



SCHOOL OF APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES

**Overcoming Academic Literacy Difficulties Through the Humanities
Access Programme: Students' and Staff Perceptions at the University of
Kwa-Zulu Natal**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Social Science (Educational Psychology)
University of KwaZulu-Natal.

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Nozuko Zandisiwe Nqana, declare that the thesis titled: *An Exploration of How Students Overcome Their Academic Literacy Difficulties through the Humanities Access Programme: Students' and Staff perceptions at the university of Kwa-Zulu Natal* is my own work and has not been previously submitted. All the sources used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

Some applicants do not meet the minimal prerequisites for admission to mainstream programmes in university. Academic development efforts like Access Programmes (AP) assist such students by preparing them for the requirements of mainstream courses. Most students who struggle more with academic literacy come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds with high poverty rates and inadequate resource in schools. Due to these factors, students are frequently ill-prepared for higher education, negatively affecting their academic performance and increasing the dropout rate.

This study explored the students' and staff perceptions of the Humanities Access Programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The focus was on the strategies used by students to overcome academic literacy difficulties. Purposive sampling was employed, and individual interviews were conducted with six students and two staff members. The data was analysed thematically, and the findings show that when the participants started the academic year in the AP, they were stigmatised by students in mainstream programmes. They also felt their studies were prolonged and became dissatisfied with beginning their university studies through the AP. However, at the end of the academic year, the students believed that the AP helped them to transition to the university setting and were better prepared to meet the academic demands.

Keywords: Access Programme, Academic Literacy, Transitioning to University

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ACRONYMS

AP	Access Programme
BSS4	Bachelor of Social Sciences Augmented Curriculum
DoE	Department of Education
DoHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
MKO	More knowledgeable other
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In their bid to enter university, some applicants do not meet the minimum requirements for admission to mainstream programmes. Academic development initiatives such as Access Programmes (APs) aid such students by preparing them for the demands of mainstream courses. APs are implemented as a mechanism for increasing accessibility to higher education for students who initially do not meet entrance requirements for the courses for which they wish to apply (Nair, 2002). In many cases, these students come from disadvantaged educational backgrounds and need pre-degree assistance. McKinney and Van Pletzen (2004) point out that APs offer students an opportunity to engage in less intensive first-year academic activities, which supplement core or foundation modules. Du Pré (2003) highlights that APs aim to bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary education and to compensate for the under-preparedness of students by providing fundamental assistance and academic support.

Kapp (1994) notes that higher education serves a gatekeeping function in aspects of social, cultural and economic development. Equitable access is therefore important in the broad task of facilitating social change. Kapp (1994) further argues that APs were established as a solution to two problems: (1) the need to increase access to higher education among socio-economically disadvantaged students (2) to equip students with academic literacy skills for tertiary studies. In higher education, various initiatives have been implemented to address the needs of underprepared students. Many terms have been used to describe these initiatives: access programme; foundation programme; bridging course; augmented curriculum; and extended programme. Different institutions may adopt different terminology to refer to a similar initiative.

1.2 Background to the Study

Within a decade of democracy (1994), many Africans in South Africa had the opportunity to enroll in institutions of higher education; however, others are still not able to access higher education due to their not attaining the required entry points (Kahn, 2005). The AP in the College of Humanities was introduced at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) to respond

to the high volume of students who have not met the minimum entry requirements, particularly for applicants from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. According to Tyson (2010), the Humanities AP was established in the year 2000, when a gap was identified in the academic field, where some students who came from disadvantaged backgrounds had difficulties with academic writing skills or completing tasks from various modules. The AP expanded from the model that was initially adopted in 2001 at the Pietermaritzburg Campus of the former Natal University, now the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Due to a lack of funding, the programme was serviced by lecturers and a part-time educational psychologist. By the year 2002, the AP had demonstrated it was beneficial to the students who were enrolled, and this resulted in 400 students registering for the programme (Hildenbrand, 2016). The Department of Education (DoE), before the launch of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET), increased the funding for the appointment of academic, administrative and psychosocial staff. At the UKZN Howard College campus, the intake of AP students increased to 200. More students registered for the Bachelor of Social Sciences Augmented Curriculum (BSS4). This enabled them to register for a mainstream module in the second semester, choosing from a limited number of mainstream modules (Psychology, Sociology, Political Science and Dramatic Arts).

1.3 Problem Statement

Makura et al. (2011) note that the majority of the students who experience greater difficulties with academic literacy come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, which are characterised by high levels of poverty and schools that lack basic infrastructure. Thus, they tend to obtain poor results in the matriculation examinations. These circumstances very often result in students who are under-prepared for higher education, and consequently experience poor academic performance and high dropout rates (Matomela, 2010). As such, these students may have been viewed as non-traditional students in higher education. However, Jama et al. (2008) indicated that there doesn't appear to be a clear profile of non-traditional students and the multi-faceted academic environment in which they function. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2016), however, describes non-traditional students as those who are first-generation entrants, mature students and students from disadvantaged communities.

Bunting (2002) postulates that one of the critical issues faced by students in South African universities is related to academic literacy difficulties. For example, the use of the English language as a medium of instruction has been identified as a barrier to learning, even though students have the potential to do well in their studies. To mitigate this situation, Butler (2013) states that interventions aimed at bridging the gap between students' school attainment and the demands of higher education may be viewed as essential support structures. Mpofu (2012, p.4) posits that "an understanding of student disadvantages can lead to improved academic through-put".

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Although authors such as Van Tonder (1996), Troskie-de Bruin (1999) and Bernstein (2002) have explored the success of APs from students' perspectives, much of the research has been initiated and conducted by tertiary institutions. Consequently, APs are generally described, and evaluated, from institutional perspectives. These evaluations generally assess performance by analysing statistical correspondence such as improvement in students' marks, pass rates and throughput (Curtis & De Villiers, 1992; De Villiers & Rwigema, 1998). This allows researchers to determine the formal success (or lack thereof) of APs. There is limited literature that is available about the subjective and collective experiences of students who partake in such programmes, particularly their adjustment to mainstream studies. Timm (2005) emphasises that student perceptions of APs are an important indicator of the success of their implementation. This study serves to illuminate the staff and students' perceptions of the content that is taught and the delivery structure of the AP. The focus is on the accounts of experiences provided by students who have been in the College of Humanities Access Programme.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

1. To establish the students' perceptions of the Humanities Access Programme.
2. To establish the Humanities Access Programme staff members' perceptions of the AP.
3. To explore the students' experiences of overcoming academic literacy difficulties through the Humanities Access Programme.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What are the students' perceptions of the Humanities Access Programme?
2. What are the Humanities Access Programme staff members' perceptions of the AP?
3. How does the Humanities Access Programme assist students to overcome academic difficulties?

1.7 Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters.

- Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the topic and outlines the problem statement, as well as the purpose of the study.
- The literature review is presented in Chapter 2, with a focus on literacy, particularly academic literacy and Access Programmes. The theoretical framework underpinning the study is also discussed in this chapter.
- The methods of data collection, including the sampling technique adopted in this study, are delineated in Chapter 3.
- The data analysis and research findings are presented in Chapter 4.
- The discussion, limitations of the study and recommendations are located in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Creswell (2015) states that a literature review aims to express different findings from prior studies and continue the discussion about a particular topic. Rowley and Slack (2004) extend this view by asserting that a literature review is a synopsis of a subject field that supports specific research questions and comprises the themes and subthemes relating to the particular study. Similarly, Cooper (1984) noted that the themes are typically intertwined with findings of prior research. This study seeks to explore students' perceptions of the Access Programme in the College of Humanities at UKZN and the processes that enhance academic literacy. The discussion presented in this literature review centers on the concept of academic literacy, challenges associated with academic literacy in higher education, and an overview of APs.

2.2 The Concept of Literacy

According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, “[a] person who is literate can comprehend and write simple and short sentences related to his or her daily life” (UNESCO, 1951). From the 1990s, the concept of literacy was diversified in relation to technological developments, the change of living conditions in cities, and new necessities. Since then, this term has been increasingly used in various contexts such as computer literacy, technological literacy, internet literacy, and media literacy (Altun, 2018). Diehl and Mikulecky (1980) share the view of literacy as a socially constructed term that means different things, to diverse cultural groups of people, at various times. In this regard, literacy events demonstrate what a student has done with text, while literacy practices connect to unobservable beliefs, values, attitudes, and power structures. Social event experts within the field of literacy place emphasis on written expression as a result of social practice (Perry, 2012).

For some scholars, such as Resnick and Resnick (1977), Levine (1986), Wickert (1992) and Freebody (2001), total consensus on a universal definition or measurement of literacy might never be reached. In this study, literacy is defined as follows: “the ability to understand, evaluate, use, and engage with written texts to participate in society, achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2013, p. 48).

2.3 Types of Literacy

Different types of literacy reflect multiple contexts. These include social literacy, cultural literacy, functional literacy, higher-order literacy and critical literacy.

2.3.1 Social Literacy

According to Zahra et al. (2018), a person is socially literate when they can live and contribute to their community. This contribution can be in the form of intellectual, social, and cooperative skills. Social literacy also includes individual attitudes and values that enable one to understand numerous social problems people face in life (Arthur & Davison, 2019). This encompasses the ability to connect and interact with other people. Social skills include exercising self-control, as well as exchanging ideas and experiences with other people. In higher education, students need to be able to read and write. They also need to possess social literacy skills as they engage with other students and lecturers within the institution (Lgleysteen, 2018).

2.3.2 Cultural Literacy

Hirsch (1988) states that cultural influence stems from engaging with different institutions, such as families, churches, and schools. The term ‘cultural literacy’ was coined by E. D. Hirsch Jr. in 1987. Hirsch viewed cultural literacy as more than the ability to read and write, as he placed emphasis on the understanding of one’s native history, cultural heritage, art, and politics. Pacheco (2010) highlights that, by partaking in cultural activities and using the tools of one’s society, one learns what is important in one’s culture. A reader of literature understands the alphabet, grammatical rules and possesses sufficient vocabulary. The culturally literate person can converse with and understand others of that culture with fluency. On the other hand, the culturally illiterate person finds it difficult to understand culturally conditioned allusions and references to historical events.

2.3.3 Functional Literacy

Functional literacy may be defined as having the reading and writing skills required for day-to-day activities in modern society (Güneş, 2000). This entails basic literacy skills used by people for economic, social and cultural purposes. De Castel (1971) notes that:

[i]f an individual is able to take part in significant activities in professional, social, political, and cultural fields for a society he/she lives in with the help of literacy skills of his/her own, it is possible to define that person as functionally literate.

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2006), functional literacy means making effective use of activities involving reading and writing skills. This includes using information, communicating with others, and following a path of lifelong learning, which are necessary for that individual's ability to express themselves in daily life. This definition posits functional literacy as an activity that develops and enhances individuals' and society's ability to use reading, writing and speaking skills in their daily life.

According to the sociocultural perspective, economic considerations are one of the critical factors that define functional literacy. This is due to the expected skills that one needs to have in employment and economic development. The sociocultural perspective on literacy believes that economic and employment factors are the ground roots for the development of functional literacy. This type of literacy develops according to what the person aims to achieve. For example, a student can have good academic writing skills but fail to navigate social network websites or text messaging (Perry, 2012).

2.3.4 Higher-Order Literacy

Higher-order literacy encompasses the search for meaning within a progressively more thought-provoking range of texts. This type of literacy may be used in different settings and for various reasons, such as reading for pleasure or instruction. Higher-order literacy is the ability to read attentively or thoughtfully and imaginatively. Meece and Miller (1999) found that students preferred high-challenge tasks to low-challenge tasks and indicated that their preference resulted from controlling their thoughts and efforts. In their research study, Pressley et al. (2006, p. 387) conclude: "The data are overwhelming that tasks a little bit beyond the learners' current competence level are motivating." In other words, students should read texts appropriate for their instructional reading level; however, they should not be denied the opportunity to think deeply about ideas in texts. They should be encouraged to connect these ideas to their own lives or engage in conversations about texts.

2.3.5 Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is the ability to read texts actively and be reflective to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships. Applying critical literacy can be understood as thinking beyond the written text and focusing on comprehending the author's perspective about a particular topic (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

Teachers who facilitate the development of critical literacy encourage students to explore issues pertaining to institutions like family and education and explore societal issues such as poverty, inequality, and inequity to transform structures that transmit harmful social norms.

2.3.6 Academic Literacy

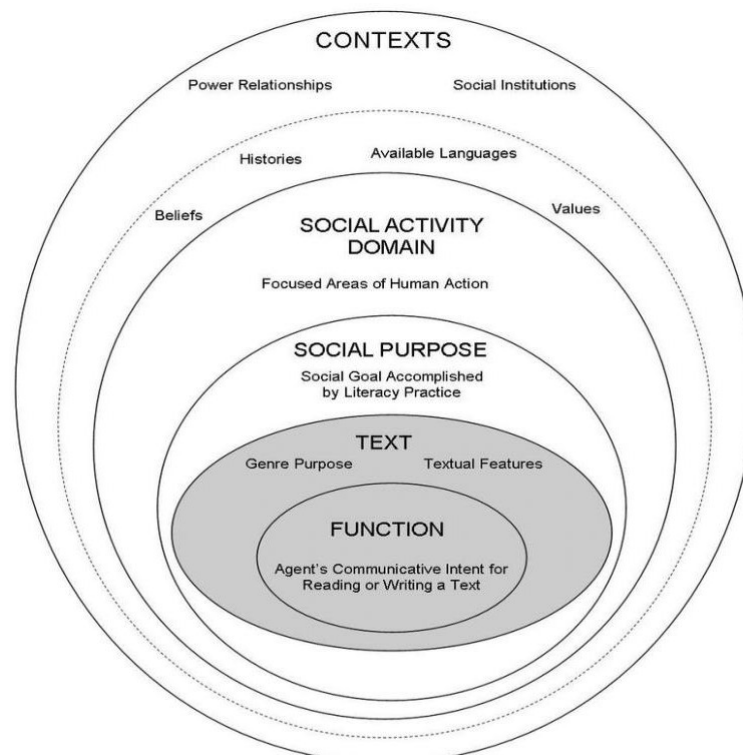
Academic literacy pertains to the ability to read and write critically and analytically. This includes distinguishing between opinion and fact, following rules for constructing arguments (such as defining terms), providing evidence for statements and adopting appropriate referencing styles. Furthermore, academic literacy enhances one's ability to articulate ideas in their field of study (Van Schalkwyk, 2010).

Nizonkiza and van Dyk (2015) conducted a study that investigated students' vocabulary size in relation to academic literacy. The study involved first-year students who were part of the AP in the linguistics department at North-West University. To investigate this, the Vocabulary Levels Test was administered to first-year students. The findings revealed that the first-year students possess a vocabulary of approximately 4,500 words per student, which is enough for them to comprehend lectures conducted in English. Moreover, the study revealed that students with a large vocabulary size had higher academic literacy proficiency. These results support studies conducted by Meara and Jones (2000), Meara and Buxton (2001), Nation and Beglar (2007), as well as Beglar (2010), who assert that there is a strong relationship between students' vocabulary size and academic literacy, and that this may predict academic performance. It appears that possessing a significant vocabulary size increases students' reading and writing competencies, thus contributing to improved academic literacy proficiency. The results also support Laufer and Nation (1995), as well as Meara and Fitzpatrick (2000), in their observation that language plays a crucial role in proficient academic literacy. The academic setting encompasses communication channels, policy documents, choice of textbooks and pedagogical approaches. The lecture rooms, university structures and teaching methods may be unusual for students; as Meara (2013) points out, for many first-year students in higher education, this whole experience is new. Bourdieu (1991/1994) states that academic literacy is factored into the language of instruction and the power dynamics that exist between students and lecturers within the academic environment. This suggests that academic literacy is largely influenced by the activities, the medium of instruction, and the interaction between lecturers and students. There are expectations and criteria that students should meet in order to achieve academic literacy. The students' ability to adopt and adapt to academic language is greatly connected to

the students' background. For some, academic text remains a source of anxiety emanating from the language barrier. Bourdieu (1991, p. 4) confirms this view by stating that “many university students are unable to cope with the technical and scholastic demands made on their use of language... [and] cannot define the terms which they hear in lectures or which they themselves use” Figure 1 demonstrates that academic literacy is not just about the text and social purpose (goal), but that it encompasses the social activity domain and contexts.

Figure 1

Model of a Literary Practice (Purcell-Gates et al., 2011, p.15)



Model of a Literacy Practice

The areas shaded in gray represent an observable *literacy event*, while the unshaded areas represent inferred aspects of the larger *literacy practice* that contextualize and shape the event.

2.4 Dimensions of Academic Literacy

Kucer (2014) asserts that academic literacy is a multidimensional concept whereby each of three identified dimensions is entrenched in academic instruction. The three dimensions are the linguistic dimension, the cognitive dimension, and the sociocultural dimension.

2.4.1 Linguistic Dimension

‘Linguistic’ refers to the scientific study of language that looks at the analysis and production of language, the meaning of language, and language in relation to social context, which may include cultural norms (Devitt, 2006). The linguistic dimension centers on the process of making meaning from text when reading. This process is facilitated by three cueing systems: semantic, syntactic and graphophonic. Semantic cueing is activated when students use their prior knowledge to read for meaning and make sense of unfamiliar words based on the context of the text. The syntactic system comprises the rules of grammar and sentence structure which facilitate comprehension. The function of the graphophonic cueing system is to decode text, letter by letter, in association with spoken words (Wren, 2001). The focus is also on the process by which native speakers of a particular language come to know how to put words together to form acceptable sentences.

2.4.2 Cognitive Dimension

The term cognition refers to “all the processes by which the sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used. It is concerned with these processes even when they operate in the absence of relevant stimulation” (Neisser, 1967, p. 6). The cognitive dimension focuses on the mental strategies and processes used to create meaning once the text has been decoded. Harvey and Goudvis (2008) argue that, for proficiency in reading, students must have strategies to assist them in the process of formulating meaning beyond the text. Academic literacy encompasses visualizing, questioning, inferring, summarizing and synthesizing information located in the cognitive domain.

2.4.3 Sociocultural Dimension

The sociocultural dimension focuses on the social identities of students and how various groups use literacy to negotiate their interactions with the world. Wilson & Dollman (2007) argue that the focus of learning should not only be geared towards content and assessment for professional development. Greater importance can be placed on the influence that the sociocultural dimension has on learning. Cooperative learning strategies, such as working in pairs to assist with the instruction, can be adopted and implemented with respect and empathy for one another. Some students may require more assistance from their peers, teachers, and parents who are more knowledgeable. Van Compernelle and Williams (2012) note that the zone of proximal development may be understood as the difference between problem-solving through guidance or collaboration with more capable peers and independent problem-solving. Through

guided support and practice, students eventually master literacy skills and strategies on their own. Since students learn much through interaction, curricula should be designed to emphasize interaction when completing learning tasks. Scaffolding may also be applied, whereby the instructor adjusts the level of structured assistance in response to the student’s level of performance, such that independent problem-solving is achieved.

Figure 2

Aspects of Knowledge Needed in Order to Engage in Literacy Practices (Perry, K., 2009, pp 57)

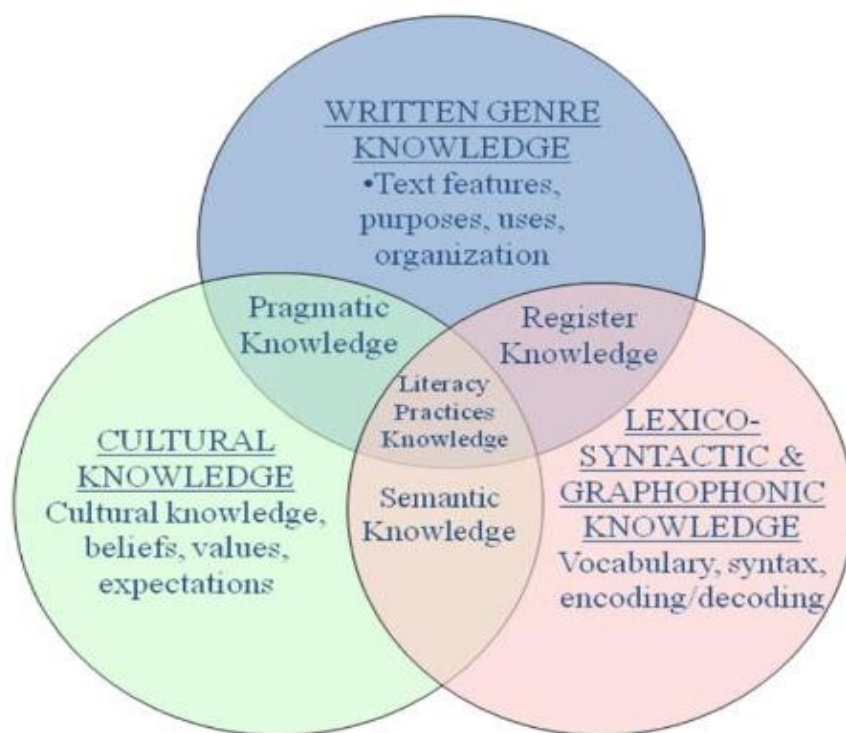


Figure 2 shows the various kinds of knowledge needed for a student to engage in literacy practices. Knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and how a given language is encoded and decoded in print is referred to as lexico-syntactic and graphophonic knowledge, while beliefs, values, and expectations are all part of cultural knowledge. Knowledge of literary traits, uses, purposes for usage, and organisation of specific genres are referred to as genre knowledge. The above illustration is an example of how the three spheres are interconnected to enhance academic literacy skills. The three spheres are inseparable, as there is an overlap from one to another. Hence, students need to develop all three spheres holistically to cultivate adequate literacy skills (Perry, 2009).

2.5 Poor Academic Performance

Institutions of higher education present students with a host of academic challenges they must overcome to succeed and graduate; these include grasping the content of the courses, successfully coping with demanding study material, and effectively managing time, amongst others. In a study conducted by Brown (2010), students explained that, although they may have an idea or an understanding of the content taught, trying to express it coherently in writing is always daunting. They also perceived paraphrasing, in-text citing and compiling reference lists as complex tasks, making them vulnerable to practicing plagiarism. All these factors can contribute to poor academic performance, which can be understood as the failure to perform well in evaluative tasks such as tests, examinations, or continuous assessments (Okoye, 2002).

Tire and Shabalala (2006) note that students coming from rural areas, where Bantu Education severely compromised the academic development of the indigenous people before 1994 tend to experience great difficulty with academic literacy. Makura et al. (2011) concur that the majority of the students who experience greater difficulties with academic literacy come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and communities characterised by high poverty levels. These students attend schools that lack basic infrastructure and tend to obtain poor results in matriculation examinations. These circumstances very often result in students who are under-prepared for higher education and who consequently experience poor academic performance and high dropout rates (Matomela, 2010).

These findings align with those of McNeil (2005) and Mbabela (2012). They agree that, due to the unequal education system, South Africa faces enormous challenges, such as the ones articulated by the participants in this study. The participants stated that English as the medium of instruction at university proves to be a challenge for first-year students. They maintained that most first-year students had been taught in their home language during their primary and secondary schooling. Furthermore, Carelse (2011) notes that the inability to use computers to gain access to the vast array of materials available on the internet serves as a stumbling block for any pursuit in an academic era that is technologically inclined. Another finding of the study by McKinney and Van Pletzen (2004) revealed that the participants had either very little or no computer literacy. Consequently, they could not access materials from the library and other internet sources or had great difficulty doing so.

The lack of computer literacy appears to be more prevalent among students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, as computers were not readily available during their school years. Tanga (2013) conducted a study in which most students whose socio-economic backgrounds had precluded exposure to computers while at school were placed at a disadvantage when they entered higher education. Students are typically required to obtain access to materials from the library database and the internet and type their assignments. Many departments in universities do not offer courses in the use of computers as part of their programmes. It becomes the responsibility of their peers and the college/faculty to aid first-year and other students who wish to acquire the skills needed to study effectively. These skills include academic writing and computer literacy, as Tinto (2006) posits that those who do not invest their time and energy in supporting their studies in this way will inevitably drop out. Additional differentiated teaching and learning materials, designed to enhance the experience of engaging in a blended teaching and learning approach, appear to be necessary for academic literacy.

Carelse (2011) indicated that the under-preparedness of students resulting from the education received by most learners who intend to enroll at university would contribute significantly to the difficulties they face during their studies. This may hinder them from completing their courses within the specified duration (Kaburise, 2010). The stunted academic performance is inevitably reflected in low rates of retention and throughput at the university, making it imperative for these students to receive adequate supplementary support to improve their academic literacy such that they can cope with academic demands.

2.6 Defining Access Programmes

Access programmes may be known by different names, including bridging or foundation programme. These are implemented to assist students who did not qualify for admission in mainstream courses. The aim of the bridging or foundation programmes is to help students who underperformed in high school and were not qualified to be enrolled in university. They attend some classes in the university but are not credited for these. An augmented curriculum programme focuses on providing for first-year students who did not meet the minimum required points to be enrolled in the university but have the potential to perform better, provided they have access to additional academic interventions. These academic interventions include offering tutorials to integrate the work done in the augmented programmes.

The duration of degree completion is extended, as students take fewer modules per semester (Sirakaya, 2018).

The DoE (2006) defines the extended curriculum program as a first undergraduate degree or diploma programme that includes a major or fundamental component, in addition to the usual coursework requirements. These programmes usually have a mixture of credit-bearing modules and non-credit-bearing academic development modules. Students in these programmes extend their period of study by one or two semesters to accommodate the academic development aspects of the programme (de Klerk et al., 2005).

2.7.1 Overview of Access Programmes

Studies such as those conducted by de Villiers and Rwigema (1998) and Curtis and De Villiers (1992) have explored the success of APs from the perspectives of university personnel and with greater emphasis placed on the pass rate. However, Timm (2005) emphasises the importance of students' perceptions of APs as an essential determinant of meeting their set objectives. Van Tonder (1996), de Villiers and Rwigema (1998), Troskie-de Bruin (1999) and Bernstein (2002) have explored the success of APs from the students' perspectives. These studies show that students commonly perceive APs as advantageous and an appropriate mechanism in preparation for their higher education studies. Essack and Quayle (2007) conducted a study that focused on the students' perceptions of the AP at the University of KwaZulu-Natal through focus group interviews. The interviewees were part of the AP. The findings indicate that students generally perceived the programme as beneficial and reasonable in preparing them for their studies.

2.7.2 Access Programmes in South Africa

The Humanities Access Programme was established by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science at the University of KwaZulu-Natal due to the increasing awareness that a growing number of students are admitted to the university who are under-prepared for their studies. At the time (2000), students enrolled for an Access Certificate, which they had to complete before progressing to the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Social Science degree. This was a "1+3"-year model, which is still adopted at UKZN. In this model, the first year comprises preparatory study, which qualifies the student to register for the mainstream courses upon completion. In South Africa, most undergraduate degree programmes encompass three full years of study.

This is demonstrated at UKZN in the College of Humanities, where students require a minimum of three years to complete their degrees (BA or BSocSci).

As per the UKZN Humanities Augmented Programme Policy (2019), there are fundamental modules that are compulsory for AP students to complete before enrolling in mainstream programmes. These modules include Academic Literacy; English Language Development; Exploring Literacies in the Humanities; Basic Numeracy (for students who obtained a score below 40% for Mathematics or below 50% for Mathematics Literacy); and Basic Computer Literacy. In the first semester, students are required to choose one elective module from the mainstream programme (in Psychology, Political Science, Drama studies, and Sociology) and two mainstream modules in the second semester. These are augmented to provide students with readily available assistance in gaining a firmer understanding of the discipline(s).

Van Schalkwyk (2018) conducted a study to explore the experiences of first-year students who were registered for the Extended Degree Programme at Stellenbosch University. The aim was to gain insight into how students acquire academic literacy through the university access programme. Van Schalkwyk highlights that, in South Africa, increasing access to higher education has become a priority for the government. However, there has been an alarming increase in poor student performance, which is often linked to under-preparedness for tertiary studies. In response, Stellenbosch University has implemented academic support programmes to address the needs of students who enter university with poor school results. One such intervention at Stellenbosch University is the Extended Degree Programme in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, which allows students to extend their first academic year over two years. The findings show that providing an academic literacy module for under-prepared students can facilitate the acquisition of academic literacy, mainly when there is support for the different mainstream modules. Another finding of the study emphasises how institutional factors such as increased student numbers have placed pressure on university infrastructure and human resources. The impact of this situation filters down to the first-year classroom and negatively influences student learning. However, the racial homogeneity and the isolation of AP students from mainstream students have contributed to some negative outcomes, such as stigmatisation and feelings of inferiority. Access programmes have a significant purpose to fulfill in the process of transformation envisaged by the democratic government. Since the abandoning of apartheid policies and practices, these programmes have played an important role in increasing access to tertiary institutions for the many academically disadvantaged

students. According to Clarence and Bharuthram (2015), academic literacy must encompass language development through linguistic structures and technical skills. This comprises the use of tenses, passive voice, concord, punctuation, and referencing. Etherington (2007) explored the views of academic staff on the qualities they looked for in students' written work. A logical argument, clarity, grammatical and lexical accuracy were among the lecturers' responses, who also noted plagiarism as a matter of concern. Troskie-De Bruin (1999) and McKinney and Van Pletzen (2004) noted that the language barrier faced by first-year students goes beyond the realm of grammar and syntax into the complexities and values of disciplinary discourses and knowledge bases. APs should place more emphasis on intertextuality, that is, requiring students to use two or more sources, as this is thought to reflect the writing that students would be required to do in their future courses.

2.7.3 Access Programmes Outside of South Africa

According to Rendón and Garza (1996), in the United States, socioeconomic status affects the quality of education. The findings presented in their study show that Afro-American and Hispanic students usually attend higher education for two years. In contrast, white Americans and Asian-American students attend school until they reach university level. In America, some tertiary institutions provide students with an opportunity to further their studies post matriculation through an affordable education program to low-income students. However, these colleges tend to offer limited courses, thus limiting the pursuit of intended degrees by the students (Rendón & Garza, 1996). Written texts and social practices are interconnected with the students' acquisition of learning (Cumming, 2013). Likewise, the Council of Higher Education (1998) states that attendance in an AP should be essential for all students, despite their ethnicities.

2.7.4 Criteria Used Internationally for Access Programmes

Certification programmes are offered as an alternative to two-year degrees; these are provided for students who hold the required points for an admission to a university degree. These certification programmes are usually short term compared to degree completion. There are criteria for certification programmes for credited courses as well as non-credit courses. Students are required to achieve above-average marks for their credited course and pass in their non-credit course to be eligible to register for a degree programme at York University. One of

the advantages of certification is that it enables students to enhance their academic skills, while the disadvantage might be in the delay in accessing employment opportunities (Hirst et al, 2004).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

Eisenhart (1991, p. 23) posits a theoretical framework as a “structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory or theories constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships”. This study is underpinned by the theory of social constructivism proposed by Lev Vygotsky.

2.8.1 History of Constructivism

According to Scott (2008), constructivism is a theory of learning based on the idea that humans actively construct new understandings. Learning occurs from comparing new information with existing knowledge in order to form connections and understanding. In other words, learning occurs through learners' ability to interpret their experiences by formulating meaning. Learning activities should therefore allow students to access their experiences, knowledge and beliefs. The process of learning may be viewed from two perspectives, namely, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism (Padmanabhan, 2019).

Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky offer explanations regarding how knowledge is acquired and utilised. While both theorists share some similarities regarding the construction of knowledge, there are differences in understanding how teaching and learning may be approached Swartz et al. (2015). Cognitive constructivism posits that students acquire knowledge through internal processes within each individual. Thus learning occurs through developmental stages. According to cognitive constructivism, development is achieved through four interrelated processes: organisation, adaptation, assimilation, and accommodation. (Gupta & Frake, 2009, p. 20). To achieve equilibration, students integrate existing schemas with new schemas, which Swartz et al. (2015) view as processes that every child goes through to help them learn or master a skill.

The social constructivist theory focuses on how social interactions affect how students understand and make meaning of the content presented to them. Constructivism, therefore, centers on how learned information adds to what students already know and how the new information expands on the theme learned. Social constructivism posits that students should

engage with the content that is taught in order for them to integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge for better understanding the content (Turuk, 2008).

2.8.2 *Social Constructivism*

Adam (2017) notes that the environment influences the development of students; this is because the environment provides students with a variety of tasks and demands, allowing them to make their own meaning. Social constructivism explains the process of how students integrate their social and cultural heritage in acquiring knowledge. Higher-order functions result from interacting with others, integrating the information gathered, and creating personal meaning (Kouicem & Nachoua 2010). Thus, learning requires cooperation, as the student is encouraged to associate with peers, teachers, and written sources of knowledge like books and journals. According to Adam (2017), emphasis must be placed on what the student can contribute in a learning context as an active meaning-maker and problem-solver. Social constructivism posits learning as dynamic, consisting of the interaction between the teacher, students, and tasks. This perspective is derived from the sociocultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky.

2.8.3 *Key Components of Sociocultural Theory*

The sociocultural theory, in this study, serves to explain academic development by understanding individual mental functioning as related to cultural and historical contexts (Verenikina, 2010). This theory posits that learning through interaction improves the students' ability to perform a new task. The task can be completed initially, but with the aid of a more knowledgeable other, and with practice, the students can perform the task independently. Learning can, therefore, be understood as mediated by social interaction. Successful interactions that mediate learning are those in which the more knowledgeable other provides the scaffold to assist students (Kouicem and Nachoua, 2010). There are five main components of the sociocultural theory that will be the focus of this study: (1) language; (2) social interaction; (3) historical and cultural mediation; (4) the zone of proximal development; and (5) scaffolding.

According to the sociocultural perspective, language is socially constructed. Power relations determine which type of literacy practices will be dominant and privileged in a particular community.

2.8.3.1 **Language.** Using one's first language allows for a broader comprehension of information; hence, Cumming (2013) posits that language-switching may enhance understanding of the content taught in a second language. In the AP context, language-switching enables students to comprehend the content in their mother tongue before translating it to the medium of instruction used in the university (Aranoff and Miller, 2003). The sociocultural theory emphasises the importance of teachers focusing on the strengths that students possess, such as using their first language. However, social interaction with a more knowledgeable other through a second language may help students move to a higher level of knowledge and skills (Turuk, 2008). During this interaction, language-switching may constitute a process of learning, as Swain (2006) has proposed that language is a fundamental means for learners to practice, refine, and consolidate their verbal abilities in an additional language.

2.8.3.2 **Social Interaction.** According to Kouicem and Nachoua (2010), the sociocultural theory places emphasis on social interaction. Therefore, peer-to-peer interaction is encouraged more than teacher interaction because it allows the students to engage freely with one another without any feelings of fear or intimidation by the presence of authority. The advantages of peer interaction may include: (1) students might form study groups to discuss ideas to enhance their knowledge; (2) some students may have skills that might help others to acquire additional information; (3) students' explanation of particular points can be more beneficial than that of the teachers, as it might be easier for students to interact with peers; and
4) students who require additional support may get ideas and correct their miscomprehension (Cumming, 2013).

2.8.3.3 **Historical and Cultural Mediation.** Two theories that have contributed most to developing the mediational approach to learning are Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Feuerstein's theory of mediated learning experience. Both theories emphasize the importance of sociocultural factors in influencing a child's development and learning. Both theorists focused on the fundamental role played by parents, teachers, peers, and the community in defining the type of learning interaction occurring between students and their environments (Kouicem & Nachoua, 2010). Vygotsky saw culture and the social environment as crucial elements in constructing human knowledge. The society in which the student lives and the social settings they

are a part of are the elements that determine the knowledge to be acquired. Therefore, the student learns through social interactions and aspects of their own culture, such as language, songs, and art (Adam, 2017).

2.8.3.4 **The ZPD Enables Learning.** Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the difference between the student's current abilities and what they can achieve with the help of more knowledgeable others (Schunk, 2012). According to Puntambekar and Hubscher (2005), the ZPD indicates skills and knowledge that the students can obtain in the learning process when given adequate instructions. It is important to consider the current level of performance of a student in relation to their potential development, as the assistance provided should be slightly beyond the students' current competence to complement and build on their existing abilities (Verenikina, 2010).

2.8.3.5 **Scaffolding.** Stone (1998) states that it is the role of the more knowledgeable other to provide students with guidance to complete complex tasks. The academic support and structure provided by a teacher to enhance student performance is known as scaffolding. The teacher gradually increases the complexity of the task to be performed then gradually removes the assistance, allowing the students to function independently. Sawyer (2006) also affirms that scaffolding is the support provided to students during the learning process to help them achieve their learning goals.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the literature in relation to the types of literacy and dimensions of academic literacy. Furthermore, the Access Programme was discussed from a South African perspective and internationally. The literature demonstrated that sociocultural factors contribute to student adaptability and academic performance.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methods adopted in the research process. The research approach, paradigm, and design are delineated. Recruitment and selection of the participants, the data collection tool, and the method of data analysis are also presented. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical processes pertaining to conducting a research study.

3.2 Qualitative Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach as the focus was on obtaining in-depth information from the participants regarding the Humanities AP (Hopkins, 2018). According to Babbie and Mouton (2005), qualitative research is characterized by interaction with participants capable of offering insight regarding a particular phenomenon. In addition, qualitative research aims at understanding the feelings, experiences, social situations, or phenomena as they occur in the participant's world (Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell & Clarke, 2007; Kelly, 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In other words, by adopting the qualitative approach, the researcher seeks to explore how students in the AP make sense of their experiences of overcoming academic difficulties (Pratt-Ronco, 2009). The qualitative approach was most appropriate for exploring the students' subjective experiences and perspectives (Maree, 2014). It is important to examine students' perceptions of the AP, as they may confirm or differ from what the institution regards as successful or necessary to succeed.

3.3 Interpretivist Paradigm

The key assumption of the interpretive paradigm is that truth is constructed intersubjectively, that is, through the use of language, awareness, and mutual interactions with others (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Interpretivist research is generally associated with qualitative data collection as researchers are more concerned with people's behavior, beliefs, and perceptions, which are not easily measured (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The researcher must be cognisant of the participants in context, as the researcher is the primary data collection and analysis instrument. In this study, the researcher aimed to construct meaning from the data obtained from the participants; hence, the interpretivist paradigm was adopted.

3.4 Exploratory Research Design

Mudau and Ncube (2018) assert that the research design assists the researcher in determining the selection of participants and data collection tools. Exploratory research aims to formulate problems more precisely, gain insight and clarify concepts to identify the boundaries of the context in which the issue of interest is likely to occur, and identify essential factors that might be of relevance to the research (Creswell, 2007). It allows a researcher to understand what is happening, search for new insights, and evaluate a research question in a new light.

3.5 Sampling

The sample of participants was drawn from a target population of students who were previously enrolled in the Humanities Access Programme from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg campus. The researcher had originally planned to sample 5-10 students from Humanities College within the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus) who had started their UKZN studies in the AP, and graduated with a Bachelor's degree. It was this graduation from a bachelor's degree that was assumed to render an access programme student successful in their studies, and therefore eligible for inclusion in this study. This was going to enable the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of how the AP assisted students in overcoming academic literacy difficulties.

Non-probability sampling was adopted in this study, more specifically, purposive sampling was chosen because the focus of the study is only on those who were students at the UKZN (PMB campus), who entered university through an AP and have graduated from university. Patton (2002) posits that purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose cases that are information rich. Swartz et al., (2010) confirms that when using purposive sampling, the researcher may seek participants who can best answer the research questions. The sample consisted of both males and females, and there was no age limit as the researcher was interested in the experiences of the students who were in the programme. According to Morse (2001), when conducting qualitative research, a small group of people ranging from one to ten can participate in a study because the focus is on the quality of their responses. While the researcher was interested in all students, a sample of six participants was selected: from each discipline: Psychology, Political Science, Drama Studies, and Sociology. The researcher had minimal resources with which to interview all students. As such, the participants were recruited through the use of a flyer (see appendix E) that was placed on the Access Programme notice board.

Gatekeeper's permission (see Appendix G and H) was granted to the researcher. Students who wished to participate in the study were requested to email the researcher. Two participants were recruited through the flyer on the AP notice board then referred the researcher to three more students who met the inclusion criteria for the study. Though the snowball technique was not a method the researcher had intended to use, the researcher relied on it to find the remaining three participants. Wagner et.al (2012) describe snowball sampling as a form of sampling where individuals from one population relevant to the study are approached and then they in turn gather more participants who fit the population. Two staff members who were interested in participating in the study whom were referred by the gate keepers were also sampled. Staff members were sampled to get insight of their perception of the AP. This was also done to understand the techniques/ strategies used to assist students in overcoming academic literacy difficulties.

3.6 Data Collection

The researcher conducted individual, face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix C for students & D for staff). Interviews were conducted on separate dates that the researcher and each participant agreed on. During the interviews, the researcher read the information sheet and consent form (see Appendix B) to each participant and described the content to them. Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions and an option to accept or decline participation when they indicated that they understood the interview contents. A signed consent form was required of all participants who agreed to participate in the study.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study, in which the views of students as well as the staff who were involved in the AP were explored. Interviews allow participants the opportunity to narrate their understandings and experiences without being limited to pre-determined answers with no flexibility for individual opinion (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Longhurst (2003) defines a semi-structured interview as a verbal interchange whereby the interviewer elicits information from the interviewee (participant) by asking questions. It allows the participant a chance to express themselves on issues they feel are important. The interview provides access to participants' views and beliefs on the discussion topic (Welman et al., 2005). Semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of students' and staff perceptions of the AP.

One of the advantages of semi-structured interviews is that they allow for collecting in-depth data, which is detailed and descriptive (Cohen et al., 2005). A disadvantage is that the interview is a social interaction between interviewer and interviewee. As such, power relations can come into play. Suppose the interviewer is perceived as an influential person over the interviewee. In that case, this could result in the interviewee not being completely honest regarding their thoughts and feelings (Cohen et al., 2000). To minimise this, the participants were interviewed in a neutral location, where they could feel relaxed. The interviews were held at the UKZN PMB campus in one of the rooms in the Discipline of Psychology.

The duration of the semi-structured interviews was approximately 60 minutes for participants to narrate their experiences such that rich data was obtained. In this regard, Cohen et al. (2000, p. 156) warn against the “Hawthorne effect” whereby “participants may wish to avoid, impress, direct, deny, [or] influence the researcher” hence impacting on the data. Babbie and Mouton (2005) indicate that this effect can be minimised through triangulation, which pertains to acquiring information about events and relationships from different points of view. The acquisition of information may be through seeking various data sources and using different data collection methods. To this end, data was obtained from two sources: students and staff.

The researcher formulated the interview schedule for students and staff members and was divided into two sets of questions. The first set pertained to constructive learning, focusing on how students construct (academic) knowledge. The second set of questions focused on the social processes that students engaged in while acquiring knowledge. The questions were informed by the assumptions of the sociocultural theory. According to Olivier (1999), the theory assumes that the learner has accumulated knowledge and comes to the learning environment with existing knowledge. New ideas are interpreted along with existing knowledge that the student has already acquired. This means that the learner’s responsibility is to synthesize information to make meaning (the first set of questions explore this assumption). The theory further assumes that learning is a social process where learners construct knowledge through discussions and sharing ideas. This allows learners to grasp different concepts, reflect on their thinking, and understand other people’s viewpoints through shared meaning (the second set of questions explores this assumption).

3.7 Data Analysis

Each qualitative research strategy has its own set of techniques for conducting, recording, and assessing data analysis processes. Thematic analysis is done by coding important concepts or keywords, which will lead to the establishment of themes in the dataset, thereby reflecting the understanding of the participants' responses (Braun et al., 2019). Themes are identified through combining concepts or experiences that are often meaningless on their own or when viewed individually. A theme is not reliant on quantifiable measurements; it is reliant on whether it conveys significance in the context of the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The first stage of engaging in thematic analysis involved immersing oneself in the transcripts by re-reading the transcripts in relation to one another. The second stage entailed generating codes by categorizing keywords across the data set. The third stage required the researcher to organize similar viewpoints from the identified codes. Coding was used to identify important elements in the transcribed data. Themes were generated by looking for similarities and patterns that referred to the research questions. Themes were generated by ranking the most frequent codes, and were guided by the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Stage four entailed reviewing themes by aligning each one to a research question. A data matrix was used to lodge codes under each theme, which enabled the researcher to formulate subthemes and demonstrated how different themes were interconnected to the entire data set (see Appendix F). In the fifth stage, the researcher named and defined themes, whereby the responses provided by the research participants were interpreted by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the last stage, the report containing the different perspectives of the students and staff about the AP was produced. Extracts from the transcripts were substantiated by the theory and the existing literature (Rapley, 2007).

3.8 Trustworthiness

The concepts of validity and reliability are understood differently in a qualitative research study than in quantitative research, where data is statistical and objective. Data in a qualitative research is based on people's experiences and their interaction with the phenomenon of study in a specific context (Maxwell, 2008). According to Lincoln and Guba (1994), the fundamental principle of good qualitative research is established through trustworthiness. To ensure rigor, the researcher must be honest about their perspectives, pre-existing thoughts, and beliefs (Cutcliffe, 2003).

Validity in qualitative research refers to the trustworthiness of the study. Recording the interviews on a tape recorder and later transcribing them (rather than only taking notes in the interview) was one way in which the trustworthiness of this research was enhanced. Another factor to consider is the bias of the researcher. The participants reviewed the findings to ensure that the researcher had accurately interpreted their experiences and views to minimize bias (Golafshani, 2003).

3.8.1 Transferability

Babbie and Mouton (2005) argue that qualitative data may be obtained by observing the specific context in which they occur. As a result, a qualitative researcher does not guarantee that knowledge gained from one context will be relevant for other contexts. The transferability of this study rests on the researcher having accurately described the participants and the context of the study. Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings to other settings and populations. Transferability was enhanced by giving a thorough contextual background of where the study was conducted and a description of the participants.

3.8.2 Credibility

Credibility can be established through data triangulation, whereby more than one method is adopted to collect or analyse data. The phenomenon of study is presented from more than one viewpoint (Creswell, 2013). The students' perspective reflects their experiences of the AP in relation to the staff perspectives. The data was collected using individual interviews, which allowed each participant the freedom to respond to the questions without judgement from other participants. Credibility was also enhanced as the researcher worked with a colleague who majored and graduated in *IsiZulu* assisted the researcher in ensuring that the translation was not taken out of context when transcribed to English. This was done to ensure that the translated and transcribed interviews were a true reflection of the interview responses.

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of the findings if this study was to be replicated by another researcher (Silverman., 2000). The collection of data was in the form of interviews. These interviews were conducted by the researcher who is a female and the participants were both gender males and females. Rapport was formed between the researcher and participants which in a way increased participation during the interviews. I reminded the participants that they can pull out from the study should they feel that they must and that their participation was voluntary. This was done so to ease or lessen the differences between the participants and the

researcher. The study was conducted within the university context (UKZN PMB Campus), which helped a lot in terms of the language and jargon used making it easier for me to translate the data. However, if another researcher from a different communal context conducted the study, most probably the findings would be interpreted differently.

To achieve dependability, the researcher must delineate the design and methods that include the data collection and analysis adopted in the study to enhance the transparency of the data process. The researcher has outlined the reasons for their theoretical and methodological choices. In this regard, records of the interviews, reports, interpretations, and recommendations have been encrypted and will be stored for five years (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). If another researcher can interpret the data and attain similar findings and conclusions, dependability has been achieved.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability means establishing that the researcher's interpretations, findings, and recommendations are consistent with the data. Confirmability was ensured by tape-recording and transcribing the interviews as well as accurately interpreting the participants' experiences. The participants had an opportunity to listen to the recording after the interview. Upon completing data analysis, the researcher discussed the findings with the participants to verify whether their experiences have been accurately presented (Maree, 2014). To enhanced confirmability, no leading questions were asked during the interviews, and all responses were transcribed verbatim.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

There are ethical considerations that need to be adhered to when conducting interviews; these include informed consent, confidentiality, and consideration of the potential consequences of the research (Borg & Gall, 1983; Cohen et al., 2000). In light of these issues, all participants were fully informed of the aims and objectives of the research. This was done by giving each participant an information sheet and a consent form whereby they indicated that they understood the contents and that they were willing to be part of the research. They were also assured of anonymity and that no identifying information would be attached to their responses. Participants were informed that they were able to withdraw from the research at any time, even after the interviews were completed. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) of UKZN (see Appendix G).

3.9.3 Gatekeepers' permission

Permission to conduct the study at UKZN PMB campus was requested from the school registrar to access the target population. The research proposal was submitted to the HSSREC at UKZN for approval to conduct the study in accordance with guidelines for the protection of participants from harm.

3.9.4 Informed Consent

The participants' informed consent form was given to the participants after receiving the information letter stating the interview contents. (See appendix B). Participants were thoroughly taken through all the procedures of the consent form. The participants were informed that data would be gathered in auditory (tape-recorded) and written form, that participation was voluntary, and that they may withdraw at any time they wished. No monetary reward was afforded to the participants, and they were made aware of this before participating in the study. The participants were also informed of the research findings upon completing the data analysis to verify if the participants' responses were accurately presented.

3.9.5 Anonymity

Anonymity refers to protecting the participants' identity (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). For the study to assure this, participants' names were not written on the findings. Pseudonyms were used for each participant, and the room in which the interviews were conducted was strictly private or void of interruptions by other persons. Both the tape-recordings and transcripts were encrypted to ensure the information is secured.

3.9.6 Non-Maleficence and Beneficence

If participants experienced emotional distress due to participating in the study, the researcher had arranged for them to utilise psychological services. A counsellor in Student Services (not from the AP) had agreed to take on this task. However, the participants neither displayed any signs of emotional distress nor asked for such services. Although there were no incentives that were provided to the participants, the study's findings were made available to the Access Programme to assist in meeting the needs of prospective students.

3.10 Conclusion

The methodology for this study, which included the qualitative research approach, interpretivist paradigm, and exploratory design, was discussed in this chapter. The data generation procedure was discussed regarding the sample, ethical issues, and trustworthiness of the study. The findings are presented in the next chapter in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter delineates the data analysis findings in relation to the interpretivist paradigm, sociocultural theory, and the literature. The participant background information is presented, and themes are discussed in alignment with the research questions.

4.2 Study Participants

The study comprised eight participants; six students and two staff members. Each participant chose a pseudonym before the interview as a way to establish rapport and to ensure anonymity. All the participants had attended under-resourced schools. Although the study did not focus on age and gender, this information is provided to characterize the participants.

Sandile: A 24-year old male. He is from iNquthu. He indicated that he was inspired to apply because he heard that UKZN is one of the best universities in South Africa. He got this information from the UKZN students who would come to visit matriculates at his high school.

Zano: A 23-year-old female from Pietermaritzburg. Upon matriculating, she could not timeously apply through the Central Applications Office (CAO) due to strike action at the post office. Nonetheless, she went to UKZN after her results were released and explained why she had not applied on time. She was informed that there was no space left, as the maximum capacity to cater for students had been reached. Since she had fewer points than required for admission, she was advised to apply for the AP.

Sifiso: A 23-year-old male from Sweetwaters, in Pietermaritzburg. According to Sifiso, his studies have always been a priority to him so he can work and provide for his family. He also indicated that he was passionate about his chosen field of study (sociology) and added that it meant a lot to him to finish his undergraduate degree in the stipulated time.

Sanele: A 24-year-old female who resides in Richards Bay. She had applied at a different university, but when she followed up on her application, the administrator advised her to apply for the Humanities Access Programme at UKZN. She explained that she had spent a year at home due to having too few points. Although she did not want to be away from home, after the administrator's advice, she saw an opportunity and applied to further her studies.

Thembelihle: A 23-year-old female from Ulundi. She indicated that applying for the AP was her second option. When she was in matric, her first option was applying for the mainstream BSS programme. Her older sister, who had also enrolled in the AP, told her how it would benefit her as she did not meet the minimum required points.

Ziyanda: A 23-year-old male who is currently registered for Bcom Masters. He resides in Pietermaritzburg, Sweetwaters. He explained that he wanted to provide for his family and that he has always been passionate about his degree of study and wanted to complete it in record time.

Staff members

Both staff member were males between the ages of 28 and 31 years.

Mr Y: He is from Pietermaritzburg. He is a former student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He got to know about the AP when he was working in a different department within the university. He came into contact with a lot of students who enrolled in the AP. This inspired him to join the AP, as he already had an idea of how it operates.

Mr X: He had a similar experience to Mr Y when he was working at a different university. This experience and passion for working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds led him to the AP at UKZN.

4.3 Generating Themes

Four themes were generated from the data and related to the research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the Humanities Access Programme?
 - Walk-ins and referrals
 - Induction to the university

2. What are the Humanities Access Programme staff members' perceptions of the AP?
 - A new experience: physical and social environment

3. How does the Humanities Access Programme assist students to overcome academic difficulties?
 - Relying on intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies

4.3.1 Walk-ins and referrals

Two students indicated that they did not know about the AP but came to the UKZN to find out about programmes for which they could apply. These students did not know anything about the AP. They were more invested in being accepted into 'a programme' to pursue their studies. Three students had obtained information about the programme prior to registration. The information came from neighbors and friends. Although the participants indicated that this was helpful, the information was limited.

Ziyanda stated that she only heard about the AP when she came to campus to seek information on any programme she might qualify for:

I wanted to get more familiar with the university system, how it works, so I knew that if I enroll into this, it will be easy for me to learn how the university system works because, in the mainstream, you just go the classes and study, without being taught how the university system works. In the Access Programme, we were taught how to write, so we are taught all those foundation stuff. So this guy who was informing me, he was also telling me about that, if I enroll into this programme, I'm going to be taught all of this [that] mainstream students are not taught. Because I know I'm a slow learner, I said, ok I'm going to enroll in to this because it will offer me those benefits and it will be easy for me to study in university.

In relation to Ziyanda's response, Haenen et al. (2003) state that integrating new concepts with prior knowledge expands one's information base and enables students to have a deeper and broader understanding of the situation. Although this is not an easy process, it develops students' ability to create meaning of the content taught.

Sifiso also came to campus to be guided about his options in relation to his matric points. He stated:

I didn't know about the Access Programme; I had no expectations as I only found out about the Access Programme when I got to university.

Ziyanda also explained:

Nobody explained anything to me when I was applying. I only got to be fully explained about the Access Programme once I was already enrolled in it.

Thembelihle, on the other hand, found out about the AP from her sister:

When I was applying, I knew nothing about the Access Programme, but luckily, I had an older sister who went to UKZN at the time, so she helped me when I was writing my CAO form.

Zano reported that:

I was told the programme is designed for students who do not meet the minimum requirement points. They further explained that, instead of finishing my degree in a space of three years, it will be extended to four years, as the first year is somehow considered as a bridging year where you are slowly assisted to adjust to the university. I was told that the Access Programme will assist me in adjusting and familiarising me with the university institution. In this way, we would be taught how to write academically, since we were not fully equipped in high school, especially since I am coming from a disadvantaged school that is under resourced.

Zano also indicated that:

Before going to campus, I was informed by someone near my home that there is an Access Programme that I can enroll in. It [is] for students who come from [a] disadvantaged background. If I want to enroll in it, I can because it

will teach me more about things that are not offered at school like computers. So I decided to enroll in it because I wanted to learn more about computers. I had never touched a computer before in my life up until I enrolled for that Access Programme.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory stresses the crucial role of social interaction in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky uses the term 'tools of intellectual adaptation' for thinking and problem-solving strategies that students internalise through social interactions with the more knowledgeable members of the community. Each culture provides its children with tools of intellectual adaptation that allow them to use the basic mental functions more effectively/adaptively (McLeod, 2020)

Sandile sought the information from documents and a helpful neighbor:

The CAO handbook clearly explained what the Humanities Access Programme was. I was more interested in it as it required less points but would still do the degree you want. Another thing, my neighbor who was assisting with the applications also advised me to also include it on my CAO booklet.

When he came to campus to seek more information about the AP, Sandile indicated that:

I was told the mainstream students were expected to have mastered the academic writing skills and computer skills, as they are already familiar with such from their previous backgrounds. Whereas, with the students from the rural areas, they need to be familiarised with such skills, as they had never been exposed to them.

The sociocultural theory stipulates that a student's intellectual development should not only be limited to their current functioning, but potential capabilities that the student might possess should be considered (Topçiu and Myftiu, 2015).

Another reason that motivated Sifiso to accept the offer to participate in the AP was the possibility of future security as he stated:

I wanted to be able to provide for my family.

According to Panofsky (2003), there is an effort of working-class youth to carve out their own route to establishment or success. Thus, students interpret schooling as work to be completed to attain a higher job status.

4.3.2 Induction into the University

All the students mentioned that the AP was beneficial since they came from disadvantaged schools and expected to be inducted into the university processes. One student explained that they had never used a computer. All the Students felt that they would have been rejected without the AP and would not be able to pursue their studies, as they did not meet the university entry requirements.

Sifiso echoed this point when he stated that:

I don't know what exactly I was expecting, as I was clueless about the difference between the Access Programme and mainstream. However, I was just excited about being enrolled in the university and to pursue my education.

In addition to pursuing their education, computers also appear to have attracted the students to the AP. Kozulin (2003) notes that, in communities that are socio-economically disadvantaged, learners are fully involved in everyday activities when they get home from school, whereas in economically advantaged communities, they typically perform activities that allow them to adjust to technology as it evolves. Different styles of mediation are therefore dependent on the environmental context. The students thus interpreted the AP as a mediational resource that would assist them to function better in the university context.

Ziyanda indicated:

I didn't expect anything other than to study and to learn more. I wanted to know more about how the computer works and all that stuff when I'm still young.

Sandile made a similar remark:

I was expecting to learn how to use a computer and to develop more academic skills, as they had promised to assist us with developing the necessary skills to adjust to the university and to cope better in mainstream.

The interpretivist paradigm speaks of how a person's reality is shaped by their social context, in the sense that having an enabling environment nurtures and enhances one's developmental skills. This is shown by how two of the participants' academic and computer skills were improved by exposure to the AP environment (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). They indicated that the AP helped them to understand the university processes, which enhanced their confidence.

Zano captured this view when she indicated:

At the Access Programme, we were told that the modules that we will do are the ones that will enable us to proceed further with our studies without encountering difficulties. We were also told that it is compulsory to pass all our modules in order to progress to the mainstream. The Access Programme was also going to teach us how to write academic writing, which includes how to structure essays and how to reference. This boosted my confidence.

She continued:

The Access Programme accommodates students coming from rural areas to adjust better in the university environment.

The sociocultural theory emphasises the importance of social, cultural, and historical knowledge as tools that can be used to empower students to adjust to a new educational/learning context. In this regard, Panofsky (2003) advocates for social interaction between teachers and students that promotes a productive and healthy learning process.

Zano also stated the benefits of being in the AP:

My expectations were met above and beyond. As an Access student, I ended up assisting students from the mainstream with how to write academically, as they were not taught. In that way, my self-esteem grew rapidly. In summary, my Access year ended up being beneficial for my other years of study.

Ziyanda expressed her gratitude:

My expectations were met beyond what I had thought. I got something that I never thought I will get.

Sifiso also felt that the AP experience had been beneficial for him:

It made me realise that I have the potential to do anything I put my mind into it. My ego and self-esteem was improved.

Four students shared some of their challenges. These challenges included time constraints, lack of access to computers, and stigma. They pointed out that they had to wait for hours in the computer rooms and sometimes spent the night there to complete their assignments as there were not enough computers for each student. Two students reported that they did not encounter any academic challenges.

Zano mentioned that:

Most of us had not been exposed to computers. As a result, the administrator would print notes for us. This was somehow a barrier, as I would sometimes have to go home to check on my parents and would miss classes. When you come days after that lecture, you would sometimes not find notes.

Ziyanda shared the same sentiment:

A major limitation I would say I encountered as an individual is that of not being able to access notes on Moodle. As I did not have my own personal laptop and I was living off campus. It would sometimes not be feasible for me to get on campus at night. If you had missed a lecture, you would not be able to catch up. Meaning, you have missed the lecture, unless you go to the administrator to give you notes.

Sandile echoed the same challenge:

I still remember our first assignment. I had not mastered computer skills and I did not have a computer to use. As a result, it took me longer than other students to finish and submit my assignment. I felt pressured when other students were submitting and I had not finished. I therefore, decided to cross-night or sleep at the LAN, working on my assignment.

Sifiso indicated:

I think students who come from underprivileged backgrounds face some challenges with academics and writing, and this environment is new to us.

Zano communicated that:

There's no specific challenge. However, I would like to believe the workload [was a challenge], as we had to submit double the assignments than the mainstream students, attended early classes, group assignments. Having sleepless nights preparing for our work.

Sanele stated:

I didn't have any challenges but I'm not sure about other students.

Sanele elaborated on this point:

Myself, I did not face much challenges because of the support system that they had helping us with everything, with notes; even [with] referencing they give us readings and properly explained assignments to us and which sources to look at. So, as someone who wasn't messing around and [was] attending classes, you shouldn't have a problem. I feel most challenges people face in the Access Programme, they created themselves.

According to Topçiu and Myftiu (2015), transition to the academic environment requires the AP (lecturers) to help students independently engage in reading (literature) and assignments. Although Sanele mentioned that she did not face any challenges due to the support she received, she indicated an awareness of stigma towards the AP:

There is a stigma at UKZN if you are doing AP - you are fixing your matric. The biggest challenge is the mainstream students looking down on the Access Programme.

According to the participants, it is not the AP that made them feel inadequate or inferior but the students who viewed the programme from the outside. This indicates that students in mainstream programmes marginalised those in the AP. They were perceived as an out-group and stigmatised. They were deemed less capable of succeeding in the mainstream programmes. These stereotypes imply that students in the mainstream programmes believed that they had superior cognitive abilities than the students in the AP.

Sandile had first-hand experience of the stigma that is associated with the AP:

Another challenge that I think I might have faced was that of being sort of discriminated/labelled by students from the mainstream as less clever. This really crushed my self-esteem, and I would sometimes lie or deny being in the Access Programme. However, as time went by, I got used to it and eventually accepted the situation. Now I am even more proud to say I went through the Access Programme, looking at what I have achieved.

Sanele further mentioned a challenge relating to the limited number of modules that AP students may choose from

The modules, I feel there should be more languages ... we should have isiZulu.

A language is a cultural tool that shapes how one thinks. Students may feel out of place in a new context and refrain from verbal participation as others may not share their cultural and historical context. Lantolf (2003) notes that students who are second-language English-speakers tend to shy away from public participation and practice their answers privately rather than blurting out the answer publicly. The teacher may think that students are not participating when they are not answering questions. However, students may be engaging in private speech to shield themselves from the embarrassment of giving the wrong answer in public. Private speech helps students familiarise themselves with the language of instruction as they analyse the question before answering the teacher. When the answer is practiced privately before announcing it publicly, students have a sense of self-efficacy.

Sanele also touched on the psychological services that are offered to students in the AP:

We only had one psychologist, and some people are not comfortable speaking to a certain gender, so that was a limitation.

She circled back to challenges relating to instruction:

Sometimes the Access Programme overdid things. So I personally see the spoon-feeding as a limitation [as] some people couldn't cope when we joined mainstream ... it had to take them one extra year to get there, if you are used to being told what to do ... someone always running after you and, when they stop, it can cause problems.

4.3.3 A New Experience: Physical and Social Environment

This theme relates to the second research question: What are the Access Programme staff members' perceptions of the Access Programme?

According to Mr X:

They [AP students] face a lot of challenges. However, the leading challenge is that of being stigmatised for being in the Access Programme. This is because they are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds; as a result, they are labelled 'farm girls'/'farm boys'. This leads them into only socialising within their programme and not making friends outside the Access Programme.

He continued:

Another one is the issue of literacy; most of them do not understand English at all. Remember these are students who were taught their subjects in their native languages. These are the students who have never been exposed to computers; as a result, we make each mainstream module have a submodule where we are going to teach them again the same content, but in a slower pace to help them grasp better.

Miller (2003) asserts that to enhance literacy, teachers need to consider the role of mediation, and reflect on how they make meaning from the text, facilitate critical thinking and cultural critique. In agreement with this statement, Panofsky (2003) states that the role of classroom practice should be to encourage the full engagement and participation of students, rather than viewing students as passive participants who are gradually progressing to the next level.

Haenen et al. (2003) posit that when a teacher capitalises on students' prior knowledge or the knowledge that students already have, the learning process is facilitated with greater ease. Thus, the teacher-student relationship should always be conducive for classroom practice, and the mediation styles should accommodate all students (Panofsky, 2003).

4.3.4 Developing Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Competencies

The fourth theme: relying on intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies, was identified in relation to the third question: How does the Humanities Access Programme assist students to overcome academic difficulties?

Students used various strategies to cope with the challenges associated with enrolling for the AP. Most students communicated with their mentors and tutors about the challenges they faced. The tutors assisted them regarding their academic and emotional needs. For some, reading and studying every day helped them cope with academic challenges. They wrote their own notes from those given to the class, allowing them to better grasp the content. They could also consult their lecturers for clarity when they did not understand a particular concept.

Zano expressed how the AP helped her improve her academic skills:

As I had mentioned, we were taught how to critically analyse the questions and answer them accordingly. We were also taught how to structure all our essay properly. By structuring the work, I mean what goes where. In addition, we were taught how to do proper research, for instance, how to use Google Scholar and not Wikipedia ... to get more reliable sources. How to rephrase, paraphrase, summarise and reference using both APA style and Harvard style.

Panofsky (2003) explains that differentiated educational activity constitutes reading as a psycholinguistic feature to accommodate the differing values and meanings students give to reading.

Zano continued:

In the Access Programme, they always encouraged group work. Despite not being a group person, it assisted me to get other people's point of view and not only rely on my own individual understandings. One of the reasons for not liking group works was that I was avoiding public speaking.

Haenen et al. (2003) note that learning stimulates developmental processes strengthened by engaging in activities from one's environment. Interacting with other people also strengthens one's emotional and cognitive faculties.

Sandile elaborated on the modules:

The modules were standardised by the Access Programme. It was compulsory for every student enrolled in the Access Programme to do them, except for Basic Literacy. You could only do Basic Literacy if you had obtained less than 50% on your mathematics in matric. Zano indicated:

We were taught how to answer questions, how to structure our essays. We were also taught how to do proper academic research. All these things benefited us as the Access students and prepared us for our following year in mainstream.

According to Lidzb and Gindis (2003), teachers may demonstrate tasks to students to imitate what they have seen. Students may also be asked to finish a task started by someone else to see their level of performance. As they advance, students may be given higher-order tasks to complete with the assistance of another peer, who is more knowledgeable about the subject matter.

In terms of developing personal values and competencies, Zano noted:

It was compulsory for you to attend [lectures]; if you didn't, your parents would get a call. Some people saw that as an advantage; some saw it as a disadvantage.

While engagement with the students' families might be disapproved by some, Portes and Vadeboncoeur (2003) state that mediated action is also embedded in family interactions. Values and expectations are co-constructed by students through cultural tools such as language and social practices learned at home.

Zano shared her strategies that helped her cope with her studies:

Listening to music calms me and helps me to concentrate. I try to manage my time according to the timetable I have made for myself. Sometimes, I would discuss sections that are confusing or difficult with my other peers.

Sandile echoed the importance of peers:

Firstly, I used to take the road ... walk with my peers and we would discuss the issue at hand. Share our views, since we are all doing the same thing. That is how we kept our minds sane.

Kozulin (2003) postulates that social interaction provides a way to characterize historically constructed knowledge with new practices, rather than the student being a passive recipient of a particular environment. Students are selective about what they perceive as valuable.

Sanele explained how she coped with overwhelming emotions:

I spoke to my psychologist about everything or just buy chocolate if I have money and call my mother and tell her I'm having a hard time. I couldn't sleep properly when stressing about school, so every time I got up I had the books to try and understand sometimes. I understood most times but sometimes I didn't. Another thing that helps me, I always started my work early as I wanted to be ahead. And I am a talkative person; I talk about everything. I do not keep anything in, so that also helped ... I told people myself how much of an idiot I felt. And I used to get lucky and find people who do understand and offer to help. Most black kids don't like talking to a psychologist about their problems, but I made sure I did and it helped.

Panofsky (2003) notes that some students develop a robust and positive sense of agency during class activities, whereas others see themselves as weak and incapable of learning. Therefore, the student-teacher relationship should accommodate students' meanings and values to minimise negative self-perceptions and enhance positive student identities.

Sifiso also agreed with Sanele:

The nice thing that we had ... we had a good relationship with the course coordinator and the lecturers. We could always speak to them about the challenges we are facing, and we had a psychologist that we could book to go and see whenever we were having challenges as part of the programme.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study in relation to the three key questions. The chief interested of this study was exploring the perceptions and experiences of students' and staff in Access Programme. Overall, the participants indicated that the AP assisted students to better prepare for academic challenges.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the students' and staff perceptions of overcoming academic literacy difficulties through the Humanities Access Programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This chapter contains a discussion on the findings of the study in relation to the literature and sociocultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky. The limitations of the study, as well as areas for future research, are also discussed. The dissertation is concluded in this chapter.

5.2 Students' Perceptions of the Access Programme

The participants in this study had a positive view of the AP but stated that, in the beginning, they did not have a lot of information about the AP as they only found out about it when they came to campus to seek information or were referred by others who had more information. Once the students were enrolled in the AP, they found it beneficial, as they learned about computers, among other things, with which they were unfamiliar. However, being in the AP is not without challenges as the participants indicated that they felt stigmatised by students in the mainstream programmes.

5.2.1 Sociocultural Dimension of Academic Literacy

Jones et al. (2008) assert that many African students entering higher education in South Africa come from disadvantaged schools and are in need of resources to prepare them for adjustment to higher education. In this light, Jones et al., (2008) further posit that the establishment of preparatory initiatives is essential in order for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to be afforded access to higher education.

5.2.1.1 **Sociocultural factors.** A majority of the studies conducted on sociocultural research in literacy focus on the understanding of literacy within different cultural settings, not integrating the central role of power relations in literacy practices (Perry, 2012). Attending university from a low-income family encapsulates the complexities of adapting to a new community and way of life. According to Potgieter (2015), the most common negative trend among students in APs is a sense of injustice and alienation that stems from being stigmatised.

Stigma refers to socially constructed beliefs that are widely held by society's members. They are "analytical models that start with the social, cultural, and historical context and provide a necessary structure for understanding the person" (Ainlay et al., 1986, p. 39). The stigma associated with being in the AP adds to these students' academic difficulties, posing a threat to the students' academic performance. The impact of stigma was felt and expressed by students in the AP.

5.2.1.2 Minimum requirements for mainstream admission. Initially, the criteria for selecting students enrolled in the AP encompassed students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This included students from under-resourced schools with limited staff capacity and physical resources (schools currently ranked as quintile 1-3) (Makgoba, 2004). Due to the lack of a unified definition of the term 'previously disadvantaged student,' it appears that the selection of candidates might not have been standardised. The findings show that the most marginalized students face barriers even to learning about opportunities for university access. Others face personal obstacles and complex immediate family or community responsibilities that preclude university study as a viable option.

The UKZN Humanities Augmented Policy (2019) stipulates that the College of Humanities Access Programme was introduced to respond to the high volume of students who had not met the minimum required points and were from a disadvantaged socio-economic background. This response entails a preparatory year where students receive academic and emotional support. After that, students qualify to register for mainstream programmes. A primary requirement for registration in a mainstream programme is that students pass all AP modules.

5.2.1.3 Financial constraints faced by students. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds typically have various needs for which they lack sufficient funds. Jama et al. (2008) mention that even students who receive NSFAS and other bursaries often still experience financial difficulties due to their strained family financial situation. These struggles are exacerbated by the students having to send a portion of their allowance home, affecting their budget. Traveling to and from campus can prove a struggle as a study conducted by Jones et al. (2008) found that some students only received funds allocated for tuition. In such cases, students are not able to afford accommodation if they live far away from campus. Students thus

have the burden of traveling expenses, hence miss some classes due to a lack of bus fare.

Bourn (2002) found that difficulties with finances can demotivate students and increase challenges with their studies. Garraway (2009) also asserts that students can face financial constraints that impact on their academic work, even when they have obtained financial assistance for their studies. The participants in this study echoed this view as they stated that they who could not afford personal laptops and stressed that they had to wait for hours to use the computer rooms and sometimes had to spend the night there so they could complete their assignments.

5.3 Access Programme Staff members' Perceptions of the Access Programme

Staff members who participated in the study indicated that the programme is beneficial to students enrolled in it. They reported that they typically observe a rapid positive change that students display during the AP year. One staff member added that statistics on the success of AP showed that the majority of the students from the AP obtained their qualification in the four years allotted to them. The staff also mentioned some limitations of the AP, such as stigma associated with the enrolled students, and the medium of instruction (English), which serves as a language barrier.

5.3.1 Cognitive Dimension of Academic Literacy

Sternberg (1994) argues for adopting an eclectic teaching style, as students have their own unique and preferred ways of acquiring, processing, and retaining new information and skills. There are various learning styles that students use. For instance, visual learners learn better when information is presented through diagrams and videos. Verbal learners learn better through explanations (either spoken or written) (Felder, 1993). Auditory learners benefit more from reading text out loud, verbal discussions, and listening to speech. These learners understand meaning by concentrating on the pitch, tone, and speed of voice. However, other scholars claim that tailoring instruction to students' individual learning styles does not improve learning outcomes (Stahl 1999; Willingham 2005). Ellis (2008) notes that this must be considered in relation to the use of a second language as students in the AP typically struggle to articulate themselves fluently in English. They prefer to use their first language to express themselves and comprehend what they are learning before language-switching to English. In this regard, Tinto (2012) asserts that the experiences that students bring to university influence their preference for particular learning approaches.

The staff members reiterated that the students face stigmatisation. Thus, they tend to limit their friendships to those in the AP. Dhunpath and Vithal (2012) posit that the perception that students in the AP are not performing at the expected academic level can stir feelings of inferiority and stigmatisation. The participants in this study confirmed this view. They reported that they felt “inferior and “stigmatised” during their year in the AP because of the notion that students who enroll for the AP come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite experiencing stigma, the participants reported an increase in their confidence, which they attributed to the support they received from the AP staff. The participants confirmed that enrolling in the AP helped them integrate into the university.

5.3.1.1 **The ZPD and Scaffolding Promote Learning.** Another issue brought forward by the staff members was that students typically have difficulty with the English language as the medium of instruction and have minimal computer skills. However, they also stated that the students improve within the year that they are in the AP. According to Topciuc and Myftiu (2015), students ought to be prepared for ‘what they are not yet’ to enhance their capacity to function at the desired level. Integration of academic concepts with prior knowledge enhances the retention of information and enables the students to have a deeper and broader understanding (Haenen et al., 2003). In the AP, students are guided to meet the demands of the programme in terms of teaching and learning. The accomplishment of this programme signifies the preparedness of the students to enroll in mainstream programmes. In such cases they no longer need to continue with the AP, as they would have acquired the necessary academic literacy skills.

5.4 Students’ Experiences of Overcoming Academic Literacy Difficulties Through the Access Programme

Kucer (2014) asserts that academic literacy is a multidimensional concept whereby each dimension is entrenched in academic instruction. Transitioning and adjusting to a new environment can significantly impact a student’s academic performance (Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Peters, 2015; King, 2016). This is because a student’s high school background can be an important factor in determining their transition to university. Jama et al. (2008) assert that some students in South Africa who enter higher education come from schooling backgrounds that have not equipped them with the necessary skills to succeed academically. The students thus experience difficulties with transitioning to higher education.

5.4.1 The Linguistic Dimension of Academic Literacy

The language issue is a contentious theme that emerged from the interviews. English-medium universities need proof that an applicant has a sufficient command of the English language to cope with the academic load. The sociocultural theory promotes learning through symbolic tools such as language. The language they use daily allows students to develop deeper fluency, theoretical abstraction, and self-consciousness. Kozulin et al. (2003) posit that learning other languages does not replace one's mother tongue; instead, one's mother tongue deepens knowledge and understanding of other languages. Developing other literacies is, therefore, beneficial for students' imagination and emotional development.

Students in this study encountered some language barriers during their AP year as they were mostly taught in their native tongue in high school. These findings show how a lack of exposure to the instructional language can be a learning barrier for students. Being proficient in the language of instruction is critical for a student's performance in higher education, hence Lewin and Mawoyo (2014), note that students who have a core understanding of the language of instruction are better able to comprehend the content and engage in critical thinking when undertaking written work. Troskie-de Bruin (1999) found that the 'one size fits all' (standardized approach) was criticised by students in other APs at another South African university. AP management reported that students were encouraged to use English (the language of instruction) as much as possible, but that mother tongue use was not prohibited. Similarly, participants in this study reported that code-switching enabled them to comprehend better and made it easier to articulate themselves. Parkinson et al. (2008) cautioned that, despite the extra academic support provided to AP students to improve their writing skills, they also need to actively participate in academic activities.

5.4.1.1 The Social Setting and More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) Facilitate

Learning. The participants indicated that their mentors and tutors assisted them with academic challenges, although they also revised their classwork on their own. The participants in this study confirmed the findings by Nala (2010), where the participants indicated that the tutorials they received in the AP helped promote their academic performance. For some, reading and studying every day helped them cope with academic challenges. This suggests that the additional support they received stimulated and motivated them to work harder. The findings in this study are also in accordance with Diseth (2010), who indicated that motivation is an effective strategic tool that students can utilise to facilitate academic success. Through

the AP, students expected to have access to university and to pursue their studies. Soudien (2010) also found that students perceived APs to be beneficial for their academic success. Much like the participants in this study, these students felt that the individualised attention and additional support they received in the AP assisted them to succeed. They also noted that they expected to learn about university processes as well as how to use a computer. Another factor that contributed to AP students' improved module performance was the desire to demonstrate their worth and abilities to mainstream students through hard work. Competitiveness discouraged underperformance from students and promoted perseverance and resilience (Kalenga, & Mngomezulu, 2015).

5.5 Challenges in Overcoming Academic Literacy Difficulties

Initially, the participants had feelings of discontent with starting their university studies through the AP because they felt singled out and delayed as their studies were prolonged. They also felt restricted because they could not make free academic choices, which they viewed as limiting their potential. Students felt like they should have been given an opportunity to do two mainstream modules rather than one, as they would have been able to cope. Other challenges included time and computer proficiency. Some students required more than basic computer skills, as they had not used the computer before, and all their university academic work required computer skills. Bourn (2002) argues that difficulties with computer literacy can demotivate students and promote challenges with their studies. Jones et al. (2008) assert that some students experience difficulties organising and managing their time regarding their studies, as discussed by the participants in this study. Nyar (2016) found that the provision of time management sessions or classes can assist the students with planning and organising their time efficiently, which can improve their academic performance.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

The intention was to sample participants registered at the UKZN PMB campus in the Humanities Access Programme. However, only two staff members were able to participate in the study. Time constraints made it difficult for other staff members to participate in the study. The size of the student sample was also limited because a pamphlet was used to recruit participants, therefore not all students who were in the AP knew about this study.

5.7 Recommendations

- Further research could aim to recruit participants from a wider variety of study and career paths.
- Preparatory support could also be considered for mainstream students who seek guidance in their transition to the higher education context.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the ways in which students from the humanities AP overcome their academic literacy difficulties through the AP in the university of KwaZulu Natal PMB Campus. The findings show that the AP provided the participants with an opportunity to access higher education as their applications for mainstream programmes would have been rejected. The AP helped them understand the university and its processes, which facilitated the transitioning process. The effectiveness of AP is determined by the extent to which the faculty, administration, and student body perceive the programme as legitimate. Motivating and preparing students in small groups, open consultations with lecturers, and encouraging peer-to-peer interaction appear to enhance student satisfaction and success in higher education. Although tutorials are available for mainstream students, the findings of this study suggest that the AP benefited students by providing focused and individualised support. The participants reported that the additional support from the AP equipped them with the academic skills needed to succeed in university. Literacy should therefore not be limited to acquiring social and academic skills; it should also encompass the different cultural contexts and power dynamics that shape various communities, particularly within a multicultural institution.

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Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Staff and Students

My name is Nozuko, Zandisiwe Nqana. I am a student at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus) where I am registered for Masters of Social Sciences (Educational Psychology). I am currently completing my research study, which is titled: Overcoming academic literacy difficulties through the Humanities Access Program: Students' and staff perceptions at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I would like to individually interview students who are in the Access Program in the College of Humanities.

The aim of this research is to explore the strategies used by students enrolled in the Humanities Access Program to overcome academic literacy difficulties. The study is expected to enroll a maximum of 4 students from the Humanities Access Program students as well as the program coordinating staff members. It will involve participating in semi-structured interview. The duration of your participation if you choose to be in the study is expected to be an hour or less. The study is not funded. Participants will not receive any compensation for participating in the study.

Participation in this research is voluntary and participants may withdraw from participating at any point. In the event of participation withdrawal, no penalty will be incurred. Information that is shared by the participants will be used solely for the purpose of research. During the interviews, an audiotape will be used to allow the researcher the opportunity to accurately capture responses. The identity of participants will be concealed, as the participants' real names will not be used and the collected data will be stored for five years under lock and key in my supervisor's office. After a period of 5 years, the stored data will be destroyed by shredding.

In the event that you have concerns/questions, you may contact the researcher at 215002738@ukzn.ac.za or 060 854 2500

My supervisor is Ms Sindiswa Shezi. Her contact details are shezis1@ukzn.ac.za or 033 260 6180.

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details:

Ms Phumelele Ximba, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office, Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za,
Phone number

+27312603587.

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT

Ihave been informed about the study titled: **Overcoming academic literacy**

difficulties through the Humanities Access Program: Students' and staff perceptions at the University of

KwaZulu-Natal by researcher, Ms. N.Z Nqana. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I understand that I may withdraw at any time without consequence.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at 060 584 2500 or 215002738@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

I understand that I may contact the research supervisor: Ms. Sindiswa Shezi who is located at the School of Applied Human Sciences in Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: shezis1@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: 033 260 6180

If I have any further questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville

Campus Govan Mbeki

Building

Private Bag X

54001 Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to for my interview to be recorded with the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix C

Semi-structured Interview Schedule for students

Title of the study: Overcoming academic literacy difficulties through the Humanities Access Program:

Students' and staff perceptions at the University of

KwaZulu-Natal. Questions:

Exploring the views of students about the Access program

1. How did you know about the Access Program?
2. What is/are your reason(s) for accepting the offer to be in the Access Program?
3. What are some of the expectations that you had when you joined the Access Program? Were your expectations met? Please elaborate.
4. What are some of the academic-related challenges that are faced by students enrolled in the Access Program?
5. In your experience, what are some of the be limitations of the Access Program?
6. What are some of the strategies that you learned in the Access Program to study more efficiently?

Exploring the social processes in overcoming academic literacy difficulties through the Access Program

7. What are some of the copying strategies that you use in cases where you feel stress emanating from academic challenges?
8. What are some of the copying strategies that you use in cases where you feel stress arising from social relations?
9. What assisted you to obtain your qualification?
10. How was your relationship with other students in the Access Program?
11. What is your relationship like with the Access Program staff members in relation to your studies?
12. Are there peers who assist you with your studies? (if yes, how do they assist you?).

Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Schedule for staff

Title of the study: Overcoming academic literacy difficulties through the Humanities Access Program:

Students' and staff perceptions at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Questions:

Exploring the views of staff about the Access program

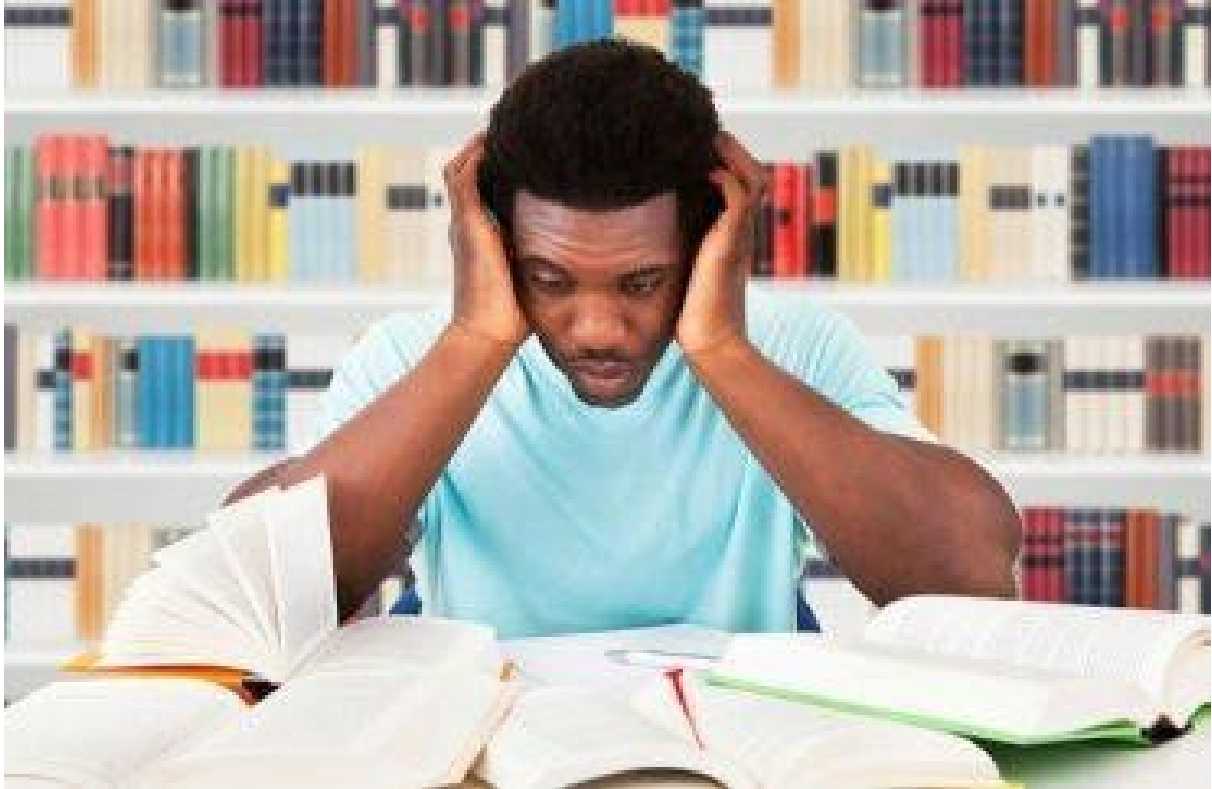
1. How did you know about the Access Program?
2. What expectations did you have about the Access Program when you joined UKZN?
 - Have these expectations changed? Please elaborate?
3. What are some of the benefits of being in the Access Program for students?
4. What are some of the academic-related challenges that are faced by students enrolled in the Access Program?
5. In your experience, what are some of the be limitations of the Access Program?
6. What teaching strategies do you use to assist students to study more efficiently?

Exploring the social processes in overcoming academic literacy difficulties through the Access Program

1. What are some of the copying strategies that you teach students to use in cases where they feel stress emanating from academic challenges?
2. What are some of the copying strategies that you teach students to use in cases where they feel stress arising social relations?
3. How would you describe your relationship with students in the Access Program?
4. What are some of the strategies that you use to assist learners to create and sustain academically based peer relationships? Please elaborate.
5. What are some of the processes that are required to assist students in the Access program to complete their studies within the recommended period?

Appendix E

Overcoming Academic Challenges....Share your perceptions of the Access program.



I am a Masters student in Psychology who is conducting a research study on students' and staff views on:

- Perceptions of the Access program
- Overcoming academic challenges

If you are in the Humanities Access Program, you are welcome to contact on me and we can arrange a face-to-face interview, on campus, to share your views. The interview will not be longer than 45 min.

Your views matter in shaping the teaching and learning context



Overcoming Academic Challenges... Share your perceptions of the Access program.

Contact me on:
215002738@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Overcoming Academic Challenges... Share your perceptions of the Access program.

Contact me on:
215002738@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Appendix F

Table of analysis

Question 1							
How did you know about the Access Program?							
Sandile	Zano	Ziyanda	Thembelihle	Sanele	Sifiso	Mr Y	Mr X
<p>The CAO handbook clearly explained what the Humanities Access programme was. I was more interested on it as it required less points but would still do the degree you want. Another thing, my neighbour who was assisting with the applications also advised me to also include it on my CAO booklet.</p>	<p>I came as a walk-in at UKZN in 2015 as I was not able to apply through the CAO on time as the post office workers were on strike in 2014. Nonetheless, I still went to UKZN after my results were out, and explained why</p>	<p>I was informed by someone near my home that there is an access programme that I can enrol in it for students who come from disadvantage background if I want to enrol in it because it will teach me more about things that are not offered at school like</p>	<p>when I was applying I knew nothing about the access program but luckily, I had an older sister who went to ukzn at the time so she help me with all that when I was doing my CAO form.</p>	<p>I had applied to the University of Ongoye but when I went to the University of Zululand to check my application a man working at the admin told me I qualify so I should be taken but advise me to redo my application and he would assist me so we doing it he put me on access program for</p>	<p>I didn't know about the access program I had no expectations as I only found out about the access program when I got to university on campus</p>	<p>When I applied I was also a tutor of political sciences and I wanted to get some experience of teaching and with the background information I had attained while I was working at the Access Programme. My aim was to get experience but</p>	<p>I never had a primary interest to work on the access programme. However, I was looking for a job and I found a job in Free State. Thereafter, the University of KwaZulu Natal PMB campus called me looking for a counsellor.</p>

	<p>I had not applied on time. When I got there, they told me all the spaces were filled and since I had less points than what was required. However, they advised me to apply for the programme called Access Programme (BSS4).</p>	<p>computers all of those things so I decided to enrol in it because I wanted to learn more about computers I had never touched a computer before in my life up until I enrol for that assess programme.</p>		<p>science and humanities for Pietermaritzburg, Howard, and Westville campus and also explain to me what it is an assured me that the Pietermaritzburg campus would take me as he has worked there and knows the procedures and I thank them and I was happy so that's how I found out about the access program</p>		<p>to further assist students from the Access Programme as they are coming from previously disadvantaged backgrounds cope with the workload that is expected at the university. More assistance is needed.</p>	
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Appendix G



15 October 2019

Ms Mozuko Zandsiwe Nqana (215002739)
School of Applied Human Sciences – Psychology
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Nqana,

Protocol reference number: **HSS/0274/019M**

Project title: **Overcoming Academic Literacy difficulties through the Humanities Access Program: Students' and staff perceptions at the University of KwaZulu-Natal**

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

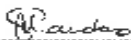
In response to your application received 03 April 2019, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 1 year from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

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

Yours faithfully


.....
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)
/ms

cc Supervisor: Sindiswa Shezi
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Ruth Teer-Tomaselli
cc School Administrator: Ms Priya Kohan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
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To who it may concern

Humanities Access Programme has granted Miss N.Z Nqana (215002738) permission to collect data from student in the BSS4 programme anytime from 07 March 2019 to 31 December 2020.

Research Topic "An exploration of strategies used by student enrolled in access programme to overcome academic literacy difficulties"

Research Method: Qualitative Method

Research Tools: Questionnaires & Consent form

The researcher is allowed to work with all BSS4 students who are majoring in Psychology, Student counsellor, BSS4 Administrator and Programme Coordinator.

The Researcher has permission to refer students to BSS4 Student Counsellor for psychological interventions should student become negatively affected by any content that is contained during interviews. The Researcher is also allowed to put posters/flyers in BSS4 office (OMB Room 8) because this a central and most convenient place where all access students meet.

Mr. S.H. Mthembu

BSS4 Student Counsellor

033 260 5754

Mthembus14@ukzn.ac.za



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