Students' Perception of Own Preparedness for Higher Education: Case Study

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ABSTRACT South African universities have been grappling with access issues and low preparedness of first-time entering students with the post-1994 widening of access to students with a non-English speaking background. The purpose of this paper is to discuss student preparedness at a University of Technology in South Africa and to analyse how first year students perceive their readiness for tertiary studies. Qualitative and quantitative designs were used in this study. A survey questionnaire was designed and distributed amongst 1500 first-year students to collect data on the following: whether these students were enrolled in programmes of their choice; attendance of orientation; ability to communicate in English; and their possession of basic computer and numeracy skills. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyse the results. Generically speaking, the students' perceptions are contrary to the literature evidence and statistics at the institution, with the students perceiving themselves as possessing the requisite critical skills for success in higher education. However, the performance in assessment outcomes at the case university does not necessarily confirm this. Regardless of how students perceive their preparedness, this study will hopefully contribute to the institution improving the quality of support programmes and ensuring students' full participation in academic support programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Students' access, preparedness and success are widely debated issues in higher education institutions worldwide. In South Africa, student under-preparedness has become a dominant learning-related cause of the poor performance patterns in higher education, which is largely blamed on systemic faults of the school sector (Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2013: 17). These systemic faults include among other problems, a poor curriculum, social class and the under-preparedness of teachers (CHE 2013: 17). In post-1994 South Africa, concerns have mounted as a result of the widening of access to the larger population, particularly to non-first-language English speaking students. However, along with this massification has come the expectation that universities will intensify support for students in a number of ways, including financial, accommodation, food, health, academic and career advising, life and academic skills and literacies, counselling, performance monitoring and through referrals (CHE 2014:17) to various support programmes.

For many South African universities, the dawn of democracy resulted in policy-driven higher numbers of previously disadvantaged students in university studies. In spite of this apparent improvement, concerns about the continuing limited access and subsequent success of these students is still highly questionable. It is regrettable that 18 years into democracy the country and education institutions in particular, still grapple with educational problems of inequities. The situation is partly associated with factors which include the legacy of apartheid, our redress strategies that are flawed with errors, as well as the expanding socio-economic rifts among different races and classes in the country.

Although one can argue that the contextual nature of student preparedness in South Africa is influenced to a great extent by the political history of the country so that its subtle effects are still being felt within all sectors of education, the fact also remains that social and economic inequalities between those who have and those who do not, have actually played a major role in the kind of learners being produced and ultimately fed into universities by the school sector. The affluent no doubt, have better educational choices than the poor who are forced to

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settle for mediocrity in schools which not only lack basic education infrastructure, do not have text books halfway through the year, depend on unqualified teachers, are wanting in the requisite number of teachers with expertise to teach the subjects they are assigned to teach, but also lack modern teaching and learning facilities, such as computers, to name but a few quandaries. Problems of unpreparedness haunt the South African education system at the macro/government, meso/institutional/school and micro/individual levels.

Although at the policy level the worst in terms of unequal education could be said to have been eliminated with the abolition of apartheid, the problems of access, retention and throughput are still not clearly defined by both the government and universities, and thus attempts to solve them have turned out to be a trial and error. The South African Council on Higher Education Monitor 9, maintains that for universities, these issues are further complicated by the fact that students entering university do so from positions of extreme inequality, most obviously in schooling, but also, in terms of financial and other resources (CHE 2010: 6).

From a policy point of view, the issues of transformation that South African Higher Education Universities grapple with today were envisaged by the South African Government through its rigorous policy conceptualisation and development since 1992. The National Commission on Higher (NCHE) that was put together by President Mandela in the early 90s prescribed a workable framework and identified fundamental principles that were meant to guide and direct the process of transformation in higher education (NCHE 1996: 8-9). Among other things, this framework envisaged that a truly transformed system of Higher Education in South Africa should ensure access to a full spectrum of educational and learning opportunities to as wide a range of the population as possible, irrespective of race, colour, gender or age. Although there are still problems which hamper full access to learning opportunities to date, higher education institutions have become accessible to all population groups.

The NCHE spelt out two important ways in which access could be promoted, namely, by paying urgent attention to the improvement of the qualifications and skills of academics and secondly, paying attention to providing contin-

ual student support. Some suggestions for supporting students include the following:

- Seeing the development of Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs) as a step that could play an important role in promoting student access and success. These programmes are normal degree programmes with an additional fourth year of study. Many universities in South Africa have developed these programmes in a few disciplines which are thought to be more difficult for students or in which the pass rates are poor. At the case study university for example, students taking this four-year option as opposed to the normal three-year degree, seem to do better in their studies than those in the mainstream. There is the realisation that academic development-oriented initiatives cannot be confined to the entry level alone, but should affect the entire undergraduate process. It is acknowledged that academic development has an important role to play in the promotion of quality teaching, curriculum and materials development at all levels of higher education.

- Acknowledging that while curriculum development is the responsibility of all academic staff members, a small professional core of specialists is needed to guide and co-ordinate academic development work at institutions.

- Realising that academic development should be provided for in the new government's funding mechanism, funding should be earmarked and made available for the development of innovative approaches and programmes (NCHE 1996: 8-9).

Much has been done in terms of observing and implementing policy regarding these stipulations, as well as going far beyond these expectations in selected cases. Surprisingly and of concern, is the fact that still no single university in South Africa, inclusive of those that admit only the cream of the crop, can safely deny students' unpreparedness, high dropout rates, poor throughput, low success rates despite innumerable academic support structures in place, as among some of the challenges that confront the country's higher education. At a glance however, one observes a fragmented approach to student academic support. For example, extended curriculum programmes which have been in existence for three decades are known to be a

South African higher education intervention of great value (CHE 2013: 70) and yet some institutions choose what type of extended curriculum to implement and in which programmes, while others have taken full advantage of these programmes for increasing access and foundation support. Many institutions still perceive extended curriculum programmes as optional and secondary and have not necessarily implemented the curriculum in all programmes where success and throughput rates are persistently low.

Even though various types of support are offered by institutions in compliance with the reality that the need for additional support is no longer a contested terrain, the following questions however arise:

- Do first-time entering students regard themselves as under-prepared?
- What kind of support will address the problems of the under-prepared students?
- How long will the higher education sector grapple with the issue of support?
- Is our approach to support dealing with the cause of the problems or the symptoms?
- Are our programmes for support robust enough or should attention be paid to the design and nature of these programmes?
- How can the school sector be brought on board, since most problems of under-preparedness emanate from schools?

Bitzer (2009: 240-241), in his study of "Student academic and social integration in first-year groups: a holistic perspective" concurs with national policy that most students in South Africa arrive at universities with some or other backlog that requires academic support. This author further argues that it is imperative to determine the level of students' skills and to overcome academic backlogs to ensure success in their first-year studies, rather than for academic staff to make wrong assumptions about the needs and shortfalls of these students – something that has proved to be devastating to students. This research investigation, which requires students' to diagnose their preparedness, complies with the assumptions of (Bitzer 2009; Sarrico and Rosa 2014:168), that instead of academics basing their support on their own assumptions regarding students' preparedness, they should take heed of students' own perceptions, opinions and expectations.

The case study university like other South African universities has put in place several strategies for the improvement of student retention. These include, but are not limited to an extended curriculum; supplemental instruction; student counselling; tutorials in selected programmes and student peer mentoring. Nonetheless, the problems of high attrition and poor completion rates still persist in certain degree courses offered by the institution. In an attempt to address these problems and to advance one of its strategic foci namely, building the learning foundation in order to make the university fit for its purpose, it embarked on a project on student preparedness. Among other things, it aimed to address the probability that the institution as a University of Technology, would (unlike traditional universities) enrol a higher proportion of students without a good university exemption pass record and therefore,who need to be supported academically to succeed in their studies (Strategic Transformation of Educational Programmes and Structures (STEPS) Synthesis Document 2010: 4).

METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to discuss student preparedness at a University of Technology in South Africa and to analyse how first-year students perceive their readiness for tertiary studies. The objective of the study was to establish the perceptions of the students regarding their overall readiness in the requisite communication skills in English basic computer and numeracy skills for success in their university studies. This research was part of a project on student preparedness undertaken by the case university to improve students' academic studies.

Design and Sample

This study adopted a multi-pronged research approach by utilising both qualitative and quantitative designs. The procedure is in accordance with the execution of scientific studies in higher education. In terms of the qualitative approach, a literature survey on student preparedness was conducted, in order to provide the theoretical foundation for the study. Specifically, the literature review led to the conceptualisation of student preparedness and identification of various issues related to the under-preparedness among

first-year students in higher education globally. Quantitative data on student perceptions of readiness for university studies were collected by conducting a questionnaire survey of 1500 first-year students in the four faculties namely: Humanities; Engineering and Information Technology (IT); Health and Environmental Sciences; and Management Sciences.

The Survey Tool

The questionnaire was designed by experts in higher education and the items comprised questions relating to student biographic information and preparedness, with specific reference to the following selected aspects:
- Influences on choice of study
- Study support
- Orientation and social integration
- Confidence communicating in English as a medium of instruction
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Numeracy (Basic arithmetic operations)

Population and Sampling

Since all first-time entering, undergraduate students must attend and pass at least the first semester of the Academic Literacy Program (ALP) – the English language proficiency programme, they were the ideal target population for this survey. More than 2000 first year students registered at the University at the beginning of 2011. Questionnaires were distributed in Academic Language Proficiency (ALP) classes to a simple randomly selected sample of 1500 students.

Response Rate and Data Analysis

Of the 1500 questionnaires sent out, 820 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 53 percent. The data were then captured into a Microsoft Excel (MS) spread sheet, with 820 rows (number of respondents) and 30 columns (questionnaire items). Having imported this sheet to STATISTICA, frequency tables and appropriate cross-tables/relationships were extracted, examined and reported. Below, are a few technical issues relating to the analysis of the data.

- Missing values per variable were accounted for, and excluded where appropriate. Interpolation was done since too many degrees of freedom would have to be dropped in the statistical tests.
- The scale of 2 or 3 or 4 ratings were kept in text form for ease of interpretation. Although ranked by up to four sequential levels, it is not statistically valid to calculate means and compare these across factors, such as gender and other variables. The data scale is too narrow, and non-normal;thus, parametric tests would not apply. Means would be inappropriate and although special non-parametric tests on modes or medians may be required, even the latter do not lend themselves to this survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results are presented in frequency tables and graphs for each question wherein counts and percentages are shown. The "Count" is the frequency or number of respondents who selected the particular variable, whereas the "percentage", in this case, is calculated as a proportion of the total number of respondents.

Table 1: Grade 12 performance of previous school leavers

Rating	Count	Percentage
Very good	246	30
Good	436	53.2
Fair	103	12.6
Poor	29	3.5
Missing	6	0.7
Total	820	100

Although 86 percent (see Table 1) of the students indicated that they came from schools that performed well, their deduction may not quite match the annual examinations analyses of the South African Department of Basic Education.

Table 2: Choice of programme

Rating	Count	Percentage
Yes	574	70
No	213	26
Missing	33	4
Total	820	100

Although one could say that 70 percent of the students are in their programme of choice

(Table 2), more than a quarter, 26 percent are not! Whilst one may be tempted to regard 26 percent as too high, it is important to point out that programmes in demand may not have the capacity to take in more students. Secondly, sometimes students either have unrealistic expectations or their school subjects do not match admission requirements. Table 3 shows the different variables (influencing factors) and the choices the respondents made.

Table 3: Factors influencing choice of university

Factor	Count	Percentage
1st choice full	116	14.2
Other (nobody specified)	62	7.6
Not qualify for 1st choice	66	8.0
No own idea: Friends influenced	17	2.1
No own ideas: Parents influenced	12	1.5
Had own ideas: Parents influenced	20	2.4
Had own ideas: Friends influenced	6	0.7
Missing	521	63.5
Total	820	100

In previous first-year surveys, as well as one undertaken in 2012 (CUT 2013) at the University, the overwhelming response to a question almost similar to the one above, namely "Where did you hear about the University?" was family and friends. In this case only 7 percent indicated that their choice of programme was influenced by the same group. The same percentage chose "Other" for a response. This answer could mean counselling, national brochures, websites and radio to mention only a few media. Although evidence points to students' dependence on the same group, i.e. family and friends for information regarding the institution and study programmes, the onus is not only on the student to find out as much as possible about the chosen programme of study before enrolling, but equally on the institution to provide this information in order to align students' expectations and needs with university offerings (Bitzer 2009: 241; Sarrico and Rosa 2014:168).

Generic Skills: Study, Essay Writing, Information Searching and Time Management

Table 4 shows that about a quarter of the respondents think that their study skills, essay writing, information searching and time management are on par, and that they do not need help are unrealistic. Other studies on student pre-

paredness and proposals for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa (CHE 2013), as well as the performance in assessment outcomes at the case university do not necessarily confirm this.

Table 4: Generic skills

Study skills	Count (out of 820)	Percentage
No support	155	18.9
Very little support	234	28.5
Great support	404	49.3
Missing	27	3.3
Essay Writing	**Count**	**Percentage**
support	375	45.7
Very little support	257	31.4
No support	169	20.6
Missing	19	2.3
Information Searching	**Count**	**Percentage**
Great support	362	44.1
Very little support	245	29.9
No support	196	23.9
Missing	17	2.1
Time Management	**Count**	**Percentage**
Great support	400	48.8
Very little support	215	26.2
No support	187	22.8
Missing	18	2.2

Support: Examination and Orientation

Thirty-five percent of the 820 respondents (see Table 5) indicated that they did not attend the orientation programme, and a similar proportion of all first-year students at the university were also not there. These results imply that a large cohort of our first time entering students'

Table 5: Examination support and orientation

Examination	Count (out of 820)	Percentage
Great support	467	56.9
Very little support	185	22.6
No support	152	18.5
Missing	16	2.0
Orientation	**Count**	**Percentage**
Did not attend	289	35.3
Not helpful	82	10.0
Not to extent wanted	111	13.5
Adequate	235	28.7
Beyond expectation	97	11.8
Missing	6	0.7

intake missed orientation. It remains to be investigated by the institution whether there was poor communication of information to the students or whether students perceived orientation as "not necessary", or whether there were logistical obstacles, or other reasons. These hiccups should then be addressed to prevent the recurrence of non-attendance. On the other hand, one could argue that university students as adult learners who enrol voluntarily should see the need to take the initiative and seek support in its various forms, rather than wait to be fed information.

Table 6: Usefulness of orientation

Response	Count	Percentage
Did not attend	289	35.2
Not helpful	51	6.2
Not to extent wanted	100	12.2
Adequate	242	29.5
Beyond expectation	130	15.9
Missing	8	1.0
Total	820	100

In Table 6, about 40 percent of the respondents were well satisfied with the way the orientation programme helped direct them in resolving personal problems and in obtaining relevant information. What is disconcerting is to see how unpopular orientation is to first time entering students. Over 35 percent did not attend (Table 6), who, in the SA context are also thought to have limited levels of preparedness from the school sector. Orientation is regarded as crucial for among other reasons, the familiarisation of new students with the university environment, the establishment of relationships with as many staff members on campus as possible, the transition from school to university, exposure to new methods of learning-to-learn, and the provision of appropriate information about courses before commencement of study.

With regard to communication skills, the study interestingly points to a high level of students' perception of their abilities in different areas of performance in English. For instance, 83 percent are very confident about their ability to write in English; 79 percent are satisfied with their ability to participate in group discussions in English; 74 percent perceive themselves as competent in asking questions in English in class; while only 62 percent expressed a high level of confidence in using English in oral pre-

Table 7: Communication skills

Use of English in Class	Count	Percentage
Very confident	282	34.4
Moderately confident	329	40.1
Slightly confident	157	19.1
Not confident	45	5.5
Missing	7	0.9

Use of English in Group Discussion	Count	Percentage
Very confident	340	41.5
Moderately confident	309	37.7
Slightly confident	140	17.1
Not confident	23	2.8
Missing	8	1.0

Writing English Paragraph	Count	Percentage
Very confident	381	46.5
Moderately confident	307	37.4
Slightly confident	107	13
Not confident	18	2.2
Missing	7	0.9

English in Oral Presentation	Count	Percentage
Very confident	207	25.2
Moderately confident	304	37.1
Slightly confident	223	27.2
Not confident	75	9.1
Missing	11	1.3

sentations (Table 7). At least two speculations are possible from these results. One is that writing gives one more time to construct one's sentences. The other speculation is that groups of friends are less critical of one another. Orey (2015) argues that a more nuanced understanding of communication gives learners a solid foundation upon which to build strong skills, confidence and ultimately success in their studies. It should be noted however, that even though these results show high perception levels by the respondents; this is contrary to concerns in the literature, as well as to the performance in assessment outcomes at the case university. Incompetence in English academic proficiency is documented as one of the main factors militating against academic performance of students from a non-English-speaking background (Simpson and van Reyneveld 2010; CHE 2013:58). Webb (2002) assert that each academic area is a science with arduous linguistic demands on students who are second-language speakers of the medium of instruction in HE institutions. Furthermore, literature on the academic needs of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds in higher education (HE) points to the

need for HE to establish wide-ranging institutional support services to guarantee that such students reach their full academic   potential (Napier and Makura 2013; Bretag et al. 2002:2).

Table 8: Computer skills

Google Use	Count (out of 820)	Percentage
Very good	349	42.6
Good	314	38.3
Fair	145	17.7
Missing	12	1.4
Cell Phone Use	Count	Percentage
Poor	52	6.3
Fair	99	12.1
Good	240	29.3
Very good	420	51.2
Missing	9	1.1
E-mail Use	Count	Percentage
Very good	292	35.6
Good	241	29.4
Fair	166	20.3
Poor	111	13.5
Missing	10	1.2
Microsoft Word Use	Count	Percentage
Very good	376	45.9
Good	274	33.4
Fair	128	15.6
Poor	36	4.4
Missing	6	0.7
Microsoft Excel Use	Percentage	Percentage
Poor	130	15.9
Fair	260	31.7
Good	237	28.9
Very good	184	22.4
Missing	9	1.1

With reference to electronic communication, it is no surprise that the students feel highly competent in using Google and cell phones but less so with E-mail (Table 8). This is confirmed by (Baijnath and Ryan 2014) who argue that the greatest challenge is to trust that learners are able to disseminate information using social media and link it with their formal learning.

The high levels of confidence in using MS Word is however gratifying, since students in all programmes need word-processing skills for studies and afterwards. One could sift the first-year students and arrange MSWord classes for those who need it. On the other hand, experience has shown that when people say they can "do advanced Excel", their ability is nowhere near "advanced". Flexible delivery, such as the use of technology could also help students optimise their individual learning patterns and styles. "Increased student access requires attention to procedures for admission and selection. The provision of flexible entry points to first degree/diploma programmes that take into account the levels of preparedness of entering students is a crucial element in such rethinking" (NCHE 1996:8). This is also consistent with the proposals for a flexible curriculum structure by the Council on Higher Education(CHE 2013).

Numeracy Skills

In the four elementary numeracy skills tested and placed in order of achievement (Table 9), the percentage and average calculations were mastered by more than three-quarters of the respondents, whilst barely half can work out an average. Furthermore, just thinking through a few steps, logically and for an everyday transaction appeared to be difficult for more than half these students. Whilst much seems to be done about literacy in the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) (Table 7), Table 9 shows a need for intensified efforts to improve numeracy among the respondents. This observation is in line with long standing arguments by (Venkat et al. 2012) and other critiques that mathematics performance at all phases of schooling in SA continues to be in a state of crisis.

Table 9: Numeracy skills

Calculating %	Count	Percentage
Correct calculation	676	82.4
Incorrect calculation	120	14.7
Missing	24	2.9
Convert a Fraction	Count	Percentage
Correct fraction	621	75.7
Incorrect fraction	167	20.4
Missing	32	3.9
Calculate an Average	Count	Percentage
Correct average	477	58.2
Incorrect average	299	36.4
Missing	44	5.4
New Price of Tank of Petrol	Count	Percentage
Correct price of tank of petrol	427	52.1
Incorrect price of tank of petrol	362	44.1
Missing	31	3.8

Relevance and Generalisability of the Findings and the Research

The survey offers confirmation of trends often reported in the literature, but also affords the case study university a tool to customise solutions to fit its suite of new programmes. The sample size represents a valid proportion of first-year students (820 respondents out of 2000 students) and the questions were specific enough for direct inferences to be drawn from the data. The findings are in line with the findings of several researches undertaken internationally and particularly in South Africa. These studies covered a range of topics, such as retention and non-completion in higher education (2003); student engagement (South African Student Engagement (SASSE) 2010); access and throughput in South African higher education: three case study universities (2010); a proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure (2013); as well as student satisfaction with Portuguese higher education institutions: the view of different types of students (2014).

In the retention and non-completion study of three South African universities, students' experiences regarding academic encounters in lectures, in residences, student centres and daily interactions with other students and staff ; factors influencing academic performance and current throughput rates, were investigated in order to highlight problems that students face at entry into higher education. The study further suggests ways in which the complexities may be tackled. It was found that approximately 20 percent of undergraduate students drop out due to poor preparation for university studies. Even those universities which attract the best students (30% with distinctions – a mark 75% and above) still suffer the same dropout rate, regardless of the manifold support programmes that are in place (CHE 2010:1-32; CHE 2013).

At one of these three universities up to 20 percent of students could be admitted to the institution without meeting the usual academic requirements (CHE 2010). However, all these students must complete a foundation year programme before being admitted into the mainstream and if they fail this programme they are de-registered (CHE 2010: 22). The third institution which also clarifies reasons for the low retention and throughput into three groups, name-

ly: student-related factors (including under-preparedness of students, students' prior learning, language skills, poor mathematics foundation); staff-related factors (skills in teaching and assessment practices - staff under-preparedness); and systemic factors (too little support for students for transition from school), also suffers low graduation rates and a high exclusion of students by the university due to failing their undergraduate studies.

The literature on student engagement also points to the fact that student success and achievement are linked to among other things, student's academic preparation and motivation (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; SASSE 2010; CHE 2010; Bolkan 2015) and students' ability to employ proactive learning strategies which include personal qualities and strategies for knowledge construction such as critical curiosity, meaning-making, strategic awareness and creativity (Crick and Goldspink 2014). Furthermore, Byrne et al. (2012) also argue that students are motivated by a combination of intrinsic and vocationally-oriented factors which make them feel well-prepared for higher education. In student engagement surveys undertaken at the case study university in 2010, 2011 and 2012 with cohorts of first-year students, the intra-institutional and inter-institutional comparisons of students' engagement results showed that compared with the other participating institutions, first-year students at the case study university show significantly lower levels of academic challenge than students from other participating institutions, but also lower levels of engagement than senior students at their university. Although this investigation focused on specified skills, other evidence has been gathered from various perception studies undertaken on students' opinions about low retention and high drop–out rates and why some students persist and stay in higher education institutions. Revelations from such inquiries include the fact that students persist when they are taught by well-qualified academics; when their lecturers are caring and provide assistance and support in the form of either individualised attention or through tutorials; when both students and lecturers spend a lot of time on learning and teaching tasks respectively during contact hours; and when lecturers closely guide students through learning, giving regular and informal feedback on performance (York, St John College of University of Leeds 2002: 3-7).

A consolation for the case university is that these problems, as well as growing student needs are not unique to it, but are global issues. In 2014, the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) drew a national strategy for access and student success to respond to the persisting problems of access, success, progression and throughput in the United Kingdom (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2014).

CONCLUSION

Although groups of students accessing higher education change with time, the problems of under-preparedness seem to persist. The question of how (well) students are prepared for higher education remains valid. Students accessing higher education appear to lack basic/generic competencies for dealing with their studies. Contrary to evidence from the literature and the first-year performance statistics at the institution, it is clear that the students do not see themselves as deficient in any of the skills that were researched, but rather perceived themselves as ready and well equipped with the requisite skills for success in their university studies. The fact that institutions present various ideas for academic assistance and have established several support programmes and initiatives for students, further contradicts the students' perceptions that they are adequately prepared. The persistence of student unpreparedness as a problem has challenged many universities in SA and globally to strengthen and enhance their already existing support structures by raising the admission requirements into university; extending their assistance and support to the school sector through in-service training of teachers; and boosting support for their lecturing staff; to mention only a few interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although problems of the under-preparedness of learners from the school sector continue to haunt the institutions of higher learning and continue to challenge them to increase their efforts towards academic support, students do not identify themselves with under-preparedness. Contrary to the performance outcomes at the case institution, findings from this study reflect overzealous students who feel they are ade-

quately prepared for tertiary education and who do not take support services provided by their institution, seriously. The following recommendations are made based on the results and findings from the literature. Firstly, the university should avoid admission of first-year students based on walk-ins but should develop a sound marketing strategy in order to intensify marketing and the recruitment of new students. Greater emphasis should be placed on what works, such as school visits and dissemination of information through different media. Furthermore, the case study university has to intensify its efforts in academic and career counselling and advising which are currently undertaken in a fragmentary manner. This will ensure that students access programmes of their choice and thus increase their chances of success in their studies.

The findings from the study as appraised by documented knowledge from the literature, point to an important aspect which should also receive more attention in further research on the challenges of teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Such an aspect is the perceptions of lecturers' regarding lecturer preparedness. Further empirical investigation into lecturer preparedness is overdue and should receive urgent strategic attention. Another area deserving further investigation is research into the perceptions of lecturers regarding students' preparedness and the need for the institution to establish which academic support programmes impact students' success.

Since the results also imply that a large cohort of our intake of first-time entering students missed orientation, it remains to be investigated by the institution whether there is poor communication of information to the students or whether students perceive orientation as unnecessary or whether there are logistical obstacles for non-attendance.

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