

Factors that Influence University Student Throughput and Dropout: An Analysis of  
the University of KwaZulu-Natal, College of Humanities

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of

Master of Social Science

(Public Policy)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

2014

## Abstract

This study was an investigation into the Factors that Influence University Student Throughput and Dropout focusing on the University of KwaZulu-Natal, College of Humanities. The study focused on students who dropped out even though they did not owe the university and were also in good standing academically. It must be noted though that the literature of this study did not reveal much about the students in good academic and financial standing as the university data revealed that all types of students (those performing poorly and owe the university and those in good academic and financial standing) do drop-out for different reasons.

There were two theoretical frameworks guiding this study, namely: the Theory of students Integration by Tinto (1975) and the Pathway Study by Letseka (2009). These two theories advocate for good integration of students in both the institutional and social culture of the university. The Integration theory broadly articulates this view in a global perspective whilst the Pathway Study articulates this view from a South African perspective.

This study utilized both the Qualitative and the Quantitative methodologies. This was done through the snowball sampling and the document analysis methods respectively. The study population was the students who dropped-out, the UKZN management, the SRC and the Counselling Department. These participants provided informative and interesting insights on the issue at hand.

This study identified numerous factors that influence students to drop-out and these factors are similar to those that obtain in the literature of this study. Notably, there were also new factors that influence students to drop-out which were established by this study. One such factor is the issue of sicknesses requiring serious traditional intervention.

Lastly, the study concluded by recommending that the institutional support mechanism at UKZN be reviewed towards the development of specific policies that can address the issue of drop-outs.

## Declaration

I **Siyabonga Salatien Nkontwana** solemnly declare that this dissertation is my own original work. All references, citations, and borrowed views have been duly acknowledged. This dissertation is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Public Policy in the College of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

Signature



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DATE

02 October 2012

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## Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wish to thank God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the insights, wisdom and direction which enabled me to finish this project.

I would also like to acknowledge the following people for the contributions they have made throughout my career:

- My late mother, Mrs Doris Fikelephi Nkontwana (Msweli, Nondumo, Ntshongweni) for advice, encouragement and the blessings she gave me before she passed on. Thank you my beloved mom. May your soul rest in peace.
- My sister, Ms Sindisiwe Pretty-Girl Nkontwana for the emotional and financial support she has given me and also for being my source of hope after my mother passed on.
- My supervisor, Dr Bheki Mngomezulu for guidance, support and encouragement. Your availability, advices and assistance you have given me will forever be appreciated. Thank you very much and may God bless you.
- My wife-to-be, Ms Portia Hleziphi Ngubane for all the support and also for being my source of hope whenever I came across hardships.
- The study participants for sharing their thoughts, perspectives and insights with me. It really gave me invaluable perspectives on this study.
- The Teaching and Learning Office of the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the support it gave me during the course of this study.
- The University's Language Planning and Development Office for the support they have given me so that I could finish this study.
- My daughter Ms Phiwulwazi Nkontwana, for keeping me focused. My special gratitude goes to you for reshaping my life for the better.
- Lastly, I would like to thank my family, especially my sisters, for all the support they have given me throughout this journey (Ngiyabonga bontshongweni, nyamazane!)

## Acronyms

ACT:	American College Testing
AM&E:	Academic Monitoring and Exclusion
AMS:	Academic Monitoring and Support
CHE:	Centre for Higher Education
DHET:	Department of Higher Education & Training
DMI:	Data Management Information
DoE:	Department of Education
DUT:	Durban University of Technology
FET:	Further Education and Training
FTE:	Full Time Equivalent
IKS:	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
OECD:	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RAC:	Registrations Appeal Committee
SRC:	Student Representative Council
TUT:	Tshwane University of Technology
UCT:	University of Cape Town
UK:	United Kingdom
UKZN:	University of KwaZulu-Natal
USA:	United States of America

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## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction

Education and skills development remain pivotal tools to economic development and poverty alleviation in South Africa. Notably, student drop-outs constitute one of the niggling problems in South Africa. The problem affects both basic and higher education institutions alike. This study focused on the higher education sector. It foregrounds the history of drop-outs at South African Higher Education institutions and the policies put in place as means to avert this endemic problem. According to CHE (2013) the reliable records of completion rates do not go back to the last century and concerns about attrition date back at least as far as the late 1960s. As a consequence, a number of South African universities introduced units or “bureaux” for university teaching in the 1970s (Nupen, 1973). The colonial and apartheid rule in South Africa which spanned 350 years had a devastating impact on the intellectual, economic and social fabric of the society (Makgoba and Mubangizi, 2010).

Black South Africans were highly oppressed by the apartheid regime. It is worth noting that this oppression was enforced amongst other things through education. According to Chisholm (2004) the schools were fragmented and this was the most effective tool to allocate resources unequally. This fragmentation happened in all levels of schooling (primary and high schools) and tertiary institutions (Universities and Technikons).

The policies in the sector of education were enacted to further perpetuate colonialism and oppression. This was achieved through the founding of colonial universities such as the University of Zululand which to all intents and purposes was a designated institution for Blacks, African students in particular, whilst the University of Natal and the University of Cape Town were reserved for Whites and the University of Durban Westville was designated for Indians. The implementation of Bantu Education policy further perpetuated this culture of racial discrimination in the education sector. As a result the numbers of Black students in higher education were very low. Fiske and Ladd (2004:233-234) as quoted in Letseka (2009) corroborate the views expressed above in their argument “that as a result of apartheid policies and legislation, repetition and drop-out rates among black students are high and matriculation pass rates low” (Letseka et al, 2009;7).

CHE (2013) asserts that participation of Black students in higher education began to grow in the 1980s. In 1994, access to higher education became widely open, under the theme of 'balancing the imbalances of the past' and this goal was achieved with some success (CHE, 2010:viii). Thus the proportion of black students rose to 40% of the total student body in 1999, to 61% in 2004 and to 72 % in 2005 (Valentine, Hirschy et al. 2011). Despite the increasing number of students accessing higher education, the throughput and retention rate decreased consistently. It can be deduced that the high increase of student dropouts might be caused by the poor quality of students entering higher education or institutions of higher learning whose unpreparedness was caused by the imbalances of the past.

This chapter begins by explaining the concepts that are deemed to be relevant in the literature. There are a lot of different concepts that are utilized whilst attempting to explain student dropouts/retention which might cause confusion when left unexplained. In light of this, the researcher decided to explain such concepts. Notably, these terms include: Attrition, Attrition rate, Cohort, Completion rate, Drop-out, Drop-out rate, Exclusions, Graduation rate, Good Standing Headcount, Retention, Retention rate, Throughput rate, Student success rate, and Undergraduate. They are discussed below as follows:

## **1.2 Explanation of relevant concepts**

### **1.2.1 Dropout**

DoE (1998) defines dropouts as students who voluntarily exit the system (not academically excluded). According to Tinto (1975) there are two shortcomings that lead to the failure to determine the characteristics of student dropouts, namely; inadequate attention given to questions of definition and to the development of theoretical models that seek to explain, not simply to describe the processes that bring individuals to leave institutions of higher education. The failure to define dropouts adequately can have a significant impact upon questions of policy in higher education. This has caused a situation whereby researchers are unable to distinguish between a dropout resulting from voluntary withdrawal and a dropout resulting from academic failure and also the fact that researchers happen to put together a permanent and temporal dropout sometimes referred to as stop outs and the transfers (Tinto, 1975: 90).

It can be argued that not putting adequate attention to the definition of student dropouts might play a significant role in the failure to establish a policy on student dropouts by both government

and institutions of higher learning globally. It can also be argued that the development of theoretical models might be the cause of the misunderstanding of the problems caused by this phenomenon. The interchangeable use of the concepts such as attrition, retention, dropouts and persistence might contribute immensely to the people's inability to comprehend the damage caused by the contradictions particularly on many studies' findings that prevail as a result of this.

Tinto (1975) further argues that the failure of the past research to make such distinctions has often produced findings which are contradictory in character and/or misleading by implication. For instance, failure to distinguish academic failure from voluntary withdrawal has often led to seemingly contradictory findings that indicate the ability to be inversely related to dropout, unrelated to dropout, and directly related to dropout. In other cases, failure to separate permanent dropout from temporary and/or transfer behaviors has often led institutional and state planners to overestimate substantially the extent of dropout from higher education (Tinto, 1975:90).

This study, therefore, opted to discuss the definition of student drop-outs in the following fashion: it entails two types of meanings namely, voluntary withdrawal and the excluded students which is the same as dismissal. These are explained below.

Withdrawal is separated into three types, namely; temporal (stop-out), permanent and intentional drop-outs. By intentional drop-outs we mean the students who register without the intention to graduate but with an interest of getting an understanding of some modules and go back to work and get promoted thereafter or register whilst waiting for the response in their preferred institution and once they get admitted they leave irrespective of what period it is and they can leave having not even written a single examination. For this study, the latter is the crucial definition of drop-outs which requires serious attention. Hence the focus of this study was more on this definition Tinto, 1975: 92).

Valentine, Hirschy et al (2011) support the above argument by asserting that when defining dropouts, it is important to make a distinction between students who meet their educational goals before graduating but do not receive a degree and students who enrolled intending to graduate but do not do so. For instance, a student might enter a college with the intention of taking three accounting courses to upgrade his or her status at work. When this happens, neither the

institution nor the student fails, yet the institution would likely count the student as a dropout. On account of the above mentioned reasons, some students plan to participate in postsecondary education for a variety of reasons thus enroll in postsecondary education (for example, university, community college, or programs designed to lead to qualifications for skilled jobs) in an attempt to improve their employment prospects (Valentine, Hirschy et al., 2011:215).

Tinto (1987) is concerned that the term “dropout” tends to have negative connotations. As a consequence, he suggests that the term “departures” be used instead. Again, as alluded to above some students leave the institution intentionally, especially after having acquired what they were aiming to achieve and thus do not deserve a negative evaluation of their action connoted by the concept ‘drop-outs’.

### **1.2.2 Attrition**

This is a combination of drop-outs and exclusions. It means that the student does not re-enroll in the consecutive terms.

### **1.2.3 Attrition rate**

This concept refers to the total number of drop-outs and exclusions, in a given year and is divided by the total number of headcount enrolments in that year.

### **1.2.4 Cohort**

Cohorts are first-time entry (no prior exposure to higher education) students who enroll for an undergraduate qualification in a particular year.

### **1.2.5 Completion rate**

This refers to the ratio of students who graduate in min+1 time divided by the total number of enrolled students. [UKZN target 65%].

### **1.2.6 Drop-out rate**

This is the total number of drop-outs in a given year divided by the total number of headcount enrolments in that year.

### **1.2.7 Exclusions**

These are students who are required to leave the university due to unsatisfactory academic performance or disciplinary transgressions.

### **1.2.8 Graduation rate**

This term refers to the total number of graduates in a given year divided by the total headcount enrolments for that year [UKZN target 25%].

### **1.2.9 Retention**

The institution is able to keep the student from the first year to graduation. Student retention is often viewed simply as a measure of the percentage of students who gain a course credit or an award based on the number that registered for a course or an award. This is a narrow definition of the concept and one that is referred to as the institutional dimension. Two additional dimensions of this multidimensional concept are put forward for discussion in this dissertation (Ashby & Alison, 2004) namely, the student dimension and the employer dimension.

### **1.2.10 Retention rate**

This refers to the total number of enrolled students for the current year (who have not graduated, dropped-out or been excluded) divided by the total number enrolled in that year.

### **1.2.11 Throughput rate**

This is the number of first-time entry undergraduate students of a particular cohort who graduate within the minimum time or up to two years beyond the minimum time, divided by the number of students who enrolled in that cohort.

### **1.2.12 Student success rate**

This refers to the ratio of FTE [Full Time Equivalent] degree credits to FTE enrolments. [DHET target 80%].

### **1.2.13 Undergraduate**

These are students engaged in a first entry degree-level qualification.

### **1.2.14 Stop-outs**

Astin (1976) defines the term stop-outs as students who interrupt their undergraduate education for a relatively brief period and return to complete the degree.

### **1.2.15 Persistence**

This term means the quality of students who continue to study despite facing many challenges and as Tinto (1987) mentions; they will “stick it out.”

### **1.2.16 Withdrawal**

This term means departure from the college campus.

### 1.3 Reasons for choosing the topic

Being involved in student leadership (as SRC President) brought about awareness to me of many issues affecting students and the university in general, amongst those is the students' drop outs phenomenon. In light of this the researcher then decided to explore the factors that influence student's drop-out. The study was deemed important as it would:

- (a) Investigate whether the university provides adequate systems to prevent and regulate dropouts, and if not, then suggest the establishment of the new system which could be relevant in this regard.
- (b) Assist the university by ensuring that valid information and facts are available with regard to students' dropouts.
- (c) Recommend the development of a policy on students' retention which will pronounce clearly on students dropouts.
- (d) Also help government through the department of higher education to develop its policy on students' retention and dropouts.

Levin (1992: 258) asserts that all policy is shaped by a particular formulation of a problem." Therefore, the issue that has been raised above with regard to the policy development derives from the fact that policies are established, in Levin's terms, because of the three fundamental bases outlined below:

It is thus argued by the author that:

- (a) Policies are established when there is a persisting problem, for instance HIV/AIDS is a persisting problem; hence it requires policies to be regulated in any institution, be it an organization or an institution of higher learning etcetera.
- (b) Policies are established when there is a foreseen problem. For instance, when we are calling for all institutions of higher learning to open doors of learning for everyone without discrimination, we must therefore establish a policy to regulate access so as to

prevent unqualified people from entering the system, hence the establishment of the admission policies in higher institutions of learning.

(c) Policies are established when there is a sudden problem/situation going on, for instance the stealing of perhaps degree certificates to be utilized somewhere or any other situation that is unusual which thus requires a policy to regulate that.

In line with the first basis of establishing a policy relating to a ‘Persisting Problem’ one would argue that students’ dropout is indeed a persisting problem since it is an on-going challenge affecting the whole world and thus requires a policy to regulate it. However, the policy should speak to students’ retention in general and students’ dropouts in particular. Although the above enumerated reasons prompted the researcher to embark upon this study, he was mostly prompted by the identified knowledge gap in the policies (AM&E and RAC) in this university as they do not target students in good academic and financial standing. Therefore, the enactment of the retention policy made sense in view of the fact that the university would want to retain these students. .

Three key assumptions informed this study. Firstly, this study assumed that it would persuade the university to establish a retention policy since the absence of such a policy that deals with retention and dropout might be a major contributory factor to the lack of students’ persistence in pursuing their studies. Secondly, it also assumed that this institution does not have a mechanism in place to identify and help students in good academic and financial standing to persist in their studies. Thirdly, it assumed that there are factors that have not been identified which are certainly influencing students in good academic and financial standing to dropout.

#### **1.4 Key research questions**

The key questions for which the study hoped to find answers were the following:

- (a) What are the factors that influence students to drop out in general?
- (b) What are the factors that influence students in good academic and financial standing to drop out?
- (c) What is the role played by the university to support students and to prevent students’ drop-outs?



## 1.5 Chapter outline

This dissertation is organized under seven chapters, each of which is summarized below.

### **Chapter 1**

Introduction and background

In most studies chapter one serves as the introduction of what the research is about and also outlines the aims and objectives of that particular study. Thus, this chapter as mentioned above introduces the study by providing the historical background of higher education in South Africa. The history of the South African higher education is briefly explained in order to provide the necessary context within which the thrust of the discussion is to be understood. The discussion of the key research questions is done in this chapter and in doing so one attempted to explain the specific purpose of each question and its relevance to the study. This chapter, therefore, concludes by providing a brief synopsis of the respective chapters of this study.

### **Chapter 2**

Literature Review

A literature review is an important component of a study since it serves as a primary source of information for the study. Therefore, this chapter discusses the literature on students' dropout from international perspectives to the local level. The local level case studies such as the Students Path Way study by Letseka et al (2009) are discussed in order to provide a perspective of this phenomenon (students' dropout) in our context. This chapter is arranged thematically in order to reveal specific information about the factors that influence students' dropout with the view of distinguishing those factors that have already been established from those that are established by this study.

### **Chapter 3**

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the most important component of the study because it serves as the guiding basis of the study as whole. This study was guided by Tinto's (1975) theory of integration and the Path Way Study by Letseka et al (2009). The Theory of Integration, on the

one hand, claims that the phenomenon of students' drop-outs in the entire world is influenced by failure to integrate students in both the institution and the social life within the institution. On the other hand, the Student Pathway Study by Letseka et al (2009) studied students' drop-outs from the South African point of view and identified more or less the same factors as the Integration theory with fewer notable exceptions which are contextual in nature.

## **Chapter 4**

### Research Methodology

Research methodology is defined as the logic of scientific approaches to the examination of the phenomenon or phenomena (Marais et al 1996). This chapter, therefore, outlines the scientific approach that was used to conduct this study. It explains in detail the types of approaches that were used, the reason for choosing such methods, how these approaches were utilized and the place where the research was conducted. This chapter, therefore, uses the snowball sampling method and the data was collected through the qualitative approach. However, to a certain extent, the university documents such as policies and other publications were also used to acquire the necessary information. This chapter also outlines how empirical data was collected.

## **Chapter 5**

### Findings Presentation

This chapter presents the results of the study without discussing them because they are discussed in the following chapter. It does so by presenting the responses from the study respondents, namely: the student drop-outs, the SRC, UKZN management, and UKZN department of students counselling. The results revealed new factors that are influencing students to drop-out and also confirmed some factors which had already been established by the literature as factors that also impact on UKZN students' dropouts particularly in the College of Humanities.

## **Chapter 6**

### Findings, discussion and analysis

This chapter discusses the findings of the study and further analyses them in order to give the author's perspectives on the overall presentation of the results. This is done through discussing and analyzing the three interviews conducted in this study with the students' drop-outs, the SRC,

UKZN management, and UKZN department of students counselling. The interviews are discussed thematically under the key questions. These findings link the literature of this study with the newly revealed results.

## **Chapter 7**

### Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter synthesizes all the chapters starting from the literature review to the findings in order to give the overall conclusion, the policy implications and the recommendations of the study. This is one of the most important chapters because it gives the direction to the reader on what to do after reading it. This chapter, therefore, concludes by raising pertinent issues that might help in reducing or addressing the students' drop-out phenomenon, thereby proving a solution to the endemic problem of students-drop-outs.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

Access to higher education was widely opened since the inception of the democratic government in 1994 under the theme of '*balancing the imbalances of the past*' and this goal was achieved with some success (CHE, 2007:9). The Center for Higher Education (CHE) 2010 argue that the proportion of black students rose to 40% of the total student body in 1999, to 61% in 2004 and to 72 % in 2005 (Valentine, Hirschy et al. 2011). Ironically, as the number of students accessing higher education increased the throughput and retention rate decreased. It is in light of this that Letseka (2009) argues that there is a large number of students dropping out in higher education before finishing their junior degrees.

It can be inferred from the above observation that the high increase of students dropouts might be caused by the poor quality of students entering institutions of higher education or their unpreparedness caused by the urgent need to redress the imbalances of the past. As one mentioned above its 20 years after the country attained its democracy therefore access to higher education has been created for everyone but the challenge of this epoch is the throughput which is caused among other things by the pschological underpreparedness of the leaners mostly from underresourced schools and impoverished families.

In line with this, the DoE(2005) as cited in Letseka et al (2009,9) released a report which noted that of the 120 000 students that enrolled in South Africa's higher education sector (Universities and Technikon) in 2000, 36 000 (or 30%) dropped out during their first year of study. A further 24 000 (or 20%) dropped out during their second and third years of study. Of the remaining 60 000 (or 50%), less than half graduated within the three years duration for a generic Bachelors degree. Furthermore, the Department of Education (DoE) expressed concerns that this high drop-out rate resulted in the annual loss of an estimated R4.5 billion in subsidies and bursaries to higher education institutions (Letseka, 2009: 1).

It can be argued that the statistics presented above might be an indication that students are still grappling with familiarizing themselves with the new environment and the culture of the

university. Contrary to the foregoing argument, it might be that the institution's support programs are perceived not to be effective in ensuring that all students, first years and undergraduate students in particular, are well equipped with the necessary skills to cope in the university environment. It can also be argued that resources such as financial aid, bursaries etcetera. are perceived to be wasted if students are not progressing academically because they are said to be occupying the space which is supposed to be occupied by new incoming (or prospective) students who also rely on the same financial resources to further their studies.

In light of the aforementioned, this study sought to investigate the factors that influence the students to dropout. It must be noted though that many studies have been focusing on students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are both performing poorly in their studies and who are financially needy. On the contrary, this study focused on factors influencing students in good academic and financial standing but who nonetheless drop-out.

This chapter discusses and reviews the local and international literature that is relevant to this study. Such literature was sourced from peer reviewed journal articles found online and relevant books, reports and UKZN publications and reports. In line with the Student Attrition Theory's argument that students are sometimes affected by their experiences with the different components of an institution such as, institutional quality, courses, and friends, this chapter discusses the concept "stress" in order to check whether it does have an influence in student dropouts especially in relation to friendship or not (Bean and Metzner1985).This concept includes loneliness, depression and satisfaction.

## **2.2 Conceptualizing stress**

The application of Durkheim's theory of suicide as a foundation of Student Integration Theory by Tinto provided the rationale for this study's choice to discuss the concept of stress with the view of ascertaining whether or not stress is a factor in students' dropout (Tinto, 1975: 92). Beamish et al (1985) argue that stress is one of the major causes of sudden death and suicidal acts. This study discusses the term stress in the following manner: we first define stress in relation to many fields as discussed by different authors, and is then followed by discussing

terms, such as Loneliness, Depression and Satisfaction, which are related to stress and which also play a huge role in defining stress.

It can be argued that there might be a link between stress and student dropouts. Thus stress can be one of the major contributory factors of this phenomenon. It is also assumed, on the one hand, that when a person/student is satisfied with almost everything, his/her life proceeds smoothly and is not easily affected by things such as dropping-out. On the other hand, if a student/person is not satisfied it can be argued that she/he might be affected by loneliness, depression, hardship, stress etcetera. This might lead to an increase in student dropouts.

The term stress, meaning hardship or adversity, can be found though without a programmatic focus at least as early as the 14th century (Lumsden, Wilson et al., 1981). This term is extensively discussed in almost all fields of study. This is corroborated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984: 1) who argue that “it is virtually impossible today to read extensively in any of the biological or social sciences without running into the term stress”. The concept is even more extensively discussed in health care fields and it is found in economics, political science, business and education as well (Cabrera, Nora et al., 1993). This term has been associated with the following terms: loneliness, depression and satisfaction. There are other factors that contribute to loneliness and stress such as gender, age, education level, marriage status, and health problems. Additionally, there are also factors that contribute immensely in solving loneliness and stress problems such as parents support, teachers’ preferences, friendship and the role of schools (Serin, Serin et al., 2010)

It can be inferred from this definition of stress that when students go through hardship in the university they are likely to dropout and also that factors such as, gender, age, educational level, marriage status and health problems play a huge role in loneliness and stress which then results in in students dropping-out. For instance, it can be argued that when students finish matric and assume university studies in line with Tinto’s (1975; 1986) student integration theory and also the theory of student departure in accordance with Letseka’s path way study, they might feel the stress which derives from the perceived work load of the university compared to what they were used to in high schools. The situation explicated above can result in students not coping in this kind of environment which might then culminate in their dropping out of the system. This can arguably serve as a justification of the findings of the CHE’s report of 2010 as alluded to in the

introduction above. It can also be argued that as health problems are construed as having the potential to cause stress and health related issues which might lead to students dropping out.

Gender is also considered as one of the significant contributory factors in loneliness and stress and most of the studies related to loneliness arrive at a similar conclusion when addressing gender issues. Notably, loneliness is more frequent in male students as they are more disadvantaged than female students at expressing themselves and solving problems in social relations (Le Roux and Conners, 2000). According to Saltalu, Öztürk et al.(2009) male students attending in the Faculty of Vocational Education had a significantly higher level of loneliness than female students. Hamarta (2000) examined university students at Selcuk university in the faculty of education in Turkey and established that male students' loneliness level was significantly higher than that of female students (Ari and Hamarta, 2000).

Furthermore, Galaif, Sussman et al. (2003) argue that girls may be socialized to seek social support more than boys. These arguments are consistent with the research findings in Russell, Cutrona et al. (1984) and Andersson and Stevens (1993). But other studies have reported results in contradistinction to Kivett (1979), Alkan and Sezgin (1998). It is also notable that females might have a large social network than males (Hazer and Boylu, 2010).

The table below confirms the above arguments that males are more likely to be affected by stress compared to females given the fact that they form the large percentage of drop-outs. This data derives from Willging and Johnson (2004) who conducted a study to establish the factors contributing to student drop-outs at the University of Illinois in the United States of America

**Table 1: Comparison of Persisters and Dropouts on males and females**

Gender	Persisters	Drop-outs	Total	Drop-outs%
Male	16 (29.1%)	12 (42.9%)	28 (33.7%)	42.9%
Female	39 (70.9%)	16 (57.1%)	55 (66.3%)	29.1%

Source: Willging and Johnson (2004)

It can be argued that the statistics above are an indication that females by nature persist in whatever they do and this is exemplified by their act of enduring the pain of giving birth. Another relevant example in this regard is that it could be argued that widows now lead or head

households successfully whereas the majority of men seem to fail dismally to lead their households after the death of their wives. Equally, in relation to the issue of student drop-outs, it can be argued that female students might persist more than their male counterparts and this can be utilized as one of the justifications of the statistics above. Lastly, it can also be argued that women possess the ability of being outspoken about their problems unlike their male counterparts who are perceived to normally keep problems within themselves. This is conceived as the underlying reason accounting for why males fail to persist in hardship compared to females.

Loneliness is an enduring condition of emotional state that arises when a person feels estranged from, is misunderstood or rejected by others, and/or lacks appropriate social partners for desired activity, particularly activities that provide a sense of social integration and opportunities for emotional intimacy (Rook, 1984; Donaldson and Watson, 1996). Researchers argue that loneliness can be separated into two types namely; social and emotional loneliness (Saltalu, Öztürk et al. 2009). Social loneliness is a worry resulting from isolation from a group or society. For example, when a student is isolated by other students in the university, social loneliness ensues.

Social loneliness is much more related with lack of social relationship (Saltalu, Öztürk et al., 2009). A person who moves to a new city feels lonely in this new environment. For example, when students are from the rural areas they are likely to feel lonely in the university environment. There is a difference between a state of loneliness and being alone. Hazer and Boylu (2010) further argue that the fact that a person or a student in our case is alone does not necessarily mean that she/he is stressed because sometimes being alone is associated with pleasure and emotionally refreshing (Berg et al., 1981; Andersson, 1998).

One can argue that loneliness might be linked to students drop-outs in that its definition gives an indication that loneliness prevails when a student/person is not understood or is rejected by others. Therefore, according to the student integration theory by Tinto (1975) the rejected student referred to above needs both social and academic integration into the university, failing which the student might drop-out. Therefore, integrating the student into the university has the potential of reducing the perceived high level of student drop-outs.



Depression is also closely related to stress as one alluded to above. Therefore, depression/stress affects people in different ways as some people become mentally ill as a result of stress whilst some engage in unbecoming behavior when stressed (Beck, 1976). Cai and Harrison (2000), argue that anxiety and depression lead to the use of alcohol or drugs among students, unbecoming behavior, decrease in aptitude, an increase in absence from school and to a decrease in motivation and success. Notably, therefore, depression might be linked to illness and student dropouts since when people or students are depressed their academic program becomes affected, and might contribute immensely to the student decision to drop out. It can also be argued that depression requires medical and psychological intervention in time. However, the perceived failure by institutions to identify and intervene in this problem timeously might also be a contributory factor causing students drop-outs.

Satisfaction is also closely related to stress as mentioned above. Serin, Aydınoglu et al. (2010) state that life satisfaction can be defined as how far an individual reaches the aims s/he has set (Koch, 2001) and the positive appraisal of a person's whole life according to the criteria defined by that person (cited in Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). Satisfaction is also defined by Serin, Aydınoglu et al (2010) as an individual's conscious, cognitive appraisal of the quality of his or her life (inHeadey and Wearing, 1992) and may echo a worldwide appraisal as well as appraisals within specific life domains (for example, family and self). One can argue that successful students have the lower negative stress, higher resilience and higher life satisfaction than students experiencing failure.

Parents, teachers and schools play an important role in reducing stress and enhancing resiliency by providing positive support. Werner and Smith (1992) established that students who are able to beat the odds and succeed have a favourite teacher who is their role model. Additionally, confidence and good experiences in the school help build positive outlook and mitigate the stress (Serin, Aydınoglu et al., 2010: page?). Therefore, it can be argued that integrating students into the institutional culture of the university may assist in relieving stress from students. (Tinto, 1997)

It can also be argued that teachers, parents and schools/ universities play an important role in supporting students to persist in their university studies and ultimately graduate. For instance, parents can strengthen their provision of advisory role to their children, and involve

psychologists where it is necessary. . The high level of student drop-out might decrease. It is also contended that if teachers can teach with dedication and passion students might easily be integrated and this might culminate in their coming to classes willingly. It is also notable that if universities could intensify their support programs for students, perhaps this could contribute in reducing the perceived high level of student drop-outs.

Lazarus (1966) makes a distinction between three kinds of stress, namely: harm, threat, and challenge (Lazarus, 1966; 1981; Lazarus and Launier, 1978).

Harm refers to psychological damage that has already been done, for instance an irrevocable loss such as the case where a student is forced by circumstances to study at a particular institution whereas the student prefers another institution for a certain period of time forced by circumstances such as parents, bursary etcetera. Arguably, this time will never be reversed and has harmfully damaged the life of this particular student.

Threat is the anticipation of harm that has not yet taken place but may be imminent. Thus threat is an unpleasant state of mind that may seriously block mental operations and impair functioning, such as in the case where a student is envisaging that he/she will not finish a degree in a particular field of study because maybe his/her friends are changing the institution. The example cited above is arguably one of the contributory factors to students drop-out.

Challenges in life derive from difficult demands which we feel confident to overcome by effectively mobilizing and deploying our coping resources. For instance it could be argued that when students are not integrated into the institutional culture they feel lonely, therefore the institution must establish systems to integrate such students (Tinto, 1997) and that students who are away from their family environment might suffer from separation anxiety at a significant level if they are deprived of social support and cannot establish close relationships (Serin, Aydınoglu et al., 2010).

### **2.3 Students achievement and drop-outs**

Since the early 1970s, a big number of research has concentrated on factors that affect achievement and drop-out rates in higher education (for example, Elkins, Braxton, and James

2000; Jansen 2004; Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson, 1983; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1987;1993). The question of why student drop-out rates vary across higher educational institutions is both important and topical and has been the focus of considerable research activity, especially in the USA (Glaeser, Ponzetto et al., 2007). Therefore, the analysis of student dropouts behaviour has gained much attention in the USA, where one of the most powerful theoretical explanations of student insistence in the path analyses model of Tinto has been established (Arulampalam, Naylor et al., 2004). Another question that needs probing relates to what some of the reasons for this are. According to Tinto, these students must show a strong commitment and individual goals. Anthropologist Suarez-Orozco in his study of immigrants established that students' families played an important role in assisting these students to cope with the challenges which assists students to persist despite being in another country (Tinto, 1997). According to Tinto (1987) many students who experience difficulties in meeting the academic performance do continue and only leave when they are forced to.

The further question that arises out of the above argument is that, it is close to fifty years since this issue started to be investigated, theoretical models have been established but instead of finding solutions and trying to reduce this problem, rather it is perceived to be continuing and increasing the percentage of drop-outs. The question becomes: What is it that we are not doing right? Or how are we supposed to approach this issue so that it could be addressed once and for all? Perhaps it could be argued that the opening of the access to higher education for blacks might have brought some foreign factors which needed more time for this matter to be addressed. However this study argues that a policy approach could be useful in finding a solution for this problem.

There are two distinct lines of inquiry that dominate the research on factors that influence student drop-outs, namely studies that focus on the economic perspective as the significant contributor, and studies that focus on the preparedness or fitness of the institution as the major contributory factor.

In the United States, the most significant dropouts occur at two-year associate degree allowing public universities (i.e. community universities) a sector that enrolls almost one-half of all undergraduate students in the United States of America (Barefoot, 2004). The dropout rates differ from institution to institution, which is why Smith and Naylor (2001) assert that the

question of why student drop-out rates vary across higher educational institutions is both important and topical and has been the focus of considerable research activity, especially in the USA.

It can thus be argued that the varying rates of student drop-outs might be attributed to the individualistic approaches employed by different institutions when dealing with this matter. It is notable, therefore, that institutions might want to be worshiped as heroes if they found solutions to this problem. Perhaps, endorsing a holistic policy centered approach might be useful in this regard. However, one appreciates that the context might also play a role in shaping the differing drop-out rates per institution. Therefore, if the unique experiences of these institutions could be shared amongst themselves and government the solution might be found.

The American College Testing (ACT) program conducted a study on collegiate/university dropout rates in general. Table\_2 shows the dropout rate means and standard deviations for freshmen to sophomore year by type of institution. More than 2,500 institutions were included in the compiled data for these 2003 estimates [13].

**Table 2: Freshman to Sophomore Year by Type of Institution**

<b>Degree Level</b>	<b>Number of students enrolled</b>	<b>Dropout Rate Mean (%)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Two-year Public	729	47.2	14.6
Two-year Private	122	33.0	18.4
BA/BS Public	84	31.8	13.4
BA/BS Private	464	29.6	16.6
MA Public	227	30.2	10.7
MA Private	506	25.7	12.0
PhD Public	214	22.7	9.4
PhD Private	184	17.7	12.1

Source: Willging and Johnson (2004)

The above table indicates that the drop-out rate is high in the public institutions and as such it creates a problem for the American government.

This literature review is set out to identify the factors that influence the students' drop-out from the previous literature, the gaps in the existing literature, and suggest possible ways of addressing the gaps. This will be achieved through utilizing different theoretical models such as, 1. Theory of educational production, which is a widely tested educational effectiveness model by Smith and Naylor (2001:2). Student integrated theory, which advocates for the involvement of students in the academic life of the institution/ college by Tinto (1997:3). Students Attrition Theory which argues that student attrition is analogous to turnover in work organizations and emphasizes the significance of behavioral intentions as predictors of persistence behavior by Bean and Metzner (1985) and the Student Pathway Study which contextualizes students' dropouts in a South African perspective and is therefore explored, through a postal survey, students' opinions on retention strategies, pass rate, failure rate, drop-out rate, graduation rate, throughput rate, and on their labour market experiences by Letseka (2009), who at the end got results which are consistent to the theory of integration by Tinto, particularly on the issue of students integration in the institutional culture of the university. Similar to Letseka's (2009) study (students Pathway Study), this study specifically investigates the reasons why students in good academic and financial standing are not remaining in the public higher education system, particularly in UKZN College of Humanities.

Notably, other authors have expanded and critiqued Tinto's Integration Model by questioning the role of the institution in the social and cultural integration of students. Nora (2005), for example, argues for the perspective of dual socialization. According to this view, institutions share responsibility in the successful cultural and social integration of students into college/university (Jensen, 2011). Tinto (2007) advocates for academic and social integration as the two most important factors affecting students' dropouts. Tinto also avers that student retention is one of the most widely studied areas in higher education.

Thus it can be argued that retention might possess ambivalent meanings in different institutions because some institutions indicate that their intention is not to retain students but to graduate them. However, the question that needs probing relates to how they can graduate students if they do not retain them in the system until graduation period. The answer to this potential question would differ from person to person. One could argue though that perhaps following other institutions such as the Durban University of Technology (DUT) which established a clear policy

on retention might play a significant role in student retention and drop-outs. One can also argue that the critiques are construed to be important in giving insights on what was not considered by other authors when developing their theories/models. However, criticisms without implementable practical solutions might not be helpful in this process. Therefore, one can argue that this might be attributed to focusing more on the gaps of the theories already established and not on how best those theories can be implemented and improved where necessary.

There are factors that have already been identified by other studies which were conducted by different scholars (for example, Elkins, Braxton, and James, 2000; Jansen, 2004; Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson, 1983; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1987; 1993). The UK Government in the year 2000 developed a range of performance indicators for higher education institutions which became a primary motivation for studying the non-completion rates of UK university students. However, large scale micro data on UK University students have not been available (Smith and Naylor, 2001).

Notably, a lot has been done in relation to identifying factors that influence student drop-outs. However, literature focuses on students from poor backgrounds and students who perform poorly (bad academic standing) in their studies whilst neglecting the other important student body coming from affording or rich families and who are in good academic standing. Arguably, despite the latter's student being the minority, higher institutions have something to learn from these students. For instance, in the year 2012 academic top performers in UKZN indicated that the factors that contribute immensely to their performance is '**reading a lot**'. Therefore, one expects UKZN to implement programs that promote reading in order to inculcate the culture of reading which might reduce the level of drop-outs.

In line with the above argument, Lehmann (2009) is of the view that first-generation working-class students were more likely to leave university very early in some cases within the first two months of enrollment. He further argues that they are also more likely to leave university regardless of their stable academic performance. The Italian study on students dropout conducted by Walberg (1980) analyzed this phenomenon from the early 1960s to 1980s where they also argue that students are likely to dropout at their first year of study. Thus they argue that the Drop-out rate (drop-outs as a percentage of total enrolment) increased from 8.8% in 1960 to 10.8% in 1970 and to 16.8% in 1980. The rise is even more remarkable if we consider the

percentage of freshmen who drop out during their first year: 1 3.6% in 1960, 2 0.4% in 1970 and 32.0% among those enrolled in 1980-81(De Francesco, 1984: 180).

However, the bold statement made by this study is that “in Italy, as no articulation of institutions exists, no alternative is offered to the student in difficulty except that of withdrawal” (De Francesco, 1984: 180).

It can be argued that the above argument might also apply in the South African context because she gained her independence in 1994. Most of the students, therefore, belong to the first generation of the people who have gained access to higher education and higher education experience is foreign to their families and themselves and might also be the reason why a large number of students drop-out. In Italy the student drop-outs phenomenon has been increasing since the 1960s just like in South Africa where the statistics of drop-outs has been increasing.

Similarly, Torenbeek, Jansen et al. (2010) on the effect of the fit between secondary and university education particularly on the issue of first-year student achievement was in line with the above argue that a large number of students dropout in their first year of study and as a result many institutions of higher learning are faced with a large number of students’ drop-outs and students taking a relatively long time to finish their courses. On average, nearly one-third of the students in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries withdraw from higher education before getting a diploma or a degree. In the South Africa (OECD, 2008), however, a significant proportion drops out in the first year which then necessitates that there be an intervention which might be useful if implemented in the first year of study (Walberg, 1980).

The question that needs probing in this regard relates to what is it that can be done in order to minimize the student dropout phenomenon. This potential question should of necessity underpin all studies that seek to investigate this phenomenon. Therefore, dropout prevention even though it is supposed to be one of the answers, it is one of the greatest challenges confronting educators and other community leaders today (Hahn, Danzberger and Lefkowitz, 1987; Hammack, 1986; McDill, Natriellofc & Pallas, 1985; Pallas, 1986). This could be as a result of the complexity of the dropouts’ problem and the fact that it is multifaceted. Notably, there is increasing evidence that a number of different types of students from diverse backgrounds and circumstances are

leaving school (LeCompte and Goebel, 1987). In order to ensure that this issue is adequately addressed, different models of interventions must be implemented as submitted by different authors (Franklin, McNeil and Wright, 1990; Franklin and Streeter, 1991; LeCompte and Goebel, 1987).

Some authors believe that early intervention (in this regard this means at the beginning of the year in the university) by a counsellor, faculty member, or student personnel specialist can ease the student's entry into the academic community (Beck and Davidson, 2001). In line with the above assertion Young (1955) also believes that a well-organized counselling program does tend to lower the dropout rate. For instance, the proficiency tests that are provided to students at Tshwane University of Technology at the beginning of the year are a good indication of early intervention (Young, 1955).

It can be argued that counseling and mentorship have been stigmatized as it is associated with academic weakness. As a consequence, students might not want to attend these programs. One can also argue that the returning students are also to blame for that because they set a bad example and they do not even encourage them to attend such programs.

Other authors argue that most of the programs that are designed to increase persistence to assist students at risk or who are not in good academic standing utilize Tinto's theoretical base as the foundation. For instance, orientation programs often introduce students to campus academic resources, for example, tutoring programs, librarian assistance (Valentine, Hirschy et al., 2011). However, a lot of studies have not been focusing on better understanding the reasons why students in good academic standing withdraw from the universities, except the study that was conducted at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2005 which sought to achieve an understanding in this regard. **DoE (2001: 17)** asserts that "high drop-out rates are due to financial and/or academic exclusions and students in good academic and financial standing not remaining in the public higher education system".



## 2.4 Factors that influence students' dropouts.

**Table 3**

Engaged literature	Factors Influencing student dropouts	The impact to higher education	The impact to the society in general	Possible solutions
The perspective of international scholars	Students finance and family background	Decreases the production of academics	Rising of poverty and unemployment	Multi-corporations and government must financially support the universities
	Classroom environment and class attendance issues	Low participation and attendance rate	Rising levels of drop-outs and unemployment	The universities must establish a good environment in class rooms
	Prior schooling and under preparedness	Require a lot of institutional support	Increases unemployment	The United Nations shall develop a proper mechanism to support schools globally.
	Gender issues	Unable to produce more male academics	Causes the imbalances in the society	There must be gender oriented programs implemented in universities to address these issues.
	Institutional support			
The South African context by South African scholars	Financial issues and family background	Decreases the production of skills	High poverty and unemployment	Government must work with corporate sector to solve this problem
	Government policies	Lack of policies in the universities	High level of drop-outs and unemployment	Designated policies must be developed to deal with the drop-outs issues
	Historical context	Still carry the burden of apartheid	Still suffers the result of apartheid	Universities must exercise their institutional autonomy by developing their unique programmes to address the imbalances of the past.

Source; (Author's interpretation, 2013)

*“The higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion” (Tinto, 1975: 96).*

There are two types of factors that influence student drop-outs which appear in almost the entire literature namely; the external and the internal factors. Notably, within external and internal factors there are also different contextual factors. External factors are: family, illness, schooling background and so forth, whilst internal factors are: social and academic integration, the institutional commitment, academic support and so on.

#### **2.4.1. Individual and institutional commitment**

##### ***2.4.1.1 Student finance and family background (the focus of this subtopic is family background)***

The studies and reports indicate that financial hardships facing many students may be the contributory factor to the high drop-out rate, especially those who are from poor families (HE Green Paper, 2012; Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). The DoE expressed concerns that this high drop-out rate resulted in the annual loss of an estimated R4.5 billion in subsidies and bursaries to higher education institutions (Letseka, 2009: 1).

Factors such as work, family, study commitments, insufficient time, ill health, pregnancy and being a father, cultural isolation, ‘missing out’ on youthful social activities and study load are also contributing to student dropouts (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). Family background and economic circumstances during childhood are seen as predictors of educational success in young adulthood (Haveman, Wolfe et al., 1991).

Forsyth and Furlong (2003: 205) assert that “despite this overall expansion, the gap in the level of participation between the most affluent and the most disadvantaged young people has remained clear”. They further argue that less affluent students are more likely to drop out of higher education because of financial hardship. However, it can be argued that despite the financial hardship that students might have to endure, collective commitment plays a role in the decision of whether to drop-out or not.

#### **2.4.2 Classroom environment and class attendance issues.**

Tinto (1997: 599) argues that “the college classroom lies at the center of the educational activity structure of institutions of higher education in that the educational encounters that occur therein are a major feature of student educational experience”. It can be argued that most of the academic activities happen in the classroom - be it a tutorial or the actual lecture, and it plays a center stage in the academic lives and experiences of the students. It is worth noting, therefore, that this is the most important component in the academic lives of the students.

Willging and Johnson (2004) conducted the largest study of dropout rates in the UK which involved more than 500 college staff, 8,500 students, and 33 colleges. The results from this study are in line with other research findings particularly those with factors such as gender (males are mostly affected), Integration, loneliness, the difficulty of their first year, and financial problems. It has also been established that the quality of teaching and the relationship between the student and the instructor are contributing factors as well (Willging and Johnson, 2004).

However, authors such as Bean, (1983); Cabrera, Castafieda, Nora, & Hengstler, (1992); Tinto, (1987) and others argue that the classroom has not played a central role in current theories of persistence. One can, therefore, argue that this might be attributed to the technological advancement in particular smart phones with social networks, because students become preoccupied by social networks in the classroom whilst the lecture is going on, thus compromising the important engagement which are supposed to be driving classrooms interactions.

Although Italian university students are always classified in international statistics as 'full-time students', (OECD, 1981; Unesco, 1981: 22-24) in reality they are much more part-timers. This is so because even those who do not work often appear to attend university on a part-time basis.

As much as the majority of South African students are said to be attending full time in their universities, the majority of them do not attend classes which might be caused by one of the following: the lack of commitment from the student, the failure of the lecturer to teach properly or the lack the understanding the language utilized by the teacher/ lecturer resulting in the student losing interest to come to class.

### 2.4.3 Prior schooling and under preparedness

Under preparedness warrants serious attention (CHE, 2013). Some researchers argue that the academic achievement of students depends on factors like prior knowledge, social background, confidence, and motivation (Lehre, Hansen et al., 2009). It can be argued that students from disadvantaged schools normally referred to as low level quintile schools, their academic performance might be negatively affected because of the poor knowledge they have acquired in the schooling system before the university.

The argument advantaged above is in line with what these authors are advocating for. However, one may also argue that prior schooling has nothing to do with the performance of the student in the university because the primary and high school by their nature are not meant to prepare students for the university only. Hence the generic syllabus they have is supposed to feed into Higher Education as a whole which consist of Further Education and Training (FET), traditional universities, universities of technology, private colleges and any other form of further education which means that the prior school prepare learners for one of the above institutions. Notably, there are those that qualify for all or more than one institution. It would seem, therefore, that a discussion on whether or not we need to establish a syllabus which will be specific to the above institution needs to be initiated.

### 2.4.4 Gender issues

Lehre, Hansen and Laake, (2009) argue that males and females show different patterns of study activities. These authors argue that this is the case because females tend to be more disciplined compared to their male counterparts (Anne-Catherine et al, 2003). However, in a familiar environment females do better than males whilst in an unfamiliar environment males do better than females. UK researchers investigated the first year student dropout, where they established that factors influencing student dropouts were: subjects studied and the scores achieved. They also established that gender effects are important determinants of drop-out rates, with males being about 8% more likely to drop out than females. However, they also established that school background has little effect on the drop-out rate (Willging and Johnson, 2004).

It is argued in the literature above that females by nature are persistent and this is exemplified by the fact that they go through labour pains when giving birth but still fall pregnant again and go through the same pains or worse but continue to persist. This corroborates the statement that perhaps they were made to be more persistent than males.

It can be argued that one of the major contributory factors related to gender is pregnancy. This situation affects both females and males although females are forced to drop-out immediately whilst males drop-out later in order to secure employment or make means to ensure that the child will be financially supported.

## **2.4.5 Student support division**

### ***2.4.5.1 Academic and social support***

Tinto (1975: 98) argued that “a person may perform adequately in the academic domain and still drop out because of insufficient integration into the social life of the institution (for example, through voluntary withdrawal)”. Tinto’s perspective in this regard also recognizes that there should be commitment from the side of students though this should be coupled with the support mechanisms in order to ensure that students are integrated fully into the system of the university.

The factors influencing student persistence that seem to be appearing in Tinto’s theory are student’s motivation and academic ability, and the institution’s academic and social characteristics (Cabrera, Nora et al., 1993). This view is supported by other authors who argue that Tinto articulated the two most important factors affecting students’ dropouts namely; academic and social integration.

## **2.4.6 Social support**

### ***2.4.6.1 Student counseling and Mentorship program***

Beck and Davidson (2001) believe that early intervention (in this regard this means at the beginning of the year in the university) by a counselor, faculty member, or student personnel specialist can ease the student's entry into the academic community. The question that might

arise out of Beck and Davidson' (2001) assertion is whether universities have enough capacity in a form of resources to cater for the large number of students within their systems. It can be argued that one of the objectives of universities is to teach students to be responsible and prepare them for the next stage in life which normally entails establishing their families. This process, therefore, does not need people who get coddled or 'Spoon fed' because they will not survive in future.

In conclusion, one can argue that indeed many factors contributing to students drop-out have already been identified. However, the fact that most of the studies focused on students from disadvantaged backgrounds (who are both in bad academic standing and financially needy) is an indication that not all the factors have been established hence, there is a need for more studies to be conducted in order to identify the factors that affect specifically the students who are both in good financial and academic standing. This is the academic lacuna that the present study aimed to fill.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed a lot of literature on students drop-out from an international perspective down to the South African context. In the process a number lot of internal and external factors that contribute to students drop-outs have been established and amongst those are health related issues, loneliness, prior schooling and under preparedness and so on. This literature gave important insight and direction to the study particularly regarding studies that have been conducted, their findings, recommendations and limitations. The limitations assisted the study to establish more factors which have not been established by previous studies. Having laid, discussed and reviewed the literature on students' drop-outs, it is important to outline the theory which guided this study in order to ensure that the study was conducted properly. Therefore, the following chapter thoroughly discusses the theoretical framework which guided this study.

## Chapter 3

### The theoretical framework

#### 3.1 Introduction

There are two theories employed to guide this study, namely, the *Theory of Student Integration* (Tinto, 1975) and the *Students' Pathway Study*. These theories have been chosen because they are extremely important when one investigates factors contributing to the phenomenon of students' dropouts. The *Theory of Students Integration* (Tinto's theory) attributes attrition to the lack of congruency between students and institutions (Cabrera et al, 1993). It discusses amongst other things the issue of institutional culture as a factor that contributes immensely to the decision taken by students to persist or not whilst at the same time the *Student Pathway Study* also endorses institutional culture as one of the most contributory factors to student's dropout. However, choosing *Student Pathway study* was informed by the desire to investigate the factors influencing the transitions of students through the higher education sector, in particular, and the reasons why they drop-out, and to trace their pathways into the labour market. This theory contextualizes the dropout phenomenon from a South African perspective. It relates to this study because it seeks to investigate factors that prompt students in good academic standing to drop out. This study, however, differs from the *Student Pathway study* in that it expands the research by not looking only at students with good academic standing but extends to students with both good academic and financial standing. In these two theories the issue of students' stress is also mentioned as a factor prompting student dropout (Letseka et al., 2009: 23). This chapter entails the following : it discusses Tinto's theory, Application of Tinto's Theoretical Model, Student departure Model, The relationship between Student integration and student pathway study, and Critique of Tinto's theory of student departure,

#### 3.2 Tinto's theory

The theory of integration concerns itself with drawing a correlation between the stages or phases of a person's development. It systematically builds from the foundation laid by Durkheim's

(1961) theory of suicide. Durkheim's theory argues that the central and primary cause of suicidal events is the lack or insufficiency of proper integration into the community/ society. In the theory of integration, the drop-outs in the university are viewed analogously with those who are suicidal in the wider community. Durkheim (1961) argues that there are two types of integration that informs suicide, namely: moral (value) integration and insufficient collective affiliation. Moral (value) integration exists as a result of the consequence of one's holding values that are highly conflicting with those of the social collectivity, whilst Insufficient Collective Affiliation is seen when there is insufficient personal interaction with other members of the collectivity (Durkheim, 1961).

In light of the above, the theory of student integration, therefore, advocates for social and academic integration as key factors in the student drop-outs phenomenon. According to Tinto (1975) Cope (Note 1), Cope and Hewitt (Note 2), Flacks (1963), and Jones (1962) social integration mediated through friendship support is directly related to persistence in college. Tinto's theory (1975: 108) also claims that "students with more 'conventional' values, attitudes, and interests are more likely to establish close relationships with a wider range of peers than are their less conventional counterparts within the college". However, this study chose to focus on voluntary withdrawal (like suicide) which does not necessarily occur as a result of insufficient levels of academic performance (poor grades) and/or from the breaking of established rules concerning proper social and academic behavior (for example, student strikes, stealing exams etcetera (Tinto, 1975). One can argue, therefore, that this type of withdrawal might happen intentionally.

Notably, what determines withdrawal according to the student integration theory is the lack of integration and commitment from both the institution and individuals. In this regard, this theoretical model also takes into account the external forces that may affect a person's decision to stay in the university. For instance, it allows one to include the effects of changing supply and demand in the job market on rates of dropout, while also considering the existence of restrictions (for example, through discrimination) that may restrict the ability of individuals to invest in other forms of activity perceived as being potentially more rewarding (Tinto, 1975: 95).

Additionally, institutional commitment entails the goals of the institution. For instance, if the goal of the institution appeals to a student, that student is likely to persist in that institution.



Moreover, if the student identifies himself with the institutional goal, that student is likely to persist. This is the case, for example, with UKZN whose primary goal is to be “a premier university of African scholarship.” It bears repeating, therefore, that if students identify with this goal then they might stay at UKZN. Tinto’s (1975) model of student integration thus incorporates these commitments and this is justified by his utterances that “The higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion” (Tinto, 1975: 96)

Tinto’s theory of student integration, therefore, serves as a foundation or a base for this study. It is notable that Tinto (1997) also emphasizes the importance of the classroom and the key role played by the classroom in bringing about knowledge and socializing. Hence, he comments that “if academic and social involvement or integration is to occur, it must occur in the classroom” (Tinto, 1997: 599). However, it is worth noting that the author was surprised that the classroom has not played a more central role in current theories of student persistence (for example, Bean, 1983; Cabrera, Castafieda, Nora and Hengstler, 1992; Tinto, 1987).

Furthermore, it can be argued that in South Africa the classroom issue has not played a central role in students’ dropouts’ debate. Even in the *Students Pathway Study* the classroom issue is not one of the factors mentioned as contributing to student drop-outs. One could also argue that many studies on student drop-outs have been focusing on students’ poor performance and institutional support whilst neglecting the role of the classroom. In this model, student commitment to the institution is theorized to be affected by the peers' attitudes and pressures (Thomas, 2000). However, it is notable that there obtains a major gap in Tinto's theory and that allied research has been the role of external factors in shaping perceptions, commitments, and preferences (Cabrera et al, 1993). It needs to be conceded though that Tinto (1975) did mention external factors as role players in student drop-outs and persistence. The author in this study avers that “it is recognized that a person may withdraw from college for reasons that have little to do with his interaction within the college systems” (Tinto, 1975: 97)

A lot of studies put emphasis on student integration into the university culture. There are three conceptual models that have been established from different theoretical ideas on students’ persistence namely: Bean's *Student Attrition Model* (1980, 1982, 1983 and 1990), Tinto's *Student Integration Model* (1975, 1987 and 1993) and *Students Pathway Theory* by Letseka et al (2009).

The *Student Attrition Model* is also one of the most important theories when investigating student dropouts. However, it doesn't differ that much compared to the theory of integration except that unlike the theory of integration it also recognizes that factors external to the institution can play a major role in affecting both attitudes and decisions while the student is still attending college/University. Therefore, in this study, the *Student Pathway Theory* is indeed recognizing external factors as well (Letseka et al., 2009)

One can argue that the above mentioned studies are construed to have failed in coming up with the solutions towards the reduction of the student dropouts phenomenon and as a result a lot of criticism has been levelled against these theories. This fact notwithstanding, these studies have played a huge role in identifying factors that cause student drop-outs which serves as a primary foundation or basis towards finding solutions to this problem.

The student dropout topic is relevant from both policy considerations and from an institutional perspective given the different social and institutional programs aimed at stimulating enrollment and preventing attrition by addressing variables other than institutional ones (that is, ability to pay, parental support) (Cabrera et al., 1993). Similarly, CHE (2005) argues that a stronger focus on issues of accountability and (cost effectiveness) in government policy cause a new shift in the debate from 'educational disadvantage' to the question of throughput and retention (CHE, 2005)

The literature of this study argues that access to higher education for previously disadvantaged students has been widely opened with success and further mentions that the problem now lies with the success of the students. Therefore, one can argue that what perhaps might be the solution to this problem is the implementation of requisite policies.

### **3.2.1 Application of Tinto's Theoretical Model**

The application of Tinto's (1975) theory of student integration phenomenon explains entirely how different students have different forms of drop-out behavior. It also provides a theoretical model that gives an explicit explanation of academic and social integration as key determinants of student drop-outs and persistence.

The nature, context, and situation of students have changed drastically. Therefore, one can argue that Tinto's (1975) integration model should be carefully applied so that it could yield the intended outcomes. For instance, barriers to higher education have been destroyed successfully, which means that restrictions in terms of race, in particular, have been conquered. In the South African context, Black people have been granted full rights to access education (CHE, 2010: ??). This is, however, coupled with a massive technological advancement and civilization. This is evidenced by the introduction of smart cellular phones with social networks, advanced computers, games and so forth. The students get into the universities carrying the aforementioned package.

With reference to the above, the questions therefore arise, is Tinto's (1975) *Student Integration Model* still relevant? If yes, how best can one apply this model of student integration in the current context? In an attempt to answer this question it is important to note that it could be argued that there are two types of perspectives that need to be taken into account before answering this question, namely *Social intelligence* and *Academic intelligence*. These two concepts are closely related to what Tinto (1975) refers to as Social integration and Academic integration respectively.

To answer the first question, first and foremost, students are supposed to be academically and socially integrated into the university culture. To answer the second question, one chooses to discuss Social and Academic intelligence. Students are now living in the modern and technologically advanced world. Therefore, almost 90% of them own cellular phones which then expose them to all sorts of distractions. . As a result, one argues that a quality and knowledgeable student back then could not be rated in the same standard compared to the quality of student at this current juncture - meaning that in those days students were exposed to few distractions compared to students of today. Therefore, what remains as key to the success of a student is the balance between academic and social intelligence. The greater the balance between social and academic intelligence, the greater the chances for the student to persist in her/his studies and eventually graduate.

Tinto's (1975) model of student integration should be applied in stages as outlined in the process of student departure.

The background of this model is derived from Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and his study of the rites of membership in tribal societies. According to him, there are three types of stages in the growth or development of a person and those stages involve the transfer of membership by a person from one group to another. These stages, according to this author, sometimes require traditional events/ ceremonies in order to support and ensure the growth of that particular person. The three types of these stages, are: the separation stage which involves the separation of the individual from past associations to join new members; the transition stage which is when the person begins to interact in new ways with members of the new group into which membership is sought - it also involves adopting the behavior and norms of the new membership; and the incorporation stage which involves the taking on of new patterns of interaction with members of the new group and establishing competent membership in that group as a participant member (Tinto,1975)

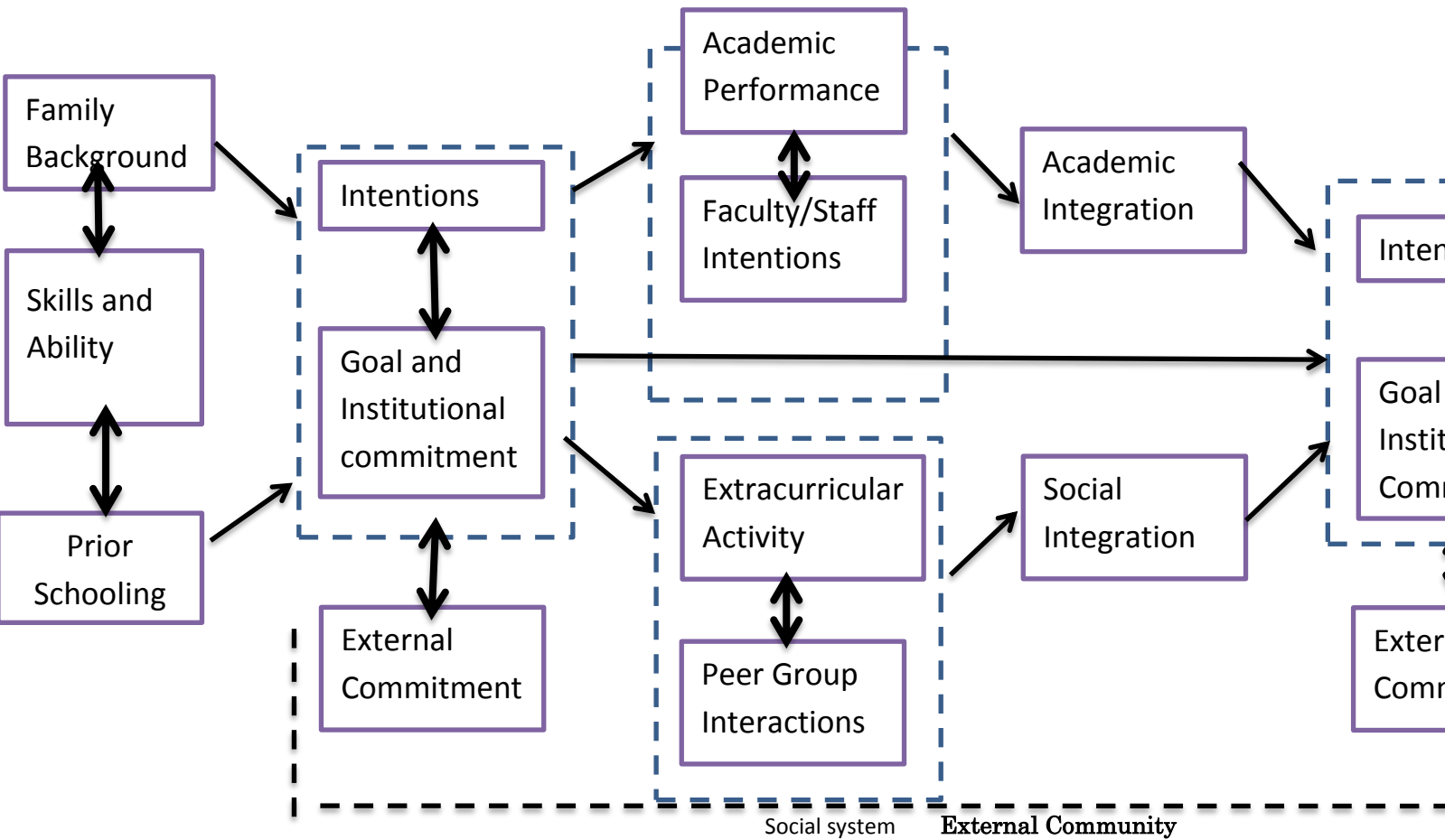
With reference to the above, students can also be viewed in the same manner as the above mentioned stages of movements because when they change their membership by leaving their community into the new university community (separation) and somehow between leaving their communities and being accepted well and granted full membership of the university community, the transition stage occurs. Finally, when students feel at home in the university community it means that they have been well incorporated into the university culture and community (Tinto, 1997:615). The following diagram illustrates clearly the three mentioned stages. It provides a picture of how students travel their path through these different stages.

Figure 1: Student departure Model (Tinto, 1975)

Pre-entry      Goals/ Commitment  
 Goals/commitment      Outcomes

Institutional Experience

Integration



It can be argued that this model covered almost everything that needs to be taken into consideration when investigating the factors that influence student departure. This model is also describing the process that students go through, right from the beginning at the entry, within the system, until the end. However, this model needs to be viewed in conjunction with the ideal of change of membership as discussed by Braxton, Elkins, and James (2000) in particular, the three stages, namely: separation, transition, and incorporation. These are aligned with this model in the following fashion: The separation stage is the process whereby students are exiting their community with their pre-entry qualities such as family backgrounds, skills and abilities, and poor schooling, into the new community of the university. This is corroborated by Braxton, Elkins, and James (2000: 252) in their argument that “separation occurs prior to and at the outset of the institutional experiences in both the academic and social systems. As students enter college, they are required to disassociate to some extent from membership in communities of the past, such as families, friends, the local high school, and local areas of residence”. The students and the institutional goal commitment, the intentions and the external commitment are also critical at this point and it is informed by their pre-entry attributes.

The transition stage is informed by the separation stage. This is where institutional experience comes into play which comprises of the academic and social systems wherein academic performance and faculty/ staff interactions are part of the former, whereas extra-curricular activities and peer group interactions remain/ become part of the latter. Integration also plays a critical role in transition and consists of academic and social integration.

The incorporation stage is informed by the transition stage as this is where the re-visiting of the goal commitment leads to the last one which is the outcomes (completion or departure decision).

### **3.3 The relationship between Student integration and student pathway study**

Tinto's (1975; 1987) models and theories have been explicitly discussed and criticized by different authors (Elkins, Braxton, and James, 2000; Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson, 1997; Moline, 1985; Nora, 1990; Nora & Horvath, 1989; Stampen & Cabrera, 1986; Voorhees, 1985; Letseka, Cosser, Breier, and Visser, 2009). As it has been alluded to above, this theory serves as a foundation for student drop-outs models.

It can be argued that this model or theory gave birth to other models or theories such as the fact that Tinto's theories were developed and tested in the environment outside of the country of origin. This theory has been influential in defining factors that influence student persistence and drop-out, although one believes that in order to really understand factors that contribute to student drop-out in this country, it is important to engage studies that have been conducted in this country because factors might differ in different countries. The fact that socio-economic factors are also identified as a major contributory factor makes it not only necessary but also imperative for this study to use Tinto's theory as a foundation. Moreover, this is necessary in that since the theory is developed in our country, it is capable of contextualizing matters that cause students to drop-out.

The *Student Pathway Study* identified almost the same factors which the *Student Integration Theory* has identified but obviously the *Student Pathway Study* gives a background from the South African perspective. Therefore, it becomes important to utilize Tinto's theory of *Student Integration* and complement it with the *Student Pathway Study*. These theories are related to each other but are developed in different contexts that make important contributions to this study.

### **3.4 Critique of Tinto's theory of student departure**

According to Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) Tinto's theory of college student departure needs revision. These authors further argue for the alternative course of action. Notably, there are two most important constructs of Tinto's theory of college student departure; namely the academic and the social integration. These constructs are explained by Tinto as having a strong influence on the subsequent institutional commitment, the student graduation rate, and the students' persistence (Tinto, 1997).

However, Braxton et al (1997) argue, on the one hand, that indeed evidence affirms that "students subsequent commitment to the institution is positively affected by their degree of social integration and that the greater the degree of students' subsequent institutional commitment, the greater the likelihood of their degree of persistence in college" (Braxton et al,

1997:89). On the other hand, they argue, that there seems to be no strong relationship between academic integration and the subsequent institutional commitment.

In fact, these authors further argue that academic integration can be considered and included in student departure theory although not in the manner in which Tinto included it (Braxton et al., 1997). Alternatively these authors propose that a concept of academic normative integration be utilized instead as empirical evidence proves that it carries a fit between the personal type of a student and the existing academic environment of a given university. Notably, therefore, this concept possesses a strong influence on students' departure, and students' persistence (Braxton et al., 1997).

It can be argued though that this critique might be valid. However, one notes that such a critique might take us nowhere since it does not provide a theoretical model of how to address the problem of students' departure. Tinto (1975: 89) does indicate that the failure of past research to define more clearly the multiple characteristics of dropouts can be attributed to the failure to develop theoretical models that seek to explain, not simply to describe, the processes that bring individuals to leave institutions of higher education. In light of this argument one can argue that the above critique provides a descriptive analysis of Tinto's (1975) theory and not an explanation or a theoretical model which is needed to get us closer to resolving this problem.

Finance is considered by many authors as one of the most important contributory factors to the student drop-out phenomenon. These authors argue that Tinto's theory of integration does not consider this factor as an independent variable in its construction and therefore suggest that it should be incorporated into his model of student integration (Moline, 1985; Nora, 1990; Nora & Horvath, 1989; Stampen & Cabrera, 1986; Voorhees, 1985). However, in 1993 Tinto revisited his model of student integration to incorporate finance as the key factor that plays a role in student persistence (Braxton, 2000).

Bean and Eaton (2001) argue that Tinto (1975) and Spady (1970) as sociologists only explain student departure from a sociological point of view which limit them to view it from other important dimensions such as the psychological point of view etcetera. This could be the case because the theoretical foundation underpinning Tinto's student integration model derives from Durkheim's theory of suicide.



One argues that since Tinto's (1975) Theory of integration is derived from Durkheim's (1961) theory of suicide, one of the contributory factors to suicide is stress, but it is not incorporated into Tinto's (1975) theory and model of student departure. Therefore, the conclusion is that stress is neglected as an important role player in student departure whereas it might make a difference in bringing about a clear understanding of this phenomenon.

Tinto's extension of Van Gennep's rites of passage to the college student departure process also has received criticism. Tierney (1992), in particular, asserts that Van Gennep's rites of passage cannot be extended to the movement of an individual from one culture to another. He argues that positing the college experience as a ritual accords higher status to one culture over others because rituals are culturally specific (Tierney, 1992). As a consequence, rites of passage are for dominant majority students and not minority students. Tierney also contends that students cannot depart from a ritual because in traditional cultures, initiates neither choose to participate in a ritual nor do they choose to leave one (Tierney, 1992). Thus, Tierney criticizes Tinto for inappropriately borrowing the anthropological construct.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter explained in detail the theory of integration by Tinto (1975). In doing so, it highlighted the historical background of the formation of this theory by relating it to Durkheim theory of suicide. Furthermore it also explained the Pathway Study by Letseka et al (2009) and the relevancy of this study amongst those that were conducted in South Africa. Therefore these, two theories guided this study from a different perspective but drew a similar conclusion that the integration of students is important in addressing the issue of students' drop-outs. The outlining of this chapter brought to light the fact that theories guide research. However, it should be noted that this serves as a support for the research methodology which also plays an important role in conducting a study. Therefore, the following chapter delves more into the research methods utilized in this study.

## Chapter 4

### Research Methodology

#### 4.1 Introduction

According to Marais et al (1996: 16) “research methodology is defined as the logic of scientific methods to the investigation of phenomenon”. This definition refers to the logic of decision making in scientific research. Marais et (1988) defined research methodology two years later as a study of research methods in all its broadness and complexity, the various methods and techniques employed, the reasons that underpin the utilization of such methods and techniques, the selection of methods, the limitations and so on (Marais et al, 1988).

The two definitions outlined above give an indication of how important research methods are in any study. Therefore, it can be deduced that research methodology is the most important part of the study because it is where the real planning of what the research intends establishing takes place. When the research methodology is weak the whole study might be affected and perhaps yield poor results.

The research methods are a section that gives a clear explanation of the approach that one uses in order to gather information. It states in clear terms what approach the researcher used and why and further presents a description of the procedure followed by the researcher. Research methodology thus makes it easier for the scholar who wants to replicate this research (Blanche et al., 2006).

This chapter focuses on explaining the different important stages that need to be included when one is conducting a proper research from a general perspective. It also focuses specifically on the methods that were followed to conduct the present study. These stages are arranged as follows: Research paradigm, Research Design, Sampling method, Data Collection techniques, Limitations of the study, Ethical issues and lastly the summary of the methods in line with the research questions.

#### 4.2 Research paradigm

Both Qualitative and Quantitative methodologies were utilized in the present study. The reason why these methodologies were used is because firstly, in an attempt to answer the questions, the researcher used statistics which were related to the quantification of constructs. Such data sets automatically lend themselves into the quantitative paradigm. Therefore, this method (Quantitative approach) is relevant regarding the role of variables in analyzing human behavior since the study analyzed trends of students dropouts in the past three years (2010, 2011 and 2012) in the College of Humanities at UKZN. This study was also qualitative simply because it aimed at studying human behavior from the insider's perspective in a social science sphere, hence the in-depth analyses of students' dropouts. Therefore, the quantitative method supplemented the qualitative data. This research was designed to investigate the factors that influence student dropouts particularly students who are progressing academically as opposed to simply focusing on those who experience academic/financial challenges. Essentially, this research also took an applied research approach given its focus. The theories employed in it are theories already advanced by other academics in different settings. In carrying out this research, concepts describing students' dropouts and students' retention were employed as advanced by scholars in respective studies such as Tinto (1975) and Letseka (2009). However, such concepts were tested in the context of policy formulation.

This study, therefore, depended much on the statistics in analyzing the students' dropouts (Martin & Kevin' 1999: 49). Secondly, in the subsequent chapters human behavior was described and understood rather than merely explaining and predicting it. Therefore, the researcher used observations and other research methods, for instance, unstructured and personal documents to determine the findings, hence the qualitative method was also deemed to be vital (Martin & Kevin, 1999: 53). This study used the exploratory approach since it sought to explore the issues pertaining to factors that influence students' dropouts in the university. The accessible population of this study was the students and the study population was the university community.

### **4.3 Research Design**

Seltiz et al (1964:50) define research design as "the arrangement of the conditions for the collection and analysis of data in such a way that seeks to combine relevance to the purpose in an economically procedural way. Therefore, another purpose of the research design is to align the

pursuit of the research goal with the practical considerations and limitations of the project (Marais et al, 1988:32).

Since the main objective of the study was to investigate the factors that influence students' dropout phenomenon in the College of Humanities, it became imperative therefore to utilize a case study research design in order to ascertain the required information. According to Yin (2009) the case study method "allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life event such as individual life cycle, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performances, international relations and the maturation of industries"(Yin, 2009: 4). This research focused on the dropout behaviour of a group of students. Hence the utilization of the case study method was relevant in this regard.

#### **4.4 Sampling method**

In order for a research to be successful there is a need to find participants who are informed, people who will provide the study with proper information, hence the study's sampling method was the snowball sampling method. According to Kumar (2011) snowball sampling is the process of selecting a sample using networks, whereby a few people in a group or organization are selected and the needed information is collected from them. These people would then have to identify other people in a group or organization and those selected people become part of the sample. Information is, therefore, collected from them and also these people are asked to identify other people in a group or organization and those people become part of the sample and information is collected from them. This process is continued until the required number of the saturation point has been reached in terms of information being sought (Kumar, 2011).

There were 6 interviewees (student dropouts) who were interviewed in this study. The study focused only on South African students because the literature reveals that black South Africans are the ones affected the most by the students' dropout phenomenon. The number of interviewees was determined by the limited resources and time allocated to conduct this study. Half or 3 of these informants were males while the other three were females. This was done in

order to ensure a balanced gender representation. These informants were identified through the snowball sampling as explained above. Furthermore, through purposive sampling two members of UKZN management were interviewed, two members of UKZN department of student counseling were also interviewed and two members of the SRC were also interviewed. Therefore, in total, there were 12 interviewees in this study. This number was deemed to be representative of the key stakeholders. Secondly, the amount of time and resources available to the researcher made this sample size manageable.

When deciding who to include in the sample, the criteria outlined below was used in this study:

- (a) UKZN students' dropouts.
- (b) The dropouts, especially those who were in good academic and financial standing,
- (c) Students who were registered in the College of Humanities.
- (d) Male and female students.

This method was relevant to this study since it was anticipated that the findings of the study were going to be determined by the targeted informed stakeholders within the institution. Dropouts were interviewed in order to get an in-depth understanding of the root cause of the dropouts' phenomenon. This targeted population represented undergraduate students at different levels of study (first years, second years, third and fourth years). The researcher then gathered the requisite information through this method. The study utilized both the probability and non-probability sampling methods since it also used judgmental sampling method.

#### **4.5 Data Collection techniques**

There are two types of data collection techniques used in this study, namely; interviews and university documents because this study intended to acquire empirical data from the drop-outs who were the primary source of information in this study. The study utilized interviews and available data from the institution pertaining to students' dropouts. The data sources were students, Management, department of student counseling and the SRC as explained above (in the sampling method). The data was collected this way precisely because the researcher was using

both qualitative and quantitative methods through snowball sampling method. The conclusions were drawn from informative participants. In light of the saying that ‘there is nothing for us without us’ the researcher deemed it very important to interview dropouts since they are the ones who could be the real source of information in this regard and could play a critical role in identifying factors that influenced them to dropout.

This study also used document analysis and statistics from the university reports and other related documents in order to supplement the qualitative data which was collected through interviews.

#### **4.6 Limitations of the study**

The limitations of this study are that the study focused only on African students (because the literature reveals that African students seem to be the ones affected the most by the drop-out phenomenon), in the College of Humanities and excludes other Colleges, which means that the results cannot be generalized for other Colleges. The study focused on students who were progressing academically and did not owe the university whilst excluding poor performing and owing students. Again, these results cannot be generalized for all students. The amount of time and the financial resources available to the researcher also became an impediment to this study since the research required one to travel in order to meet with the interviewees, something which had to be done within a very limited space of time.

#### **4.7 Ethical issues**

It is important to ensure that the anonymity of a person participating in a study of this nature is strictly observed. This helps in guaranteeing that should people participate in the study they remain anonymous as this would have been the guaranteed condition which would have informed their consent to participate in the study. Therefore, only people who were willing to participate in this study were used as informants. The consent letter with a full explanation of the purpose of the study stipulating that no one is going to be paid for participating and that a person is allowed to pull out of the study anytime was provided to each informant. A declaration form with only the space for the informant’s signature was also provided to each participant.

#### 4.8 The summary of the methods which are explained above

Basically, the table below summarizes everything contained in the research methods that were utilized in this study by aligning everything with the three key research questions mentioned in their order of importance (starting from question 1 to question 3) as follows: what are the factors that influence students in general to dropout?, what are the factors that influence students in good academic and financial standing to dropout?, and what is the role played by the university to prevent student dropout?

The first and second questions were answered through the inductive qualitative approach where interviews (Data Collection Tool) were conducted with UKZN SRC, UKZN Management, and UKZN Student Counseling Department (source of information). The findings were analyzed through thematic analysis in line with the literature review themes of the study.

The third question was answered through inductive qualitative approach, where UKZN documents served as a Data Collection Tool. For instance, policies and data from UKZN available documents (source of information) were analyzed using content analysis as indicated in Table 4

Table. 4: Data Collection Process

Questions	Approach	Data Collection Tools	Sources of information	Data Analysis
Questions 1 and 2	Inductive Qualitative	Interviews	UKZN SRC, UKZN Management and a senior counselor	Thematic Analysis
Question 3	Inductive Qualitative	UKZN documents e.g. Policies	Exclusion Policy & UKZN available data	Content Analysis

Source; (Author's interpretation, 2013)

## 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter served as the bases on which the conclusion of the study is predicated. This chapter also assisted the researcher to acquire information through using two types of methods namely, interviews and documentary analysis. It bears repeating that the most important informants of this study were the drop-out themselves since they were the primary source of information. These informants revealed both unknown and known factors that contribute to students' drop-outs. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that the methodology utilized in this study achieved a lot of what was anticipated, for instance, the interviews were well conducted and the researcher gained a lot of knowledge and insights which proved to be helpful for this study. The number of interviews conducted was satisfactory for the analyses and the conclusion of this study. The UKZN documents that were analyzed provided sufficient data for this study to be concluded logically. The results analyses are discussed in the next chapter, which is chapter 5. This is done through content analysis and thematic analysis as discussed in the table above.



## Chapter 5

### Presentation of the Findings

#### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings without interpreting the meaning. The presentation of the findings of this study is done in the following sequence: the brief contextual understanding of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Howard College Campus in particular, summary of the participants, in more detail the perspectives of the three types of participants (Students' drop-out, UKZN Management, and the SRC) are also presented in order to respond to the questions posed by this study.

#### **The University of KwaZulu-Natal**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal has five campuses namely: Medical School, Pietermaritzburg, Edgewood, Westville and Howard College campuses. It has four colleges namely; Agriculture Engineering and Science, Law and Management, Health Sciences and the College of Humanities. In these five campuses, Humanities exists in three of them, namely Howard College, Edgewood and the Pietermaritzburg campus. Therefore, this college constitutes about 40% (16000 students) of UKZN student population which is made of different racial groups (<http://coh.ukzn.ac.za/Homepage.aspx>) The African students are the majority as they constituted 80% of the Humanities students in 2013. Interestingly, according to the university published information:

“The College of Humanities is the second most productive College at UKZN. This is indicated by the fact that it produces the largest number of PhDs in the University” (UKZN website: 2014). NB Since the quotation is not long, make it part of the paragraph above

The 12 respondents for this study are from the college of Humanities. They provided insight into what is really going on and in the process identified factors that influence students to drop-out.

**Figure 2 Contextual background of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (College of Humanities)**



**Aerial view of PMB, Edgewood and Howard College campus respectively**

The first question interrogated the demographics of students' dropout and also responded to one of the main objectives of this study which was to *“describe the demographic profiles of students in good academic and financial standing who dropout”*. It also examined the year and the level of study in which these students have departed. The following questions interrogated the factors that might have caused the students to dropout and they were meant to respond to the second main objective of this study, which was to *“investigate factors that influence students' dropout”*. The last questions towards the end were meant to interrogate the institutional support provided to students and therefore respond to the following key question: *what is the role played by the university to support students who are in good academic and financial standing?*

**Table 5 Summary of participants (Humanities College)**

No	Types of Participants	No. of Participants	Age / years	Gender	Race
1.	Student Dropouts	6	18-23	3M &3F	Africans
2.	SRC Members	2	21-25	1M &1F	Africans
3.	Counselling Department	2	34-40	1M &1F	Indians
4.	UKZN Management	2	40-60	1M &1F	Africans
5	Total	12		6 M& 6F	

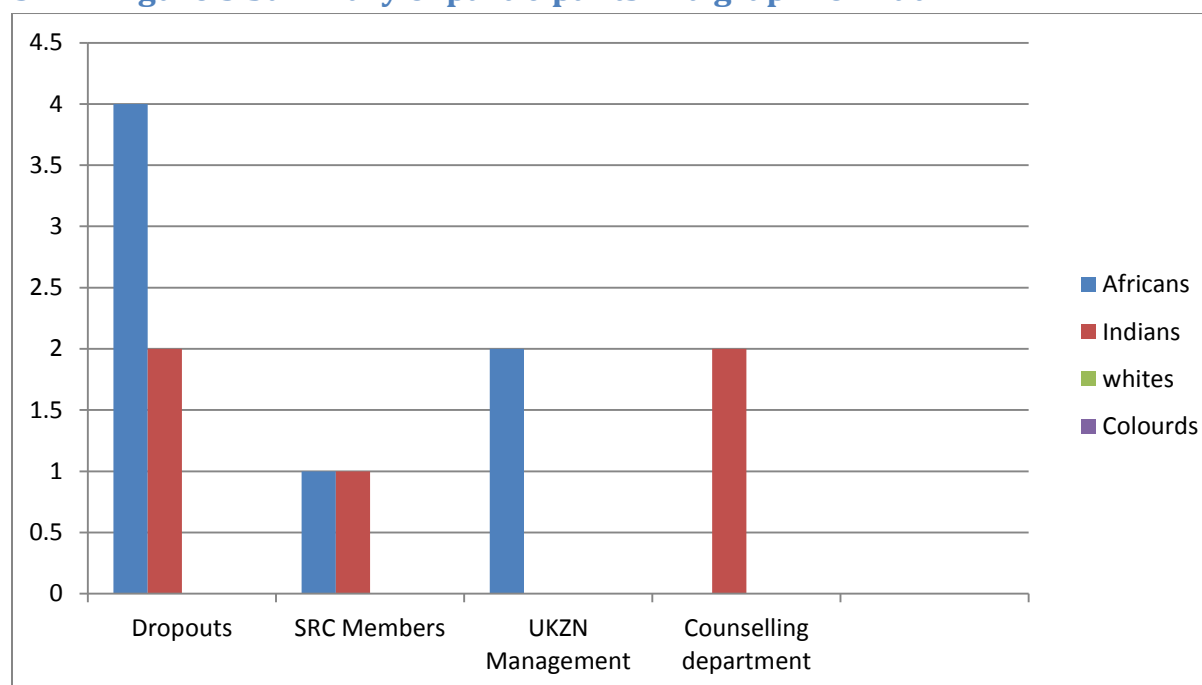
Source: Author's compilation

This study presents its findings as follows:

- (a) The students' interviews (Drop-outs)
- (b) The SRC interviews
- (c) UKZN Management's interviews and
- (d) The Student counselling members' interviews.

The above mentioned sub-topics are thematically presented in line with the themes of the literature review of this study. What informed this way of presenting these findings is the data revealed by these findings which verified a lot of factors that were revealed earlier by the literature of this study. However, it is important to note that there are numerous factors that have been revealed by these findings which were not revealed by other researchers before.

## 5.2 Figure 3 Summary of participants in a graph format



Source: Author's compilation

## 5.3. The students' interviews (Drop-outs)

As mentioned earlier, there were 12 interviews conducted in this study but the ones specific to this sub-topic were 6 interviews with students who dropped-out. The number of interviewees was

determined by the limited resources and time allocated to conduct this study. Five respondents revealed that their fees were paid by their parents whereas, on the other hand, the remaining student fees were being paid by the scholarships or bursaries. Four of the respondents revealed that they left the institution because they initially did not choose this institution as a first choice but ended-up studying in this institution because their parents forced them to do so for many reasons. However, two of the respondents indicated that the University of KwaZulu-Natal was their first choice but revealed that they dropped-out because their parents had started to fail to pay for them. As a consequence, they felt that dropping out to secure a job so that they could finance their studies would be a solution.

### 5.3.1 Loneliness and pregnancy

The pregnancy situation was also cited by four of the respondents as one of the critical factors that largely contribute to student drop-outs. The gender was balanced on this view since 50% of the males and 50% of the females shared the same view in this regard. For instance, this was said to be affecting males and females equally with stress being the triggered feeling but differently in other aspects. The males were thus affected severely because they felt responsible for both the pregnancy and their girlfriends from then onwards. Females are normally faced with a situation whereby they become socially and academically disintegrated. Hence, one of the respondents stated:

*“I was pregnant and I have never been so lonely and stressed in my life during that period”* NB Inert the quotation in the paragraph above

The above indicates that pregnant students on campus sometimes face social and academic disintegration.

### 5.3.2 Health issues

The students also indicated that health issues also contribute immensely to students drop-outs. They further revealed that sickness differs in various people and requires different medical attention. For instance, some sicknesses are traditionally rooted and as such require traditional

medication in order to be cured. Therefore, a person would leave the university for medical assistance towards healing the illness he or she would be suffering from .

Another respondent indicated that she left the university but the reason to leave was not because she owed the university or that she had poorly performed but it was because of her health related issues and hence she said:

*“I have never failed even a single module and I do not owe the university fees because I had a bursary, so my health problems made me to take a decision to drop-out”*

Clearly, these students would not have left the university if it was not for their sicknesses. Therefore, the university must also focus on health issues that affect its students. Another respondent who shared the same view indicated that her sickness was not normal and did not require Western medical attention but required a traditional healer to cure it. Hence, she said:

*“I had to start UkuThwasa which was something that nearly killed me since I was in denial from grade ten”*

Judging from the above statements perhaps the university should look into strengthening both the western and traditional health systems on its campuses in order to avoid student drop-outs.

### **5.3.3 Prior schooling and under-preparedness**

Other factors that were revealed by the drop-outs are prior schooling and under-preparedness. The respondents referred to their secondary /high schools as useless institutions because they felt that these high schools did not prepare them for the university and as a result they found university study very difficult and decided to drop-out. Interestingly, some were referring to their secondary/high schools as good preparatory schools for the university but felt that they were taught more such that they became bored in their first year because they were repeating most of the things they had already covered at secondary/high school level and as a result decided to drop-out with the hope of finding something more challenging to do.

One of the respondents said: *“I feel it is useless to continue studying because I have a responsibility of running businesses at home, so what I am studying does not relate to what I do for a living”*. In conclusion, the student made it clear that he was not intending to go to the

university and that he enrolled because his friends were enrolling and he sees no value in education.

### 5.3.4 Institutional support

All the respondents shared the same view in respect of facilities being available in this university such as Student Counselling Department and Academic Monitoring and Support and the Clinic. However, it is vitally important to note that these respondents also indicated that these facilities are not enough to cater for the large numbers of students of this college since they share them with other colleges. As a result, they end up having to schedule appointments (particularly in the clinic) as this demoralizes them and then resolve to shy away from accessing the assistance provided. With the state of affairs being what it is, the drop-outs indicated that this will contribute to the lack of skills in future. They suggested that the institution must review its programs in order to provide adequate support to all students, particularly to the group of students who do not owe the university and who progress well academically.

### 5.3.5 Language of teaching and learning

Three of the respondents indicated that the other contributory factor to students' drop-outs is the language of teaching and learning used by this university. The University of KwaZulu-Natal uses English as the language of teaching and learning. One of the respondents said:

Maybe it was going to be easy for me to be socially and academically integrated into the culture of the university if my language was used for communication, teaching and learning.

In support of this statement the other respondent argued that:

All departments are dominated by English language speakers so I was afraid to ask them for assistance because I was not good in communicating with English

The last one also reiterated that the use of English as a language of teaching and learning was also harmful to her academic career hence she said:

The university should expedite the process of developing our languages because the use of English only is problematic to someone like me, who comes from rural areas where even Mathematics was taught in isiZulu.

NB Insert a concluding sentence

## 5.4. The SRC interviews

Two SRC members were interviewed and they raised a lot of issues which are discussed in the sub topics below. In line with the literature review of this study, the SRC made mention of finance and poor family background, classroom environment and class attendance issues and prior schooling and under preparedness as some of the factors influencing students to drop-out in general (Letseka, 2009; Tinto, 1975). The SRC further mentioned Institutional support and health related issues as factors influencing students who do not owe the university and progressing well to drop-out. The latter factors were of cardinal importance since they related very well with what this study was investigating. Therefore, the focus of this interview specifically wanted answers on how these two factors influenced students in good academic and financial standing to drop-outs.

### 5.4.1 Institutional support

The SRC made it clear that there is academic and social support provided by the institution to all students. For instance, not all deserving and qualifying students are able to get financial aid; not all students are allocated mentors by the mentorship programme of this university. Mentorship is meant to assist students balance their social and academic life therefore it could be argued that student in mentorship program are likely to succeed then those who are not part of it. This is justified by the 2012 UKZN AMS report. Another concern was that traditional medicine is not given equal status as western medicine. As a result, the clinic is full time whereas *Umakhosi* is not full time on campus and she is not easily accessible to many students, let alone students from Edgewood and Pietermaritzburg campuses. The stopping of the forum periods on Thursdays and Fridays kills the social cohesion that students had before. Consequently, students do not become socially integrated into the university system. Academic support in the form of tutorials,

according to the SRC, has always been there. However, the number of students in one tutorial defeats the purpose of it being a tutorial where one expects a few groups of students in one tutorial in order to be able to have a close interaction with a tutor which cannot happen in a lecture. Furthermore, in 2013 things changed when tutorials were made voluntary as it became entirely up to a student to attend a tutorial or not. The SRC, therefore, noted that this contributes immensely to student drop-outs and that the solution might be to design specific policies to assist students who are in good academic and financial standing to remain at the university and finish their academic qualifications.

#### 5.4.2 Health Issues

The SRC members indicated that there are a number of students who leave this university due to sickness or health related issues. They further said that students feel much safer and better at home when they are sick rather than being in the university because of a number of reasons. Amongst these is that the campus clinic closes at night and there is no standby university ambulance that attends to students urgently should a need arise. Over and above that, during the day the campus clinic operations are not student friendly, particularly because of the appointments system that is used by the clinics. Hence, one SRC member said:

*“We do not have appointments with our sicknesses therefore we do not understand the appointment system of the campus clinics”*

The SRC also indicated that some students leave the university because of having fallen pregnant and they choose to leave because of the same reasons mentioned above. Lastly, other groups of students leave the university because of traditional related sicknesses. The SRC, therefore, noted that this contributes immensely to students drop-out and it requires the institution to change the way it operates and the Indigenous Knowledge System needs to be implemented fully to address traditional issues including sicknesses.

#### 5.4.3 UKZN Management

The management mentioned three important factors, namely: finance and family background, government policies and classroom and attendance issues. There are many other issues that the



management raised such as the fact that they thought the number of students (who are in good academic and financial standing) that depart from the university is relatively small compared to those who are not in good standing both academically and financially. One of the respondents said:

I agree there are students who in good academic and financial standing who are dropping out, but the large number of students drop-out because of poor performance and financial related issues.

In line with the SRC and the literature review of this study, the management sees financial and family background as the most contributory factors to students drop-out. According to the management, this also contributes to poverty and unemployment. The management felt that the corporate sector and government should work together to solve this problem.

## **5.5. Student counselling department**

There are three factors identified by the student counselling department, namely: student's attitudes, Health issues and Institutional support.

### **5.5.1 Students' attitudes**

The counsellors indicated that students have a very bad attitude towards accessing help that is provided by this department. According to one respondent "students think that if you attend counselling it is an indication of being unfit to be at the university." Therefore, students sometimes choose to consult the SRC rather than this department which becomes problematic to us because the SRC, mentors or whoever is being approached for the problems, is not trained to address them and they mostly do not succeed in solving them and that might increase the student drop-outs. On the other hand, another respondent mentioned that even the counselling department needs to have a good attitude toward the students; hence she said: "our counsellors and our staff must be approachable and welcoming to the students."

Therefore, it can be argued that the issue of attitude might be the issue affecting both the students and the staff and as such requires collective effort to be addressed. The SRC can play a key role in teaching students about the importance of accessing the services offered by this department and thus re-direct the students to this department when the need arises.

### 5.5.2 Health issues

The student counselling department indicated that this department deals with two aspects of therapy, namely: mental therapy and social therapy. The respondents made it clear that these two issues have a bad connotation to the student population. Hence one of them indicated that mental therapy is understood by students as if it relates to their mental capability of coping in the university. Thus she said:

*“Students perception of mental therapy is that, it’s for those who are not fit enough mentally to cope at the university, whilst in actual fact it is not.”*

In support of the above argument the other respondent further explained mental therapy as the therapy that is necessary for everyone regardless of academic performance. She therefore said:

*“Whether the students are in good academic standing or not, the truth of the matter is that they still need mental therapy”*

As a result students develop misconceptions about counselling and this also affects social therapy as well because they end up not consulting for this type of therapy. In their view, this is indeed contributing to students’ drop-outs particularly because students end up being shy or afraid that they might be judged if they come for consultation. Lastly, the respondents also made mention of general health related issues which some of the students who drop-out do face. In fact, the ones they had direct contact with whilst they were still in the university left the university because they felt that institutional support is not enough and therefore preferred being at home instead. In their response on whether there is a relationship that exists between them and the campus clinic, they expressed great gratitude with the level of the good relationship they have. However, they were concerned that the clinic is not opening 24 hours and also about the non-availability of a designated ambulance within the university, particularly at night.

These respondents finally suggested that the university must design policies which shall bring together all the stakeholders in order for them to play a meaningful role in intensifying student counselling and ensure that it is accessed by all students who need it without fear and apology.

### 5.5.3 Institutional support

The respondents indicated that the university does provide institutional support to students but the question is whether the support is effective or not. For instance, one of the respondents referred to the mentorship programme as a good mechanism for support. However, she thought that its effectiveness could be enhanced if they could work together with the counselling department because the mentors are sometimes faced with issues that require an expert or a psychologist and that as non-experts they are more likely to be unsuccessful in responding in a commendable manner. Equally, they felt that the SRC needs to work together with the counselling department since they are also sometimes faced with similar situations as those of the mentors. These situations might be one of the factors contributing to students' drop-outs.

Lastly, the respondents also made mention of the fact that the university needs to take seriously the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) since some of the problems that students sometimes grapple with are traditionally related and thus require traditional medication. In saying that, they really applauded the university by having a *Sangoma* notwithstanding their feeling that there needs to be a coordinated way of ensuring that the *Sangoma*, UKZN clinic and the Counselling department work together in order to ensure that problems are approached holistically.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the informants (the students' drop-outs, the Students Representative Council, the UKZN Management and the Department of Student Counselling) of this study shared a lot of information which reflected perspectives from different angles. All these respondents contributed meaningfully to this study since all the information they provided was considered in the analysis chapter of this study. There are both known and unknown factors mentioned by the informants. Those that are known are discussed in the following chapter in line with the literature review of the study. It is thus recommended that the newly established factors such as traditional related

sicknesses be properly explained so that the future studies would verify them for the generations to come.



## Chapter 6

### Discussion and analysis of the findings

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the result of the study as presented in the previous chapter. The analysis of these results follows a particular sequence which is guided by the key questions of this study. This chapter also discusses both the identified and the general factors articulated by the respondents and the literature respectively. Therefore the chapter is separated into three parts. The first part starts with a key question relating to the demographic profiles of the students, the second part is a key question relating to the factors influencing students in good academic and financial standing to drop out. The chapter, therefore, discusses all the factors identified by the respondents. It is followed by the table of factors as summarized by the author and the third part discusses general questions and is followed by the general factors as identified by both the literature and the respondents of the study. Towards the end of the chapter there is a table of summarized factors developed by the author on the basis of the information obtained from the literature and through empirical research. Lastly, in the identified and general factors as mentioned above the author also puts his perspectives on how those factors can be addressed.

#### 6.2 Description of the demographic profiles of students in good academic and financial standing who dropout.

This study interviewed only black South African students who dropped out from the college of humanities. According to the respondents, black students are the ones affected the most by this problem and the reasons for this are mostly based on the historical background of this country and that the university is not a first priority for them. There are, of course, other things that they prioritize and this accounts for why they were chosen to be the informants of this study. This is in line with the data gathered from DMI which clearly indicate that out of 15% of the students who dropped out in 2012 17.8% were African students. It is interesting to note that white students that also dropped out are almost equal to this percentage and were seating at 17.7% according to the DMI data. In line with this, the 2013 Academic Monitoring Support 2013

report revealed that the white students' drop-out rate of the cohort (2008-2010) is higher than the African students' drop-out rate. This is informed by many factors some of which have been revealed by this study already and some are mentioned by the AMS report (UKZN, 2013).

**Table. 6      2012 drop-out rate (College of Humanities)**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Drop-outs in %</b>	<b>Year</b>
1	African	17.8%	2012
2	Whites	17.7%	2012
3	Coloureds	14.6%	2012
4	Indians	9.3%	2012

**Source: UKZN AMS Report, 2013**

### **6.3 Factors that influence students in good academic and financial standing to dropout**

#### **6.3.1 Institutional support:**

According to 10 of the respondents, institutional support is the main factor which is causing students to drop-out. Amongst these respondents were the students' drop-outs who indicated clearly that there is lack of institutional support given to students who do not owe the university and progressing well academically. They further made reference to the fact that the university only has policies specific to students who are performing poorly and those owing the university. Those policies are, Academic Monitoring and Exclusions and Registrations Appeals Committee policies. The SRC felt that this might contribute to the lack of leadership of the country in future, whilst drop-outs and counsellors felt that this might contribute to the country's lack of skills and the decrease of the production of academics in the near future. These groups of respondents suggested that the university must design a policy that is specific to assist this group of students (who do not owe university fees and who are also progressing well academically).

This is consistent with the reviewed literature of this study particularly Letseka et al (2009) who asserts that there are no policy design to deal with the issues of students drop-outs. Equally in the University of KwaZulu-Natal one may argue that the policy in place focuses on how to

exclude than how to assist students. Over and above that not all students are catered for by these policies like the aforementioned case of students who do not owe the university and who are performing well academically.

According to UKZN Management, programs such as Academic Monitoring and Support, which includes Mentorship programme are offered by the institution to provide academic and social support to students. This is a social support programme offered by the university to first year students. However, not all first year students are assigned mentors but only those who are lucky enough to get this privileged benefit from this initiative. The University management further assert that students who attend mentorship normally do well academically and do not drop-out. However, the SRC and students expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which this programme operates and the fact that mentors do not have enough time to help students since they too have to do their school work during their working hours.

One can argue that the university shall provide this service to all students (first and returning students) and that the university calendar shall also incorporate the mentorship programme in order to prevent dissatisfaction from the SRC and the general student population.

One respondent on institutional support said "*I felt a bit robbed*". This respondent elaborated by saying that there was no effort made by the university to ensure that proper orientation was done in order to familiarize and inform new students about things to expect at the university such as supplementary exams and many other crucial things in the academic arena. He stated that he was a victim of such lack of information because he was not told about supplementary exams as a result he did not write his supplementary exams. The only time he got helped was after his first semester. In short there is a lack of institutional integration as it relates to both social and academic issues as explained by Tinto (1975). He was not aware of mentorship and counselling programs. He therefore suggested that the only solution to these problems is visibility from the side of the institution, meaning that these programs must be well known by the students at the beginning of the year, particularly first year students.

According to UKZN management, on the one hand, another factor causing students' drop-outs is the poor academic performance, which they reckon is largely caused by the fact that students do not attend lectures and tutorials as they should.



On the other hand, the SRC pointed out that the university keeps on accepting a lot of students who it is failing to accommodate within its limited financial and material resources. Facilities such as lecture theatres are not big enough to accommodate the growing numbers of students admitted in this institution. Therefore, this presents a situation whereby students become less interested to attend lectures because they are likely not to have desks to sit on.

The SRC also advanced the argument that academic support has declined which is one of the causes of poor performance. For instance, tutorials play a huge role in terms of academic support. However, in the year 2013 tutorials were not compulsory in the College of Humanities and there were no tutors appointed on the grounds that the university did not have money to pay them. This deprived students of an opportunity to learn from their peers.

It could be argued that what is said by the UKZN management and the UKZN SRC about the tutorials is a contradiction because the management is complaining about non-attendance while the SRC reveals that the very same management made it optional for students to attend tutorials in 2013. Therefore, one can conclude that both the students and the management have a big role to play in order to ensure that there are no contradictions in terms of university operations. Hence it is submitted that if the university and the students can forge relations and work together these parties could easily solve the problems facing them.

### **6.3.2 Loneliness and pregnancy**

In line with the literature review of this study seven respondents dwelled much on the pregnancy situation as a factor that contributes immensely to their decision to depart from this university. This is in line with the literature that was discussed earlier (Rook, 1984; Donaldson and Watson, 1996). This reason had the equal percentage of both females and males who were interviewed. And closely related to the pregnancy factor, are the issues of stress, loneliness and dissatisfactions which are perpetuated by poor institutional support programs implemented by the university to assist these students. However, the stress levels did not seem to have affected students equally. In actual fact, males were mostly affected than females. This is consistent with the argument from the literature of this study which revealed that gender is also considered as one of the significant factors in loneliness and stress but it is more frequent in male students as they are more disadvantaged than female students at expressing themselves and solving problems in social relations (Le Roux and Connors, 2000).

Therefore, the female respondents felt that no support programs are implemented to support women in particular when they have fallen pregnant. On the contrary, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns portray this situation as a bad thing and channel much energy of the campaigns to helping those who are not pregnant to prevent it whilst in the process neglecting pregnant women. As a result, they find more comfort at home and decide to drop-out. One of the respondents when asked about her drop-out situation said:

*“I was pregnant and I have never been so lonely and stressed in my life than during that period”*

Another respondent indicated that:

*“When a woman is pregnant she sometimes loses friends because of jealousy and become socially disintegrated”.*

With regards to the first quotations, there are many reasons that were mentioned by this respondent which are deemed to have contributed to her loneliness. For instance, lack of support from her boyfriend, the university and the family were identified as the main causal factors.

The latter quotation refers to the relationship between the pregnant woman and her friends soon after the disclosure, which according to the respondent was ruined. This might also result into social problems. According to Tinto (1975) when a student is not academically or socially integrated he/she is likely to drop-out. It follows that the above statement is in line with both the literature and the theoretical framework of this study. Therefore, jealousy together with the other reasons enumerated above such as lack of institutional support for pregnant women within the university culminates into an increased level of stress and subsequent departure from the university.

On the other hand, their male counterparts expressed a very strong view of being lonely and stressed out after finding out that they have impregnated a woman. This is caused by, amongst other things, the fact that males, firstly, keep this issue within themselves for a long time before gaining confidence to discuss it with other people unlike females who indicated that they are mostly open about it. Males, therefore, feel responsible for the pregnancy and decide to quit the university in order to look for a job to support their pregnant girlfriend and the child. Furthermore, the African culture forces males to pay their girl-friends' families for the damage

they have caused which makes the situation even worse. The boys become stressed and drop-out of the university. Again, this is consistent with the reviewed literature of this study which revealed that male students' loneliness level is significantly higher than that of female students (Ari and Hamarta, 2000).

The general feeling amongst the males is summarized below by one of the interview response with a male respondent,

*“I left the university because I impregnated my girlfriend, so I had to take care of her and also save money for damages or Inhlawulo to her family”*

However, these respondents felt that they would not have dropped-out had the university availed institutional support to them in a form of part-time jobs so that they could take care of their situations.

One can argue that the quote at the beginning of this section clearly explained loneliness in a manner that fitted into the situation analyzed above. For instance, if a pregnancy situation prevails, women in particular, normally have emotional problems such as losing temper easily and not being comfortable around certain people and so on. Ultimately, they lose friends and their partners sometimes as a result of being *‘misunderstood or rejected by others’*. It is noted, therefore, that this kind of treatment culminates in them being alienated from the social and academic support and subsequently drop-out of university. This is consistent with Tinto's (1975) argument that if social and academic integration is done properly students are likely to persist in the universities until graduation.

### **6.3.3 Health issues:**

The second most important contributory factor revealed by these findings is that health related matters also contribute immensely to student drop-outs. Hence some of the respondents indicated that the reason why they departed from the university was because they fell ill in the middle of the university academic calendar. One of these respondents said:

*“Being sick requires parental or family support, so the university does not provide that kind of support hence I decided to leave the university”*

The above statement makes one to wonder whether the university support programs such as Academic Monitoring and Support, Student Counselling Department and the University Clinics play their important role of providing support to such students or not. Clarity on this puzzlement is provided by the university AMS evaluation report of 2013 which revealed that the above mentioned programs, particularly the AMS programme, is implemented properly, However, there is room for improvement and also places that require special attention such as implementing this programme uniformly with the inclusion of all university colleges. For instance, the panel recommended that “the University ensures that Colleges fully comply with Policy in terms of making AMS activities compulsory to underperforming students” (AMS, 2013: 14).

#### **6.4 The choice of the university and programs:**

The students also indicated that the choice of the university plays a huge role in their careers. In fact, they made it clear that when the choice is not theirs they are likely to leave that institution. As a result one of the respondents in relation to this made the following statement:

*“It was not entirely my decision to register at UKZN; it was my parents’ decision. I had to agree to it because they were paying for me”*

This respondent indicated that he started from a negative point of view since he developed a negative attitude towards this institution before even beginning to study in it. It emerged during the interview that even the course he registered for was not his choice. He later dropped out in his first year of study. This could lead to two consequences namely: poor academic performance or dropping-out. It is important to make mention of the fact that this study identified some factors as the causes of student drop-outs. Interestingly, during this interview, four of those factors were also mentioned by the respondent, namely; Student support division, Classroom environment and class attendance issues, prior schooling and under preparedness and Student finance and poor family background. However, the respondent mentioned these factors from a different point of view. These factors are discussed in the following subsections.

Contrary to the sentiments expressed above, one of the respondents indicated that although UKZN was her university of choice, she chose a wrong programme for herself and the reason for this is that she got a bursary for that course but she did not enjoy it at all. Hence she said:

“The biggest mistake I committed was to follow my bursary conditions especially when it comes to the choice of the course I registered for”

One argues that the university must consider designing a programme or resuscitating the existing programmes to cater for such students because had the student been provided with institutional support she would not have left the university without getting her qualification.

### **6.5 Prior schooling and under preparedness**

According to one of the respondents, family background plays a huge role in schooling before university. For instance, his parents are rich and they afforded to pay for his education in Glenwood High School which laid a good foundation for higher education because programs such as career guidance were implemented for them to actually make a determination of what they want to do after high school. However, that was ruined by the very same parents who chose his career path at the end. On the other hand, the SRC pointed out clearly that under preparedness of students as a result of prior schooling is also a contributory factor to students' dropouts and this is also in line with the argument by Vithal and Dhunpath (2012).

On the other hand, one of the respondents mentioned that she felt that she was not ready to go away from home since she is from the north part of KwaZulu-Natal. In fact, she indicated that she was underprepared for the university not in terms of academic performance but because of social and personal issues. Thus she thought going back home for a while and coming back perhaps in two years' time would assist her to find her career path and be psychologically, emotionally and socially prepared to be part of this university again.

### **6.6 Student finance and poor family background**

According to four of the respondents from the SRC and UKZN management, the large number of students drops out because of financial constraints. This is consistent with the reviewed literature of this study since authors such as Tinto (1975) and Letseka (2009) did make mention of this. One was very shocked that the University is indeed aware of this factor but nothing much is done to address this problem. It needs conceded though that the Management did acknowledge the

fact that the main contributory factor to this is the limited financial resources that have been allocated to the institution, which only accommodate a relatively small number of needy students and the fact that a relatively large number of students comes from poor backgrounds (Letseka et al, 2009).

## 6.7 Opinions on comparative analysis of student dropouts

6.7.1 The Table of Factors influencing students in good academic and financial standing to dropout

**Table 7 Factors influencing students in good academic and financial standing to dropout**

No.	The respondents	Factors Influencing student dropouts	Impact on higher education	Impact on the society in general?	Possible solutions
1.	Student Representative Council (SRC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Students finance and poor family background</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Puts the institutions into a huge deficit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High poverty levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate sector must work with government</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Classroom environment and class attendance issues</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low graduation rate.</li> <li>• High dropouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illiterate communities</li> <li>• Low numbers of future academics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build new lecture halls</li> <li>• Innovative ways of teaching</li> <li>• Change of students attitude</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prior schooling and under preparedness</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High failure rate</li> <li>• Requires much support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High poverty levels</li> <li>• High level of unemployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redesigning of the curriculum</li> <li>• More financial resource required in education</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Health Issues</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affecting mostly African students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less mAfrican/g raduates professional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous Knowledge System shall be implemented (Sangoma)</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Institutional support</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High dropouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease a number of future leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re designing of policies &amp; Sangoma must be full time.</li> </ul>
2.	UKZN Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Financial issues and poor family background</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tarnishes the image of the university</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High poverty, unemployment and lack of skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Corporate sector must work with government to solve this problem</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Government policies</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This sector is unable to deal with this issue decisively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal engagement on this issue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government must establish a policy specific to this problem</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Historical context</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrying a historical burden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High poverty levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing the imbalances of the past</li> </ul>
3.	Students dropouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Health issues.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhausting resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra burden to poor families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinics and Sangomas must be put into higher education</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pregnancy issues</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low throughput rate and high dropouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High poverty, high diseases and extra burden for government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness campaigns, proper support shall be provided</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stress and Loneliness</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of dropouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortage of skills and high levels of poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensified institutional support and IKS introduction</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Language of teaching and learning</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of dropouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short of skills and high levels of poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of the UKZN language policy and plan.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Institutional support</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low academics production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of requisite skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revival of this programme to provide adequate support</li> </ul>
4.	Student counselling department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Students attitude</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not accessing support provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty, crime, diseases and unemployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing programs that speaks to this, for example, awareness campaigns</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Health issues</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loses potential talent and scholars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High poverty and diseases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher education must guarantee health assistance.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Institutional support</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste of resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreases future academics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies shall be designed such that it responds to the needs</li> </ul>

Source: Author's compilation

## 6.8 Factors influencing students to drop-out in general

There are many general factors that have been mentioned by both the literature of this study and the respondents. These are listed in their order of importance below as follows:

- (a) Students finance and poor family background;
- (b) School background and under preparedness;
- (c) Lack of institutional support;
- (d) Government policies; and
- (e) Classroom environment and class attendance issues.
- (f) Language of teaching and learning

### **6.8.1 Students' finance and poor family background.**

Both the international and the local literature revealed that students' finances and poor family background are the most contributory factors to students' drop-out and that this situation decreases the production of skills by the universities which is likely to contribute immensely to the already rising levels of poverty and unemployment. These studies/ perspectives suggest that government and the corporate sector must work together to solve this problem (Letseka et al, 2009). Furthermore, one can argue that individual institutional effort is also necessary to provide a solution to this problem. For instance, independent strategies of fundraising would go a long way towards addressing this endemic problem.

In line with the above argument the SRC and the Management also indicated that finances and poor family background are indeed contributory factors to students' drop-outs. However, the SRC mentioned that this situation puts the university into a huge deficit because it is sometimes compelled to go an extra mile in order to financially assist those students. On the other hand, management indicated that this situation tarnishes the image of the university because of the limited funding allocated to it by the national government, which only caters for a few students. These respondents both indicated that finances and poor family background perpetuate the rising levels of poverty and unemployment. They, therefore, suggested that government must work together with the corporate sector to solve these problems.

### **6.8.2 School background and under preparedness**

The literature of this study – both international and local studies – indicated that prior schooling and under preparedness are other general factors that cause students to drop-out from higher



education (Tinto, 1975; Letseka, 2009; Dhunpath and Vithal, 2012). The literature also revealed that this situation costs both the universities and government huge resources. In light of the aforementioned one can argue that government must put a lot of resources in basic education in order to create a solid foundation for students before they complete high school and enter the higher education sector.

In line with the literature as mentioned above, the SRC and UKZN Management also reiterated that prior schooling and under preparedness are some of the general factors influencing students to leave UKZN College of Humanities in particular. UKZN College of Humanities is said to be the second best in research production within the university. This is something positive which the College should pride itself on. However, it can be argued that the dropping out of students might negatively affect the research production of this College in future. Therefore, the SRC suggested that the university must develop a specific policy to deal with the issues of students drop-out. The SRC also suggested that the institutional support must be intensified in order to assist such students. On the other hand, management's point of view was in line with the literature in that they think that government must put a lot of resources in basic education in order to create a solid foundation for students before they complete high school and enter the higher education sector. Furthermore, one would argue that when students have entered the university government must allocate financial resources to the university that are equivalent to the number of student population that is admitted so that the university would be able to sustain its programs aimed at bridging the gap between higher and basic education.

### **6.8.3 Lack of institutional support**

This factor appeared in this study as one of the general ones because it was already mentioned by both the international and local studies. For instance, Tinto (1975: 124) argues that institutional support is paramount in the lives of the students in the university because in order for them to cope in the university environment they need to be well integrated in both the academic and social systems of the university. In line with this trajectory, Letseka et al (2009: 19) reiterate the seriousness of the lack of institutional support such as adequate career guidance and counselling facilities as factors causing students to leave the higher education sector in South Africa before they graduate.

Whilst on the other hand the management of the university does acknowledge that institutional support is the key to the students' success, however, they also emphasized that the University of KwaZulu-Natal is providing adequate and sufficient support to its students but the challenges facing UKZN are the same challenges facing all universities in South Africa.

#### **6.8.4 Government Policies**

This is one of the factors that are also categorized as general by this study since it was mentioned by both the literature and the respondents of the study. The study literature revealed that the South African government does not have a specific policy to regulate students' drop-outs (Letseka et al, 2009). On the other hand, the management of the university indicated that the lack of a specific policy regulating students' drop-outs, presents many problems which are likely to be solved if government were to develop such a policy. On the other hand, the Student Representative Council of the university called for the establishment of the institutional students' drop-outs policy in order to deal with unique problems that might face the individual institutions.

One would argue that the suggestions such as the development of individual policies could be something worth looking into because as long as there is no specific policy on this issue there will always be a problem which is likely not to be solved.

#### **6.8.5 Classroom environment and class attendance issues**

This study revealed that classroom environment and class attendance are also some of the contributory factors to students drop-out. This is in line with the literature of this study which also revealed the same. For instance, according to Tinto (1975), classroom environment is also vital and is one of the factors causing students to drop-out. Furthermore, he is of the view that when students feel well integrated into the classroom environment they are likely to succeed but when they are not they surely depart from the university. In line with this argument, the UKZN management and the SRC also expressed their emphases on the importance of an amicable classroom environment and the good role it plays to the lives of the students. However, the SRC felt that the classroom environment goes hand in hand with the attendance issues. In fact, when students feel that the class environment is not suitable or conducive for them they do not attend.

As a result, this is one of the factors that compel students to leave this institution. One may argue that the above mentioned goes hand in hand with the institutional support and that if the support can be strengthened these problems are likely to disappear.

#### 6.8.6 Language of teaching and learning

The respondents indicated that the language of teaching and learning is also a contributory factor to students' drop-outs, hence they call for a proper implementation of the language policy of UKZN so that it can elevate the status of the language that is mostly spoken here in KwaZulu-Natal which is isiZulu. According to the respondent the proper implementation of this policy will contribute immensely to the retention of students.

On the other hand, the UKZN management on language matters indicated that the university has recently taken a radical step towards elevating the indigenous languages, in particular, isiZulu because it is the language that is spoken by the majority of the people in this province. In support of this argument UKZN management has taken a decision that all students who are registered for the first time in UKZN will not be allowed to graduate without having done at least one module of isiZulu. The SRC, on the other hand, agreed to the assertion made by drop-outs that the use of English also contribute to students' drop-outs but at the same time applauded the aforementioned decision taken by the university about first time entrance.

It can be argued that the Language Policy and its Implementation Plan clearly explains the phases that the university is embarking on in order to address the concerns raised by the students above, for instance, phase one and phase two involve the development of technical terminology in isiZulu in order to accord it the status of a language of teaching and learning, harnessing resources to assist in its implementation and training the people to be able to teach in isiZulu until 2030, the policy envisage that in 2030 isiZulu will be at par with English. (UKZN Language Policy, 2006)

### 6.9 Factors influencing students to dropout in general

#### **Table 8 Factors influencing students to dropout in general**

No.	The respondents	Factors Influencing student dropouts	Impact on higher education	Impact on the society in general?	Possible solutions
1.1.	Student Representative Council (SRC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students finance and family background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Puts the institutions into a huge deficit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High poverty levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate sector must work with government</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prior schooling and under preparedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High failure rate</li> <li>Requires much support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High poverty levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of a drop-out policy</li> <li>More financial resource required in education</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High dropouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decrease the number of future leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sangoma must be full time.</li> </ul>
2.	UKZN Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students finance and family background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tarnishes the image of the university</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High poverty, unemployment and lack of skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate sector must work with government to solve this problem</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prior schooling and under preparedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost the university a lot of resource</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases the level of drop-out and unemployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>government must invest much in basic education for it is a foundation of higher education</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This sector is unable to deal with this issue decisively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No formal engagement on this issue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government must establish a policy specific to this problem</li> </ul>
3.	The perspective of the international scholars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students finance and family background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decreases the throughput</li> <li>Decreases the production of academics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases the level of unemployment</li> <li>Increases poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate sector and government must work together to solve this problem</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom environment and class attendance issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weakens the academic and social integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased number of drop-outs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The universities must work together with students to design proper support systems</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prior schooling and under preparedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large numbers of students drop-out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The increase number of drop-outs in the society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early intervention</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Institutional support</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensify academic and social programs</li> </ul>
4.	The South African context by South African scholars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Students finance and family background</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreases the production of skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High poverty and unemployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government must work with corporate sector to solve this problem</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Government policies</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of policies in the universities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level of drop-outs and unemployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated policies must be developed to deal with the drop-outs issues</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prior schooling and under preparedness</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost the universities a lot of resource</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The country loses a lot of money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career guidance must be implemented</li> </ul>

Source: Author's compilation

### 6.10 Contextualization of general and specific factors

This study revealed a lot of general and specific factors. However, the study focused on specific factors that influenced students who are in good academic and financial standing to drop-out. The factors that were identified are: loneliness and pregnancy, health related issues, Institutional choice and programs and traditional or indigenous issues. It is important to note that the author observed that secondary data from the university revealed that African students are the ones who mostly drop-out followed by Whites as put in table 1.1 above. One would argue that perhaps the factors affecting African students are the same as those affecting White students given the fact that the African students investigated in this study come from the same family background as the White students.

The study revealed that the lack of Indigenous Knowledge Systems is a factor that contributes immensely to students drop-outs. This is because when students are suffering from traditional related sicknesses they are compelled to go back home so that they can be given proper medical attention. It is acknowledged that the university does provide a traditional healer (*Isangoma*) but according to drop-outs and the SRC it is not enough and sufficiently supported.

In the discussion which the author had with the interviewees, it appeared that in all categories the health related issue as a factor was from different angles. For instance, the students drop-out and UKZN SRC shared a similar conviction on this issue and they were more concerned with the

manner in which the institutional support in terms of health services is provided. In their view the university fails students when it comes to this issue because of the many reasons they cited. For instance, one SRC member said:

*“The campus clinics close at night and there is no standby university ambulance that attends to students urgently”*

This and many other reasons made them come to the conclusion that students decide to be at home than staying at the university when they are sick because it is much safer at home. The operations of these clinics are also questionable from the SRC’s point of view and the traditional related sicknesses are also not supported well according to the SRC.

On the other hand, the department of counselling believes that students have over time developed a very bad attitude towards the support systems provided to them. They indicated that even if students are sick they do not use the university facilities such as counselling or the traditional healers or the clinic. Instead, they choose to dropout without having accessed the assistance that the university is providing for them.

One would argue that the support provided by the university must not in any way be symbolic in the sense that it is just there without the will to go an extra mile to cater for the students. The university has a sectorial constituency and therefore has a similar role to play to its community like the government does to its general communities. This can only be achieved when the SRC and Management work together towards finding solutions in this regard. In this way, therefore, the drop-out issues could be reduced.

When coming to the pregnancy issues, this factor falls under health related factors to a certain degree because a pregnant woman would require medical attention most often. However, not only females are affected by this situation in this context. As a matter of fact, their male counterparts are also affected although they do not require medical attention like females. Perhaps these types of situations could be handled very well if all the support systems of the university can be structured such that they work together.

Lastly, since the information from the drop-outs, which is supported by the literature of this study and the data from DMI, reveals that the large number of students drop-out in their first year, it is important that the university considers initiating its support programs as proactive

systems. One is arguing for this point because currently almost all the support systems of the university are reactive, meaning that they are only applicable after the first semester when the damage has already been done.

### **6.11 Conclusion**

In conclusion, since the findings of the study have already been stated in chapter five, this chapter sought to discuss the revealed findings. Interestingly, some factors such as prior schooling and under preparedness, financial issues and so on had been revealed already by the literature of this study in chapter two. However, some factors such the traditional related sickness and so on were established for the first time by this study. This gave a broader insight and another side of the factors influencing students to drop-out. The discussion about the policies and their importance in regulating students drop-out was also an important factor that requires further scrutiny. However, the broader conclusion and recommendations are properly dealt with by chapter seven which follows below.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 7.1 Conclusion

This chapter concludes this study by painting a picture of what was presented drawing from the introduction up to the findings of the study. It also provides the author's perspective on the key findings of the study and also put forward recommendations for future research. Notably, there is no policy that exists to regulate drop-outs particularly those students in good academic and financial standing at UKZN except the academic and exclusions policy whose main focus is on students who are not performing well academically and the Registrations Appeals Policy whose main focus is on students who owe the university fees. This situation, therefore, leaves students in good academic and financial standing vulnerable since they have no specific policy regulating their drop-out problem and the Language Policy which articulates the position of the university on indigenous languages and in particular the plan of the university to develop isiZulu to be the language of teaching and learning.

The aim of this study was to establish the factors that cause students to leave the College of Humanities at the University Of KwaZulu-Natal before they attain their first degree even if they are not failing their courses and do not owe the university. The above aim was achieved since there is no doubt that a large number of students depart from the university before they acquire their first degree, particularly in their first year of study. It is notable though that there is a relatively small number of the above mentioned students who leave the university without having acquired their first qualifications. The study has revealed that general health issues, pregnancy situations, institutional support and traditional sicknesses are the most contributory factors causing students to dropout at UKZN before graduation. These factors, particularly the traditional sicknesses contribute to the new body of knowledge which might add value to higher education as a whole and also assist towards finding a solution to the students' dropout problem.

The limitation of this study is that its sample population (students who dropped out) was only Africans even though other respondents from other races participated but they could only give



their perceptions and the empirical data was gathered from students' dropouts who were Africans. The results of this study, therefore, can only be generalized for African students within the College of Humanities. Further studies will continue with this kind of research as and when it is so desirable through incorporating all races in their study population and also by extending it to all the four colleges. It transpired from this study that UKZN must review its supporting systems and design new policies to address this problem.

## 7.2 Recommendations

Given all that has been highlighted in this entire dissertation it is prudent at this juncture to make requisite recommendations as a way forward. These recommendations are listed below in no order of importance.

- (a) In the spirit of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and also judging from the responses from the interviews, it is recommended that the *Sangoma* be employed on a permanent basis and that equal effort be put to this programme in the same manner as in the Counselling Department.
- (b) In light of the responses as they relate to health issues, it is recommended that all UKZN clinics be opened 24 hours and that the university must buy its own ambulances so that its students would have easy access to medical help should a need arise, especially at night.
- (c) In light of the fact that there are only two policies that are regulating the issues of drop-outs, namely: Academic Monitoring and Exclusions Policy and Registration Appeals Policy, these policies are only specific to two type of students, those are the students who are underperforming (not in good academic standing) and those who owe the university fees respectively. Thus it is recommended that the university considers developing a policy that will cater for students in good academic and financial standing who drop out of the university.
- (d) With regards to the students' under preparedness, it is recommended that the university implement a compulsory entrance test over and above the matric points that are currently used to assess /measure the capability of students before they enrol for any

qualification. This test must be a generic one so that it can be utilised to re-direct students to their areas of competences.

(e) The university must ensure that everyone participate in the implementation of the language policy. By everyone I mean the students (both general students and student representatives), the staff (both non-academic and academic) and importantly, all the departments and schools must have strategies to implement the university's language policy.

(f) The university must initiate and implement its support programs as proactive systems. One is arguing for this point because currently almost all the support systems of the university are reactive, meaning that they are only functional or put into use after the first semester when more damage had already been done.

## Appendices

### A Letter of informed consent and a declaration.



**School of Social Sciences  
Howard College  
Durban  
4001**

#### **Letter of Informed Consent**

##### Request for Participation in this Research

To whom this may concern,

My name is Siyabonga Nkontwana and I am currently conducting research on factors that Influence University Student Throughput and Dropout: which is an Analysis of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, College of Humanities. However this study focuses on students in good academic and financial standing. It will also check whether the academic support systems in place at UKZN are effective in regulating student persistence and student retention. I would therefore like to ask you to participate in this study. Participants in this will not be remunerated in any form & participation is voluntary. Any participant can withdraw from this study at any point should they choose to do so. All participants will be guaranteed anonymity and their identities will not be disclosed. Additionally, should any participant wish for confidentiality, the information that they disclose will not be utilized.

My contact details are:  
Email: 206506592@ukzn.ac.za  
Cell: 073 784 2285

The Contact details of my Supervisor are:

Bheki Mngomezulu  
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Your participation would be appreciated.

Sincerely

Siyabonga Nkontwana

## **B Interview questions**

### **B1 Interview question of students' drop-outs**

1. What influenced your decision to study at a university?
2. What factors influenced your preference for this institution when you were still in matric / Grade 12?
3. Which institution did you plan to go to when you were in matric / Grade 12?
4. What factors affected your preference for this course of study when you were still in matric / Grade 12?
5. What course of study did you plan to pursue in a higher education institution when you were still in matric / Grade 12?
6. Where were you living while you were studying?
7. Who paid for your studies?
8. Who paid for your living expenses while you were studying?
9. Did the university provide career guidance for students?
10. Is there a role played by students to help others not to dropout?
11. What are the factors that influenced you to dropout?
12. What do you think should be done to solve the issue of dropouts?

**B2 Interview question of the UKZN Management**

1. What do think influences the decision of students to study at the university?
2. What factors influence their preferences to UKZN when they are still in Matric/Grade 12?
3. Do you think the choice of the university play a role in students' dropouts?
4. Do you think the choice of the course of study play a role in students' dropouts?
5. Do you think the family background of student play a role in students' dropout?
6. What are the factors that influence students in good academic and financial standing to dropout?
7. What is the role played by the students to prevent students' dropout?
8. What is the role played the university management to address students' drop-out?
9. Are there support systems put in place by the university to address students' drop-out?
10. What do you think could be a solution to address students' drop-out?

**B3 Interview questions of the UKZN SRC**

1. What do think influences the decision of students to study at the university?
2. What factors influence their preferences to UKZN when they are still in Matric/Grade 12?
3. Do you think the choice of the university play a role in students' dropouts?
4. Do you think the choice of the course of study play a role in students' dropouts?
5. Do you think the family background of student play a role in students' dropout?
6. What are the factors that influence students in good academic and financial standing to dropout?
7. What is the role played by the students to prevent students' dropout?
8. What is the role played the SRC to address students' drop-out?
9. Are there support systems put in place by the university to address students' drop-out?
10. What do you think could be a solution to address students' drop-out?

**B4 Interview questions of the counselling department**

1. What do think influences the decision of students to study at the university?
2. What factors influence their preferences to UKZN when they are still in Matric/Grade 12?
3. Do you think the choice of the university play a role in students' dropouts?
4. Do you think the choice of the course of study play a role in students' dropouts?
5. Do you think the family background of student play a role in students' dropout?
6. What are the factors that influence students in good academic and financial standing to dropout?
7. What is the role played by the students to prevent students' dropout?
8. What is the role played the university counselling department to address students' drop-out?
9. Are there support systems put in place by the university to address students' drop-out?
10. What do you think could be a solution to address students' drop-out?



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