

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
SCHOOL OF NURSING

AN INQUIRY INTO STUDENT SUPPORT MECHANISMS IN
POSTGRADUATE NURSING PROGRAMMES AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL: A STUDENTS'
PERSPECTIVE

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Award of a Coursework Masters Degree in Nursing Education**

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January 2010

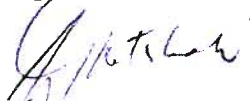
DECLARATION

I, John Mugarura hereby declare that this research dissertation titled “**An Inquiry into Student Support Mechanisms in Postgraduate Nursing Programmes at the University of KwaZulu- Natal: A Students’ Perspective**” is my original piece of work. It has therefore never been submitted to any academic institution or anywhere else for any purposes whatsoever. Caution was exercised to acknowledge sources of information used in this work by paraphrasing, direct quotation within text and in the reference list.



12.02.2010

Signature



Date

11/03/2010

DEDICATION

This piece of work is dedicated to my family and friends

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God who has seen me through this seemingly endless academic journey. My sincere gratitude also goes to my research supervisor and lecturer, Prof. Mtshali, for her expert guidance, encouragement and patience throughout the study period. I similarly wish to appreciate the contribution accorded to this study by all my research participants. A lot of thanks go to the staff and student community of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, most especially in the School of Nursing.

A vote of thanks is also extended to Ms Mary Murebwayire and Ms Julie Kimonyo at the Rwandan Ministry of Health for their support and encouragement.

Special thanks to the Rwandan Government and the Belgian Technical Cooperation in the Kigali and Pretoria office for the scholarship offered to me, their support and understanding.

I am also grateful to friends and family in Rwanda and South Africa and the entire University of KwaZulu-Natal community for their love, support and kindness.

ABSTRACT

Background: Literature on postgraduate student throughput and success suggests a mismatch between registration, throughput and success rates among postgraduate students.

Purpose of the Study: This study aimed at exploring and describing mechanisms used to increase throughput and success rates in Postgraduate Nursing Programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Conceptual Framework: The theoretical framework used in this study was derived from Tinto's proposed Theory of Institutional Action (2005). This theory is based on the assumption that learners' behaviour which is manifested in persistence or departure is never fully understood because only the act of leaving or staying is observed, not the underlying intentions behind the action.

Research Methodology: Using a mixed methods paradigm, the whole target population of 83 participants was sampled for the quantitative aspect and 2 focus groups each consisting about 12 participants for the qualitative aspect were used. Data were collected using a questionnaire and an interview guide. Descriptive statistics and were used for quantitative data, while thematic content analysis was used for qualitative data.

Results: This study revealed that the support mechanisms for increasing student throughput and success rates are structured in three phases: the pre-enrolment phase, the integration phase, and the engagement phase. During the pre-enrolment phase, support is offered in form of information to help students understand what is expected of them, inform students about the programmes offered, the cost of the programmes, duration of the programs and the available support services. During the integration phase, the support provided includes guidance about the registration process, information about programmes and disciplines offered, counselling regarding curriculum design, modules to select and required credits for completion, orientation, and helping international students with visa extension with repatriation issues. During the engagement phase, the support provided includes academic, psychosocial and financial services.

Facilitating factors reported include: student interaction with academic staff to monitor and provide feedback, a responsive curriculum to learning needs through the teaching and assessments methods utilised, active student involvement, personal effort, prior learning and working experience, and enough learning resources.

Barriers reported were inadequate information, insufficiency of student-lecturer interaction time, unsuitable psychosocial support for adult learners, lack of mentorship and academic advising services, lack of time to participate in co-curricular activities, limited time for studying, ineffective use of learning resources, and language barrier.

Recommendations: The study revealed a need to provide a balance mixture the available support mechanisms because academic support dominated the support services offered. Findings also showed the necessity to adapt the psychosocial support to the needs of all categories of students including adult postgraduate students.

KEY WORDS

Postgraduate Nursing Programmes

Student Support Mechanisms

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- C.A.P.A: Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
- C.H.E: Council for Higher Education
- D.O.E: Department of Education
- F.W.M.P: Foreign Workforce Management Programme
- I.S.S.O: International Student Support Office
- N.Q.F: National Qualifications Framework
- N.R.F: National Research Foundation
- O.P.AC: On-line Public Access Catalogue
- S.A.N.C: South African Nursing Council
- S.A.Q.A: South African Qualifications Authority
- U.K: United Kingdom
- U.K.Z.N: University of KwaZulu- Natal
- U.N.E.S.C.O: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
- U.N.I.S.A: University of South Africa
- U.S.A: United States of America

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Student support in higher education according to Tait (2000) is defined as a series of services offered to individuals and groups of students with the aim of complementing learning materials.

According to Ritzer (1998), university education has become such a highly sought after consumer service and the students now expect universities to treat them in the same manner that any other service provider would treat their clients. Greatrix-White (2007) however argues that the quest for knowledge through university education is not a new venture because it dates as far back as the 13th Century when students used to flock from various corners of the world to Alexandria and Baghdad, the best centres of scholarship at time. What perhaps makes the situation different today could be a change in context and students' needs.

Goldstein and Kim (2006) suggest that a decrease in historical barriers such as ethnocentrism, prejudice, intercultural communication apprehension, intolerance and an increase in interests and expectations, and globalisation have increased mobility, not only within national borders, but abroad as well for study purposes. This necessitates student support in education in order to help students overcome barriers related to their backgrounds.

1.2 Background to the study

Literature on postgraduate student throughput and success suggests a mismatch between registration, throughput and success rates among post graduate students (UNISA & NRF, 2007), and the UKZN fact Site, 2008). This contrasts with the need to produce a larger skilled workforce that is needed on the labour market to replace the ageing professionals (Champagne, 2006) and provide quality services to society (UNISA & the NRF, 2007). A number of factors influence postgraduate student throughput and success. According to Tinto (2005), some of the factors are inherent in students themselves, while others are institution dependent.

According to Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2005), increased mobility in education is viewed as a means of learning new ideals and integrating knowledge with skills in a democratic society and a way of promoting social mobility and well being according to the Council for Higher Education (CHE, 2004). Bunting (2004) however argued that some students who access higher education are inadequately prepared and according to Ngcongco (2000) may not have the adequate life skills necessary to help them succeed in their postgraduate studies. According to Greatrix-White (2007), international students abroad are also faced with a number of extra issues such as separation from families, a feeling of alienation, and socialisation and language problems.

Given this background, the need for student support in education seems not only to stem from the fact that it is on high demand as Ritzer (1998) suggests, but also because of the need to help students overcome barriers related to their backgrounds. This support and engagement in favour of students is stressed by Rumble (2000) and Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt (2005), who proposed a number of features that an education institution needs to possess in order to translate such an engagement into student persistence and success. Such features include a “living mission” and

“lived educational philosophy”, a stable focus on student learning, suitable environments for educational enrichment, clearly marked pathways to student success, an improvement oriented ethos and shared responsibility for educational quality and student success (Rumble, 2000).

Despite the suggested requisite features that education institutions need in order to foster student throughput and success, Braxton and Hirschy (2004) argue that the problem of increasing student throughput has been researched in the United States of America (USA) for over 70 years now and it still remains a challenge to education institutions. These authors maintain that the student dropout problem remains the centre of interest to both academics and practitioners in a sense that it brings the nature of student experiences into the limelight and poses an administrative challenge to practitioners.

Tinto (2005) argues that although previous studies have made significant steps towards establishing the nature of student attrition, institutions still fail to implement tenable student support programmes because of the absence of a theory on which to base student support interventions. The author attributes this absence of a working theory to the fact that it is difficult to fully understand and define human action. As a result, researchers and education institutions are only able to define student behaviour that is manifested in departure or persistence but have not identified yet the underlying intention that students may have. This also implies that student persistence in a programme or institution cannot guarantee that they will complete their qualification or whether they will complete in time if they make it to the end. This understanding, suggests that institutional student support programmes, where they exist, cannot ensure timely and successful completion of courses because the underlying problems are not known with certainty.

Cooper and Subotzky (2001) reported a remarkable change in student demographics in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa. For example, from 1988 to 1998 there was a significant increase in enrolment of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds (01.2% to 26.6%) and an increase in the female student population from 37.1% to 48.14% (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001). Favish (2005) however, noted that whilst the numbers of students from previously disadvantaged groups were increasing, the graduation rate for this category of students has been steadily declining. Favish attributed this decline to increased access without corresponding increased levels of student support.

Bunting's work (2004) revealed that in South Africa, most studies are merely concerned with the access of previously underprivileged sections of the country's population to higher education. This draws from the need to promote the nation's human capital through education. Following initiatives to increase access to higher education, the South African Department of Education (2001) indicated that by the year 2001, out of a total of 610,000 students who enrolled in higher education, 94.3% were South Africans and foreigners with a permanent residence permit, 4.9% were other African nationals on a temporary study permit, and 0.8% were from Europe and the USA. Out of this total enrolment, the Department of Education document indicated that most (82%) were enrolled in Undergraduate Degree and Diploma Programmes compared to 6% enrolled in Masters and Doctoral Programmes, 9% in other Postgraduate Programmes below the Masters level and 3% in non degree courses.

From the literature reviewed on student support, most authors (Rumble, 2000; Kuh et al., 2005; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 2005; Astin & Oseguera, 2005; and Bean, 2005) focus on the support given to students in open and distance education programmes and on the freshman or the post secondary university entrants. Rumble (2000) suggests that students in open and distance education

programmes are likely to be less catered for, since these programmes are delivered away from the physical academic environments because students are engaged in their jobs, family and other chores. Nonetheless, little is discussed with regard to student support and throughput in postgraduate education and there is a marked paucity of literature on student support in nursing education programmes. At a joint University of South Africa (UNISA) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) (2007) conference which aimed at reflecting on issues affecting postgraduate research and mechanisms to increase throughput at post graduate levels, it was found out that most postgraduate students drop out at the Honours' degree level and that the path to a PhD qualification in the South African Education System was 13 years long compared to an average of 8 years in other countries.

According to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Access and Admissions Policy Document (2004), access does not just mean entrance into the university but should also accord students the chances of making effective use of and developing the capabilities necessary to successfully complete their respective academic programmes. However, the lower graduation rates at postgraduate level call for strategies to scale up throughput rates in order to retain students in their programmes and enable them to complete their programmes. Yorke and Longden (2004) argue that this inability to complete within the expected amount of time is a liability, not only to the students, but to all parties involved in student enrolment in higher education. On one hand, at individual level, this suggests that when students complete their studies within the minimum stipulated amount of time, their cost burden is minimised. It also implies that there are delayed services from students to society when they take longer than expected to graduate. Swail (2006) views this loss to students, their families and sponsors, not only in monetary terms, but also in time invested.

On the other hand, at institutional level, Gouws and van der Merwe (2004) suggest that in addition to the incalculable damage done to students who drop out in terms of moral and psycho-social disappointment, the funds that should have been used to improve educational programmes are wasted on admitting students who will never graduate. This culminates in the likelihood that an institution's public funding may be reduced if students do not complete their studies due the concern that the funds provided did not yield the desired outcomes. This is true in the South African context where according to Ministry of Education Funding Framework for public higher institutions (2004), 87% of the funds allocated to public Higher Educational Institutions is distributed in the following proportions: teaching input, dependent on the approved student vacancies (56%), teaching output, dependent on the number of non-research graduates produced (14%), research output, dependent on the number of research Masters and Doctoral publications (12%), and institutional factor grants, given on the basis of the enrolment size and percentage of disadvantaged students (6%).

As much as student support services exist in the university, throughput and graduation rates at postgraduate level have remained low. Little research has been carried out to this day to look into the long standing low throughput and graduation rates in postgraduate education. Very little is known with certainty about various factors that influence student throughput and graduation in postgraduate nursing education.

1.3 Problem statement

Bunting (2004) argued that each year about 15% of the students registered in the public higher education system in South Africa drop out before they graduate while only 14% complete their qualification. In a similar development, at a conference hosted by UNISA and NRF, it was found out that it is at the Honours' degree level that most postgraduate students drop out and that the low throughput rate at graduate level causes a skills shortage (UNISA & NRF, 2007).

At the University of KwaZulu-Natal, since the year 2000, the School of Nursing has been a World Health Organisation (WHO) collaborating centre for educating nurses and midwives in community problem solving in Africa. This has attracted nursing and midwifery students from both within South Africa and from other African countries as well as beyond Africa on full time basis, part time and through student exchange programmes. However, according to the UKZN Fact Site (2008), the annual graduation rate among nursing postgraduate students over a 6 year period from the year 2000 to 2005 is much lower compared the enrolment rate over the same period. Student graduation data (UKZN Fact Site, 2008) indicate that over a 6 year period from 2000 to 2005, an average of 13.7% of postgraduate nursing students dropped out, 6.5% were excluded while 27.9% graduated. The 51.9% difference is not accounted for. This perhaps corresponds to the number of students that are still in the education system. This could suggest that their progression was slow.

A preliminary study conducted by Mugarura and Mtshali (2007) suggests that student support structures such as student centred teaching approaches, psychosocial and financial services are provided to undergraduate nursing students. What is not established is whether these support mechanisms also function at postgraduate level and if they do, the role they play in facilitating learning and improving student throughput rates.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the mechanisms used to increase throughput and success rates in postgraduate nursing programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

1.5 Research Objectives

This study's objectives were to:

- Explore the existing support mechanisms to increase postgraduate student throughput and success rates.
- Identify what facilitates an increase in throughput and success rates in postgraduate nursing programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Identify barriers to increasing postgraduate student throughput and success rate.

1.6 Research questions

- What support mechanisms exist to ensure an increase in postgraduate nursing students' throughput and success rate?
- How are postgraduate nursing students supported to ensure an increase in throughput and success rate?
- What facilitates increase in postgraduate nursing students' throughput and success?
- What hinders postgraduate nursing students' progression and success?

1.7 Theoretical framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was derived from Tinto's proposed Theory of Institutional Action (2005); (See Diagram 1). This section starts by briefly presenting Tinto's model and later presents an adapted conceptual framework that was used to guide this study. Tinto's Theory of Institutional Action is based on the assumption that learners' behaviour which is manifested in persistence or departure is never fully understood because only the act of leaving or staying is observed, not the underlying intentions behind the action. The author argues that there is a variety of reasons for departure some of which educational institutions cannot control because, the many factors that influence students' decisions to continue or drop out for a given period of time are only known to them.

Conceptual framework

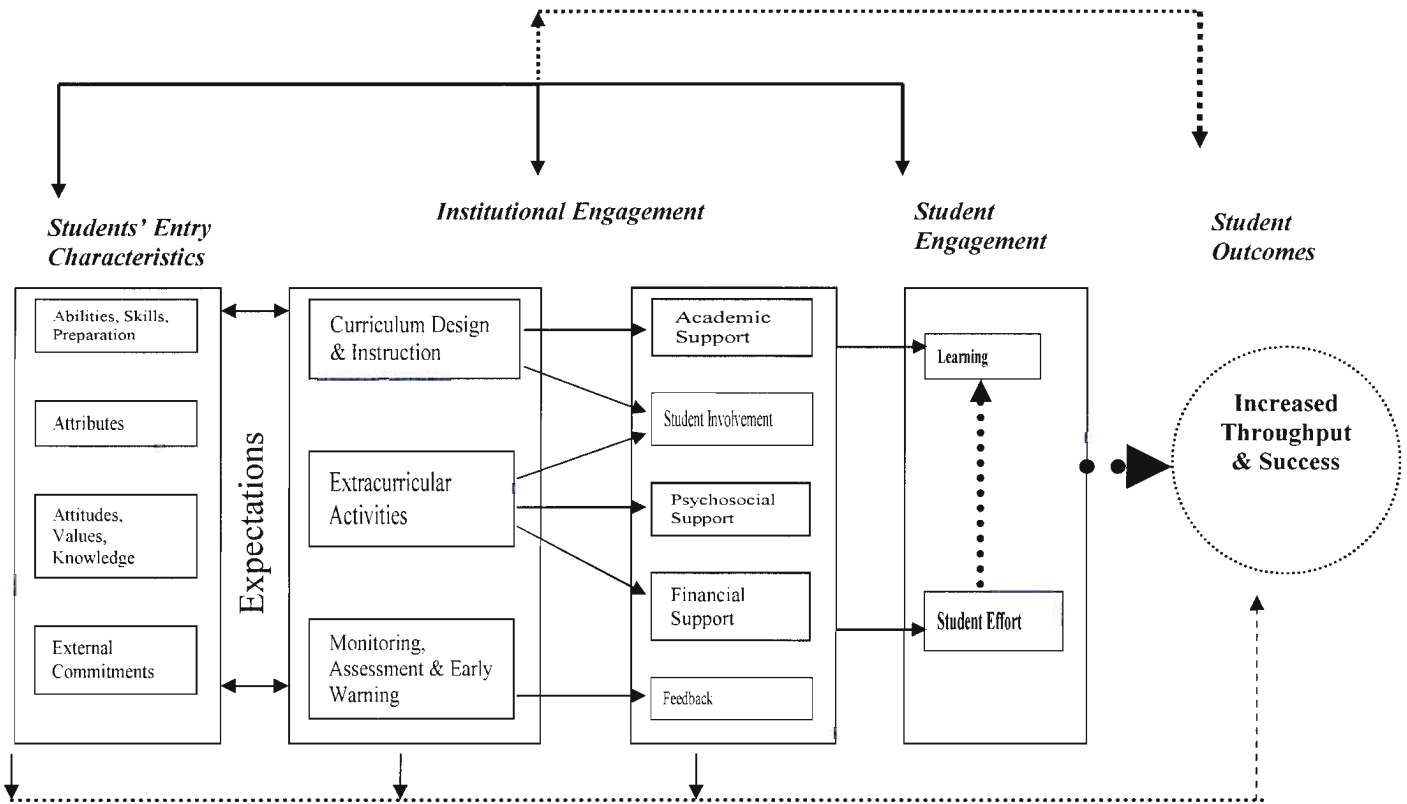


Diagram 1: A student throughput model (Adopted from Tinto's institutional action model, 2005)

Tinto's (2005) model indicates that learners may harbour various reasons for leaving, such as joining another programme or institution, taking on a better paying job. Although this may be a positive step to take in the learner's view, the institution may view it as a failure on its part to deliver what is expected of it and a loss in terms revenue from tuition fees. This failure to identify the underlying cause for learners' departure leaves the institution in a weak position as far as designing and implementing programmes that facilitate student throughput and success is concerned.

Tinto (2005) further states that previous theories predicted student departure and persistence. He argues however that these theories did not provide institutions with a framework within which to act in order to improve student throughput and success. Tinto (2005) then proposed a much more focused model, his theory of institutional action that will help institutions deal more objectively with abstract concepts such as student departure, student persistence, and social and academic integration by providing guidelines to effective policies and programmes that will foster student persistence and completion. This theory which is derived from a social constructivist understanding of learning, suggests that student learning is a key to success, implying that whether students persist in the institution or not, they will not succeed unless they learn. It also suggests that the terminal student success that may be seen at the end of a given study period or at degree completion is gradually constructed from one class at a time through academic throughput. Based on these assumptions, any institutional action to foster student success should focus on measurable dimensions within its confines such as staff development, student support mechanisms, curriculum design and instruction, assessment and extra curricular activities.

The section below explains the major concepts from the adapted model used to guide this study.

Students' entry characteristics: The Student Throughput Model considers that learners come to the university with diverse *abilities, skills*, and qualifications (*preparation*); background *attributes* such as gender, religion, and race, and *attitudes, values* and *knowledge*. It also recognises that as social beings, learners also have *external commitments* in families, communities, and in work settings, and that each of these commitments have a bearing on the learner's time and energy.

Expectations: When learners are admitted to the university, they have certain expectations from the university and the latter has its expectations from students. Tinto (2005) argues that students are more likely to succeed in learning environments that expect them to succeed. He however, argues that whereas learners usually have high expectations when they come to the university, the university expects very little of learners, or has different expectations from different categories of students. This view is shared by Kuh (2003) who, in a national survey in the USA, justified this low level of expectations by the fact that first year students spend less time in out-of-class learning experiences than they expect for successful learning.

Institutional engagement: Tinto (2005) argues that institutional commitment conditions student success in that students are very likely to succeed when they are placed in settings that are committed to their success. Within this model, institutional commitment requires the institution to align its attributes to ensure student success. This requires translating vision and mission statements into reality by allocating resources in staff development programmes that will cater for student support needs, *curriculum design* and implementation using strategies that engage students in learning experiences, *extracurricular activities*, and *monitoring and assessment* of student progress. According to the model, *academic support, psychosocial and financial support, student involvement* in both curricular and extracurricular activities and constant *feedback* are some of the mechanisms that are likely to improve the *quality of effort* students invest in their learning and promote meaningful *learning* that will foster *throughput and success*.

Curriculum design and instruction: Tinto (2005) suggested that universities should construct educational environments that promote student success. This could be done through designing curricula that engage students. Such curricula include strategies such as cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and problem based learning strategies which engage students in service activities that provide them with learning experiences.

Extracurricular activities: According to Mandew (2003), student involvement in extracurricular activities such as clubs and societies and financial support programmes was reported as a means of creating self confidence and a sense of belonging among students and student development and this is likely to enhance learning.

Monitoring, assessment and early warning: According to Tinto (2005) monitoring, assessment and early warning are essential techniques that allow for making an early diagnosis of student needs in order to direct the worthwhile efforts that will foster student success.

Feedback: Tinto (2005) argues that students stand a better chance of succeeding in environments that provide frequent feedback amongst students and staff. This system of retro-information could be through monitoring of performance, assessment of learning skills, and early warning alerts to students and staff about the need for assistance. This form of learning needs assessment could use tools such as learning contracts, reflective diaries and portfolios. According to this model, a combination of feedback with student engagement in learning activities and an existing student support system is also likely to improve the quality of the effort that students invest in learning and will increase the chances of their success.

Student involvement: This model sees engaging students in curricular and extracurricular activities as paramount because it improves the *quality of effort* invested by students in learning, improves *learning* experiences by making them more meaningful, resulting in **success** both in terms of

throughput by progressing to the next class and success in terms of degree completion. According to Tinto (2005) and Astin (1999), the more involved students are, the more they are likely to stay at the university until they complete their degree.

Academic support: Tinto (2005) suggested that since some students are inadequately prepared when they join their programmes, academic support in form of developmental programmes and remedial instruction may be necessary to foster *throughput and success*.

Psychosocial support: Psychosocial support in the form of counselling and mentoring is suggested by different authors as a necessary support service to students to help them integrate into the university environment and to promote learning because some students may feel out of place, given the diverse backgrounds they come from (Tinto, 2005; Frost, 1991).

Financial support: Tinto (2005) suggested that student support in terms of academic, social, and financial support constitute essential conditions for student success. This could take the form of study groups, tutoring, supplemental instruction, foundational courses, counselling, mentoring, and financial aid.

Student engagement: According to the model, the *quality of students' effort* invested in learning and the resulting learning experiences have an influence on throughput and success. This is congruent with Astin's argument (1999) that for any given curriculum to achieve its intended effects, sufficient *student effort* and energy must be invested to bring about the desired learning outcome.

Student outcomes: In this model, student outcomes are considered to be a culmination in *increased throughput and success* that is registered as a result of *the effort* students invest in learning and the **learning** experiences a student is engaged in. It is also an end result of all the

interacting variables in this model including students' entry characteristics, institutional engagement and student engagement.

1.8 Significance of the study

Literature suggests that little improvement has been made in throughput rates among higher education institutions worldwide, despite extensive research addressing problems related to low levels of student success (Seidman, 2005). Tinto (1997 & 2005) argued that the unwavering institutional inability to establish successful programmes to increase student throughput and success is due to the fact that very little is known about the varying reasons for student departure and the fact that what is thought to be known might be a misconception.

Whereas resources have been invested in improving student access to higher education, and extensive studies have been carried out in the past to improve student success, they have always focused their attention on neophyte university students and minority students. However, the UNISA and the NRF (2007) conference identified the fact that postgraduate students also have issues that need to be addressed because the high drop out rate at the Honours degree level is depriving the public of a skilled workforce.

This study sought to explore and describe the mechanisms needed to increase throughput and success in postgraduate nursing students. The study generated findings that reveal the nature of what influences student success and an understanding of what education institutions expect from students from the students' own perspective. This is expected to inform the administrative process with regard to student recruitment, bearing in mind diverse students' entry characteristics. This

could also be used by various stakeholders in the nursing education system including students, parents, nursing education institutions, and funding agencies to focus their efforts towards practices that will lead to increased student throughput and success rates. The study also informs the teaching-learning process in a sense that it highlights teaching and learning practices that from the students' perspective foster student learning to increase throughput and success. Findings and recommendations from this study could also serve as baseline data for further studies relating to student success.

1.9 Operational definition of terms

Postgraduate Nursing Education: Within the scope of this study, postgraduate nursing education denotes a period of study from the Honours degree level to a PhD. Throughout this study, the term graduate and postgraduate will be used interchangeably.

Student Support: Tait (2000) defined student support as a series of services offered to individuals and groups of students with the aim of complementing learning materials. In this study, student support refers to all those services available at the university that are rendered to students from the time they first apply for postgraduate studies until they graduate in order to enhance students' individual and collective success.

Success: Ferrer de Valero (2001) defined success as the students' ability to complete their degree requirements in a timely manner.

Throughput: Horne and Naude (2007) defined throughput as the number of students who registered for a module and passed the examination. In this particular study, throughput refers to the number of students who enrol in an education programme and who pass the examination at the end of the semester and at the end of the year.

1.10 Conclusion

In the course of this study, the literature consulted suggests that there is a variation between post graduate student registration, throughput, and success rates. This is likely to hamper the effort to feed the labour market with a larger skilled workforce that is needed on to replace the ageing professionals (Champagne, 2006) and provide quality services to society. Tinto (2005) argued that the many factors influencing postgraduate student throughput and success are both inherent in students themselves, as well as institution dependent.

Guided by the student throughput model which was adopted from Tinto's (2005) institutional action model, this study used a mixed methods research paradigm, and quantitative and qualitative research methods, using exploratory and descriptive study designs to explore and describe the mechanisms used to increase throughput and success rates in postgraduate nursing programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. More exploration, description, and argument about the student throughput and success phenomenon are presented in chapter two.

1.11 Outline of the Dissertation

This report is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1: This chapter provided introduction and background to the study. It also presents the problem statement, purpose statement, objectives of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, significance of the study, and operational definition of terms.

Chapter 2: .This chapter present reviewed empirical literature and it organised according to themes. These themes are presented as subheadings. They include drivers of postgraduate studies,

a necessity for throughput and completion, barriers to student success, the need for a support system, success of student support programmes and challenges in student support programmes.

Chapter 3: This chapter present a research methodology that was followed in executing this research. A pragmatic mixed methods approach, using an exploratory descriptive approach was adopted in this study . The research setting was the school of nursing in one of the universities in the KwaZulu-Natal province. The stuy population included 83 postgraduate students. Convenience probability sampling was used to select data for the quantitative and quantitative aspects of this study. A self administered questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data and two focus group interviews were conducted to collect qualitative from the postgraduate students. There was a focus group formed by local (South African) students and another focus grouped formed by international students. Quantitative data was analysed using an SPSS software package version 16 and qualitative data was analysed using theoretical thematic analysis.

Chapter 4: This chapter presents data analysis, presentation, and discussion of findings using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents a summary of the dissertation, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents reviewed empirical literature. It covers research studies on throughput and completion in general, students' expectations from postgraduate education, factors influencing throughput and success rates, barriers to students' success, the need for a support system, success stories and challenges in student support problems. During the literature search, multiple electronic databases were searched using keywords such as postgraduate education "AND" student support, graduate studies "AND" throughput, studying "AND" abroad, studying abroad "AND" challenges.

The following databases were consulted: ERIC via EBSCOhost, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition via EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Medline via ebscohost, SA ePublications via SABINET online, Academic search complete via ebscohost and the TDNet Journal Portal of the Research Libraries Consortium. There was a general scarcity of literature on student support at postgraduate level and no literature at all related to student support in nursing education. This could suggest that little research has so far been carried out in this area.

2.2 Drivers for Postgraduate Studies

Students join education institutions with particular expectations and according Tinto (2005), students' expectations are always high. This forms the basis for their success, especially when they join an institution that expects them to succeed. Such expectations according to Goldstein and Kim (2006) include getting more competitive jobs, and greater social mobility both within and across national boundaries. In the USA, Goldstein & Kim (2006) suggest that students are motivated to

study abroad because they expect that the experience gained abroad will get them more competitive jobs in the globally oriented job market. However, Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, and McCune (2008) argue that whilst students who join higher education institutions are faced with the challenge of adapting to the university culture and ways of learning which are new to them, it is also necessary that universities be flexible to adapt to the changing needs of new students so as not to stick to practices that thwart learning and throughput. Such a culture includes among others, learning and teaching approaches.

Brown (2007) posits that students' expectations from the university are shaped by their previous learning experiences. As such, different academic traditions will engender different behaviour and knowledge that are different in nature. This is consistent with the argument by Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping and Todman (2008) who posit that new students were likely to experience problems related to adapting to the new university environment. In this regard, Roman, Cuestas, and Fenollar (2008) argue that others' expectations, including those of teachers are likely to shape and influence students' behaviour (including learning). This is consistent with Tinto's argument (2005) that students were likely to adapt and perform well in environments which expect them to learn and succeed. As much as others' influence on students' learning should not be underrated, Roman, Cuestas, and Fenollar (2008) argue that other's expectations may not synchronise with individual students' personal learning and growth tendencies and are more likely to influence superficial learning and not the complex internalisation that is associated with deep learning and integration of knowledge. Lloyd and Griffiths (2008) posit however that, adult students will often have more defined expectations from the university compared to young students and their learning approaches will therefore be different from those of younger students. Callender (2006) however, argues that the prevailing circumstances such as social patterns, cultural opportunities and the labour market

define who participates in learning. This is consistent with Vermueulen and Schmidt's (2008) argument that education now serves to predict people's occupational success.

A study conducted by Bariso (2008) on factors affecting participation in adult education suggests that the availability of properly trained teachers, suitable learning resources and an appropriate learning environment were some of the factors that motivate adults to learn. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) perceive such an appropriate learning environment as one which emphasises the best educational practices that engage students and make them feel supported and empowered to maximise their learning potential. An appropriate and supportive environment is also described by Astin and Oseguera (2005) and Kember and Leung (2005) as being one where learning is achieved through interaction with peers because interaction among students, their peers and lecturers result into positive learning outcomes in terms of student achievement. Bariso's study (2008) also showed that the most common reasons why adults were motivated to learn were developing a career, obtaining a qualification, getting a new job, and the desire to satisfy personal interests.

Since the current trends in university education tend to focus on the process of learning and learning outcomes and not on teaching methods, Lloyd and Griffiths (2008) argue that there was a need for a balanced partnership between students and lecturers to allow for the opportunity to discuss students' learning needs and the potential barriers to throughput and success lying ahead. On the other hand, Brown (2007) argues that concerning the integration of international students, since countries' education systems draw from national cultures, international students are likely to experience what he termed "a culture shock". According to this author, most of the stress that international students face is due to the difference between the academic traditions in their countries of origin and the countries in which they are currently studying.

According to Jiang (2008), although economic, political, social, cultural, and educational contexts may differ, university education has always been international because the knowledge learnt is universal. The author however maintains that globalisation and the knowledge economy have had great impacts upon the current internationalisation of higher education in a sense that higher education has become a vehicle for the internationalisation and communication as far as knowledge production is concerned. This author also looks at the international picture of higher education from the commercial perspective, positing that the commercialisation of higher education has from both national borders and beyond, endeavoured to generating revenues by exporting (and importing) education, thereby attracting international students to higher education institutions.

Greatrix-White (2007), on the other hand, argues that when it comes to studying abroad, students claim to be able to develop their ability to explore situations from different perspectives, better than they used to. The author also argues that when professionals are educated internationally they are able to work at the international level, influence global issues and further develop cultural awareness and as well, gain a self discovery of their own culture (Greatrix-White, 2007). Becoming culturally competent and developing communication skills, according to Bodenhorn, DeClarla Jackson and Farell (2005), encourages students to understand knowledge as social construction, listen to various perspectives and think critically. This argument is consistent with Paulo Freire's description of the purpose of education as the liberation of people through an awareness of themselves in a social context (Freire, 1972).

However, there are challenges associated with studying abroad and according to Greatrix-White (2007). These include feeling foreign, detachment from family and a sense of disturbance about being removed from daily routines. To some, studying abroad is also associated with risk and the inability to figure out what to do next. According to this author, foreign students also experience

escape, loneliness and isolation, depression, frustration, a feeling of incompetence due to their inability to adapt to new situations. Other challenges according Ferrer de Valero (2001) include having to go through foreign language proficiency tests.

2.3 A Necessity for Throughput and Completion

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2008) suggests that university postgraduate programmes, especially those that combine training and research are considered to offer prestigious academic credentials to their students and to focus on specific work-related fields which can lead to professional advancement. To this end, Mackinnon (2004) argues that as much as higher degree graduates obtain personal benefit, they contribute to the wider society through effecting change in students so that they may contribute to knowledge generation. This, in the author's view, enables higher education to help renew the academic community as well as serve as a marketing tool for the graduates and the knowledge generated. However, Champagne (2006) argued that in the USA, there was a dire need for nurse graduates, quoting the US Department of Health prediction that the US health system would be short of 800,000 nurses by the year 2020. One of the reasons for this predicted nurse shortage, this author argued, was that there were large numbers of nurses nearing retirement in the American healthcare system in the next 20 years without a corresponding number of replacements from the younger generation.

Whereas the education system in developed countries is said to cater for both academic and professional needs, the UNESCO (2008) report indicates that in developing countries education systems still face a challenge of balancing between traditional academic training and professional skills training for the labour market. Among the nursing academics, Champagne (2006) argued that there was a similar concern about a shortage in the nursing faculties due to an ageing professorial

corps, and an inadequate number of young academics joining the nursing faculties. According to the UNESCO (2008), this shortage is also heightened (especially in developing countries) by the loss of the skilled workforce in search of better working conditions and this puts the professions affected in a disadvantaged position in the global society that is knowledge-driven. The need for increased throughput and success as a market-driven demand to fill the gap left by a retiring workforce was reiterated by Austin (2002) who argued that there was an expanding societal demand from academic institutions in terms of the quality and number of graduate output.

Mandew (2003) reiterated the need for increased student throughput and success as a means of fostering student development and lifelong learning in a changing environment. According to Aspin and Chapman (2000), the lifelong learning that results from student success prepares them for the management of their adult lives, leads to the distribution of education throughout students' lives and enhances a fundamental societal transformation.

2.4 Factors Influencing Postgraduate Student Throughput and Success

Ferrer de Valero (2001) suggested that the possibility of increasing throughput and success rates was dependent on both individual student characteristics and institutional factors. The student characteristics he highlighted include demographics such as age and gender, financial support, motivation and academic ability. This is consistent with Hopkins' (2008) argument that even non academic variables such as students' demographic characteristics such as age and gender had an impact on student achievement. Institutional influences included the size of the graduate programme in terms of student numbers, the availability and type of student support, relationships among students and between students and academic staff and graduate policies and practices. Such practices according to Bunting (2004) include the academic programmes and teaching methods that need to change in order to match the demands of the transformed higher education system.

Reporting on the concern about low throughput rates in the Australian Higher Education system, Martin, Maclachlan and Karmel, (2001) outlined the factors affecting throughput and success rates as age, gender, field of study, mode of study (full time versus part time) and the institution attended. These authors argued that in a cohort of postgraduate students in Australian universities from 1992 to 1999, postgraduate students under the age of 25 years registered higher completion rates; female students were equally or even more likely to complete than males; completion rates were higher in science oriented programmes and fulltime students had a higher completion rate than their part time counterparts. Similar results on factors influencing postgraduate student throughput were highlighted by Seagram, Gould and Pyke, (1998) who reported in their study that differences in time to degree and completion rates were evident only between programmes but not between gender and age.

2.5 Barriers to Student Success

Rochford (2003) argued that it is expected worldwide that 75% of the Masters students embarking on dissertations under research supervisors will not graduate. In one of the South African university departments, this author argues that a low Master's degree throughput rate has been registered for the previous seven consecutive years. Similar concerns were raised by Lessing and Schulze (2002) who argued that completion rates among postgraduate students were low, citing only 10% completion of master's dissertations at one South African university.

Among the barriers to increased throughput and completion rates in postgraduate students, Ngcongco (2000) argued that a number of students enrol into postgraduate programmes without sufficient background and experience in research and life skills. According to Hailikari, Katajavouri and Lindblom-Ylanne (2008), student throughput as well as curriculum design and instruction are hampered by students' lack of important prior knowledge and skills when they join

the higher education system. Based on the understanding that the quality and quantity of prior knowledge positively influence knowledge acquisition and /or processing and the capacity to apply higher order cognitive problem solving skills, lack of prior knowledge will impinge on throughput and success rates.

Drawing from the South African higher education context, Lessing and Schulze (2002) delineated a multitude of problems encountered in postgraduate supervision that could hamper postgraduate student throughput and success. They argued that while South African Higher Education Institutions were engaged in the transformation process, an increasing number of postgraduate students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds accessed higher education. Bunting (2004) maintains that this weakness in the admission procedure ushers into higher education, students who are ill prepared to take on the courses offered, leading to low throughput rates. Lessing and Schulze (2002) argue that these ill prepared students also come with limited experience with regard to searching for information from the library, data bases and independent study, at the time when lecturers are preoccupied with the demand to increase access and the changing curricular designs and modes of delivery, leaving students to fend for themselves and this impedes student success.

In the USA, Ferrer de Valero (2001) argued that the time to complete a Doctoral degree continued to increase from an average of about 6.6 years in 1983 to 7.1 years in 1993 and the time lag between a Bachelor's degree and the Doctoral degree increased from an average of 9.8 to 10.5 years. The author predicted that this course of events was likely to continue unchecked and result in the reduced supply of a skilled workforce. Ferrer de Valero (2001) attributed this deterioration to the fact that funding graduate education is expensive and that reduced national resources for higher education affects students' ability to complete their degrees in time. The overbearing cost of

higher on students in South Africa is also highlighted by Bunting (2004) who argued that many students from disadvantaged backgrounds are unable to meet the costs of the higher education institutions and drop out on financial grounds.

Ferrer de Valero (2001) argued that empirical evidence has proved that institutional factors such as requirements for graduate study were a major cause for delayed completion of graduate degrees. Such requirements could be foreign language proficiency exams, registration with professional bodies and verification and validation of foreign qualifications, and field research. However, McMillan (2007) argued that at times the situation may be aggravated by certain university environments that alienate students in a sense that students find a mismatch between their expectations and experiences, and the university culture. In this author's view, this chasm that exists between the students' lived experiences in their former institutions and workplace, and the university culture of what is acceptable for successful learning to take place leads to low throughput and success rates. To this end, Hailikari, Katajavuori and Lindblom (2008) argue that when such a difference exists between the expected students' prior knowledge and their actual knowledge base when they join the institution, the quality of learning is at stake and this will hamper student throughput rates.

Eggens, van der Werf and Bosker (2008) argue that students joining higher education institutions are faced with challenges of adaptation between their personal and academic environments that necessitate great personal adjustment to cope. The extent to which students adjust between personal and environmental constructs will determine their outcomes in terms of throughput and success or failure. Eggens, van der Werf and Bosker (2008) delineate the determinants of student outcomes into two categories namely, contextual determinants and student related determinants. Contextual determinants include curriculum design and instruction and assessment methods while

rates are due to a lack of preparation before students enrol into their programmes, or because of a lack of academic and/or social support, efforts at predicting factors that influence student success should only be embarked on if educational institutions are to be able to more effectively bridge gaps in student support programmes and increase throughput and success. Brown (2007), on the other hand argues that due to differences in academic traditions as earlier stated, foreign students are very likely to experience academic challenges due to their failure to understand and to communicate at the academic cultural level that is acceptable in the institution.

In order to increase student throughput and success, Jones, Blatchford and Ashcroft (1997) reiterate the need for student support services in order to help students overcome difficulties relating to coping with the new environment, some of which might not only impact on studies but also on students' family and social aspects of their lives. To better understand student support, Tait (2000) outlined the major functions of student support as cognitive, affective and systematic. This is consistent with Christie et al. (2008) who argued that learning needs to be looked at not only as a cognitive process but also a reflexive and emotional process that includes deconstructing earlier learning experiences to be able to adapt to new environments by integrating new learning experiences. It is against this background that the author argues that learning engages the whole person, not just their cognitive dimension but also the rational, objective, intuitive, emotional, and social dimensions.

Whereas Tait (2000) suggests that by performing its cognitive function, student support should develop learning through the mediation of standard elements of the course material and learning resources for individual students, affective support implies creating an environment that promotes student commitment and self esteem, while systemic support refers to establishing administrative processes and information management systems that are effective, transparent and student friendly (Tait, 2000). However, Case (2008) argues that such a supportive and friendly atmosphere that

would have otherwise helped students to integrate into the new university environment is constrained by university routines which position students in a certain particular way that renders them subservient and powerless in their relationship with lecturers. This author views this practice to be an alienating and disempowering experience that not only defines how students integrate into the university, but also impinges on their throughput and success.

Roman, Cuestas, and Fenollar (2008) argue that fostering students' self esteem improves their deep learning and reduces surface learning. These authors posit that increasing students' self esteem helps because students with high esteem were likely to endure, even if they faced challenges of failure in the beginning and were less prone to feelings of incompetence and self doubt. In the end, this is likely to result in better academic achievement, leading to increased throughput and success. In an effort to protect their self esteem, Covington and Omelich (cited in Roman, Cuestas, and Fenollar (2008) however argue that some students prefer to attribute their low academic performance to the little effort they invested in learning rather than on their inability and poor preparation. According to these authors, this argument is based on the assumption that poor performance attributable to minimum effort invested in learning was less damaging to self-esteem than poor performance due to incapacity.

To this end, Jones, Blatchford and Ashcroft (1997) suggest that students get to effectively learn when there are good support systems in place to help them cope with the transition between their current academic environment and their past experiences. Among prerequisite factors for student throughput and success, Kuh et al. (2005) suggest student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompting feedback, devoting much time to learning, addressing student expectations, respect for diverse talents and multiple ways of learning, and institutional environments that are perceived by students to be inclusive and conducive for learning. This view is shared by Jones, Blatchford and Ashcroft (1997) who suggest that soliciting students' feedback

and involving them in academic issues is likely to boost their morale, self confidence and motivation, which in the end may enhance their academic integration.

Tinto (2003) raised similar issues which he called the five conditions which are necessary for student throughput. These include expectations, support, feedback, involvement and learning. In this regard, he argues that expectations are a condition for success because students are most likely to persist and graduate in environments that expect them to succeed and that provide the academic, social and personal support to do so. On a similar note, Tinto (2003) further argued that settings that provide frequent and early feedback about students' performance, involve students as valued members of the institution and that foster learning are more likely to increase student throughput and success. Conversely, Brown (2007) argues that since students might often not only need to consult their supervisors with academic and research problems but also to try to justify their lack of academic progress with explanations about their personal problems, supervisors will also need to be prepared for the dual role of academic advisor and counsellor. These will require them to acquire receptive and empathetic listening skills in order to respond to students' personal problems and juggle between academic, mentoring and counselling roles.

Astin (1999) suggested that research has proven that peer group support is a great help and recommends that research be carried out to ascertain whether peer support can work at university level as a means of enhancing student involvement in the learning process. Similarly, Bingham and Daniels (1998) re-affirm the importance of having peer support groups because they facilitate team work and offer personal and social support and development. According to these authors, the teacher's role in the facilitation of student peer groups is crucial. Bingham and Daniels (1998) list quick academic and social integration, the ability to cope with the education system, a feeling of self esteem and value among peer support groups as some of the benefits of peer group support

mechanisms. This view is echoed by Eggen, van der Werf and Bosker (2008) who argue that peer support groups help increase self esteem and self worth among students and this helps in increasing student throughput and success. These authors posit that the quality and quantity of students' relationships within the context of peer support networks influence academic achievement through student motivation.

In his article on student involvement, Astin (1999) argues that for any given curriculum to achieve its intended effects, sufficient student effort and energy must be invested to bring about the desired learning outcome. This view is shared by Frost (1991) who suggests that student academic involvement is a major factor not only in terms of academic achievement, but also because it promotes student satisfaction and a sense of belonging. According to Astin and Oseguera (2005), student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. From that perspective, a highly involved student is one who invests his/her time and energy in studying, participates actively in student activities and interacts frequently with fellow students. On the other hand, according to Jones, Blatchford and Ashcroft (1997), student involvement not only benefits students but also the institution, since student feedback may shed light on problems with the academic programme that might call for institutional research to find solutions.

From another perspective, Ngongo (2001) argued that student support especially at Masters and Doctoral level needed to go beyond just increasing throughput and success rates and move to a much broader context of viewing student support in terms of supervision as a means of transformative leadership. According to the author, this would empower students as researchers at the end of their programme and enhance self esteem and capacity building in graduates and that this could be achieved in a number of ways such as inviting, guiding and supporting them to

participate in activities such as presenting papers at conferences, participation in community projects and research (Ngcongong, 2000 & 2001). However, Brown (2007) suggests that in cases where research supervision involves international students who are studying far from home, the research supervisor might be the only contact person students have and will be expected to deal with more than just the students' academic queries but will also play a parental and advisory role.

2.7 Succeeding in Student Support Programmes

In instances where the attempt to increase throughput and success in graduate programmes have worked, it has been attributed to continuous support on daily basis especially in research where an advisory or mentor role was taken in contrast to merely a supervision role. According to Glyn, Saucer, and Miller (2003), early prediction of success or the lack of it is important in order to put in place effective support mechanisms. Rochford (2003) argues that whenever lecturers respond to students' request for close personal assistance throughout their study period, students' throughput rate is increased. Ngcongong (2001) asserted that in instances where the support and supervisory role of teachers have yielded success, it was attributable to supervisors' behaviour such as a willingness to lead students to a mastery of all research stages, their commitment to guiding students through regular communication, availability for students' consultation, approachability, and building trust with students. In order to harness any of the student support mechanisms highlighted above, Swail and Austin (2004) maintain that an equilibrium must be established between cognitive, social, and institutional factors, all of which take place within the student in order to provide a solid foundation for student growth, development, and persistence.

2.8 Challenges in Student Support Programmes

According to Lotkosowski, Robbins and Noeth (2004), before embarking on any student support effort, educational institutions need to look for ways of identifying students who need help and

what kind of support they might need in order to accelerate and monitor their learning and throughput. These ways would address both the academic and non academic factors associated with student attrition. This view is also shared by Seidman (2005) who asserts that for intervention programmes to be effective, they ought to be powerful enough to cause change. To this end, Swail (2006) proposes a list of issues that ought to be considered and these include understanding the nature of the problem, reasons why students leave, steps already taken by the concerned institution to address the issue, how effective past support strategies have been, what strategies are worth considering, availability of evidence that there exists in the institution significant support to address student success, and understanding the institutional change process.

Seidman (2005) suggests that student development issues, financial issues and obligation to the students admitted to the university were the major concerns for student support programmes. He identified effects of attrition as personal trauma, familial concerns, and employment difficulties. Ngcongco (2001) however, argued that teachers are challenged in the supervisory support role by their inadequate awareness of students' needs, limited resources, a limited capacity to provide the required level of supervision for student success, and time constraints at the hands of both supervisors and students. Brown (2007) argues that it should be expected that students arrive at some functional level of academic excellence after they are done with the coursework component of their postgraduate programme and most especially after several meetings with their supervisors. Contrary to this understanding, Ngcongco (2001) argues that from the students' perspective, certain behaviours on the part of research supervisors such as delays in returning submitted work, giving unspecific feedback, inapproachability and resistance to divergent views, hampers academic throughput and success.

According to Brown (2007), the difference in expectations that may exist between research supervisors and their students also poses a challenge in a sense that in universities which expect students to be independent and creative learners, lecturers and supervisors will be required to model this independency into the students. This may not always be possible for the lecturers and supervisors due to time constraints and the teaching load before them and as a result, they decide to leave students on their own at an early stage. On the other hand, Brown (2007) further argues that in cases where students often require more consultation hours than their supervisors are willing to give, students who hail from an academic culture with bureaucracies will find it difficult to approach their supervisor and the latter will tend to assume that their students do not need help. This will in the end hamper students' throughput and success.

However, Mackinnon (2004) characterises good quality supervision as that which creates the right conditions for the creation of good scholars and scholarship. This author suggests that improving the practice of research supervision ought to be tackled at in three levels, namely the individual level, departmental level and at institutional level. At individual level, Mackinnon (2004) argues that a communication document needs to be drawn up that will not only serve as a reference frame but will also set down the student-supervisor responsibilities and expectations of each other.

At departmental level, the author suggests a formal supervisory group, while at institutional level an accredited formal training course is suggested for members of staff embarking on new supervision roles of postgraduate students for the first time. As much as students may be expected to develop independence of mind and creativity, Brown (2007) argues that students, most especially international students who are not familiar with the institution's academic culture, find it difficult and this impedes their throughput and success. Brown (2007) argues that international students usually present more than just academic problems but also have financial, social and emotional problems and these have an impact on the academic performance.

2.9 Conclusion

Most research studies on student throughput and success have suggested that factors inherent to both the student and educational institutions are key influences in defining the level of throughput and success. Champagne (2006), Austin (2002), Mandew (2003) and Aspin and Chapman (2000) have reiterated the need for increased student throughput and success, not only in terms of securing an advanced qualification but also as a gateway to social responsibility such as replacing an ageing workforce and providing the needed skills for the labour market and social transformation.

A number of barriers to an increased throughput rate were however highlighted by many authors. Some of these barriers are inadequate academic preparation of students, a high delivery cost of postgraduate education, prerequisite requirements such as foreign language proficiency exams, registration with professional bodies and verification and validation of foreign qualifications, and field research. Some university environments may also alienate students in a sense that students find a mismatch between their expectations and experiences and the university culture (Bunting, 2004; Lessing and Schulze, 2002; Ferrer de Valero, 2001; and McMillan, 2007).

Some challenges also related to studying abroad impede international students abroad. The diverse nature of student backgrounds and the existing barriers have called for support mechanisms which some authors view as far reaching and go beyond the immediate need to complete a postgraduate degree to the acquisition of life skills such as transformative leadership (Ngcongo, 2000 & 2001; Aspin and Chapman, 2000; and Mandew, 2003). As much as some successes have been registered in the bid to increase throughput and success rates, Ngcongo (2001) asserts that some problems such as lack of the necessary resources and time constraints still remain a hindrance to successfully implement programmes to improve student throughput and success.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology used in this study including the research paradigm and approach followed, study design, research setting, study population, sampling, data collection, validity, reliability and trustworthiness, data analysis, ethical considerations, data management, and limitations to the study.

3.2 Research Paradigm and Approach

A mixed methods paradigm was adopted in this particular study. A paradigm according to Guba and Lincoln (cited in Plack, 2005) is a set of basic beliefs that represents a worldview. According to these authors, it also defines the nature of the world and the individual's place within it, guides action and contains the investigator's assumptions about the research methodology and how the investigator defines and comes to grips with truth and reality.

Greene and Caracelli (2003) outline different streams within the mixed methods paradigm in research as dialecticism, an expansive and inclusive stream, a pragmatic and context driven stream, and a concept driven stream. Within the confines of this study, the mixed methods paradigm was employed from a pragmatist perspective. A pragmatic mixed methods paradigm is that which is premised on the assumption that true knowledge claims are those that are practical, contextually responsive and consequential, taking cognisance of the demands, opportunities and constraints of the situation in which the study is carried out (Greene & Caracelli, 2003).

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in this study. The choice of mixed methods in this study was based on the understanding that it helps to explore the complex concepts of social interest such as care and human behaviour that cannot be explained by statistical patterns and generalisations or narratives alone (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The concept of human behaviour that is manifested in student throughput and success forms the core of this study's investigation. Burns and Grove (2005), and Saks and Allsop (2007) argue that a mixed methods approach has the advantage of triangulating findings from more than one method to overcome potential flaws that may arise from the use of a single method.

3.3 Study Design

Mouton (2006) defines a research design as a set of guidelines to be followed in addressing a research problem. As such, the design is expected to guide the researcher in planning and implementing the study in a manner that is very likely to maximise chances of attaining the intended outcome (Burns & Grove, 2005). This study used exploratory and descriptive research designs. According to Mouton (2006), exploratory research designs are used with the aim of establishing facts by gathering data to determine whether patterns exist between the data sets collected. Descriptive designs on the other hand seek to depict factual data and empirical generalisations and narratives by describing phenomena as they truly exist. This is what was done in this study.

3.4 Research Setting

The study was conducted in the School of Nursing at University of KwaZulu-Natal. The School of Nursing falls under the Faculty of Health Sciences in the College of Health Sciences. According to the Faculty of Health Sciences Handbook (2008), postgraduate programmes offered by the School of Nursing are Honours, Masters and PhD degree programmes both on a fulltime and a part time

basis. The faculty handbook states that the Honours degree stretches over a two year period on a part time basis and one year on a fulltime basis. The Master's degree on the other hand is offered over a one year period on a fulltime basis and 2 years on a part time basis while a PhD fulltime programme stretches over three years on full time basis and five years on part time basis.

3.5 Study Population

Population refers to the whole set of individuals or elements that meet the researcher's set criteria of selection (Burns & Grove, 2005). The target population for this study was 83 registered postgraduate nursing students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. According to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Fact Site, (2008) and the School of Nursing records (2008), 83 students registered for postgraduate courses in the school of nursing. Of this total, 3 were registered for the Honours programme, 64 for the Coursework Master's programme, 3 for a Masters degree by research and 13 for a PhD.

3.6 Sampling

Burns and Grove (2005) define sampling as a selection of elements within a population that are considered to accurately reflect the population studied in relation to the variables under investigation and other factors that may influence those variables.

Sampling for Quantitative Methods: For the quantitative aspect of this study, a convenience non-probability sampling technique was used to select a sample of participants. In this type of sampling, participants were selected on the basis of their availability at the time of data collection as expressed by Burns and Grove (2005). Katzellenbogen, Joubert and Abdool Karim (2005) and Burns and Grove, (2005) criticise this technique for its inability to eliminate biases. In this study,

such biases were minimised by including every available member of the study population to maximise representativity.

Sampling for Qualitative Methods: Qualitative data were collected through two focus group interviews; one consisted of local students and another one comprised of international students. The researcher believed that soliciting data from these groups would provide a better understanding of specific issues related to each group. Convenience sampling was used to selected participants in each group. The researcher approached those students who were on campus attending lecturers. Most of the coursework postgraduate students attended their lectures on Wednesdays and Fridays while individual schedules were arranged with Masters by research and PhD students.

According to Green (2007), the use of focus groups has a number of advantages some of which are that a focus group may assume more control over the data collection process than a single interviewee at a time. Using focus groups also allows for the diversity of views to be studied and allows participants to structure their discussion in their own terms as opposed to the investigator's views. These are likely to minimise the investigator's bias. Within this study, focus groups provided consistent and detailed information that individual interviews would have provided.

3.7 Data Collection

3.7.1 Data collection Tools

This study started by first collecting quantitative data and then qualitative data from participants. Quantitative data were collected using a self reported questionnaire which was developed by the

researcher (See Appendix 1). The questionnaire consisted of 4 parts that corresponded to the major concepts in the conceptual framework. The first section looked at students' entry characteristics, the second looked at students' expectations from postgraduate education at the university and what the university expects from them, the third looked at both the university and student engagement, while the fourth section was concerned with student outcomes.

Qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were guided by four main questions and probing questions were used for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (See Appendix 2).

3.7.2 Data Collection Process

To gain access to the study participants, a list of registered postgraduate students was obtained from the School of Nursing. Lecture timetables were consulted to identify the days when most of the postgraduate students would be on campus. The researcher also used the university e-mail system (GroupWise) address book to search for all the registered postgraduate nursing students' e-mail addresses (which corresponded to their registered student number) and sent e-mails to them explaining the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate. Prior arrangements were made with lecturers to have access to students in their free time, especially during break time. Postgraduate students were invited to participate in the study after explaining the purpose of the study and the rights of the participants. Suitable times were then negotiated with participants for data collection. A meeting with coursework postgraduate students was arranged during the days when they came to the University for Lectures. Separate convenient schedules were arranged with research and PhD students.

Data were collected in two stages. During the first stage, questionnaires were administered to all participants, while during the second stage two focus group interviews were conducted. One focus group comprised international students while the second group included local postgraduate students. The selection of these two focus groups was based on the understanding that these were the only highly diverse and relatively large distinct groups within the study population. The international students group was diverse in the sense that it consisted of students from different backgrounds from within and beyond Africa, while the local group was diverse in terms of age, educational background, family responsibilities and work environments.

The data collection process took four weeks. The first week was used to invite study participants; the second and third weeks were used to administer questionnaires to different groups within the study population, while the fourth week was used to conduct focus group interviews. During data collection, convenient private venues were selected to meet the study participants. Each questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete after which participants put them in a secure box which had been provided. For focus group interviews, convenient venues were selected to meet the interviewees. The identity of the investigator, the purpose, and nature of the interview were explained in an introductory note. The interviews began by posing general questions about the interviewees' experiences with an interlude of probing questions in between. Although each interview was audio recorded, the investigator had an assistant who took note of particular proceedings of interest such as facial expressions and the participants' mood, which were likely to escape the researcher's attention. Each focus group interview lasted about one hour.

Given the sensitivity of this study and the outcome of the focus group interviews that reflected an atmosphere of venting and an expression of the participants' emotions, the researcher also decided

to verify some of the participants' views by interviewing other members of the university community who, in the researcher's view would bring more insight into the controversial issues expressed by the study participants. Among those other interviewees were some members of staff of the International Student Support Office (ISSO) and the university main library at the Howard College Campus.

3.8 Validity and Reliability for Quantitative Methods

Long and Johnson (2000), and Graneheim and Lundman (2003) posit that validity and reliability serve as a means of ensuring the rigour of the research process and research findings. The validity of research tools is defined as a determination of the extent to which the tool reflects the abstract construct under investigation (Burns & Grove, 2005). Within this study, content and construct validity were ensured by checking items in the data collection tools against the study objectives and concepts in the conceptual framework to ascertain whether they measured all the elements to be investigated. The data collection tools were also reviewed by a panel of experts in research and in nursing education. To ensure external validity, the sample used for this study included all the available members of the study population. This could allow for generalisation of the study findings in similar situations.

Burns and Grove (2005) define reliability as a measure of the consistency obtained by using a particular instrument. As a means of testing reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was ascertained by use of a test re-test method. The questionnaire was administered to five postgraduate students two consecutive times to test the consistency of their responses to the questionnaire. These five students were not included in the final study. Items in the questionnaire

that were answered differently in the two sessions were restructured in order to obtain consistent results.

3.9 Trustworthiness for Qualitative Methods

While the terms “validity and validity” are applicable to quantitative research approaches, Riege (2003) argues that they are less relevant in qualitative studies and in their stead suggests credibility for internal validity, transferability for external validity, confirmability for construct validity, and dependability and trustworthiness for reliability as the applicable terms in qualitative research. Cresswell and Miller (2000) also proposed three means or “lenses” through which trustworthiness can be assessed and these include the researcher himself through triangulation, disconfirming evidence and researcher reflexivity; the lens of study participants through member checking, prolonged engagement with participants and collaboration with study participants, and “the lens of people external to the study” through audit trails, and thick and rich descriptions.

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, member checking, and thick and rich description approaches were employed. Through member checking, the first transcripts, themes and categories from the interviews and the analysis thereof were sent to participants for them to validate the data generated. Further additions and clarifications were incorporated in the final analysis. Some of the qualitative data generated from student focus groups were also verified through disconfirming evidence by interviewing some members of staff in the International Student Support Office (ISSO) and the library.

Through thick and rich description, a detailed description of the study context and participants’ characteristics was also made to provide more insight into the study.

Creswell and Miller (2000) described member checking as a vital means of ascertaining credibility in qualitative research because it seeks participants' validation of the data collected. Thick and rich description is attained through the description of the study setting, participants and themes under discussion in rich detail, to provide readers with a semblance of an experience of events as they occurred (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

3.10 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was coded and entered for analysis using the SPSS for Windows software, version 13. Data were presented using pie charts, bar graphs and frequency tables. Descriptive statistics using frequencies, mean and standard deviation were used.

Qualitative data generated from focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim, open-coded and analysed using thematic content analysis. Themes and categories were formed to group similar ideas. These were then analysed in relation to the variables under investigation to draw more meaning for the study.

3.11 Ethical Considerations and Data Management

Ethical approval was sought from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Ethics Committee and then permission to collect data was sought from the School of Nursing. To obtain the study participants' approval, written informed consent was sought from them. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were not required to provide their identification details to ensure anonymity of participants. They were informed of their freedom to withdraw at anytime if they no longer wanted to participate in the study. The Study did not carry any potential harm and this was explained to the participants. To ensure confidentiality in this study, the questionnaires used for collecting

quantitative data did not bear participants' identification details but just a code for purposes of data entry.

Data from the study were used for the purpose of completing this study; crude data were guarded confidentially in a locked place during the process of analysis and report writing after which it will be kept in the supervisor's office for a period of 5 years at the end of which they will be disposed of in fire. Analysed data were saved in computer files that are protected by a password that was only known to the investigator.

3.12 Conclusion

This study used a mixed methods research paradigm with both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and descriptive and exploratory study designs. The research setting used in the current study was the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Nursing, using the 83 postgraduate nursing students for the year 2008 as the study's target population. Convenient sampling was used to select the study participants, and a questionnaire and interview guide administered to participants during their convenient times. Ethical research norms were respected in this study and measures were taken to ensure validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. There were however some limitations to the conduct of this study, which are highlighted herein. Details about how the data obtained from the study were treated are provided in chapter four which presents the research findings.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of findings obtained from a study that was conducted on postgraduate nursing students in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. To reiterate, the purpose of the study was to explore and describe the mechanisms used to increase throughput and success rates in postgraduate nursing programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The results from quantitative data are presented first and are followed by findings from the qualitative data. For the quantitative part, descriptive statistics using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation (S.D) were used to report findings. Findings from qualitative data are presented in conceptual themes. The last part of this chapter presents a summary of findings and discussion of results.

4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

4.2.1 Sample realisation

This study targeted 83 students registered for postgraduate nursing programmes in the year 2008 and attained a participation rate of 80.7% (n=67). Only 67 (80.7%) completed and returned the questionnaire.

4.2.2 Demographic data

Age

The findings in this study revealed that 30 (44.8%) of the 67 participants were aged between 36 and 45 years and 18 (26.9%) were between the ages 25 and 35 years. Sixteen (23.9%) were above

45 years and only 3 (4.5%) were below 25 years (See Table 1). The standard deviation was 0.826 which means there was a skewed distribution.

Table 1: Participants' age distribution

Age Category	Frequency	Percent
25 years old and below	3	4.5%
26-35 years old	18	26.9%
36-45 years old	30	44.8%
Above 45 years old	16	23.9%
Total	67	100%

Gender and marital status

The majority of the participants in this study were females (n=59; 88.1%). Males were only 8 (11.9%). Only 37 (55.2%) of the female participants were married and 17 (23.4%) were single. Five (7.5%) of the female participants did not complete this section of the questionnaire. The standard deviation was 0.36. Of the 8 males that participated in this study, 4 (50%) were married and 4 (50%) indicated that they were not married (See Table 2).

Table 2: Participants' gender and marital status distribution

Marital Status	Gender			
	Female		Male	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Married	37	55.2%	4	6%
Single	17	23.4%	4	6%
Not Stated	5	7.5%	0	0%
Total	59	88.1%	8	11.9%

Dependants at home

Out of 67 participants, 55 (82.1%) indicated that they had dependants at home to cater for, 10 (14.9%) indicated that they didn't, while 2 (3%) did not complete this section of the questionnaire as indicated in table 3. (S.D = 0.36). This standard deviation value indicates that the responses were widely distributed within the study population.

Table 3: Presence of dependants at home

Presence of dependants at home	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	55	82.1%
No	10	14.9%
Not answered	2	3%
Total	67	100%

Employment status and type

Based on the above item which showed that the majority of the participants funded their own studies, the study findings showed that the highest percentage of participants 65 (97%) were employed (See Table 4). Only 2 (3%) were unemployed. About 62 (92.5%) of the participants had full time employment and 3 (4.5%) were employed part time (S.D = 0.394).

Table 4: Participants' status and type of employment

Type of Employment	Employment Status			
	Employed (n=65; 97%)		Unemployed (n=2; 3%)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Full Time	62	92.5%	0	0%
Part Time	3	4.5%	0	0%
Total	65	97%	2	3%

Working experience

The majority of participants, that is 51(76.1%) had working experience of 5 years or more, 14 (20.9%) had working experience of less than 5 years, while only 2 (3%) had no working experience at all, as reflected in Table 5.

Table 5: Participants' length of working experience

Working Experience	Frequency	Percentage
No Experience	2	3%
Less than 5 years	14	20.9%
5 years and More	51	76.1%
Total	67	100%

Relationship between participants' employment and current studies

Establishing the relationship between participant's employment and current studies was aimed at understanding the relevance of the programmes offered to the participants' careers. Out of 67 participants, 61 (91%) reported that their current studies were related to what they were doing in their current or previous area of employment, 5 (7.5%) indicated that it was not related, while 1 participant (1.5%) indicated that this question did not apply to them (S.D = 0.354). This standard deviation value indicates that this variable was widely distributed within the study population.

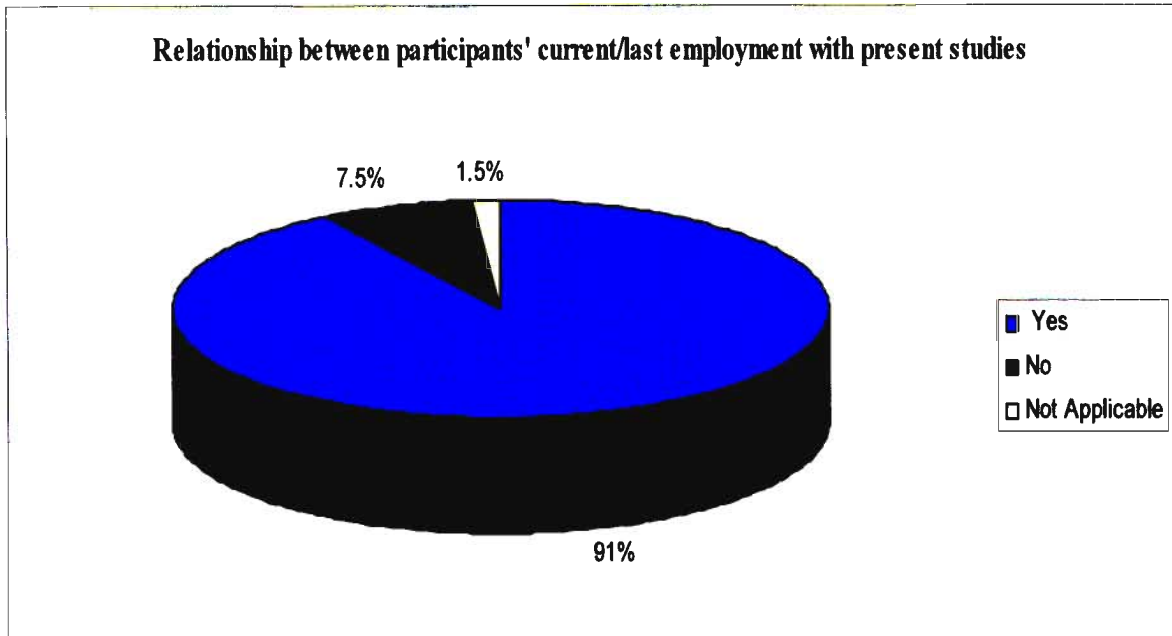


Figure 1: Relationship between participants' employment & current studies

Paid leave versus unpaid leave and mode of study

Most of the participants in this study were not on paid study leave. The results showed that out of 67 participants, only 24 (35.8%) consisting of 16 (23.8 %) fulltime students and 8 (12%) part time students were on paid study leave. The study findings also revealed that 43 participants (64.2%) were fulltime working students. Furthermore, the majority of the study participants (n=43; 64.2%) in this study were part time students while 24 (35.8%) were full time students as reflected in Table 6 and the standard deviation was 0.483.

Table 6: Participants' study mode and type of leave offered

Type of leave	Study Mode			
	Fulltime		Part time	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Paid	16	23.8%	8	12%
Unpaid	8	12%	35	52.2%
Total	24	35.8%	43	64.2%

Residency type

The item on residency type was aimed at establishing whether the participants were South African permanent residents or were holders of study permits. Data showed that the majority of the participants in this study were permanent South Africa residents (n=49; 73.1%) and 18 (26.9%) were on a study permit (See Table 7).

Table 7: Participants' type of residency

Type of residency	Frequency	Percent
Permanent Resident of the Republic of South Africa	49	73.1%
Study Permit Holder	18	26.9%
Total	67	100%

Study level

The participants in this study included students from the BN Honours programme, Coursework Masters, Masters by research and PhD students. The findings reflected that the majority were doing coursework masters (n=52; 77.65%), seven (10.4%) were PhD students, 5 (7.5%) were

Masters by research students, while 3 (4.5%) were BN Honours degree students. (S.D = 0.698).

See table 8.

Table 8: Participants' study level

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Honours Degree	3	4.5%
Coursework Masters	52	77.6%
Masters by Research	5	7.5%
PhD	7	10.4%
Total	67	100%

Sources of funds

The study findings revealed that the majority of the respondents were self funded. Out of 67 participants, 46 (68.7%) were self sponsored, 17 (25.3%) were sponsored by their government, 2 (3%) were on the university financial aid system, 1 (1.5%) was sponsored by the employer while 1 (1.5%) had fee remission (See Figure 2). The standard deviation was 1.5.

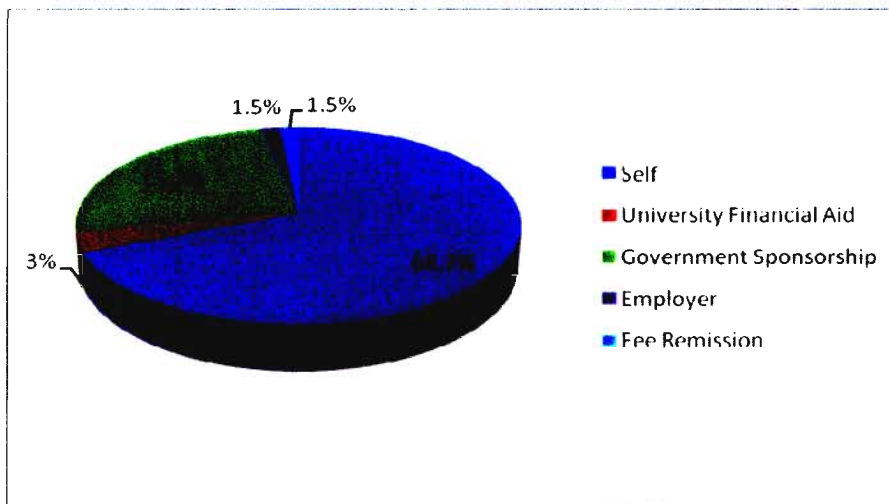


Figure 2: Source of participants' funds

Sufficiency of funds for basic immediate educational needs

Thirty seven (55.2%) of the total number of participants (67) considered their funding to be insufficient for their immediate educational needs whereas 30 (44%) of the participants indicated that their funding was enough to cover their basic educational needs, see Figure 3.

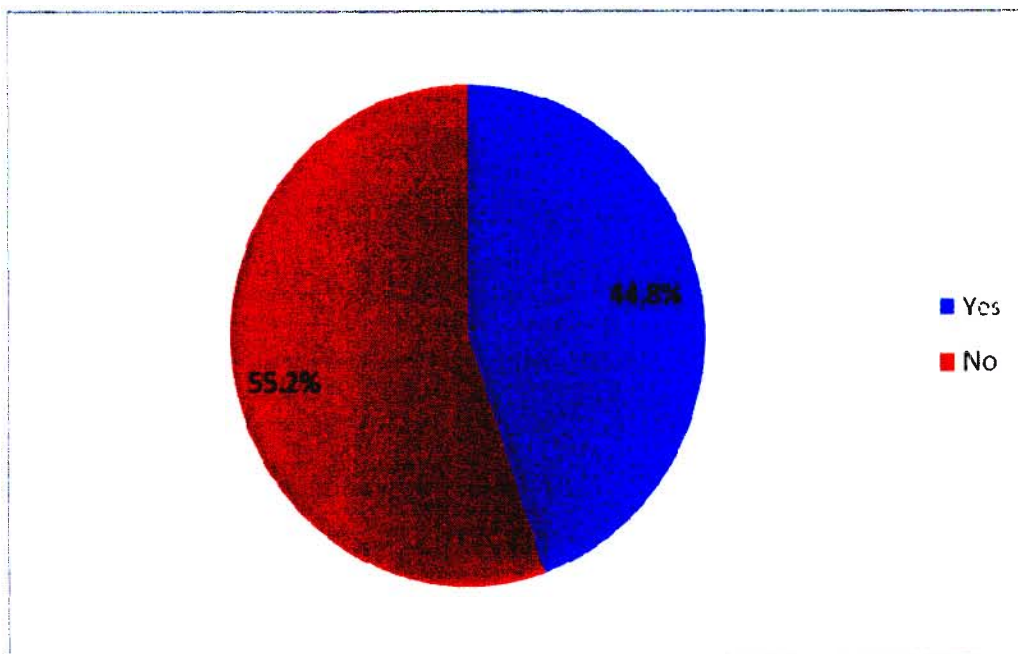


Figure 3: Sufficiency of participants' funds for basic educational needs

4.2.3 Meeting of expectations

Findings from the quantitative data suggested that the programme met the expectations of the majority of the participants. Out of 67 participants, 42 (62.7%) indicated that the programme was meeting their expectations, while 25 (37.3%) indicated that the programme was not meeting their expectations (See Figure 4).

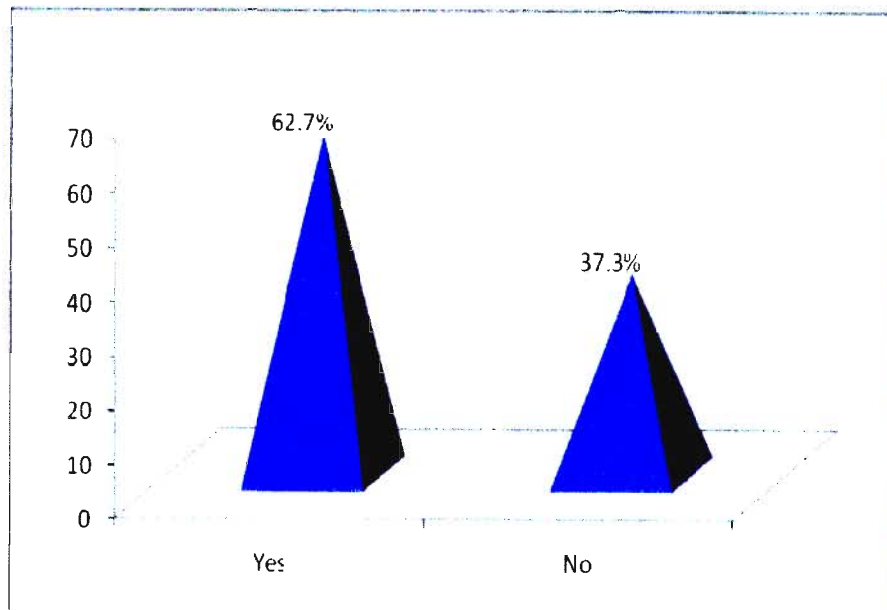


Figure 4: Whether participants' expectations were met

Regarding the university's expectations from the students, the study findings suggested that more than half of the participants understood what the university expected from them (n=37; 55.2%) while 30 (44.8%) reported that they didn't understand what was expected of them, as shown in Figure 5.

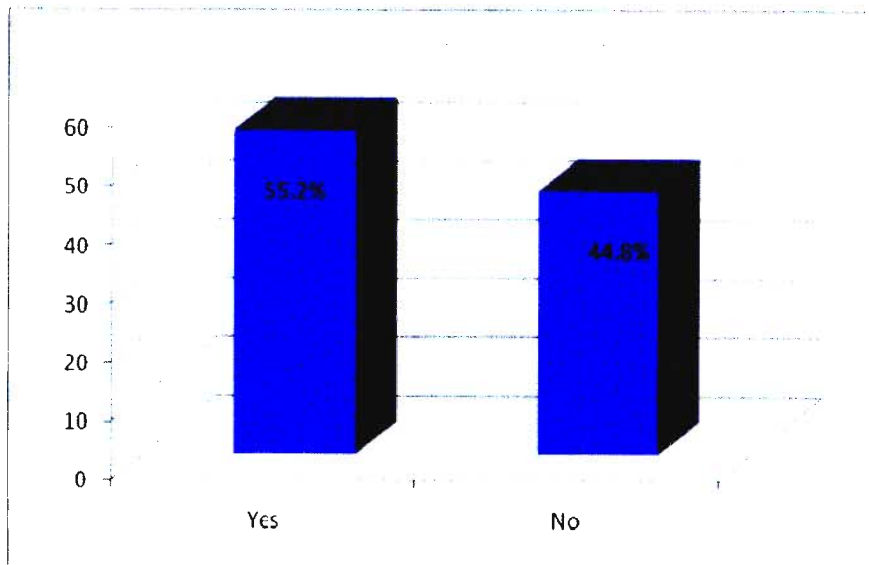


Figure 5: Participants' understanding of what is expected of them

4.2.4 Existing support mechanisms

The support mechanisms in this section are divided into support during the pre-enrolment phase and support during the institutional engagement phase; that is during the teaching-learning phase.

Support during the pre-enrolment phase

Out of 67 participants, 50 (74.6%) indicated that there was someone to help them regarding information about the existing programmes and the application process.

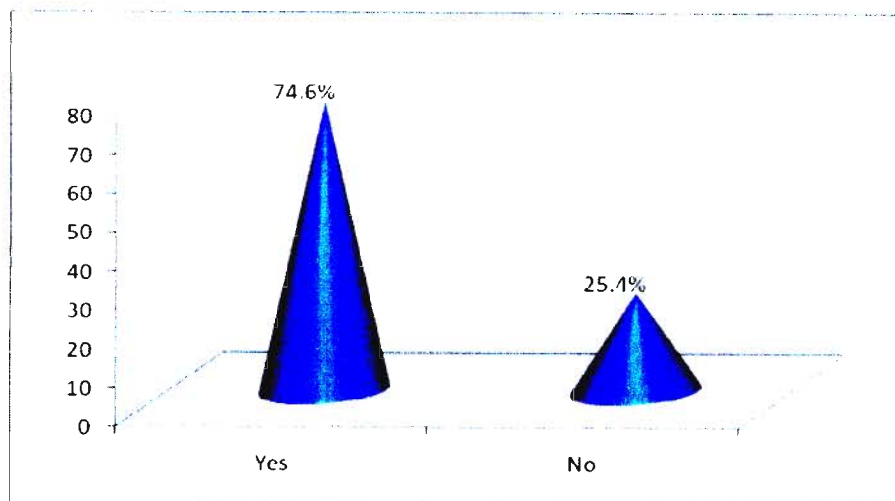


Figure 6: Access to help during the pre-enrolment phase

Student support during the institutional engagement phase (teaching -learning phase)

A number of items addressed support during the institutional engagement phase and these items included;

Availability of support services for student needs

Results from the study showed that there are support services available for student needs during the institutional engagement phase. Out of 67 participants, 45 (67.2%) reported that there were support services to students (S.D = 0.51). This standard deviation value indicates that this variable was averagely distributed within the study population (See Figure 7).

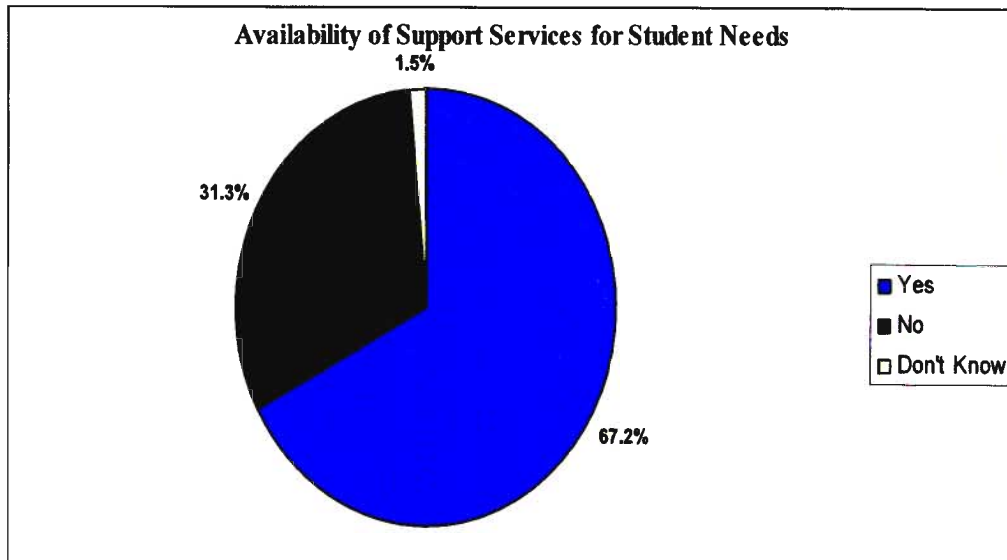


Figure 7: Availability of support for student needs

Available support to students

The study findings revealed that a variety of support services including academic, psychosocial and financial services were available to students. The results suggested that the academic support services were the most accessible services (n=28; 41.8%). Only 2 (3%) participants reported accessing psychosocial support, 6 (9%) accessed financial support, 7 (10.4%) accessed both academic and financial support and 20 (29%) reported having accessed both academic and psychosocial support, as reflected in Figure 8.

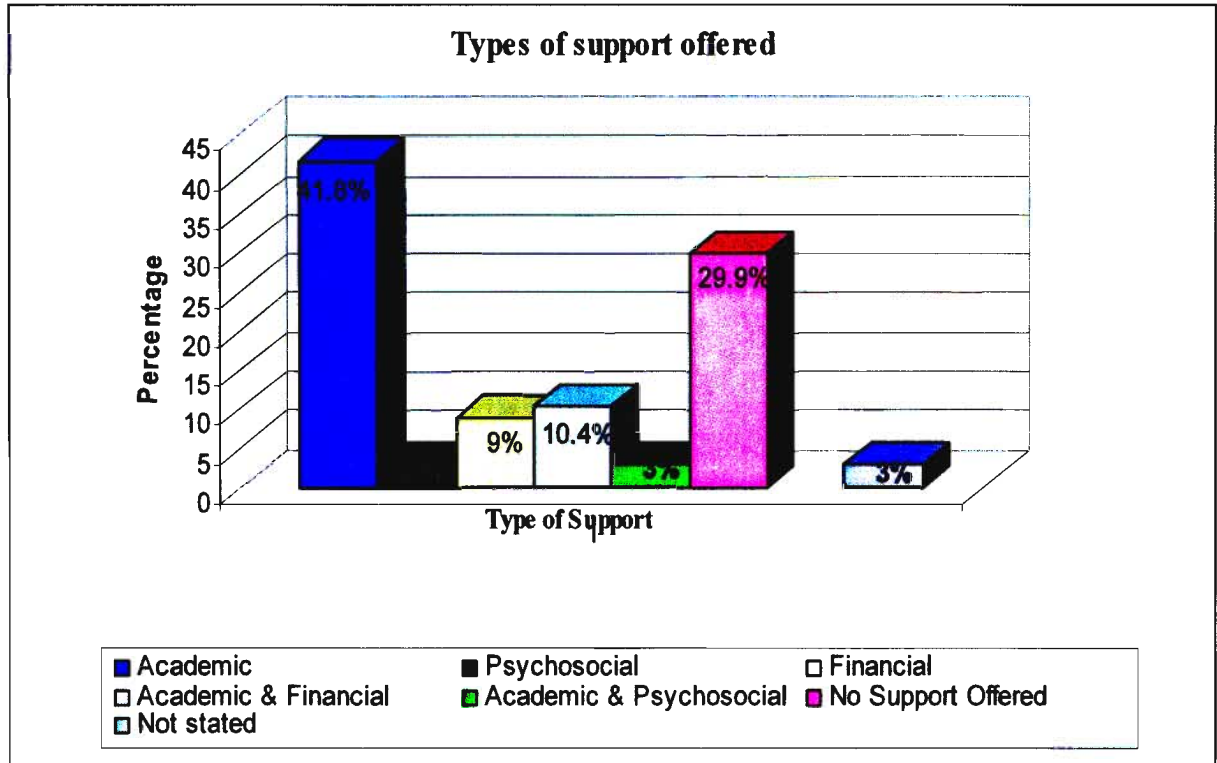


Figure 8: Type of support offered to students

Student interaction with academic staff

Findings indicate that postgraduate nursing students interact with the academic staff. About 62 (92.5%) reported that they interacted with their lecturers, compared to only 5 (7.5%) who stated that they did not (S.D = 0.265). This standard deviation value indicates that the responses to this item were widely distributed (see Figure 9).

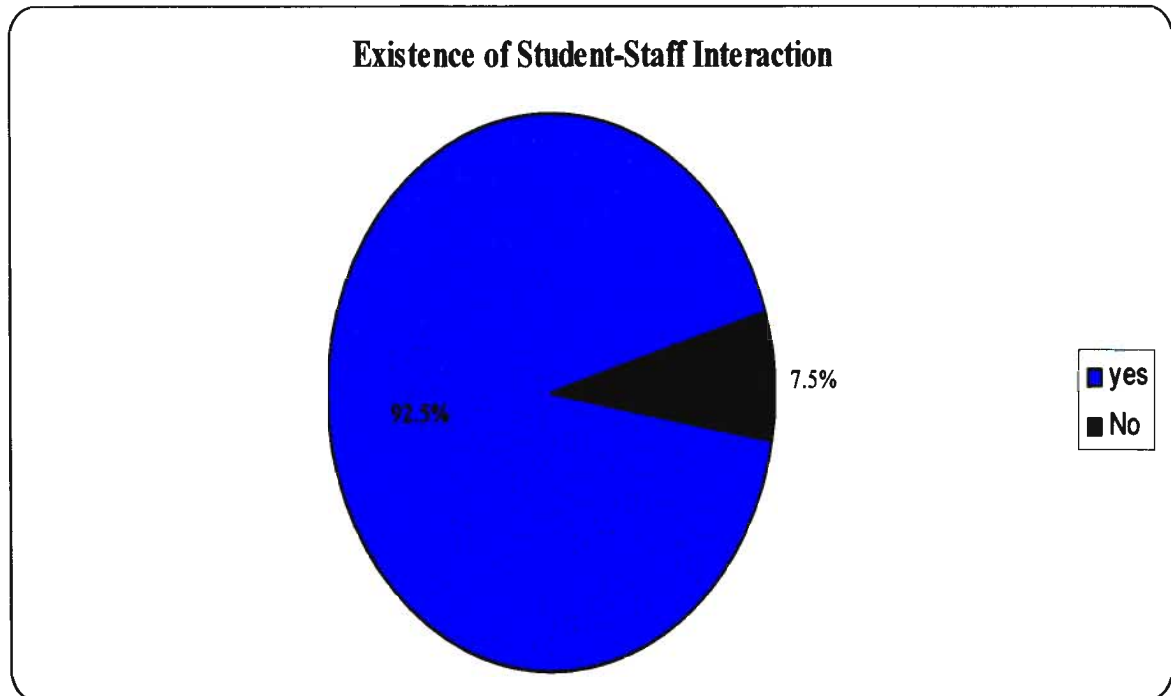


Figure 9: Whether students interact with academic staff

Means of interaction used

The study findings showed that the most commonly used means of interaction to provide feedback between students and their lectures was a combination of class sessions, individual appointments and e-mail. Among the three means of interaction used, findings showed that class sessions were the most widely used forum of interaction between postgraduate students and their lecturers. About 25 (37.3%) indicated that a combination of all the available means of interaction including class sessions, appointments and e-mail were used as a means of interaction between students and lecturers; 17 (25.4%) reported that the single most widely used means was class sessions (see Figure 10).

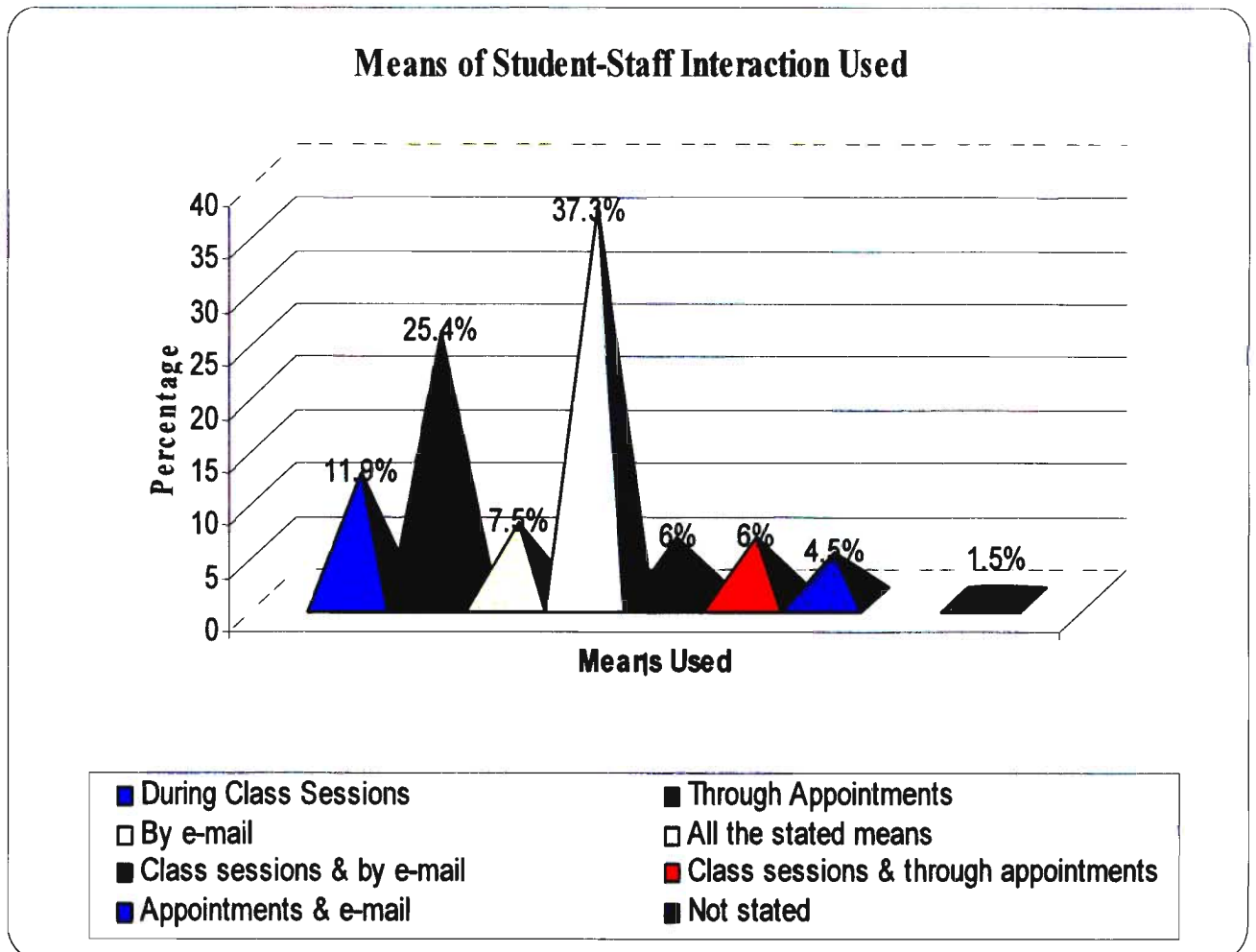


Figure 10: Means of interaction used

Sufficiency of time of interaction with lecturers

Findings suggest that the time spent during student-lecturer interaction was insufficient (see Figure 11). Out of 67 participants, 38 (56.7%) indicated that the time available for student-lecturer interaction was insufficient compared to only 29 (43.3%) who reported that the time available was sufficient (S.D = 0.49).

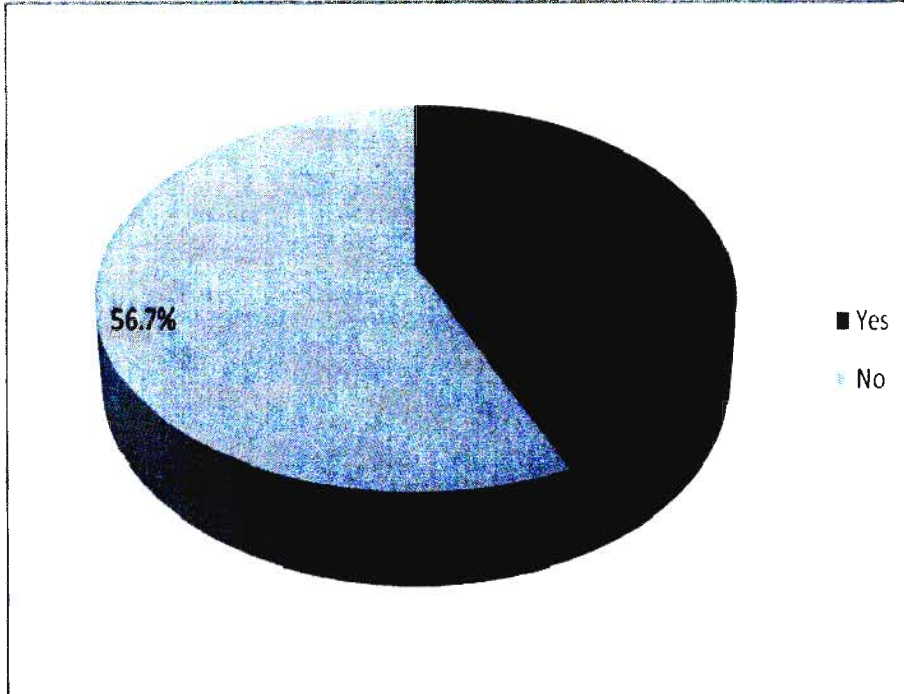


Figure 11: Sufficiency of student-lecturer interaction time

Whether student- lecturer interaction promotes student success

Responses from participants regarding student-lecturer interaction reflected that interaction between students and lecturers promotes student learning and success. Out of 67 participants, 44 (65.7%) indicated that student-lecturer interaction promotes student learning and success, 22 (32.8%) stated that the interaction doesn't promote success while 1 (1.5%) indicated that they didn't know (S.D = 0.513). This standard deviation value indicates that the responses were averagely distributed (See Figure 12).

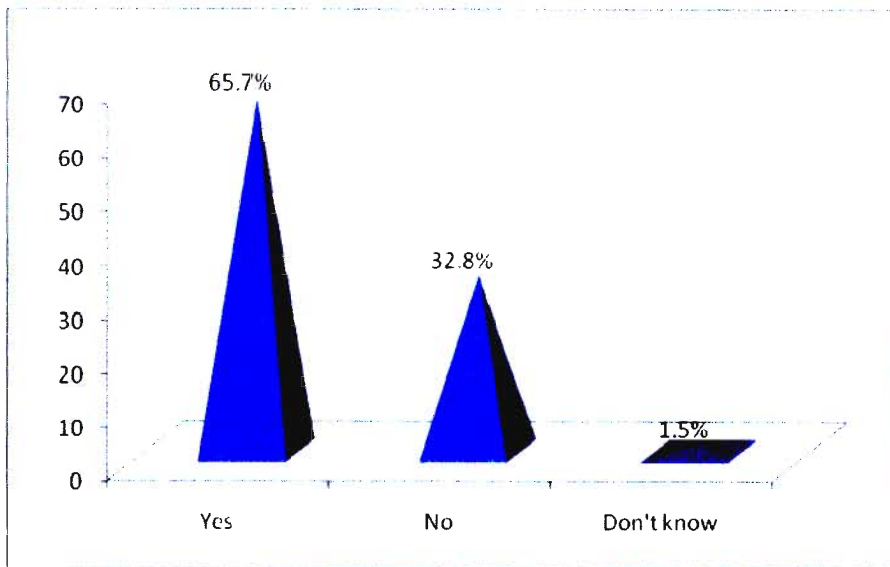


Figure 12: Whether student- lecturer interaction promotes student success

Coursework curriculum response to students' learning needs

Results from the study show that the coursework masters curriculum responds to the learning needs of the majority of the students. Out of 67 participants, 49 (73.1%) indicated that their curriculum responded to their learning needs (S.D = 0.523). This standard deviation value indicates that the participants' responses to this item were averagely distributed.

Table 9: Coursework curriculum response to students' learning needs

Coursework Curriculum Response to Students Learning Needs	Frequency	Percent
Yes	49	73.1%
No	16	23.9%
Do not know	2	3%
Total	67	100%

Student role in the teaching-learning process

The study findings showed that out of 67 participants, 63 (94%) reported that students take an active role in the teaching and learning process, with only 3 (4.5%) that they were passive (S.D = 0.21). This standard deviation value indicates that the responses to this item were widely.

Table 10: Student role in the teaching-learning process

Student Role	Frequency	Percent
Active	63	94%
Passive	3	4.5%
Don't know	1	1.5%
Total	67	100%

Student involvement in module evaluation

Regarding student involvement in the evaluation of the modules offered, the findings revealed that students were involved in module evaluation. Out of 67 participants, 46 (68.7%) indicated that students are involved in module evaluation and 21 (31.3%) said no (S.D = 0.47).

Table 11: Student involvement in module evaluation

Student Involvement	Frequency	Percent
Yes	46	68.7%
No	21	31.3%
Total	67	100%

Assessment methods

The findings suggested that a number of methods used to assess learning. These included continuous tests assignments, projects and exams are used to evaluate students (Figure 13). The

findings showed that the commonly used forms of assessments were assignments and projects (n=28; 41.8%). The standard deviation was 1.9.

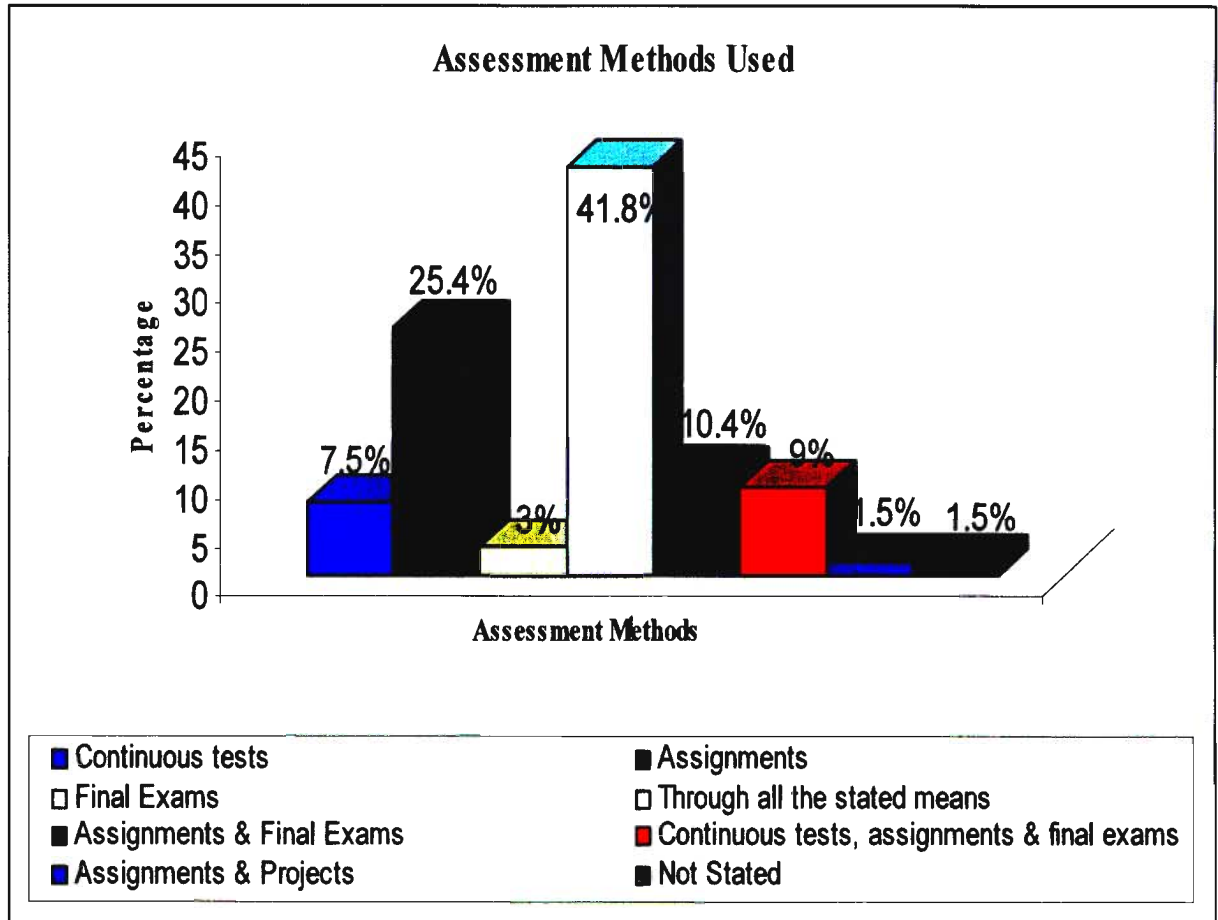


Figure 13: Assessment methods used

Promotion of student success through assessment methods used

Data from this study revealed that the assessment methods used promote student learning and success (Table 12). Out of 67 participants, 58 (86.6%) indicated that student learning and success is promoted through the assessment methods used (S.D = 0.34).

Table 12: Promotion of student success through assessment methods used

Promotion of student success through assessment methods used	Frequency	Percent
Yes	58	86.6%
No	9	13.4%
Total	67	100%

Need for extra personal effort to succeed

The results reflect that 57 (85.1%) of the participants believed that they needed to invest their personal effort in their studies in order for them to succeed (S.D = 0.36). The standard deviation value indicates that the responses to this item were widely distributed (see Table 13).

Table 13: Participants' need for extra personal effort to succeed

Need for extra personal effort	Frequency	Percent
Yes	57	85.1%
No	10	14.9%
Total	67	100%

Duration in the current programme

The results showed that the majority of the participants (n=45; 67%) were in their first year of study; 16 (24%) were in their second year of study, with only 5 (7.5%) in their third year and 1 (1.5%) having been registered as postgraduate students for a period of four years (See Table 14).

Table 14: Participants' duration in the current programme

Duration	Frequency	Percent
1 year and below	45	67%
2 years	16	24%
3 years	5	7.5%
4 years	1	1.5%
Total	67	100%

Time limit for the completion of current studies

The study findings show that the majority of the participants had a time limit set for the completion of their studies when they started their respective programmes (Figure 14). Out of 67 participants, 60 (90%) had a time limit set within which to complete their studies (S.D = 0.31). This standard deviation value indicates that the responses to this item were widely distributed.

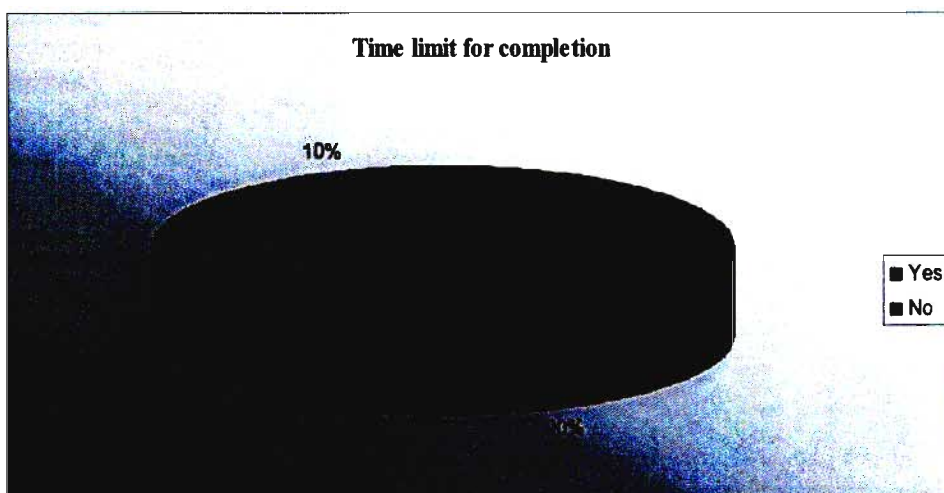


Figure 14: Whether participants had a time limit for the completion of their current studies

Possibility of completing in time

Data from the study showed that most of the participants were optimistic they would complete their studies in the set period of time (see Table 15). Out of 67 respondents, 46 (68.7%) indicated that they still could foresee completing in the set period of time (S.D = 0.504). This standard deviation value indicates that this variable was averagely distributed within the study population.

Table 15: Participants' possibility of completing in time

Possibility of a timely completion	Frequency	Percent
Yes	46	68.7%
No	20	29.8%
Don't Know	1	1.5%
Total	67	100%

Whether former students completed their studies in time

Regarding whether previous students completed their studies on time, the findings suggested that not all the former postgraduate students completed their studies in time. Thirty two (47.8%) indicated that some of the former students they knew didn't complete their postgraduate studies in time, while according to 28 (41.8%) participants, they completed in time (See Table 16).

Table 16: Whether former students in the same programme completed in time

Timely completion of former students in the programme	Frequency	Percent
Yes	28	41.8%
No	32	47.8%
Don't know	7	10.4%
Total	67	100%

Attrition to other programmes or education institutions

The study findings show that some students withdraw from postgraduate nursing programs to join other programmes or institutions (See Table 17). The majority, 37 (55.2%) of the participants indicated that they did not know of any student that withdrew and joined other programmes within the same university or to join other institutions. Only 23 (34.3%) of the participants knew students who withdrew from the programme to other programmes or institutions (S.D = 0.63). This standard deviation value indicates that this variable was averagely distributed within the study population.

Table 17: Withdrawal to join other programmes or education institutions

Withdrawal to join other programmes or institutions	Frequency	Percent
Yes	23	34.3%
No	37	55.2%
Don't know	7	10.4%
Total	67	100%

Attrition related to resuming fulltime jobs

In response to the item on attrition of students to other programmes or education institutions, 30 (44.8%) reported that some of the former students they knew, had abandoned their studies to resume their fulltime jobs or to take on new jobs (See Table 18).

Table 18: Whether students withdraw from studies to resume fulltime jobs

Withdrawal to resume fulltime jobs	Frequency	Percent
Yes	30	44.8%
No	30	44.8%
Don't know	7	10.4%
Total	67	100%

Exclusion from postgraduate programme

In response to the statement about whether there were any students who were excluded from the postgraduate programme, the study findings suggested that there were no exclusion of students from postgraduate programmes. The majority of the participants, 58 (86.6%) reported that students are not excluded from postgraduate programmes (See Table 19) and the standard deviation was 0.37. This standard deviation value indicates that the responses were widely distributed.

Table 19: Exclusion from postgraduate programmes

Whether some students were excluded	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	4.5%
No	58	86.6%
Don't know	6	9%
Total	67	100%

4.2 Qualitative Data Results

Qualitative data in this study emerged from two focus group interviews conducted on separate occasions which took an average of 1 hour each. One focus group comprised of 12 local South African students and the other, consisted of 14 foreign international students. After compiling the first transcript from the focus group interviews, some contentious issues arose which necessitated disconfirming evidence by verifying the findings through interviewing some members of staff from the library and the International Student Support Office (ISSO). Theoretical rather than inductive thematic analysis was conducted to analyse qualitative data that emerged from the focus group interviews. This process was driven by the research's theoretical framework, as stated in Braun and Clarke (2006). The codes that emerged were grouped into conceptual themes that corresponded to some of the concepts on the conceptual framework used. Extracts that emerged from the focus group interviews are presented as supporting information to these conceptual themes.

The conceptual themes from qualitative data include a) disparity in expectations, b) student support during the pre-enrolment phase, c) student support during integration phase, d) student support during the teaching learning phase, d) facilitators of progression and success and e) barriers to progression and success.

4.3.1 Disparity in expectations

Data sources revealed disparity between the university and the students' expectations pre-enrolment. The sub-themes that emerged under this theme were a) the nature or life skills expected from postgraduate students and b) the nature of communication systems used.

According to data sources, there was a difference between the nature of a postgraduate student expected by the university and the nature of the students which were applying at postgraduate level. The university expected postgraduate students to be self-directed, take initiative when seeking information about the programme and access the available information systems, such as the university website and school of nursing's website.

...The postgraduate chair told us during orientation that the university treats as adult learner, which means we have to be self-directed and take responsibility for our education. The school is there to provide support and facilitate our learning.

The orientation block at the beginning of the course clearly reflected that we are in a different space where we are treated as grown ups, not as young learners and that scared me a lot. I am that type of a student that needs a lot of support. I thought I was not going to cope..

...the university expects us to get the information from the internet, whether you have IT skills or not, that is not considered.

The students on the other hand, expected to be treated as young students and be given information about the programme and student fees. In their view that was the task of the people responsible for the postgraduate programme. The participants from the international students' focus group made an example that the provisional acceptance letters for international students refers them to the university website for more information about the programme and student fees, and it gives them a South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) website to access the application forms, the Foreign Workforce website to sort out their own registration. The major challenge was that some of these students have never used a computer in their lives, let alone accessing the internet but the university expected them to access internet, as stated in these extracts;

..... we expect to be given information by people dealing with students but they refer us to the website. Some of us don't even know what the term 'website' means.

.... They send a letter, with the SAQA website and assume that you know what that is about and how to access the information.

...some of us phone from our countries and we are told about websites where to obtain certain information.

..... Those with limited computer skills have a challenge in this area.

After spending a year in this place, now I understand why they assume we know about IT. The young undergraduate students in this university have no problem. They are the ones teaching us.

Data collected from the focus group that was formed by local students revealed that the university expected that the postgraduate students have developed a culture of reading and the students on the other hand expected to be told more about the programme rather than be made to read about it. The participants indicated that the school or faculty office gives the applicants hard copies of information brochures and pamphlets instead of explaining to them the content of these brochures and pamphlets. The university, on the other hand, gives out information with the hope that applicants will read it and refer to those documents when it is time for them to make informed decisions. Data showed that this in the long run created some tension because when the students complain, the lectures refer the students to the information brochures; university rules book and faculty handbooks which are given to the students before commencing the programme.

..... We expect admission office to make time and tell us about the programmes offered but they just give us brochures with information and expect us to read that.

..... I think we need to develop a culture of reading because that is what the university communicates to us by giving us information.

Regarding expectations during the teaching learning phase, it emerged from the focus group interviews that the university expects postgraduate students to be independent learners who can define their expectations and understand what they need to learn, with minimal guidance. The students, on the other hand, expected to be given information and not made to look for information. Some of the participants felt that the university expected postgraduate students to know everything and provided them with very limited assistance. This emerged as a challenge to

postgraduate students because most of them were from programmes which were teacher driven not student centred like in UKZN.

.....Students expect to be fed with information instead of being told to look for it.

...when I compare this class with the classes that I have been in my previous learning experiences, I found that this is quite different.

...it shows that we are now adults and we are treated like adult learners who have to be self-directed and play an active role in their learning.

..... They make you look for the information instead of just giving it to you because we are here to learn; they keep telling us about 'self-directed learning' and being an 'adult learner'

The study participants also pointed out that the lecturers expected the students to be computer literate as some of the modules are offered on-line. The lecturers conduct classes without considering the challenges confronting those with limited computer skills. The participants suggested that such expectations should be shared with students during the pre-enrolment phase so that they can start preparing themselves.

...Some of the modules are offered on line and the lecturer assumes that we can manage and continues to teach, and she only provides minimal support to those who are struggling. If you do not pull up your socks, you don't pass her module.

4.3.2 Student support mechanisms

Sub-themes under the student support mechanisms main theme were grouped according to the three phases; pre-enrolment, integration phase and university engagement phase.

Support during the pre-enrolment phase

Data from the focus group interviews revealed that support provided during the pre-enrolment phase is in a form of a university website that is accessible throughout the world. The website

provides prospective students with information about existing programmes, different specialisations, the student fees, the duration of the programmes offered and the available student services.

.....I went through the internet; I searched for the South African universities.” “I saw Cape Town, UKZN, Pretoria and I applied to both. “UKZN is the one that replied and then, I just came here.

.....I checked the existing programmes from the university's website and chose those that were relevant to my work related needs. The website also provides a fee structure.

Data also revealed that the other form of support to prospective students during the pre-enrolment phase include hardcopies of brochures, pamphlets and faculty handbooks. These were made available to the public during open days, in the department's reception area and in the faculty office. The international students' focus group revealed that the provisional acceptance letter from the university is another form of support because it helps them apply for the study leave, sponsorships, and it facilitates their registration with the South African Nursing Council (SANC), the Foreign Workforce Management Programme (FWMP), and accreditation by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Registration with these aforementioned regulatory bodies is a pre-requisite for the registration of foreign students into South African postgraduate nursing programmes, therefore getting the acceptance letter early is crucial.

... they give us brochures with information...”

..... They also give us faculty handbooks with programme structures and university rules book to read.

... they sent us provisional admission letters.....because time is running short, you need to process your study leave apply for visas and register with SAQA and SANC.

It also emerged from the focus groups that the university had informal ambassadors who were very informed about the university. They recruit and provide the necessary support during the

application period. These include former students or graduates from the UKZN, lecturers, home governments and foreign embassies who had previous working relations with the university.

.....I came to this University after I had been motivated by one of my friends and colleagues and they supported me throughout the application process.

.....The professor who was visiting my country recruited us, gave us application forms, assisted us with their completion and took them back with her for processing. She gave us her email address in case we had problems or questions.

.....In the application and I was helped in that process by my government and the embassy because they knew more about this university's requirements.

Data verification revealed that the International Student Support Office (ISSO) also provide some support to the international student. The ISSO provides information documents about the university in a form of pamphlets and brochures and by word of mouth to those who visit the office for enquiries. The ISSO also indicated that during the pre-enrolment phase, they provide a student support package to international students that includes pre-arrival information about the university and the surrounding areas, shopping malls and the city centre and security tips.

.....the admissions and information office distributes brochures that contain information for prospective students and answers queries on the phone.

.....the ISSO and UKZN International offer pre-arrival information to international applicants concerning the university, the beach, shopping malls and security tips.

The study findings also revealed that the ISSO support package to international student during the integration phase includes picking them from the airport when they arrive, transporting them from the airport, orientation to the university, accommodation arrangements, verification of study permits, medical aid, and scholarships, clearance for registration, study permit extension, and assisting with repatriation issues at the end of students' study tenure.

.....the ISSO has a person responsible for receiving them at the airport.

.....we offer a wide range of services from giving them orientation to the university and the surrounding areas, accommodation arrangements, assist with visa extension and repatriation issues.

Support during the integration phase (registration and orientation phase)

Forms of support that emerged under the theme 'support during integration phase' included provision of guidance about the registration process, provision of information packages about the programme including disciplines within the programme, counselling regarding curriculum design/structure, modules making up a qualification and required credits to meet the all the requirements for a degree, including assisting students with completion of registration forms. Orientation day for the new postgraduate students to the programme came up as another form of support. The orientation programme included information about the programme structure, different curricula (per specialisation) at postgraduate level, credits calculation, library tour including accessing resources and information from the library and different search engines, available financial support, orientation to specialisation streams done by the co-ordinators of those specialisation, and helping international students with visa extension and repatriation issues.

....New postgraduate students are invited to orientation sessions before they begin. This orientation made me feel comfortable in the new school environment and gave me direction about how to go about my studies.

...the professor called me in and she gave me direction on the types of subjects that I would be doing....I knew I was going to be doing masters but I didn't know the structuring of subjects.

...the documents given to us clearly describe what is required of every student when they register in terms of modules and credits offered in individual academic programmes.

It emerged from the data sources that students are taken through the registration process by the faculty officer, the programme coordinator and some lecturers. Furthermore, there is an existing student support package which includes faculty handbooks that clearly outline the programme structure and modules under each stream. This information is also available from the brochures

which are part of the information package. Some of the study participants considered the information provided during orientation about the different student career paths in the university and the academic counselling student received to be extensive. In the participants' view, this kind of orientation is motivating.

... ..Lecturers and peers also assist regarding which courses or modules to register for.

.....she even told me about career pathing in the university and all the other opportunities available for me, so that on its own alone I found it was so motivating.

... ..The counselling before enrolment assisted me to choose the relevant programme that will improve my skills and knowledge in my work area.

The challenges experienced during this phase are presented under barriers to increasing throughput and success.

Support to students during the engagement phase (teaching-learning phase)

Three sub themes emerged under the theme support during engagement phase. These included academic support by lecturers, psychosocial support by student counselling centre and peer support. Properties that formed part of the sub-theme academic support included reserved times for appointments, submissions of first drafts of assignments, and the nature of feedback given to students.

Data showed that lectures provided support in a numbers of ways. The lecturers reserved time for appointments with students who had learning related needs. The system that was followed was that the student had to make an appointment with the lecturer on the day for appointments. The appointment dates and times, according to the participants appear on each course guide, including

the contact details of the lecturer. The students made appointments mainly with their lecturers to clarify what was not clear during the class interaction, as in the quotes below;

.. we make appointments with our lecturers to meet with them to clarify some work that was not clear in class. They make time for this.

... ..In my course, our lecturer has time reserved for appointments and is reflected on the course outline. That time is important because sometimes left behind in class if the concepts which are discussed are difficult to follow. The lecturer uses this time to help us, we slow learners (laughing).

Some participants in the focus groups stated that in other courses the facilitators allowed the students to submit the first draft of their assignments two weeks before the submission date. This opportunity was open to all the students who felt that they needed support, but the students had an option to use this opportunity or not. According to the students, submitting a first draft assisted a lot because the feedback they were getting was clearly showing that they were not going to perform well in the assignment, as reflected in these extracts;

... some lecturers give us an opportunity to submit a first draft of the assignment two weeks before the due date”.

....Commonly, the feedback we get from submitting the first drafts show that indeed we needed to submit a first draft, otherwise we were not even going to get 30%”.

The nature of feedback given to the students was seen as a form of support because it facilitated learning. The participants indicated that it was detailed, comprehensive and informative in the sense that it highlighted the positive, the negative and how the students can improve the performance.

... ..Our course facilitator takes her time when giving feedback, she has a special tool she uses, she calls us one by one to her office and explain what you did right, the limitations in your work and what you need to improve.

..... *We get a very detailed feedback for almost all our activities; assignments, tests, practical exams.*

..... *I always take my facilitator's feedback seriously and it helps me improve in my next performance.*

The student counselling centre emerged as another student support facility available to all students.

..... *there is social support at the student counselling centre...*

... *our lecturer advised us to use the student counselling centre services because they also run workshops about how to study for exams, how to write an academic paper...*

I sometimes see adverts of the workshops by the student counselling centre but I have never used this facility because of the limited time.

Peer support emerged as playing an important role in providing psychosocial support. According to the participants, the students shared with their friends and peers their grief, challenges and they encouraged one another, as reflected in the following extracts from the focus group interviews:

..... *I get a lot of support from my colleagues here....*

..... *we rely on each other as students. You go to cry to your friend and if they support you then life goes on.*

4.3.3 Facilitating factors

Sub-themes that emerged under this theme include a) responsive nursing programme/curriculum, b) special support structures dedicated to postgraduate students, c) library as a learning resource, d) teaching methodologies used, e) healthy student lecturer relationship and f) personal commitment or effort

Responsive nursing programme/curriculum

Two properties emerged under responsive programmes. The programmes were responsive to the work-related needs (needs of the employer) and they were also responsive to the personal needs of the students. It emerged from focus group interviews that the university was offering a programme that was responsive to the work related needs of the students. According to the participants, having a programme with different streams of specialisations, rather than being a generic programme facilitated meaningful learning and immediate application of what was learnt in the workplaces. The design of the programme with different specialisations was supported by the employers because their employees were doing what was viewed as benefiting the institution. Some of the employers supported fully their employees' studies because the things they were learning were in line with their work-related needs, as stated in these quotes;

... I checked the existing programmes from the university's website and chose a specialisation that was relevant to my work related needs. Doing something that adds value to your life and work is a good motivation.

... My employer from my country, (outside South Africa) identified this university as one university with a programme that is required to develop their staff. My employer is very supportive because I am doing what they need, something that will improve the quality of service in our institution.

According to the participants, the programme did not only meet their work-related needs, it also addressed their personal development needs, empowering them to be lifelong learners, which they regarded as critical for those in leadership positions. That made the students to be enthusiastic too, as stated in the following quotes;

.....As we engage in the classroom, it is like we are in a management meeting, addressing real issues and supplying theoretical evidence supporting our argument. This course is doing more than just meeting the needs of my employer as they have sent me to study here. I am also growing a lot as a person; I can say I am becoming a better nurse manager and a lifelong learner along the process.

.....The programme is in line with what I am doing at work and that is motivating to me and I am learning skills, outside the planned curriculum, which will be useful to my work.

.....In education, there is what we call a 'hidden curriculum' (smiling). We are learning a lot as the programme demands keep over-stretching us for us, for us to realise the potential we have within. That helps us develop personal skills which are essential in our work.

... For example, I already see how I will apply what we are doing in my nursing education class in my setting. I am learning how to facilitate learning compared to the lecture method I am using in my place. This makes my learning exciting.

Special support structures dedicated to postgraduate students

Data reflected that the school has a space specially dedicated to postgraduate students. This space according to participants has computers which are connected to the internet. The postgraduate students use these computers in between classes or during their free time when they are in the department. Data further revealed that the university has a computer laboratory that is allocated to be used by postgraduate students only. This computer room has a printing machine which requires students to use their special cards to be able to print. The library was also reported as having study carrels which are reserved for postgraduate students, so that they can have a quite space for working. According to data sources, the students book and pay for the study carrels at the beginning of the year and they can use them through out the year.

.....We can't complain because the postgraduate students are well catered for in this university. The school has a postgrad space where we work in between lectures.

.....I have a study carrel I use when I am in the library. These carrels are for postgraduate students only. This study carrel helps me a lot because these young ones are very noisy in the library.

.....In fourth floor there is a computer room for all the students but Shepstone building has one that is used by postgraduate students only. You can sit there the whole night.

The library, a supportive resource centre

The data sources indicated that the library was accessible in terms of time and distance. It emerged that the library was viewed by the participants as a supportive resource centre in that the library operating hours were regarded as friendly to the postgraduate students. The library according to the participants opened till very late at night and even on Saturdays and Sundays, especially during examination times. This was confirmed by the librarian that is allocated to attend to the nursing students' only.

.....The long library hours are very helpful to us who are working.

.....Some of us we work Monday to Friday. We only get time in the evenings and weekends and fortunately the hours are student friendly.

The data furthermore revealed that the library resources, especially the electronic resources are available even outside the university campus. The students only need a special log in to be able to access resources such as electronic journals and books from their homes.

.. I rarely visit the library because I can connect to the library from home even late at night.

.....I have an Internet at home. I can search for information from our library's electronic journals from home the whole night. All I need is a special log in which you get from the library.

Having a librarian dedicated to attend to nursing students was regarded as one of the forms of support. The participants viewed this librarian to be very useful to the postgraduate students because she even assists them with their library searches when they are working on their research projects. According to the participants, the students had to give the librarian search terms and she will do the search for them and give them a long list of resources or data bases where they can get the articles for their research.

Having a librarian for nursing students only helps, especially because some of us are challenged when it comes to searching for resources from different data bases.

Mrs ... helped me with my literature search. She advised me to have a session with my supervisors to identify search terms or concepts to use. She patiently took me through the process of searching for information for my research proposal...

Data also showed that the library is also accessible in terms of distance. Data sources reflected that the university has a number of campuses and each campus was reported to have a library or more than one library. According to the participants, they could access some of the books and journals in other campuses which are nearer their homes rather than travelling to the main campus, as stated in these extracts;

I am from Pinetown. Rather than coming to Howard, I go to Edgewood campus library. Edgewood campus keep some of the books and journals which are recommended in my course.

I am doing psych and we share resources with psychology department. I just go the Pietermaritzburg campus over the weekend instead of driving down to Durban.

Having libraries in all the campuses helps us a lot because when we are in Westville for lectures in the Management Studies Department, between the lectures we are able to use the library there.

Teaching methodologies used

Data reflected that although the teaching methodologies used at postgraduate level emerged as not favourable at the beginning of the course, they were later viewed as facilitating the students learning. According to the data from focus groups, students' active involvement in the learning process assisted them in recalling information during assessments. Participants indicated that the examples used in class which were based on real life experiences made learning more meaningful reinforced what was supposed to be learned. According to other participants, other programmes

used reflective learning diaries where students reflected on their work-based experiences and indicate how they applied the theory they learned in class when dealing with those experiences in the workplace. Participants indicated that compiling reflective learning diaries of their work-based experiences facilitated integration of theory and practice. This also helped them a lot in responding to the questions where they were expected to apply their knowledge into real life scenarios, as stated in these extracts;

... she made us produce at least three reflective learning diaries for our personal and academic development portfolio. We struggled compiling these initially but we enjoyed them at the end of the course because it was teaching us reflecting in and on practice thus making the content taught more alive.

.....We use clinical learning logs in my programme and completing them now is very exciting. I hated them at first.

Data further revealed that using teaching methodologies which were in line with the forms of assessments used facilitated students' success. According to the participants where case studies were used, the experience gained during the process of working on those cases where they were expected to analyse them basing their arguments on theory made theory taught more meaningful. That experience prepared them for the exams where scenarios were used.

.. I find learning through case studies and case presentations very helpful because we take a real case and critique it's management using the theory from our course. This also makes our life less stressful during exams where scenarios are used.

.....When exam time comes, we don't struggle because we are used to questions at an applied level.

Supporting students' research projects

Data from focus group interviews revealed a number of mechanisms aimed at supporting students to complete their research projects. These mechanisms included opportunity for PhD students to

present research seminars before presenting the research proposal to the school research committee so as to get input from the academic staff members regarding whether their projects are at a PhD level and how they can elevate the standard of their PhD projects to the expected level.

... Now I realise why the school encourages PhD students to start by presenting a seminar. The seminar helps us in that we learn to differentiate between a masters degree research and a PhD research project.

... I was made to change my research because I could not convince the panel why my research was appropriate at a PhD level. Now I thank them because I do see that my project was not going to make it. I was exploring perceptions and the panel kept on asking me about the final product of my research that will contribute new knowledge to my discipline and I was stuck.

Participants also indicated that all postgraduate students present their proposal to the school research committee and the purpose is to provide support to the student before the proposal is submitted to the faculty research committee and university ethics committee. The input from the school research committee helps the students improve the quality of their research.

... The round room (the room used for research proposal presentations) helped me a lot because the committee assisted me in thinking through what I intended to study. The questions they posed made me revisit some of the things I intended to do.

... Eih!! (sighing) presenting a proposal to the school is not a child's play. It is nerve wrecking because you don't know what to expect. But the feedback you get from the committee helps you a lot in the process of conducting your research.

Other participants indicated that the school organises a three day workshop for postgraduate students. The aim of this workshop according to the participants is to provide support to students with specific reference to developing a research proposal, data collect and analysis as well as report writing. Some of the participants stated that the workshop helps them understand how to apply the research theory they have learned to the actual process of conducting research.

... We have a postgrad workshop mid year and we learn a lot of things. In my case I was able to share what I intended investigating and that helped in shaping my proposal.

... The school runs a postgrad workshop once a year. I wish they can have two, the first one to focus on proposal development and the second one to focus on data analysis and writing up. I am saying this because this workshop helped me a lot in developing my proposal but it was early for me to follow well data analysis.

Data sources also revealed that having a research supervisor allocated to provide support to you throughout the process is critical. The research supervisors according to these participants serve as mentors and provided necessary guidance and direction. According to some of the participants, other lecturers also provide support, for example, if they come across an article that is in the area of your study they reserve it for you; as stated in the abstracts below;

After presenting my research seminar to the school, other lecturers gave me articles which were relevant to what I am doing. They gave them to my supervisor who was able to pass them to me.

Having a supervisor dedicated to you who is available on appointments is a blessing. When I am stuck I contact her for guidance.

We are fortunate that we have supervisors who are able to identify with our needs. Most of them are still busy with their studies so they understand what we are going through and they provide good support.

Healthy student lecturer relationship

Some of the study participants considered the relationship between students and their lectures or supervisors to be healthy and collegial in nature and that facilitated their learning. Participants who reported that they had a healthy and collegial relationship with their lecturers stated that they met with their supervisors at agreed upon times and their lectures gave them constructive feedback. In

such a relationship, participants reported that they felt free and comfortable with their lecturers and in their view; this facilitated their learning, as reflected in the following excerpts:

... .. our lecturer is a real facilitator and we feel that she is like one of us. We benefit a lot from this relationship because during appointments she does not rush. She makes time for questions and for clarifying unclear issues.

... She doesn't treat us like pupils, she respect us and make our learning needs a priority. She does not intimidate us during our appointments with her.

She is not a threatening person; she is very welcoming and supportive to our learning. She gives constructive feedback in our assignments, feedback that facilitates learning.

Small class sizes

Data sources reflected that the small class sizes at postgraduate level facilitated individualised attention. According to the participants, the class sizes ranged from 4 to about 12 students in a group. There was however one masters class that had 17 students. The participants explained that their lecturer stated that this happened for the first time because there were some logistical challenges during the registration process and the number exceeded the acceptable maximum number. The participants indicated that small groups are sometimes frustrating in that the lecturer is able to pick you up if you did not prepare well for the class. The participants appreciated the small numbers because as adult students, they have special needs and challenges that require individualised attention as stated below;

... .. we are a group of five students. We were six when we started and the other one dropped out due to family pressure. We get all the attention we need from our lecturer.

... ..Eih!, you can't come to class not prepared because our lecturer just spots you. We have to be ready for class all the time.

Personal commitment or effort

Some of the participants considered their personal effort and time invested in learning to be one of the essential attributes that facilitated their success. They indicated that they are goal driven and they do not allow anything to distract them from achieving their goals, as reflected in the following extracts:

...I'm goal orientated...I do not entertain what wants to distract me from my target, which is to complete the course within the set period".

...what facilitates my learning is my energy.

... I've got enthusiasm...I don't sleep. I will sleep when I am back in my country. I have to finish my studies first.

... I know what I want and I'm here to achieve what I have set for myself.

4.3.4 Barriers to Progression and Success

Barriers in this study were also grouped according to the three main phases, pre-enrolment, integration phase and institutional engagement phase.

Pre-enrolment phase

Barriers that emerged pre-enrolment included a) inadequate and outdated information from the university website, especially the school's web page; b) fragmented student services; c) delay in obtaining registration with critical bodies such as SAQA, SANC and Foreign Workforce and d) manner of communicating with prospective students.

Inadequate and outdated information from the university website

Inadequate information from the university website emerged as one of the barriers. Some of the information according to the participants was outdated and the university website including the school's website, required some updating. This in some cases created problems with funding from their sponsors, as sponsors take what is on the website. The participants from the international students' focus group indicated that it concerned them because the employers and sponsors relied on that information and it created problems for them when they were giving updated information. This meant spending time convincing the sponsor about the current requirements and that delayed the students' progress with their studies. For example, the fee structure from the university website does not have information about funding for research projects, which is very costly. The students, required to be funded but the sponsors had to verify this first and time was not waiting for them. Some of the participants reported that they even chose the courses they did not like, only to find then what they needed has been introduced but not yet appearing on the website.

.....The inadequate information on the website made me apply for anything that was available because I desperately wanted to further my studies and the sponsor wanted to have plan of what I intended to study I just chose what was available.

.....May be the information on the website needs to be updated and include detailed programme structures and available options.

.....I was not aware that the registration for the research project excludes the cost of conducting the research project. I had to later submit a special budget to my sponsor.

.....Getting money from the sponsor is a challenge especially if that money was not part of the initial budget that was submitted.

Fragmented student services

According to data collected from the international students' focus group, the prospective students struggled to get all the information from one office at the same time because there are a number of offices responsible for dealing with student issues. For example, the office of the postgraduate coordinator has a administrator who assists with the initial application process, the faculty office deals with application forms and write acceptance letters, there is an office that deals with student fees and another office that deals with accommodation. The students indicated that they understand the rationale behind separation of these offices but it was frustrating to them, especially when they were requesting help from outside the country. They were given a number of telephone numbers to phone, whereas making one international call in other countries is a challenge, as stated below;

The faculty refers us to a number of offices, student fees, residence, etc. This is frustrating when you are outside South Africa. Why don't they have everything under one roof?

We only get to know about the help we can get from the international office very late. You phone one department, you find yourself waiting to be transferred to another office because the answers are provided by different offices.

Delay in obtaining registration with critical bodies

Another major barrier before enrolment to the university that emerged from the international students' focus group was the delay in the application and acceptance to the programme because they had to get SAQA accreditation of their qualifications first, register with the South African Foreign Workforce and with the SANC. According to the participants, it seemed as if these offices were also not talking to each other because sometimes SANC wants proof of registration with Foreign Workforce before attending to your application and Foreign Workforce wants SANC

registration first before granting you foreign workforce status. This delay had implications to the students' full acceptance to the university. The university gives them provisional acceptance so as to start the application to these authorities and they only grant students full acceptance to the university once the registration with these bodies is sorted and that delays them. Other students resort to taking other specializations that do not require registration with the SANC, as reflected in the following extracts;

The provisional acceptance letter helps us start early the SAQA, SANC application process.

..... I am doing courses which I did not intend to do because I could not get registration with the SANC. The easy way out was to do those courses that will not require me to access the clinical sites where registration with the SANC is a pre-requisite.

*...that's one of the things which really frustrate us as foreign students." "... SANC, SAQA, oh, you spend your money on it, you phone they just refer you to somebody, or call tomorrow, or do this, eh, the whole year you are doing SANC, SAQA, SANC, SAQA; and yet you need time to study.
...they should liaise with SAQA and SANC so that the process doesn't delay.*

Manner of communicating with prospective students

Data from both focus group interviews showed that some staff members were not communicating properly with the applicants; they were very unfriendly, rude, intimidating and treated students as if they knew nothing and they cannot think. Some participants highlighted that some of the staff members do not listen to what you are saying, they respond without getting what you are trying to communicate to them, as stated in these extracts;

...the problem was the reception that I got from the admin person who was very much unaccommodative.

...there is one clerk who is not good there...she does not listens to you, she tells you what she thinks you want, you leave without getting an answer to your query, very bossy and intimidating...

..... I met what....eh.....the admin clerk who is not really becoming on her professionalism.

...if the admin clerk can, may be change the attitude because she doesn't give much of a direction.

Barriers during the integration phase

Two sub-themes emerged under the barriers during the integration phase. These include the long registration process and timing of the orientation period.

Long registration process

The registration process as it emerged from discussions with participants was described as a frustrating experience because they were spending long time waiting for the administration personnel because of the large numbers of students to deal with and to be informed of other requirements in the registration process such as the payment of fees. It emerged from the study that the registration process is delayed by the long queues at the student fees and student cards department. In the participants' view, time spent on the queues and the time it takes them to obtain financial clearance is long and exhausting. It also emerged that completing the registration process was tedious and problematic because most of the students were working. They found it difficult to wait in the long queues to pay fees, to inquire whether their payment was received into the university account and to obtain student cards. The participants' recommendation was that the school should come up with alternative ways to alleviate the delays caused by long queues.

....it was very frustrating because she was supposed to tell us that we must go and pay the money before we wait those two hours while we were waiting for her –the faculty officer (whispering).

...eh, my God, that queue, we stayed there about an hour- remember we are not that young. By the time we arrived in the school for the faculty officer, they were closing."

...I waited in the queue for the faculty office twice, to get the registration form first and to be entered into the system after financial clearance. I also waited in the student fees section's long queue twice, first for paying student fees and secondly for financial clearance.

Timing and content of the orientation programme

The participants appreciated the orientation programme but indicated that it was not preparing them enough for the reality at a postgraduate level, especially because it was taking place during the registration week when they are sorting out their registrations. According to the data, the programme should have time dedicated to teaching methodologies used and responsibilities of the students, learning styles, time management and also invited senior students to share their experiences with them, as the processes at postgraduate level comes as a shock to adult learners who most of them have never studied for years, and they studied in the programmes where the teacher directed the whole process. The participants further indicated that the coordinators of different specialisations should be more involved and visible during the orientation phase. The only one hour they spend with them was felt not be enough. In their view that is the time which should be spent sharing expectations by both parties, as stated in these quotes;

.....I can suggest, during the orientation to courses, after the postgraduate coordinator has explained to us broadly, we should be able to go to our specific course coordinators so that they could guide us this one, yes, that one

.....We would benefit more from the orientation if they include thing such as teaching methods they use because, I find them very challenging. It is a culture shock to us adult learners from traditional programmes...

.....Orientation takes place at a time where we are involved in a number of things, such as registration, sorting out fees.... It overwhelms us.

Barriers during the university engagement phase (teaching-learning phase)

A number of sub-themes emerged under the barriers during the engagement phase. These include a) intellectually challenging educational programme, b) poor transferable life skills, c) language barrier, d) library access and available resources, e) lecturers with multiple responsibilities, f) quality of student- research supervisor relationship, g) relevance of psycho-social services to the

needs of adult learners, h) lack of mentorship services, i) favouritism, and j) lack of financial support.

Intellectually demanding educational programme

The data sources revealed that the postgraduate programme is a very demanding programme academically and on time. According to the participants, the modules are demanding because they are expected to go beyond the knowledge comprehension level and actually apply that knowledge in their disciplines and the learning is very context much driven. The lecturers expect the students to apply the learned knowledge in a specific context. This is challenging to the students who have had a gap between their studies and who were trained in the programmes where ability to recall or comprehend information was enough, as stated in these extracts

...the problem is not too many modules, the problem is the standard of teaching and the quality of the knowledge expected from us... ha! ha! the course is demanding..

“We are expected to apply theory we are learning to the cases used for teaching”.

... we use cases and analyse things such as blood gases, ECGs, taking into consideration the condition of the patient. What a challenge.

... In my life, I have never scored less than 60% but in my first test, I got less than 40% and that made me wake up and realize that the standard is not the same. I knew my information but applying it was a challenge.

The intellectually demanding programme appeared as having an impact on the students' ability to engage in co-curricular activities according to the participants. Both fulltime and part-time students reported that they did not have time for curricular activities because they have to meet deadlines. The participants acknowledged that involvement in co-curricular activities is important for their personal development but they could not fit it into their already packed and intellectually demanding programme, as expressed in the following excerpts:

...we really don't find time to partake in any other social activity other than what we are doing right now.

"I've got too much on my hands; adjusting to university expectations, coping with the demands from my course and my family, I really don't have time for playing.

"There is a tennis court on my campus and I like tennis but the programme demands are too much...

Poor transferable life skills (organisation and time management skills)

According to the participants, the postgraduate programme requires a person who is able to organise her work properly because it is demanding on time. Furthermore, the person should be good in time management because managing time well is essential for one to complete the tasks in time and meet the deadlines. Some of the participants reported that it is frustrating when other students ask for extension of time for submitting the assignment when they have already submitted theirs because that means the others get more time. Poor time management by some of the students affect the functioning of the whole group and disrupts the already packed programme for the year.

.....The programme is very packed and challenging, some of us struggle with time management and that is because we are unable to sit down at the beginning of the year and plan our work.

... ..Our lecturer knows that towards submission time, we will ask for the extension and she is no longer entertaining that. She was very understanding first semester.

....Because of our poor work organisational skills, we are not performing well. We need to learn how to plan and organise our work.

Language barrier

Language emerged as one of the barriers, especially from the international students' focus groups. According these participants, most of them are from the countries where English is not a medium

of instruction. Most of the students were from the Franco-phone countries where French is the language of instruction. They appreciated the efforts by the university of having a language department that has a language laboratory that supports those struggling with languages. The study participants, indicated that with support from lecturers and language laboratory, they were able to finally find their feet, as reflected below;

...as international students, we were not able to explain things in good English but we are trying and our lectures understand... The good thing is that in the test, they do not mark the language but the substance....

..language is my problem, I start by writing the assignment in French and it is then translated to English. When I read after translation, I sometimes noticed that some of the points have been diluted but I can't help myself... ”

...I managed to cope along the course of time because the lecturers did not use my poor knowledge of English to under mark me

... and there are lecturers who check our work before the final submission and this service is opened to all students.

Library facility as a support structure

Some of the participants highlighted that accessing the library outside the university, and the nature of available resources in the library had some limitations to their learning. Data reflected that accessing the library from outside the university required then to have a fast working internet, which is slightly costly. Most of them had computers with slow working internet because their family computer intended to be used by their children for their school projects. With the slow bands, they were sometimes unable to access the library or download the articles, as stated in these extracts;

..... I used to wait and wait and wait at home and not accessing the library. I then asked the librarian and she explained to me the different internet things, she was talking about fast and slow bands, and my internet service provider advised me what to do. Now I am not struggling...

.....I installed the internet for my kids to do their homework. I had to upgrade it to be able to surf from home successfully, otherwise it was a nightmare. These should be shared with us may be during orientation to save time.

The data from the focus groups also revealed that although the library had resources, they were not enough and some were old. They had to compete for the limited resources, for example, the library keeps about two copies of each book for reference purposes but students loan them and keep them for longer periods. The other participants voiced that some of the resources appear on the university's on-line reference list as if they are available but when they get into the library the resources cannot be found, as stated below;

...you get frustrated when you get there and you can't find the books you are looking for, yet the system says they are there..

... sometimes even the library assistants can't find the copies which appear as available from the system and that is frustrating...

...The library keeps about two copies of books for reference purposes but some of our colleagues take them for longer period and they no longer serve the purpose”

...The library has a reserve section which keeps some copies but you can't have that book for than an hour.

.....Journals are not a problem, the library keeps a wide range of nursing journals for all the specialist disciplines, the problem is with the books, they keep one or two copies and some are old and outdated.

The data also showed that those students with limited computer skills struggled searching for information from the library because the library provides computers and the students check for themselves which resources are available from the library. Those who cannot use the OPAC system really struggle because they have to ask for help all the time.

... not being able to access the readings on the computer using EBSCO-host like other students is frustrating. I have to ask for help from my colleagues who are also busy with their work.

... having to go to the library when ever I need resources because I need help with the search is a problem...

.....I waste a lot of time, instead of doing this from home or where I can access the internet....

Some of the challenges experienced by the students, as reflected above were confirmed by the library staff. The library staff also felt that it remained a challenge facing the higher education system, not only nursing students, that many students have difficulty using computer and information technology to access electronic databases on and off campus, owing to their historical backgrounds. The library staff interviewed felt that though some databases may be momentarily inaccessible at times and some electronic journals may not be subscribed to, there was a lot more available which students were not accessing simply because they lacked the skill to search the OPAC system. They felt that students needed regular training sessions to acquaint them with the necessary skills for them to make effective use of the available library resources. The library staff also felt that it would also work in the students' favour if the library increased its effort to advertise its services to students and faculties.

.....The students are correct, some of the books are old but we update them yearly, keep the old copies for some time and discard them after a certain period.

.....The students from the nursing department come for library orientation but we can do more. They can have more training on how to do the library search on campus and outside campus.

.....We have a person who is solely dedicated to attend to nursing students, that person can take small groups to train them on the existing data bases and how to conduct searches.

Lecturers with multiple responsibilities

Data sources revealed that the lecturers had a number of responsibilities which were sometimes impinging on the time to be dedicated to students' learning. It came out that some of the lecturers were not accessible because they were busy doing other things, even during class times. These lecturers tell the students that they are involved in projects and activities which sometimes take place during class times, for example, faculty board meetings, research committee meetings, and curriculum meetings. According to the participants, other responsibilities are treated as priority over their learning. For example, lecturers do not come to class because they are attending to these responsibilities. Other lecturers give their students work to do independently until they come back but others they leave the message with the receptionist to tell them. The participants indicated that they feel that their learning is not a priority, as expressed in the following extracts:

...they don't have time for us. To be honest, they don't have time to for us because they claim to be busy with other schools' responsibilities... ”.

... we have decided as a group to work on our own because our lecturer is too busy with big projects and exam times are coming. She leaves messages with ... (name of the school receptionist)

...I think they have their own important things. She like telling us that she is attending a faculty board meeting or she will leave the class halfway because she has to attend a research committee meeting. We keep quiet about it but it is not acceptable.

Quality student-research supervisor relationship

Some of the participants in the focus groups indicated that they had problems with their research supervisors who were not accessible, even after having made an appointment with them. These participants also indicated that even during the consultations, their supervisors were attending to their never ending ringing telephones and that took a lot of their time. Furthermore, some of the

research supervisors sometimes did not even have time to read their documents; they will just scan the document in front of the student. That affected the quality of the feedback given to the students. This had an impact on students' learning because in the participants' view, they were unlikely to progress very well in their studies, especially the international students that had tight time frames.

... ..I meet my supervisor according to her schedule; even in that meeting, you are not free; it's like a meeting between the principal and a learner telling you what to do..

... you should be able to relate freely with your supervisor, be able to get consult her when you need some guidance but some of us we are allocated to difficult supervisors and that affects our progress.

...we agree on the next appointment and I submit on time, only to find that she has not had time to read my work. She will just scan the document while we are talking. The feedback you get in that case is very minimal and this is frustrating to us wanting to complete and go back to our countries.

...when a phone call rings during the consultation she attends to that for the next 20 minutes, another person pops in and spends another 10 to 15 minutes.when you start discussing you are already exhausted.

Inadequate psychosocial support services for adult learners

Data reflected that inadequate psychosocial support for postgraduate students, especially by the university student counselling centre. Participants expressed that those offering counselling services were too young to even start understanding what they were talking about as adult, working and married students. The age difference emerged as a challenge because the young counsellors had limited life experiences to provide necessary support. The students resorted to confiding to peers. Some of the participants also felt that the student counselling centre should either have mature adult counsellors to deal with adult students or the school should have a person dedicated to attend to psychosocial support needs of postgraduate students, as it has an academic

development officer that is responsible to attend to undergraduate students' needs. The participants stressed that postgraduate students were not benefiting from psycho-social support services offered by the student counselling centre, as stated below;

.....Those '20 year old children' student counsellors cannot offer any help to an old postgraduate student and you also feel uncomfortable opening up to the child that is the age of your daughter.

....there is social support at the student counselling....you go there and find a 20 year old....how is that child going to help you.

...I once went there and this child just said to me 'hello (with an attitude), can I help you?' then I started chatting with her trying to build some relationship, but she did not have time for that" ... how could I discuss (with this child) my problems"

....The school must have a person like the academic development officer for undergraduate students, an older person who will understand our problems or negotiate with the student counselling unit that they employ matured counsellors.

Lack of mentorship services

One other barrier highlighted by participants was the lack of mentorship services for postgraduate students. In their view, other universities allocated mentors to students when they arrived. Some of the study participants felt that this had repercussions on the academically weak students because the support from the lecturer alone was not enough.

.....in other universities, when you arrive, you are allocated a mentor".

"I wish we had mentors from second years because that helps a lot. The school should try and introduce this system, especially for the weak students like us, who always think about giving up.

Favouritism

Data also reflected that some of the lecturers had their favourite students and in most cases, the favourites were those students who were performing well and who could express themselves freely in class. The unequal treatment of students also created tension amongst the students thus making the relationship amongst students unhealthy.

.....There are those who are her favourites and they are always in and out of her office. She likes the high performers and she ends up neglecting us the slow learners...

.....Our class rep is not recognised... our lecturer has a person she likes who is serving as her liaison person between us and her but we did not choose her, she just likes her.

.....May be the lucky students are those who are doing well. Those are the students who are likely to get the support.

.....There was almost a fight in class because this one acts as our class rep because our facilitator likes her. It annoys us and the facilitator knows but she is not doing anything about it.

Lack of financial Support

Restrictions regarding who qualifies for financial support emerged as a major concern, especially to part-time students. Most of the financial support was reserved for full-time South African students. The participants felt that their learning and success were hampered by a lack of financial support. The participants indicated that although information about financial support and how to access it was provided to students, some of them felt that they were not benefiting from it, it was reserved for those students who were high achievers, it required the applicant to have scored 75% and above in their previous academic programme in order to qualify as indicated in the following extracts:

...when I enquired about financial support, I was not taken because they wanted above 75%.

...it means the financial support is reserved for only those people that are well performing and us, the average people there is no financial support where as this is what we really need.

...I did not qualify because I am a part-time student and they wanted full time South African students only ...

.....In other faculties, PhD students gets funding for doing their PhD research, we have to get our own funds.

Other barriers

Data sources revealed that there were other barriers to progression and success at postgraduate level. These included a) multiple roles, b) lack of support from work, and c) limited experience prior undertaking the course.

Multiple roles

The findings from the focus group interviews revealed that postgraduate students had limited time for their studies because most of them had fulltime jobs, families and children to look after and social responsibilities. They indicated that this impacted heavily on their studies. Some of the participants felt that they did not have enough time to read in preparation for class, tests, assignments and exams. Participants also felt that although they knew how to pursue their goals, they found it difficult to learn and achieve the level of academic performance they would have wanted to because they had very limited time to study.

...I'm a fulltime worker, I'm a mother and I'm studying; you see, that affects my studies"

...I just feel that I don't have more time.... time away from your fulltime job would be nice to dedicate most of the time to my studies"

... As a woman in the community, you have to attend funerals and other activities and that takes time from your already packed programme.

Lack of support in the workplace

It emerged from focus group interviews that, although employers supported them allowing them to study, participants felt that the employers were not supportive enough because their workload remained the same irrespective of the 50/50 study leave. This was affecting their learning in a sense that they spent more time at work and had very little time left to concentrate on their studies.

...where we work because we don't get support... what we are doing here....it's going to contribute where we are working.

...the lack of support from the employers; they are not really quite supportive as far as time is concerned though on other aspects we do receive some support from them.

...we are expected to have these qualifications by a certain period but the support we are receiving is not really adequate...

Limited experience prior to undertaking the course

Some of the participants indicated that their lack of or inadequate relevant experience in the current field of study before embarking on the course affected them and that delays their progress and affects their performance. For example, some of the international students were sent by their governments to come and study so as to establish a certain discipline, such as intensive care nursing. According to the participants, they only had exposure to surgical outpatients and surgical units because there were no ICUs in their institutions. Some of them had never even seen a ventilator or a ventilated patient. They struggled because they had to start by understanding the fundamentals before understanding specialist information.

...My country sent me to do ICU with no experience. This is a setback because I have to start by learning the basics, such as a ventilator because I was seeing it for the first time.

I had to start by understanding the discipline specific language because I came to study something I had no experience of. My country wanted me to establish ICU because there are no ICUs , we use high care units.

.....Lack of exposure to my current field of specialisation has hindered my progress. I find it difficult to link what I am doing with experience in the field because I don't have it. I am sometimes lost in class.

4.3.5 Outcomes

Only two immediate outcomes emerged from the qualitative data. The students reported that were empowered academically and personally and because of the support, they were able to progress with their studies

Academic and personal development

Some of the study participants felt that the programme afforded them an opportunity to construct their self identity as specialists in their disciplines. Participants felt that they had had an enabling learning opportunity that empowered them to become lifelong learners. Some of the participants also felt that they were accorded the opportunity of continuously exploring new experiences and this had facilitated throughput and success.

...I think coming to this course has actually empowered me. I'm thinking at a different level.

... now I feel grounded in critical care nursing, give ICG, blood gas analysis, I am a real master.

... I am not afraid to be referred to as a sp[ecialist in my area because I am different from the time I came to this place and my colleagues at work sees this.

Progression

Some of the study participants felt that they were in a teaching-learning environment that enabled them to learn and complete their studies because of the flexibility of the programmes and the people involved in the teaching and learning process.

.....I find this learning environment a very mature one and one that enables you to complete what you need to do because of the flexibility and the maturity of the people that are involved with the course.

...it has been an eye opener. I've learnt a lot.

4.5 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter reflect that there are a number of support mechanisms within the school or university that facilitate success and throughput. According to the data sources, support is provided in three phases; pre-enrolment, integration phase and during the institutional engagement phase. There are a number of factors that facilitate students' success and there are also a number of barriers to the success of the postgraduate students.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary, conclusions and recommendations reached in this study. The study explored student support mechanisms aimed at increasing throughput and success rates in post graduate nursing programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Although Cooper and Subotzky (2001) reports a remarkable change in student demographics in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa, Favish (2005) noted that whilst the numbers of students from previously disadvantaged groups were increasing, the graduation rate for this category of students has been steadily declining. Favish attributed this decline to increased access without corresponding increased levels of student support.

As much as student support services exist in the UKZN, throughput and graduation rates at postgraduate level have remained low. Little research has been carried out to this day to look into the long standing low throughput and graduation rates in postgraduate education. Very little is known with certainty about various factors that influence student throughput and graduation in postgraduate nursing education.

This study's objectives were to:

- Explore the existing support mechanisms to increase postgraduate student throughput and success rates.
- Identify what facilitates an increase in throughput and success rates in postgraduate nursing programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal
- Identify barriers to increasing postgraduate student throughput and success rate.

In this study, a mixed methods paradigm using exploratory and descriptive research designs was adopted. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in this study. The choice of mixed methods in this study was based on the understanding that it helps to explore the complex concepts of social interest such as care and human behaviour that cannot be explained by statistical patterns and generalisations or narratives alone (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The target population for this study was 83 registered postgraduate nursing students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. According to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Fact Site, (2008) and the School of Nursing records (2008), 83 students registered for postgraduate courses in the school of nursing. Of this total, 3 were registered for the Honours programme, 64 for the Coursework Master's programme, 3 for a Masters degree by research and 13 for a PhD.

For the quantitative aspect of this study, a convenience non-probability sampling technique was used to select a sample of participants. In this type of sampling, participants were selected on the basis of their availability at the time of data collection as expressed by Burns and Grove (2005). Quantitative data were collected using a self reported questionnaire which was developed by the researcher. Qualitative data were collected through two focus group interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. One focus group consisted of local students and another one comprised of international students. The researcher believed that soliciting data from these groups would provide a better understanding of specific issues related to each group. Convenience sampling was used to selected participants in each group. The researcher approached those students who were on campus attending lectures. Most of the coursework postgraduate students attended their lectures on Wednesdays and Fridays while individual schedules were arranged with Masters by research and PhD students.

5.2 Summary of findings and discussion

The study findings provide a response to the research objectives. A number student support mechanisms available at the university are highlighted in this study. Facilitating factors as well as barriers to postgraduate throughput and success are also indicated in the findings.

5.2.1 Student characteristics

The findings from this study showed that the majority of the study participants (88.1%) were female students from the Republic of South Africa and other African countries. It is acknowledged that nursing is a female dominated profession but the high number of female students at postgraduate level is something to be noted. The high number of female students supports the statement by Cooper and Subotzky (2001) that there is a remarkable change in female student demographics in higher education institutions in South Africa. These authors reported an increase from 37.1% to 48.14% from 1988 to 1998. Given the educational background of such previously disadvantaged sections of the population such as females, Bunting (2004) and Ngcongco (2001) argue that they are likely to be inadequately prepared to face the academic challenges in higher education.

This study also reflected that most of the study participants were fulltime employees and had left their families at home including wives or husbands, children and parents. Fifty-five (82.1%) of the participants had dependents, 62 (92.5%) were employed fulltime, 46 (68.7%) personally funded their studies, 17 (25.3%) were sponsored by the government, 2 (3%) were on university financial aid system, 1 (1.5%) sponsored by the employer and 1 (1.5%) had remission of fees. Data also revealed that the postgraduate programme admits a number of international students. Eighteen (26%) of the participants were from outside South Africa. The analysis of characteristics of students reflects that they were from different backgrounds. Tait (2000) asserted that the diversity

of backgrounds from which the students are drawn necessitates a good support system that will facilitate their success in higher education institutions,. Schwartz and Washington (2002) pointed out that non academic student characteristics such as the age, gender, race, and socio-economic status are better predictors of student success than previous academic achievement.

5.2.2 Expectations

The findings from both qualitative and quantitative data revealed disparity between the university and the students' expectations. Lloyd and Griffiths' (2008) assert that adult students often have more defined expectations from the university, however this study showed that some of the participants in this study did not know what the university expected from them and their expectations were also not shared with the university. According to Tinto (2005), student success partly depends on whether students' expectations are aligned with the university's expectations, especially when they join an institution that expects them to succeed. Brown (2007) posits that students' expectations from the university are shaped by their previous learning experiences, which was also reflected in this study. Most of the participants were from traditional programmes where the teacher gave direction to the learning process. In those programmes the students were fed with information. As a result they expected the same from the university. The university on the other hand expected students to be self-directed. Christie et al. (2008) argue that the challenge of adapting to the university culture and ways of learning should not only be borne by students but universities also ought to be flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of new students. McMillan (2007) warns that in the absence of such flexibility on the part of the university this may lead to low throughput and success rates because students feel alienated.

The findings in this study further revealed disparity between what the university expected from the students during the teaching learning process. For example, the university expected postgraduate students to be independent learners who can define their expectations and understand what they need to learn, with minimal guidance. Furthermore, through offering online modules, the university was communicating subtly that the students have to be computer literate. Regarding expectations in the area of teaching and learning, given the diversity of the students admitted to postgraduate programmes, Austin (2002) argues that students come with new needs and expectations which institutions need to recognise and get prepared to learn how to adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate this diversity. As a solution to differences in expectations, Lloyd and Griffiths (2008) suggest that there ought to be a balanced partnership between students and lecturers to allow for the opportunity to discuss students' learning needs and the potential barriers to throughput and success lying ahead. The students in this particular study suggested that the university should make it clear to the applicants that they need to be computer literate so that the applicants can develop themselves in this area before embarking on the programme.

5.2.3 Phases of student support

Support during the pre-enrolment phase

Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that support is provided during the pre-enrolment phase. For example, 50 (74.6%) of the participants indicated that there was someone to help them with information about the existing programmes. According to qualitative data, this help is provided when prospective students make enquiries about the university and the programmes offered. Other forms of support included information about the student fees or cost of the programmes, the duration of the programmes offered and the available student services. The data from the focus groups revealed however that information from the websites needed to be updated

as this was another form of student support especially to those who were outside South Africa (international students). CAPA (2008) also highlighted shortcomings by higher education institutions regarding the quality of information provided to students. CAPA stated that although education institutions have an obligation to provide information to prospective students, there have been reports in Australian Higher Education Institutions where students were offered poor quality or misleading information resulting in disappointment and stress when students arrived. The frustration in this study as a result of the outdated website was experienced by the international students when it was time to embark on their research projects. The cost of undertaking a research project was not reflected on the website.

It also emerged from this particular study that the university helps prospective students who qualify by issuing them early with provisional admission letters to enable them to process their study leave and to specifically facilitate international students' registration with the South African Nursing Council (SANC), the Foreign Workforce Management Programme (FWMP), and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Registration with these aforementioned regulatory bodies is a pre-requisite for the registration of foreign students into South African postgraduate nursing programmes. This is aligned with Ferrer de Valero's (2001) argument which suggests that empirical evidence has proved that addressing the prerequisite requirements such as foreign language proficiency exams, registration with professional bodies and verification and validation of foreign qualifications early in the admission process facilitates early integration of students and timely completion of graduate degrees.

Other forms of support offered to students during the pre-enrolment included colleagues and friends who were former students, lecturers, home governments and foreign embassies, and information on the university website. This is consistent with Brown's indication (2007) that

positive word of mouth was important for universities' more successful recruitment of students to its programmes.

Support during the integration phase (registration and orientation phase)

Forms of support during the integration phase included orientation block. Providing guidance and orientation to new students helps the student to integrate and cope with the new environment since according to Eggens, van der Werf and Bosker (2008), students joining higher education are faced with challenges of adaptation between their personal and academic environment that necessitate adjustment to cope. This view is shared by Case (2008), Tinto (2005) and Jones, Siraj-Blatchford, and Ashcroft (1997) who also argued that there was a need for student support services during the integration phase in order to help students sort out difficulties relating to coping with the new environment, some of which might not only impact on studies but also on students' family and social aspects of their lives.

Data regarding support to international revealed that the international office provided a special ISSO support package to these students. This package included picking international students from the airport when they arrive, transporting them from the airport, orientation to the university, accommodation arrangements, verification of study permits, medical aid, and scholarships, clearance for registration, study permit extension, and repatriation issues at the end of students' study tenure. This form of student support was highlighted by Yorke and Longden (2004). These authors asserted that education institutions need to adopt a welcoming attitude to students from the pre-enrolment phase until the integration and engagement phase

Support to students during the teaching-learning phase (Institutional engagement phase)

In line with the findings from qualitative data, 45 (67.2%) participants reported that there were services to support students available during this phase and academic support services were the most accessed (n=28; 41.8). Financial support appeared to be very limited. Only seven (10%) had access to financial support. Both qualitative and quantitative data revealed that psycho-social support was also the less accessible form of support. About 20 (29%) participants supported this statement. Qualitative data revealed that commonly, psychosocial support was provided by peers and friends. Some of the participants reported that they relied on one another as students in order for them to progress through their postgraduate programmes. Astin (1999) reported similar findings that peer group support helped in increasing throughput rates and success. This view is shared by Bingham and Daniels (1998) who reiterate the importance of having peer support groups because they facilitate team work and offer personal and social support and development. This is also consistent with Eggens, van der Werf and Bosker's (2008) argument that peer support groups help increase self esteem and self worth among students and this helps in increasing student throughput and success. These authors posit that the quality and quantity of students' relationships within the context of peer support networks influence academic achievement through student motivation.

5.2.4 Factors facilitating student throughput and success

Programme responsive to the employment needs

Forty-nine (73.1%) participants indicated that the coursework masters programme was responsive to the learners' needs which were work-based according to qualitative data. This understanding

that students expect further studies to articulate with their work related needs is supported by Goldstein and Kim (2006) who argue that reasons for further studies include getting more competitive jobs, and greater social mobility. This argument is further supported by Vermueulen and Schmidt's (2008) that education now serves to predict people's occupational success. Relevance of the programmes to the needs of the students served as a motivator for them to work harder. According to the participants, the programme did not only meet their work-related needs, it also addressed their personal development needs, empowering them to be lifelong learners, which is critical for those in leadership positions. That made the students to be enthusiastic too.

Student interaction with the academic staff

Quantitative data showed that 65 (92.5%) of the participants interacted with their lecturers. About 25 (37%) indicated that students interacted with facilitators in a number of ways including class sessions, appointments and e-mails. These means of interaction were used to provide feedback to the students and that facilitated students learning, according to participants. Astin and Oseguera (2005) and Kember and Leung (2005) stated that effective learning is achieved through interaction between students and this is likely to result into positive learning outcomes in terms of student achievement. About 44 (65.7%) participants indicated that student-lecturer interaction promotes student success. This was shared by participants from focus group interviews that such interaction promoted their learning.

Curriculum response to learning needs

Findings from this study revealed that the coursework curriculum responds to students' learning needs and some of the study participants felt that the curriculum responded to their personal development needs by empowering them to be lifelong learners. According to Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) a curriculum that responds to students' learning needs is that which

emphasises the best educational practices by engaging students to make them feel supported and empowered to maximise their learning potentials. Some of the particular learning needs according to Bariso (2008) include developing a career, obtaining a qualification, getting a new job, and the desire to satisfy personal interests.

The study participants also indicated that the teaching methods used were cognisant of students' worth because during class sessions, their lecturers created an atmosphere where students felt they were in one accord with their lecturers, irrespective of the difference in professional expertise and knowledge between students and lecturers. Other programmes use reflective learning diaries where students reflected on their work-based experiences and indicate how they applied the theory they learned in class when dealing with those experiences in the workplace. That allowed for the integration of theory and practice, which helps a lot in exam or test questions where they are expected to apply their knowledge into real life scenarios.

Student role in the teaching-learning process

Quantitative data showed that the teaching learning facilitates active learning from the students. About 63 (94%) of the participants supported this statement. In line with the theoretical framework used in this study which suggests that student involvement in the teaching-learning process facilitates learning and success, results revealed that students play an active role in the teaching-learning process and are involved in evaluating their learning. This is consistent with Astin's (1999) argument suggesting student involvement enhances chances of learning and brings about the desired learning outcome. According to Astin and Oseguera (2005), student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. From that perspective, a highly involved student is one who invests his/her time and energy in studying, participates actively in student activities and interacts frequently with fellow

students. On the other hand, according to Jones, Blatchford and Ashcroft (1997), student involvement not only benefits students but also the institution, since student feedback may shed light on problems with the academic programme that might call for institutional research to find solutions.

Furthermore, assessment methods used emerged to be in line with the teaching methodologies used and that facilitated success. Quantitative data reflected that 58 (86.6%) of the participants viewed assessment methods used as able to facilitate success. According to Tinto (2005) assessment methods provide a means of monitoring student progress and providing feedback to promote learning and improve throughput rates. In line with this assumption, findings from this study revealed that continuous tests, assignments, projects and exams were the assessment methods used to evaluate students as reported by 41.8% of the participants. In the participants' view these methods promoted learning and success, given Brown's (2007) assertion that some students from backgrounds which do not prepare them to communicate or consult their lecturers may not be easily supported. However, the use of assessment methods reflected in this study may provide lecturers with the opportunity to monitor progress and provide such students with feedback.

Personal effort and commitment

In line with the qualitative data, 57 (85.1%) of the participants indicated that they needed to invest their personal effort in their studies to succeed. Participants from focus group interviews also considered their personal effort and time invested in learning to be one of the essential attributes that facilitated their progress and success in their studies. Astin (1999) also shared the similar view that for any given curriculum to achieve its intended effects, sufficient student effort and energy must be invested to bring about the desired learning outcome.

Prior Learning and Working Experience

About 61 (91%) of the participants reported that their current studies were related to what they were doing in their workplaces and 51 (76.1%) of the participants had more than five years experiences in their work places. Prior knowledge and working experience emerged from the qualitative data as one of the factors that facilitated learning and success in postgraduate nursing programmes. Some of the participants considered reflection on their workplace clinical experience to be their major recourse to help them learn and succeed by correlating their experience with the information generated during class discussions. Some of the participants however did not have required experience in the area of specialisation they selected. As a result, they struggled with their studies. Commenting on the importance of prior experience, Hailikari, Katajavouri and Lindblom-Ylänne (2008) argued that student throughput as well as curriculum design and instruction is challenged by students' lack of important prior knowledge and skills when they join the higher education system.

Support from the workplace

Support from the employer emerged as critical to facilitate learning. Qualitative data revealed that those working students who were not getting support from their employers were very frustrated and that hindered their learning. A study conducted by Lowe and Gayle (2007) in the United Kingdom (UK) revealed that working students who received support from their employers and partners at work managed to balance their work and study demands. This view is shared by Case (2008) who argues that a supportive and friendly atmosphere helps students to attain academic achievement.

Availability and accessibility to learning resources

Findings showed that the university had enough learning resources at the disposal of postgraduate students and this enhances student throughput and success. In this regard, students had 24 hour access to the internet where they could access electronic data bases and journal articles to which the university is subscribed. The university library was considered to be well stocked and accessible. This enabled students to get the information they needed in their studies and facilitated their learning. This is consistent with the findings from the study conducted by Bariso (2008) which suggest that the availability of suitable learning resources and an appropriate learning environment were some of the factors that motivate adults to learn.

Co-curricular activities

The study revealed that the university had a number of co-curricular activities at the students' disposal. The students were aware of these activities but did not have time to participate in them. In line with the theoretical framework used in this study, involvement in co-curricular activities plays a major role not only in making students fully integrated into the university environment, but

also in facilitating learning and personal development through the acquisition of life skills. According to Mandew (2003), student involvement in co-curricular activities such as clubs and societies and financial support programmes was reported as a means of creating self confidence and a sense of belonging among students and encouraging student development and this is likely to enhance learning and success.

5.2.5 Barriers to student throughput and success

Under-prepared students

Data sources revealed that postgraduate students who were under prepared for higher education studies struggled adjusting to the university culture and expectation. The under preparedness of students was linked to the students who struggled assuming their roles as adult learners. For example, taking responsibility for your own learning, being self-directed, understanding your own needs and communicating them to the lecturer concerned. One of the major setbacks reported from qualitative data was limited computer skills. These students experienced a number of challenges, as the library required them to search for the references using a computer; there were modules which were offered on line. There was no option of either online learning or paper-based learning. Lessing and Schulze (2002)'s study also reflected that the students who are ill prepared had limited experience with regard to searching for information from the library, data bases and independent study. The students in Lessing and Schulze's study felt that they were left to fend for themselves at the time when lecturers were preoccupied with the demand to increase access and the changing curricular designs and modes of delivery. This according to these authors had an impact on student success.

Data also revealed under preparedness of students for active and student driven learning in class, as most of the students were from traditional programmes, which were teacher directed. The students expected the teacher to give them information, not to be made to search for information. This paradigm shift in the teaching or learning approach posed a challenge to the underprepared students. This challenge was also highlighted in Ngcongos' (2000) work where this authors stated that some students admitted into postgraduate programmes lack sufficient background, experience and life skills and that affected their progress with their studies. Eggens, van der Werf and Bosker (2008) also stated that underprepared students joining higher education institutions struggle because of the challenges of adapting to the demands of the higher education institution that necessitate great personal adjustment to cope. According to these authors, the extent to which students adjust between personal and environmental constructs determine outcomes in terms of throughput and success or failure.

Insufficiency of funds for respondents' needs

One of the barriers under qualitative data was insufficient funds to support the studies of postgraduate students. This concern is in line with data collected quantitatively, in that only 2 (3%) had access to financial support. Thirty (46.1%) indicated that obtaining financial support was a challenge, especially because according to qualitative data, they had other responsibilities, such as families, schooling children that also drained from the limited financial resources. It emerged from focus group interviews that the challenge of inadequate funds was mainly experienced by international students because the estimated fee structure that was submitted to the sponsors of their studies did not include other costs, such as the cost of conducting the research project. The fee structure only included the fees for registering for the research project. The cost of travelling to different clinical learning sites was also not included. The participants recommended some form of

support for postgraduate studies that has relaxed criteria, as the current system catered for full time and mostly South African students. In response to such a statement, Ferrer de Valeo (2001) stated that funding postgraduate studies is expensive and reduction in national resources to fund higher education affects the students' ability to complete their studies on time.

Insufficiency of the student-lecturer interaction time

Although 29 (43.3%) of the participants reported that time for interacting with lectures was enough, about 38 (56.7%) felt that time available for student interaction with lecturers was not sufficient. Time to interact with lecturers emerged as critical from the focus group interviews in that the time spent by the students with their supervisors and course coordinators facilitated their learning. That time was used to clarify what was not clear in class and get feedback from the lecturers. Some of the participants from the focus groups showed concern that some of the lecturers claimed to have a number of responsibilities which were regarded as more important than the students' learning. For example, the lecturers attended meetings instead of coming to class, participated in research meetings when they were supposed to be in class.

Some of the participants from focus group interviews reported concern about the quality of the relationship between the students and research supervisors. These research supervisors were either not available or they did not take the process of research supervision seriously. For example, some of the supervisors were taking time attending to their telephone calls during the consultation process. Furthermore, the approach of some of the research supervisors to the students was not welcoming; it was intimidating, thus making research supervision session not worthwhile learning experiences. Sambrook, Stewart and Roberts (2008) advised that the relationship between the student and research supervisor should be collegial. These authors stated that the importance of the

availability of supervisors and the collegial relationship between students and their supervisors is dependent on the manner in which each party deals with critique through the exchange of feedback between students and their supervisors. Some of the participants expressed some concern about the nature of the feedback they were getting from their supervisors, who were sometimes not ready for the research consultation session. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) suggested a careful balance on the part of supervisors between feedback that stresses weaknesses in a student's piece of work and that which emphasises on praise and encouragement to try harder. Wisker warns on the other hand against a too friendly student-supervisor relationship in order for both parties to benefit from honesty and constructive criticism.

The frustration as a result of the poor student-research supervisor relationship was mainly expressed by international who were pressed by time to complete and go back to their countries, as their study permits expire. Browns (2007) stated that this may be expected especially from international students because their supervisor might be their only contact in the unfamiliar learning environment. They expect to develop a supportive relationship that will facilitate their learning. This view is also shared by Sambrook, Stewart, and Roberts (2008) who argue that although the purpose of research supervision is to guide and support students through the process of conducting research, the main task of a research supervisor is to provide both emotional and technical support. This engages the social and technical skills of the supervisor to be able to provide the emotional and cognitive/technical support required of research supervision. Quality research supervision is critical because this has an impact on the throughput rates at postgraduate level, especially in South Africa where there is a concern about throughput rates. Lessing and Schulze (2002) reported that completion rates among postgraduate students were low and they cited 10% completion of masters' dissertation at one of the universities in South Africa. In the university where this study was conducted the university website reflected a 27.9% of nursing

postgraduate students graduating. Zhao, Golde, and McCormick (2007) also contended that a satisfactory student-supervisor relationship was essential for students' successful completion. However, given the steps of the research process students have to go through, Sambrook, Stewart, and Roberts (2008) maintain that the magnitude of the supervisory task might be too demanding for the supervisor hence compromising the student-supervisor relationship.

Lack of structured mentorship programme at postgraduate level

Qualitative data revealed that another barrier to learning and success was the lack of structured mentorship programme at postgraduate level. Some of the study participants felt that the university lacked mentorship services whereas other universities allocated advisors and mentors to students when they arrived. In the participants' view, this leaves lecturers without a framework within which to offer mentorship and advisory support to postgraduate students. Some of the study participants felt that this had repercussions on the academically weak students because, although the academically strong students were the ones who did not need much support, they were more likely to benefit because owing to their good performance, they were the ones who enjoyed a good relationship with lecturers. In line with this concern, Zhao, et.al (2007) suggested that mentorship and academic advising remain an essential component of postgraduate study for increased throughput and success across countries.

Multiple roles leading to insufficient time for studies

Consistent with the assumption made in the theoretical framework used in this study which posits that external commitments have an impact on student learning and success, the findings from the focus group interviews revealed that postgraduate students had limited time for their studies

because most of them had fulltime jobs, families and children to look after. This was viewed as a hindrance to learning and success. Some of the participants felt that they did not have enough time away from their fulltime jobs to read in preparation for class, tests, assignments and exams. Participants also felt that although they knew how to pursue their goals, they found it difficult to learn and achieve the level of academic performance they would have wanted to because they had very limited time to study. A study conducted by Lowe and Gayle (2007) exploring the work-life-study balance revealed that full time working students were likely to devote more of their time to work related tasks at the expense of academic work.

Language barrier

The language barrier emerged to be another impediment for international students in postgraduate nursing programmes because some of them considered themselves as unable to express themselves in English as the majority of the international students were from the French speaking countries. Some of the study participants felt that they experienced the English language as a barrier in their academic discourse because English was neither their first language nor the medium of instruction for basic nursing education in their countries of origin. The study participants, however, felt that they were able to finally find their feet to learning because lecturers did not use their limited fluency in English to under mark them. These findings are consistent with Ferrer de Valero's (2001) findings that language proficiency constituted problems facing students who study abroad. Scheyvens, Wild, and Overton (2003) also share this view by asserting that language difficulties constituted major obstacles to international students' academic adjustment.

5.2.6 Student outcomes

The two immediate outcomes reported in this study were empowerment academically and personally and ability to progress with studies. In this study those participants who experienced personal growth and development felt they had had an enabling learning opportunity that empowered them to become lifelong learners. This is consistent with the findings from the study conducted by Makoe, Richardson, and Price (2008) where learning was conceived as promoting critical thinking, personal development and lifelong learning skills. Mandew (2003) argues that fostering lifelong learning in a changing environment facilitates success and prepares students for their adult lives.

5.3 Conclusions

Most of the study participants were females (n=59; 88.1%) and this reiterates the indication by Cooper and Subotzky (2001) that trend in higher education student demographics shows was a remarkable change in favour of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds such as females. Most of the study participants also had dependants at home to cater for (82.1%) and such a category of students according to Rumble (2000), were likely to face problems during their studies and benefit less from the support services available at the University.

The study findings about students' expectations suggest that they were unlikely to experience major problems because the majority (62.7%) were meeting their expectations, and more than half of the participants understood what the university expected from them (n=37; 55.2%). This explains Tinto's argument (2005) students will most likely to succeed in environments which expect them to succeed.

Results from the study showed that there are support services available for student needs during the institutional engagement phase. Out of 67 participants, 45 (67.2%) reported that there were support services to students (S.D = 0.51). This standard deviation value indicates that this variable was averagely distributed within the study population. The results suggested that the academic support services were the most accessible services (n=28; 41.8%). Only 2 (3%) participants reported accessing psychosocial support, 6 (9%) accessed financial support, 7 (10.4%) accessed both academic and financial support and 20 (29%) reported having accessed both academic and psychosocial support,

The study findings revealed that the facilitating factors include responsive nursing programme/curriculum, special support structures dedicated to postgraduate students, library as a learning resource, teaching methodologies used, healthy student lecturer relationship and personal commitment or effort. Out of 67 participants, 49 (73.1%) indicated that their curriculum responded to their learning needs. Out of 67 participants, 58 (86.6%) indicated that student learning and success is promoted through the assessment methods used. About 62 (92.5%) reported that they interacted with their lecturers, and the most commonly used means of interaction to provide feedback between students and their lectures was a combination of class sessions, individual appointments and e-mail.

The study findings also revealed that barriers to student throughput and success include inadequate and outdated information from the university website, especially the school's web page, fragmented student services, delay in obtaining registration with critical bodies such as SAQA, SANC and Foreign Workforce and manner of communicating with prospective students.

5.4 Recommendations

The study revealed most of the participants were not aware of all the available student support services. It is therefore recommended that:

- ◆ The school of nursing develops a detailed information guide for the prospective students; a guide that will detail the university expectations from adult, postgraduate students from the pre-enrolment phase. This will help applicants to start preparing themselves for these expectations. For example, the university assumes that the postgraduate students have basic computer skills. The university can communicate this to these students through the acceptance letters so that they can do short courses in computer just have the basic understanding of how the computer works.
- ◆ The University should improve its marketing strategy to sell out their support services to current and prospective students. This could be done by updating the website and provide more details about the postgraduate programme
- ◆ Discipline Coordinators should play a more active role during the orientation process to help students make the right choices so that the expectations by both parties may be shared during this period- early in the programme. They could also use this opportunity to introduce the students to the teaching methodologies they use to avoid the culture shock, as a result of the paradigm shift in teaching methods.

The study revealed most of the participants did not have an estimated cost of the whole programme that would help them to make projections about how they would finance their studies. They thus recommended that the school has to have a fee structure that will indicate a rough estimated cost including transport costs to clinical areas and costs for conducting a research project.

The study findings also revealed that the registration process for international students takes too long because students have to first register with the SAQA, SANC, and FWMP, before they undergo the registration procedures which also take long. It is therefore recommended that:

- ◆ The School should assist students with SAQA, SANC and Foreign Workforce registration exercise by appointing from among its staff, a liaison officer, to handle students' registration with these bodies, and impute the related costs on the students' account.
- ◆ The SAQA, SANC, and FWMP should establish provincial liaison offices to facilitate the registration process.
- ◆ The programme coordinator should keep the registration forms rather than getting from the faculty officer. That will cut down on the waiting time because the coordinator will issue the registration forms, assist the students with selection of modules and calculation of credits, and the students go and pay their fees, get financial clearance and then go to the faculty office for the last stage of registration. Through this process, they only queue once for the faculty officer.
- ◆ The orientation programme be restructured to allow for time to acquaint new students with teaching methodologies used and responsibilities of the students, learning styles, time management and may have senior students to share their experiences with them on how they adjusted to the hectic university life. This could be done through a series of sessions in form of seminars and not just in a single orientation session.

The study findings showed that there was no alignment between students' expectations from the university and what the university expected from students and this had an impact on the way support was offered to students.

- ◆ It is recommended the university should take into consideration student backgrounds in order to develop support mechanisms that are responsive to the current student needs. This could be done in form of surveys conducted after each intake in order to get an update of student profiles.
- ◆ It is also recommended that the University should develop where possible structured support mechanisms that specifically target postgraduate students. The student counselling centre may also appoint matured counsellors who are equipped to deal with issues of postgraduate students.
- ◆ It is further recommended that the University should introduce a mentorship programme through which senior postgraduate can mentor new students as early as possible in their programme. The orientation block could be used to pair the new postgraduate students with the senior postgraduate students, preferably according to specialisations.

It also emerged from the study that among the support services offered, academic support was the most widely offered type, while psychosocial support offered at the student counselling centre was considered to be only suitable for young students. It is recommended that:

- The University should upgrade the psychosocial, financial and other available support mechanisms to respond the needs of all student categories including adult learners. The university should come up with mechanism to support part-time students and even international students because, according to the Funding Framework for Higher Education Institutions in South Africa, the university benefits when the students complete on time

- The school together with the librarian that is dedicated to attend to nursing students should have training sessions, not just one, to ensure that the students become competent in library searching skills.
- The library staff on the other hand should advertise widely the available services to the students, especially because the orientation for postgraduate students take place early in the year when students have a number of things to worry about.

Findings also revealed that students needed more time with their lecturers and supervisors than they presently have.

- ◆ It is recommended that other means of research supervision such as team supervision and co-supervision be looked into in order to accommodate students' need as some of the research supervisors do not have enough time to attend to the students.

The scope of the current study targeted mainly postgraduate students and could not reach former students for them to give their account of the nature of student support offered at the university.

- ◆ Further research is thus recommended to include former students' perspective.
- ◆ Further study into this area is also recommended to include members of the academic staff to enrich the understanding of the student support phenomenon in the same setting as well as other support structures available to postgraduate students that are alluded to in this study such as the library and the ISSO.

5.5 Limitations

This study used tools that were developed by the researcher with the guidance of the research objectives and the theoretical framework. This suggests that the reliability of the tools was not proven although measures were taken to increase it by using a test-retest method for the quantitative part and member checking, and disconfirming evidence for the qualitative part.

The scope of the study was limited in a sense that only currently registered students' views are reflected in the findings. A comprehensive study including former students and members of staff could bring more insight into the problem investigated.

The study was also constrained with time limits because it had to be completed in one year. As such, further probing could not be done to exhaust sources of information concerning the problem under investigation.

5.6 Conclusion

The study revealed that the average age category of the study participants was between 36 and 45 years old, with an average working experience of more than 5 years. The majority of the respondents were females who were married and had left behind dependants when they came for further studies. Most the study participants were permanent South African residents most of which studied part time students and worked fulltime in various health institutions and did not a paid study leave. Most of the participants had so far spent in their current programme an average period of one year and the majority were doing their Coursework Master's degree and most of them were studying in the fields that were related to their current or previous employment. The majority of

the respondents were also self funded and almost a half the number of respondents considered their funds to be insufficient to cover their academic needs.

Findings revealed that most of the students' expectations were met but a difference between students and university expectations were also reported.

The study findings also showed that various support mechanisms for increasing student throughput rates and success are offered in the three phases of students' engagement with the university. During the pre-enrolment phase, a number of strategies, mainly the word of mouth from former students, lecturers and governments were used to recruit prospective students to enrol into the university postgraduate programmes. Printed brochures and online information about the university and the programmes offered constitute the pre-enrolment support package provided to prospective students.

During the registration process, the existing support mechanisms include orientation to courses and to the university environment, while during the teaching and learning phase, the existing student support mechanisms include academic, psychosocial, and financial support. Findings further suggest that academic support is the most offered support mechanism to postgraduate students, while psychosocial support is considered by older postgraduate students to be irresponsive to their needs.

Findings also suggest that no statistically significant difference exists between the support received by fulltime and part time students, between permanent South African resident students and students on a temporary study permit, and between female and male students. The study also did not find any statistically significant differences in the possibility of a timely completion of

students' current studies between fulltime and part time, permanent South African resident students and students on a temporary study permit, and between female and male students.

Findings from the study revealed that the factors facilitating learning and increased throughput include interaction with academic staff, coursework curriculum response to students' learning needs, playing an active role in the teaching-learning process, individual extra effort invested in learning to succeed, the assessment methods used, prior learning and working experience, a supportive working environment, enough learning and the availability of co-curricular activities.

On the other hand, the perceived barriers to increased throughput and success were inadequate information, insufficient student-lecturer interaction time, low quality student-lecturer relationship, psychosocial support services that are not appropriate for adult learners, lack of mentorship and academic advising services, inaccessibility to financial support, inconsistency in academic discourse, imbalance between coursework and research component, lack of time to participate in co-curricular activities, limited time for studying, ineffective use of the available resources, inability to search for books in the library, language barrier, lack of support from the workplace, and lack of exposure to learning experiences.

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Appendix 1

A QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE ANSWERED BY POSTGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS

Questionnaire No:

Please complete the questionnaire by putting a “√” in the box that corresponds to the option of your choice.

Section I: Student Characteristics

1. Please indicate your age in years

1. 25 years old and below 2. 26-35 years old
3. 36-45 years old 4. Above 45 years old

2. Please indicate your gender

1. Female 2. Male

3. Please indicate your marital Status

1. Married 2. Single
5. Divorced 6. Widowed

4. Do you have any dependants?

1. Yes 2. No

5. Are currently employment?

1. Employed 2. Unemployed

6. If you are employed, what is your type of employment

1. Full Time 2. Part Time

7. How long is your working experience after your last professional qualification?

1. None 2. Less than 5 Years 3. More than 5 Years

8. Is your current employment/ last employment related to your current studies?

1. Yes 2. No

9. Do you have a study leave

Appendix 1

1. Yes 2. No

10. Are you on a paid study leave

1. Yes 2. No

11. Please indicate the type of residency you have in South Africa

1. Permanent Resident 2. Study Permit 3. Other

12. What is your level of study

1. Honours 2. Coursework Masters 3. Masters by Research 4. PhD

13. Please indicate your mode of study

1. Full Time 2. Part Time

14. Who funds your education?

1. Parents 2. Self 3. University Financial Aid
4. Private Company 5. Government Scholarship 6. Private Bursary

15. Do you find your funding enough to respond to your immediate educational needs?

1. Yes 2. No

Section II: Expectations

16. Did you have any expectations from the course you enrolled into when you joined the postgraduate program at the university?

1. Yes 2. No

17. Are your expectations met by far?

1. Yes 2. No

18. Do you always understand what the University expects of you as postgraduate nursing student?

1. Yes 2. No

19. Is there any one to help you understand what is expected of you?

Appendix 1

1. Yes 2. No

Section III: University & Student Engagement

20. Are there any support services offered in the school for student needs?

1. Yes 2. No

21. If Yes, What kind of support is offered?

1. Academic 2. Psychosocial 3. Financial

22. Do students interact with the academic staff in the School of Nursing?

1. Yes 2. No

23. How do you interact with staff in the School of Nursing?

1. During class sessions 2. Through appointments 3. By e-mail

24. For any means of student-staff interaction used, do you think the time given is enough?

1. Yes 2. No

25. In your view, do you think the nature of student-staff interaction promotes student success?

1. Yes 2. No

26. Do you think the school coursework curriculum responds to students' learning needs?

1. Yes 2. No

27. What role do students play in the teaching- learning process?

1. Active role 2. Passive recipient role

28. Are students involved in the evaluation of coursework modules?

1. Yes 2. No

29. How is assessment of learning done in the School of Nursing?

1. Through continuous tests 2. Through assignments

Appendix 1

3. Through final exams 4. Through projects

30. In your opinion, do you think the assessment methods used in the School of Nursing promote student success?

1. Yes 2. No

31. Do you think you need any extra personal effort than is just required through attending lectures and submitting assignments for you to succeed in your studies?

1. Yes 2. No

Section IV: Student Outcomes

32. How long have you been enrolled into your current program?

1. Less than 1 Year 2. 2 Years 3. 3 Years

4. 4 Years 5. 5 Years 6. More than 5 Years

33. Do you have a time limit set for the completion of your degree?

1. Yes 2. No

34. Do you foresee yourself completing your degree within the anticipated period of time?

1. Yes 2. No

35. Do students in your program usually complete their qualification within the anticipated period of time?

1. Yes 2. No

36. Do students in your program leave to join other programs or other institutions?

1. Yes 2. No

37. Have any students in your program left on their own to resume their fulltime jobs for an unspecified period of time?

1. Yes 2. No

38. Were any students in your program ever excluded?

1. Yes 2. No

Thank you very much for your participation!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Appendix 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Could you please describe the process you went through when you applied for postgraduate nursing studies at the university?
- Please share with me how you have experienced being a postgraduate nursing student at this university
- Please explain to me the type of support (academic and psychosocial) that is available to postgraduate students to ensure that they are successful in their studies.

Probing questions

- What type of support is available during the application and admission phase to the university, as well as during the course of the programme?
- What facilitates success or progress with your studies?
- What do you regard as barriers to your success or progress?
- If you are not having lectures, how do you spend your free time? (extra-mural activities provided by the university)
- What are your views about the available support mechanisms?
- Any recommendations or suggestions to improve postgraduate students' success rate?

Appendix 3

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

STUDY TOPIC: An Inquiry into Student Support Mechanisms in Postgraduate Nursing Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: A Students' Perspective

Introduction

Dear Participant,

I am John Mugarura, a nursing student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting a study as one of the requirements for the completion of a Coursework Masters Degree Program in Nursing Education. My research is titled "*An Inquiry into Student Support Mechanisms in Graduate Nursing Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: A Students' Perspective*"

Invitation to participate

I would like to invite you to participate in this study which will involve filling out a questionnaire and participating in a focus group interview. Your collaboration in this exercise is very important in the accomplishment of my study objectives. You will be requested to complete the questionnaire and drop it in the box provided. Filling out the questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes. If you are selected to participate in a focus group interview, it will be audio recorded and take approximately 45 minutes. The study will involve post graduate nursing students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Risk; Participating in this study carries no risk at all. It may only inconvenience you in terms of time.

Benefits: Your participation in this study will help me fulfil the research objectives. The findings from the current study may also help the relevant authorities in improving strategies towards increasing student throughput and success rates of nursing students. Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will not result in penalty or loss of any benefits whatsoever. You will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time without fear for any consequences.

Appendix 3

N.B: By completing this questionnaire, you will have consented to participate in the study and should you so require, the findings of this study will be communicated to you.

Confidentiality: The information obtained from you will be kept to the highest possible level of confidentiality. Questionnaires are coded using numbers and this will ensure anonymity of respondents. Before and during data analysis, questions will be kept in a locked cupboard where only the researcher has access. Analysed data will be saved in computer files that are secured by a code that is only known to the researcher. After the project has come to completion, questionnaires and audio recorded tapes will be burnt in fire so that there is no further means of tracing raw data back to respondents. However, results that might be of importance in as far as data analysis and presentation is concerned will be utilised. Results will therefore be published but the identity of respondents and institutions will be protected.

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Appendix 4: Qualitative Data Analysis Template

<p>Expectations</p>	<p>Disparity in expectations</p>	<p><i>“.....the university expects us to get the information from the internet, whether you have IT skills or not, that is not considered.</i></p> <p><i>“..... we expect to be given information by people dealing with students but they refer us to website. Some of us don't even know what the term 'website' mean..</i></p> <p><i>“..... some of us phone from our countries and we are told about websites where to obtain certain information”.</i></p> <p><i>..... They send a letter, with the SAQA website and assume that you know what that is about and how to access the information.</i></p> <p><i>“... Those with limited computer skills have a challenge in this area.</i></p> <p><i>“After spending a year in this place, now I understand why they assume we know about IT. The young undergraduate students in this university have no problem. They are the ones teaching us”.</i></p>
<p>Factors facilitating progression and success</p>	<p>Programme responsive to work-related needs</p>	<p><i>“... I checked the existing programmes from the university's website and chose a specialisation that was relevant to my work related needs. Doing something that adds value to your life and work is a good motivation”.</i></p> <p><i>“... My employer who is outside South Africa identified this university as one university with a programme that is required to develop their staff. My employer is very supporting because I am doing what they need, something that will improve the quality of service our institution...”</i></p>

Appendix 4: Qualitative Data Analysis Template

		<p><i>“As we engage in the classroom, it is like we are in a management meeting, addressing issues and supplying theoretical evidence supporting our argument. This course is doing more than just meeting the needs of my employer as they have sent me to study here. I am also growing a lot as a person, I can say I am becoming a lifelong learner”.</i></p> <p><i>“The programme is in line with what I am doing at work and that is motivating to me and I am learning skills, outside the planned curriculum, which will be useful to my work.</i></p> <p><i>“ In education, there is what we call a ‘hidden curriculum’ (smiling). We are learning a lot from the programme demands that keep stretching us for us to realise the potential we have within us. That helps us develop personal skills which are essential in our work.</i></p> <p><i>“... For example, I already see how I will apply what we are doing in my nursing education class in my setting. I am learning how to facilitate learning compared to the lecture method I am using in my place. This makes my learning exciting”.</i></p>
	<p>Availability and accessible of learning resources</p>	<p><i>“We can’t complain because the postgraduate students are well catered for in this university. The school has a postgrad space where we work in between lectures”.</i></p> <p><i>“I have a study carrel I use when I am in the library. These carrels are for postgraduate students only. This study carrel helps me a lot because these young ones are very noisy in the</i></p>

Appendix 4: Qualitative Data Analysis Template

		<p><i>library”.</i></p> <p><i>“In fourth floor there is a computer room for all the students but Shepstone building has one that is used by postgraduate students only. You can sit there the whole night.”</i></p> <p><i>“The long library hours are very helpful to us who are working...”</i></p> <p><i>“Some of us we work Monday to Friday. We only get time in the evenings and weekends and fortunately the hours are student friendly”.</i></p> <p><i>“I have an Internet at home. I can search for information from our library’s electronic journals from home the whole night. All I need is a special log in which you get from the library.”</i></p>
	<p>Teaching methodologies used</p>	<p><i>... she made us produce at least three reflective learning diaries for our personal and academic development portfolio. We struggled compiling these initially but we enjoyed them at the end of the course because it was teaching us reflecting in and on practice thus making the content taught more alive.</i></p> <p><i>We use clinical learning logs in my programme and completing them now is very exciting. I hated them at first</i></p> <p><i>“.. I find learning through case studies and case presentations very helpful because we take a real case and critique it’s management using the theory from our course. When exam</i></p>

Appendix 4: Qualitative Data Analysis Template

		<p><i>time comes, we don't struggle because we are used to questions at an application level"</i></p>
	<p>Academic support by lecturers</p>	<p><i>... some lecturers give us an opportunity to submit a first draft of the assignment two weeks before the due date. Commonly, the feedback we get shows that indeed we needed to submit a first draft, otherwise we were not even get 30%</i></p> <p><i>.. we make appointments with our lecturers to meet with them to clarify some work that was not clear in class. They make time for this.</i></p> <p><i>In my course, our lecturer has time reserved for appointments and is reflected on the course outlines. That time is important because sometimes you loose out in class if the concepts which are discussed are unfamiliar. The lecturer uses this time to help us, we slow learners (laughing)</i></p> <p><i>We get a very detailed feedback for almost all our activities; assignments, tests, practical exams.</i></p> <p><i>Our course facilitator takes her time when giving feedback, she has a special tool she uses, she calls us one by one to her office and explain what you did right, the limitations in your work and what you need to improve.</i></p> <p><i>We get a very detailed feedback for almost all our activities; assignments, tests, practical exams.</i></p> <p><i>I always take my facilitator's feedback seriously and it helps</i></p>

Appendix 4: Qualitative Data Analysis Template

		<p><i>me improve in my next performance</i> <i>The marking guide they use clearly show where you have gone wrong and they make recommendations.</i></p> <p><i>You learn and develop if you read the written feedback they give you and act on it.</i></p>
	Healthy teacher-student relationship	<p><i>..... our lecturer is a real facilitator and we feel that she is like one of us. We benefit a lot from this relationship”</i></p> <p><i>... She doesn't treat us like pupils, she respect us and make our learning needs a priority.....</i></p> <p><i>She is not a threatening person, she is very welcoming and supportive to our learning. She gives constructive feedback in our assignments, feedback that facilitates learning...</i></p>
	Small class sizes	<p><i>“ we are a group of five students. We were six when we started and the other one dropped out due to family pressure. We get all the attention we need from our lecturer”.</i></p> <p><i>“ Eih!, you can't come to class not prepared because our lecturer just spot you. We have to be ready for class all the time”</i></p>
	Personal commitment or effort	<p><i>“...I'm goal orientated...I do not entertain what wants to distract me from achieving my target, which is to complete the course within the set period”.</i></p> <p><i>“...what facilitates my learning is my energy”.</i></p> <p><i>“... I've got enthusiasm...I don't sleep. I will sleep when I am back in my country. I have to finish my studies first”.</i></p>

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		<p><i>“... know what I want and I'm here to achieve what I have set for myself”</i></p> <p><i>“...what can facilitate my learning is to read books more and understand the course I'm doing...”</i></p>
Barriers to Progression and Success	Pre-enrolment phase	
	<i>Inadequate and outdated information from the university website</i>	<p><i>“The inadequate information on the website made me apply for anything that was available because I desperately wanted to further my studies and the sponsor wanted to have plan of what I intended to study I just chose what was available”.</i></p> <p><i>“May be the information on the website needs to be updated and include detailed programme structures and available options</i></p>
	Fragmented student services	<p><i>..... The inadequate information on the website made me apply for anything that was available because I desperately wanted to further my studies and the sponsor wanted to have plan of what I intended to study I just chose what was available.</i></p> <p><i>... May be the information on the website needs to be updated and include detailed programme structures and available options.</i></p> <p><i>..... I discovered that the course that I chose was so difficult for me and I couldn't cope just because there was no much information about that course</i></p>
	Delay in obtaining registration with critical	<i>... .. I am doing courses which I did not intend to do because I could not get registration with the SANC. The easy way out</i>

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	<p>bodies</p>	<p>was to do those courses that will not require me to access the clinical sites where registration with the SANC is a pre-requisite</p> <p>“...that’s one of the things which really frustrate us as foreign students.” “... SANC, SAQA, oh, you spend your money on it, you phone they just refer you to somebody, or call tomorrow, or do this, eh, the whole year you are doing SANC, SAQA, SANC, SAQA; and yet you need time to study.” “...they should liaise with SAQA and SANC so that the process doesn’t delay.”</p>
	<p>Manner of communicating with prospective students</p>	<p>“...the problem was the reception that I got from the admin person who was very much unaccommodative.”</p> <p>“...there is one clerk who is not good there...she does not listen to you, she tells you what she thinks you want, you leave without getting an answer to your query, very bossy and intimidating...”</p> <p>“..... I met what....eh.....the admin clerk who is not really becoming on her professionalism.”</p> <p>“...if the admin clerk can, may be change the attitude because she doesn’t give much of a direction.”</p>
	<p>Integration phase</p>	
	<p>Long registration process</p>	<p>....it was very frustrating because she was supposed to tell us that we must go and pay the money before we wait those two hours while we were waiting for her (faculty officer).”</p> <p>“...eh, my God, that queue, we stayed there about an hour-remember we are not that young. By the time we arrived in the school for the faculty officer, they were closing.”</p>

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		<p><i>" I waited in the queue for the faculty office twice, to get the registration form first and to be entered into the systems after financial clearance. I also waited in the student fees section's long queue twice, first for paying student fees and secondly for financial clearance."</i></p>
	<p>Timing and content of the orientation programme</p>	<p><i>"I can suggest, during the orientation to courses, after the postgraduate coordinator has explained to us broadly, we should be able to go to our specific course coordinators so that they could guide us this one, yes, that one,"</i></p> <p><i>"We would benefit more from the orientation if they include thing such as teaching methods they use because, I find them very challenging. It is a culture shock to us adult learners from traditional programmes..."</i></p> <p><i>"Orientation takes place at a time where we are involved in a number of things, such as registration, sorting out fees.... It overwhelms us".</i></p>
	<p>Teaching-learning phase</p>	
	<p>Intellectually challenging educational programme</p>	<p><i>"...the problem is not too many modules, the problem is the standard of teaching and the quality of the knowledge expected from us... ha! ha! the course is demanding.."</i></p> <p><i>"We are expected to apply theory we are learning to the cases used for teaching".</i></p> <p><i>"... we use cases and analyse things such as blood gases, ECGs taking into consideration the condition of the patient. What a challenge I think it is because we lose our time on what is not relevant".</i></p>

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		<p><i>“ In my life, I have never scored less than 60% but in my first test, I got less than 40% and that made me wake up that the standard is not the same. I knew my information but applying it was a challenge”.</i></p> <p><i>“...we really don't find time to partake in any other activity other than what we are doing right now”.</i></p> <p><i>“I've got too much on my hands; adjusting to university expectations, coping with the demands from my course and my family, I really don't have time for playing”.</i></p> <p><i>“There is a tennis court on my campus and I like tennis but the programme demands are too much...”</i></p>
	Poor organisation and time management skills (life skills)	<p><i>“The programme is very packed and challenging, some of us struggle with time management and that is because we are unable to sit down at the beginning of the year and plan our work”</i></p> <p><i>“Our lecturer knows that towards submission time, we will ask for the extension and she is no longer entertaining that. She was very understanding first semester”.</i></p> <p><i>“Because of our poor work organisational skills, we are not performing well. We need to learn how to plan and organise our work”.</i></p>
	Language barrier	<p><i>“...as international students, we were not able explain things in good English but we are trying and our lectures understand... The good thing is that in the test, they do not mark the</i></p>

Appendix 4: Qualitative Data Analysis Template

		<p><i>language but the substance... ”.</i></p> <p><i>“...language is my problem, I start by writing the assignment in French and it is then translated to English. When I read after translation, I sometimes noticed that some of the points have been diluted but I can't help myself...”</i></p> <p><i>“...I managed to cope along the course of time because the lecturers did not use my poor knowledge of English to under mark me... and there are lecturers who check our work before the final submission and this service is opened to all students”.</i></p>
	<p>Library facility as a support structure</p>	<p><i>“...for the nursing side, we have very old books, very old outdated literature...”</i></p> <p><i>...The library keeps about two copies of books for reference purposes but some of our colleagues takes them for longer period and they no longer serve the purpose”</i></p> <p><i>“The library has a reserve section which keeps some copies but you can have that book for than an hour”.</i></p> <p><i>“Journals are not a problem, the library keeps a wide range of nursing journals for all the specialist disciplines, the problem is with the books, they keep one or two copies”</i></p> <p><i>“... not being able to access the readings on the computer using EBSCO-host like other students is frustrating. I have to ask for help from my colleagues who are also busy with their work”.</i></p>

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		<p><i>... having to go to the library when ever I need resources because I need help with the search is a problem...</i></p> <p><i>" I waste a lot of time, instead of doing this from home or where I can access the internet... "</i></p> <p><i>"The students are correct, some of the books are old but we update them yearly but we keep the old copies for some time and discard them after a certain period"</i></p> <p><i>"The students from the nursing department come for library orientation but we can do more. They can have more training on how to do the library search on campus and outside campus"</i>.</p> <p><i>"We have a person who is solely dedicated to attend to nursing students, that person can take small groups to train them on the existing data bases and how to conduct searches"</i>.</p>
	<p>Lecturers with multiple responsibilities</p>	<p><i>"...they don't have time for us. To be honest, they don't have time to for us because they claim to be busy with other schools' responsibilities..."</i>.</p> <p><i>" ... we have decided as a group to work on our own because our lecturer is too busy with big projects and exam times are coming. She leaves messages with ... (name of the school receptionist)"</i></p> <p><i>"...I think they have their own important things. She like telling us that she is attending a faculty board meeting or she will leave the class halfway because she has to attend a</i></p>

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		<p><i>research committee meeting. We keep quiet about it but it is not acceptable”.</i></p>
	<p><i>Quality student-research supervisor relationship</i></p>	<p><i>“I meet my supervisor according to her schedule; even in that meeting, you are not free; it's like a meeting between the principal and a learner”.</i></p> <p><i>“ ... you should be in a position to relate freely with your supervisor, be able to get consult her when you need some guidance but some of us we are allocated to difficult supervisors...”</i></p> <p><i>“we agree on time as to the day and time we should meet but there are a lot of interruptions when have a meeting...”.</i></p> <p><i>“ ...there's a phone call and she attends to that for the next 20 minutes, another person pops in and spends another 10 to 15 minutes.when you start discussing you are already exhausted...”</i></p>
	<p><i>Inadequate psychosocial support services for adult learners</i></p>	<p><i>Those '20 year old children' student counsellors cannot offer any help to an old postgraduate student and you also feel uncomfortable opening up to the child that is the age of your daughter”</i></p> <p><i>“there is social support at the student counselling....you go there and find a 20 year old....how is that child going to help you?”</i></p> <p><i>“I once went there and this child just said to me 'hello (with an attitude), can I help you?' then I started chatting with her</i></p>

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		<p><i>trying to build some relationship, but she did not have time for that" ... how could I discuss (with this child) my problems"?</i></p> <p><i>"The school must have a person like the academic development officer for undergraduate students, a older person who will understand our problems or negotiate with the student counselling unit that they employ matured counsellors"</i></p>
	Lack of mentorship services	<p><i>".....in other universities, when you arrive, you are allocated a mentor".</i></p> <p><i>I wish we had mentors from second years because that helps a lot. The school should try and introduce this system, especially for the weak students like us, who always think about giving up"</i></p>
	Favouritism	<p><i>"There are those who are her favourites and they are always in and out of her office. She likes the high performers and she ends up neglecting us the slow learners..."</i></p> <p><i>"Our class rep is not recognised... our lecturer has a person she likes who is serving as her liason person between us and her but we did not choose her, she just likes her".</i></p> <p><i>".....May be the lucky students are those who are doing well. Those are the students who are likely to get the support".</i></p> <p><i>"There was almost a fight in class because this one acts as our class rep because our facilitator likes her. It annoys us and the facilitator knows but she is not doing anything about it."</i></p>

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	<p>Lack of financial Support</p>	<p><i>...when I enquired about financial support, I was not taken because they wanted above 75%.</i></p> <p><i>...it means the financial support is reserved for only those people that are well performing and us, the average people there is no financial support where as this is what we really need.</i></p> <p><i>“...I did not qualify because I am a part-time student and they wanted full time students only ...”</i></p> <p><i>“In other faculties, PhD students gets funding for doing their PhD research, we have to get our own funds”.</i></p>
	<p>Limited experience prior to undertaking the course</p>	<p><i>...My country has sent me to do ICU with no experience. This is a setback because I have to start by learning the basics, such as the ventilator because I was seeing it for the first time.</i></p> <p><i>I had to start by understanding the discipline specific language because I came to study something I had no experience of. My country wanted me to establish ICU because there are no ICUs , we use high care units.</i></p> <p><i>“Lack of exposure to my current field of specialisation has hindered my progress. I find it difficult to link what I am doing with experience in the field because I don't have it. I am sometimes lost in class.</i></p>

Appendix 4: Qualitative Data Analysis Template

Student outcomes	Academic and personal development	<i>...I think coming to this course has actually empowered me. I'm thinking at a different level.</i>
	Progression	<i>.....I find this learning environment a very mature one and one that enables you to complete what you need to do because of the flexibility and the maturity of the people that are involved with the course. ...it has been an eye opener. I've learnt a lot.</i>

Appendix 5



RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL : ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

30 JUNE 2008

MR. J MUGARURA (206519798)
NURSING EDUCATION

Dear Mr. Mugarura

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0223/08M

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been approved for the following project:

"An inquiry into student support mechanisms to increase throughout and success in postgraduate nursing programs at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: A students' perspective"

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

Yours faithfully


.....
MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA

cc. Supervisor (Prof. NG Mtshali)
cc. Mr. S Reddy

Appendix 6

John Mugarura
University of KwaZulu-Natal
School of Nursing
4041, Durban-South Africa
Cell: +27 (0) 835653559
E-mail: johmuk@yahoo.co.uk
July 09, 2008

The Head of School
School of Nursing
University of KwaZulu-Natal
4041
Durban- South Africa

Through: The Director Postgraduate Programs
School of Nursing
University of KwaZulu- Natal

Dear Prof,

RE: Request for permission to collect data from postgraduate nursing students

I am a Masters Degree student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the Nursing Education Program. I am expected to conduct a research project as one of the requirements for the completion of my degree program and my research project is titled: **“An Inquiry into Student Support Mechanisms in Postgraduate Nursing Programs at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: A Students’ Perspective”**.

After obtaining the University Ethics Clearance (**Ethical Clearance Approval Number HSS/0223/08M**), I would like to seek your permission to proceed to collecting data from postgraduate nursing students.

Attached is a copy of my ethical clearance and research proposal.

Sincerely yours,
John Mugarura

Appendix 7



24 July 2008

Mr J Mugarura
c/o School of Nursing
UKZN

Dear Mr Mugarura

Permission to collect data from Postgraduate nursing students

Please be advised that permission has been granted for you to collect your data from postgraduate students in the School of Nursing, University of KZN

Wish you all the success in your study, and hope you observe the ethical obligation as per your protocol

Thank you

Sincerely

Professor B R Bhengu
Head
School of Nursing

School of Nursing, Howard College Campus

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