

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**The pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences  
of MBA students**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

The role of the student is central in the process of teaching and learning and therefore forms an invaluable source of information for quality control and performance excellence. The quality perceptions of students are linked to the success of business schools and in the competitive arena of education their views cannot be ignored. With the student as the customer, quality in higher education can be viewed as the difference between the students' pre-decision expectations and their-post decision experiences of their university Master of Business Administration (MBA) education. The contention raised in the literature review is that the needs of the student have been ignored in the debates that have focused on the contributions of MBA programmes and their limitations in reaching their educational goals. There has been no recent research on the student's expectations and experiences of the MBA programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Graduate School of Business and Leadership (UKZN GSB&L).

The aim of this study was to determine the relationships that exist between MBA students' pre-decision expectations versus their post-decision experiences and thereby fill the gap that exists. The study focused on MBA students that were enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L in 2013. The population included MBA students studying on the block release and full time classes on the MBA first, second and third year programmes. The population of the classes comprised of 305 students. The data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The salient findings from the study showed that the main reason for the students' pursuing an MBA qualification was the development of managerial knowledge and personal skills. The majority of students had considered other Graduate School of Businesses (GSB's) before enrolling at the UKZN GSB&L. The areas that students rated highly when considering the UKZN GSB&L were the accreditation, reputation and the rating of the institution. The study has shown that the majority of the students were satisfied with the overall experience of the MBA programme at the UKZN GSB&L. On a personal level, the MBA programme has improved the students' confidence level and communication skills. The majority of the students would recommend the MBA programme offered by the UKZN GSB&L to people that they know. The recommendations to improve the satisfaction level of the students at the GSB&L have been provided and the limitations identified serve as a catalyst for further research in this field.

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## List of acronyms and abbreviations

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| AACSB  | Advanced Collegiate Schools of Business         |
| CHE    | Council on Higher Education                     |
| CSR    | corporate social responsibility                 |
| EFT    | electronic fund transfer                        |
| GIBS   | Gordon Institute of Business Science            |
| GSB's  | Graduate School of Businesses                   |
| GSB&L  | Graduate School of Business and Leadership      |
| HEQC   | Higher Education Quality Committee              |
| IMD    | Institute Management Development                |
| INSEAD | Institut European d'Administration des Affaires |
| KZN    | KwaZulu-Natal                                   |
| MBA    | Master of Business Administration               |
| PMR    | professional management review                  |
| ROI    | return on investment                            |
| SA     | South Africa                                    |
| UCT    | University of Cape Town                         |
| UDW    | University of Durban-Westville                  |
| UK     | United Kingdom                                  |
| UKZN   | University of KwaZulu-Natal                     |
| UNISA  | University of South Africa                      |
| US     | United States                                   |
| USB    | University of Stellenbosch                      |
| Wits   | University of Witwatersrand                     |

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Students form a critical link between the educational and corporate contexts as students transform the curriculum that is planned by educators into relevant knowledge in their workplace. From a marketing perspective using the consumer decision process as reference, the student provides an invaluable source of information to business schools for quality control and performance excellence (Bruce, 2010).

Students who are enrolled in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme are direct observers of a business school's quality. The students' expectations must be understood in order to provide the best prospects for practical MBA degrees that are rich in academic discipline. With the student as the customer, quality in higher education can be viewed as the difference between the students' pre-decision expectations and their post-decision experiences of their university MBA education. Students that are satisfied with their educational experiences will serve as excellent ambassadors to promote the business school. This will have a direct impact on the reputation of the institution (Guell, et al., 2011).

The focus of this study was to establish the pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences of MBA students studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Graduate School of Business and Leadership (UKZN GSB&L). Understanding the gap that exists between the expectations and experiences of MBA students serves as a measure of the students' satisfaction level (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001).

This chapter outlines the motivation behind the study and the focus of the research topic undertaken. It presents a problem statement, objectives and corresponding research questions. Chapter One concludes with an overview of this research study.

### **1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

Vazquez (2012) contended that the needs of the student have been ignored in all the debates that have traditionally focused on the contributions of MBA programmes and their

limitations in reaching their educational goals. Vazquez (2012) also proclaimed that in the development of capabilities and competences, the role of the student is central in the process of teaching and learning and therefore focus must be placed on the students. Mintzberg (2004) identified that the purpose of an academic institution is to create and convey insights so that the students see the world in profound and diverse ways. Tapping into students' perceptions is one way in which business schools can obtain insight into the quality of their programmes, thereby ensuring their progression towards excellence (Mintzberg, 2004).

The intention of this study was to contribute to the understanding of the pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences of MBA students that are currently studying at the UKZN GSB&L. The results of this study will benefit the following stakeholders:

- The leadership of the UKZN GSB&L who will have a better appreciation of their students' expectations and experiences. The findings will assist them in their strategic planning activities.
- UKZN GSB&L lecturing and administration staff can use the findings to assess their effectiveness and efficiency in meeting the students' expectations.
- The marketing division of the UKZN GSB&L can utilise the findings to improve their knowledge of the target market and consequently their marketing plan.
- Current students can use the findings to assess how their expectations and experiences compare to that of the other students.
- Prospective students can use the study as an additional source of information to guide them in the buying decision process.

### **1.3 FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

The target population for this study was MBA students currently enrolled at the UKZN GSBL. The population included MBA students studying both on the block release and full time classes at the first, second and third year levels of the MBA programme. The objective of using currently enrolled MBA students as opposed to students that have already completed their studies was to ensure that the information obtained is current.

The focus of this study was to understand the satisfaction level of the MBA students registered at the UKZN GSB&L by investigating the pre-decision expectations versus the post- decision experiences of the students.

#### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

MBA students form a vital link between the educational process and the corporate context. There is very little literature on the expectations versus experiences of MBA students themselves. Understanding the students' expectations versus experiences in an MBA programme is one way that business schools can obtain insight into the quality of their programmes and thereby ensure their progression towards excellence.

The question that the study therefore sought to answer is, "How satisfied are MBA students with the UKZN GSB&L prior to the decision to study?" A sub-question is, "Have the students' expectations been met after commencing studies?"

#### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The questionnaire for the research was developed with the objectives in mind. To facilitate this, the following questions were raised:

- What were the students' expectations prior to enrolling for the MBA programme?
- What were the students' experiences during the registration process?
- Were the students' expectations met?

#### **1.6 OBJECTIVES**

In order to address the research question, the following objectives were identified:

- Determine students' expectations prior to enrolling on the MBA programme.
- Evaluate students' reasons for choosing the UKZN GSB&L to pursue their studies.
- Establish the students' experiences during the registration process.
- Determine whether the students' expectations were met during their studies.
- Establish whether the MBA programme has made a difference to the lives of the students.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For this study the quantitative approach to collect and analyse the data was used. A research questionnaire was used to obtain responses from the target group. In order to explain the research observations the numerical data gathered from the respondents was presented in a statistical form. The letter of consent to conduct the research was obtained from the UKZN as their database was used to distribute the questionnaire to the MBA students. Once the respondents had completed the questionnaire, the responses were anonymously stored on the QuestionPro database.

The target population for this study was the MBA students that were enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L in 2013. The population included MBA students studying both on the block release and full time classes. The population comprised 305 MBA students, made up of 180 first year, 60 second year and 65 third year MBA students. For a population of 305 students the appropriate sample size at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% is 169 (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). The online questionnaire was viewed by 221 students, 149 of these students started the survey and 119 completed it. The actual response did not meet the recommended minimum sample size despite the survey being sent out 3 times over the survey period of 3 months.

The data was summarised using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, the measurement of central tendencies and the measurement of dispersion. The data was compiled in bar graphs and tables which are illustrated in this dissertation in Chapter 4.

## **1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Researchers identify and document limitations in their studies in order to assist future studies in the field. The following were identified as limitations in this study:

- The results of this study cannot be generalised across the entire population of the UKZN GSB&L students as the minimum number of respondents was not met.
- The majority of the students that responded were first year students. This imbalance may have skewed the findings of this study.

## **1.9 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

The approach used for this research ensured that the research process adopted a logical flow. The dissertation comprises of the following five chapters:

- Chapter One: this chapter has introduced the research topic, the statement of the problem and the research question that had to be addressed. The objectives, research methodology and limitations of this study have also been identified.
- Chapter Two: provides a literature review that covers the history of MBA education both globally and within the South African context. In addition, the quality of MBA education and the elements of the consumer buying process are discussed.
- Chapter Three: describes the various research methods adopted for this study. The method of data collection, sampling and the instrument used are also discussed.
- Chapter Four: this chapter covers the presentation and analysis of the research findings. The data collected from the completed questionnaires were interpreted within the identified research objectives. The findings were used in discussing each objective of the study.
- Chapter Five: this chapter concludes the study and presents the recommendations to improve customer satisfaction within the UKZN GSB&L. In addition, limitations are identified and recommendations are presented for future research.

## **1.10 SUMMARY**

The competitiveness and success of business schools depend on the quality of their MBA programme. When applying the marketing “buying decision process,” on MBA students’ expectations and experiences, vital information is provided that cannot be ignored by progressive business schools. This feedback provides vital information on the institutions’ quality control and performance excellence. A literature review on the MBA education and the buying decision process is conducted in Chapter Two.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **MBA EDUCATION AND THE BUYING DECISION PROCESS**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

An MBA curriculum that is planned by educators can be transformed into relevant knowledge only by the students. The link that the students form between the educational and corporate contexts makes the students' expectations and experiences a very important topic in the arena of management education (Vazquez, 2012). The expectancy disconfirmation model evaluates services by comparing expectations with perception (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001). Hoffman and Bateson (2001) cautioned that perception takes place in the mind of the consumer and is sometimes not related to the actual service. This study has therefore focused on the post-decision experiences rather than perceptions of MBA students.

Bruce (2010) observed that students are a key customer to business schools and therefore from a marketing perspective the consumer decision process must be understood. Universities administer surveys to gather quantifiable information on the teaching effectiveness of their faculty members. What is missing in these surveys are the expectations and experiences of MBA students themselves (Bruce, 2010). Students' expectations must be understood in order to provide the best prospects for practical MBA degrees that are rich in academic discipline (Rapert, Garretson, Smith and Velliquette, 2004). Students enrolled in the MBA programme are the only direct, daily observers of institutional quality. They are therefore an invaluable source of information for quality control and performance excellence (Rapert, et al., 2004). With the student as the customer, quality in higher education is defined as the difference between what a student expects to receive and his or her perceptions of actual delivery. The quality perceptions of students are therefore linked to the success of business schools (Guel, Tince and Turan, 2011).

The first part of this literature review focuses on the development of MBA education. The second part pertains to the quality of MBA education. The third part explores MBA education in South Africa, and finally the fourth part highlights the students' expectations and experiences of the MBA degree.

## 2.2 THE HISTORY OF MBA EDUCATION

Pfeffer and Fong (2004) traced the emergence of management as a discipline, which began with the establishment of the first business school in the United States (US) in around 1908. The MBA was initially seen as an elite qualification for senior managers and leaders. Business schools originated during this period since there was a need to educate business people in business management, industrial production, distribution and marketing (Pfeffer and Fong, 2004). Lange (2004) observed that the Great Slump of 1929 and the ensuing economic crisis introduced a new dimension into governments' local and international economic policies during the first part of the 20th century. The impact of the crisis on production prices and on employment was felt on an unparalleled global scale.

When business schools reopened in America after World War II they faced the criticism contained in two reports funded by the Ford Foundation (Gordon and Howell) and Carnegie (Pierce) Foundation respectively (Lange, 2004). The reports probed the desirability of offering an undergraduate education in business and questioned the legitimacy of business schools, as they did not conform to academic norms. The Ford Report recommended the reduction of the number of courses offered by business schools. In addition it recommended the repositioning of the business curriculum as the study of the art and science of management (Lange, 2004). In comparison to the pace of changes in America, business education reached Europe only in the late 1940s and 1950s in Belgium – in the Institute of Management Development (IMD) - and in France – in the Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires (INSEAD). In Britain the first business schools, which were established with government support in Manchester and London, opened in 1965 (Lange, 2004).

Initially, there was no consistency in the curricula of business schools. Harrington (2010) noted that the MBA curriculum varied widely from one institution to the next. Daniel (1998 cited in Harrington, 2010), in his analysis of MBA programme curricula (circa 1910), identified a total of 30 distinct categories of courses offered. Curriculum standards for business education were formalised in around 1925 when the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) outlined a set of subjects expected to be covered in business programmes (Harrington, 2010).

The courses were accounting, statistics, business law, finance and marketing. This list was expanded by the AACSB in 1949 to include economics and production or industrial management. Over the next 30 years additional subjects were introduced which included international behavioural management, ethics and management information systems. The subjects listed above have constituted the curricula of both undergraduate and graduate business programmes for many years (Harrington, 2010).

### **2.2.1 The objectives of an MBA**

Mintzberg (2004) raised the question: “What constitutes an excellent MBA programme?” And he responded that the purpose of an academic institution is to create and convey insights so that the students see the world in profound and diverse ways. This insight is advanced by either generating new knowledge or by transmitting it thoughtfully. Tapping into students’ perceptions is one way in which business schools can obtain insight into the quality of their programmes and thereby ensure their progression towards excellence. Pfeffer and Fong (2004) agreed with Mintzberg’s views. They stated that the objectives of a business school include “developing important, relevant knowledge and serving as a source of critical thought and inquiry about organizations and management, and by so doing, advancing the general public interest as well as the professionalization of management”.

Pfeffer and Fong (2004), while agreeing with the views of Mintzberg, also identified another objective that business schools must consider. This relates to the students’ development of critical thinking and analytical abilities. Martin (2002 cited in Pfeffer and Fong, 2004) observed that the University of Toronto based its MBA programme on developing integrative thinking. Toronto’s approach is that problems do not come classified by subject area and that extremely successful people approach their tasks with an integrated decision-making process, which makes them more successful than their peers. Mintzberg (2004) in addition to the work conducted by Pfeffer and Fong also advocated the concept of critical thinking. This was in response to his observation that business schools emphasise the mastery of facts rather than the process of inquiry and questioning.

### **2.2.2 Criticism of the MBA**

Pfeffer and Fong (2004) recognised that the US business schools have always dominated the MBA market in both quality and quantity. They cautioned, however, that as others rush to

emulate the US model they should be aware of the fact that there are problems in US business schools. Grey (2001 cited in Pfeffer and Fong 2004) intuitively noted that business schools have “a curious dual insecurity”. On the one hand, business schools have been accused of not meeting the students’ and industries’ needs, yet on the other they simultaneously stand accused of being too market driven. Mintzberg (2004) also echoed the view of Pfeffer and Fong that the research and teaching of business schools have contributed very little to the developments in the world of business. Porter, et al. (1997 cited in Pfeffer and Fong, 2004) noted that as students and recruiters are increasingly viewed as customers to be served by business school administrations, their business values begin to drive the academic agenda. The consequence of this is that the values and character of higher education are compromised. Pfeffer and Fong (2004) remarked that “business schools have made a particular promise and that efforts to fulfil that promise create profound difficulties for the schools”. They cautioned that in their effort to satisfy their market-driven ideology of responsiveness to customers, business schools run the risk of losing potential competitive advantages to their rivals (Pfeffer and Fong, 2004).

The criticism that business schools do not adequately prepare graduates for the needs of industry is still prevalent in the recent literature. Slater (2010) claimed that MBA graduates are ill-equipped to cope with the challenges of a dynamic and global environment. The contention is that the MBA is irrelevant to the needs of current managers. The single-minded pursuit of profits has partially been responsible for recent business scandals and unethical executive actions. In addition, the concept of making a profit at all costs does not take into account the global scarcity of resources. MBA programmes do not consider this global problem to be their domain (Slater, 2010).

Vazquez (2012) in his research added a new dimension to the criticism between the business schools and industry and his contention was that the needs of the student have been ignored in all the debates. Vazquez stated that the main debate has focused on the contributions of MBA programmes and their limitations in reaching their educational goals. Corporations argue that the substance taught lacks practical application and does not address real market problems. Vazquez (2012) further proclaimed that in the development of capabilities and competences, the role of the student is central in the process of teaching and learning and for this reason additional focus must be placed on the students.

### 2.3 THE QUALITY OF MBA EDUCATION

In pursuit of the meaning of quality in education, Rapert, et al. (2004) observed that quality education is associated with developing leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills together with the intuition required to perform in a job situation. The goal of the reengineered MBA programme he analysed was to shape the students into well-rounded team players. This was to be achieved through interdisciplinary courses reinforced by tangible learning experiences (Lord, 1997 cited in Rapert, et al., 2004).

The concept of quality in education programmes is based on the ideas of quality experts such as Deming, Juran and Ishikawa (Guel, et al., 2011). They stated that the fundamental purpose of an education system is to create a better society. In reviewing the literature, the repeated theme that there should be an interaction between the academic and the student is evident (Guel, et al., 2011). Tofte (1995 cited in Guel, et al., 2011) believes that a quality education must achieve the following:

1. Provide an appropriate education that fits with students' needs, expectations and wills;
2. Try to create constant betterments in every process for student satisfaction; and
3. Try to add value to students' lives.

Guel, et al. (2011) stated that customer service and customer satisfaction in the services sector have become important issues for business management. Franklin (1999 cited in Guel, et al., 2011) defined service quality as "reducing the gap between customers' excellent service expectations and their perceptions about the services available to them". The concept of service quality can therefore be utilised as a synonym of customer satisfaction (Guel, et al., 2011). Expectation as a concept in the quality terminology has significance as it forms the frame of reference used to determine the degree of satisfaction of the customer or client – in this case the student. Students' expectations are based on previous students' experiences and the prestige of the academics (Guel, et al., 2011).

Guel, et al. (2011) added that perceived quality is based on the comparison of customers' perceptions and quality expectations. With the student as the customer, quality in higher

education is defined as the difference between what a student expects to receive and his or her perceptions of actual delivery (Guel, et al., 2011). The quality perceptions of students are therefore linked to their satisfaction and success. When the difference between the students' expectations and perceptions of a university's educational system is within the tolerance limit, positive sentiments are spread by the students (Guel, et al., 2011). This positive endorsement promotes other students' preference for the university. The perceptions of students are therefore an enormously valuable source for the university administrators to determine the standards of their MBA programme (Guel, et al., 2011). Telford and Masson (2005 cited in Guel, et al., 2011) pointed out that the perceived quality of education depends on the students' expectations and values. Students who cannot harmonise their studies with their values experience disappointment. Students who have realistic expectations experience less of a difference between the expected and perceived quality. Once university administrations have identified what the exact expectations of the students are, they can use this information when designing their schedules (Guel, et al., 2011).

O'Neill and Palmer (2004 cited in Guel, et al., 2011) introduced another definition regarding quality in higher education. They defined quality as "the difference between what a student expects to receive and their perceptions of actual delivery". The preference level of the students is a factor that determines the preference level of the business school. If the quality of a university's education meets the students' expectations this positive sentiment is a source of advertisement for the University. The converse is also true. If the expectations of students are not met then negative publicity would be generated and this would deter future student enrolment (Guel, et al., 2011). Although students beginning their studies have big expectations of university life, these expectations may not be very realistic as they do not have university experience. In their second and third years their satisfaction generally depends on the extent to which their expectations are realised. This presents a window of opportunity for university administration. If the administration conveys accurate information about the quality of the education offered, the students' expectations can be made relatively realistic (Guel, et al., 2011).

Clewes and Ah-Kim (2003 and 2010 respectively cited in Guel, et al., 2011) identified five elements as the dimension of service quality. They unpacked the kind of interrogation of quality that could take place in terms of these five elements as follows:

1. **Tangibles:** This includes visible objects such as equipment and the physical facilities provided to facilitate service delivery. In the context of education, the tangibles would include lecture rooms, course materials and computers facilities. The quality of the tangibles is a measure of the quality of the educational institution, and must therefore be considered by the university administration.
2. **Reliability:** This refers to the ability to perform the pledged service as promised repeatedly. It is necessary to do so in an educational context in order to meet the students' expectations.
3. **Responsiveness:** This refers to the capability to respond to the customer's needs timeously and in a helpful manner. When applied to education, it is vital that students' expectations, demands and needs are responded to promptly.
4. **Assurance:** This element has to do with sharing relevant knowledge with costumers and conducting all actions politely and with trust, thus creating a sense of confidence in the customer. For academic and administrative personnel an environment that displays trust can be achieved by demonstrating appreciation of students and communicating with them in a polite manner.
5. **Empathy:** This refers to the efforts taken to show understanding of the customer. Academics should attempt to look at issues from students' perspectives.

### **2.3.1 The complexity of the constituents of good quality**

According to Rapert, et al. (2004 cited in Sulaiman and Mohezar, 2009), the complexity of providing a quality programme is due to the diversity of the students that enrol in these programmes. This diversity is associated with their diverse academic backgrounds such as engineering, science, social science and medicine. The quality of the programme becomes personal and is related to the previous experience and individual expectations of the

students (Sulaiman and Mohezar, 2009). Existing literature on what constitutes quality in MBA programmes reflects this theme of diversity. Clewes (2003 cited in Guel, et al., 2011) remarked that quality in education is a subjective concept, and up until now there has been no consensus on the best way to define and to measure the quality aspect of education. Yeo (2009 cited in Guel, et al., 2011) stated that quality in higher education does not depend on course materials or computers; it is dependent on the human element of service provision.

Rapert, et al. (2004) also warned that providing a quality MBA programme is a difficult and an evolving task. He believed that perceptions of quality are linked to the expectations of external stakeholders, especially the students, in the context of the diversity that they bring to the programme. In addition, MBA students have gained work experience and have developed likes and dislikes of the various disciplines in the organisation, such as accounting, marketing, and other business areas (Rapert, et al., 2004). The MBA students have steered off the path that they were travelling on and invested their time, energy, and money in their MBA studies. As a consequence their standards are high and their expectations are diverse (Rapert, et al., 2004). This affirms the notion that the meaning of quality is personal and is strongly linked to the previous experiences and future hopes of each individual student (Rapert, et al., 2004).

Rapert, et al. (2004) recognised that the student as a stakeholder is a source of discernment in matters relating to quality in business education. He contended that students pursuing an MBA programme are the only direct witnesses of the institution's quality standards. Students therefore form an invaluable source of information when a judgement is to be made about the quality of an educational establishment. He therefore urged that the expectations of students must be understood so that they may be equipped with the best opportunities by taking a practical business degree that is rich in academic discipline (Rapert, et al., 2004)

## **2.4 MBA EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Lange (2004) commented that there is no South African MBA, just as there is no American or French MBA. The contents and pedagogy of the functional areas of management are globally similar. What distinguishes MBA programmes is the quality of the faculty, the integration of research into the teaching, the resources utilised, the admission criteria, the areas of

specialisation focused on, and the programme's relationships with the world of business and the public sector (Lange, 2004). There is, however, something that can and should differentiate the South African MBA from that of other countries, and this is the intersection between global and local trends (Lange, 2004). For the MBA programmes offered in South Africa to meet their objective of preparing managers for the country, the content must focus on the specific authenticities of business and management in the context of our developing nation (Lange, 2004). This can be achieved by business schools dedicating their time and resources to the production of research for curriculum renewal and challenging old or inadequate business practices (Lange, 2004).

#### **2.4.1 A brief history**

In conducting research for the Council on Higher Education (CHE), Lange (2004) noted that the history of the MBA in South Africa is integrally linked to the influence that apartheid legislation had on higher education. Apartheid legislation determined the range of degrees and subjects that institutions of higher education could offer and prescribed the racial profile of the students that these institutions could enrol (Lange, 2004). The rapid industrialisation of South Africa in the 1940s and the buoyant economic mood was favourable for the introduction of management education in the country. The first MBA (strictly speaking an MCom) was introduced at the University of Pretoria in 1949 (Lange, 2004). During the 1960s the economic progress and stability for White South Africans was strong, despite the political tensions that the country was engulfed in (Lange, 2004). During this period, the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of Stellenbosch (USB), the University of South Africa (UNISA), and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) started to offer MBA degrees at their newly-opened business schools (Lange, 2004). The University of Durban-Westville (UDW) started offering the first MBA for Black students in the 1970s. This was during a period when the resistance to apartheid was gaining momentum. The international disinvestment and political unrest during the 1980s created an economic crisis in South Africa. In order to improve the productivity and technical education of both Black and White students, Technikons were created (Lange, 2004). They offered the MBA in partnership with United Kingdom (UK) and Australian universities (Lange, 2004). Horwitz and Bowmaker (2003 cited in Lange, 2004), in their study on the evolution of the labour market, noted that the legislation during the apartheid era created a legal framework that excluded

Blacks from having access to managerial, professional and skilled work outside the designated independent and non-independent homelands.

The national accreditation of MBA programmes was undertaken by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The re-accreditation exercise identified areas of concern and excellence in relation to 13 criteria that were developed (Lange, 2004). These criteria were taken into account in the international debates on the MBA. Lange (2004) noted that until 1990 there were only seven business schools in the country offering the MBA programme. On completion of the re-accreditation programme by the HEQC in April 2002, the MBA footprint in South Africa consisted of 27 providers comprising of 18 public higher education institutions and nine private providers. The survey by Finweek (2012) considered all accredited South African Business Schools. The number of accredited providers referenced in their survey was 23 providers, a reduction of four providers since 2002 (Finweek, 2012).

#### **2.4.2 Factors that South African students consider when pursuing an MBA degree**

Lange (2004) noted that an increase in career options has been the most important reason for students enrolling in the MBA programme in South Africa since 1985. The other considerations leading to students' pursuing an MBA degree were:

- Skills development as identified by their employers.
- The development of entrepreneurial skills.
- Guaranteed success at work.
- A guaranteed salary increase.
- The perception that if one planned to leave South Africa the MBA would be a useful qualification abroad.

Finweek (2012) observed that usually business schools and the media have focused only on the impact the degree has on one's career and financial remuneration. In their research they recognised that this is just one part of the overall impact that an MBA degree has on the individual. The areas that they recognised include:

- Alumni management: The effectiveness and importance of the alumni management activities.

The primary aim of the research that Finweek (2012) conducted was to provide a holistic and well-balanced view of the MBA student's perceptions of the overall value and impact of the MBA degree. A student having such a well-balanced view would be able to make an informed decision on whether to pursue an MBA qualification or not. In addition, a prospective student would be in a position to link any particular accredited South African business school to his or her particular expectations. The conclusion that Finweek (2012) reached is that the MBA degree offers remarkable benefits to those students who attain the qualification. They caution that the MBA degree demands significant sacrifices in the short term.

## **2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE MBA DEGREE**

According to Antonacopoulou (2008 cited in Vazquez, 2012) the educational outcome of an MBA is the mastering business action. The students' engagement and the purposes of MBA programmes are connected by the development of actionable knowledge. This asserts that the curriculum planned by MBA educators can be transformed into relevant knowledge only by the students. The link that the students form between the educational and the corporate contexts makes their perceptions of their educational process a very important topic in the arena of management education. Their perception enhances the understanding of the students' learning process and the resultant outcome of enhanced capabilities and competences.

Latham and Brown (2006) confirmed that student's perceptions and degrees of satisfaction are important to businesses and business schools. They provided two: firstly, students would not recommend the business school if their expectations had not been met; and secondly, when MBA programmes are ranked, feedback from past and present students is taken into account. Consequently, student perceptions influence the ranking of the business school. This puts on-going pressure on the head of the business school to find ways to increase the satisfaction of the students in their MBA programmes (Latham and Brown, 2006). The accreditation programme of South African Business Schools is well entrenched and student perception plays a pivotal role in the process (Latham and Brown, 2006). Other factors considered are the quality of the curriculum, whether value is provided for the money spent, the quantity and nature of the research performed, and the extent of the administrative support provided to students (Furlonger, 2008).

MBA students invest a great deal of time and make personal sacrifices in pursuit of their higher education (Carmichael, 2005). Students' perceptions establish whether or not the overall benefits they derive from the MBA make their sacrifices worthwhile. Implicit in students' perceptions of the value of an MBA is whether or not they learnt what they needed to learn in order to become effective managers. The work conducted by Mintzberg (2004) confirms the importance of different learning methodologies in adding value to the MBA experience in terms of competence development.

Hoffman and Bateson (2001) suggested that the simplest and most powerful model in which consumers evaluate services by comparing expectations with perceptions is the expectancy disconfirmation model. The concept of this model is straightforward - if the perceived experience is better than the expectation, consumers are satisfied; the converse is also true. Hoffman and Bateson (2001) cautioned that perception takes place in the mind of the consumer and does not always correlate to the actual service. It is for this very reason that this research study was based on the post-decision experiences and not perceptions of MBA students studying at UKZN GSB&L.

## **2.6 THE CONSUMER DECISION PROCESS AND THE LINK TO THE MBA DEGREE**

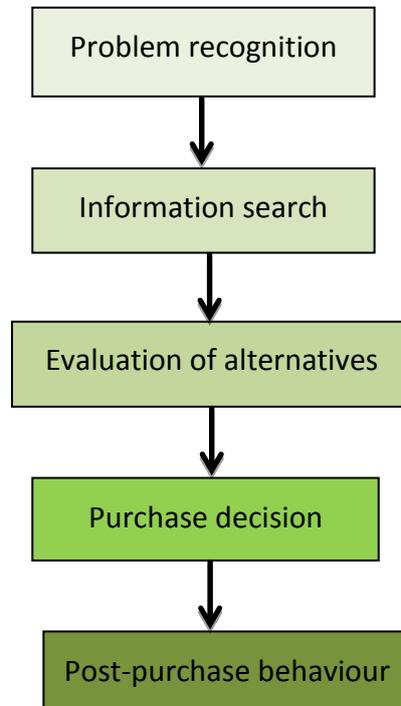
Bruce (2010) observed that from a marketing perspective the consumer decision process is no different when a student is the consumer. Students first make a category level decision - this is whether or not to pursue the MBA (Bruce, 2010). Next there is the brand level decision - this is in which school the degree would be pursued. When the ultimate decision is reached to enrol at a particular school this suggests that the student has concluded that the value that they will derive from the MBA offered by the school selected will be greater than the cost (Bruce, 2010). Navarro (2005) pointed out that benefits are what the customer receives. Benefits are inherently subjective, that is, they exist only in so far as they are perceived by the customer. Management of perceived value can therefore be defined in the value equation (Navarro, 2005):

$$\text{Value} = \text{Perceived benefits} / \text{Price}$$

From the above equation it is noted that the MBA student will experience value when the perceived benefit exceeds the price of the product.

### 2.6.1 The consumer buying process: The five stage model

The buying process commences long before the actual purchase and has consequences post the purchase (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The five stages that the consumer passes through are described in Figure 2.1 below.



**Figure 2.1: Five-stage model of consumer buying process**

Source: Adapted from Kotler, P. and Keller, K.N., 2012. *Marketing Management*. 14<sup>th</sup> Edition. Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.

- Personal life: The impact that the MBA has on the students' personal lives.
- Network: The extent to which the MBA network helps graduates in their post-MBA endeavours.
- Financial impact: The influence that the MBA degree has on the salary progression of graduates.
- Outlook on life: The influence that the MBA degree has on the graduates' world-view and their view of their own potential.

- Problem recognition

The need arises from an external stimulus. Marketers need to understand the circumstances that trigger a particular need so that marketing strategy that is developed sparks consumer interest (Kotler and Keller, 2012). In the case of prospective students making enquiries into studying at colleges this stimulus can be a commercial or a social stimulus (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001). Hoffman and Bateson (2001) described a commercial stimulus as an advertisement about the college while a social stimulus is derived from peers that are already studying at college. These stimuli lead the student to examine whether a need exists and the decision process continues to the information search stage (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001).

- Information search

The major information sources that consumers will turn to fall into four groups. These groups are: personal (family and friends), commercial (advertising and websites), public (mass media and consumer rating agencies) and experiential (handling and using the product). Kotler and Keller (2012) noted that the greatest amount of information about a product is derived from commercial groups while the most effective source comes from the personal or public sources that are independent authorities.

From the total set of alternate brands that are available the individual consumer will only come into contact with the brands that they are aware of. These brands are referred to as the awareness set (Kotler and Keller, 2012). From the awareness set the consumer narrows down the available brands into a choice set. The brands in the choice set are used by the consumer to make a decision. Kotler and Keller (2012) advised that organisations must understand what is in the consumer's choice set so that appropriate alternate appeals can be planned.

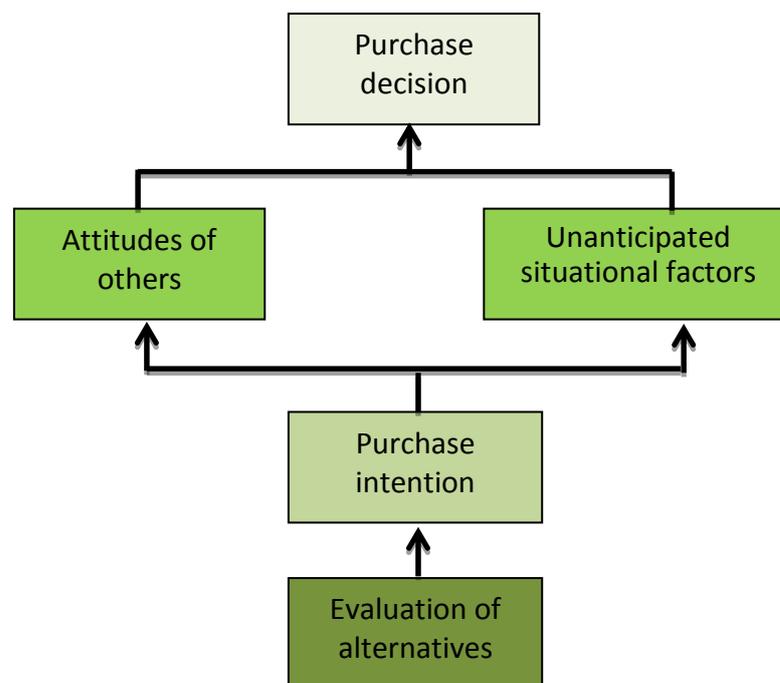
- Evaluation of alternatives

Kotler and Keller (2012) concluded that in the current model the consumer forms judgements on a conscious and rational basis. In the evaluation process consumers are firstly trying to satisfy a need, secondly they are looking for certain benefits and thirdly they identify each product as a bundle of attributes with varying abilities to deliver the benefits.

The attributes that deliver the most sought after benefits will receive the most attention from consumers. Consumers conduct extensive research when the purchase has a high involvement or has a high expenditure associated to it (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Hoffman and Bateson (2001) advocated that the task for management is to use competitive advertising to reduce the attribute scores of competing colleges. The example cited is that by advertising their accomplishments, the past poor academic results of a college can be changed (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001).

- Purchase decision

Kotler and Keller (2012) observed that in executing a purchase decision from the consumer's choice list, two factors can intervene in the process. These steps are described in Figure 2.2 below.



**Figure 2.2: Steps between the evaluation of alternates and a purchase decision**

Source: Adapted from Kotler, P. and Keller, K.N., 2012. *Marketing Management*. 14<sup>th</sup> Edition. Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.

The first intervening factor between the purchase intention and purchase decision is the attitude of others and included in this are consumer reports (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The influence of another person's attitude depends on two things, namely the intensity of the person's negative attitude and the motivation to comply with the other person's wishes. The

intensity of the negativism will adjust the purchase decision (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The second intervening factor is unanticipated situational factors such as the loss of one's job. The intervening factors that provide risk in consumers must be understood by marketers so that they can provide information that will reduce this risk (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

- Post-purchase behaviour

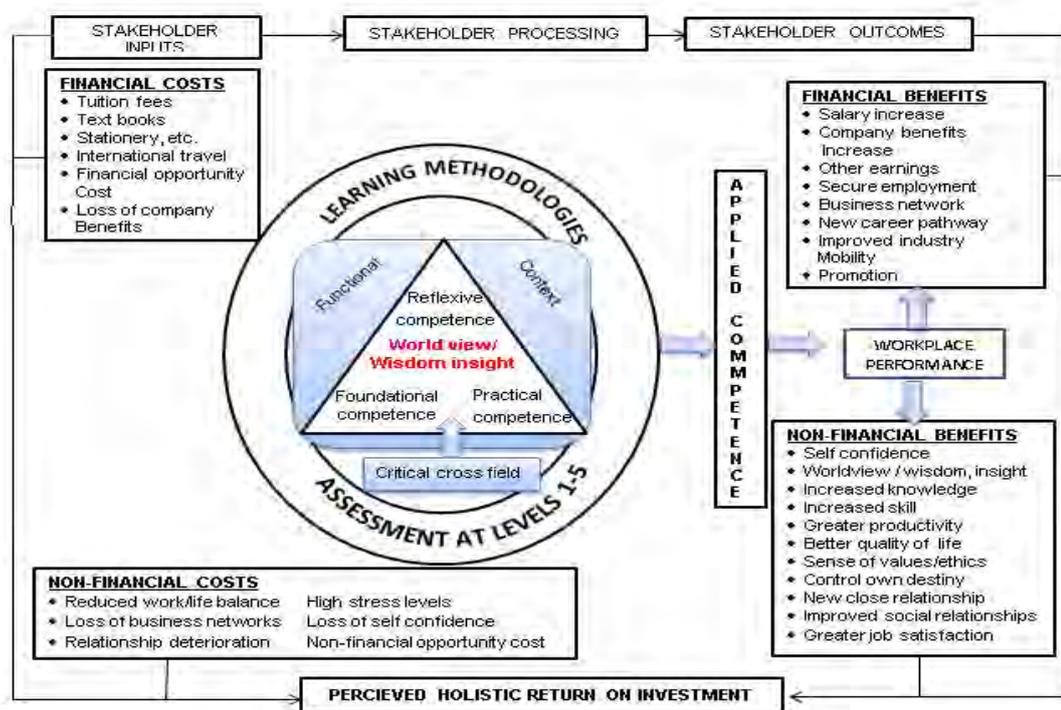
The marketers must supply beliefs and evaluations that reinforce the consumer's choice and this function does not end with the purchase (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Satisfaction has been defined by Kotler as the closeness between expectation and the product's perceived performance. Disappointment results if the performance falls short of expectation and these feelings make a difference if the customer recommends the product to other consumers (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Hoffman and Bateson (2001) advised that one way of increasing customer satisfaction is by increasing the sense that they are in control and that they know what will happen next. This model is referred to as the perceived control perspective (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001). When post purchase communication to buyers exists in the form of soliciting customer suggestions or sending them informative magazines, a good channel is provided for the speedy redress of customer grievances (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Hoffman and Bateson (2001) added that consumers experience cognitive dissonance post the purchase. This manifests as doubt in the mind of the consumer on the correctness of the purchase (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001).

## **2.7 A HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF AN MBA DEGREE**

Carmichael (2006) conducted research at the University of Witwatersrand and established that student perceptions of the cost and benefit variables related with an MBA degree extend beyond the financial. The respondents divided the cost and benefit variables into two categories, namely the financial and non-financial. Focusing on the financial benefits, 68% of the respondents were able to command higher salaries on completion of their MBA degree. This finding indicates the perceived importance of this variable. The highest response frequency, 75.9%, had to do with the improved network of business contacts that was built up during the MBA programme. The three most important non-financial benefits that accounted for more than half of the total weight allocation were: increased confidence, having a broader worldview / insight / wisdom, and having significantly greater knowledge.

The perceived benefits of doing an MBA outweighed the perceived costs. Ninety eight percent (98%) of the respondents stated that the benefits were greater than the costs. This perception of the students clearly shows that there is more to the notion of a ‘return on investment’ than simply financial measures.

Carmichael (2006) proposed a framework based on a transformation model in which both students and members of the faculty may take advantage of the factors contained in the framework and a more holistic and positive experience of the MBA may take place. This framework is represented in Figure 2.3 below.



**Figure 2.3 Holistic framework for the perceived ROI in an MBA**

Source: Adapted from Carmichael, T., 2006. A holistic framework for the perceived return on investment in an MBA. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 36(2), p.66.

The circle in Figure 2.3 represents the role and activities of the MBA faculty and learning facilitators in ‘processing’ the student. The objective of extending the assessment into the workplace is to build the graduate to a higher level of applied competence. This would lead to workplace performance and ultimately to financial and non-financial benefits. These enhanced benefits are unlikely to occur without an improved performance level. The MBA

degree on its own will not bring enhanced benefits; there is a considerable amount of other work that also needs to be accomplished.

This transformation-based model can be used by students in order to obtain full benefit from their MBA experience (Carmichael, 2006). This is achieved by managing the inputs (the cost variables), taking full benefit of the elements that make up the learning process and being accountable for the application of their learning at their workplaces. Through this process the student will reap the benefits in a holistic way. MBA programme administrators may also find the model useful in their quest to positively influence students' perceptions of the return on investment (ROI) they attain from their studies.

## **2.8 GOAL SETTING AND THE LINK TO MOTIVATION ON THE MBA PROGRAMME**

Latham and Brown (2006) observed that people have the desire to accomplish what is important to them. Satisfaction is measured by the degree to which their goals are attained. There is a direct correlation between the satisfaction and the success in attaining one's goal. The conclusion reached in his study is that students will be satisfied with their MBA programme to the extent to which their goals are met. Goal setting therefore has an important bearing on students' perception of the MBA programme and has a positive effect as it provides them with a sense of purpose; it is a theory of motivation. The findings from the performance-based studies suggest two impediments that would mitigate the positive effects of goals on a student's perception: these are a lack of ability and environmental uncertainty (Latham and Brown, 2006). The finding shows that when students must acquire knowledge or skill before they can perform a particular task, the setting of a high outcome goal has a damaging effect on performance. A possible explanation for this negative goal setting outcome is low self-confidence (Latham and Brown, 2006). Participants who set learning goals had more self-confidence than students who just did their best (Latham and Brown, 2006).

## **2.9 THE VALUE MBA STUDENTS PLACE ON INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)**

Montgomery (2011) concluded from his research that the most important attribute of a job offered to MBA students is the intellectual challenge implicit in the job. This was rated as being more important than the financial package and the geographical location. Kirchmeyer

(2002) presented another perspective: career success is measured by the MBA student's progression within a company. Compensation is therefore one variable that defines success. The other factors noted are the hierarchical level within the company and promotions received. In conducting research on French MBA students, Peterson (2011) concurred with the work conducted by Montgomery (2011) in saying that students place more emphasis on the challenges that organisations present and less emphasis on compensation.

The second finding is of importance to top management, recruiters, and human resource personnel (Montgomery, 2011). A firm's reputation for corporate social responsibility (CSR), especially in the way of ethical products and practices related to caring about employees, is highly rated by MBA students. MBA students are keen even to forego income in order to work for an organisation that they perceive as caring for the natural environment, communities and stakeholders. The findings have consistently showed that MBA graduates below the age of 30 will not work at a company that they could not be proud to say they worked at. Organisations that demonstrate a commitment to embracing ethical business products and practices would therefore be more successful in attracting the best MBA graduates. This study therefore provides MBA recruiters and organisations hoping to attract MBA talent with a better understanding of the relative importance of job factors. Underwood (2002) and Johnson (2002) in previous studies concurred with the observation made by Montgomery on the importance of CSR. Johnson observed that the students recognised environmental issues more important than compensation. Underwood concluded that MBA students rated CSR as being just as important as the salary that they are rewarded with. Businesses need to ensure a social return for their staff in addition to the norm of a financial return on investment (Montgomery, 2011).

## **2.10 THE VALUE MBA STUDENTS PLACE ON WORK/LIFE BALANCE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

Sulaiman and Mohezar (2009) established that the prospect of developing their knowledge and skills motivated students to enrol in MBA programmes. Students chose to pursue the MBA programme simply to achieve the qualification. Thompson and Gui (2000 cited in Sulaiman and Mohezar, 2009), on the other hand, showed that their group of respondents perceived an MBA qualification as an opportunity to advance their careers. Sulaiman and Mohezar (2009) also indicated that although the students' salary increased upon their

graduating with an MBA degree, the increment was not considered to be a key factor in motivating students to pursue an MBA degree. Baruch and Leeming (2001 cited in Sulaiman and Mohezar, 2009) also concluded in their study that salary increments were not a motivating factor amongst students. According to their study, the improvement in career development post the MBA degree is one of the values that students are looking for. Students believe that having a management qualification is a pre-requisite to achieving senior management positions.

Fish (2010) undertook research into students' perceptions regarding their career expectations, and the findings of the research have important implications for recruiters and business school heads. MBA students view work/life balance as a critical area that drives career expectations and perceptions. Fish (2010) established that job characteristics and compensation were closely linked to the importance placed on the work/life balance. MBA students value job location, travel time and telecommuting as important areas in work/life balance.

## **2.11 THE IMPACT OF GENDER AND AGE ON MBA STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO ENROL IN THE MBA PROGRAMME**

Sulaiman and Mohezar (2009) examined the impact of gender and age on the motivation of students to pursue an MBA degree and showed that female respondents were more highly motivated to enhance their management knowledge and technical skills than their male counterparts. Male respondents showed greater motivation to pursue an MBA as it promised faster career advancement and increased career possibilities. The prospect of an increase in earning power motivated the male respondents to a larger extent than the female respondents. Differences in the ages of the respondents were also noted. Respondents who were older than 34 years demonstrated higher levels of motivation to improve their management knowledge and technical skills than the younger respondents. The older respondents were driven to enhance their networks and were less interested in career advancement and changing jobs than the younger respondents (Sulaiman and Mohezar, 2009).

In their earlier study, Bartol and Martin (1987) produced findings different from Sulaiman and Mohezar's. They observed that it was the male MBA students who had significantly

higher levels of motivation than the female MBA students. Managerial motivation scores were found to be significant predictors of salary post-graduation. Measurements taken at the beginning of the MBA degree programme and after graduation showed no significant differences. The differences noted between the genders suggest that the progress of women in management needs to be monitored, to determine the level at which upward mobility is restricted. Their recommendation was that if the implications were serious, then the MBA content aimed at enhancing motivation needed to be re-designed to address the problem (Bartol and Martin, 1987).

Kirchmeyer (2002) established that family variables such as marriage may be a factor that slowed down the managerial success of women. The disparity in income between men and women was skewed in favour of men. This differential in income led to lesser perceived success for women (Kirchmeyer, 2002).

## **2.12 SUMMARY**

It is apparent that the role of the student is central in the process of teaching and learning. Customer focus and customer satisfaction in the service industries have become important issues for business management. In the context of the student, the concept of service quality is synonymous with customer satisfaction. Perceived quality is based on a comparison of the customers' perceptions and quality expectations. With the student as the customer, quality in higher education can be viewed as the difference between the students' pre-decision expectations and their-post decision experiences of their university MBA education.

Academics have an important role in improving education quality. This improvement can be achieved by academics performing their duties during the education process, for example by structuring course content, giving feedback about students' performances, and encouraging students to improve their performance and motivation levels. A comparison of the students' pre-decision expectations and their post-decision experiences is an important source of feedback to university administrators to monitor their quality levels and performance.

There has been no recent research on the students' expectations and experiences of the MBA programme at the UKZN GSB&L. The purpose of this study is to fill the existing gap. The results from this research would be beneficial to MBA faculty administrators, current and

prospective MBA students and recruiters who are targeting MBA graduates in their quest to improve their levels of talent.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Bryman and Bell (2007) have explained that research design was linked to the criteria that are used when evaluating business research. In addition they have illustrated that research design is a framework for the generation of evidence that is suitable to both the set of criteria and the research question that the researcher is interested in answering. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) aptly defined research as an undertaking by people to discover things in a systematic way that leads to the proliferation of their knowledge base. The term “systematic” implies that research is based on relationships that are logical.

This chapter systematically covers the aim and objective of the study and proceeds into a detailed explanation of the research methodology adopted and the questionnaire design.

#### **3.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

MBA students form a vital link between the educational process and the corporate context. There is very little literature on the expectations versus experiences of MBA students themselves. Understanding the students’ expectations versus experiences in an MBA programme is one way that business schools can obtain insight into the quality of their programmes thereby ensuring their progression towards excellence.

There has been no recent research on students’ expectations versus experiences of the MBA programme at the UKZN GSB&L. The aim of this research is to determine the relationship that exists between students’ expectations versus their experiences and thereby filling the gap that exists in the literature.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Determine students’ expectations prior to enrolling on the MBA programme.
- Evaluate students’ reasons for choosing the UKZN GSB&L to pursue their studies.
- Establish the students’ experiences during the registration process.

- Determine whether the students' expectations were met during their studies.
- Establish whether the MBA programme has made a difference to the lives of the students.

### **3.3 PARTICIPANTS AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY**

The target population is defined by three criteria, namely the elements, geographic location and time (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). The target population for this study was MBA students currently enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L. The population included MBA students studying both on the block release and full time classes on the first, second and third year levels of the MBA programmes.

The objective of using currently enrolled MBA students as opposed to students that have already completed their studies was to ensure that the information obtained is current.

### **3.4 TYPE OF STUDY**

Sekaran and Bougie (2011) have noted that studies are either exploratory experimental, casual or descriptive in nature. An exploratory study is undertaken when very little knowledge or information is available on the topic being researched.

In an experiment the researcher establishes an artificial setting and some of the variables are controlled. The objective of this is to manipulate the independent variable in order to establish cause-and-effect relationships. A causal study is undertaken to establish cause-and-effect relationships amongst variables. Finally, in a descriptive study the researcher describes the variables in a situation that is of interest to the researcher. Sekaran and Bougie (2011) emphasised that descriptive studies are undertaken when the characteristics of a situation are known to exist. The researcher wants to describe the characteristics better by presenting a profile of the elements.

This study used the descriptive study method to meet the objectives that were set. The descriptive method was used because there was no desire to change the behaviour patterns of the MBA students targeted but was intended to understand their decisions, decision-making process and the reasons for their choices.

### 3.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

In research design two methods of data collection are described by Sekaran and Bougie (2011). These are the qualitative and quantitative methods. These methods are utilised to collect information that enhances the understanding of the situation being researched. It is important to understand the differences between qualitative and quantitative research before choosing a research approach to a study. The type of research method chosen directly influences the questions that are asked and the choice of data collection instruments and finally the data analysis method.

**Table 3.1: Differences between qualitative and quantitative research**

| Quantitative  | Qualitative   |
|---|---|
| Collection of data in a standardised numerical format       | Collection of data that is non-standardised that is required to be classified into categories |
| Objective   | Subjective  |
| Can be generalised, based on multiple research studies      | Cannot be generalised, based on single research studies                                       |
| Meaning is derived from numbers                             | Meaning is expressed through words  |
| Analysis is conducted by the use of diagrams and statistics | Analysis is conducted via conceptualisation   |

Source: Adapted from Sekaran, U. and Bougie, R., 2011. *Research methods for business*. 5th edition. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

From Table 3.1 it is evident that there are discrete differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative research is non-generalisable, subjective and relies on uncontrolled observations during the data collection activity. Quantitative research on the other hand is generalisable, objective and relies on controlled observations during the data collection activity.

Due to the short duration of the study, the quantitative analysis which is based on meanings derived from numbers was used for this study. Primary data was obtained from all MBA students who are currently registered at the UKZN GSB&L via a survey questionnaire.

In their research, Bryman and Bell (2007) stated that the questionnaire method has limitations as low response rates were observed in certain situations. Despite this limitation,

there are other advantages which were considered in using the questionnaire. These were the low cost using electronic media, the ease of running the survey and the enhancement of the confidentiality of the respondent as no face to face contact is made.

### **3.6 SAMPLING**

Sekaran and Bougie (2011) described sampling as a technique of selecting a suitable representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters and characteristics of the entire population. When the population is very large, sampling is used as it is both costly and impractical to consult with every member of the population. Sampling allows inferences to be drawn from the parameters of the chosen sample to the entire population. For this study a probability sampling design with a simple random sampling method was chosen.

#### **3.6.1 Description of the population**

This study was specifically focused on MBA students currently enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L. The population included MBA students studying on the block release and full time classes on the MBA first, second and third year programmes. All the students in the defined programmes were approached in this research. This implies that the research was not restricted to a target group but incorporated the entire population. The population of the 2013 classes comprised of 305 students.

#### **3.6.2 Need to sample**

Although the entire population was selected in this study, it is important to understand why sampling is needed. Sekaran and Bougie (2011) defined sampling as a process of selecting items from the population that ensures that the characteristics can be generalised to the population. Sampling involves the use of practical methods for gathering data that best represents the larger population (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). More reliable, accurate and precise results are produced when sampling is used. This is accomplished economically (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011).

### **3.6.3 Probability vs. non-probability approach**

Bryman and Bell (2007) identified two distinct sampling procedures, namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling. In order to draw inferences from the study, the selection of the sample plays a critical role in qualifying the results of the study.

#### *3.6.3.1 Non-probability sampling*

In the non-probability sampling technique the core characteristics of the samples are selected on the subjective judgment of the researcher (Keller, 2009). Sekaran and Bougie (2011) clarified that the elements in the population in non-probability sampling do not have a known or predetermined chance of being selected as sample subjects. This means that researchers cannot generalise the results obtained to the entire population.

#### *3.6.3.2 Probability sampling*

In contrast to non-probability sampling, the elements of the population in probability sampling have a known chance of being selected as sample subjects (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2007) explained that in the probability sampling technique the units are selected from the population at random which enables the researcher to make inferences from the sample to the population of interest. Probability sampling is therefore chosen when researchers want a precise, statistical description of a larger population. For this study probability sampling was used.

Sekaran and Bougie (2011) defined various forms of probability sampling. These probability sampling methods are described in the Section 3.6.4 below.

### **3.6.4 Sampling methods**

Prior to concluding on the type of probability sampling method that was used for this study an understanding of the various types of sampling methods available is important. Sekaran and Bougie (2011) defined six types of probability sampling.

These are described in Table 3.2 below:

**Table 3.2: Types of probability sampling**

| Type of probability sampling  | Description  | Comment  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Simple random sampling     | All elements in the population are considered and each element has an equal chance of being chosen as the subject.   | Advantage is that findings can be generalised.   |
| 2. Systematic sampling        | Every nth element in the population is chosen. The starting point is from a random point in the sampling frame.  | Easy if a sample frame is available. Systematic biases are possible.   |
| 3. Stratified random sampling | Population is initially divided into meaningful segments. In proportionate stratified random sampling the subjects are drawn in proportion to their original numbers in the population. In disproportionate stratified random sampling the subjects are drawn using criteria other than their original population numbers. | This is the most efficient of all probability designs. It is time consuming in comparison to simple random or systemic sampling. A sampling frame is required. |
| 4. Cluster sampling           | The starting point is the identification of heterogeneous members in a group. Once selected, these members are randomly selected and all members in each of these groups are studied. In essence this sampling ensures intragroup heterogeneity and intergroup homogeneity.  | This is the least reliable and efficient since the subsets of clusters are more homogenous than heterogeneous.   |
| 5. Area sampling              | This is a form of cluster sampling within a particular area or locality.   | It is time consuming to collect data from an area.   |
| 6. Double sampling            | The same sample or a subset of the sample is studied twice.  | Offers more detailed information on the topic of study.  |

Source: Adapted from Sekaran, U. and Bougie, R., 2011. *Research methods for business*. 5th edition. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

For this study the probability sampling design with the simple random sampling method was selected as each element of the population had a known and equal chance of being selected.

### **3.6.5 Sample size**

There has been debate on the best sample size (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). The conclusion reached is that a sample size greater than 30 and smaller than 500 is suitable for the majority of research studies.

The population comprised 305 MBA students currently enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L. The population was made up of 180 first year, 60 second year and 65 third year MBA students. All students in the full time and block release classes were chosen. For a population of 305 students the appropriate sample size at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% is 169 (<http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>).

## **3.7 DATA COLLECTION**

There are many types of data collection methods. Sekaran and Bougie (2011) identified the primary data collection methods as face to face interviews, telephonic or electronically assisted interviews, personally administered questionnaires and observation of individuals. Primary data for this study was collected using the questionnaire survey method. In choosing this method consideration was given to the quick turnaround time using an electronic questionnaire, cost effectiveness and the convenience of respondents who could complete the survey in their own time. The data base of the UKZN GSBL was used to email the 345 students that were enrolled on the MBA programme in February 2013.

### **3.7.1 Instrument**

The questionnaire (Appendix 2) was constructed with the following criteria: no ambiguity, easy to navigate through and no poorly worded questions. Careful attention was given to ensuring that no double barrelled questions were asked and the utilisation of open-ended questions was kept to the minimum. Open-ended questions allow the respondents to express their opinions in their own words while close-ended questions are chosen from a scale of programmed responses (O'Leary, 2004). The choice from a programmed scale according to O'Leary (2004) allows closed questions to be easily analysed statistically.

The questionnaire was administered electronically to the respondents. It was accompanied by a covering letter, which outlined the aim and objectives of the study and provided a brief

explanation of the purpose of the research (Appendix 2). Another important aspect of the letter is that it gave assurance of the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondent.

### **3.7.2 Instrument construction**

The questionnaire was developed with the objectives in mind. The objectives in turn would ensure that the purpose of the study was met. In ensuring that the purpose of the study would be met the questionnaire was divided into six sections.

Section 1 - Questions 1 to 6:

Demographic data. This identified the student and the management level that they occupied in the organisation.

Section 2 - Questions 7 to 8:

These questions examined the students' expectations prior to enrolling on the MBA programme.

Section 3 - Questions 9 to 15:

These questions examined the students' reasons for choosing the UKZN GSB&L to pursue their studies.

Section 4 - Question 16:

This question examined the students' experiences during the registration process.

Section 5 - Questions 17 to 21:

These questions determined whether the students' expectations were met during their studies at the UKZN GSB&L.

Section 6 - Questions 22 to 26:

These questions examined whether the MBA programme has made a difference to the lives of the students.

The questionnaire was based on one open-ended question with the remainder of the questions being closed ended. Open ended-questions allow the respondent to be spontaneous, while the disadvantage of a closed-ended question is that it does not allow spontaneity (Bryman and Bell, 2007). A tick or numeric ranking was inserted by the respondents in the checkbox of each question; this was linked to a numerical scale by QuestionPro which allowed for easy analysis of the data.

The types of closed-ended questions utilised in this study were:

- Dichotomous scale. These were the yes/no type question which was used to obtain precise answers. Immediately after the dichotomous type question was asked it was followed up by question which probed the reason for the yes or no choice. This ensured that additional detail was obtained.
- Multiple choice questions. These questions were used to obtain single answer demographic data and information on the student management level, choice of institution and rating of the UKZN GSB&L.
- Likert scale. A Likert scale is described as a non-comparative scaling technique, which is one-dimensional in nature (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In this study the Likert scale was utilised to rate the respondents' experiences during the registration process and with the GSB&L facilities.
- Ranking scale. This type of question was used to establish the importance that respondents placed on their experiences. The ranking was done using a numerical ranking, for example where one is the most important reason and eight the least important.

### **3.7.3 Reliability and validity**

Reliability and validity are two important characteristics that should be considered when assessing a research instrument. Sekaran and Bougie (2011) stated that the reliability of a measure indicated the degree to which it is error-free. Being error-free or without bias ensures consistent measurement across time and across the various items in the instrument. This, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2011), means that the reliability of a measure is an

indication of the stability and consistency of the measure. The closer the relationship between the results of the instrument once administered, the greater is the reliability.

The concept of validity answers the question: “how can we be reasonably certain that we are measuring the concept that we set out to measure and not something else?” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). Sekaran and Bougie (2011) identified and elaborated on the following tests for validity: content, face, criterion-related and construct validity. Content validity measured whether the concept was adequately measured. Face validity as the name suggested examined on the face of the question the logical link that the questions had with the objectives of the study.

Criterion-related validity was established when the measure differentiated individuals on a benchmark that it is expected to predict. Construct validity tested the accuracy of the results obtained in relation to the theories around which the tests were designed. From the concepts discussed it was important that the questions measured the issues in the research study.

It was not possible for any research to collect data that was a hundred percent reliable and valid (Anderson, 2004). It was necessary, however, to ensure that reliability and validity tests minimise the limitations, this would ensure that the results of the study are credible. The questionnaire administered for this study was pilot tested. This ensured that the reliability and validity of the responses were maximised.

#### **3.7.4 Timeframe**

The time horizon selected was a cross-sectional study as opposed to a longitudinal study. A cross-sectional study is undertaken just once in order to answer the research questions (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). In a longitudinal study the researcher gathers data on more than one occasion in order to answer the research question (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). In this study data collection was conducted from mid April 2013 to the end of June 2013. It was a challenge obtaining timeous responses from the targeted MBA students, which led to an overall delay on turnaround time of the questionnaires.

### **3.7.5 Pre-testing and pilot**

The intention of a pilot study is to ensure that the research questionnaire was fully developed prior to proceeding with the full scale research activity (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). By conducting pilot testing the researcher uses the feedback to ensure that any errors are rectified prior to the final questionnaires being sent to the target population. Sekaran and Bougie (2011) defined a pretest as a test of the understanding and appropriateness of the questionnaire using a small number of respondents.

The small group that Sekaran and Bougie (2011) have referred to was defined by Leedy and Ormrod (2005) to include at least a dozen friends or colleagues. The pilot group used in this research included the research supervisor and 15 MBA students from the third year class. From the feedback received the following comments were noted and changes made to the questionnaire:

- The respondents found that there was a correlation between the questions and the objectives of the study.
- The estimated time of between ten and fifteen minutes to complete the survey was found to be appropriate.
- Grammatical errors were corrected.
- The length of the questions were adjusted where possible.
- The duplication of questions was reported and these duplications were deleted from the questionnaire.

### **3.7.6 Distribution and administration of the instrument**

The online electronic research software tool QuestionPro was used to generate and distribute the questionnaire. Utilising the database of UKZN GSB&L the questionnaire was e-mailed to the targeted MBA students. The respondents were directed to the electronic survey link: <http://MBASatisfaction.questionpro.com>. This link allowed the students access to the research questionnaire. Once the questionnaire had been completed the responses were recorded onto QuestionPro for further analysis.

In completing the administrative aspects of the survey, ethical considerations and ethical behaviour were important aspects that had to be considered. Ethics in research governs the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of the respondents of the study (Saunders, et al., 2003). For this study ethical clearance was obtained from the UKZN's research office. The essence of this ethical clearance is to offer protection to the researcher and the University against any ethical transgressions. In conducting research it is unethical to collect research data without the participants' knowledge, willingness and consent. These aspects were addressed in the informed letter of consent and covering letter to the questionnaire. In this informed letter of consent the necessary information regarding the purpose of the study was addressed. The respondents were advised that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to terminate the process at any stage.

### **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data obtained from the questionnaires should be analysed on a statistical basis in order that meaning is derived (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). This data must be statistically coded in order to determine variation. QuestionPro codes the responses by assigning numbers to them. It allows the data to be grouped into categories which subsequently enables statistical analysis to be conducted. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) stated that statistics condenses a large body of information to a level that the mind can comprehend. Graphical frequency analysis of the data was conducted.

### **3.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter has introduced and presented the research methodology employed to conduct the research. The aim, objectives, sampling method and data collection were discussed. Insight was gained on the research instrument, the questionnaire, which was used to gather primary data. The data collection methods were explored. The appropriate data collection method formed the basis upon which data analysis was conducted. Through the pre-testing and pilot study the research instrument used in this research was verified to be reliable and valid. The next chapter, Chapter Four, presents the research results and through discussion also presents meaningful conclusions that were drawn from the data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents and summarises the empirical findings of the primary data that was collected from the current students enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L. The data obtained was analysed using graphs, tables and discussions. This chapter consists of three parts. In the first part the demographics of the student profile is discussed. In the second part the findings of each objective is presented and discussed and finally a summary is presented.

#### **4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE**

The total population comprised of 305 students enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L. This population comprised of 180 first year, 60 second year and 65 third year MBA students. The online questionnaire was viewed by 221 students of which 149 started the survey and 119 completed it. For a population of 305 the appropriate sample size at a confidence level of 95% and a margin error of 5% is 169 (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). The limitation of this survey is that due to the sample size not being met, the results cannot be generalised across the entire population.

#### **4.3 DEMOGRAPHICS**

The first part of the study analysed the demographics of MBA students. The students were asked six questions pertaining to their demographics. The questions have been summarised in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Sample of demographic information**

|                                 | Characteristic    | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                   | Male              | 67%        |
|                                 | Female            | 33%        |
| <b>Race</b>                     | African           | 53%        |
|                                 | Indian            | 38%        |
|                                 | White             | 7%         |
|                                 | Coloured          | 2%         |
|                                 | Other             | 1%         |
| <b>Age</b>                      | 25 - 34           | 43%        |
|                                 | 35 - 44           | 51%        |
|                                 | 45 - 54           | 5%         |
|                                 | 55 and over       | 1%         |
| <b>Current level of study</b>   | MBA 1             | 58%        |
|                                 | MBA 2             | 8%         |
|                                 | MBA 3             | 35%        |
| <b>Class attended</b>           | Full time         | 66%        |
|                                 | Block release     | 34%        |
| <b>Current management level</b> | Non-management    | 15%        |
|                                 | Junior management | 13%        |
|                                 | Middle management | 42%        |
|                                 | Senior management | 30%        |

It is evident from Table 4.1 that twice the number of male students responded in comparison to that of female students. African and Indian students comprised 91% of the respondents. African students formed the majority of the respondents at 53% and Indian students 38%. Fifty one percent (51%) of the students were between the ages of 35 to 44, while 43% were between the ages of 25 to 34. This shows that 94% of the respondents were between the ages of 25 to 44 and only 6% of the respondents were over 44 years of age. The majority of the respondents were from the MBA 1 class at 58% and only 8% of the respondents were from the MBA 2 class. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the respondents were registered on the full time option with the remaining 34% comprised of the block release option. Students that were employed as middle to senior management comprised of 72% of the respondents.

Demographic information provides an understanding of the environment in which research is conducted. The demographics of the students are important for the business school as it forms an important source of information for strategic planning.

From the findings it is evident that African students formed the majority of the respondents at 53%, Indian students 38%, White students 7% and Coloured students 2%. The population group breakdown for students that are completing their MBA in South Africa comprises of the following percentages; 26% African, 14% Indian or Asian, 54% White and 5% Coloured (Finweek, 2012). In comparison to the respondents to this survey it was noted that the UKZN GSB&L has a much higher average of African students of 53% versus the national average of 26% (Finweek, 2012). It is evident that the percentage of White students that responded was only 7% versus the national average of 54 (Finweek, 2012).

The population of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in terms of population group comprises of 87% African, 7% Indian or Asian, 4% White and 1% Coloured (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Comparing these figures to the survey it is evident the percentage of African respondents (53%) does not correlate to the high population distribution figures of KZN (86%). It is of interest to note the number of Indian respondents is high at 14% in relation to the population distribution figures of 4%.

The level of management status noted in the Finweek survey of students that are studying for an MBA nationally shows that 23% are in middle management and 54% are in senior/executive positions (Finweek, 2012). It is evident from the results in Table 4.1 that the results do not correlate, while there is a higher percentage of respondents in middle management positions (42%), the percentage in senior management (30%) is very low in comparison to the national average of 54%. This reflects that the management profile at the UKZN GSB&L has a much lower representation of senior management students than the national average.

#### **4.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

In order to elicit the students' responses for each of the objectives, relevant questions were linked to the objectives. This link is summarised in Table 4.2 below:

**Table 4.2: The questions from the survey pertaining to each objective**

| Objective / Number | Objective  | Question pertaining to the objective |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|--------------------|--|--------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1                  | Determine students' expectations prior to enrolling on the MBA programme.              | 7                                    | 8  |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 2                  | Evaluate students' reasons for choosing the UKZN GSBL to pursue their studies.         | 9                                    | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 3                  | Establish the students' experiences during the registration process.                   | 17                                   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 4                  | Evaluate whether the students' expectations were met during their studies.             | 18                                   | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 |    |    |    |
| 5                  | Evaluate whether the MBA programme has made a difference to the lives of the students. | 23                                   | 24 | 25 | 26 |    |    |    |    |

The questions' numbers linked to the objectives in Table 4.2 were designed to reach a finding for each of the five objectives that were identified for the study. The questions pertaining to the objectives are analysed and discussed below.

#### **4.4.1 Objective One: To determine students' expectations prior to enrolling on the MBA programme.**

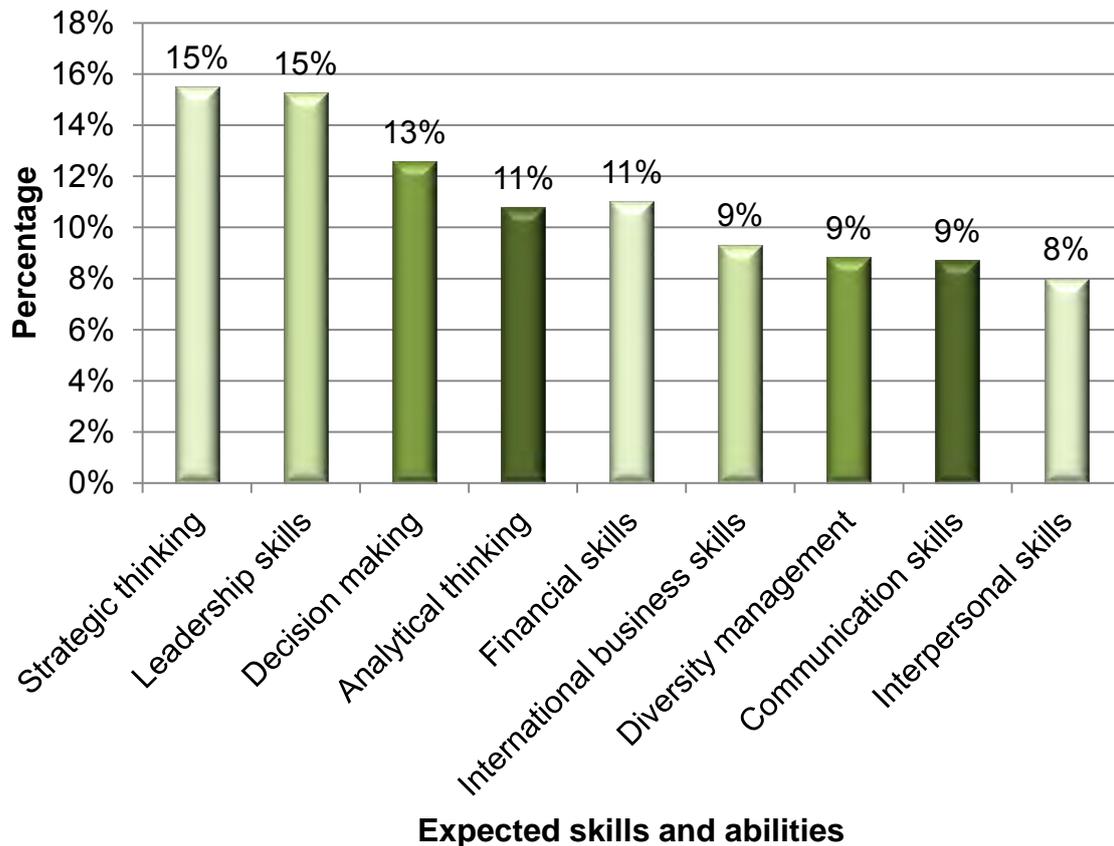
For this objective, students were asked two questions to gain insight into their expectations prior to enrolling for the MBA programme. The first question asked students to rank the reasons why they had decided to enrol for the MBA programme, where 1 was the most important reason and 6 was the least important. The students' responses are presented in Table 4.3 below. In the second question the students were asked to choose the skills and abilities that they were hoping to gain from the MBA programme. Their responses are presented in Figure 4.1.

**Table 4.3: Ranking of the reasons for students enrolling on the MBA programme**

| Rank | Reason for enrolling on the MBA programme               | Mean |
|------|---|------|
| 1    | Development of managerial knowledge and personal skills | 2.76 |
| 2    | Preparation for a better job in the market place        | 2.95 |
| 3    | Opportunity to improve personally                       | 3.08 |
| 4    | Increase in earning power                               | 3.56 |
| 5    | To become an entrepreneur                               | 4.23 |
| 6    | Opportunity to network and form relationships           | 4.42 |

Based on the results presented in Table 4.3 it is evident that most of the students ranked the “development of managerial knowledge and personal skills” (mean = 2.76) as the most important reason for enrolling on the MBA programme. “To become an entrepreneur” (mean = 4.23) and the “opportunity to network and form relationships” (mean = 4.42) were ranked on the lower end of the scale by the students.

The development of knowledge at a higher ranking than a better job or increase in earning power is surprising. This finding however correlates to the national survey conducted by Finweek (2012). The finding conducted by Finweek shows that nationally, business knowledge was the major option chosen by students for enrolling on an MBA programme. The low ranking of increasing the earning power also correlates with the national survey. In the Finweek survey financial motives is sixth on the list for students enrolling on the MBA programme.



**Figure 4.1: Skills and abilities that MBA students expect to gain prior to enrolling for the MBA programme**

Figure 4.1 shows that the two main skills that MBA students are expecting to gain from the MBA programme are strategic thinking (15%) and leadership skills (15%). The skill least desired by students is interpersonal skills (8%).

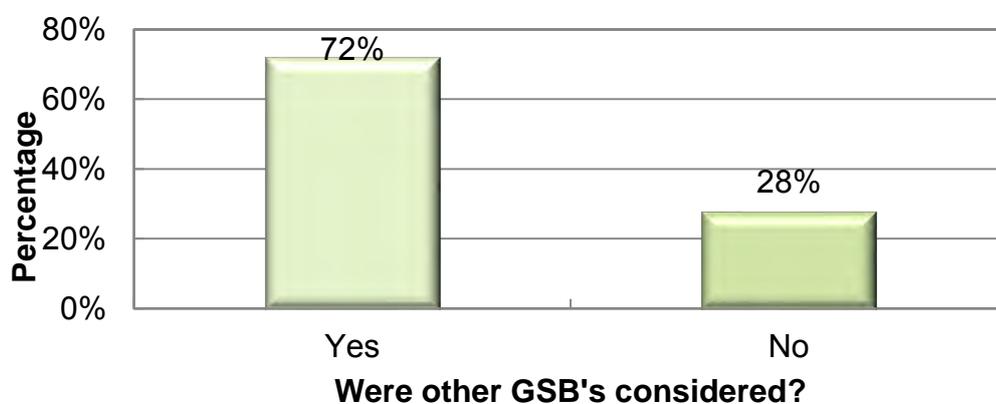
These findings are consistent with the work of Sulaiman and Mohezar (2009) who conducted research at the Graduate School of Business University Malaya. They established that the students' major motivator for enrolling on the MBA programme was to enhance their knowledge and skills in management (Sulaiman and Mohezar, 2009).

#### **4.4.2 Objective Two: To evaluate students' reasons for choosing the UKZN GSB&L to pursue their studies**

In examining the students' reasons for choosing the UKZN GSB&L, eight questions were posed. The first four questions examined if students had considered other universities prior

to choosing the UKZN GSB&L and the reason for choosing this institution. The response and analysis of these questions are presented in Figures 4.2 to 4.4. In question five, the students were asked to rank the reason why they had chosen the UKZN GSB&L over other Universities. Their responses are presented in Table 4.4.

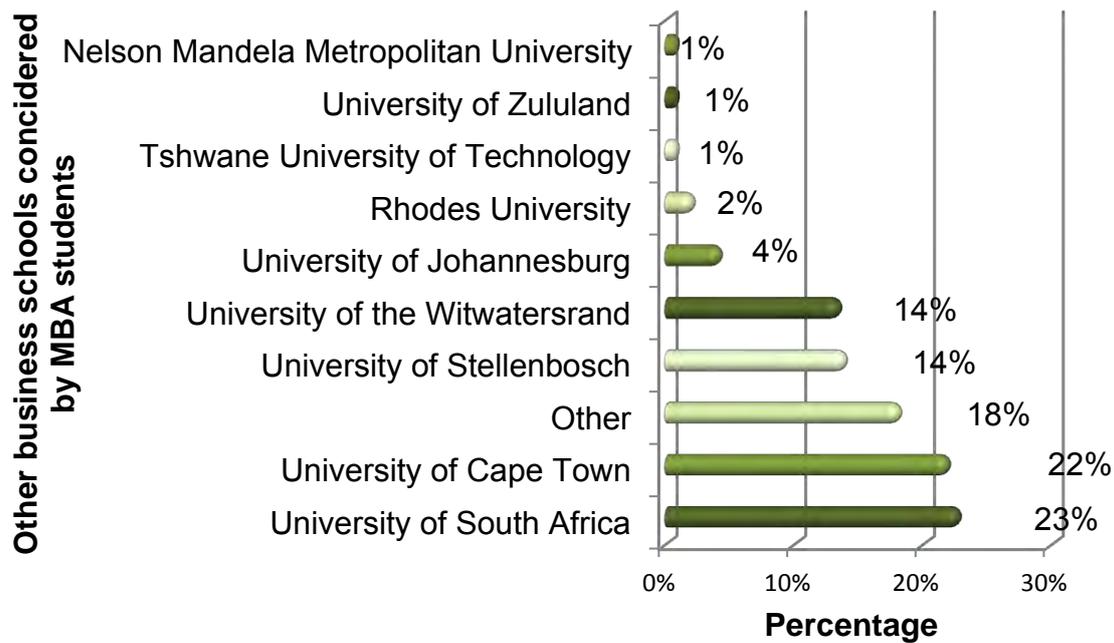
Finally in questions six to eight, students were asked to verify which media presented the most information to them and the duration of time from when they had considered doing an MBA to the time that they applied to do the MBA. The responses to these questions are presented in Figures 4.5 to 4.7.



**Figure 4.2: Response by MBA students on whether other GSBs had been considered prior to choosing the UKZN GSB&L**

Figure 4.2 shows that 72% of the students had considered other GSBs before enrolling at the UKZN GSB&L.

When consumers make an expensive purchase they conduct extensive research (Kotler and Keller, 2012). An MBA is an example of an expensive purchase and the observation by Kotler and Keller is demonstrated by the high percentage of respondents (72%) who had considered alternate business schools.

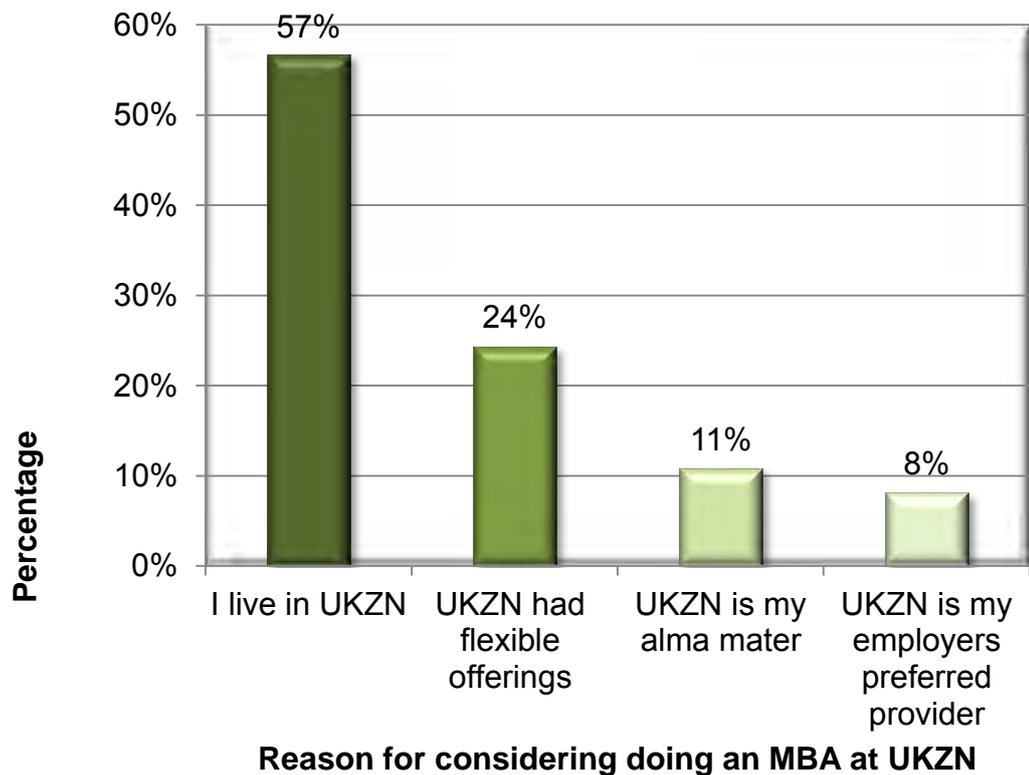


**Figure 4.3: Other business schools considered by MBA students**

In Figure 4.3 it is clear that the UNISA was considered by 23% of the students. This was closely followed by UCT at 22%. The other two universities that had been considered by the students were USB (14%) and the Wits (14%).

The Professional Management Review (PMR) rankings for 2011 and 2010 show that UCT, Wits and USB have been consistently placed on the top five rankings of business schools in South Africa (SA) (PMR, 2010 and 2011). In the previous ranking (Table 4.4) it has been established that accreditation and reputation of the business schools have been identified as major considerations by the respondents in their selection process. There is therefore a correlation between PMR rankings and the value placed by the respondents on accreditation and reputation.

UNISA has been ranked tenth on the PMR survey for 2011 which is not as high as the other alternates (PMR, 2011). Their flexible long distance learning option has attracted the attention of the respondents for placing UNISA as the most popular alternate consideration. This observation correlates to the previous finding (Figure 4.4) where the flexible offering by the UKZN GSB&L has been an important reason for the respondents choosing the institution to study at.



**Figure 4.4: Student’s reasons for considering enrolling for an MBA at UKZN GSB&L**

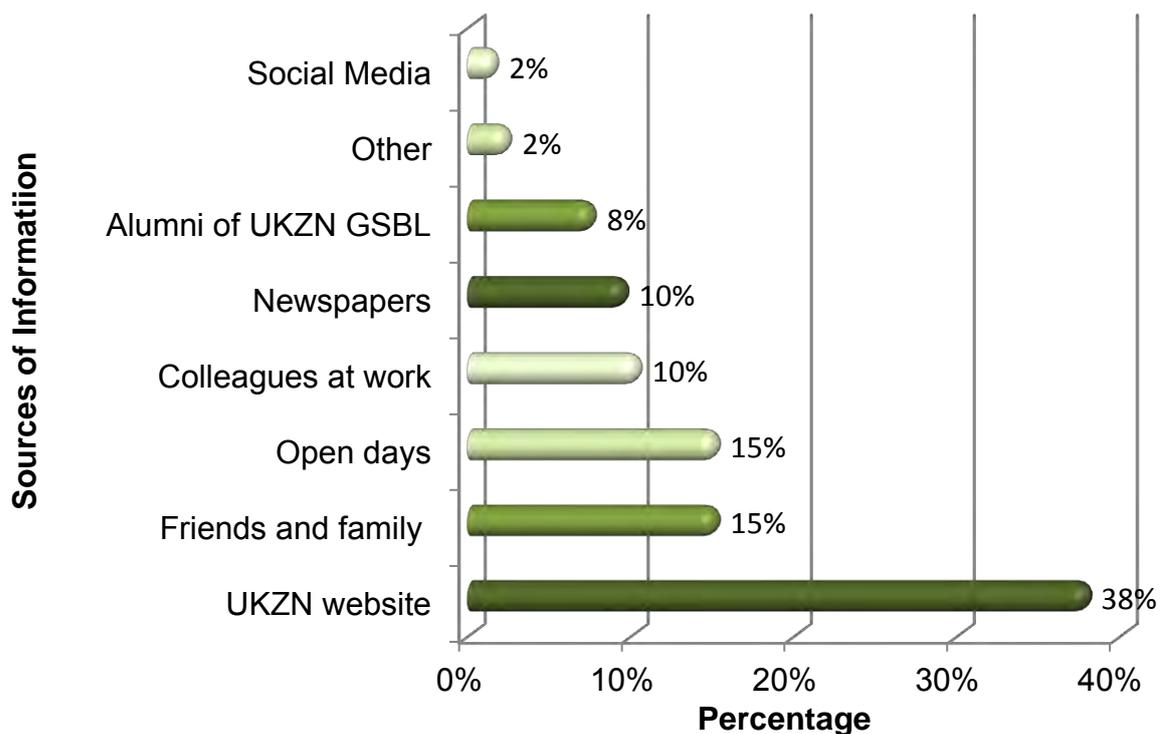
In Figure 4.4 it is evident that the most common reason for 57% of the students considering the UKZN GSB&L was that they lived in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Twenty four percent (24%) of the students were attracted to the flexible part time and block release offerings while 11% considered the UKZN GSB&L as it was their alma mater.

**Table 4.4: Ranking of the reasons for students choosing the UKZN GSB&L over other business schools**

| Rank | Reason for choosing UKZN GSB& | Mean |
|------|-------------------------------|------|
| 1    | Accreditation                 | 3.31 |
| 2    | Reputation of the school      | 3.61 |
| 3    | Rating of the school          | 3.83 |
| 4    | Low cost                      | 4.21 |
| 5    | Course content                | 4.46 |
| 6    | Experienced lecturers         | 4.76 |
| 7    | Facilities                    | 5.09 |
| 8    | Research profile of lecturers | 6.74 |

Based on the results presented in Table 4.4 it is evident that the top three ranked reasons for students choosing the UKZN GSB&L over other institutions were the accreditation (mean = 3.31), the reputation of the school (mean = 3.61) and the rating of the school (mean = 3.83). The research profile of the lecturers was the lowest ranked reason (mean = 6,74) for students choosing the GSB&L.

There is a strong correlation of the findings in Figure 4.4 to the University of Pretoria’s Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) students ranking in the Universum Student Survey 2012/13 (GIBS, 2013). The top two reasons for students selecting GIBS as their business school were the business school’s ratings and accreditation of the institution. This correlation shows the high value placed on accreditation and reputation by both the respondents of this survey at the UKZN GSB&L and students at GIBS.

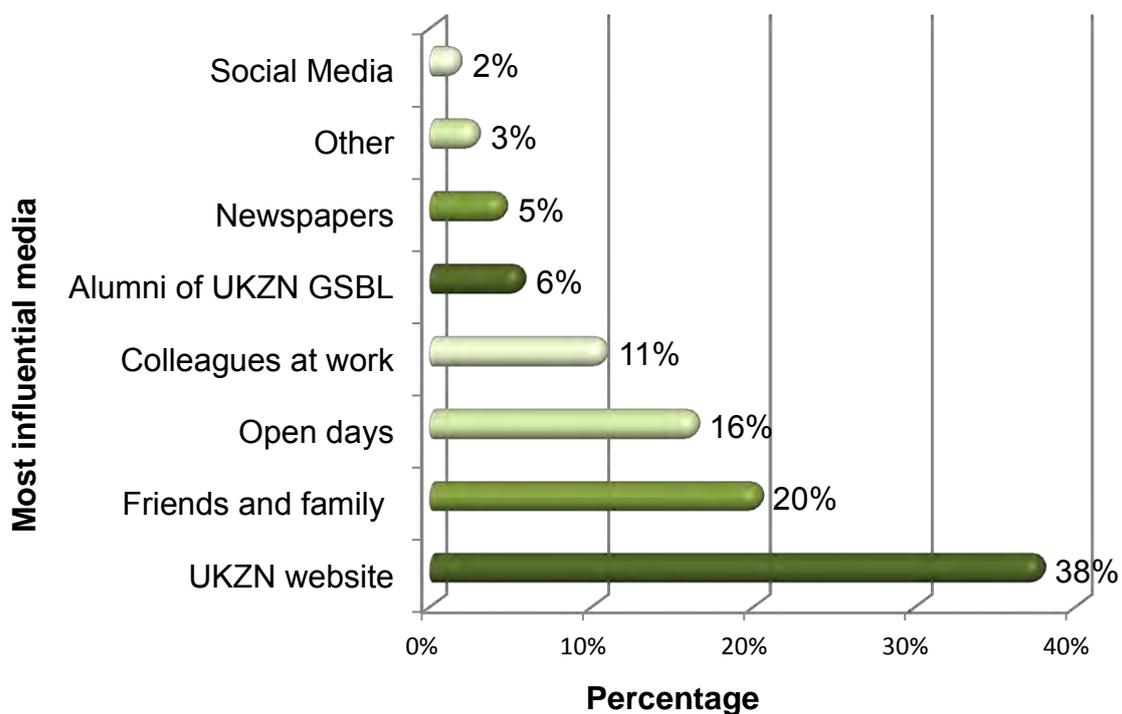


**Figure 4.5: The various media that influenced MBA students to study at the UKZN GSB&L**

Amongst the various sources of information on the MBA offered by the UKZN GSB&L, it is evident from Figure 4.5 that 38% of the students were influenced by the information on the UKZN website. Fifteen percent (15%) of the students were influenced by the open day held by the business school while an equal percentage of students were influenced by friends and

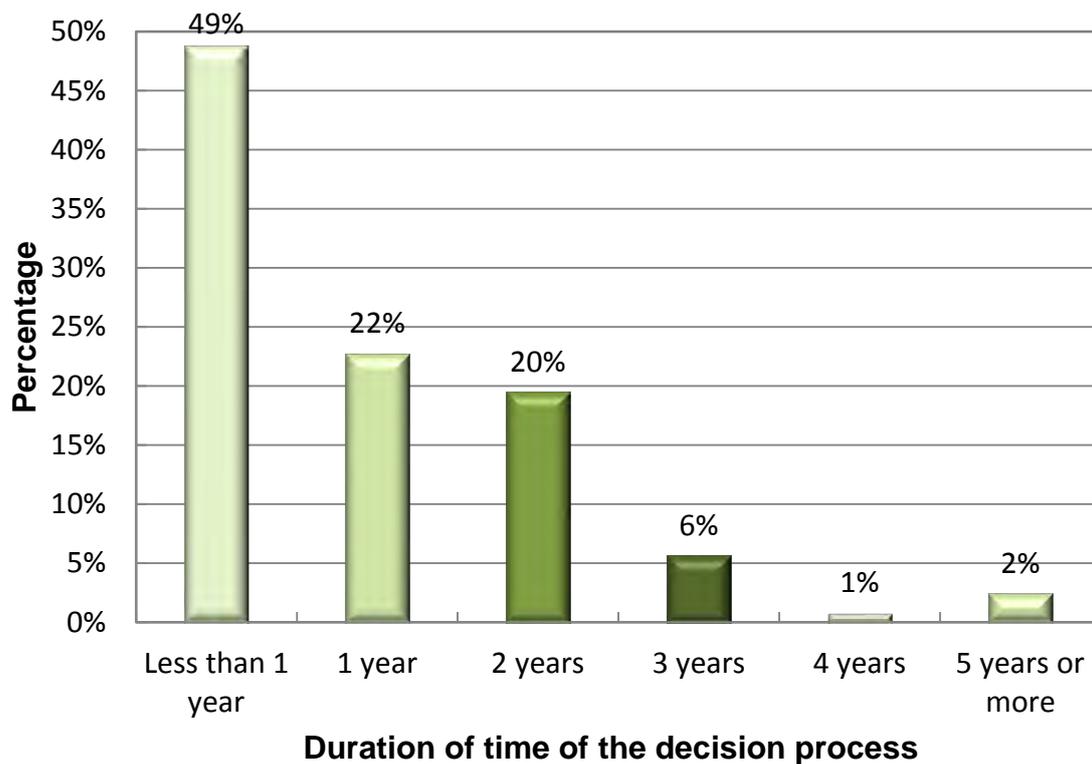
family that have been associated with the UKZN GSB&L. It is interesting to note that only 2% of the students were influenced by social media.

The high influence that the UKZN website and family/friends have on the prospective students correlates to the observations made by Kotler and Keller (2012). They noted that the largest amount of information is derived from the commercial group which is the UKZN website in this study. In addition, they pointed out that the most effective source comes from the public sources which are the family and friends in the study (Kotler and Keller, 2012).



**Figure 4.6: The media that most influenced students' decisions**

From Figure 4.6 it is evident that the UKZN website was considered the most influential media by 38% of the students. This was followed by 20% of the students who were influenced by their friends and family associated with the UKZN GSB&L. Sixteen percent (16%) of the students found that the open days were influential while 11% maintained that their colleagues at work had influenced them. Once more that the social media was the least influential as only 1% of the students that responded were influenced by this media.

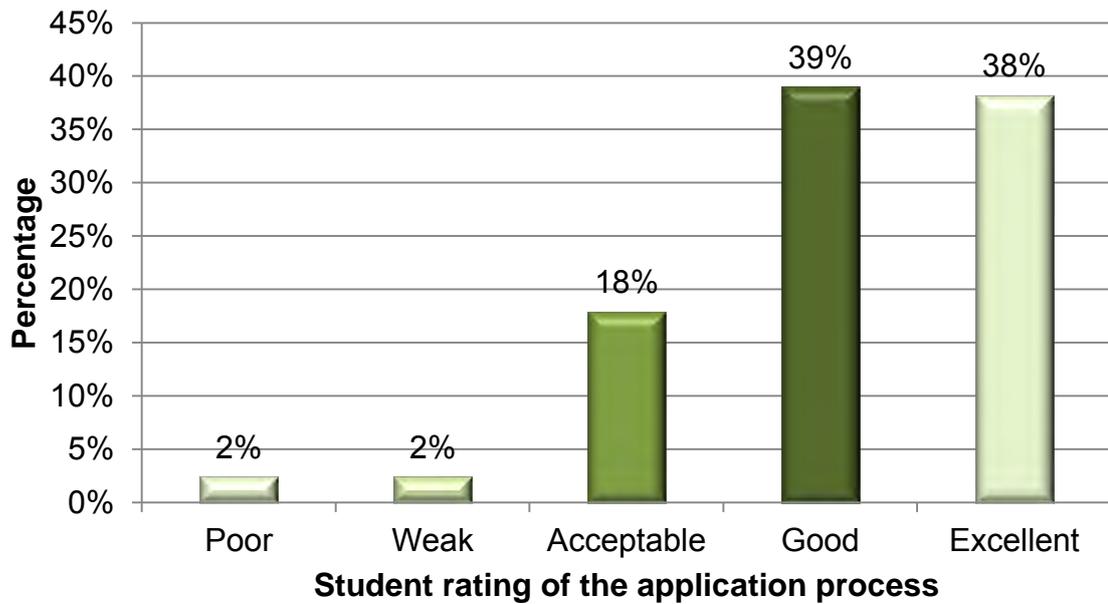


**Figure 4.7: Duration of time from when students considered enrolling for an MBA to application for the programme**

From Figure 4.7 it is evident that the decision to enrol for an MBA degree was reached by 49% of the students in less than one year from when they had considered enrolling for an MBA degree. Twenty two percent (22%) of the students reached the decision after one year. Only 2% of the students took five years or more to enrol.

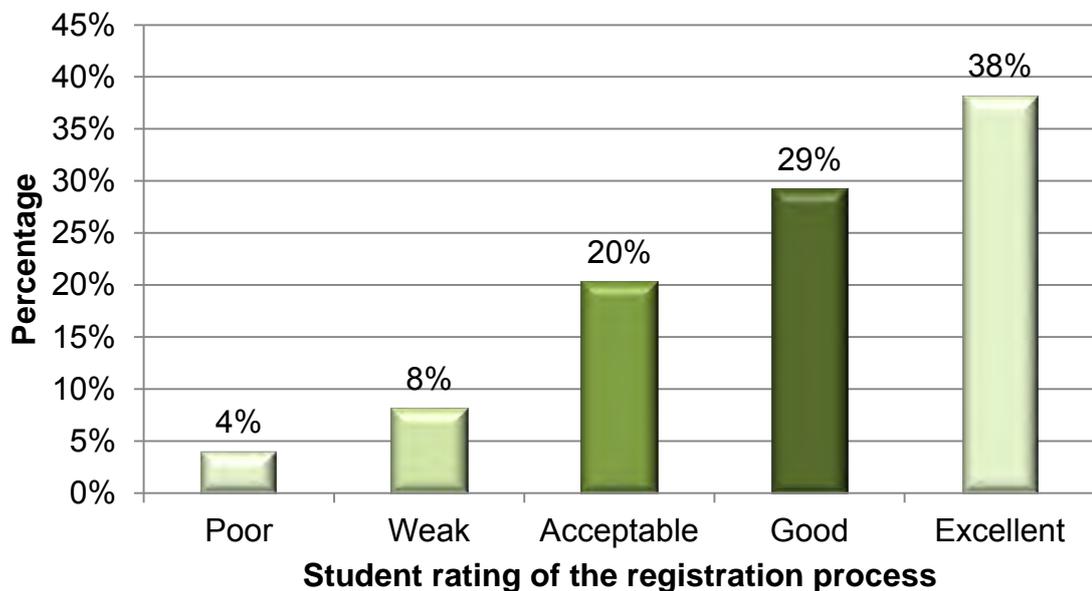
#### **4.4.3 Objective Three: Establish the students' experiences during the registration process**

Students were asked to rate five elements during the registration process. These elements were the application procedure, the registration procedure, the payment procedure and the administration staff knowledge and helpfulness. The results and analysis of the students' responses are presented in Figures 4.8 to 4.12.



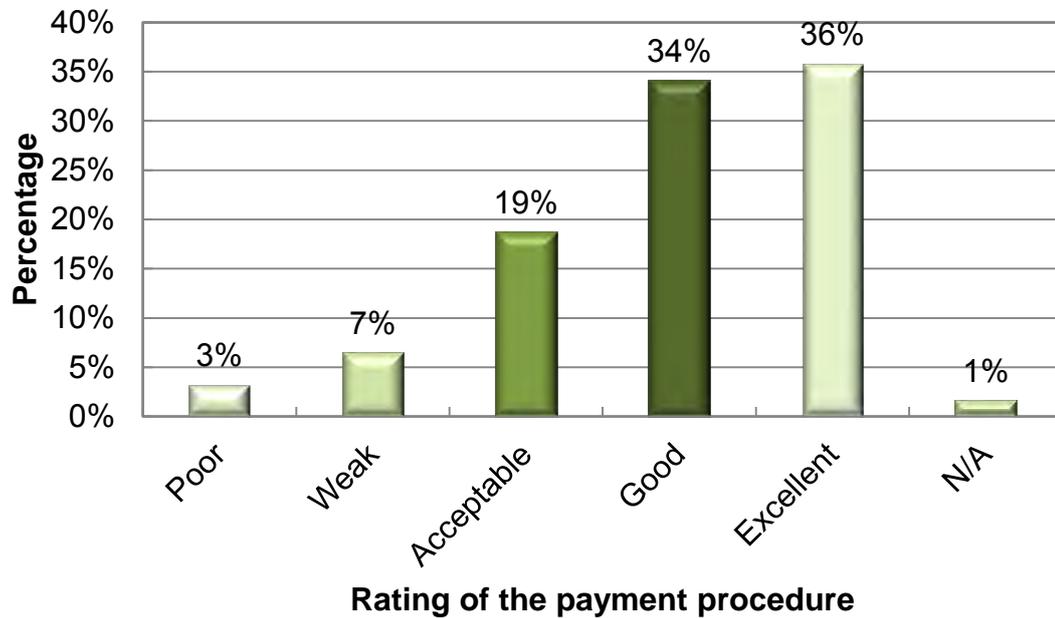
**Figure 4.8: Students' rating of the application process**

Figure 4.8 shows that a total of 96% of the students that responded rated their application process as being acceptable (19%), good (39%) and excellent (38%). Only 4% of the students rated the application process as being weak (2%) and poor (2%).



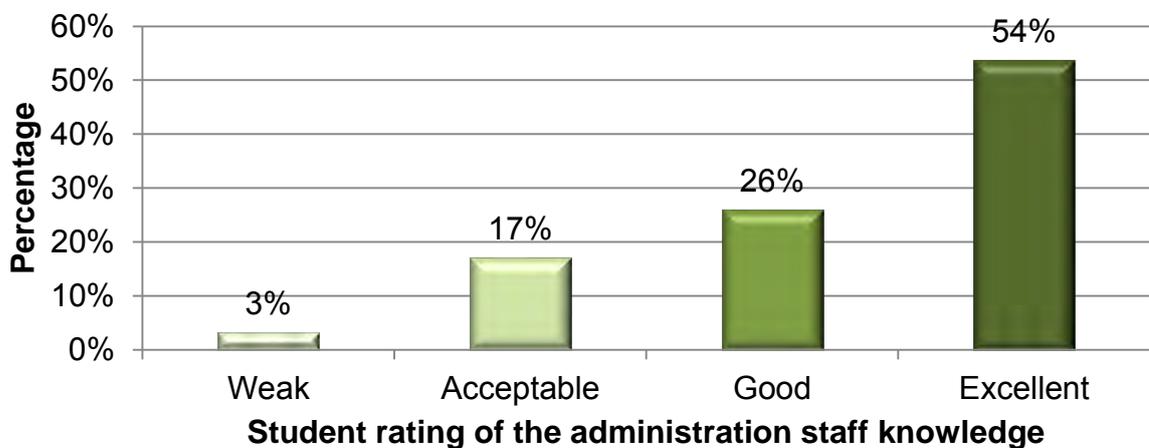
**Figure 4.9: Students' rating of the registration process**

Figure 4.9 illustrates that a total of 87% of the students that responded rated the registration process as being acceptable, good and excellent. A total of 13% of the students rated the registration process as being weak (9%) and poor (4%).



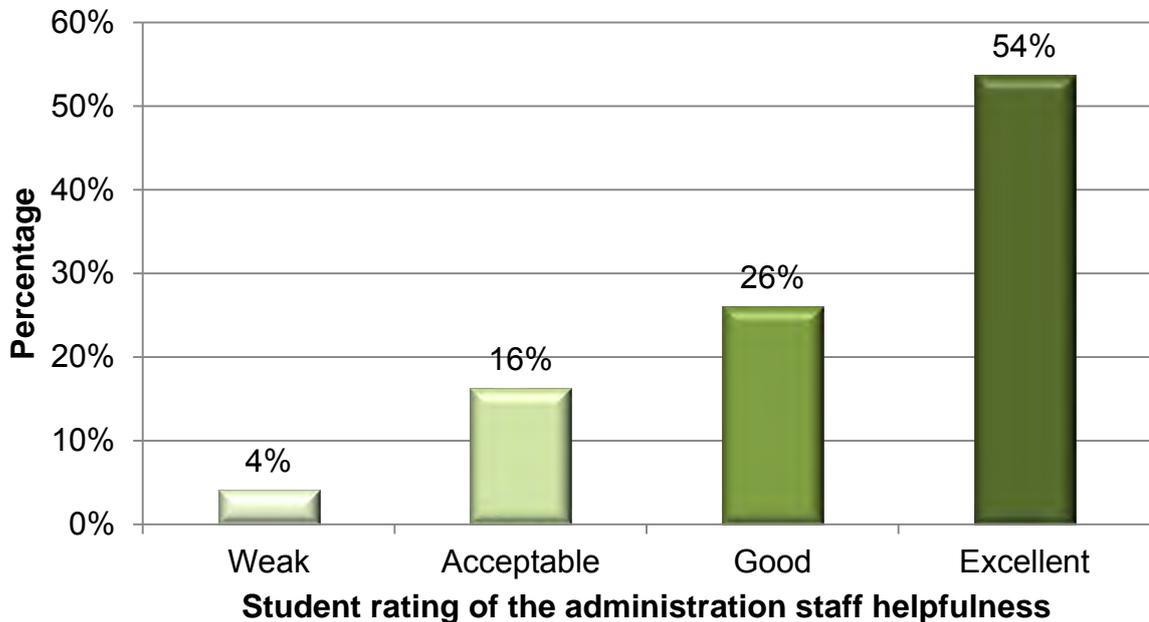
**Figure 4.10: Students' rating of the payment procedure**

Figure 4.10 illustrates that a total of 89% of the students rated the payment procedure as being acceptable (19%), good (34%) and excellent (36%). A total of 10% of the students rated the payment procedure as being weak (7%) and poor (3%).



**Figure 4.11: Students' rating of the administration staff knowledge**

Figure 4.11 shows that a total of 87% of the students rated the knowledge of the administration staff as being acceptable (17%), good (26%) and excellent (54%). Only 3% of the students rated the knowledge of the administration staff as being weak.

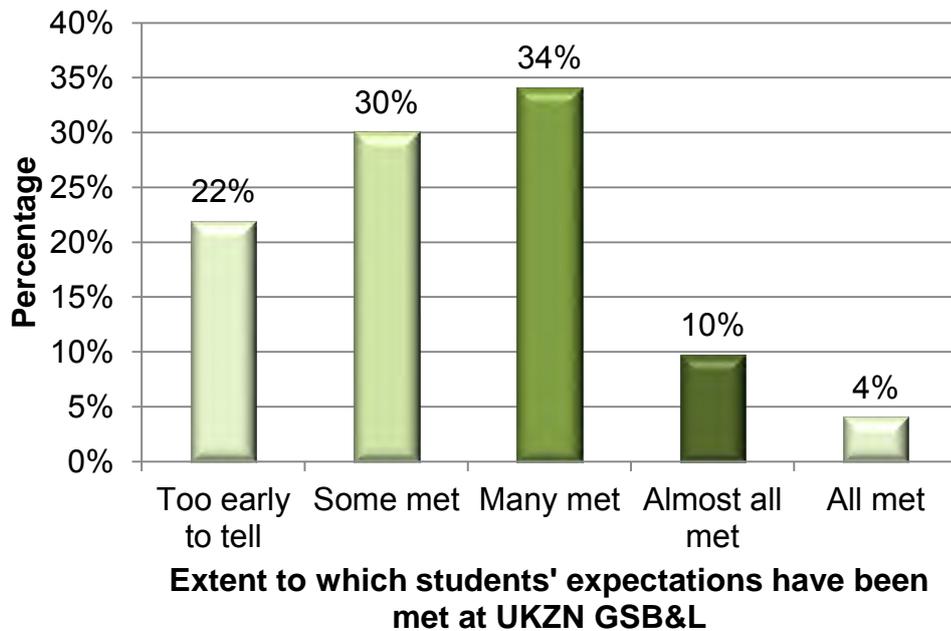


**Figure 4.12: Students' rating of the administration staff helpfulness**

Ninety six percent (96%) of the students rated the administration as acceptable (16%), good (26%) and excellent (54%) with regard to their helpfulness. Only 4% of the students rated the administration staff helpfulness as weak.

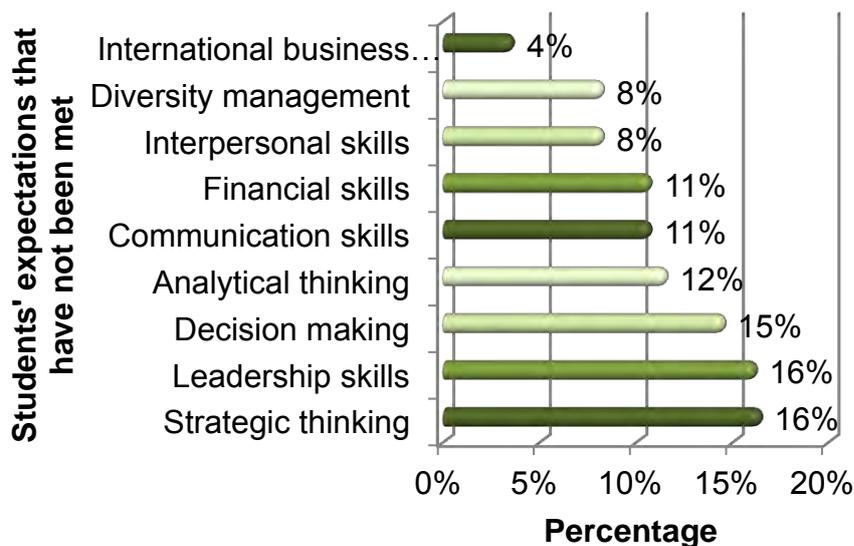
#### **4.4.4 Objective Four: Evaluate whether the students' expectations were met during their studies.**

Three aspects were considered. Firstly, students were asked to what extent their expectations had been met. The responses and analysis are presented in Figures 4.13 and 4.14. In the second aspect students were asked whether the lecturers had met their expectations. The responses and analysis are presented in Figures 4.15 and 4.16. Finally students were asked to rate eight aspects of the GSB&L facilities. These facilities were the lecture venues, computer Lan, wireless network, parking, number and availability of study rooms, library resource centre and electronic resources. The responses and analysis are presented in Figures 4.17 to 4.24 below.



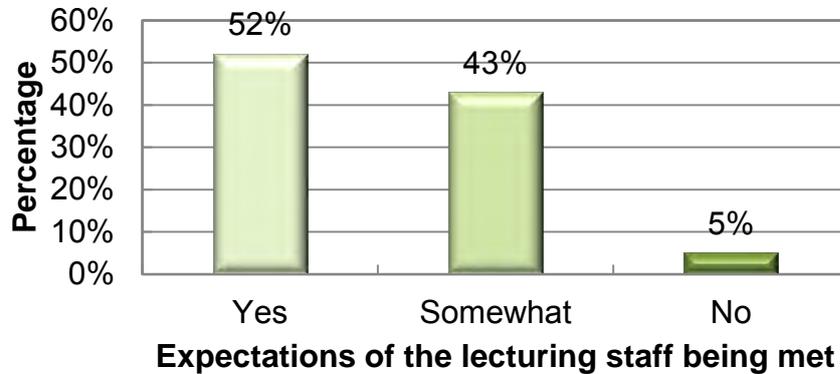
**Figure 4.13: Extent to which students' expectations of the UKZN GSB&L have been met**

Ten percent (10%) of the students responded that almost all their expectations had been met, while 4% stated that all their expectations had been met. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the students selected that it was too early to conclude the extent to which their expectations had been met. Of the remaining 64% of the students, 34% responded that many of their expectations had been met and 30% responded that some of their expectations had been met.



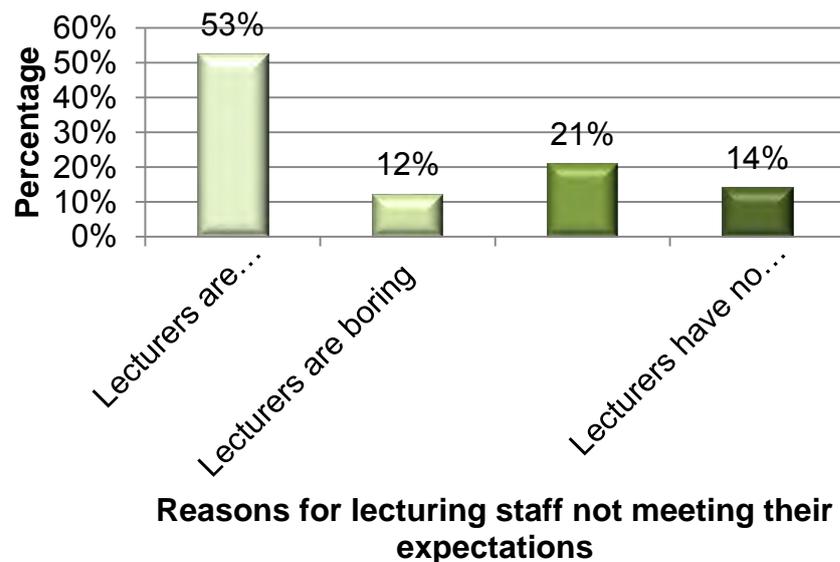
**Figure 4.14: Students' expectations that have been met**

The main expectations, as shown in Figure 4.14, that have been met by the respondents are strategic thinking (16%) and leadership skills (16%). From the results it is evident that students are not interested in acquiring international business skills.



**Figure 4.15: Students' responses on whether their expectations of the lecturing staff had been met**

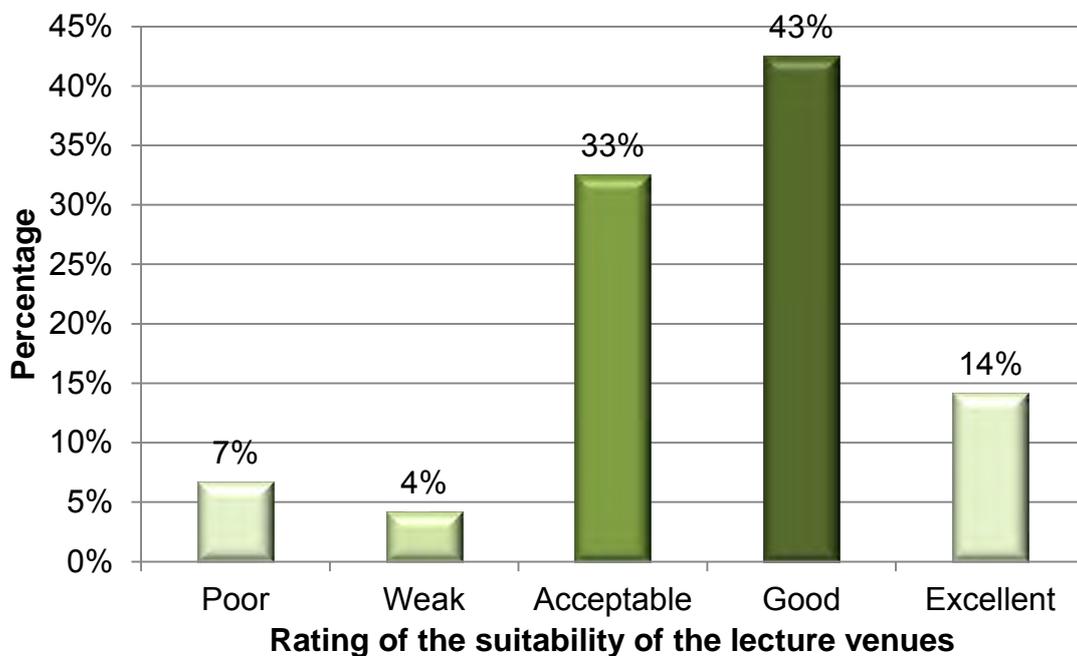
Fifty two percent (52%) of the students indicated that their expectations of the lecturing staff had been met. Forty three percent (43%) responded that their expectations had been met somewhat, while 5% indicated that their expectations of the lecturers had not been met.



**Figure 4.16: Reasons for students' negative responses on why the lecturing staff had not met their expectations**

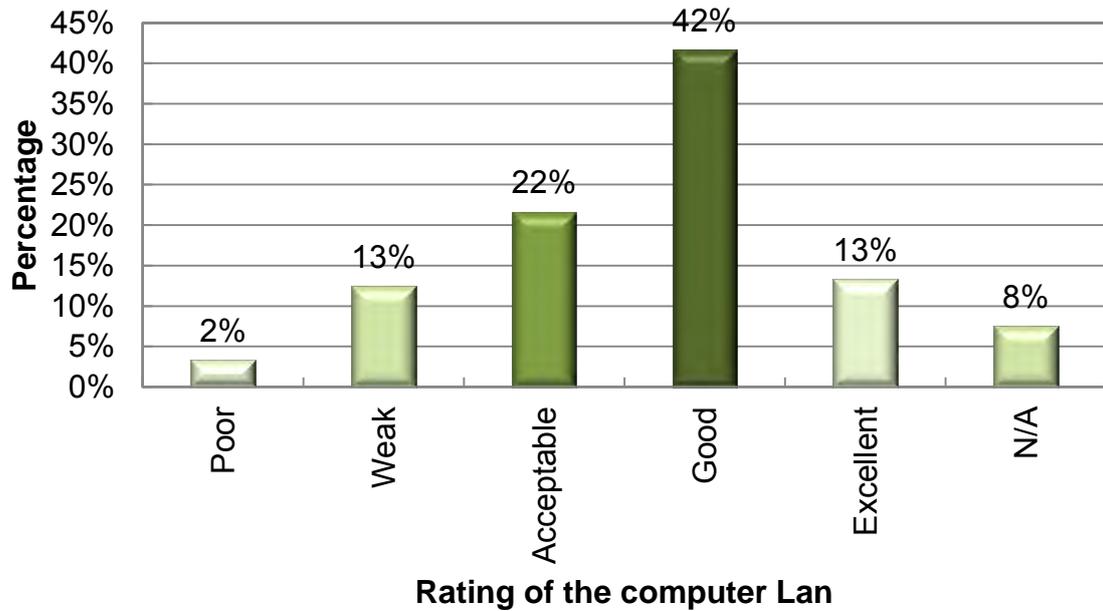
Fifty three percent (53%) of the students responded that the lecturing staff did not meet their expectations because they were too theoretically orientated. On the opposite end of the spectrum none of the students found that the lecturing staff were too practically oriented. Twenty one percent (21%) of the students found that their expectations had not been met as some of the lecturers were poor communicators.

Of the 19 attributes that are measured by PMR in their surveys, two of them relate directly to the lecturing staff and their effectiveness. These are the application of knowledge in the workplace and communication skills (PMR, 2011). The finding from the survey that the lecturers are too theoretically orientated and are poor communicators is concerning as these are areas that can improve or drop the ranking of the business school.



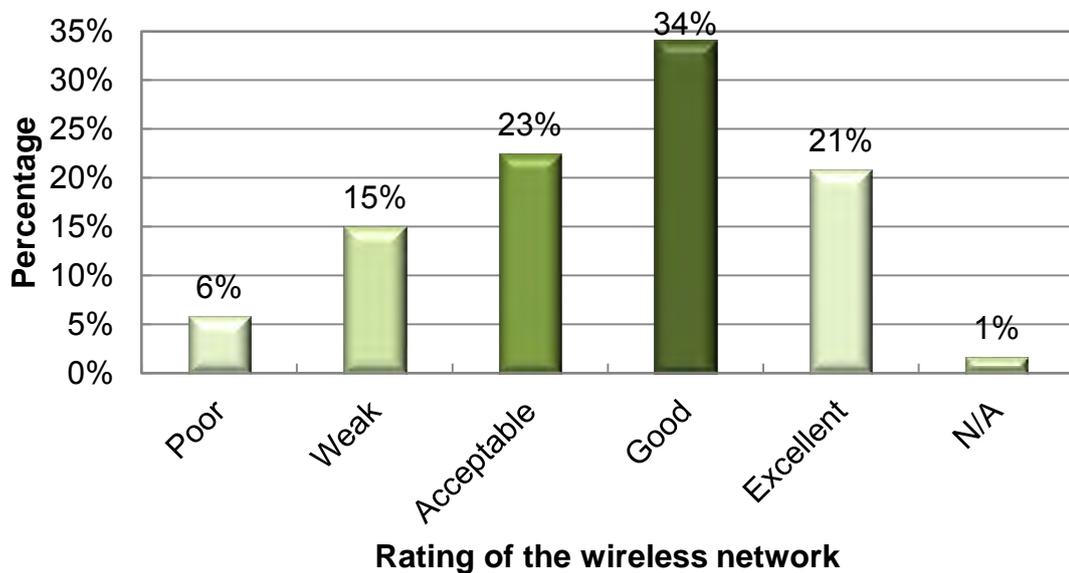
**Figure 4.17: Suitability of the lecture venues at the UKZN GSB&L**

It is evident from Figure 4.17 that 57% of the respondents had a positive opinion of the suitability of the lecture venues, whilst 11% had a negative opinion.



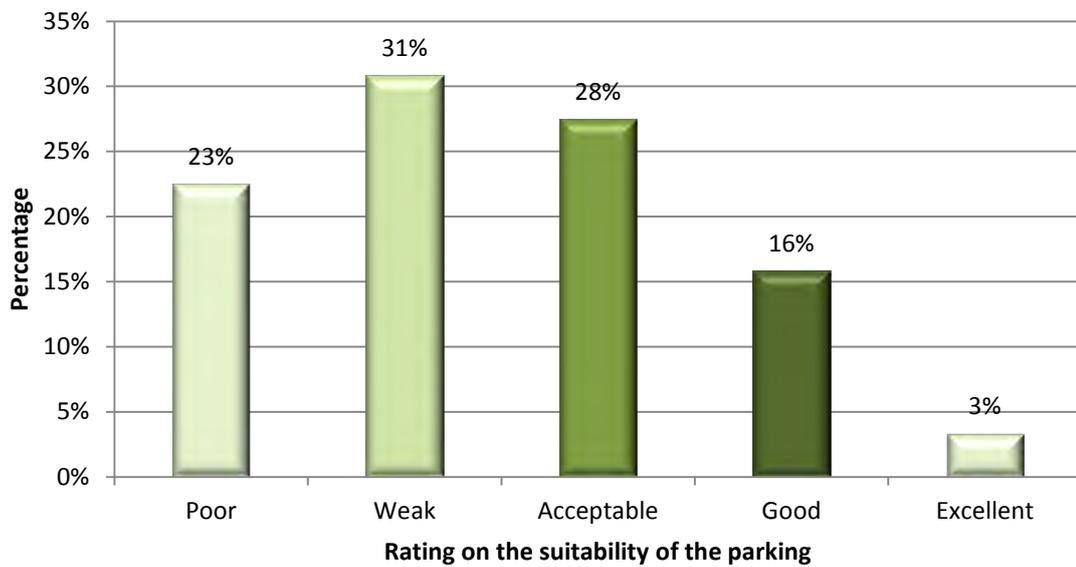
**Figure 4.18: Suitability of the computer Lan at UKZN GSB&L**

It is evident from Figure 4.18 that 63% of the respondents had a positive opinion of the suitability of the computer Lan, whilst 15% had a negative opinion.



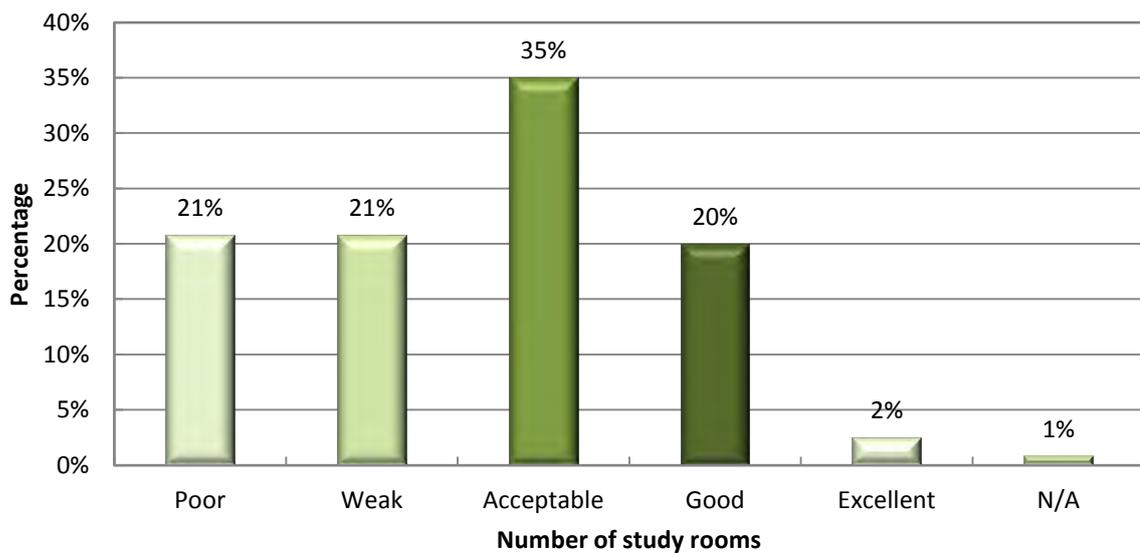
**Figure 4.19: Suitability of the wireless network the UKZN GSB&L**

It is evident from Figure 4.19 that 56% of the respondents had a positive opinion of the suitability of the wireless network, whilst 21% had a negative opinion.



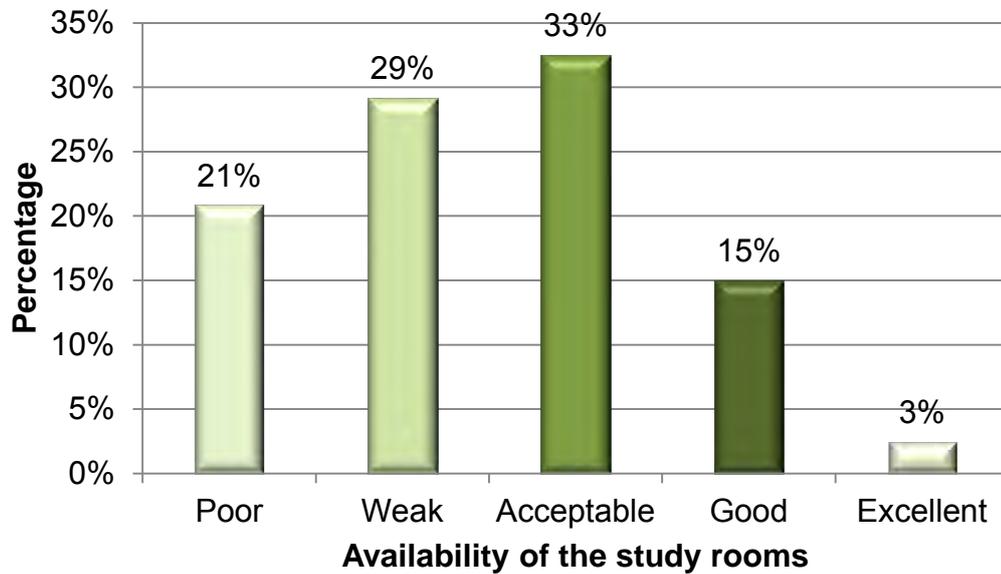
**Figure 4.20: Suitability of the parking at the UKZN GSB&L**

It is evident from Figure 4.20 that only 19% of the respondents had a positive opinion of the suitability of the parking, whilst 54% had a negative opinion.



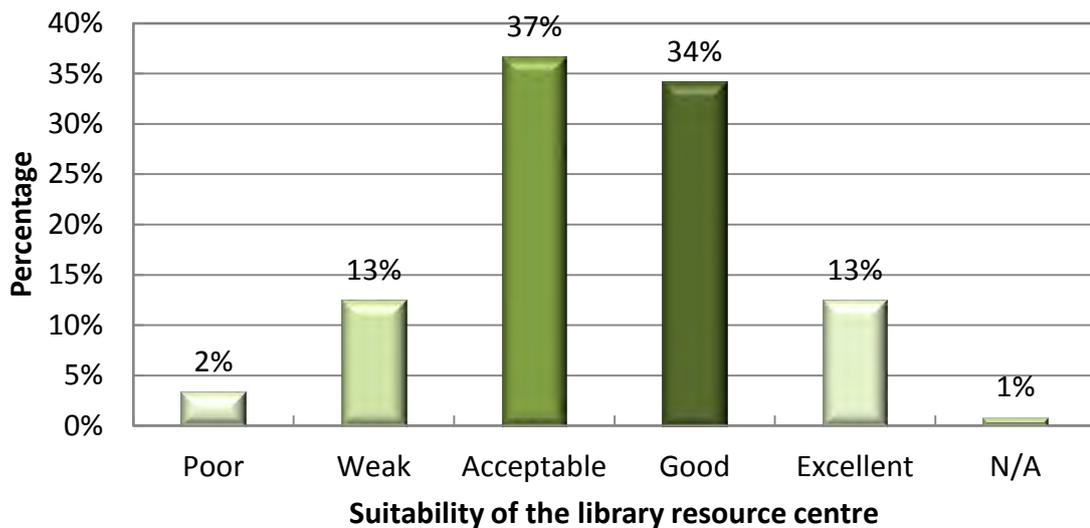
**Figure 4.21: Suitability of the number of study rooms available at the UKZN GSB&L**

It is evident from Figure 4.21 that 42% of the respondents felt that the study rooms were not suitable whilst only 23% felt that they were suitable.



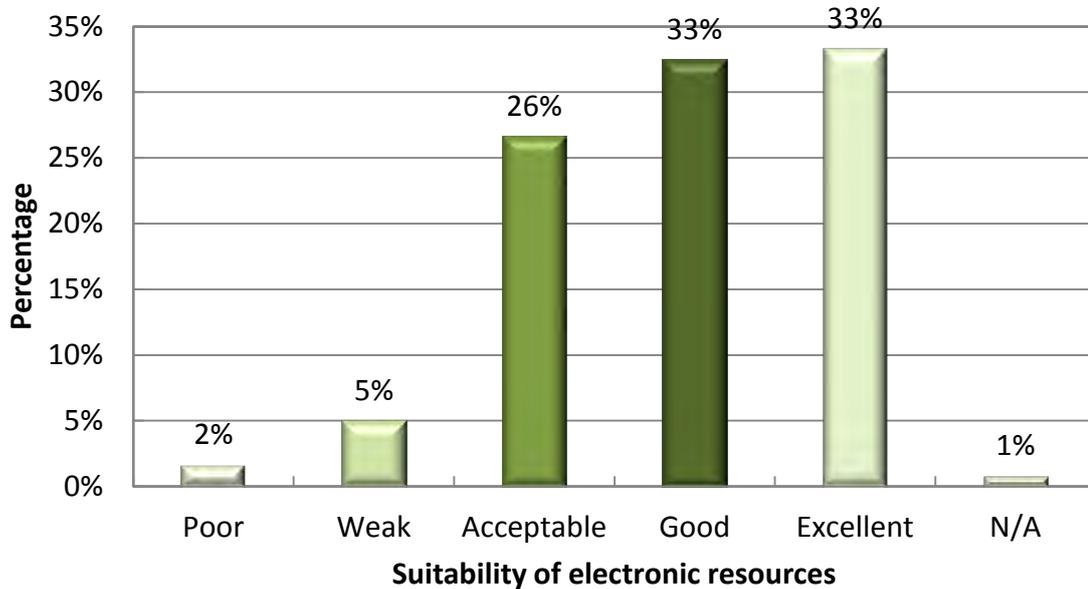
**Figure 4.22: Availability of the study rooms at the UKZN GSB&L**

It is evident from Figure 4.22 that 50% of the respondents felt that the study rooms were not available whilst only 18% felt that they were readily available.



**Figure 4.23: Suitability of the library resource centre at the UKZN GSB&L**

It is evident from Figure 4.23 that the majority, 48%, felt that the resource centre was suitable, whilst only 15% of the respondents felt that it was unsuitable.

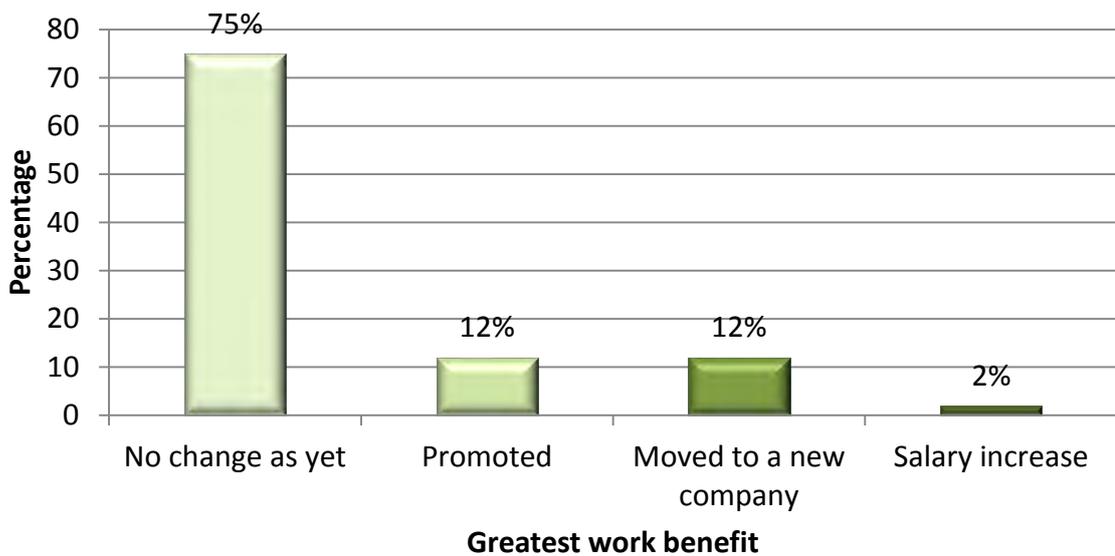


**Figure 4.24: Suitability of electronic resources that are available at UKZN GSB&L**

It is evident in Figure 4.24 that 67% of the respondents rated the suitability of the electronic resources as acceptable, whilst only 7% rated them as unsuitable.

#### **4.4.5 Objective Five: Evaluate whether the MBA programme has made a difference to the lives of the students**

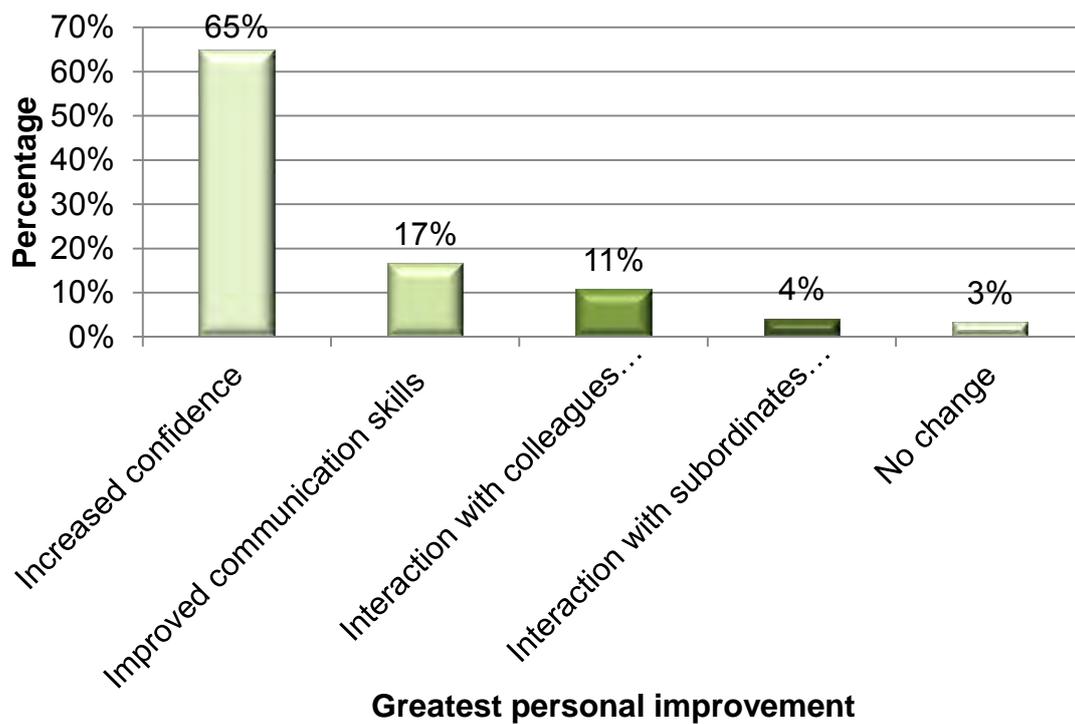
Students were asked to identify the work and personal improvements that the MBA programme has contributed. The responses and analysis are presented in Figures 4.25 and 4.26. Finally students were asked to rate their overall expectations of the UKZN GSB&L and whether they would recommend this institution to people that they know. The responses and analysis are presented in Figures 4.27 and 4.28 below.



**Figure 4.25: Greatest work benefit students have experienced since embarking on the MBA programme**

In establishing the greatest work benefit, 75% of the students responded that there had been no change as yet in their benefits. Twelve percent (12%) of the students responded that they had been promoted, while 12% of the students had moved to a new company. Only 2% of the students responded that they had received an increase in salary.

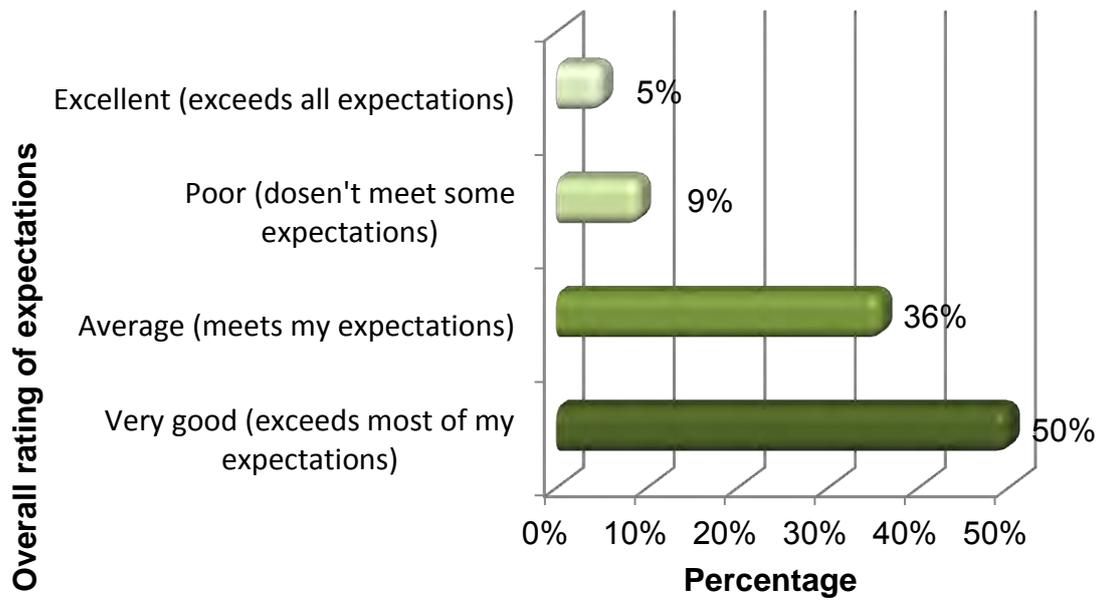
The result that only 26% of the respondents noted an improvement in their work benefits does not correlate with the national average (Finweek, 2012). The national average shows that 67% of students and graduates who responded in the Finweek survey have definitely noted an improvement in their work benefits. The low percentage in comparison to the national average can be attributed to the large percentage of the respondents who are in the first year of the MBA programme (Table 4.1).



**Figure 4.26: Greatest personal improvement students' have experienced since enrolling for the MBA programme**

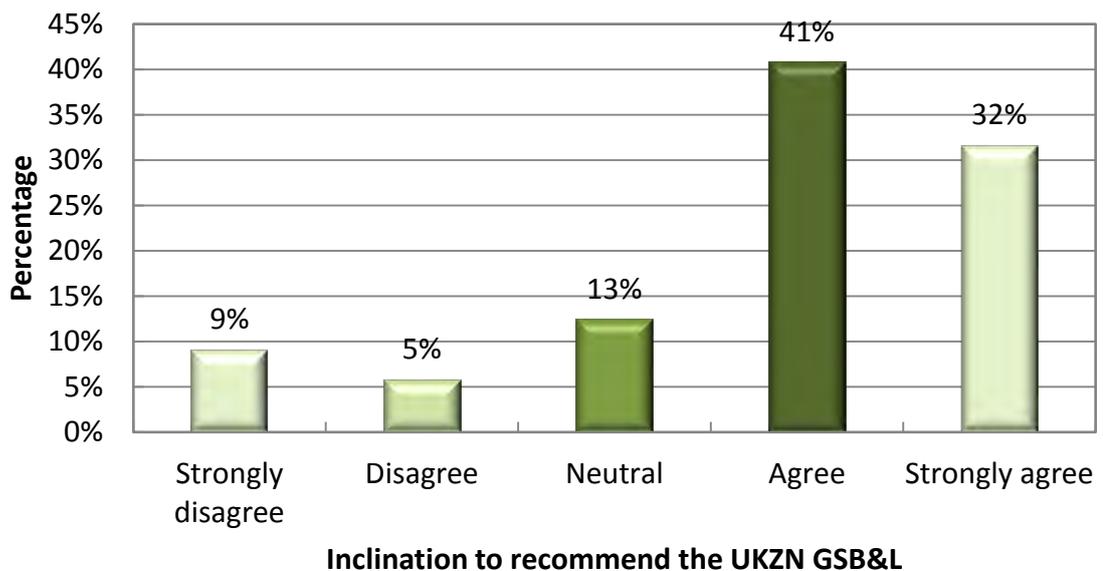
The confidence level of 65% of the students had increased since enrolling for the MBA program. Seventeen percent (17%) of the respondents cited an improvement in their communication skills while 11% of the respondents stated that their interaction with their colleagues had improved. Four percent (4%) of the students noted that their interaction with their subordinates had improved and 3% responded that there had been no changes as yet.

The finding that the confidence level was the greatest personal improvement of the respondents in the survey at UKZN GSB&L correlates to the findings in the national survey of MBA students conducted by Finweek (2012). The finding in the Finweek survey showed that 74% of the respondents have definitely noted an increase in their confidence level and self-belief (Finweek, 2012).



**Figure 4.27: Overall rating of the students' expectations of the UKZN GSB&L**

From Figure 4.27 it is evident that a total of 50% of the students found that all or most of their expectations had been exceeded, while 5% noted that all their expectations had been exceeded. Only 9% of the respondents stated that their overall rating was poor; this meant that some of their expectations had not been met.



**Figure 4.28: Inclination to recommend the UKZN GSB&L to others**

Seventy three percent (73%) of the students agreed and strongly agreed that they would recommend people that they knew to pursue the MBA programme offered by the UKZN GSB&L. Figure 4.28 shows that 14% of the students would not recommend the business school to people that they knew.

#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

This study has provided significant findings in the pre-decision expectations versus post-decision experiences of MBA students at the UKZN GSB&L. The key reason for the students pursuing an MBA qualification was the development of managerial knowledge and personal skills. The study has revealed that the majority of students considered other GSBs before enrolling at the UKZN GSB&L. It is vital therefore that the UKZN GSB&L maintains their competitive advantage in order to attract prospective MBA students. The areas that students rate highly when considering the UKZN GSB&L are the accreditation, reputation and the rating of the institution. Students were least interested in the research profile of the lecturers or the institution's facilities in their decision-making process.

While the findings of the study have shown that the majority of the students were satisfied with their experience during the registration process, it has highlighted weaknesses in the students' expectations of the lecturing staff and some of the facilities. The findings show that the lecturers are too theoretically oriented while the parking, number and availability of the study rooms were found to be either weak or poor. Finally the study has shown that the majority of the students were satisfied with the overall experience of the MBA programme at the UNKZN GSB&L. On a personal level the MBA programme has improved the students' confidence level and communication skills. The majority of the students would recommend the MBA programme offered by the UKZN GSB&L to people that they know.

The following Chapter (Chapter Five) concludes the study and provides recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The literature has indicated that in the context of the student the concept of service quality is synonymous with customer satisfaction. Focusing on the customer buying process from a marketing perspective the literature has shown that the quality perceptions of students are linked to the success of business schools. The objectives identified for this study attempted to contribute information to establish the pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences of MBA students enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L. This chapter focuses on the research study findings, recommendations based on the findings, the identified limitations, and recommendations for future research.

#### **5.2 KEY FINDINGS**

The research questions outlined in Appendix 2 were designed so that they were aligned with the objectives of this study. The findings of each objective are discussed in detail below.

##### **5.2.1 The demographics of MBA students currently enrolled at UKZN GSB&L**

The finding of this study has revealed that African students formed the majority of the respondents. It is interesting to note the number of Indian respondents is high in relation to the population distribution figures.

One may conclude from these findings that the number of African students who have responded to the survey in relation to the population distribution of KZN is low. The large percentage of Indian students who have responded is indicative of the high percentage of Indians that reside in KZN. A further conclusion can be drawn that the UKZN GSB&L lags behind the national average with regard to attracting White students onto the campus. The national average of white students studying nationally is 54%, while the study has shown that UKZN GSB&L has only 7% respondents (Finweek, 2012).

### **5.2.2 Objective One: Determine students' expectations prior to enrolling on the MBA programme (Stage one of buying model: Recognition of need)**

The results of the ranking of the students' reasons for enrolling on the MBA programme revealed that knowledge and job advancement were more important than developing networks and providing employment through entrepreneurship. In determining the skills and abilities that MBA students expect to gain prior to enrolling for an MBA programme, it is evident that the majority of the respondents were most interested in developing their strategic thinking and leadership skills.

This leads one to conclude that prospective MBA students are focused on the reason for pursuing an MBA qualification. Their focus is on the accumulation of knowledge and job advancement. This will be achieved by improving their strategic thinking and leadership skills. These results also show the confidence that students have in the ability of the MBA degree to provide them with the necessary knowledge to be effective in a business environment.

### **5.2.3 Objective Two: Evaluate students' reasons for choosing the UKZN GSB&L to pursue their studies**

The findings of this objective are described in two stages of the buying model. These stages are the information search and evaluation of alternates. These stages and findings are discussed below.

#### *5.2.3.1 Stage two of buying model: Information search*

It is evident from the findings that the information on the UKZN website, the open day held by the business school and the influence by friends and family that have been associated with the UKZN GSB&L are the three most popular media that influenced students in enrolling for the MBA programme at the UKZN GSB&L. On further probing it was established that the UKZN website and friends and family were the most influential in the decision-making process.

It may be concluded from these findings that the UKZN website and friends and family that have been associated with the UKZN GSB&L are the two most important sources of information and source of influence in the decision-making process.

### *5.2.3.2 Stage three of buying model: Evaluation of alternates*

The findings from this objective reveal that the majority of respondents had considered other GSBs before enrolling at the UKZN GSB&L. The two most popular institutions that students considered were the University of South Africa and the University of Cape Town. On further investigation it is evident that the most common reason for the students considering the UKZN GSB&L was the fact that they lived in KZN. In addition, most respondents considered the UKZN GSB&L over other institutions mainly because of the accreditation and reputation of the business school. The respondents were least interested in the research profile of the lecturers in their decision-making process.

One may thus conclude from these findings that the UKZN GSB&L is subjected to the competitive forces that exist in the market place. It is evident that the advantage that the UKZN GSB&L has over their competitors is the location of the business in KZN. It can be also concluded that the high ranking of the alternate business schools that were considered (UCT, Wits and USB) can be linked to the value placed by the respondents on accreditation and reputation.

### **5.2.4 Objective Three: Establish the students' experiences during the registration process**

The finding in the students' experiences during the registration process demonstrated an overall satisfaction by the students registered at the UKZN GSB&L. The majority of the students were satisfied with the:

- application process,
- registration process,
- payment procedure,
- knowledge of the administration staff, and
- administration helpfulness.

It can be concluded from these findings that there are no apparent sources of dissatisfaction encountered by the students during the registration process.

#### **5.2.5 Objective Four: Evaluate whether the students' expectations were met during their studies**

It is evident from the findings of this objective that only 4% of the respondents indicated that the majority of their expectations had been met. Strategic thinking and leadership skills were the most highly rated of the expectations that were met. The majority of students' were satisfied with their expectations of the lecturing staff. The major reason provided by the students for the lecturing staff not meeting their expectations was that the lecturers were too theoretically oriented.

The findings on the students' expectations of the facilities has revealed that the majority of the students were satisfied with the suitability of the lecture venues, computer Lan, wireless network, library resource centre and electronic resources.

What is of concern, however, is that the majority of the respondents had a negative opinion regarding the suitability of the parking and availability of the study rooms.

These findings lead to the conclusion that the expectations of the majority of the students have not been met. It may be concluded that the major areas of dissatisfaction are that the lecturers were too theoretical in their approach, poor parking facilities and the non-availability of study rooms. It can also be concluded that the students were least interested in the research profile of the lecturers or the institution's facilities in their decision-making process.

#### **5.2.6 Objective Five: Evaluate whether the MBA programme has made a difference to the lives of the students**

The findings from this objective reveal that when considering the greatest work benefit that the MBA programme has made, the majority of the students indicated that there had been no change as yet. A plausible reason for this is that the majority of the respondents were first year students and the timeframe for any tangible change was too short. It is evident that on a personal level the majority of the respondents noted that their confidence level and communication skills had improved since enrolling on the MBA programme.

The study on the students' overall satisfaction with the MBA programme has shown that the majority of the students were satisfied with the programme. On further probing, it is evident that the majority of the students would recommend the MBA programme offered by the UKZN GSB&L to people that they know.

This leads one to conclude that although the programme has not made any significant difference at work, the personal benefits of improved confidence and communication levels are evident. One may also conclude that overall, the majority of the students were satisfied with the MBA programme and they would recommend UKZN GSB&L to people that they know.

### 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

Based on the summary of the results and findings that have been outlined in the key findings above, it can be concluded that overall, the objectives of the study have been achieved. This study has provided significant and valuable information regarding the pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences of MBA students registered at the UKZN GSB&L and the gaps that exist. Based on this, the recommendations in Table 5.1 have been proposed. By applying these recommendations the UKZN GSB&L can improve the service quality and consequently their MBA student satisfaction.

**Table 5.1: Recommendations arising from this study**

| Objective and stage in consumer buying process                        | Recommendation   |
|---|--|
| <b>Demographic:</b>   | <p>The demographics of KZN are not represented in the analysis of the respondents. The marketing strategy needs to focus on attracting more African students into the UKZN GSB&amp;L as this is where the growth opportunities lie.</p> <p>This can be achieved by the UKZN GSB&amp;L setting up satellite resource centres in KZN where the target market is located. These resource centres will facilitate group work with compulsory lectures on the main campuses on a scheduled basis. This will ensure sustainability of the UKZN GSB&amp;L in KZN.</p> |
| <b>Objective one: Students' expectation Stage 1: Need recognition</b> | <p>It is vital that the GSB&amp;L administrators understand that the major need of students is to improve their strategic thinking and managerial skills. They must therefore advertise these skills that the MBA will enhance. Prospective students will identify with these core skills and consequently place the UKZN GSB&amp;L on their choice set.</p>   |
| <b>Objective two:</b>   | <p>The major reasons for students considering the UKZN GSB&amp;L are the</p>   |

| Objective and stage in consumer buying process  | Recommendation  |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Students' reasons for choosing the UKZN GSBL</b><br/> <b>Stage 2: Information search</b></p>                              | <p>accreditation and reputation of the business school. The UKZN GSB&amp;L needs to constantly build on their brand to attract and retain students. The development of the brand can be achieved by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensuring that the website is professionally updated by a qualified web designer. The UKZN website has been identified as the most influential media by the students.</li> <li>2. The student alumni of the GSB&amp;L must be constantly kept aware of the accomplishments of the business school, the achievements of past and present students and the achievements of the academic and administrative staff. Friends and family have been identified as an important source of advertising by prospective students.</li> <li>3. Inviting influential business leaders that can personally promote or endorse the UNZN GSB&amp;L to address the students' at the open day or recruitment programmes. These business leaders will provide the confidence that prospective students need in order to consider the institution.</li> </ol> |
| <p><b>Objective two: Students' reasons for choosing the UKZN GSBL</b><br/> <b>Stage 3: Evaluation of alternates</b></p>         | <p>Consumers make their final decision from their choice set of alternate brands. The following action plan is recommended to ensure that the UKZN GSB&amp;L remains firmly on the prospective students' choice set:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The marketing department needs to focus their advertising on reducing the attribute scores of their competitors. This can be achieved by planning alternate appeals in the advertisements. For example, the use of the competitive cost of studying at the UKZN GSB&amp;L versus UNISA or UCT must be used to counteract the high accreditation of these business schools.</li> <li>2. The UKZN GSB&amp;L marketing division needs to ensure that their communication channels are kept updated and informative. Prospective students focus on the UKZN websites for information.</li> </ol>   |
| <p><b>Objective three: Students' experiences during the registration process</b><br/> <b>Stage 4: The purchase decision</b></p> | <p>The registration procedure must undergo a process of continuous improvement. The following factors must be considered to ensure that this process is successful:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The entire registration process must be effectively communicated to the students so that their contact personnel are identified at every stage.</li> <li>2, The UKZN GSB&amp;L must strive to have the entire registration process conducted within the GSB&amp;L as the majority of their students are middle to senior management who have very little time available to sit in cues. The registration process for MBA students can be planned so that the necessary shared resources are available for the registration process.</li> <li>3. Electronic fund transfer (EFT) and credit card payments must be made available so that registration is speeded up.</li> <li>4. An effective channel to resolve student problems must be in place as an unresolved problem leads to student dissatisfaction.</li> </ol>  |

| Objective and stage in consumer buying process   | Recommendation   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Objective four:</b><br/> <b>Establish whether the students' expectations were met</b><br/> <b>Stage 5: The post-purchase decision</b></p>                  | <p>The quality of the tangibles is a measure of the quality of the educational institution. It is vital therefore that the university administration addresses the dissatisfaction as identified in this research so that the customer satisfaction levels are increased. This can be achieved by the following actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The poor parking facilities and lack of adequate study rooms must be addressed. Additional parking must be made available to the growing intake of students into the business school. Group meetings and discussions form a vital part of the MBA curriculum and the lack of adequate study rooms will lead to student dissatisfaction. Therefore, more suitable rooms need to become available to MBA students.</li> <li>2. The concern raised by students regarding lecturers that are too theoretical must be investigated. The UKZN GSB&amp;L needs to recruit and retain captains of industry who have both the practical knowledge and academic background to impart knowledge to the students.</li> <li>3. The UKZN GSB&amp;L must minimise cognitive dissonance by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Reassuring the students that the correct decision has been made by focusing on the achievements of the GSB&amp;L and past students.</li> <li>3.2 Personal meeting of each new student with the head of school and senior lecturers must be encouraged. This will instil a sense of belonging in the student population.</li> <li>3.3 Students must be sent a personal letter of welcome at the beginning of each academic year.</li> </ol> </li> </ol> |
| <p><b>Objective five: Evaluate whether the MBA programme made a difference to the lives of the students.</b><br/> <b>Stage 5: The post-purchase decision</b></p> | <p>It is important for the marketing department of the UKZN GSB&amp;L to constantly focus on the post-purchase behaviour of MBA students. The following actions must be taken:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Student surveys and interviews must be conducted regularly to gather information on their satisfaction levels. In addition a platform must be created to address concerns that students may have.</li> <li>2. Students must be consulted on an on-going basis to ensure that the MBA curriculum contains the key elements that they deem important. This will ensure the sustainability of the MBA programme to the evolving nature of students' needs.</li> <li>3. The UKZN GSB&amp;L student alumni serve as an excellent barometer to gauge the changes that the MBA programme has made to the students. Membership to the student alumni must be encouraged by fostering a sense of belonging through workshops and special rates to key functions hosted by the business school.</li> <li>4. A higher degree of satisfaction is attained when students are encouraged to feel that they are in control of their studies. This model is described as perceived-control perspective (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001). This sense of control can take the form of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Allowing students to make the choice when alternates are presented,</li> </ol> </li> </ol>   |

| Objective and stage in consumer buying process | Recommendation  |
|--|---|
|  | for example setting of suitable dates for make-up lectures.<br>4.2 Keeping the students informed whenever there are any changes at the business school. |

#### 5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is important for the researcher to identify and document the limitations of the study as this may assist future studies in the field. The identification of limitations also serves as a basis for recommendations for further studies. The following limitations have been identified:

- The slow response rate by students did not allow the minimum number of respondents to complete the survey. The results of this study cannot be generalised across the entire population of the UKZN GSB&L students.
- There was no balance in the students that responded in the first, second and third years of study. The majority of the students that responded were first year students. This imbalance has skewed the findings of this study.
- In order for meaningful insight to have been obtained on the pre-decision expectations versus post-decision experiences of MBA students, the first year students should have been excluded as it is too early for them to make a meaningful contribution. Students that have completed their MBA studies should have been considered in their place.

#### 5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The recommendations for further research are based on the findings and limitations identified in this study. The recommendations for further research include:

- This study should be extended to include graduates. This will add a new dimension to the benefits that the MBA degree from the UKZN GSB&L offers their graduates.
- Further research should identify if there is a correlation between career orientation profiles and success in management and career progression.

- A stratified study of the pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences of MBA students with regard to age and gender must be considered.
- This study should be repeated substituting the employer for the student. The employer is also an important stakeholder in the education process and their input can add new perspectives on improving the education strategies of business schools.

## **5.6 SUMMARY**

The research objectives that were set for this study have been satisfied. Taking the limitations into account, this study has raised several important issues. The findings of this study have revealed several gaps regarding the expectations and experiences of the MBA students registered at the UKZN GSB&L. In addition, various recommendations have been proposed to address these shortcomings. These recommendations are aimed at improving the customer satisfaction level of the students enrolled at the UKZN GSB&L. In the competitive arena of education customer satisfaction is an important issue for business school leaders to consider. It can be concluded that improvements that will increase the customer satisfaction at the UKZN GSB&L will ultimately result in an improved brand image. The consequence of this is that students will identify the UKZN GSB&L as their preferred service provider for their business studies in KwaZulu-Natal.

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**APPENDIX 1:**  
**INTRODUCTORY LETTER**

**Informed Consent Letter 3C**  
**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**  
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP**

Dear Student

I am Krishna Shah, a Master of Business Administration (MBA) student at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership (GSB&L) at the University of Kwazulu Natal (UKZN). You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: "The pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences of MBA students."

The aim of the study is to understand the students expectations prior to enrolling for an MBA @ UKZN GSB&L and whether these expectations where met during their studies. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the survey at any time with no consequences. It should take between 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey.

Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the GSB&L, UKZN. Should you accept the conditions of this study and are willing to participate, please click the box next to **"I ACCEPT"**CONTINUE to proceed with the questionnaire.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed below:

Researcher: Krishna Shah (031 4604459)

Supervisor: Professor Anesh Maniraj Singh (031 2607061)

Investigator's signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

**This page is to be retained by participant**

**APPENDIX 2:  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

**1. Gender**

- Male
- Female

**2. Race**

- African
- Indian
- Coloured
- White
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Age group**

- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 and above

**4. What is your current level of study?**

- MBA 1
- MBA 2
- MBA 3

**5. What class are you attending?**

- Full time
- Block release

**6. What level of management do you currently occupy? (Please select the main option).**

- Non-Management
- Junior Management
- Middle Management
- Senior Management

**7. Rank the reasons why you decided to enrol for an MBA programme, where 1 is the most important reason and 6 is the least important.**

- Preparation for a better job in the market place
- Opportunity to improve personally

- Development of managerial knowledge and technical skills
- Increase in earning power
- Opportunity to network and form relationships
- To become an entrepreneur

**8. What skills and abilities are you hoping to gain from an MBA programme, where 1 is the most important reason and 10 is the least important. (You may choose up to a maximum of 4 answers).**

- Analytical thinking
- Strategic thinking
- Interpersonal skills
- Leadership skills
- Diversity management
- International business skills
- Decision making
- Communication skills
- Financial skills

**9. Did you consider a number of GSB's before choosing UKZN?**

- Yes
- No

**10. Since you answered yes to question 9 which of the other schools did you consider? (You may choose more than 1).**

- North West University
- University of KwaZulu-Natal
- University of Pretoria
- University of the Free State
- University of Johannesburg
- University of the Western Cape
- University of Fort Hare
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
- University of Limpopo
- University of Cape Town
- Rhodes University
- University of Stellenbosch
- University of Venda
- University of the Witwatersrand
- University of Zululand
- University of South Africa
- Tshwane University of Technology
- Cape Peninsula University of Technology
- Walter Sisulu University of Technology and Science, Eastern Cape
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Since you answered no to question 9 why did you not consider other schools?**

- UKZN is my alma mater
- UKZN is my employers preferred provider
- I live in UKZN
- UKZN had flexible offerings (part-time and block release)

**12. Rank the reasons why you chose UKZN over other business schools, where 1 is the most important reason and 8 is the least important.**

- Low cost
- Experienced Lecturers
- Rating of the school
- Reputation of the school
- Accreditation
- Facilities
- Course content
- Research profile of Lecturers

**13. Where did you find most of the information that influenced your choice? (You may choose more than 1 option).**

- UKZN website
- Colleagues at work
- Open days
- Friends and family members that have or are in the process of completing their MBA degrees
- Alumni of UKZN GSBL
- Newspapers
- Social media
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Which of these media influenced your decision most?**

- UKZN website
- Colleagues at work
- Open days
- Friends and family members that have or are in the process of completing their MBA degrees
- Alumni of UKZN GSBL
- Newspapers
- Social media
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**15. What was the duration from the time that you considered doing an MBA to the time that you applied to do the MBA?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years or more

**16. How would you rate the following registration, preregistration systems, people and procedures?**

|                                  | Poor | Weak | Acceptable | Good | Excellent | N/A |
|----------------------------------|------|------|------------|------|-----------|-----|
| Application procedure            |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Registration procedure           |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Payment procedure                |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Administration staff knowledge   |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Administration staff helpfulness |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Academic staff knowledge         |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Academic staff helpfulness       |      |      |            |      |           |     |

**17. Now that you are a student at UKZN GSBL to what extent have your expectations been met?**

- It is too early to tell
- None have been met
- Some have been met
- Many have been met
- Almost all have been met
- All have been met

**18. Since you answered some, many and almost all in the previous question which of your expectations have been met?**

- Analytical thinking
- Strategic thinking
- Interpersonal skills
- Leadership skills
- Diversity management
- International business skills
- Decision making
- Communication skills
- Financial skills

**19. Have the lecturing staff met your expectations?**

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

**20. Since you answered somewhat / no, what are the main reasons for your negative response?**

- Some lecturers are too theoretically orientated
- Some lecturers are too practically orientated
- Some lecturers are too boring
- Some lecturers are poor communicators
- Some lecturers have no interest in student growth

**21. How would you rate the following GSBL facilities?**

|                            | Poor | Weak | Acceptable | Good | Excellent | N/A |
|----------------------------|------|------|------------|------|-----------|-----|
| Lecture venues             |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Computer lan               |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Wireless network           |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Parking                    |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Study rooms (number)       |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Study rooms (availability) |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Library resource centre    |      |      |            |      |           |     |
| Electronic resources       |      |      |            |      |           |     |

**22. What is the greatest work benefit you have experienced since embarking on the MBA?**

- I have been promoted
- I have received an increase
- I have moved to a new company
- There has been no change as yet

**23. What is the greatest personal improvement that you have experienced since enrolling for the MBA?**

- My confidence has increased
- My interactions with colleagues has improved
- My interactions with suppliers has improved
- My interactions with subordinates has improved
- My communication skills have improved

**24. Overall how would you rate your expectations of the UKZN GSBL?**

- Excellent (exceeds all expectations)
- Very good (exceeds most of my expectations)
- Average (meets my expectations)
- Poor (doesn't meet some expectations)
- Weak (meets very few or none of my expectations)

**25. I will recommend the UKZN GSBL to the people that I know.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

**26. What improvements would you recommend to enhance the overall experience of future MBA students?**

---

## APPENDIX 3: CONSENT LETTER



10 April 2013

Mr KRS Shah  
Graduate School of Business & Leadership  
Westville campus  
UKZN

Email: [sunneals@feltex.co.za](mailto:sunneals@feltex.co.za)

Dear Mr Shah

### RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

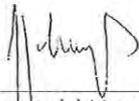
Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"The pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences of MBA students"

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by randomly handing out questionnaires to students on the Westville campus.

Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely



Professor J J Meyerowitz  
REGISTRAR

---

Office of the Registrar  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa  
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

1910 - 2010  
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## APPENDIX 4

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE



18 July 2013

Mr Krishna Ramsundar Shah 8218168  
Graduate School of Business and Leadership  
Westville Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0236/013M  
Project title: The pre-decision expectations versus post-decision experiences of MBA students.

Dear Mr Shah

**Expedited approval**

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted full approval.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Professor U Bob (Chair) and Dr S Singh (Deputy Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor Anesh Maniraj Singh  
cc Academic leader research: Dr SA Bodhanya  
cc School Administrator: Ms Wendy Clarke and Eileen Mohamed

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Professor Urmilla Bob (Chair) and Dr Shenuka Singh (Deputy Chair)  
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Website: www.ukzn.ac.za  
Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS



**APPENDIX 5**  
**ENGLISH EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE**



October 2013

**To whom it may concern**

---

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Student:        | Krishna Ramsundar Shah   |
| Student number: | 8218168  |
| Degree:         | Master of Business Administration                                  |
| Title:          | The pre-decision expectations versus the post-decision experiences |
| Graduation:     | 2013   |

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This is to inform you that Ronél Gallie of the University of Stellenbosch Business School did the technical editing of the abovementioned dissertation and Jeanne Enslin, freelance language editor who is on the USB list of editors, did the language editing.

We trust that the work done to the abovementioned dissertation is satisfactory.

Kind regards

Handwritten signature of R Gallie in black ink.

R Gallie  
Technical editor

Handwritten signature of Jeanne Enslin in black ink.

Jeanne Enslin  
Language editor



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UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

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