

The Challenges of Implementing Peer Academic Support Programmes at a University in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

Magdaline Nji Tangwe^{1*} and S. Rembe²

Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare, PB X1314, Alice 5700, South Africa
E-mail: ¹<njimado@yahoo.com>, ²<srembe@ufh.ac.za>

KEYWORDS Teaching and Learning Centre. Peer Facilitators. Peer Academic Support Programmes. Previously Disadvantaged Students. Supplemental Instruction

ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to examine the challenges that are faced in the implementation of peer academic support programmes, namely supplemental instruction (SI) and Language and Writing Advancement Programmes (LWAP) at a university in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Using a qualitative research design, a sample of 22 participants made up of peer facilitators, students who use academic support services and coordinators of these programmes was chosen. Data was collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The data collected was coded to get sub and main themes that were analysed to make meanings of shared experiences of participants. The results show that there are numerous challenges facing the implementation of these programmes at the university under study. These include, among others, poor attendance at sessions, low participation by the students, large classes, under-representation of many departments as peer facilitators, and poor remuneration. The paper recommends longer training of peer facilitators, equal representation of departments in the programmes, good incentives, 'buying in' from departments, amongst others.

INTRODUCTION

After the first democratic elections of 1994 in South Africa, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) came up with a policy which aimed at enhancing equity and redress at higher institutions (CHE 1996). It involved the provision of greater access for black students into higher education institutions which still remained unequal in terms of resources and capacity (Cloete 2002:11). According to Boughey (2005) as a result of relaxed apartheid policies in the early 1980s, historically white universities began to admit small numbers of black students. In an attempt to improve the quality of the increased number of students that were admitted, academic support programmes were introduced (Boughey 2005). According to CHE (2014), academic support programmes in South Africa were introduced to assist students without the necessary background to be able to benefit immediately from lectures and tutorials. This early ini-

tiative was liberal in scope in that it focused on attempting to give historically disadvantaged students equal opportunity by filling the gap between their poor socio-economic and educational backgrounds and university education (Boughey 2005). The expectation of those working in academic support programmes set up in universities was that under-preparedness would eventually be a major factor among the majority of students (John 2013).

Boughey (2005) identified a number of activities that are characteristic of early academic support work in South Africa, some of which have continued to date. They include access and admission and attempt to identify students with the potential to succeed in higher education despite their disadvantaged backgrounds and poor scores in matriculation examination. Most universities in South Africa have introduced similar academic support programmes by putting in place programmes such as: language and writing; supplemental instruction; peer tutoring and mentoring; life skills and curriculum; and many others. This shows that the implementation and enhancement of programmes that place peers in leadership roles in the academic domain are on the rise (Keup and Mullins 2010). Latino (2008) concluded that such peer influ-

Address for correspondence:
Magdaline Nji Tangwe
Faculty of Education,
University of Fort Hare,
PB X1314, Alice
5700, South Africa

ence can lead to a positive outcome on retention and throughput for students receiving the support as well as the peers performing the roles.

Academic support has been defined as a condition that promotes success (Tinto 2003). Tinto reiterates that the availability of academic support, for instance in the form of developmental education courses, tutoring, study groups and other programmes such as supplemental instruction, is an important condition for students' continuation at the university. According to Tinto (2003), there are three types of support mechanism that promote success at universities and these include academic, social and financial support. Academic support is the most important one because most students enter the university insufficiently prepared for the rigour required of university study. A review on higher education teaching and learning by John (2013 online) concluded that: *The best answer to the question of what is the most effective method of teaching is that it depends on the goal, the student, the content and the teachers. In continuation, the next best answer is students teaching other students. Peer collaboration also serves to develop the key social skills that are essential for success in life after schooling.*

These are the expectations of peer academic support programmes in South African higher education institutions. For the fact that there have been, and there are still problems with retention and throughput is an indication that there are challenges with the way these programmes are being implemented. The most commonly used peer academic support programmes in most South African higher education institutions, that is, supplemental instruction and language and writing programme have yielded little results (Napier and Makura 2013).

According to Boughey (2010), supplemental instruction (SI) programme aim at providing support to students doing historically difficult subjects such as natural sciences, accounting and others by focusing on helping the students to understand the subject content thereby enabling them to be involved in process of learning. Jacob et al. (2008) pointed out that mentoring SI sessions is a one-on-one support mechanism at universities. This is mostly done by peer facilitators that are controlled by coordinators. Coordinators are key members' who have direct contact of facilitators and make sure the programmes are well implemented. Facilitators are those who implement the programmes and have direct contact with the students.

The second is Language and Writing Advancement Programme (LWAP) which is meant to produce knowledgeable students in most previously disadvantaged universities in South Africa (Makura et al. 2011; Napier and Makura 2013). According to Archer (2010) Academic Writing Programme (AWP) targets historically disadvantaged students in most South African higher education institutions who are in need of academic assistance with writing in order for them to gain discipline specific conventions. Although peer academic support programmes, namely SI and LWAP have been implemented in almost all the universities in South Africa, very little has been achieved in terms of the objectives (Archer 2010; Boughey 2010; Makura et al. 2011; Napier and Makura 2013). Hence this paper examines the challenges encountered in implementing peer academic support programmes, specifically Supplemental Instruction and Language and Writing Advancement Programmes (SI and LWAP) in one University in South Africa. The main research question was: What challenges are encountered in implementing peer academic support programmes in one University in South Africa?

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach: Qualitative Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2007) explains that the aim of qualitative research approach is to explore and understand a central phenomenon. This has to do with understanding the processes, social and cultural contexts which work in line with various behavioural patterns. The behavioural patterns are mostly concerned with exploring the 'Why,' 'How,' and 'What' questions of research (Maree 2007). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative inquiry employs human actions from the perspective of social actors themselves. A qualitative research approach was important for this study because it enabled the researchers to understand the challenges faced by both facilitators and coordinators in the implementation of peer academic support programmes.

Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

A population is defined as a collection of items of interest in research and it represents a group that a researcher wishes to generalise the research findings to (De Vos 2005). The popula-

tion of this study was derived from one university in South Africa offering peer academic support programmes. All undergraduate students of that university that made use of these services, the peer facilitators and the coordinators of these programmes constituted the population. The sample for this study was limited to some undergraduate students benefiting from peer academic support programmes some facilitators as well as all the coordinators.

For the purpose of this study, non-probability sampling procedure was used. This study utilised a purposive non-probability sampling technique in the selection of the sample. According to De Vos (2005), purposive sampling is based on the judgment of the researcher that a sample has typical elements which contains the most typical attributes of the population. Therefore in this study, peer facilitators of the programmes - as gatekeepers - recommended undergraduate students who, in their opinion, could provide the necessary information for this study. Overall a total of 22 participants were selected for this study, namely; ten facilitators, two coordinators, and ten undergraduate students. It was ensured that all faculties and genders were represented in the sample.

Instruments of Data Collection and Data Collection Procedures

The qualitative approach allowed the use of different kinds of data collection instruments to gather information, namely in-depth interviews and focus group interviews as suggested by Drew et al. (2008). Two types of data collection instruments were used for this study. These were in-depth interviews with programme co-ordinators and facilitators and focus group discussions with undergraduate students who received services from the programmes on a regular basis. Regarding interviews, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two programme coordinators and with ten peer facilitators. These interviews were conducted using interview guides.

Focus group discussions were held with two groups of ten selected undergraduate students. Each group consisted of five participants. Both genders, different levels of studies, faculties and other parameters were considered in the selection of the participants of the focus group discussions. The two focus group discussions were conducted in the Teachers and Learners Centre (TLC) where peer academic support programmes

are based. The principal researcher facilitated the discussion with the help of a research assistant. A discussion guide which contained a series of questions and topics was used by the principal researcher. This guide helped to keep the discussion focused on the research topic as well as ensured that the topics and questions were all covered during the discussion.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions was manually carried. A general analytical procedure was used in analysing the qualitative data based on the key themes that emerged from the audio-tape recordings, field notes and discussions. After coding the data and identifying categories and developing themes, a matrix of the main themes was presented to show the challenges regarding the implementation of the peer academic support programmes at the university under study. In order not to compromise the identity of the participants, all participants were given codes and referred to only by these codes in the paper.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics is defined as a matter of principled sensitivity to the right of others (Cohen et al. 2007). In addition, ethical considerations protect the fundamental rights of participants, including respect for privacy, whilst maintaining the highest level of confidentiality (Wiid and Diggins 2009). Participants in this study were all encouraged to participate voluntarily; that is out of their own free will. While conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions participants' anonymity was maintained and guaranteed. Moreover, participants had to sign informed consent letters.

RESULTS

The challenges facing the implementation of academic support programmes at the university under study are presented according to different themes which are outlined below.

Poor Attendance in SI and Language and Writing Consultant (LWC) Sessions

An important theme that emerged during interviews with peer facilitators was poor attendance of students at SI or LWC sessions that

are organised and run by facilitators. All the facilitators indicated their disappointment regarding the poor attendance of students during their sessions. They wonder why they should be putting in much effort to help students that do not want to be helped. A facilitator cited ignorance for the poor attendance or non-attendance of students who would otherwise benefit from services provided by these programmes. This frustration and disappointment for the facilitators suggest that they seem to be wasting their time. According to one facilitator:

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

Moreover, some peer facilitators acknowledged that the attendance rate fluctuates most of the time this discourages the regular students because when those who missed sessions attend, the facilitator is forced repeat what had already been done in previous sessions. In addition, many students come late and given the time constraint, facilitators cannot complete what they had planned for that day.

Low attendance seems to be a general issue of concern to both the facilitators and the programme coordinators. The coordinators of the programmes were also interviewed on how satisfied they were with students making maximum use of the programmes. Their responses were similar to those of the facilitators, namely; students are not making use of the programmes that have been put in place to help them. When asked whether lack of information contributed to poor attendance, the coordinators refuted this. They blamed faculties and departments for not sensitizing their students about the services offered by the Teaching and Learning Centre or sending them there for the necessary help. One of the coordinators of the programmes explained:

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

Large Classes

The findings show that the majority of the facilitators agreed that they are sometimes confused on how to help students especially when the number is too large and during the times when they themselves are about to write their tests and examinations. Students who bring their problems expect solutions from the facilitators immediately but many of them have no knowledge or expertise in the disciplinary field. Many of the students bring their assignments when it is already almost due for submission to their lecturers and therefore expect immediate interventions from TLC which is not feasible. One facilitator maintained that:

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

One facilitator was of the opinion that consultations and reviewing assignments, especially proposals, pose problems to her. The facilitators said that some of the assignments are too badly written and it is not possible to help students effectively. Some students ask challenging questions while others from other departments expect the facilitators who are not even from their discipline or department to help them.

However, a few participant facilitators had different views from those held by the majority. They insisted that they are not challenged when it comes to implementation of the programmes. They reiterated that they do not help students with anything coming from a different discipline other than their own. One of the facilitators stated: *"I am not confused; everything is fine, especially as I try to review assignments coming from my discipline and faculty"* (Facilitator 2). Some facilitators intimated that some students are just out to trap them with difficult questions in order to either ridicule or mock them. Some students simply attend SI sessions to see how well some of the peer facilitators can speak, assist or solve problems brought by students. In such cases, they will tease the facilitators with challenging questions to test their ability.

Little or No Participation of Students in Sessions

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

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

In a similar vein, another facilitator echoed the view of the first colleagues and said that lack of participation has tempted him to provide solutions to questions the students usually ask during their sessions. This therefore defeats the purpose of peer facilitation which should not be that of a teacher or lecturer.

Low Remuneration or Incentives

Facilitators were asked to explain how they were motivated to do their job effectively. Low financial remuneration was mentioned as a demotivating factor. Five facilitators stated that they were not happy with the low incentive they receive compared to tutors in other departments. They complained that they did a lot of work in order to claim while in other academic departments tutors have a fixed stipend every month whether they work or not. More so they receive the same amount every year despite the high prices and inflation. One of them stated that:

We need to be motivated financially with prices of goods and services sky-rocketing each and every year. We receive the same amount every year irrespective of these high prices and inflation. In addition, the pay is low with difficult tasks to perform and having to claim whereas tutors in many departments are simply being paid a stipend whether they work or not (Facilitator 1).

They equally complained about the claiming system; compared to the fixed sum earned by tutors who are at the same level and different payments to SI and LWC. For example, a facilitator said the issue of claiming de-motivates them

when compared to other colleagues of their level. She confirmed that she hate the claiming system that the Centre is practicing. The amount of money paid is based on the number of assignments reviewed, consultations made, meetings and shared learning sessions attended by a peer facilitator. This, therefore, means that when students do not go for consultation, a peer facilitator cannot be paid because he/she might not have anything to claim for.

One of the programme coordinators lamented that it is better to be a tutor and get paid without doing anything than work as a peer facilitators at the centre. As TLC peer facilitator, the tasks are much and this is worsened by having to file a claim which many struggle in order to meet the required minimum of 24 hours per month. The key to any successful venture or enterprise that employs human labour is sufficient remuneration of staff. This might explain the reason why the TLC continuously losses their SI and LWC who prefer to be tutors or facilitators in Life Knowledge Action (LKA) with fixed stipend rather than claiming at TLC.

Voluntary Use of Programmes

Another challenge that emerged from the findings was the fact that students are not obliged by the university system to seek assistance or help from the centre when facing academic problems; it is up to the students. The two coordinators confirmed that the method was problematic because it is voluntary. That is, being voluntary students are not obliged to attend the programmes irrespective of whether they are performing poorly in their academic work or not. According to them, the university should make it compulsory for poor academic performing students to seek for academic help from the Centre. This can be seen from the words of one of the coordinators: *"The model we are using is problematic because it is voluntary, most students do not see that they need help"* (coordinator 1).

This therefore could be the reason why students do not take the programmes seriously. It might be interpreted that students feel that lecturers are not interested since they do not encourage them to seek support from the programmes. Also from the perspective of the coordinators, the methods are not really functioning well because students who have problems do not feel that they have problems, and are not

forced or encouraged to seek for help. When further asked what they were doing to solve this problem, the coordinator added that:

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

Considering the responses from coordinator 1 above, it can be acknowledged that the coordinators are trying to formulate another strategy of marketing that will enable lecturers to be part of the programmes. It is believed that students have more faith in their lecturers than in any other persons; and this may be the reason why the coordinators want to get lecturers involved. Another reason, as indicated by the coordinators, is that there are other problems faced by the university which the programme coordinators cannot change alone without involvement of other members of the University community. Coordinators 2 stated: *“Most other challenges are those faced by the university that we can’t change alone”* (Coordinator 2).

DISCUSSION

Information collected from facilitators, coordinators and students revealed a number of challenges encountered in the implementation of peer academic support programmes. Poor attendance by students is a likely indication that most students are not motivated and do not take these support programmes seriously even though they face challenges in their academic work. This corroborates the fact that at-risk students, in particular, have difficulty in recognising and accepting that they are experiencing academic problems and are often reluctant to seek help (Levin and Levin 1991). There are enormous benefits of participating in peer facilitations. For example, Wilcox (1993) explains that students who take advantage of SI programmes benefit from transferable study strategies and engage in proactive participation, thereby gathering, retaining, and transferring knowledge at higher level. It is unfortunate that these students cannot achieve such knowledge if they do not take advantages of the programmes. The Executive Chief of CHE, John (2013) indicated that there is an acknowledgement that all universities have support programmes for students who are not adequately

prepared for university study, but the problem is that the impact of these programmes is limited.

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

Apart from poor attendance, those that manage to use the service either come late or attend irregularly causing much frustration and disappointment on the part of the facilitators of the programmes. The university has invested enormous resources in these programmes and towards the end of the year, the programme coordinators facilitators to device programmes in order to prevent underutilized money from being sent back. This perhaps explains why one of the coordinators said these programmes are grossly underutilised. It is unfortunate that there is no monitoring of attendance trends of students in peer academic support programmes at the university under study. In other universities, such as the University of Ulster (2008), a flash red light indicates that there is a student who is absent from such sessions as SI. At the university under study, students at risk are not identified by the institution. This happens in other universities as early warning system. Rosenthal (2008) suggests that universities should identify students-at-risk in order to provide them with and additional support.

It is most likely that the programmes are not fully utilised and most departments are not encouraging their students to make use of TLC services for a number of reasons. Most students do not like going to TLC for help because of the feedbacks they receive from facilitators especially when they fail to effect the right corrections or fail their assignments. One peer facilitator remarked that some of the students are just reluctant, lazy or negligence in attending the programmes even though they have academic problems. This idea confirms what Boughey

(2010) reiterated about poor attendance of tutorials, SI sessions and workshops. In addition, the author maintained that most of the students always present false excuses for not attending sessions. It is in this regard that John (2013) noted with dismay that 7 years after South Africans were informed that about half of the undergraduate students drop out of university, there is no improvement in this debacle of poor academic performance.

According to John (2013), educationists and students blamed this on inadequate assistance, poor support and family pressure. Perhaps, this is the reason for the proposal by Macfarlane (2013) that more years should be taken to complete degree programmes instead of the three and four years currently in place. Macfarlane (2013) and Jansen (2013) indicated that the only proposal from the CHE is the extension of undergraduate degrees by a year. They concluded that more than 55% of African and coloured students will never graduate. Furthermore, nationally and across all faculties in South Africa, only one in four students will graduate within the required minimum time (Macfarlane 2013).

However, Dison and Selikow (1992) emphasized that the problem with intervention programme is that students do not attend classes especially when they have too much workload such as test times and assignment submission dates. Lack of encouragement of students by departments or faculties to seek help from these programmes contradicts what Tinto's theory on how to improve student's retention. According to the theory, there should be a strong link between faculty support and student's retention. Almost all peer facilitators hold the opinion that they face difficulties in discharging their duties of facilitation. There can be a problem managing large numbers of students that some departments have especially if they are not well equipped with adequate knowledge and strategies of facilitation. Sometimes students come for consultation at critical moment when the facilitators are busy with their own work and the latter cannot be blamed for not helping them with their assignments. It can be assumed that the fact that some departments are large and have just one peer facilitator, it is a problem affecting to all the students especially during what I may call peak hours' like test and examination periods. It can be seen that it is really a challenge because some of the students might want

immediate help which they might not receive. This finding corroborates Kuh et al. (2005) proposition about large workload. Accordingly, the authors suggested that large workloads often make it difficult for facilitators to build strong relationships with all their students. In this note, it might become difficult for students to have regular contact with their facilitators.

As revealed in the data collected LWC face the challenge of reviewing students' assignments. However, some of them lack experience and are less qualified and they can therefore not effectively assist students who visit TLC. For example, the biographical data shows that, there are 3 Honours students serving as LWC leaders and 5 out of 10 had experience of one year or less. Another reason for the challenge with assignment reviewing may also stem from the fact that some peer facilitators review assignments from any student irrespective of the discipline because they want to accumulate enough hours for making a claim for payment at the end of the month. It is discouraging and frustrating, especially among new or inexperienced facilitators, when they are mocked or undermined by some students. It can also be argued that this may be due to the manner in which some peer facilitators present themselves during their sessions.

The non-participation of students in session defeats the policy of the university under study on facilitation which also emphasizes a humanizing pedagogy. Many factors have been highlighted as possible reasons for non-participation of students in lectures and peer group facilitations. For example, students might not want to contribute in the sessions because of language. Perhaps, it might be necessary to adopt what the Registrar of the University of KwaZulu-Natal intimated, namely that poor academically underprepared first year students should be tutored in their language; IsiZulu, to explain concepts to those whose mother's tongue is not English (Jansen 2013). Also, Woolacott et al. (2012) affirmed this by stating that most isiXhosa-speaking students' understand the importance of the English language and desire to improve speaking it. Gibbs (2006) claimed that there is a problem with learners from disadvantaged background whereby they always feel inferior and lack confidence when they get to the university. This may be the same situation with the institution under study especially because most students in this institution are from disadvantaged background.

CONCLUSION

There are many peer facilitators who are from the Faculty of Science and Agriculture and Social Science and Humanities of the university under study. The most likely conclusion that can be drawn is that most departments are not fairly represented at the Centre and this disadvantages those students from disciplines that have no representatives. As such students' assignments or academic problems are handled by academic support peers from other disciplines; hence the poor performance by some of the peer facilitators. The reason for, this is probably because most of those serving as SI leaders are undergraduate students. Most of them are less experienced after having only being recruited at the beginning of 2013. In this regard, they are not well equipped with facilitation skills. Moreover, the undergraduate peer facilitators have their own personal, academic and social obligations that pose challenges to the implementation of the Supplemental Instruction programme run by the Centre.

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

The problem of reviewing of assignments from any department by any peer facilitator emanate from the remuneration system that is adopted by Centre which involves making a claim for work done and completed. In order to accumulate enough hours to claim at the end of the month, the peer facilitators are lured to review assignments from whichever disciplines, irrespective of their knowledge or expertise in that discipline. Therefore the perceived poor remuneration and the claiming system which is different from that practiced in most departments with tutors have probably contributed to this problem. It is a problem if facilitators are not sufficiently paid, especially the experienced ones. This has forced some of them to seek multiple jobs within the Centre and departments as facilitators and tutors. At the same time they

will receive more money to finance their studies and meet other social needs. The policy of the University under study stipulates that students should not work more than 24 hours per month. While some benefits from double dipping, others fear these stipulations hence are forced to abandon one job most obviously the Centre's in preference for a steady tutor's stipend. This perhaps explains the reason why TLC keeps on losing peer facilitators throughout the year.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- (i) All peer facilitators should receive a much longer intensive training at the beginning of the year in addition to the normal monthly training meetings in order to

- equip them with the knowledge and skills needed for peer facilitation.
- (ii) All faculties should be represented and large faculties like Science and Agriculture and Social Sciences and Humanities should have at least two peer facilitators each to help students.
 - (iii) There should be sufficient remuneration of TLC peer facilitators, their stipend should be at par with tutors, and their wages should also be reviewed annually to keep in line with for inflation.
 - (iv) Peer facilitators should all be post graduate students especially from Master's level since they are not constrained by any class work. They have the requisite academic knowledge and maturity for handling academic problems, especially for the undergraduate students. This will also enable the Centre to open its doors even during examinations and holiday periods.
 - (v) Students and lecturers should be educated on the differences between a tutor and an SI leader. This will eliminate the current confusion that lingers on in the mind of students and academics about these two types of peer facilitators.

REFERENCES

- Archer A 2010. Challenges and potentials for writing centres in South Africa tertiary institutions. *South Africa Journal of Higher Education*, 24 (4): 495-510.
- Boughey C 2005. *Learned from Academic Development Movement in South African Higher Education and their Relevance for Student Support Initiatives in the FET College Sector*. Commissioned Report. Cape Town: Human Science Research Council.
- Boughey C 2010. *Academic Development for Improved Efficiency in the Higher Education and Training System in South Africa*. Pretoria: DBSA.
- Cloete N 2002. Policy expectation. In: N Cloete, R Fehnel, P Maassen, T Moja, H Perold, T Gibbon (Eds.): *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*. Lansdowne: Juta, pp. 87-108.
- Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison K 2007. *Research Methods in Education*. 6th Edition. London: Routledge.
- Council on Higher Education (CHE) 1996. *NCHE Report: A Framework for Transformation*. Pretoria: CHE.
- Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2014. *Framework for Institutional Quality Enhancement in the Second Period of Quality Assurance*. Pretoria: Institutional Audits Directorate.
- Creswell JW 2007. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- De Vos AS (ed.) 2005. *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Services Professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Dison L, Selikow T 1992. The Lunchtime Programme: A Response to Some of the Constraints Faced by ASP in Sociology at Wit University. *Proceedings of the 7th Conference of the South Africa Association for Academic Development*, Port Elizabeth Technikon, 3-5 December.
- Drew CJ, Hardman ML, Hosp JL 2008. *Designing and Conducting Research in Education*. California: Thousand Oaks.
- Gibbs G 2006. Why assessment in changing. In: C Bryan, K Clegg (Eds.): *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 11-22.
- Jacobs G, Hurley M, Unite U 2008. How learning theory creates a foundation for SI leader training. *Australian Journal of Peer Learning*, 1: 6-12.
- Jansen L 2013. Call for Extra Year to Earn Degrees. Post, July 29. From <www.thepost.co.za/call-for-extra-year-to-earn-degrees-1.1554180> (Retrieved on 30 July 2013).
- John V 2013. Dropout Rate Points to Lack of Support. Mail and Guardian, May 17. From <www.gm.co.za/print/2013-05-17-dropout-rate-points-to-lack-of-support> (Retrieved on 29 August 2013).
- Keup JR, Mullins E 2010. Findings from a National Survey of Peer Leadership Experiences and Outcome. *Concurrent Session Presented at the 29th Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience*, Denver, February 13.
- Kuh GD, Kinzie J, Schuh JH, Whitt EJ 2005. Never Let it rest: Lessons about students' success from high-performing colleges and universities. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 37(4): 45-51.
- Latino JA 2008. Empowering Peer Educators: Shaping First-Year Student Development Through Peer-Assisted Learning. *Preconference Workshop Presented at the 21st International Conference on the First-Year Experience*, Dublin, Ireland from June 23-26, 2008.
- Levin M, Levin J 1991. A critical examination of academic retention programmes for at-risk minority college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 32: 323-334.
- Macfarlane D 2013. Damning CHE Report into University Performance. Mail and Guardian, August 30. From <www.mg.co.za/print/2013-08-20-damning-che-report-into-university-performance> (Retrieved on 29 August 2013).
- Makura A, Skead M, Nhundu K 2011. Academic development practices at Fort Hare University: An epitome of University access. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 12: 13-22.
- Maree K 2007. *First Steps in Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Napier A, Makura AF 2013. Students' and staff perceptions of the efficacy of English language literacy support programmes for students at a previously disadvantaged higher education institution in South Africa. *Int J Edu Sci*, 5(1): 1-10
- Rosenthal J 2008. Posting in the Retention. List Discussion Group. From <www.cscsr.org/retention/listserv.htm> (Retrieved on 14 August 2012).

- Tinto V 2003. Learning Better Together. *Higher Education Monograph Series, No. 2*. Higher Education Program. New York: Syracuse University.
- Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) 2013. *Enrolment and Graduation Statistics*. East London: TLC.
- University of Ulster 2008. Student Transition and Retention (The STAR) Project. From <www.info.emeraldinsight.com/teaching/insights/retention.htm> (Retrieved on August 13 2010).
- Wiid J, Diggins C 2009. *Marketing Research*. Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd.
- Wilcox K 1993. Reasons educators and students choose SI. In: DC Martin, D Arendale (Eds.): *In Supplemental Instruction: Improving First Year Students Success in High-Risk courses*. Columbia: University of South Carolina.
- Woolacott L, Simelane Z, Inglis S 2012. On the learning behaviors of English additional language speakers entering engineering education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 25(3): 612-630.