators since they were face-to-face interviews. Also the interview format allowed the researcher to collect rich, descriptive data from information-rich informants that provides an in-depth understanding of peer implementation of academic support programmes at the University under consideration.

According to Drew et al (2008), the quality of data is absolutely depended on the quality of data recorded, and it takes practice and care. Patton, (1990) also adds that a tape recorder is "indispensable". Therefore, all the interview sessions conducted during this study were audio-tape recorded and handwritten notes were also taken

and transcribed in narrative form. In accordance with Drew et al (2008), the researcher practiced questioning, listening and recording data before the actual interview sessions commenced. This was done by rehearsing an interview protocol, practicing with recording devices in settings similar to the research setting. This proved to be very helpful for the researcher to be accurate and reliable when the actual data collection was taking place. Finally, the use of semi-structured interviews which made use of face-to-face interactions provided the opportunity for this researcher to collect data from peer facilitators and programme coordinators on training of facilitators, monitoring and evaluation, challenges, perceptions as well as experiences with their involvement in the programmes.

The structure of the semi-structured interviews included an introduction, demographic questions, key questions and closing questions. The introductory section serves the purpose of pointing out to the participants the objective of the study and other issues regarding ethical considerations including confidentiality and anonymnity. It also touched on informed consent and the researcher's intention to record the interviews and discussion sessions. The opening questions serve as a section for questions regarding the background of the participants including their gender, faculty, year of study, department, years of service for SI or LWC and years of experience in facilitation. These questions enabled the researcher to gain insight into the participants'background and to begin the process of building a rapport in the interview. This was followed by general opening questions whose aim was to continue to build rapport with the participants so that they feel comfortable enough to narrate their stories. These questions were followed by key questions or essential questions on the research topic designed to collect core information that would answer the research questions. Sometimes, these questions were followed by probing questions meant to gain detailed information from the participants.

Finally, there was a closing question which allowed the closure of the interview. According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011), closing questions make the participant not to be left emotionally vulnerable or with painful memories.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussion involves unstructured group interviews in which the focus group leader actively encourages discussion among participants on the topics of interest (Engel & Schutt, 2009). It is also a means of understanding how people feel or think about an issue (De Vos, 2005). A focus group discussion is an interactive discussion between six to eight pre-selected participants and led by a moderator with a focus on a specific set of issues (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). The importance of a focus group discussion is that it gives an opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited time frame and it also provides direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). One of the benefits of focus group research is the additional insight gained from the interaction of ideas among the group participants (Krueger, 2003). These are some of the reason for using a focus group interview or discussion, because it enables undergraduate students to share knowledge, perceptions and experiences (both positive and negative) about the implementation of peer academic support programmes at the University under study.

Stewart and Shamdasani (1992) claim that the number of participants in a focus group discussion depends on the objectives of the research. Smaller groups of 4 – 5 participants are preferable when the participants have many things to share about the topic (kreuger, 1988). Similarly, according to KitzingerKitzinger (1995), a focus group interview allows interaction between participants that highlight their views of the world – the language they use to discuss their issues and common situations.. For the fact that this type of interview allows little control over the data produced, participants are guided to focus on the topic, comment on the topic and express their opinions (Morgan, 1998).It is also suggested by Drew et al, (2008) that focus group sessions be recorded on tape or by video camera in order to obtain an accurate record of the discussion.

Goodwin (2005) maintains that an effective researcher for a focus group begins by explaining the overall goal(s) of the session and the ground rules for the discussion (e.g., taking turns, don't dominate the discussion, try not to interrupt someone

speaking and no arguing). Before the beginning of a focus group discussion, Stewart and Shamdasani (1992) assert that it is a good idea to have group members introduce themselves and say a little about themselves.

Concerning this study, two focus group discussions were held with two groups of ten selected undergraduate students made up of five participants per group. Both genders, different levels of studies, faculties and other parameters were considered in the selection of the participants for the focus groups. It should be reiterated that focus group interviews or discussions were used as complementary to other methods of data collection, such as individual interviews with the co-ordinators and peer facilitators. The two focus group discussions were conducted at the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) where peer academic support programmes are based. The researcher facilitated the discussion with the help of a research assistant.

The focus group discussions began with the researcher introducing herself and the research assistant and thereafter welcoming and thanking the participants for voluntarily accepting to be part of the study. She further provided an overview of the topic, stated the rules and asked the participants to briefly introduce themselves, which they did cordially. All the participants then read the informed consent form and each signed it as an acknowledgement of voluntary participation and in turn confidentiality and other ethical issues were guaranteed. The two group interviews were conducted in a friendly manner and a congenial atmosphere. While the research assistant audio-taped the discussions, the researcher asked guiding questions as well as guiding the process of discussion and also taking down relevant notes for subsequent cross checking purposes. The interview schedule that was used by the researcher provided a guide for the interaction and ensured good use of time during the discussion of multiple subjects. The schedule also helped produce a more systematic and comprehensive process and also helped to keep the interaction focused on the subject matter being investigated which was the perception of the implementation of peer academic support programmes at the University of Fort Hare.

A discussion guide which contained a series of questions and topics was used also by the researcher. This guide helped to keep the discussion focused on the research topic as well as ensured that the topics and questions were all covered during the discussion; hence, it acted as a checklist. Nonwithstanding the logical sequence of the issues and questions in the guide, issues were raised spontaneously and haphazardly The researcher had to be flexible enough to follow the topics and yet keep the discussion flowing in the direction of the study topic. In other words, there was no rigidity in the questions and issues raised during the discussions.

The discussion guide included an introduction, an opening, transition questions, key questions and closing questions. During the introduction, the researcher introduced herself and her research assistant and the various aspects which included, information about the study, making participants feel as ease, ethical considerations and the way the discussion was going to onfold. An ice breaker question was asked which served to invite everyone to participate in the discussion and build rapport. This was followed by introductory questions which were closed-ended questions about the background of the participants and these questions continued to build rapport between the researcher and the participants. Transition questions were then asked of the group to elicit information on their perception of the implementation of the peer academic support programmes at this University. This generated discussion that provided the research data, especially the probing questions that were posed by the researcher to get detail and rich information. The focus group discussion was concluded with a general question and followed by a summary of the major themes that were discussed. Participants were then asked if the summary was a good reflection of the group discussion.

3.7.3   Document analysis

Document analysis is a data collection instrument involving all types of written communications which enlighten the researcher on the phenomenon under study (Maree, 2007). The author concludes that documents which are used as a data gathering technique focus on all types of written communication that may shed light on the phenomenon under investigation. The analysis of documents in this study

complemented the interviews in the data collection process, and also helped in answering all the questions that the interviews could not address, as asserted by Lincoln and Cuba (1985).

Yin (2003) identifies the following as documents: letters, memoranda, communiques agenda, announcements and minutes of meetings and other internal documents, formal studies or evaluations and articles appearing in the mass media. Mertens (2010) confirms that the qualitative researcher can turn to these documents and records to get the necessary background of a situation and insights into the dynamics of everyday functioning.

Secondary sources of data were made use of including peer academic support programme documents, books, journals, assignments, minutes of meetings and other secondary materials both published and unpublished. Therefore, access to these records and documents were negotiated up front with the relevant TLC management. Although several criticisms are levelled against document analysis methods due to their social context and identity (Creswell, 2003), a careful and deliberate as well as unbiased selection of particular documentation relevant to the study was undertaken. These documents provided insight into the history, literature on implementation of peer academic support programmes, statistics of students accessing these programmes and the management of the programmes at the particular University under consideration.

3.8   Trustworthiness and credibility of research instruments

There are certain aspects of a study that give merit to the findings and include trustworthiness of the research instruments, credibility, dependability and conformity.

3.8.1 Trustworthiness

Babbie and Mouton (2005) maintained that the key criterion or principle of good qualitative research is the notion of trustworthiness, the neutrality of its findings or decisions. Furthermore, a qualitative study cannot be considered valid unless it is

reliable and also, a qualitative study cannot be called transferable unless it is credible. Therefore, a trustworthy research must be credible and transferable to other contexts (Maree, 2007). Creswell (2003) argues that the trustworthiness of a study is established when findings reflect the meanings as described by the participants. Trustworthiness was acquired through the use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as well as document analysis, prolonged engagement and multiple influences on the participants. Also, participants were given the opportunity to speak freely without distorting what they were saying while being interviewed. The instruments were further validated by the study supervisor.

The researcher employed the member checking, dependability and confirmability procedure to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Membership checking is the process of going back to the participants to see if the analysis/interpretation makes sense to them and reflects their experiences (Creswell, 2003, 2007). The researcher went back to a few facilitators who participated in the study and were willing to comment on whether or not the data were interpreted in a manner that resonated with their own experiences. Member checking allowed these few participants to review findings from the data and to confirm and to challenge the accuracy of some aspects of the work as Creswell (2003) suggests.

3.8.2 Credibility

Credibility refers to that which can be readily believed, on the ground of rigorous evidence or argument, authority and so on (Maree, 2007). To enhance the credibility of the research findings, the researcher made use of both types of triangulation: multiple data source (students, facilitators and Co-ordinators) and multiple forms of data (focus group, interviews and document analysis). The researcher also kept notes on research decisions, coded data and used member checking to verify findings and enhance credibility (Maree, 2007).

3.8.3 Dependability and conformability

Conformability is a technique used to show that clean data will be collected so as to overcome method boundedness (Cohen & Manion, 1994). This will enable the results

to be confirmed or corroborated by others, thus enhancing their dependability. Dependability and conformability can be determined by way of a properly managed inquiry audit in which reviewers examine both the research process and the product of the research for consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Henning (1995) confirmed that dependability and conformability can be achieved by clearly stating research procedures and providing evidence of raw data.

To ensure the dependability and conformability of this study, the researcher quoted liberally from the data and systematically stored the audio cassettes that contain the raw individual and focus group interviews. The typed transcripts and the final draft of the research project are also stored for verification by any interested individual or participant.

3.9   Data collection procedures

The researcher obtained permission to carry out the study from the Manager of the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) and coordinators of the peer academic programmes of the University under study. This enabled the researcher to arrange appropriate dates for the interviews and focus group discussions with the selected sample. In line with the requirement to keep the physical and natural environments of the participants as a prerequisite for qualitative studies, the interviews and focus group discussions were held in TLC offices during official working hours. Each participant voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and had to sign an informed consent statement which contains the objective of the study among other things in pursuance of the study. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes while the focus group discussions were about one hour long each. Data collection was through audio-tape recorded interviews with all participants and hand written notes were also taken during interviews and focus group discussions. Although all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, only a few of the available participants who were willing had the opportunity to review the transcripts for verification and signed the agreement form, allowing the researcher to use the interview data.

3.10　Data analysis

De Vos et al (2005:333) explain data analysis as a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to a mass of data collected. Zimmerman (1992) cited in De Vos et al (2005:84) refers to data analysis as a search for pattern in recurrent behaviour or object of body of knowledge. Creswell (2002:99) defines it as a process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of data collected. Therefore, qualitative researchers integrate the operations of organizing, analyzing and interpreting data, and call the entire process data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Data analyses of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and documents were manually carried out qualitatively. A general analytical procedure was used in analysing the qualitative data based on the key themes that emerged from the audio-tape recordings, field notes and discussions. After coding the data and identifying categories and developing themes, a matrix of the main themes and sub-themes was presented to vividly show the perceptions and experiences of the participants regarding the implementation of the peer academic support programmes at the University of Fort Hare. In order not to compromise the identity of the participants, all participants were given codes and referred to only by these codes in the dissertation. Facilitators were given codes ranging from Participant 1-10; coordinators were given codes as coordinator 1 and 2. The two focus group discussion (FGD) participants were given Student 1 FGD 1 – 5 and Student 1 FGD 2 – 5 respectively for FGD one and two. Finally, some responses were reported verbatim while others were paraphrased in-order to capture expressions, phrases and sentences as presented by the participants.

3.11　Ethical considerations

Ethics is defined as a matter of principled sensitivity to the right of others (Cohen et al, 2007). Although ethical issues are not optional, they are a matter of necessity and importance in social science and education research (Wiid & Diggines, 2009). Their importance lies in the fact that they protect the physical and mental integrity of participants and respect their moral and cultural values as well as their religious and

philosophical convictions. In addition, ethical considerations protect the fundamental rights of participants including respect for privacy whilst maintaining the highest level of confidentiality (Wiid & Diggines, 2009).

3.11.1 Voluntary participation

Participants in this study were all encouraged to participate voluntarily; that is, of their free will. According to Babbie (2004), research represents an intrusion into people's lives. Therefore, a tenet of social and educational research ethics is that participation should be voluntary. All participants, both for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions signed consent letters to confirm their willingness to participate. The objectives of the study were explained to them before the commencement of the interviews and focus group discussions.

3.11.2 Avoidance of harm

In the course of the study, physical, emotional or psychological harm was guarded against and thoroughly examined. According to Babbie (2004), research should never injure the participants being studied irrespective of whether they volunteered. This ethical consideration was strictly adhered to during the investigation.

3.11.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue that underpins all qualitative research, and privacy is highly valued and investigators are urged to ensure that participants' privacy is respected (Fraenkel, 1990). Privacy is often seen when it comes to personal information such as age, finance, religion, family, income, etc. While employing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in data collection, participants' anonymity was maintained and guaranteed. Therefore, to protect the privacy of participants, the study ensured anonymity and confidentiality (Byrne, 2001).

The identities of the participants were not linked to the actual data or responses and this is called anonymity. While confidentiality was guaranteed through a careful management of data to prevent participants' identities from being linked to their responses to the questions or issues raised during the study. This explains why the names of the participants were not taken, nor were there any identity numbers linked to their responses. Therefore, confidentiality was clearly explained to the all the participants and they were assured that no one would have access to the results except the supervisor who would not even know their names as participants in the study.

3.11.4   Informed Consent

Informed consent is one of the fundamental practices of ethical research. An informed consent form containing the objectives and importance of the study was signed by participants. Diener and Crandall (1978) define informed consent as the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions. This protects and respects the right of self-determination and places some of the responsibility on the participant should anything go wrong in the research (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992). The objectives of the study and their own role in the study were duly explained to all the participants of the study.

The participants were also informed of their right to free and voluntary participation and their right to withdraw their consent at any stage during the study. Participants "should be aware of their right to refuse to participate; understand the extent to which confidentiality will be maintained; be aware of the potential uses to which the data might be put; and in some cases be reminded of their right to re-negotiate consent" (Corti, Day & Backhouse, 2000). The participants had to sign an informed consent letter. Informed consent is "a procedure for ensuring that research participants understand what is being done to them, the limits to their participation and awareness of any potential risks they incur" (Corti et al, 2000:67-70). Similarly, the participants were also informed about other issues that will affect them during and after the study. Hence, Bless, Higson and Kagee (2007:106) emphasize that participants have a right

to know what the research is about, how it will affect them, the risks and benefits of participation and the fact that they have the right to decline to participate if they choose to do so.

3.12   Gaining entry

Before data are collected, the researcher must follow appropriate procedure to gain permission from the gate keepers. Gatekeepers are those with power in the organization or agency (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007). A letter was written to the director of TLC and the manager of the Alice campus TLC to obtain permission to interview students accessing these programmes, peer facilitators and programme coordinators. Also, ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee as well as the University Ethics Committee for the study to be conducted.

Furthermore, a letter of introduction was made available to participants. According to Morse (1994), talking with other researchers who have conducted research in similar settings can be quite helpful. Therefore, the researcher talked with some seasoned researchers who worked at the TLC and had conducted research on similar topics and they provided some ideas on how to go about certain issues regarding gaining entry.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1   Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the findings of the study as well as discussion in the light of the theoretical framework and current literature. The aim of this study was to examine the implementation of peer academic support programmes at one university in South Africa as a case study. The findings are presented according to the demographic characteristics and also with the main themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews with peer facilitators and programme coordinators as well as focus group discussions that were organized for undergraduate students. Participants were coded and identified using certain codes. Coordinators are identified as coordinator 1 and coordinator 2. Peer facilitators were numbered from Facilitator 1-10: and students who participated in focus group discussions were numbered and identified as FGD 1 (focus group 1) and FGD 2 (focus group 2).

4.2   Biographical characteristics of participants

This section of the analysis is a presentation of the biographical characteristics of the participants.

4.2.1 Biographical characteristics of peer facilitators

According to the study, there were 10 participant peer facilitators from four faculties who took part in the in-depth interviews. Of this total number of participants, three (3) were from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, represented by one (1) each from Social Work, Communication and Human Movement Departments. Four (4) participants were from the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, two (2) each from Physics and Geology Departments. Two (2) participants represented the Faculty of Management and Commerce with one (1) participant each from Public Administration

and Industrial Psychology Departments. The Faculty of Education had only one (1) participant from the School of Further and Continuing Education. It is worth noting that more peer facilitators came from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. This could be attributed to the fact that this faculty has the largest number of students (3,175 representing about 26 per cent of the total students' population of 12,364 at the university) of any faculty. Thus, more peer facilitators are recruited from this faculty to serve their numerous peers.

Furthermore, the level or year of study of the 10 participant peer facilitators who took part in this study was enquired. Three participants each came from Level 3 and Honour's Level while three were at the PhD level and only one at the Master's level. The Centre (TLC) that runs these peer support programmes for students prefer final year students to serve as peer facilitators, especially serving as supplemental instruction leaders (SI). However, fourth year final year students in programmes such as social work and education cannot serve as peer facilitators because the students are engaged in six month block field practicum from January to June. On return, they are preoccupied with writing their reports and studying for their final examinations as well as writing their research projects. The centre for these programmes would also prefer recruiting Honours, Masters and PhD students to serve as Language and Writing Consultants because they are academically mature to facilitate peer training on how to write assignments as well as reviewing of assignments from both undergraduate and postgraduate students. This therefore explains the reason for the three Honours and three PhD participants chosen to take part in the study.

Regarding the years of experience, out of 10 facilitators or participants that were interviewed, five had one year or less of experience while three had two years of experience and the remaining two had three years of experience. This simply indicates that perhaps the facilitators were selected purposefully on the basis of their experience in the implementation of the programmes. However, from every indication, it can be seen that about half of the facilitators were newly recruited. This is necessary as they would need to gain experience and to replace those more experienced ones who will be leaving the university. Looking at designation and sex, four of the

facilitators were males; three of them were LWC and one SI, while six were females represented by three LWC and three SI. This means that more females were recruited and trained to be facilitators than males. Also this can be attributed to the fact that there are more females than males in most institutions in South Africa (CHE, 2010). The demographic characteristics of two focus group discussions are explained below.

4.2.2 Biographical characteristics of focus group discussion participants

The two focus group discussions were made up of six males and four females giving a total of 10 participants. The findings reveal that the majority of the students chosen for these focus group discussions came from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities with a total number of eight out of 10 students representing the different departments. Four students were from the Department of Psychology and two each from the Departments of Social Work and English. One (1) student represented the Faculty of Science and Agriculture from the Physics Department while the other one came from Management and Commerce, Department of Public Administration. Perhaps this is still a reflection of what has been mentioned earlier regarding the figures in Table 1; that the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities is the largest faculty in terms of population at this University.

Finally, the demographic data indicates that the focus group discussion sessions were made up of seven first level (year) students, two second level and one third level students. This gives a reason for having eight undergraduate first year students out of 10 representing the focus group discussion sessions. Given the fact that first year students are new and have many problems trying to integrate into the system, the study had a particular focus on them as they make the most use of the services of these programmes that is Language and Writing Advancement and Supplemental Instruction Programmes, (LWAP and SI). This gives a reason why seven out of 10 students who attended the focus group discussion sessions were first year students.

4.2.3 Biographical characteristics of programme coordinators

Two programme coordinators participated in the study. One male coordinator was responsible for 42 supplemental instruction leaders (SI). The other was a female coordinator in charge of 21 Language and Writing Consultants (LWC). The two coordinators both had four years of experience.

So far, biographical information has been provided so as to shed light on the general characteristics of the participants (peer facilitators, students and coordinators). The next section dwells on the main themes that emerged during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the study participants and programme coordinators. These themes formed the basis of the findings as per the study objectives. They are presented and discussed in the rest of this chapter vis-à-vis the assessment of the implementation of peer academic support programmes in a university in South Africa.

4.3   The recruitment and training of peer facilitators

One of the main findings of this study is that all participants applied, were recruited and trained by the centre responsible for these programmes.

4.3.1   Application for positions and selection of peer facilitators

The overwhelming majority of the participants did apply for the positions of SI and LWC and were called for interviews. Thereafter, they were informed that they were successful and were provided with a two day intensive training on peer facilitation so as to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out the functions and responsibilities of the Centre under study. One participant made the following comments in the interviews regarding the process of recruitment:

> *I applied through filling an application form which was approved by my HoD and I was invited for an interview. After that, I was called for an intensive training for two days which I was finally selected because not everyone who was trained was retained as SI* (Facilitator 1).

Kennedy et al (2010) maintained that the first thing is to select and train the facilitators, by a team of professional staff and former peer facilitators. Some writers have recommended that students with high grade point average should be selected based on a written essay while training should be one of the most important aspects of a successful peer education programme (Materniak, 1984).

Nonetheless, the rigorous nature of the selection process portrayed in the literature is absent at this university under study. For example, one of the participants did reveal that she was not recruited like others but appointed. As in many situations, there are exceptions like that of this particular peer facilitator who was simply called to start work at the centre without interviewing and training. This points to the fact that there is the possibility that other peer facilitators were also simply asked to take up facilitation duties at the centre, especially as some of those students who were trained turned down these positions for various reasons. This was confirmed by one coordinator:

> *I think the first problem is that facilitators go for more than one job which is not allowed in some departments of the university. As a result, facilitators are not being paid for more than one job which makes them drop the one from this centre (Coordinator 2).*

When facilitators are not being paid for two jobs, they automatically abandon the one from the centre under study. It could be seen that by the time they abandon the job, they need replacement, which will entail another recruitment and training process for new facilitators. It can be interpreted that some facilitators might miss training if it does not suit their time table, as commented by coordinator 1 when asked to explain the challenges faced regarding training. One coordinator reported that "there is also the problem of time for training, especially making appropriate time for students from different departments". Some facilitators do not receive equal training to others. This therefore becomes a problem for the department, the facilitator and even the students they are facilitating. The peer facilitator who was not interviewed or trained revealed that:

I was appointed rather than recruited. This is because the peer facilitator responsible for our department never showed up for anything at TLC and also because there was no time to conduct a selection interview, I was simply called upon and asked to be SI for our department (Facilitator 5).

The findings show that before a student is recruited as a peer facilitator in TLC, the student must apply for the position and be called for an interview and thereafter undergo intensive training before being recruited as a peer facilitator. However, as indicated earlier, some peer facilitators do not follow this channel. According to one participant, she applied and was not called. This may be because she might not have been as qualified as the person who was recruited. But the candidate initially recruited did not attend training   and eventually the participant was then given the opportunity as she might have been on the waiting list.

4.3.2 Regular training and shared learning meetings

On the basis of how regularly facilitators are being trained, and what they are trained to do, the findings revealed that nine participants had regular trainings; at least twice per month after the initial two day training in February each year. Apart from the initial two day training, these participants said they usually have regular training sessions and meetings; almost on a monthly basis. One of the facilitators made the following comment:

We are often trained twice per month for the whole year after the intensive training session at the beginning of the year. There is no specific time or period of the year for these meetings or trainings but at any time during the semester (Facilitator 3).

When further probed on what they do during this regular training, a participant stated that:

We always have meetings and training sessions where we share ideas on how to facilitate sessions. We are lectured by mentors and programme coordinators. We narrate our experiences and get comments as well as

suggestions on how to improve on our facilitation skills. There is also portfolio development by peer facilitators based on what we do (Facilitator 1).

Facilitators are trained on their work description, which is how to review assignments for LWC and how to conduct sessions for SI. One of the participants summarised the content of their training as follows:

We are trained to assist students in writing their assignments, to read

properly before submitting their assignments and also to be able to

present such assignments in workshops. We are also trained on how to

effectively facilitate learning and how to conduct ourselves with our

students or peers during sessions or consultations. Finally, we are taught

some administrative skills relating to our job at TLC (Facilitator 4).

In the same vein, another facilitator also avers:

We are trained on how to conduct sessions actively, involving students in

active learning, reviewing assignments and presenting to groups or classes, how to write assignments and cite as well as reference sources of information they use in such assignments (Facilitator 6).

Regarding this same idea of training, one of the coordinators indicated "I train facilitators on soft skills such as facilitation communication, writing and group dynamics. I suppose it is all about professionalism" (coordinator1).

This is an indication that peer facilitators are well trained on how to implement the programmes when they are recruited. This finding corroborates that of Makura, Skead and Nhundu (2011) who indicated that training is a vital part of

peer support programmes. Without training, the student peer facilitators will not be able to effectively implement the services envisaged for the programmes. Terrion, Phlion and Leonard (2007) in their study of the impact of a university peer mentor training programme, support that mentor training is indispensable in providing tools and techniques that mentors will use in their mentoring function. For example, knowledge of the learning strategies relevant to the university studies, how to establish a helping relationship, and knowledge of the university resources in order to direct students toward these services. Therefore training is an important part in programmes implementation. Latino and Ashcraft (2012) confirm this when they stipulated that intentional and ongoing training is perhaps the most important aspect of a successful peer education programme. Therefore

According to Maxwell (2001), the training for peer educators who support academic functions should be intentionally designed to adequately prepare students for their responsibilities in and around the classroom and to help them develop the necessary skills to mentor and support students. According to Arendale (2011), since peer educators are neither professional nor student development specialists, they need to receive some form of training in order to discharge their responsibilities of facilitators. This training should be formal (Terrion & Leonard, 2007) and according to Budge (2006), the most important aspect of the peer support programmes is training should go beyond the selection process. Also, as much time should be devoted to the training of peer facilitators as is to faculty members (Latino & Ashcraft, 2012). For a successful peer education programme, Materniak (1984) suggested that the training of peer facilitators should include the role of the educator in the learning centre, process, content skills; boundaries of the role of peer educator; instructor's role relative to that of peer facilitator and coordinator's role; role relative to other students; policies and procedures of the programmes; ethical considerations, how to make referrals; undertake administrative role among others.

It is for the above reasons that students are being recruited and trained based on job description so that they can become equipped with different skills necessary for their academic career and to help other students as well. This is an indication that peer

facilitators at this university do follow the normal pattern and standard in the training which the literature has acknowledged. This is imperative if facilitators are to do their work well and for the university is to achieve its goal of high retention and throughput rates. Although the fact here is that they are trained throughout the year, but some peer facilitators still complain about the training. "I am not satisfied because I missed the initial training which could not be repeated. This has handicapped me a lot" (facilitator 5).

It can be assumed that even though the coordinators have regular trainings with facilitators, some facilitators fail to attend the trainings, which are not repeated. Regarding how satisfied peer facilitators were with the different trainings, the majority of the facilitators said they were satisfied regarding the training while a few were not. One indicated that "I am satisfied with the training I have received because the strategies are working out well" (Facilitator 7). However, some peer facilitators were not satisfied with the training for various reasons. One of them said:

I am not satisfied because I missed the initial training. This has

handicapped me a lot vis-a-vis other facilitators who attended the training.

I hope that I could attend another one soon which unfortunately comes

only at the beginning of the year and next year, I will not be eligible given

the fact that I will be on long field work training for the whole of the first

semester (Facilitator 5).

The other participant who was not satisfied however said she has learned a lot but certain things made her to conclude that she is not satisfied with the trainings. In her own words, she reported as follows:

I have learnt a little but not satisfactory because I still face problems with the review of assignments. Sometimes we review assignments that are not from our disciplines and as such, we are not very conversant with the subject matter and style used in other disciplines. We have to do so in order to get enough hours to claim as our payment is based on the number of hours you work here at TLC (Facilitator 2).

Coordinators of programmes were also asked a variety of questions regarding the training of peer facilitators. The two coordinators both said there are monthly meetings on trouble shooting and also observation by the coordinators and peer facilitators. One of the coordinators revealed:

We do training once every month, troubleshooting meetings and talking about issues around challenges faced by facilitators. Here we all find a means of getting solutions to these challenges. We call this the developmental approach. Here, opportunity is given to experienced facilitators to share their experiences with the newly recruited ones. There is also a facilitator for statistics. This person also helps in capturing evidence based on their activities (Coordinator 1).

Concerning what the peer facilitators are trained to do, one coordinator stated:

I train them how to respond to assignments, present workshops and also how to consult students, when they come for consultation. Another aspect is the use of power point presentations, which is also a skill that they learn when they present at workshops (Coordinator 2).

Complementing the first coordinator, the second revealed as follows:

 "I train facilitators on soft skills such as facilitation communication, writing and group dynamics. I suppose it is all about professionalism" (Coordinator 2). Peer facilitators were further asked about the relevance of the training they received regarding their job in the implementation of the peer support programme. The findings show that the trainings are very important because they have equipped facilitators with different

facilitation skills on how to assist students. However, some said that there is need for improvement in the area of how to review assignments. One of them reiterates this importance in the following words:

We learn how to actively engage students during our sessions. From the beginning, it looks difficult, especially how to conduct sessions. But as time goes we are taught and we get used to it. There is nothing which is useless or irrelevant of the trainings we have received. Every aspect of the training is geared towards what we do as SI (Facilitator 1).

Another facilitator reiterated the importance of training in the following way; "the trainings are very relevant because we have learned the different strategies of facilitation which have enhanced and boosted our confidence as peer facilitators of learning*"* (Facilitator 10). Nonetheless, most facilitators expressed the need for more training in plagiarism detection, administrative duties and more on how to facilitate learning. A participant commented that they "would like to be trained more on plagiarism detection since it is a common problem. It is difficult to detect when and how a student has plagiarised somebody else's work" (Facilitator 6).

On the aspect of the length of training, some universities provide a more intensive training for peer support programmes. McKenna and French (2010) put forward in an experimental study about evaluating the efficiency of peer tutoring model for quality assurance purposes. They confirmed that after the peer tutors have been selected, they receive five weeks training. This is different from what is happening at the university under study even though they are following the normal process of recruitment and training. The peer facilitators at this university seem to have many training programmes; looking at the number of times that facilitators are trained for the whole year and the length or duration of such trainings. For the fact that training is done once or twice per month, it is regrettably noted that some peer facilitators still find it difficult to attend; especially those trainings that clash with their time table. One of the peer facilitators confirmed that "we have shorter trainings and meetings during the term which some of us do not attend most of the time because our classes clash with the time of the meetings" (facilitator1).

This is an indication that although facilitators are trained, they are still frustrated with regards to what they are supposed to do. Perhaps, it might be the case of Honours' students who are recruited as language and writing consultants and without adequate experience; they find it difficult to properly review students' assignments. Instead of declining to review assignments which are not within their disciplines, some peer facilitators simply accept in order to be able to claim more hours at the end of the month. Hence, they pay lip service to the implementation of the programmes. It might also suggest poor training. Rodriques and Bond-Robinson (2006) maintained that without proper training, facilitators were ineffective at promoting higher level thinking skills during class activities. To remedy the situation, Andrews and Morreale (2001) recommend continuous professional training ranging from a few hours to several semesters. Looking at this, it is likely that peer facilitators who are not trained face a similar problem which is a cause for concern. Similarly, Buskist (2000) reviewed 10 common mistakes made by facilitators due to lack of proper training. Some of the mistakes range from presentational issues such as standing with one's back to the class, to more significant problems, such as fostering positive classroom dynamics which is failing to reinforce students' contribution.

Although it is reported that the Council on Higher Education revealed that "less than 5 % of black Africans and coloured youth succeed at university and more than half of all first-year entrants never graduate at all", Kadalie (2013:1) stated that the problem does not only lie with structural intervention, curriculum reform etc. but the quality of teachers and teaching at universities. Accordingly, poor peer facilitation could also contribute to poor throughput and retention rates at universities. It is obvious that the facilitators who fail to attend training workshops organized by programme coordinators will find it difficult to help students. That is why those selected to serve as peer facilitators should be well trained, monitored and motivated. These facilitators should also be dedicated to implementing the programmes and not simply to earn money. Similarly, John (2013) quoted the Executive Chief of CHE who claimed that "students do not know that the services are being offered to them, and whether or not these services are provided to students, they are definitely not given in a way that the students understand." This is perhaps the reason why some of the peer facilitators

recognizing shortcomings have recommended further trainings in other areas as well as those that they have been trained in already. This is also a pointer that the payment system and the amount paid to peer facilitators might be a huge problem which might be negatively affecting the implementation of the programmes. The fact that they are supposed to claim before being paid is causing peer facilitators to do extra work and even do what they are not supposed to do like reviewing assignments from different disciplines. One peer facilitator clearly said "we review assignments that are not from our discipline and as such we are not very conversant with the subject matter and style used in other disciplines" (facilitator 2). When the peer facilitator was asked why he does that, the response was they do so in order to get enough hours to claim, since their payment is based on the number of hours a facilitator works.

4.4 Strategies/methods used in the implementation of these programmes

Information collected reveals that there are a variety of strategies/ methods used by facilitators in the implementation of the programmes. The most common method is what is referred to as question and writing method.

4.4.1 Use of question and writing methods

The most common method of facilitating at TLC that emerged from in-depth interview and focus group discussion participants was the questioning and writing method. The argument put forward here is that these methods enhance active learning of students. Four aspects are presented under this main theme and include the following: participants had two to three sessions per week; peer facilitators usually help students with what was not understood in class through explanation and writing as well as reviewing of assignments; no complaints about the sufficiency of the available materials; and satisfaction with the methods of questioning and writing which they are currently using at the centre. This section elaborates the methods/strategies under different subheadings including the different participants' (coordinators, facilitators and students) voices.

4.4.1.1 Facilitators weekly sessions

Facilitators were asked how often they met students for help; they reported that they met students 2-4 times per week. However, some met students on a daily basis. One participant said that "I meet students for help on a daily basis; I always have consultations 2-3 times per week, and sessions 2 times (Facilitator 1).

Although almost all of the participants hold the same view that they meet students on a regular basis, there is a difference on the number of times; one peer facilitator meets to help students about 6-7 times a week which is unusual. The most likely explanation for this student having an unusually high number of sessions per week is simply to get enough hours at the end of each week to be able to claim the required maximum number of hours which is fixed at 24 hours.

Concerning the number of students the facilitators usually meet, majority of the facilitators stated that they usually meet approximately about 15 – 25 students while a few said they have from 20 – 60 students per session. The rest of the facilitators maintained they often have one to five students per session. One of the facilitators in the majority group who usually have about 20-25 students per session stated:

> *I usually have about 15-20 students. Sometimes up to 80 and this becomes difficult to manage. This high number usually is from the beginning of the year because many students are still grappling with many academic issues and therefore need our help or intervention with their academic problems (Facilitator 1).*

The findings show that all the facilitators have sessions at least twice every week depending on the demands of students, except one peer facilitator who has all the time to help students. It is amazing that this facilitator has enough time to see students throughout the week, considering the fact that she is an SI which is very demanding and the fact that she also has her own academic work. The number of students that each SI facilitator handles is a cause for concern. Given the fact that all the SI are undergraduate students still battling with their own academic work and holding session

of 20-25 students per session is too much for them. Some facilitators confirmed that it is difficult sometimes to manage large classes especially when classes resume at the beginning of the year. This may be due to the fact that when schools resume, students are still new and are eager to study. After a few months, when they are pack with much work load, they are no longer interested in support programmes. This idea contradicts that of other peer facilitators and the coordinators who complained that students are not making use of the programmes. For instance, one coordinator confirmed that the buy-in is very low.

4.4.1.2 Provision of assistance through explanations, writing and reviewing of assignments

With regards to the type of academic problems the facilitators help students with, they all shared similar responses. All the facilitators reported that students bring problems that are challenging to them for help. These include mathematics problems, assignments writing as well as anything that was taught in class but not understood by the students. Some facilitators also mentioned other academic problems which include how to structure assignments, content, style of referencing amongst many other problems students take to TLC for different forms of assistance. A participant who is an SI facilitator from the faculty of science and agriculture noted:

> *Students always bring mathematics problems to be solved and we learn foundation skills prior to varsity. I'm a science student and most of those that are from science and agriculture faculty face problems with mathematics. As you know, this is a huge problem even at the secondary and high school levels in South Africa* (Facilitator 1).

Another participant who is an LWC facilitator said:

> *Students bring a variety of problems to be helped with. First, the common one is to review their assignments for correctness of content and style as well as references. Unfortunately, students always come with the hope that we will provide them with all the information they need* (Facilitator 2).

Similar to facilitator 2 is the opinion of another facilitator who revealed the type of problems that students bring to TLC for assistance with. In the facilitator's words:

> *Students bring a variety of different questions from areas they haven't understood in class with their lecturers. Others also request help on their assignment's structure and presentation format as well as content* (Facilitator 3).

The findings show that students go to TLC with academic concerns that they do not understand, especially in sciences where most female students fear to enroll. In addition, reviewing of assignments from different departments is becoming a popular service provided by the LWC facilitators and this is common with students from departments that understand the essence and role of TLC. The students take these assignments to the facilitator for guidance on how to go about writing a good assignment; looking at different aspects like introduction, body, conclusion and even in-text citation and referencing. According to Blunt (1997) academic support meant for one on one tutoring or generic study skill courses, particularly focuses on assignment writing and exam preparation. Nevertheless, it seems these programmes do not focus on exam preparation because none of the facilitators did mention this aspect. Their main focus is assignments and also helping students on course content. Packham and Miller (2000) reiterated that assignments constitute the largest students' concern.

It was also evident from PASS feedback, interviews and term meetings that the majority of student problems centred on writing assignments, referencing in the text and compiling a reference list. Students seeking assistance in completing assignments dominated PASS sessions (TLC, 2013). Document analysis from TLC shows that 93% of the students' problem areas regarding assignments is focused on introduction, plagiarism and in-text citation during the first term (TLC, 2013). However, not all students from the university make use of these services because either they are not convinced that they can be helped or lecturers in their ignorance are not referring students to TLC.

One coordinator insinuated that the problem is "some departments do not make use of the programmes; they do not encourage their students to make use of it" (coordinator 2). A fundamental issue is the misunderstanding of the difference between a tutor and SI leader of TLC; this affects lecturers and students alike. One peer facilitator confessed that the lecturer of the course she is helping students with, does not know anything about this programmes and does not want to hear about it. "The only discouraging thing about this programme is that my course lecturer does not like me to visit his classes all the time" (facilitator 3).

4.4.1.3 The provision of facilitation materials

The majority of the participants indicated that the types of materials they use include text books, hand-outs from lecturers and past examination questions for revision. This is particularly important for SI leaders who participate in lectures and are provided with these materials in order to assist their peers who have problems that need their assistance. Others reported that they use materials such as overhead projectors, flipcharts and board makers when they organize and present workshops. These materials are also important for LWC facilitators who are required to present lectures to students on how to write assignments, in-text citations and references, etc, with the permission of the lecturers. A peer facilitator (SI leader) commented SI:

> *We usually use textbooks, lecture notes, tutorial articles, past exam questions and any other materials related to the course in order to facilitate learning* (Facilitator 1).

On the other hand, an LWC facilitator also mentioned the type of materials they use as LWC. In her words, she stated:

> *I use overhead projectors, chalkboards and flipcharts. Power point presentations and notes compiled by the lecturers are some of the materials I used in students learning facilitation (*Facilitator 8).

Participants were asked whether the materials are sufficient to enhance their effective implementation of their programmes at TLC. All except two of the facilitators said the

materials were adequate because there have been no complains. However, one problem mentioned is that they need to photocopy hand-outs to give to students after presentation of their different topics such as proposal writing and referencing style in the case of LWC.

One participant who believed that the materials are sufficient noted that "Yes the materials are adequate because students are doing well. This is an indication that the materials are adequate and okay for the students" (Facilitator 6). Similarly, no coordinator mentioned the shortage of materials as a challenge, confirming the facilitators' views. Some participants however, did not think that the materials provided to them by TLC to discharge their duties as peer facilitators are enough. According to one of them:

> *I don't think they are enough, I need more materials. We need specific*
>
> *course materials that we can easily use to help students and not just bulky*
>
> *hand-outs from the lecturers or programme coordinators* (Facilitator 2).

Similarly, another peer facilitator said "The materials are not really adequate because we also need to photocopy materials to give to students" (Facilitator 8). The data collected reveals that the participants, who overwhelmingly agreed that the materials were sufficient, based their judgment on the fact that the students were doing well and there had been no complaints about the shortage of materials.

From all indications, the basic teaching and learning materials are provided by TLC to facilitate students' learning, although human beings are never satisfied as our wants are said to be insatiable. The two participants who held different viewpoints misjudged the issue of materials and referred to lecturers' hand-outs instead of what was provided to them at TLC. A common problem with the provision of materials to student facilitators is that there is usually misuse of these materials. They often treat them as personal materials, especially materials like pens, papers, bold markers, etc. Therefore, care must be taken on how these materials are distributed and monitored amongst the peer facilitators.

4.4.1.4   Satisfaction with current methods of questioning and writing

The findings show that the most common methods used by peer facilitators to help students solve their academic problems are the use of questioning and writing methods. According to the findings, these methods get the students involved in active learning unlike other methods. The group method is also good as revealed by the participants. One of the participants stated the reasons for the use of these methods:

> *I use the active learning method by posing questions that demand answers from the students. As a peer facilitator, I don't provide answers to questions but I re-direct everything to the students and simply let them discuss and come out with the answers to questions posed by other students. In this way, I stay as a peer facilitator and not as a lecturer although lecturers these days are also expected to be facilitators however weak students would not* benefit from this.(Facilitator 6).

Another participant had a similar view regarding the methods they use at TLC. She recounted her experience in the use of the methods as follows:

> *The methods I use include questioning and guiding of students on how to write properly towards getting their answers correctly. These methods could possibly lead to critical thinking* (Facilitator 10).

It can be seen that the use of questioning is an important in facilitation by peer facilitators. That is why Glynn et al (2006); Ross and Cameron, (2007) and Kennedy et al (2010) confirmed that peer tutors seem more comfortable asking questions from their peer tutees. I believe this is a good method because it gives room for both tutors and tutees to get involved into some kind of meaningful discussion. Tinto (2000) stressed that at Griffith University, attempts are made to generate a stimulating intellectual environment, with discussion, debate, exploration and discovery that extends beyond the classroom. Therefore it is assumed that the peer facilitators use the different methods to develop the necessary academic literacy skills within a disciplinary context as stipulated by Tinto.

As to whether they were satisfied with these methods, there was general satisfaction because students are passing. However, one participant was not satisfied because the methods are limited to facilitation not teaching. A satisfied participant revealed that:

I am satisfied with the method because the results are good. We have had students coming back to thank us for passing assignments, tests and examinations (Facilitator 6).

However, one of those participants who was not satisfied with the methods they are currently using said that "I am not really satisfied because the methods I use are limited to facilitation and not teaching" (Facilitator 9).Two other participants suggest two different methods that can be added to the existing methods of facilitating learning. One participant suggested as follows: "As an additional method, I also provide photographic images on what needs to be done" (Facilitator 3). A second participants recommended additional methods of "study skills and methods like the use of mnemonic devices, deriving a way of learning a particular aspect (Facilitator 7). The two coordinators of the programmes confirmed the use of these methods which are principally used at their centre of learning. Similarly, students expressed satisfaction with this method of facilitation.

The findings are a testimony that at the University under study, there is insistence on problem solving skills, team work, participatory skills etc. This is where the learning is student-centred and takes into consideration the socio-economic backgrounds of the students. In addition, it also emphasizes critical thinking in students and not simply memorizing of facts, concepts and theories. These methods stimulate learning in students and let the lecturer play the role of a facilitator and not that of a teacher while students passively consume knowledge from the lecturer. Rather, students should be able to analyse, process and interpret different sources of information so as to solve complex societal problems. These methods of learning which the TLC is instilling in peer facilitators are already preparing those who will take on the role of lecturers in the near future. This is a sign that peer facilitators concentrate on students as individuals as well as in groups. This is in line with Skead (2006) who reiterated that students are

supposed to be given special attention as individuals as well as in a group. It is believed that this will help the students to co-operate and share ideas. Fisher (1995) indicates that when students learn and teach each other which is sometimes called peer tutoring, they benefit a lot especially with the less able and more able students. However, the methods recommended by two other participants are useful and are fairly new. These methods include images (visual methodology) and the use of mnemonic devices. Nonetheless, other methods worth mentioning here include the use of technology such as blackboard and other innovative teaching methods.

4.5   The challenges facing the implementation of the programmes

Concerning challenges facing the implementation of the programmes, the main theme that emerged from the interviews was a feeling of disappointment, especially from the peer facilitators and programme coordinators.

4.5.1 Feelings of disappointment

The feelings of disappointment expressed by peer facilitator participant, students in a focus group discussion and programme coordinators include, poor quality of students who visit TLC, large classes, poor attendance, little or no participation in sessions, low monetary remuneration, time-consuming replacement of peer facilitators, problems faced in reviewing assignments, and the problematic choice of method used by the Centre under study. These views are from a diverse group of participants.

4.5.1.1   Poor attendance in SI and LWC sessions

An important theme that emerged during interviews with peer facilitators was poor attendance of students at SI or LWC sessions organised and run by facilitators. All the facilitators indicated their disappointment at the poor student attendance of their sessions. They wonder why they should be putting in much effort to help students who don't want to be helped. One of the facilitators revealed that:

Students do not attend sessions. This is a very critical problem that all of us as SI and LWC and TLC are facing. Despite our marketing of the programmes, many students still do not attend sessions and also many lecturers are not aware of the services we provide. Even those lecturers who know these services are reluctant to send their students while some complain that they have tutors who are helping their students since according to them, there is no difference between the work done by tutors and SI and LWC. For me, this is a fundamental problem that needs intervention at the level of TLC with all departments at the university under study (Facilitator 2).

Similarly, another facilitator put it differently:

I feel disappointed and embarrassed for wasting my time when students whom I want to help don't show up for sessions yet they face many academic problems in their disciplines (Facilitator 2).

Another facilitator blamed poor student attendance on ignorance; rather than a lack of need for the services. This therefore leads to frustration and disappointment on the part of the facilitators who seem to be wasting their time. According to this facilitator:

Non-attendance of sessions and consultations by many students is really disappointing and sometimes, it leaves me frustrated. It is not that these students do not have academic problems; it is simply because of ignorance laziness and pure negligence on the part of some of these students (Facilitator 6).

Some facilitators noted that because the attendance rate fluctuates, it discourages the regular students because when those who missed sessions attend, the facilitator is forced to go back to enable them to be on the same page with those who attended the previous sessions. Closely related to this is the fact that many students come late, and given the time constraints, facilitators often cannot complete what they have planned for that day. A facilitator added that:

The first challenge is that many students come late and some do not attend sessions which takes the facilitator backwards. When this occurs, the regular students are not happy because their time is being wasted (Facilitator 1).

Low attendance seems to be a general issue of concern to both the facilitators and the programme coordinators. The coordinators of the programmes were also interviewed on how satisfied they were with students making maximum use of the programmes. Their responses were similar to those of the facilitators; that students are not making use of the programmes that have been put in place to help them. One of the coordinators said:

*I think we are under-utilizing the resources because there is quite a lot of wastage. For instance there are some courses I think should be discontinued because students are not making use of the facilitators (*Coordinator 1).

When further asked whether lack of information might have been contributing to the poor attendance, the coordinators refuted this but rather blamed the departments for not sensitizing their students about TLC or sending them to TLC for the help that they require. One of the coordinators of the programmes explained:

The problem here is that, some departments do not make use of the programmes. They do not encourage their students to take their assignments or academic problems to TLC. So we are saying that the buy-in is very low. I don't think it is all due to ignorance, because we always have a representative from TLC in faculty meetings (Coordinator 2).

According to documentary analysis, some departments are not represented by peer facilitators; this includes the SI of the Faculties of Education and Law. However, there are LWCs from the Faculty of Education and not from Law. Perhaps, this explains why there were only seven consultations in the first term from Faculty of Education

students (TLC, 2013) which is a gross underutilization of resources. On how to solve the problem of attendance, different facilitators proposed a variety of solutions including pleading with students to attend, organizing catch-up sessions, and calling students on their phones. One of the facilitators stated:

I try to find students who missed the session by calling them, saying we missed you, hope all is well with you, why didn't you come for the session? I also try to catch-up if I missed a session because of no available classroom (Facilitator 1).

Kuh (2003) in his national study indicates that first year students spend less time on their studies out of class than is deemed necessary for successful learning. It is my view that this is the case with many of the students because most institutions do not construct educational settings that motivate students, Tinto (1993). It might be assumed that the programmes do not motivate students – in fact some students (few) complained of a lack of motivation, when they were asked if they were satisfied with the way their problems were being solved. "I'm not satisfied because I get feedback on assignments with lots of corrections in them which demotivate me" (FGD 2, student 2).

This poor attendance by students is a most likely indication that many students are not motivated and do not take these support programmes seriously even though they face challenges in their academic work. This corroborates the fact that at-risk students, in particular, have trouble recognizing that they are experiencing academic difficulty and are often reluctant to seek help even if they do recognize their difficulty (Levin and Levin, 1991). There are enormous benefits participating in peer facilitations. For example, Wilcox (1993) explains that students who take advantage of SI programmes benefit from transferable study strategies and engaging in proactive participation, thereby gathering, retaining, and transferring knowledge at a higher level. It is unfortunate that these students can't gain such knowledge if they do not take advantage of the programmes. Quoting the Executive Chief of CHE, John (2013) indicates that there is an acknowledgement that all universities have support programmes for students who are not adequately prepared for university study, but the problem is that the impact of these programmes is limited.

To buttress this claim of low attendance at TLC, statistics from document analysis reveal that for the first term, for supplemental instructions, there were just 19 consultations from faculty of Management and Commerce, 10 from Social Sciences and Humanities, and 34 from Science and Agriculture (TLC, 2013). For LWC, there were 35 consultations for the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities, 6 from Science and Agriculture, 28 from Management and Commerce and 7 from Education with none from Law (TLC, 2013). This is an indication that students are not making maximum use of the programmes taking into consideration the total population of the University.

Apart from poor attendance, those who manage to use the service either come late or attend irregularly causing much frustration and disappointment on the part of the facilitators of the programmes. The university has invested enormously in these programmes and often towards the end of the year, programme coordinators will start urging facilitators to devise programmes to use the money, which is usually sent back due to underutilization. This explains why one of the coordinators said these programmes are grossly underutilized. It is unfortunate that there is no monitoring of students' attendance in peer academic support programmes at this university. In some universities such as University of Ulster (2008), a flashing red light indicates that there is a student who is absent from such sessions as SI. Also, at this university, students at risk are not identified by the institution. This happens in other universities as early warning system. Rosenthal (2008) suggests that universities should identify students-at-risk for early and additional support to them. Smith et al. (1992) also suggest that universities should provide academic support tactfully through initiating contact with students.

There are many reasons why the programmes are not fully utilized and most departments are not encouraging their students to make use of TLC services. One of them being that most students do not like going to TLC for help because they resent the feedback they receive from facilitators especially when they don't do the right corrections and fail their assignments, as mentioned by one facilitator. One peer facilitator remarked that some of the students are just reluctant, lazy and negligent to

attend the programmes even though they have academic problems, and do not see themselves as students having problems. This idea confirms what Boughey (2010) reiterated about poor attendance of tutorials, SI sessions and workshops. In addition, the author maintained that most of the students present false excuses for not attending sessions. It is in this regard that John (2013) noted with dismay the fact that 7 years after South Africans were informed that about half of the undergraduate students drop out of university, there is no improvement in this debacle of poor academic performance.

According to him, educationists and students blamed this on inadequate assistance, poor support and family pressure. Perhaps, this is the reason for the proposal of more years to be taken before completing degree programmes instead of the three and four years currently the case. Macfarlane (2013) and Jansen (2013) indicated that the only proposal from the CHE is the extension of undergraduate degrees by a year. More than 55% of black Africans and coloured students will never graduate. More so, the nationally, and across all faculties in South Africa, only one in four students will graduate in the required minimum time (Macfarlane, 2013).

However, Dison and Selikow (1992) emphasized that the problem with intervention programme is that, students do not attend classes especially when they have a heavy workload such as test times and assignment submission dates. On the aspect of departments or faculties not encouraging their students to seek help from these programmes as stipulated by the coordinators, it contradicts what Tinto's theory explained on how to improve student's retention. According to Tinto (1975), there should be a strong link between faculty support and student's retention; therefore faculty support in promoting these programmes is important. It is a problem when the faculties or departments are not encouraging their students to go and get help from the programmes- which is the case in this study

4.5.1.2   Large classes

The findings show that a majority of the facilitators agreed that they are sometimes confused on how to help students especially when numbers are large, and during the

times when they themselves are about to write their tests and examinations. Also, they mentioned the fact that they are not experts in all fields because students who bring their problems expect solutions from the facilitators immediately. Many of the students bring their assignments when is already almost due date to submit the assignments to their lecturers and therefore expect immediate interventions from TLC which is sometimes not feasible. One facilitator maintained that:

> *It is sometimes difficult to manage large groups. Again sometimes students come for consultation at a critical moment when the facilitator has her own work to do. It is really challenging trying to create time for the students at this critical moment. Some other students will bring their work and need immediate help from SI which is very difficult because there are some areas that a facilitator might not be familiar with and need to read or prepare him or herself before being able to help the student* (Facilitator 1).

One other facilitator was of the opinion that the area which she faces problems is consultations and reviewing assignments, especially proposals. The facilitators said that some of the assignments are too bad and it is not possible to help them effectively. Some students ask challenging questions while other students from other departments expect facilitators who are not even from their discipline or department to help them. A facilitator narrated her ordeal as follows:

> *I am baffled when it comes to reviewing assignments and proposals. Sometimes it seems as if you are writing the students assignment or proposal all over. Some of these assignments and proposals are too bad that you don't know exactly where to begin and where to end* (Facilitator 6).

However, some participant facilitators had different views from the majority. They insisted that they are not overly challenged and that everything is fine especially the fact that they review assignments from students who are coming from their departments or disciplines. Therefore, they are not challenged when it comes to implementation of the programmes. They reiterated that they do not help students with anything coming from any disciplines other than theirs. One of the facilitators stated

that "I am not confused; everything is fine, especially as I try to review assignments coming from my discipline and faculty" (Facilitator 2). Nonetheless, some facilitators intimated that some students are just out to disturb them with difficult questions just to either ridicule or mock them as peer facilitators. Some students simply attend SI sessions to see how well some of the peer facilitators can speak, help or solve problems brought by students. In such cases, they will tease the facilitators with difficult questions to test their ability. One facilitator indicated:

> *Of course, I am sometimes confused when students who bring difficult assignments for me to help them with. In addition, some students like challenge us with difficult questions just to challenge our ability to help them as peer facilitators since we are students like themselves and they know us* (Facilitator 10).

Almost all peer facilitators hold the opinion that they face difficulties in discharging their duties as peer facilitators. Sometimes the problem is facilitators are managing a large number of students. The problem is amplified when they are not well equipped with the knowledge and strategies to facilitate well. Sometimes students come for consultation at critical moment when the facilitators are busy with their own work and these facilitators cannot be blamed for not helping them with their assignments. It can be assumed that the fact that some departments are large and have just one peer facilitator, it is a problem attending to all the students especially during what I may call 'peak hours' like test and exam periods. It can be seen that it is really a challenge because some of the students might want immediate help which they might not get. The finding corroborates what Kuh et al (2005) maintained about large workload. Accordingly, they suggested that large loads often make it difficult for facilitators to build strong relationships with all of their students. In this note, it might become difficult for students to have regular contact with their facilitators.

Regarding the challenge about reviewing assignments, it is expected that an LWC should be able to review students' assignments, but some of them lack experience and are not qualified. This makes it difficult for them to effectively help students who visit TLC for assistance with such assignments. For example, the biographical data

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shows that, there are 3 Honours students serving as LWC leaders and 5 out of 10 were having experience of one year or less. This was confirmed by one of the coordinators when they were asked whether they were satisfied with the services of the peer facilitators:

I am satisfied but to some extent the facilitators with honours degree sometimes face challenges especially when it concerns reviewing assignments. I thought of not recruiting them, but again it will still be a challenge in that I will never have experienced facilitators (Coordinator 2).

Another reason for the challenge with assignment reviewing may also stem from the fact that some peer facilitators review assignments from any student irrespective of the discipline, because they want to claim enough hours at the end of the month in order to earn more money. Also, some students undermine facilitators so that they cannot help them and this is discouraging and frustrating, especially with new or inexperienced facilitators. This might also be a warning that those students are under-minding the activities of the peer facilitators which might also lead to non-attendance. It can also be argued that this may be due to the manner in which some peer facilitators present themselves during their sessions.

4.5.1.3 Little or no participation of students in sessions

Peer facilitators were asked to explain the challenges they face putting theory into practice, and most of the facilitators concurred that one of the greatest problems is that students do not participate in sessions. This is closely related to poor attendance as one facilitator revealed that:

I face the challenge of lack of participation of students during our sessions. As a peer facilitator, I am supposed to be facilitating and letting students talk during sessions but the contrary is true. I don't know whether the students are shy to talk among their friends or peers or because they don't understand the content of the sessions. This is puzzling to me and to many other peer facilitators (Facilitator 4).

In a similar vein, another facilitator re-echoed the view of the first colleagues and said this lack of participation tempts him to provide solutions to questions the students ask him during their sessions. Therefore, this defeats the purpose of peer facilitation which should not be that of a teacher or lecturer. In his words, he said:

> *I face the problem of lack of participation on the part of the students during consultations and sessions. They come very quiet when you ask questions and this makes one to be tempted to provide the answer or solution to the problem* (Facilitator 6).

Peer facilitators were asked how to stimulate active participation during sessions. Those who indicated that students do not participate in sessions mentioned a number of strategies including the use of different methods i.e., active learning methods to engage the students, advice, and questioning among others. One facilitator indicated that she provided the following solutions to encourage them to participate:

> *I always try to advice students after the session on how to better behave themselves and the importance of such sessions to them for the good of their future and that of their families* (Facilitator 5).

The non-participation of students in a session defeats the policy of the university under study on facilitation which also emphasizes a humanizing pedagogy; this means that learning should be student centred and take into consideration the backgrounds of students. From the perspective of a teacher, it is obvious that when students do not answer questions in class, the teacher is obliged to give the answers and this is a challenge to academics, who tend to teach, rather than facilitate learning. Many factors have been highlighted as possible reasons for the non-participation of students in lectures and peer group facilitations. For example, Archer (2010) explores the virtual and verbal nature of reflective writing and states that some academic problems are rooted in the apartheid legacy and the problematic nature of pre-tertiary educational practices which students develop and bring into higher education. This is an indication that students might not want to contribute in the sessions because of language issues. Perhaps, it might be necessary to adopt the suggestion of the Registrar of the

University of KwaZulu-Natal that poor academically underprepared first year students be tutored in their home language; Zulu, to explain concepts to those whose mother's tongue is not English (Jansen, 2013). Also, Woolacott, Simelane and Inglis (2012) affirmed this by saying most isiXhosa-speaking students' understand the importance of English and desire to improve their use of it. Gibbs (2006) claims that there is a challenge for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, who feel inferior when they get to the university, resulting in their lack of self-confidence. This may be the same situation with the institution under study especially because most students in this institution are from previously disadvantage backgrounds.

4.5.1.4 Low remuneration as incentive

Facilitators were asked to explain how they were motivated to do their job effectively. Low financial remuneration was mentioned as a de-motivating factor. Five facilitators stated that they were unhappy with the low incentive they received in comparison with tutors in other departments. They complained that they had to do a lot of work in order be able to claim reasonable amount while in other academic departments Tutors had a fixed monthly stipend whether they worked hard or not. Moreover, they received the same amount every year despite the high prices and inflation. One of them stated that:

> *We need to be motivated financially with prices of goods and services sky-rocketing each and every year. We receive the same amount every year irrespective of these high prices and inflation* (Facilitator 1).

They also complained about the claiming system in comparison with the fixed sum earned by tutors in other departments who were at the same level as they were. For example, a facilitator said the issue of claiming de-motivated them. She confirmed that she hated the claiming system at the TLC. The amount of money paid was based on the number of assignments reviewed, number of consultations, number of meetings and shared learning sessions attended by a peer facilitator. This meant that when students did not go for consultation, a peer facilitator would not be paid because he/she might not have anything to claim for. When questioned further, she said they

were over worked and yet received lower remuneration. In her own words, she maintained:

Regarding monetary motivation, I am not very satisfied as the pay is low with difficult tasks to perform and the issue of claiming whereas tutors in many departments are simply being paid a stipend whether they work or not though they ensure that they execute the tasks assigned to them in their different departments (Facilitator 2).

One of the programme coordinators insinuated or made reference to this problem when he said that somebody once said it is better to be a tutor and be paid for doing nothing, than to work as a peer facilitator at the TLC. This was an indication that the duties of a TLC peer facilitator were many and this was rewarded with low pay, as many struggle to get the required 24 hours per month. The coordinator remarked:

The candidates are too many both for SI and other departments. Someone said 'we'd rather get paid for doing nothing than do this SI'. So it is a problem because in most departments, tutors are being paid for doing nothing. So students will prefer being tutors than SI (Coordinator 1).

The key to any successful venture or enterprise that employs human labour is sufficient remuneration of staff. This might explain the reason why the TLC continuously lost a lot of their SI and LWC who preferred to be tutors or facilitators in Life Knowledge Action (LKA) with a fixed monthly stipend, rather than the TLC process.

4.5.1.5 Replacement of peer facilitators

Both coordinators who were interviewed on the issue of the replacement of peer facilitators observed that it took a long time to replace peer facilitators. After training, some SI and LWC facilitators abandoned their positions at TLC and opted for tutorship or simply stayed without positions. The reasons for this were many and varied including laziness, low pay and the claiming system which was disliked by many, while others preferred to concentrate on their studies. The first coordinator confirmed that:

The effort made to replace a facilitator is time consuming. There is also the problem of time for training especially making appropriate time for students from different departments (Coordinator 1).

The second coordinator also added:

It becomes a problem for the department and even Human Resources Department to start the Process of recruiting and training new facilitators especially when facilitators abandoned their jobs (coordinator 2).

This was an indication that facilitators were put through many processes before recruitment, and going through all these processes was challenging to both coordinators and facilitators especially because facilitators came from different departments. Training students from different faculties after the recruitment process was problematic because the coordinators had to look for a convenient time that suited every student, whenever there was training. The problem with the facilitators abandoning their jobs was, perhaps, the result of low remuneration as stated earlier. This was probably the reason why facilitators worked at more jobs to get more money to solve their problems. The second coordinator claimed:

I think the first problem is that facilitators go for more than one job which is not allowed by some departments in the university; as a result, when facilitators are not being paid for more than one job, they automatically drop the TLC peer facilitator job (Coordinator 2).

It was, therefore most likely that many facilitators would leave the TLC once they got other jobs. When facilitators abandoned their jobs it forced the department and the HR section to start another process of recruitment which wasted time.

4.5.1.6 Voluntary use of programmes

Another challenge that emerged from the findings was the fact that students are not obliged by the university system to ask for help from the centre when facing academic problems; it is up to the students. Both coordinators confirmed that the method was

problematic because it is voluntary - students are not obliged to attend TLC programmes irrespective of whether they are performing poorly or not. According to them, the university should make it compulsory for poor academic performing students to seek help from TLC. This can be seen from the words of one of the coordinators: "The model we are using is problematic because it is voluntary, most students do not see that they need help" (coordinator 1).

This could be the reason students do not take the programme seriously. It might be interpreted that students feel that lecturers are not interested since they do not encourage them to seek support from the programme. Also from the perspective of the coordinators, the methods are not really functioning well because students who have problems do not realize it, and are not forced to seek help. When further asked what they were doing to solve this problem, the coordinator added that:

> We have come up with a marketing expo to invite lecturers to meet us half way. We also need a teaching learning week to invite lecturers so that we can talk about the programmes (coordinator 1).

Considering the responses from coordinator 1 above, it could be acknowledged that the coordinators were trying to formulate another strategy of marketing that enabled lecturers to be part of the programmes. It is believed that students believe more in their lecturers than other persons; which may have been the reason why the coordinators wanted to get lecturers involved. Another reason for this situation was that, there were other problems faced by the university which the programme coordinators did not have the authority to change as indicated by the coordinators: "Most other challenges are those faced by the university that we can't change alone" (Coordinator 2).

There appeared to be problems with the whole university system that affected the sub-systems. It was assumed that the problems would persist until the whole system was changed. Suggestions for solving some of these problems were provided by Levin and Levin (1991). According to them, institutions should deliver academic support programmes intrusively- by initiating contact with students and aggressively bringing

support services to them, rather than offering services passively and hoping that students would take advantage of their own accord (Levin and Levin, 1991). According to Smith et al (1992), students should be forced using different strategies to direct them to academic support programmes which are meant to improve their academic performance. Finally, according to the Education Commission of States (ECS) (1995), collaboration between faculty and academic- support specialists enables support programmes to become more mainstream; thus increasing the likelihood that they are not viewed as supplemental but as integral to the university.

4.5.1.7   Peer facilitators work at multiple jobs

The policy of the university stipulated that students be given only one job at a time but the lack of enforcement of this policy allowed many students to be tutors or LKA facilitators and facilitators at this Centre at the same time. Poor remuneration was a factor promoting such practices as students wanted to earn as much as possible; especially as many come from poor socio-economic backgrounds. The multiple jobs were reported as a challenge by one programme coordinators:

> *I think the first problem is that facilitators go for more than one job which is not allowed in some departments by the university. As a result, facilitators are not being paid for more than one job which makes them to drop the TLC. It becomes a problem for the department and even HR to start the process of recruiting and training new facilitators* (coordinator 2).

This situation led to the problem earlier mentioned regarding new recruitment and training of new facilitators to replace those who had dropped out of the TLC facilitation group as alluded to by the coordinator.

4.5.1.8   Other general challenges

One of the coordinators technically and tactfully pointed out that apart from the challenges discussed under this main theme, there were numerous other challenges generally faced by students from the sampled University. These included poor staffing, poor working conditions, low staff retention, poor student retention and throughput

rates. Almost all of the problems stated in the preceding paragraphs were not unique to this university under study, but to most universities in South Africa, especially the previously disadvantaged universities. These problems require long term resolution because the university administration is very rhetorical each time these issues are brought up by staff members, especially the workers' union in the sampled university (CHE 2010). As the coordinator aptly indicated, these problems were beyond their scope to resolve but affected their functioning as one of the sub-systems.

4.6 Monitoring and evaluation of programmes

The monitoring and evaluation of the programmes were reported by facilitators and programme coordinators alike. The key theme from the findings was that verbal and written feedback was usually provided to facilitators by coordinators. This is done immediately the facilitators have been observed by the programme coordinators.

4.6.1 Provision of verbal and written feedback

Programme coordinators were asked about the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes (SI and LWC) and the major theme that emerged during in-depth interviews with the two coordinators was that feedback was provided to facilitators verbally and in written form immediately after observation. Only two sub-themes emanated from this main theme. They were monitoring during monthly meetings which were held on trouble shooting incidents and also during observation; and unannounced visits by programme coordinators during sessions held by facilitators.

4.6.1.1 Monitoring through observations

Coordinators of the programmes were asked whether they monitored facilitators and how. All their responses were encouraging. They reported monitoring through peer observation and visiting their sessions. One coordinator mentioned that the two types of observations that they undertook were peer observation and supervisory observation. Peer observation is where fellow peer facilitators observe their peers during sessions while supervisory observation is where this is undertaken by the

supervisor or what is commonly known as programme coordinators. In the words of one of the coordinators:

There are two types of observation; peer observation where there is a roaster put up to know who observes who. Here the facilitators are told. The other one is the supervisory observation, where the supervisors pop in unannounced or announced (coordinator 1).

This was an indication that the coordinators used peer observation as an instrument of monitoring facilitators. This was possible because facilitators were trained in how to observe their peers, to help improve on their facilitation skills. The facilitator who observed was expected to give feedback on the session to his/her peer on how the session was conducted and also learned from the session he/she had observed. There was usually a discussion after the session between the observer and the observed peer facilitators. Also, coordinators attended workshops organised by facilitators and gave them oral feedback on their presentations**.** Coordinators for LWC attended workshops to see how facilitators gave presentations, so that they could correct them when necessary. It can be concluded that coordinators used different instruments to monitor facilitators to help them do their job well. Coordinators were also asked to explain how they evaluated the work of facilitators. The two coordinators gave similar responses. They reported that they evaluated their facilitators through their attendance and the feedback from students whom the facilitators are providing services to. For example, one of them remarked:

I evaluate the work of facilitators by looking at their attendance which is one of our performance indicators; we also get evaluation feedbacks from the students (coordinator 1).

This showed that attendance was an important criterion of evaluation. Usually, facilitators signed a form when they came on duty which enabled the coordinators to know who was on duty and who was not. As noted earlier, feedback from students receiving services from TLC was also another instrument of evaluation. Students who went to TLC for help were required to sign a form after consultation. This form is later

used to evaluate the facilitator who attended to the student. In this respect, the facilitator is evaluated after looking at the responses of the student to determine how successful the session was. Similarly, another issue that came up was how coordinators provided feedback to the facilitators; their responses were almost similar. According to the programme coordinators, feedback was provided to facilitators orally and sometimes in written form and this was done immediately after the facilitators had been observed during their facilitation. One of the coordinators reported, "We provide feedback to facilitators through verbal and written form immediately after observation" (coordinator 1).

However, the other coordinator talked of one-on-one consultation with the facilitator or sometimes the more experienced facilitators provided feedback on the less experienced ones through re-reviewing the work done by them. Also, the manager of the coordinators also would write a report to evaluate how the coordinators were helping the facilitators in their work. The coordinator asserted:

There is usually one on one consultation to discuss any issue that is troubling the facilitators. I also make sure that, for the newly recruited facilitators, the most experienced facilitators must go through the assignments they review before it is handed to the students. There is also report writing by the manager to evaluate the coordinators (coordinator 2)

This indicated that feedback on what is being done by facilitators was prompt and not delayed. In a similar vein, while the coordinators evaluated the facilitators, the manager also evaluated the coordinators to ensure proper delivery of services to students. Also, the manager was evaluated by the director of the TLC while the director was also evaluated through her performance contract with the university management. However, monitoring is not just for the sake of going through the motions. Kadalie (2013) is of the view that there is a need to interrogate mentoring and personal engagement with students at higher education institution. He maintains that Monitoring and evaluation are administrative tools to determine whether an organisation is achieving the aim for which it was established. Therefore, it involves all tiers of administration and all levels of management, from the lowest to the highest.

In the same light, Jones (2002) states that many higher education institutions have put into place a mentoring system to help improve student's academic performance. Examples of some of the mentoring programmes are monitoring attendance; making students aware of support service; third year students volunteer to provide support for first years and identifying at-risk students so that they can get additional support. This is suggests that all academic support programmes need to integrate these aspects into their programmes. It can be seen that some of these aspects are not practiced at the TLC; for example identifying at-risk students. This aspect should be integrated in the supplemental Instruction and Language and Writing Advancement programmes under study.

4.6.1.2   Unannounced visits

Another way of monitoring facilitators was through unannounced visits to facilitators' sessions and workshops in PASS venues and even outside where sessions were held. Although this was supposed to be something the facilitators knew about, the coordinators confessed that they paid unannounced visits. The coordinators were asked to explain why they visited facilitators unannounced, and one of the responses was, "I go unannounced to enable me see the real setting" (coordinator 2). It may be assumed that the coordinators wanted to instil a sense of professionalism in the facilitators, especially the supplemental instruction leaders, because most sessions were organised by them. These unannounced visits were to ensure that facilitators knew that they should always prepare for their sessions. However, sometimes facilitators could be intimidated by these visits and panic in-front of the students and this could be embarrassing and frustrating both to the facilitator and the students. This reaction was very common with novice and inexperienced and less prepared facilitators.

4.6.1.3   Support from programme coordinators

Monitoring and evaluation usually go along with support as they are useless if support is not provided by the supervisor. Information was sought on the support, as well as satisfaction with the support provided to the facilitators by coordinators. The majority of the facilitators indicated that they had support in their jobs as either SI or LWC. A variety of ways through which the facilitators were given support were indicated by the facilitators and include the provision of materials, financial support, teaching them on how to facilitate learning, and printing various support documentation. One of the facilitators narrated the nature and type of support received from programme coordinators as follows:

> *We do receive much support from the programme coordinator; especially as we are taught on how to detect plagiarism and how to manage the key areas of an assignment* (Facilitator 2*).*

Another peer facilitator recounted his own help as follows:

> *The coordinators provide us with materials for facilitation like bold makers, photocopy materials and materials to compile our portfolio of evidence* (Facilitator 5).

Despite the majority of the facilitators admitting that they received sufficient support from programme coordinators, some peer facilitators refuted this alleged support. One of them said:

> *I receive little support from the coordinator and as a matter of fact, I am restricted to review and not to correct the assignments. This makes students not to be satisfied with what we are doing as LWC* (Facilitator 8).

The fact that they were facilitators limited their ability to help students. This is because they were trained in facilitation that is guiding students in what they did not understand and not to lecture them. Perhaps this facilitator found it difficult to do so and wanted to lecture.

Regarding whether they were satisfied with the support that the programme coordinators were providing to help them achieve effective implementation of the programmes, the majority of facilitators said they were satisfied. One recurrent issue the facilitators were happy about was that the programme coordinators are always available and could be consulted at any time during working hours. One anxious facilitator maintained, "I am highly satisfied with the coordinators of the programme because they are always available when they are needed" (Facilitator 6).

Although some of the facilitators were satisfied, they had reservations concerning the reduction of the number of hours they worked.. One of them said:

> *I am completely satisfied because all my queries are always attended to by the coordinators, though sometimes our hours that we claim are reduced for no apparent reason. We count on these hours to be able to claim enough for the month* (Facilitator 2).

Two peer facilitators were not satisfied but did not blame the programme coordinators for not providing the necessary support facilitators deserve to be able to effectively implement the peer academic support programmes. One of them said, "I am satisfied to a lesser   extent because the coordinator cannot properly discharge her duties since her hands are tied as well" (Facilitator 9). In a similar manner, another facilitator also expressed her dissatisfaction with the support they received as peer facilitators. She said, "I am not completely satisfied with the support because a lot is expected to happen within a very short time" (Facilitator 10).

The findings under this theme show that the majority of participants received sufficient and satisfactory support from programme coordinators, which is very useful in helping them carryout their duties as SI and LWC at the TLC. This support is necessary, as the question of implementation of such programmes is under scrutiny from university and TLC authorities. Such support and availability of programme coordinators to provide it can go a long way in helping the facilitators provide the assistance their

peers seek from TLC. Given the fact that some of the facilitators still doubted their ability to review or effectively help their peers which might stem from a lack of experience or insufficient training, the constant and regular support can help to fill this vacuum or gap.

However, the views of some facilitators who expressed dissatisfaction with the support provided by the programme coordinators need to be given due consideration. A most likely explanation for this dissatisfaction might be that facilitators were overwhelmed by the number of issues they had to handle once they started working as facilitators. These included issues such as conducting sessions, consultations, reviewing assignments, presenting workshops and administrative duties. This may have been overwhelming, given that they too were students and had to study and do their own assignments amongst their other social and academic imperatives.

4.6.1.4 Monitoring and mentoring of less experienced facilitators

Facilitators were asked whether they had anyone monitoring and evaluating their activities. The majority reported that they had mentors who assisted them to do their work well and who provided suggestions for improvement when the need arose. A facilitator indicated:

> *I have a peer mentor who monitor's my activities. She is a senior student with more experience than me in this SI business. The mentor assists me when I have difficulties especially on time management, stress and managing large groups. She also directs me on what I am supposed to do as well as assign me to students in my discipline who want to consult anyone at TLC with their academic work* (Facilitator 1).

Similarly, another facilitator revealed:

> *I have a peer mentor who acts as a guide to my activities; this is a master's student, an LWC with plenty of experience. In order to facilitate my work as LWC, the mentor makes propositions for adjustments where necessary on the assignments I review. The mentor also assigns LWC related work to me*

and assists me wherever and whenever necessary in my duties as LWC (Facilitator 2).

Although the majority of the peer facilitators indicated that they had mentors, one said she has gained much experience and did not need anybody as a mentor but would rather act as mentor to junior facilitators. She reported, "I had a peer mentor when I started but now; I have gained much experience to mentor myself and others" (Facilitator 4).

This was a good way of letting more experienced facilitators mentor the less experienced ones, as there were only two coordinators at the TLC, and they were overwhelmed. These coordinators could not mentor all the peer facilitators effectively because of their numbers. However, it was a learning experience for the facilitators, who might one day become coordinators or lecturers. This had actually been observed at TLC where there had been some shifting and replacement of coordinators by those who once served as team leaders of peer facilitators. Without this experience of mentoring others, it would not have been easy for them to assume coordinators' positions at TLC.

4.6.1.5 Monitoring and evaluation of programme coordinators

Regarding monitoring and evaluation, coordinators of the programmes were also asked if they were being monitored by the manager or some senior colleagues at the TLC. Their responses were positive, as, they said that lived by the gospel they preached. The more senior and experienced facilitators monitored their junior peers and the programme coordinators also monitored all the facilitators. The facilitators were monitored by the manager of the centre. One of the coordinators said:

> *I also have my SI and colleagues who also come and observe me and I submit annual report every quarter to the manager. This is another lens for evaluation which our own peer observation* (Coordinator 1).

Similarly, the other coordinator maintained, "there are senior colleagues monitoring our activities, also the feedbacks that we get from the workshops are also a form of monitoring" (Coordinator 2).

The findings presented under the topic of monitoring and evaluation reveal that all facilitators in TLC including their coordinators were monitored and evaluated in order to ensure that they did their work well and effect improvement whenever and wherever necessary. It can also be observed that students monitor their peers which enabled them learn different strategies from one another. These mentors assisted them by providing suggestions for improvement. This idea supports what Ruth et al (2001) stipulate, that at the university level, the coordinators of support programmes should always arrange for peer observations where peer educators observe each other's sessions. It can also be seen that monitoring and evaluation is a continuous process, which takes into consideration several factors. Hadley and Mitchell (1995) postulate that monitoring and evaluation are not a one-time event, but an exercise involving assessment of differing scope and depth carried out at several points in time in response to evolving needs for evaluative knowledge and learning during the effort to achieve outcomes.

According to these writers, peer educators have direct experience in the role and can share suggestions from their experiences. However, some participants such as participant facilitator 4, seen earlier, are more experienced and do not need mentors although there might be less experienced ones without mentors as well. This is an indication that in any system, there are always exceptions to the rule. Hence, this single facilitator cannot destroy the quality of peer facilitators' services if mentorship is the major criterion in judging the success of the programmes. Unfortunately, this is not, or should not, be the case.

The heavy workload of programme coordinators could pose problems for the peer academic support programmes to be evaluated and also if there are large numbers of peer facilitators such as 20 (Arendale, 2005). Latino and Ashcraft (2012) maintained that little attention is paid to evaluation of the work done by peer educators and as such, evaluation efforts should be diverse and multifaceted. More so, evaluation

should be through triangulation of assessments (Wang & Reeves, 2007). This view is consistent with McClelland (1994) and Marsh (1987) that the questionnaire system of evaluation is too simple and standardized and, as such, ignores specific issues, such as content and delivery; hence the need for triangulation of methods.

Similarly, others have suggested that different methods be used in the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of peer academic support programmes. This would help all stakeholders to have a detailed and a balanced picture of the programmes (Altrichter, Felgman, Posch & Somekh, 2008). The impact of these programmes, according to Latino (2008), should be on the students served, the peer educators themselves and the overall success of the programmes and this should form an integral component of the reform process (Wilson, 1996). The evaluation of these programmes could reduce what Paton (2008) terms the reduction of uncertainty about decisions that have to be made.

4.7 The perceptions of students on the implementation of SI and LWC programmes

The two main themes that emerged from the information gathered were the general appreciation of the programmes by students who made use of the services provided by TLC and the problem that most facilitators were undergraduate students and could not help students effectively.

4.7.1 General appreciation of and satisfaction with the programmes

Students were asked in focus group discussions what they liked about the programmes. This generated comments on the appreciation of the programmes by the students. The sub-themes were the following: friendly' facilitators were friendly and provided one-on-one consultation; good assignment review and proposal presentations by LWC; duty conscious peer facilitators; the students were willing to recommend these services to their peers; passing of assignments and tests after receiving academic assistance from the TLC.

4.7.1.1   Friendly facilitators

Students who had been receiving services from TLC were asked to explain what they liked about the programmes, and the majority of them in the two focus group discussions reported that they liked the one-on-one consultations. Also, they liked the good friendly services. One of the students during a focus group discussion said:

> *I like the programmes because they involve one-on-one consultations. Also we get good and friendly services. However, the peer facilitators should be well trained to avoid criticisms levelled against them that they do not review assignments well* (FGD1, student 5).

> *Some are doing wonderful work but others are spoiling the name of TLC and their work. For example, some students go around saying that TLC facilitators are not well-equipped and are not supposed to be facilitators as according to them, they misguide students; hence, they can't take their assignments to the centre for review. The only thing that I don't like is that there are few peer facilitators and when you bring your assignment here, it takes about a week or more when lecturers normally give two weeks for an assignment to be submitted* (FGD 1, student 2).

Despite the criticisms in the above quotations, peer facilitators were welcoming in order to create a good learning environment. Therefore, these were two sides of the same coin; the 'good' and the 'bad' sides of the programmes. Also, it is possible to have a one-on-one consultation to enable students express themselves without fear, since some students were uneasy about expressing themselves in-front of others. This supports what Cuseo (2010b) affirmed as the approachability of peers, which can be very important. This is because students often address sensitive issues with their peers rather than with a faculty member. This is an important aspect which these programmes are promoting because they force students to meet other senior peers if they have a problem, which is less intimidating.

According to Tinto (1993); Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997), the key to effective academic support for first year students includes collaboration between students (peer collaboration). Therefore, it can be rightly assumed that students will feel free to communicate when they meet their peers, especially when it is one-on-one. Contrary to the findings of this study, a peer facilitator at another university said what doesn't work is "creating a classroom environment that is productive and comfortable for all students is an ongoing challenge (Heath et al, 2004). This is something that did not prevail at the university under study as the peer facilitators were described by students who seek academic support from them as friendly, encouraging and creating a good learning atmosphere.

4.7.1.2   Assignment and proposal presentations by LWC facilitators

Apart from reviewing assignments, LWC facilitators were also required to visit undergraduate classes and give presentations on how to write assignments and proposals for their research projects. In this regard, two of the students who had attended presentations by LWC facilitators affirmed their liking for the, LWC. They stated that they cherished the presentations by the facilitators on how to write assignments, do referencing both for books, articles and internet sources as well as how to avoid plagiarism. They maintained that students benefited from these presentations conducted by LWC peer facilitators. One of the participants narrated:

> *I like the presentations to us on how to write assignments, make citations and arrange references. This has been so helpful especially as we do assignments without lecturers teaching us these techniques. I also like the fact that I have always passed my assignments and tests after I have sought for help from TLC. I also like their positive and encouraging attitude* (FGD 2, student 1).

The university had been plagued by the plagiarism problem and the presentations on this issue were welcome ones. In addition, the poor presentation of assignments and the incoherence of proposals and referencing methods of many students warranted such presentations. However, care must be taken not to do more harm, if experienced

postgraduate students are not involved in such presentations. However, from every indication, students who visited the TLC for help always got something out of it because of the positive and encouraging attitude of facilitators.

4.7.1.3   Facilitators' commitment to the implementation of the programmes

Another aspect of the programmes that students liked was the fact that the peer facilitators were humble and duty conscious. One student in a focus group discussion said "some of the peer facilitators are duty conscious" (FGD 1, student 2). Most peer facilitator worked diligently despite the complaints levelled against them by some students. Another student added that "I like the fact that the peer facilitators have been taught to be very humble and respectful (FGD 2, student 3). The peer facilitators that are chosen by the TLC to help students were approachable, so students could always approach them without fear.

Facilitators sometimes rushed to consult with students at TLC or they would go to classes to campaign for students to bring their problems to them at TLC. The TLC encouraged this marketing strategy where facilitators campaigned for students because it was a way of making students aware of their services. However, the disadvantage was that some of the facilitators did this only to increase their number of students and hours and boost their claims at the end of the month. Being rude or harsh to students would only result in low pay at the end of the month.

4.7.1.4   Students recommend peers

Students were also asked if they would advise their peers to seek the services of the TLC. They all agreed that they would always advice their friends who are facing academic problems to come to TLC for help. One student even confessed that it would be a big lie if students complained that facilitators did not help. The student said:

> *Obviously, I will recommend my peers to come here for academic assistance or services. There is no way that one can refuse not benefiting something from here. It will be a big lie for anyone to say that because no*

matter what you are told here, you always learn something (FGD 2, student 1).

Another student also supported the colleague by saying:

Yes I will advise my friends to come to TLC for help, because it has been helping us. It is also helpful because here there is one-on-one consultation (FGD 2, student 3).

This suggested that even though there were complaints that the programmes,, students still benefited from these programmes. During focus group discussions, the participants also agreed that the sessions organized by facilitators were friendly and very interactive in nature. Therefore, the students were able to express themselves freely and exchange ideas on topics or issues that they did not understand in class. It has been shown that students are more likely to discuss their problems with peers and feel less intimidated by other students (Sonntag, 1993).

4.7.1.5 Performance of students who attend SI and LWC in assignments and tests

The majority of students who participated in the two focus group discussions maintained that they were satisfied with the services provided by the TLC peer facilitators. It is obvious that students are very satisfied when they pass their examinations and tests. Whoever makes it possible for students to pass their assignments and tests will most likely be loved and admired by the students. On the aspect of whether students were satisfied with how their problems presented at TLC were solved, most students agreed that they were satisfied. The satisfied students said that everything was fine because the assignments that were reviewed by TLC facilitators got passing grades and they also passed their tests. One of the responses by one student was as follows:

Yes I am satisfied because I usually pass my assignments and tests whenever I am helped from here. She added that the problem with some students is that sometimes they want the peer facilitator to do the corrections for them. Moreover, many bring their assignments and want them back almost immediately, forgetting that the facilitators are students and have their own academic work to do. (FGD 2, student 1).

This participant was very conscious of the complaints levelled against the TLC and its services when she reported the mistakes made by some students who want their problems to be attended to without delay and without taking into consideration that these facilitators are students like themselves with their own academic problems and workload. The most common mistake that is made by students is that they want peer facilitators to do the work for them. They believe that if they don't do the work for them, they should at least tell them the answer to the question so that they simply write it down. This explains why the above student mentioned seeking solutions immediately without consideration for facilitators' 'time. The role of a peer facilitator in any teaching and learning environment is to facilitate and not to teach. However, there is still a mixture of teaching and facilitation, given the poor socio-economic status of the students at most of the previously disadvantaged universities. The passing of assignments and tests shows that there is a mutual benefit that accrues from peer facilitation. Higher education research on peer teaching/learning consistently indicates that both the peer learner and the peer teacher (facilitator) experience significant gains in learning as a result of their collaborative interaction (Cuseo 2002).

4.7.1.6   Sharing of experiences and learning from each other

An interesting issue that came out of the focus group discussions regarding why the participants liked the TLC programmes was the fact that they as students are able to come together, discuss and share their different experiences and learn from each other. Topics of interest mentioned by the students include not only academic issues or concerns but other social issues such as HIV and AIDS prevention, testing and counselling. One of the focus group discussion participants maintained:

I like these TLC peer learning sessions because we are brought together and discuss freely, share ideas on many topics such as our academic problems and personal problems confronting some students such as counselling on traumatic experiences like HIV and AIDS related issues. Through this medium, I have learned and benefited a lot from these organized TLC peer support programmes (FGD 2, student 3).

4.7.2 Unqualified undergraduate students

A general issue or concern that was raised by both groups of students during focus group discussions and programme coordinators was that most facilitators, especially SI leaders were undergraduate students who were also overwhelmed with their own work. Therefore, these facilitators were unable to effectively help other students who faced academic problems. Consequently, the sub-themes of failing to pass assignments that were reviewed by TLC consultants, general dissatisfaction with TLC services, recommending TLC to open on weekends and leading up to examination periods and also engaging different departments so that they are fairly represented among the SI and LWC were noticed.

4.7.2.1 Failed assignments reviewed by peer facilitators

The findings of this study according to the two focus group discussions also indicate that some students were not satisfied with the services provided by peer facilitators. They recounted incidents where their assignments had been reviewed by TLC and they still scored lowly or failed whereas some who did not bring their assignments to TLC passed some of them even refused to come to TLC or encourage their peers to take their assignments or academic problems to TLC. One of the focus group discussion participants revealed that:

I'm not very satisfied as sometimes I am not properly helped because some of the peer facilitators are not better than me. I have also heard students who have vowed not to come to TLC because they didn't do well in

assignments they submitted here for review. They would prefer to go to other senior students for help (FGD 2, student 3).

This is in line with what one of the programme coordinators pointed out when she made the following comment:

I am satisfied but to some extent the Honours degree facilitators sometimes face challenges especially in reviewing assignments. I thought of not recruiting them, but again it will still be a challenge in that I will never have experienced facilitators (Coordinator 2).

Some students complained that their assignments always had numerous corrections which was discouraging. One student was asked why they thought their assignments always had many corrections and the student responded that "maybe it is because the facilitators are not from our faculty". They reported that some of the facilitators also had problems admitting that they didn't know something. Another student concurred that many students complained that the help they got from TLC did not help them earn better marks. It may be assumed that some of the facilitators that are recruited are not well equipped on the strategy of implementing the programmes or are less experienced as revealed in the biographical section of this chapter.

All these complaints are a warning that there is a problem with the way some peer facilitators (LWC) review assignments. It might be assumed that these facilitators need more training in order to better understand how to review assignments. It is also a clue that facilitators from different faculties review assignments for students who are not from the same faculty. According the theory of retention by Tinto (1975), a student will be more likely to continue studies if there is a favourable academic and social environment in the institution. In other words, the student will be motivated to learn if he/she is passing the courses well. On the contrary, it is not the case with some students who have negative impressions of the TLC. It might be assumed that these students are demotivated by the low marks they get when they are helped by TLC peer facilitators.

4.7.2.2　　'Opening doors' on weekends

A few students complained that TLC does not open on weekends to enable students who were busy during the week to seek academic help. A few students disliked the programmes for the reason that some peer facilitators were not well equipped and the venue was always closed when they were desperately needed during examination periods. One student complained bitterly:

> *I don't like the fact that sometimes the PASS venue is closed at a crucial time when students need academic support from peer facilitators most. This is especially towards the approach of examinations* (FGD 2, student 4).

Similarly, another student supported this by saying:

> *I dislike the fact that sometimes peer facilitators can't help during examination periods, they will say I don't know this and that, what are they employed for if they can't help us?* (FGD 1, student 3).

It is likely that the PASS venue at this university is often closed during examination periods because of undergraduate students working in the programme (SI). This may be a strategy to let them also prepare for their own examinations, rather than just serving students without helping themselves. This closure of TLC is not unique to this institution but exists in many universities in South Africa. Kadalie (2013:28) states that "South African universities shut their doors during the long vacation providing students with minimal support and incentives to boost their academic experience". This idea is in line with what most students complained about. It is an indication that during examination periods, students found it difficult to get help from TLC which was a problem. It might be appropriate to recruit only postgraduate students from the masters' level to serve as facilitators who do not write examinations so that they are available even during examination periods to help undergraduate students in need of academic support from the centre. This has been intimated elsewhere in this dissertation and has also been suggested by many students who participated in this study.

4.7.2.3   Different departments are not fairly represented

For effective academic assistance to be provided to students by the TLC peers, it is necessary that peer facilitators should come from the same disciplines or departments (facilitator and student with academic problems). This was one of the issues brought up by students whose departments or disciplines are not represented at the TLC and are therefore attended to by peer facilitators from other disciplines. One of them indicated that:

I'm not satisfied at all because those who help me here sometimes make it more confusing especially with some law courses that we are doing. There is no specific facilitator for law at the TLC which is a problem for law students. There is also no faculty of education represented here as a supplemental instructions leader. However, education has a few LWC facilitators (FGD 1, student 3).

Some peer facilitators agreed with the above concern that some disciplines are not represented and they are forced to help those students without a good knowledge of their disciplines. This is in line with one of the peer facilitators comments:

Sometimes we review assignments that are not from our disciplines and as such, we are not very conversant with the subject matter and style used in such disciplines. We therefore confuse the students even more by attempting to help them when we can't actually help them in the real sense of it (Facilitator 2).

The above student was a law student and the faculty of law has a unique reporting and referencing style which most often is in footnotes and endnotes. Peer facilitators from other faculties are not conversant with these law peculiarities, hence the confusion law students face when they helped at the TLC. Nonetheless, the faculty of law is not based on this campus were the study is being done. There is only human rights unit offering postgraduate qualifications. However, there are students from other

disciplines who are doing law elective courses and they need to be assisted by peer facilitators who are law students at TLC which is not the case. According to Tinto's theory of students' departure (1993), this category of students have not yet been integrated into the university system because their expectations and aspirations have not been achieved by the programmes and the university as well. This can affect their degree attainment as well as increase dropout rate.

4.8   Ways of improving the implementation of the programmes

Suggestions were sought on the improvement of the implementation of TLC peer academic support programmes at the university and a variety of responses were received from students, coordinators and facilitators. Most of the proposals were based on the fact that all facilitators should be postgraduate students and they should be well trained in their respective departments on how to review assignments and other related TLC support services. They also suggested that more facilitators should be recruited; at least two per department. One of the students made a lengthy proposal on how TLC could better implement its activities vis-à-vis students. She commented that:

> *I also think that if postgraduate students are those to be recruited as peer facilitators, it would be better for students seeking academic help from TLC. It is my humble suggestion that PhD peer facilitators should be allocated to help all other students from first year PhD downward to first year students. Masters peer facilitators should also be assigned to help first year masters students and right down to first year students. Therefore, masters peer facilitators must not be assigned to help PhD students whatsoever. Similarly, peer facilitators should be helping only undergraduate students and not fellow peer of the same level. Finally, final year peer facilitators should be assigned to help only students who are below them in their year of study* (FGD2, student 3).

According to the above participant, the postgraduate students recruited should only be allowed to provide academic support to students who are below them in terms of year

or level of study. In this case, there would be no inferiority complex exhibited by lower level students consulting seniors or the same year or level students. Similarly, another student echoed the above sentiment regarding the recruitment of only postgraduate students to serve as peer facilitators. The student commented:

I support the fact that only postgraduate students should be recruited as peer facilitators. If this was the case, many of these complaints will not be there. We might still have some but not as many as with the case where underprepared undergraduate are destroying the reputation of TLC with their poor and ineffective services as well as limited knowledge of the contents of what students expect to learn from TLC (FGD1, student 5).

Another suggestion from some peer facilitators is the a call for a review of how much remuneration they got compared with tutors, especially given the type of work they undertook at the TLC. They insisted that as a matter of social justice, there should be equal pay for equal work done irrespective of whether one was a tutor or a TLC facilitator. One of the facilitators suggested:

Current facilitators must market themselves very well. Perhaps the peer facilitators are not performing well because some of them complain that they earn less than a thousand rands per month when tutors are earning almost twice what they earn at TLC (Facilitator 1).

Poor remuneration at the university under study is a huge challenge and this has led to the non-retention of good peer facilitators who opt for less stressful tutor work in their respective departments or doubling positions as tutors and peer facilitators in order to earn better wages at the end of each month. This remuneration is not only a problem for peer facilitators but also a problem for staff, many of whom end up leaving for other universities.

4.9 Summary of the chapter

This chapter presented the biographical information of the 22 participants (11 males and 11 females) made up of 10 peer facilitators and 2 programme coordinators who

were interviewed and 10 undergraduate students who participated in focus group discussions. The facilitators and undergraduate students represented four of the five faculties of the university under study with experience ranging from less than one year to four years. However, apart from non-representation of one faculty, many departments were also not represented.

There were many main themes that were discussed in this chapter. Firstly, recruitment and training of facilitators under which there were issues of applying and being selected for an interview and participating in intensive training as well as regular training throughout the year. The second theme was the methods/strategies used in the implementation of these programmes, which included the use of question and writing methods, having weekly sessions, explanation, writing and reviewing of assignments, etc. The third theme discussed in this chapter was the challenges facing the implementation of the TLC peer academic support programmes. Some of the challenges presented and discussed included disappointment emanating from poor attendance at sessions and little participation in session discussion, large classes managed by peer facilitators, low remuneration incentives, and students going for multiple jobs.

The fourth theme was the monitoring and evaluation theme discussed in this chapter. The presentation and discussion centred on the verbal and written feedback provided to facilitators by programme coordinators. This feedback came from observations and unannounced visits during sessions. The fifth theme was that of students' perception regarding the implementation of these programmes. There was also an expression of appreciation for these programmes because of friendliness of the peer facilitators, the provision of one-on-consultation, duty consciousness of the facilitators, good organization of workshops on assignment writing and passing of assignments and test. However, there were some dissenting voices from the students based on the fact that assignments are not well reviewed, some facilitators were undergraduate students who were also battling with their own academic work, and that the TLC not open its doors during crucial periods such examinations and the fact that many departments are not represented at the centre.

Finally, participants of the study were also given the opportunity to suggest how the services provided at the TLC could be improved and suggestions included the recruitment of only postgraduate students from the masters' level upward to serve as peer facilitators, provision of enough incentives to facilitators, encourage departments to buy into the services provided by this centre as well as equal representation of different departments at the centre.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the analysed data as well as a discussion based on the research questions that were postulated in chapter one of this dissertation. The aim of the study was to assess the implementation of these programmes at one university in South Africa. Academic support programmes play an important role in improving academic performance of most students especially in historically disadvantaged universities. These programmes have been established in most universities in South Africa but the academic performance of many students is yet to significantly improve. There are still many challenges facing the implementation of these programmes and this greatly affects students' performance in completing their degree programmes on time. This chapter presents the summary of the findings of the study, the conclusions drawn from the findings and the recommendations based on how the implementation of peer academic support programmes could be improved. Suggestions for further studies are also presented as well as limitations of the study.

5.2 Summary of findings

As alluded to earlier, there are many support programmes in higher education institutions in South Africa to help in the improvement of students' academic performance. This section highlights the findings on peer academic support programmes, which are meant to improve retention and throughput at one university in South Africa. The findings of this study revealed how facilitators are recruited and trained, strategies used by peer facilitators, challenges facing the implementation of the programmes, monitoring and evaluation and the perception of students on the way these programmes are being implemented. A summary of the findings is presented in subsequent paragraphs based on the objectives and the research questions that were postulated to guide the direction of the study.

5.2.1 Recruitment and training of peer facilitators

The findings show that at the university under study, the general trend is for peer facilitators' positions to be advertised and for interested students to apply for these positions. Thereafter, those selected are called for an interview and the successful ones are intensively trained for two days at the beginning of the year, usually in February. Not all those who are trained are retained as peer facilitators. The students who are finally called to serve as peer facilitators are required to attend regular training meetings some of which are called trouble shooting and shared learning meetings and others are simply called meetings. All of them are meant to solve facilitators' problems or challenges regarding the implementation of their responsibilities at the TLC as well as enable them share their different experiences and learn from each other. These regular training sessions are expected to enhance the implementation of the programmes for the benefit of its clients who are students seeking academic support programmes. The facilitators are trained for their various jobs. LWC facilitators are trained in how to review assignments and SILs on how to conduct SI sessions and other general procedures for working at the TLC, which all focus on peer facilitation of learning.

Most of the facilitators expressed satisfaction with their training they had regularly received from the TLC. This is because the training is important, as the facilitators reported that they were equipped with different facilitation skills for assisting students. Nonetheless, they suggested that the focus of the training be on reviewing assignments and portfolio development for LWC and SI respectively, as well as on plagiarism detection and administrative duties.

However, the findings of this study revealed that some peer facilitators were appointed without necessarily following the normal procedure of recruitment. Consequently, these peer facilitators had not benefited from the intensive two day training which is most important and they become novices in the actual practice of peer facilitation to the detriment of the students who seek academic support from these programmes. Some of the facilitators reported that they had not attended the intensive training because of clashes with their academic programmes while others said they had not

attended because they had been appointed after the training. These are the facilitators who found it difficult to implement the programmes successfully.

5.2.2   Strategies/methods used in implementing the programmes

According to the findings, the main methods used by peer facilitators at the TLC in the implementation of LWC and SI programmes were the use of questioning and the writing method to get the students involved in active learning. This is where the facilitators pose questions to students that allowed them to think and speak their minds. They were also encouraged to continue to write by themselves for the facilitators to review instead of expecting the facilitators to write for them. These methods of questioning and writing stimulate critical thinking in students, who should not be seen as robots or inactive participants in learning.

Another method identified by the facilitators was the group method which was used at the TLC to facilitate learning. Students with similar academic problems were put into smaller groups and required to work on the academic challenge under the guardianship of the facilitator. This was especially useful with large classes and workshop presentations. The findings show that the facilitators were satisfied with these methods as they enabled students pass their tests, assignments and examinations. However, one facilitator suggested mnemonic devices as another preferable method that should be used at the TLC by facilitators. In addition to these methods, facilitators also suggested the provision of different materials in sufficient quantities for the effective execution of their responsibilities at the TLC.

5.2.3   Challenges facing the implementation of these programmes

The results of this study revealed that there were enormous challenges facing the implementation of academic support programmes at this university. A serious challenge was that most students did not make use of the academic support programmes that had been introduced to help them. Statistics at the TLC indicated that few students made use of these services, not because they did not have academic problems, (considering their disadvantaged backgrounds) but because of

other factors, including laziness and discouragement from other students who had previously used these services. Another challenge was that the few students, who visited or used the TLC's services, did not actively participate in discussions during consultations and sessions. These two challenges according to the findings had created a sense of frustration in the facilitators of the programmes, as this is an indication that the programmes were neither good nor worthwhile. The facilitators blamed lecturers who did not encourage their students to consult the TLC about their academic problems for assistance. Another issue raised regarding this under-utilisation of TLC programmes was that most lecturers and students did not know the differences between tutoring and the peer facilitation offered by these programmes.

It was also found that time management was a challenge facing the facilitators at the TLC. Facilitators found it difficult to create time to manage their own workload and to help students especially during examination and test periods. Consequently, they became frustrated with having to help students as well as studying for their own tests and assignments. There was also a challenge of replacing facilitators. The study found that when facilitators abandoned the programmes for whatever reasons, going through the process of recruitment and training both for the TLC and human resources department was problematic. Replacing a peer facilitator is time consuming, which regularly frustrated the coordinators. Another serious issue that showed up in the findings was that facilitators sometimes reviewed assignments not from their departments just to claim money. It is difficult to know what different departments want from their assignments based on the content alone. This is a problem that needs serious attention.

The reviewing of assignments from other departments is related to the challenge of poor remuneration and the system of claiming for work done adopted by TLC. The findings show that while peer facilitators at the TLC claimed their wages based on the number of hours they worked, while those in other departments serving as tutors had a monthly stipend whether they worked or not. Therefore, some peer facilitators held two or more positions or abandoned the TLC facilitation for an easy tutor's job in their departments while others reviewed assignments from disciplines other than theirs just

to claim for enough hours per month. Closely related to the review of assignment was the challenge that some of the inexperienced facilitators faced. The study reveals that there were numerous complaints from students about their dissatisfaction with some of the assignments that were reviewed by the TLC facilitators.

According to the coordinators of the programmes, the TLC method was problematic because it was voluntary. What this meant was that students needed to be compelled to ask for academic assistance from TLC when they had academic problems. According to them, students with academic problems did not realize that they needed help.

5.2.4 Monitoring and evaluation of peer academic support programmes

According to the findings of this study, an important way to monitor and evaluate peer academic support programmes was provided by the programme coordinators. The programme coordinators monitored facilitators through observation and provided written or verbal feedbacks immediately after the observation. This kind of monitoring helped the facilitators to always prepare before any session. According to the findings, coordinators also monitored peer facilitators' attendance through checking attendance registers. The findings further indicate that coordinators were also monitored by senior colleagues at the TLC, such as the manager of TLC on each campus. Facilitators got feedbacks from workshop presentations which helped them prepare for future presentations. It is evident that the monitoring and evaluation of any support programme is an important aspect for the successful implementation of the programmes. Therefore, without an adequate monitoring and evaluation process, the benefits outlined in the programmes may not be achieved. Furthermore, the findings reveal that students who made use of TLC services were required to fill an evaluation form which was seen by coordinators and the facilitators who attended to the students. Such feedback was useful, as it provided information for future improvement in the implementation of these programmes. Finally, according to the study, facilitators also observed each other during sessions, at least twice per semester. It is important for facilitators to observe each other, as they learn different strategies from each other.

In order to support in the monitoring and evaluation of these programmes, the TLC instituted a mentorship programme in which the more senior students who were facilitators served as mentors to the junior ones. These senior facilitators who acted as mentors continued to help the junior ones by showing them how to execute their responsibilities at TLC as peer facilitators. The mentors assisted them to do their work well and provided suggestions for improvement where needed. For example, the experienced peer facilitators were required to check assignments reviewed by newly recruited facilitators before handing them back to the students. In addition, the programmes' coordinators also provided support whenever the need arose or when facilitators asked for this support. Most of the peer facilitators according to the findings did express satisfaction with the mentorship arrangement as well as the support they got from the coordinators of the programmes.

5.2.5   Perceptions of students on the implementation of these programmes

Students' perceptions were sought on the implementation of the TLC academic support programmes and a variety of responses were received from the students during focus group discussions. First, the students were asked about the type of problems they took to the TLC for help and they indicated that the problems were mostly those they did not understand in class, as well as the review of assignments before they submitted them to their lecturers. According to the findings, most students were not happy with the programmes because of the way some LWC facilitators reviewed assignments. The assignments usually had so many corrections that the students felt as if they knew nothing.

Apart from many corrections, some of the students also indicated that the review of the assignments did not help them to pass well. This suggested to them that there was a problem with the review. Consequently, some were not ready to recommend to their peers to seek academic support from the TLC because of this 'bad' experience with assignment review. Nonetheless, many others said they would recommend to other students to seek solutions to their academic problems at the TLC.

The findings show that some of the students confirmed that they always passed their assignments and tests when they received help from the TLC. They liked the programmes because they involved one-on-one consultation, duty conscious facilitators and the fact that there is a friendly environment at TLC, which is learning enhanced.

The fact that most peer facilitators were undergraduate students was not satisfactory to the students who use these services because the undergraduate peer facilitators find it difficult to help students. The students also found it unsatisfactory that during crucial moments such examination periods, the TLC venue is usually closed to allow facilitators to prepare for their own examinations. It was a problem because this was the most crucial period when students needed help from peer facilitators. Again the students reported that some departments were not represented at TLC, which made students reluctant to seek help because of the fear of being misled by novices from other departments, who had no knowledge and skills in their disciplines. Similarly, they maintained that other departments, especially the ones that were big, had just one facilitator who found it difficult to help all students especially during test and examination periods.

5.3   Conclusion

There were many peer facilitators from Science and Agriculture and the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities. The most likely conclusion that could be drawn was that departments were not fairly represented at the TLC and this was disadvantageous to those who had no discipline representatives. For this reason their assignments or academic problems were handled by academic support peers from different disciplines, resulting in poor performance by some of the peer facilitators. Also, most SI leaders were female undergraduate students.. There were many disadvantages of this category of peer facilitator serving students. In addition, many were inexperienced after only being recruited at the beginning of 2013. These undergraduate peer facilitators had many challenges including their personal academic and social obligations or imperatives, and this posed a huge challenge to the implementation of the Supplemental Instruction programme run by TLC.

The recruitment and training of peer facilitators at the University under study the same as in other universities. The only shortcoming was that some facilitators were recruited without following the process and did not have the initial training which was crucial for instilling into facilitators a sense of responsibility and the ethos of working as facilitators. Although there was regular training, which many of the facilitators were satisfied with. However,, some of the facilitator's still exhibit a lack of mastery of the work they are expected to undertake at the TLC resulting in students' complain about the implementation of the programmes. It can also be concluded that having only two coordinators to control, monitor and evaluate many SI and LWC peer facilitators resulted in a shortfall in peer facilitators who come in as replacements for those who decided not to be part of the TLC peer facilitation group and placing the programmes' objectives of high retention and throughput rate at risk. The task confronting these two coordinators is enormous.

The use of undergraduate students as peer facilitators has drawn much criticism from the students who perceive the implementation of the programmes in negative terms on many fronts. However, there are probably two issues here; one is that some students' complaints are simply a result of laziness, but there is also the poor review of assignments by inexperienced facilitators as well as those who are not from the same department or discipline as the student whose assignment is reviewed.

The problem of reviewing of assignments from any department by any peer facilitator emanate from the remuneration system that the TLC uses, which is that of submitting a claim for the number of hours of work. In order to have enough hours to claim at the end of the month, these peer facilitators are tempted to review many assignments even from disciplines other than their own. Therefore, poor remuneration and the claiming system which is different from that practiced in other departments with tutors, have led this problem. It is a problem if there are few facilitators, paid, especially experienced ones. This has pushed some to go for multiple jobs at the TLC and departments serving as facilitators and tutors at the same time because they want more money to finance their studies and solve their socio-economic problems. The situation here is that the University policy stipulates that students should not work for

more than 24 hours per month. While some benefit from double jobs, others for fear of this university stipulation are forced to abandon one job which obviously is the TLC one in preference to a steady tutor's stipend. This explains the reason why the TLC keeps on replacing facilitators throughout the year.

There are adequate peer academic support programmes to help improve students' academic performance at the university under study. These are the Language and Writing Advancement (LWAP) and Supplemental Instruction (SI) programmes. However, these programmes are not being fully utilized by the students. The under-utilisation of the TLC services can be blamed not only on students but also the fact that many departments or faculties do not encourage their students to make use of the services offered. There is no clear distinction between a peer facilitator and a tutor and as a result, students and academics are confused and see the TLC facilitators as a duplication of the work of tutors. Academic support programmes are very important in enhancing student's academic performance especially for students from previously disadvantage universities like the one under study. Therefore without the adequate support of students, facilitators, coordinators and lecturers from different departments, it will be difficult for these programmes to achieve their objectives.

The methods of facilitation which include questioning and writing as well as group work adopted by TLC are effective methods that should enhance learning, despite the challenges enumerated by both facilitators and students. Also, there are enough materials that facilitators use to facilitate learning at the TLC including text books, hand-outs from lectures and past examination questions for revision. The LWC facilitators use materials such as overhead projectors, flipcharts and board makers for workshop presentations. Despite these good methods and enough materials, the programmes are plagued by a shortage of venues for facilitators to organise their sessions and this makes things difficult for the facilitator and the students.

Finally, although there are mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of peer facilitation at the TLC, some of them, such as unannounced visits to facilitators during sessions can be embarrassing and intimidating to both the students and the

facilitators. This is because an external person, such as a programme coordinator may dilute the peer facilitation principles and purpose.

5.4   Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that there are numerous challenges facing this university in the effective implementation of LWAP and SI programmes.. These challenges could be serious obstacles to achieving the high retention and throughput rates which are the targets of the TLC academic support programmes. In order for peer academic support programmes at universities to operate successfully, the following are recommended:

5.4.1 All peer facilitators should receive a much longer intensive training at the beginning of the year in addition to the normal monthly training meetings in order to equip them with the knowledge needed for peer facilitation. The initial training days should be increased from two to five days in order to give ample time to acquire enough skills especially on how to review assignments, conduct sessions and detect plagiarism.

5.4.2   All faculties should be represented and large faculties such as Science and Agriculture and Social Sciences and Humanities should have at least two peer facilitators each to help students.

5.4.3 All facilitators, especially those who possess a certain level of experience, should be given incentives to motivate and encourage them to stay in the programmes. Moreover, there should be sufficient remuneration of the   TLC peer facilitators on parity with tutors and wages should also be   considered for inflationary adjustment annually.

5.4.3 The programme coordinators should follow the normal recruitment process for every facilitator, not just appoint some without interviewing them. This will reduce the complaints by students on poor implementation..

5.4.4 All departments should be involved in the implementation process. The departments should encourage their students to seek help from the TLC

programmes. This can only be achieved if departments have a buy-in. The TLC should ensure that this is possible through encouraging their involvement.

5.4.5 Peer facilitators should all be post graduate students, especially at the Master's level, since they are not restricted by class attendance and are mature in handling academic problems. This will also enable the TLC to open its doors even during examinations and holiday periods. More coordinators of the programmes, at least two should be recruited for SI and two for LWC for each faculty to enhance effective monitoring and evaluation.

5.4.6 Students and lecturers should be educated on the differences between a tutor and an SI leader. This will eliminate the current confusion that lingers in the mind of students and academics about these two types of peer facilitators.

5.4.7 Announced visits to facilitators' sessions should be encouraged. In addition, facilitators should be given written feedback to help them reflect on their areas of weakness.

5.5 Limitations of the study

As with most academic research projects, this study did not successfully end without any hitches. The following constitute the limitations of the study:

5.5.1 Focus group discussions were not adequately representative of all the levels of study; that is first to final year, honours, masters and PhD students. They also lacked gender balance. Therefore, the focus group discussions were skewed in favour of undergraduate students. However, attempts were made to have at least a representative at each level and also both genders even if not completely balanced.

5.5.2 Some students, who were carefully and purposefully selected because they could provide sufficient and rich information about the implementation of the LWC and SI programmes were unwilling to be interviewed;. Nonetheless, measures were adopted to persuade other students to participate in the study.

5.5.3 There was limited exploitation the analysis of the TLC documents because there is no effective storage of information and annual statistics of peer facilitators' activities and services. Some registers over the years were

inaccessible and some facilitators could not give a proper account of their responsibilities at the TLC. This limitation was overcome through verbal explanations by some experienced peer facilitators and coordinators.

5.5.4 Finally, the TLC has only two programme coordinators and as such, only their views were available from the in-depth interviews. These two coordinators could not generate enough and diverse information about the implementation of these programmes to allow for comparison and for the generation of salient themes.. It would have been preferable to have different views for the purpose of themes generation.

5.6 Suggestions for further studies

This study cannot claim to have exhausted everything pertaining to the implementation of academic support programmes at universities in South Africa. Therefore, it is necessary to suggest areas for further studies. The following areas could be researched by other researchers or subsequent studies:

5.6.1 A comparative study of different previously disadvantaged universities' academic support programmes and the impact on students' retention and throughput rates will be worth investigating.

5.6.2 An assessment of the training of peer facilitators of academic support programmes.

5.6.3 An assessment of the monitoring and support mechanisms put in place for peer facilitators of academic support programmes.

5.6.4 The roles of the various university departments in the implementation of peer academic support programmes.

5.6.5 A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research could be used to determine the effective implementation of academic support programmes at universities in South Africa.

5.6.6 An extensive examination of students' perceptions regarding the use of academic support programmes and their impact on their performance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Table 1: Intake and throughput rates from one of the previously disadvantage universities (2007 – 2011)

Faculty	2007			2008			2009			2010			2011		
	Intake	Normal years to Grad.	Took More years to graduate	Intake	Normal years to Grad.	Took More years to graduate	Intake	Normal year s to Grad.	Took More years to graduate	Intake	Normal years to Grad.	Took More years to graduate	Intake	Normal year s to Grad.	Took More years to graduate
Edu	401	93	308	214	76	138	385	191	194	335	147	188	327	193	134
Law	131	71	60	139	59	80	153	73	80	115	65	50	131	64	67
M & C	381	142	239	490	215	275	533	261	272	611	275	336	714	337	377
S & A	306	148	158	306	168	138	386	179	207	483	241	242	527	269	258
SSH	414	214	200	534	284	245	667	375	292	762	437	325	716	415	301
Total	**1633**	**668**	**965**	**1683**	**802**	**881**	**2124**	**1079**	**1045**	**2306**	**1165**	**1141**	**2415**	**1278**	**1137**

Source: Extract from the Planning Unit, 2012 from the University under study.

Appendix 2

Interview guide for peer facilitators

Introduction

I am a Masters' student in the Faculty of Education carrying out a study on the topic: Implementation of Peer Academic Support Programmes in an effort to understand whether these programmes are achieving their intended goals at the University of Fort Hare. Participation in this study is voluntary.

You are kindly requested to assist in providing answers to the questions that follow. I will like to inform you that I will be tape recording and taking notes when you are responding to the questions. All responses will be used for academic purposes only. I assure you that whatever information that you would provide will remain confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. If you accept to participate in this study, please sign the informed consent form. Thank you for accepting to participate in this study.

Biographical Information

1) Gender of participant: Male ☐   Female ☐

2) Year of study of participant: Year 1 ☐   Year 2 ☐   Year 3 ☐
        Year 4 ☐

   3) Level of study: undergraduate ☐   Hons ☐   Masters ☐
      PhD   ☐

   4)   Faculty of participant: Science & Agric. ☐   Social Science & Humanities ☐
            Mgmt & Commerce ☐   Law ☐ Education ☐

5) Academic Department of participant? _____

6) Peer facilitator's designation: Supplemental Instruction Leader   ☐
        Language & Writing Consultant   ☐

7) Number of years as SI or LWC: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐
            7 & above ☐

How facilitators are being trained to enable them implement peer academic support programmes

1)   Please explain how you were recruited as a peer facilitator.

2)   How long have you been working as a peer facilitator?

3)   Please explain whether you have a peer mentor.

4)   Explain what he/she does to facilitate your work.

5) How are you being trained as a peer facilitator?

6) How often are you being trained per year and at what period of the year?

7) Please discuss what you are trained to do.

8) Please explain whether you are satisfied with the training you have received.

9) How are you supported by the coordinator of the programme ?

10) How satisfied are you with the support from the coordinator?

11) How relevant is the training that you received to your work as a peer facilitator?

12) What other areas would you like to be trained in?

The strategies/methods used in implementing these programmes

1) How many students do you normally have in a session?

2) How often do you meet students for help?

3) Explain the type of academic problems students bring to you.

4) Which materials do you use to facilitate learning?

5) Please explain whether the materials are adequate.

6) Explain the methods you use to help students in solving their academic problems.

7) Please explain whether you are satisfied with these methods or not.

8) Which other methods are you currently using and which you would like to use so as to help students?

The challenges facing the implementation of the programmes

1) Explain the challenges you face from students not attending SI or LWC sessions.

2) Please explain whether you are sometimes baffled on how to satisfactorily help students.

3) How do you solve the problem of lack of collaboration between SI and LWCs?

4) Explain the problems you face putting into practice what you were taught as a peer facilitator.

5) What other types of challenges do you face during your sessions?

6) How do you solve these or some of these challenges?

7) Please explain how you are motivated to effectively discharge your responsibilities as peer facilitators.

8) Are there any comments regarding your training which we have not covered in the above questions?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation

Appendix 3

Interview guide for programme coordinators

Introduction

I am a Masters' student in the Faculty of Education carrying out a study on the topic: Implementation of Peer Academic Support Programmes in an effort to understand whether these programmes are achieving their intended goals at the University of Fort Hare. Participation in this study is voluntary.

You are kindly requested to assist in providing answers to the questions that follow. I will like to inform you that I will be tape recording and taking notes when you are responding to the questions. All responses will be used for academic purposes only. I assure you that whatever information that you would provide will remain confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. If you accept to participate in this study, please sign the informed consent form. Thank you for accepting to participate in this study.

Biographical Information

1) Gender of participant: Male ☐   Female ☐

2) Years of experience as coordinator: Less than 1year ☐   1 year ☐   2 years ☐   3 years ☐   4 years ☐   5 years & above   ☐

3) .Which programme are you coordinating?: Supplemental Instruction ☐ Language & Writing programme   ☐

4) Total number of SI or LWC that you are coordinating? _____

How peer academic support programmes are being monitored and evaluated

1)   Please explain how you supervise facilitators daily to make sure they do their work effectively.

2)   What do you train facilitators in?

3)   How satisfied are you with the trainings?

4)   Please explain how you visit peer facilitators during their sessions.

5)   How do you specifically evaluate the work that is done by the peer facilitators?

6)   Explain how you provide feedback of evaluation to peer facilitators.

7)   How useful is the feedback to peer facilitators?

8)   How are you also being monitored and evaluated as a coordinator of SI or LWC?

The challenges facing the implementation of the programmes

1) Please explain if students are benefiting sufficiently from the use of these programme.

2) Explain whether you are satisfied with the services provided by facilitators to students.

3) Please explain the challenges you face from peer facilitators abandoning their responsibilities at TLC

4) Explain if there are any financial challenges facing the accomplishment of peer facilitators' duties.

5) How satisfied are you with students making maximum use of these programmes? .

6) Please explain the challenges face dealing with departments or faculties sending their students to these programmes.

7) Which other challenges do you face regarding effective implementation of these academic peer support programmes?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation

Appendix 4

Focus group discussion guide with students

Introduction

I am a Masters' student in the Faculty of Education carrying out a study on the topic: Implementation of Peer Academic Support Programmes in an effort to understand whether these programmes are achieving their intended goals at the University of Fort Hare. You are kindly requested to participate in this focus group discussion. Your participation in this discussion is voluntary. There are no wrong or right answers because I am asking for your opinions and experiences.

I will like to inform you that I will be tape recording and taking notes of this discussion. All responses will be used for academic purposes only. I assure you that whatever information that you would provide will remain confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. If you accept to participate in this study, please sign the informed consent form. Before we proceed to the discussion, I will like to get biographic information about each one of you. Thank you for accepting to participate in this focus group discussion.

Biographical Information

1) Gender of participant: Male ☐   Female ☐

2) Year of study of participant: Year 1 ☐   Year 2 ☐   Year 3 ☐

             Year 4 ☐ Year 1 Hons ☐   Year 2 Hons ☐

       Year 1 Masters ☐   Year 2 Masters ☐

       Year 1 PhD   ☐ Year 2 PhD ☐ Year 3 PhD ☐

3) Faculty of participant: Science & Agric. ☐   Social Science & Humanities ☐

           Mgmt & Commerce ☐   Law ☐ Education ☐

4) Academic Department of participant: _____

5) Peer facilitator's designation: Supplemental Instruction Leader   ☐

        Language & Writing Consultant   ☐

6) Number of years as SI or LWC: 1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐   6 ☐

            7 & above ☐

The perceptions of students on the implementation of these programmes

1)   How often do you go to peer facilitators for academic support?

2)   What types of problems do you take to peer facilitators for help?

3) Are you satisfied with how your problems are being solved?

4) Explain whether you would recommend your fellow peers to seek for academic support from peer facilitators.

5) Please explain what you like or dislike about the programme.

6) Please explain if you or your peer(s) have had problems regarding how peer facilitators provide help to you or your peer(s).

7) What do you think can be done to improve on the implementation of the programme?

8) Is there any other issue/concern or thing that you would like us to discuss regarding the implementation of peer academic support programmes at the University of Fort Hare? Please explain.

Thank you all for your cooperation and participation

Appendix 5
Informed consent form

I hereby agree to participate in research regarding ………………….…….... I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop this interview at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally.

I have received the telephone number of a person to contact should I need to speak about any issues which may arise in this interview.

I understand that this consent form will not be linked to the questionnaire, and that my answers will remain confidential.

I understand that if at all possible, feedback will be given to my community on the results of the completed research.

………………………..

Signature of participant   **Date**:…………………

I hereby agree to the tape recording of my participation in the study

………………………..

Signature of participant   **Date**:…………………..