

Exploring first-year students' resources from the perspectives of student support structures: A world café study

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BHons Industrial Psychology

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COMMENTS

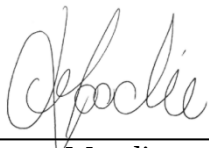
The following considerations should be taken in to account:

- The references referred to in this mini-dissertation, follow the format prescribed by the Publication Manual (6th ed.) of the American Psychological Association (APA). This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom) to use the APA style in all scientific documents as from January 1999.
- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article. The editorial style specified by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology is used, but the APA guidelines were followed in constructing the tables.

DECLARATION

I, Janette Moodie, hereby declare that this dissertation titled “**Exploring first-year students’ resources from the perspectives of student support structures: A world café study**” is my own work. The views and opinions expressed in this research study are my own and the relevant literature references are used as shown in the reference list.

Furthermore, I declare that the contents of this research study will not be submitted for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.



Janette Moodie

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I hereby confirm that the Master's dissertation by Ms Janette Moodie was edited and groomed to the best of my ability. This included recommendations to improve the language and logical structure, guide the line of argument as well as to enhance the presentation.

Rev Claude Vosloo
Language and knowledge practitioner and consultant

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<i>Don't think outside the box, reinvent the box</i>
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SUMMARY

Title:

Exploring first-year students' resources from the perspectives of student support structures: A world café study

Keywords:

First-year students, student resources, student support structures, Higher Education Institution

First-year students are confronted with various demands during their transition from secondary to tertiary education. Other factors also contribute to students' stress, especially if they do not know how to deal with it. Often too much stress leads to students dropping-out of university prematurely, affecting both the individual and university negatively. However, if both support structures and students themselves are able to identify what resources first-year students need or when they need additional support, they could manage it better.

The focus of the present study was to explore the perceptions that student support structures within a Higher Education Institution have of first-year students' existing resources and those necessary to deal with their demands. A qualitative research approach was followed. Data was collected by means of the World café method where participants ($N = 36$) were the Dean of Students, the Student Representative Council, the Centre for Student Guidance and Development, House Committee members and hostel parents. The data was transcribed verbatim and coded by an objective coder with the use of a co-coder.

The findings of this study identified three major themes, including 1) resources that are available to students; 2) resources that students need; and 3) limitations regarding existing resources and suggestions of how resources can be better utilised. For each theme, there were different sub-themes. With regards to the first theme, the resources available to students were discussed in terms of academic resources, physical resources, emotional resources, financial resources, social resources and spiritual resources. With regards to the second theme, three main sub-themes were identified as resources that students need, including academic resources, physical resources and emotional resources. Finally, limitations regarding existing resources and suggestions of how resources can be better utilised were also identified in the third theme. Limitations included ignorance of resources, lack of interaction or communication between

support services, overloading students with information in the induction and orientation programme, poor marketing of resources, fragmentation in resources, accessibility of resources, and intra-personal restrictions. Suggestions included an online information platform, central information desk, and marketing of services.

After conclusions for the study were drawn, recommendations were made for universities and students, and for future research.

OPSOMMING

Titel:

Verken eerstejaarstudente hulpbronne vanaf die perspektiewe van studente-ondersteuning strukture: 'n wêreld kafee studie

Sleutelwoorde:

Eerstejaarstudente, student hulpbronne, studente-ondersteuning strukture, Hoëronderwysinstelling

Eerstejaarstudente word met verskeie eise tydens hul oorgang van sekondêr tot tersiêre onderwys gekonfronteer. Ander faktore dra ook by tot die stres wat student ervaar, veral as hulle nie weet hoe om dit te hanteer nie. Dikwels lei te veel stres tot die vroegtydige uit-val uit universiteit uit, wat beide die individu en universiteit negatief beïnvloed. Indien beide ondersteuningstrukture en studente self kan identifiseer watter hulpbronne eerstejaarstudente nodig het of wanneer hulle addisionele ondersteuning nodig het, kan hulle dit beter te bestuur.

Die fokus van die huidige studie was dus om vas te stel waaruit die studente se huidige hulpbronne bestaan en wat hulle nodig het om hul eise te oorkom vanaf die perspektiewe van studente-ondersteuning strukture. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering is gevolg. Data is ingesamel deur middel van die Wêreld kafee metode waar deelnemers ($N = 36$) bestaan het uit die Studentedekaan, die Studenteraad, die Sentrum vir Studentevoorligting en opleiding en ontwikkeling, huiskomitee lede en koshuis ouers. Die data is verbatim getranskribeer en gekodeer deur 'n objektiewe kodeerder met die gebruik van 'n mede-kodeerder.

Die bevindinge van hierdie studie het drie groot temas geïdentifiseer, insluitend 1) hulpbronne wat beskikbaar is vir studente; 2) hulpbronne wat studente nodig het; en 3) beperkings ten opsigte van bestaande hulpbronne en voorstelle oor hoe hulpbronne beter aangewend kan word. Vir elke tema, was daar verskillende sub-temas. Met betrekking tot die eerste tema, is die beskikking van studente hulpbronne in terme van akademiese hulpbronne, fisiese hulpbronne, emosionele hulpbronne, finansiële hulpbronne, maatskaplike hulpbronne en geestelike hulpbronne bespreek. Met betrekking tot die tweede tema is drie hoof sub-temas geïdentifiseer as hulpbronne wat studente nodig het, insluitend akademiese hulpbronne, fisiese hulpbronne en emosionele hulpbronne. Ten slotte, die derde tema wat geïdentifiseer is sluit in bestaande

hulpbronne en voorstelle van hoe hulpbronne beter aangewend kan word met betrekking tot onkunde van hulpbronne, 'n gebrek aan interaksie of kommunikasie tussen ondersteuningsdienste, oorlaai studente met inligting in die induksie en oriënteringsprogram, swak bemarking van hulpbronne, fragmentasie in hulpbronne, toeganklikheid van hulpbronne, en interpersoonlike beperkinge. Deelnemers het voorstelle gemaak in terme van 'n aanlyn-inligting platform, sentrale inligtingstoonbank en bemarking van dienste.

Nadat die gevolgtrekkings van die studie opgestel is, is aanbevelings gemaak vir universiteite en studente wat toegepas kan word, en ondersoek kan word vir toekomstige navorsing.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The focus of the present study was to explore the perceptions that student support structures within a Higher Education Institution have of first-year students' existing resources and those resources necessary to deal with their demands. Identifying these resources could promote students' wellbeing and success. In order to achieve this objective, a qualitative research design was used.

This chapter outlines the problem statement and provides an overview of literature on student resources. This is followed by a discussion of the research objectives, which consist of the general and specific objectives. Thereafter the research method is discussed, and finally, a layout is given of the chapters.

Problem statement

Higher education is becoming increasingly important for individuals after they matriculate from school (McQuaid, 2005). When students have obtained a degree from a Higher Education Institution (hereafter abbreviated as HEI), this increases their opportunity for employment, and thus motivating even more young adults to enrol at a HEI (Khanna, Jacob & Yadav, 2014). As a result, universities experience high volumes of newly enrolled students, often more numbers than the support structures are capable of managing (Tinto, 1999, 2004). The Centre for Higher Education Transformation (hereafter: CHET) indicates that due to the increased numbers, student drop-out rates are higher than what is accepted according to the national norm (CHET, 2014). Typically, universities, however, aspire for most of their students to graduate, since student retention provides certain gains: it enhances financial wellbeing, build a sound public reputation, and increases the university's effectiveness (Simpson, 2005; Tinto, 1999). Students however enrol for tertiary education with the aspiration of acquiring a degree, and once obtained is left with a sense of accomplishment and self-actualisation. Both these characteristics contribute to personal wellbeing (Ivtzan, Gardner, Bernard, Sekhon & Hart, 2013). For these reasons universities give more credence to retain students (Tinto, 2012).

Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Yuan and Harrel (2013) found that a mere 48% of American students overall who enrolled for a four-year degree, completed their course within six years. Even more

concerning is that only 75% of first-year students continue with their degree after their first year at university (Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Yuan & Harrel, 2013). High drop-out rates have also been reported in various other countries such as Mexico and Australia (Knaul, 2001; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Universities across South Africa also indicate poor graduation rates, where as much as 30% of students drop out within the first year of enrolment (CHET, 2014).

According to Higher Education of South Africa (hereafter: HESA) (2014), drop-out rates differ significantly between diverse student demographics, indicating factors such as culture or background that may impact student's success rates. Diversity could also have an impact on student dropout and can include backgrounds, education levels, culture, and abilities (Tinto, 1975). HESA (2014) reported that 25% of the students who enrol for an undergraduate degree, drop out for various reasons such as financial crises, personal considerations, and poor academic performance. The ability of the university to identify those students who are at risk of dropping out would, therefore, play an important role in retaining students and addressing their wellbeing. Strydom, Mentz and Kug (2010) argue that there is a dire need for South African HEIs to investigate ways of retaining more students and increase graduation rates within their particular institutions.

At the outset of enrolling for a course at a HEI, first-year students often experience high aspirations and a sense of purpose when entering university (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010). However, these feelings are often accompanied by anxiety, fear, and uncertainty since the first year of university can be highly stressful (Christopher, Mugambi, Bhawuk, Anbe, Reid & Petocz, 2012). These experiences are influenced by both internal and external inputs, which the present study will refer to as demands and resources.

An overview of literature indicates that with a newfound independence, first-year students are faced with various demands (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). These demands can include the following: financial insecurity, time-management, mismanaged priorities, previous experiences and exposure, level of education, workload, independent living, perceived ability/competency, attitude toward the university, the ability to self-regulate, workload, and independent living (Darling, McWey, Howard & Olmstead, 2007; El Ansari & Stock, 2010; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Other factors that affect students' success include the following student related categories: wellbeing, adaptation, transitioning, motivation, expectations, and needs (Barkoukis, Taylor, Chanal & Ntoumanis, 2014; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Kahu, 2013; Kinash, Brand,

Mathew & Kordyban, 2013). Students' ability to cope with the demands also seem to impact on first-years' performance (McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000). It is evident that first-year students are exposed to various psychological, physiological, social and academic changes, which influence the experience of their first year at university (Darling, McWey, Howard & Olmstead, 2007).

The above-mentioned types of stressors are often seen to decrease psychological wellness of first-year students, which leads to lower levels of performance, un-wellbeing and student dropout (Cross, 2004; Kitzrow, 2003; Tinto, 2012). When first-year students experience fewer demands in their lives, they are more able to adapt and perform at university level (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Therefore, it is important to know exactly which resources first-year students require to deal with the various demands that will equip them to perform optimally at university. This will ultimately enhance their wellbeing and lead to success in their studies. A better understanding of what resources first-year students require will help HEIs to manage and provide these resources more effectively.

Resources can be seen as an important factor helping first-year students deal better with demands. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007) resources are those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are either/or: (1) functional in achieving work goals; (2) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. Britto and Rush (2013) describe resources as an action, strategy, and/or material that a person uses to operate effectively, and have been recorded as a sense of purpose, resourcefulness, academic preparedness and development, and of being connected to other students (Adam, Hartigan & Brown, 2010). Further resources entail social integration, invested time in studying, fitting in the academic environment, and personal characteristics (Torenbeek, Jansen & Hofman, 2010).

Tinto (1975, 1993) points out that it is of paramount importance to provide students with the necessary psychological and physical support. This should compensate for shortcomings that affect students' wellbeing and success, and hamper their ability to cope with the various demands, and eventually to graduate successfully from university. Studies conducted on adolescents provided evidence that students have developed the need to manage their demands more effectively. This indicates a natural tendency for individuals to use resources in order to cope with taxing situations which resonates with the work of Keeley and Fox (2009), who found a link between personal wellbeing and academic performance. Students therefore do not only struggle

with personal issues but also with psychological, physical and other external matters. In the process, however, students use certain resources to cope with demands.

Research also indicated that only a limited number of models focus on the above-mentioned needs (Conley, Travers & Bryant, 2013). Scholars utilise designs such as Tinto's model of student attrition, the UniStart Program and the P.R.A.C. Framework, even though these models were not designed specifically to identify particular resources that students need. Researchers such as Astin (1993), Bean (1980), Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2005), Spady (1970), and Tinto (1975, 1993) provide insight into reasons why students either thrive or fail at university level. However, these scholars do not present a clear framework outlining the specific resources that help students deal with the demands in order to be well and successful. Even though the literature reveals a need that students should have such resources, it does not clarify the nature of these resources, particularly within the South African context.

It should be remembered that the above-mentioned resources are more than individuals' own characteristics or qualities that help them deal with demands. Resources also extend to the external environment. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) indicate that resources can be found at various levels in an environment: structural, task-related, interpersonal or social. These categories are based on research conducted in an organisational context, which cannot necessarily be generalised to the environment of the first-year student.

Although individual resources have been identified, there seems to be a lack of a conceptual framework to categorise various resources that first-year students need and use. Instead, factors that may impact the retention/success of students are researched in isolation. These studies, however, do indicate an interest in exploring factors that affect students' performance such as the interrelation between resources and demands. This study will explore what resources is needed by first-year students to deal with the demands that will lead to positive outcomes such as higher retention rates and lower drop-out rates. According to Tinto (2012), by identifying causes of student drop-out, the university can create solid policies that is specifically aimed at providing the necessary resources to retain students more effectively. By exploring and identifying resources that students need, or reasons why they do not make use of the resources, the university also is in a better position to manage students' wellbeing and success, and deliver graduates who are capable of dealing with the world of work.

The above mentioned resonates with research conducted on demands and resources in the workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). It has been found that individuals' working environment and their personal characteristics do have a significant impact on their performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Optimal performance is brought about by various factors that stimulate the psychological-, physiological-, and social wellbeing of the individual (Robertson, & Cooper, 2011). By enjoying sufficient resources, individuals are equipped better to deal with life's demands, and empowered to perform optimally in their career (Rothmann, 2014). The Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, Hobfoll, 2001) is one of the most influential theories explaining the significant role of resources. Hobfoll (2001) defines resources as those aspects that help individuals cope with demands, which are those stressors that drain resources.

Resources are a clear factor that stimulates students' engagement (Newswander & Borrego, 2009). This notion indicates that the optimisation of student resources would also have a positive effect on the field of industrial psychology since the emerging workforce would be exposed to a well-balanced environment from an early onset, assuming that resources would be provided and used effectively at university level. According to Schreuder and Coetzee (2011), a person's career does not necessarily start after graduating, but rather entails the current activities in which the individual is involved with. It can therefore be presumed that a student's career actually starts at university. Industrial psychologists have the duty to contribute to the broader community and promote the sustainability of the working environment (Van Vuuren, 2010). Practically, it would mean that this study therefore adds to the field of Industrial Psychology by reaching out and contributing to the emerging workforce. This means that they do not only research the identified factors that affect optimal performance within the existing work environment; their research also focuses on exponents of the emerging workforce.

The conception above can be extended to students in the sense that this group are considered part of an emerging workforce. This notion supports the argument that it is crucial for industrial psychologists to explore this study field. This would help them be proactive in promoting the wellbeing and success of first-year students and eventually employees that will enter the workplace. The amount of research conducted on job resources underlines the importance that organisations need to understand what individuals need to perform optimally in their career (Bakker, Van Veldhoven & Xanthopoulou, 2010; Nahrgang, Morgeson & Hofmann, 2011).

To conceptualise the resources, the present study related strongly to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which advocates the importance of employee wellbeing (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This model served as the main conceptual framework on which the student-resources framework for this study was based. According to this theory, wellbeing is regulated by job demands and job resources. These job-related aspects correlate significantly with burnout and engagement, and eventually predict certain organisational outcomes such as presenteeism, turnover intention, productivity, performance, as well as proneness to accidents and injuries (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001).

The JD-R model has been researched extensively, with sufficient evidence of its relevance for the work environment. The research conducted within the work context cannot be applied to the environment of the student. The reason is that it is unclear whether resources will be similar or differ from those a working individual need. The research that involved working individuals, however, does indicate the importance of regulating individuals' wellbeing and the various corresponding factors (Demerouti, et al., 2001).

Even though the JD-R model has been used to gather data from students, it was concluded that students indeed experience resources/demands that differ from those of an employed individual (McKenzie, & Schweitzer, 2001). Resources have been described as “tools” individuals use to interact with their environment (North-West University, 2014). Correspondingly, HEIs tend to refer to these same concepts as “tools” that students can use to “fill their toolbox” (North-West University, 2014). An overview of various international and national webpages of HEIs indicates similar concepts, which describe the following resources: academic guidelines, career opportunities, financial support, social networks, recreational activities, housing, public services, health services, and safety precautions (Brown University, 2014; Kent State University, 2014; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014; University of Pretoria, 2014). Reyes (2007) reports Latin-Mexican students' opinion that drop-out rates can decrease significantly if focus should be placed on factors such as social support, home environment, academic support, and a true interest in the field of study. Furthermore, certain resources were identified that have the strongest impact on academic performance. These are: previous academic performance, integration into the university, self-efficacy, and employment responsibilities (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001).

Most of the studies mentioned above were conducted in varying geographical environments, within different fields of interest, and with diverse population groups. This makes it difficult to

generalise and apply the results within the South African context. However, the development of these ideas underlines the importance of researching first-year student resources. Nicholson (2011) points out that it is especially important that HEIs become aware of the various resources that students use, in order to reach the desirable outcomes of both the student and the institution.

Extensive research has been done on students in South African HEIs. The majority of these studies measure and examine possible factors to determine its effect on specific outcomes (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Van Zyl, 2013; Visser, Leteka, Breier & Cosser, 2015). However, it is also important to identify possible demands and resources that first-year students experience, particularly since the JD-R model is increasingly used to predict student outcomes. The present study aims to contribute towards developing a framework for the resources part of the JD-R model, as applied to students.

Furthermore, it is noticeable that current research explores resources mostly from the perception of students themselves. Although this approach is beneficial and important, there is a risk that students do not necessarily understand the context of the resources they need, or can utilise, or its impact within the environment of HEIs. In contrast, student support structures interact with candidates from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and situations on a daily basis. Therefore, these structures can provide a diverse and objective overview of what first-year student resources would consist of. In light of this fact, the present research worked towards an objective understanding of the resources that first-year students can use and need by collecting data from student support structures. Student support structures includes any individuals occupying a position higher than that of a first-year student, who form part of a formal structure of the university. This can also include students who form part of university structures, such as the Student Representative Council, House Committees etc. Participants from the following structures were invited to participate in this study: Dean of student affairs, members of the Student Representative Council, Student Support Services, House Committee members, and Hostel parents.

These structures are very important in an investigation of resources that first-year students need, can use, or reasons why they do not use resources. The reason is that these individuals often have first-hand experience of managing and dealing with the situation of first-year students. Though the Student Representative Council and House Committee member groups consist of third/fourth year students, these structures deal with first-year students in a supportive manner on a daily basis and would therefore contribute to this study in a meaningful manner.

As is evident from the information above, students utilise the resources to deal with the various demands in the HEI sphere since it can influence their wellbeing and success. This makes the various resources important topics for exploration. As was mentioned previously, South African HEIs annually allocate vast amounts to universities, only to forfeit at least 30% in throughput numbers due to student dropouts (CHET, 2014). HESA (2014) also emphasises that structures developed for successful outcomes are important for all universities, in order to promote equal education opportunities. The present study is, therefore, important since it will help provide information that could be used to develop a framework and construct a holistic model. These instruments will help researchers identify the primary resources necessary to assist first-year students, propose interventions and predict university outcomes.

The aim of the present study thus was to explore the types of resources that first-year students need and can utilise to deal with the demands and thereby promote wellbeing and success at a HEI. This study explores resources from the perspective of student support structures in order to obtain a unique and different perspective regarding the phenomena. The structures will make meaningful contributions to this study by sharing their experiences and observations from their interaction with first-year students on a daily basis. This study forms part of a larger project intending to develop a holistic framework that will be used to identify risk factors and resources required by students. The project will therefore extend its research methodologies, samples, and objectives with the aim of confirming and elaborating on current literature and the findings of this study. This will help implement specific interventions for positive student outcomes such as wellbeing and success. This study's focus was collecting data on student resources as viewed from the perspective of student support structures.

The following research questions can be formulated based on the problem statement above:

- According to literature, what are the resources that first-year students utilise and require to deal with their various demands and will promote wellbeing and success at a HEI?
- What are the resources that first-year students utilise and require, as viewed through the perspective of student support structures?
- From the perspective of support structures, why are first-year students not utilising available resources?
- How can the findings of this study be utilised to draw conclusions and make recommendations for future research?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives for the present study are divided into a general and specific objectives flowing from it.

General objective

The general objective of this research is to explore the various resources that first-year students utilise and require at a HEI.

Specific objectives

The general objective flows into the following specific objectives:

- To explore and identify from the literature resources that first-year students utilise and require to deal with their various demands and will promote wellbeing and success at a HEI.
- To explore the resources that first-year students utilise and require, as viewed through the perspective of student support structures.
- To explore reasons why first-year students are not utilizing available resources, from the perspective of support structures.
- To utilise the findings to draw conclusions and make recommendations for future research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design covers the following aspects of the present research: approach, strategy and method.

Research approach

The definition of a research design and approach refers to the plan or procedure that researchers follow to delineate the assumptions about a certain reality, which is done by collecting and analysing data (Creswell, 2013). Designing also implies the act of inventing/creating a product relevant to the individual, with the intention being that the outcome serves a specific purpose (Maxwell, 2012). The present study followed a qualitative research approach, which typically

provides in-depth insight into social phenomena in particular (Bitsch, 2005). Qualitative research furthermore help the researcher communicate with the participants in their own language and vernacular, which also provide the most authentic understanding of their reality (Matveev, 2012).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), a qualitative research approach uses an interpretive method. This means the researcher studies the situation as it would occur in a natural setting. In this regard, the researcher seeks to make sense of the reported data by attaching value to the information gathered from participants in a most natural setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1988). This arrangement of the data requires a flexible research design (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2011). Such flexibility also allowed the researcher to make changes to the design as the present study progressed. As a result, the most appropriate methodologies could be applied to the study, enabling the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions from interactions with the individual participants (De Vos et al., 2011; Matveev, 2002; Patton, 2005).

Research strategy

The research strategy will present the process followed in conducting this study.

The researcher's epistemological and ontological perspectives

To conduct a thorough qualitative research study it is important to decide on a research paradigm in line with one's belief of reality. The researcher employed constructivism as epistemological approach to the present study. Constructivists believe that there is no single reality; what is considered real is constructed through social interaction. In this regard, individuals could be viewed as experts in their own right who create a personal reality (Doucet, Letourneau & Stoppard, 2010; Tsai, 2008). The ontological approach for the present study is connected to relativism, which approaches reality as dynamic and personally constructed (Doucet et al., 2010; De Vos et al., 2011; Henning, 2004).

Consequently, the approach of this research and the interpretation of the participants' realities are based on constructivist and relativist beliefs. The researcher explored the meaning that student support structures use to construct their reality. This approach was based on the assumption that support structures have direct contact with the students. Therefore, they would have a comprehensive understanding of the resources which students require and use to deal with the various demands, in order to experience wellbeing and strive for success at a HEI. These structures

could also provide insight into students' responses to their problems and their actions to resolve them.

Methodological approach and strategy

The researcher's assumptions were based on an emic-etic approach:

- An *etic* approach focuses on universal assumptions of the problem at hand, or in other words, the point of view of an outsider who has no experience of the phenomena.
- The *emic* approach considers phenomena indigenous to the context of the study, or in other words, participants' personal experiences of the phenomena (Cheung, Van de Vijver & Leong, 2011).

In light of this two-strung approach in the present study, a literature review followed the observation of social interaction. By combining the emic-etic approaches the researcher was able to conclude this study by collecting the most suitable of data on resources that help first-year students' deal with the typical demands within a South African HEI context.

Research method

A World Café research method was used to collect data. During the World Café sessions, the researcher collected the data, after which it was analysed. Thereafter, a literature review was conducted to interpret the data and reach meaningful conclusions.

Literature review

A review of available literature was done on student-related topics such as success, wellbeing, adaption, persistence, retention, resources and similar concepts. The aim was to extract relevant themes for the topic under investigation. The research focused on models and theoretical frameworks (excluding the JD-R model), that could support the development of a student resource framework, informed by the conservation-of-resources theory. The researcher identified patterns of resources for first-year students' as recorded in the literature and the emergence of these patterns within the South African context.

Recent and relevant articles were consulted through the following databases; Academic Search Premier; PsycInfo, APA PsycArticles; EbscoHost; Emerald; Proquest; SACat; SAePublications;

Science Direct; GoogleScholar; Google Books; Science Direct; ProQuest and Library services of the North-West University.

The main academic journals were used to conduct the literature review. These include: *Research in Higher Education*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, *Higher Education*, *Higher Education Research & Development*, *Journal of Advanced Academics*, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *Journal of College Student Development*, *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *Higher Education Review*, *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *South African Journal of Education*, *South African Journal of Psychology*, *Perspectives in Education*, and *South African Review of Education*.

Research setting

The researcher had to establish an appropriate research setting to ensure relevant and meaningful data were gathered. This meant gaining permission to enter the field of research before commencing data collection (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). The participants were the Dean of Students, the Student Representative Council and the Student Support Services, House Committee members and hostel parents. In order to use the World Café method, the researcher obtained permission from the HEI where the research was conducted. As a result, no participants were inconvenienced (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). The data collection took place in a comfortable room where special attention was paid to ventilation, lighting, comfortable chairs, refreshments, and elimination of disturbances (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). A relaxed environment helped the participants speak freely and comfortably, which meant they could present their views of reality as authentic as possible (Ivey, 1988; Matveev, 2012).

Whilst conducting the World Café sessions, the participants were put at ease, and the researcher explained the purpose and context of the study. Thereafter the issues of confidentiality and anonymity were clarified. In light of these requirements, no names or any other personal identifiable information were recorded. The researcher also obtained informed consent for the use of tape-recorders. Furthermore, it was emphasised that participation was voluntary and candidates could withdraw at any time without any repercussions. The ambiance, structuring and planning of

the World Café sessions were extremely important, where the researcher had to accommodate all participants in the process. The researcher thus scheduled the sessions in specific time slots, with invitations sent to the participants stipulating the time and venue. The invitations were sent per email and included a brief introduction to the research project.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Permission for data collection from the HEI was obtained beforehand from the Dean of Students, who thereby was identified as the gatekeeper (De Vos et al., 2011). The Dean of Students communicated the necessary arrangements to the various structures involved in the study. The researcher focused on building a sound relationship with the gatekeeper, as the focal person to organise the sessions and give feedback to the various participants.

Once permission was obtained the researcher could begin the data collection. The researcher fulfilled the role of facilitator explaining the World Café arrangements to the participants. Two observers were also present, who assisted with the flow of the process. The facilitator provided the participants with the research questions for the investigation and also voice-recorded the proceedings. The participants further expressed their thoughts on posters, which the researcher later analysed as an additional source of data.

Research participants and procedure (sampling)

Typical to a qualitative study, a non-probability, purposive, voluntary sample was taken from participants. In this regard, they were chosen non-randomly through a specific inclusion criterion. This ensured a voluntary and representative sample from various cultures/languages, genders, and faculties (Boehnke, Lietz, Schreier & Wilhelm, 2011). The participants were chosen based on their involvement with students and their ability to provide credible evidence with regard of the resources that students use to deal with demands at a HEI. Credible evidence implied that the participant is actively involved in first-year student activities and interacting with this group on a regular basis. This evidence was also enhanced by field notes taken during meetings/counselling sessions. The sample size depended on the willingness and accessibility of the participants and data were collected until data saturation occurred (Ray, 2012). Three World Café sessions were conducted. Participants ($N = 36$, 12 for each World Café) with the following participants: Dean of Students, hostel parents and members of the Student Representative Council and Student Support Services.

Before the research question was posed to the participants, the researcher obtained written consent from participants and discussed the matter of confidentiality, whilst explaining the use of voice recorders and the roles of the observers. The recorded data were sorted, transcribed verbatim, and then analysed, evaluated, and interpreted. Participants also were assured of the voice recordings' safekeeping and that only the researchers involved would have access to the records. Participants' biographical information was recorded, regarding ethnicity, gender, faculty, and their association with students. Throughout the process, attention was given to the rights of the participants about aspects such as privacy, anonymity, fair treatment and protection from discomfort and harm, as stipulated by the Health Profession Counsel of South Africa (2011).

Data-collection methods

A World Café approach was used to collect data. This is a qualitative data-collection method similar to a focus group but with distinct differences. The aim is to create a café-like environment, allowing larger groups of participants to speak freely about the research question as opposed to individual interviews, single case studies, or small focus groups (Fouché & Light, 2011). The purpose of a World Café is to construct the reality evoked by the question based on the collaborative ideas of the group. Participants rotate groups until each individual had the opportunity to share and gain ideas from the other participants (Schieffer, Isaacs & Gyllenpalm, 2004). Seven principles were followed to ensure the success of the World Café sessions (Homer, 2014):

1. The context of the World Café was established in order to clarify the goal and expectations of each session.
2. The correct ambiance was created. Unique to such a session is ensuring a café-like environment where data can be collected in a most natural setting. The participants had to feel safe and welcome.
3. It was important to ask the right question since this facilitates the flow of the conversation. Only one question was posed to the participants: *We want to learn more about how students experience their first year at university. Can you tell us about the different resources you*

perceive first-year students to have? We ask you to not only focus on structural factors at the university, but any resources that first-year students' use and need in their lives.

4. When participants feel that they are contributing to something meaningful they tend to increase their input. Therefore, their contribution and value of their inputs were emphasised.
5. It was important for members of groups to rotate. This ensured that ideas and perspectives were shared and linked between the participants.
6. The importance of active listening during the World Café sessions was emphasised, since it helped identify patterns and shared ideas. Participants were reminded not only to contribute themselves, but also reflect critically on what the other participants are saying.
7. Lastly, it was ensured that the patterns and insights gained during the World Café sessions were shared with the rest of the group.

During each session, three to five groups (each consisting of three to five participants) were placed at tables similar to those at a coffee shop (Fouché & Light, 2011). Each table was decorated with colourful tablecloths, large whiteboard drawing paper, pens, pencils, sticky notes, stickers, refreshments, and flowers. Background music was also used to create the ambiance, which encouraged a “living network”. This means the participants discussed a single research question freely as it would occur in reality, with the question used to spark authentic conversation (Hurley & Brown, 2009).

The participants were introduced to the World Café session, after which the research question followed. Specific communication techniques, suited to context of the World Café, were used to extract maximum verbal responses from the participants (Corey, 2012; Okun, 1992). The sessions consisted of three rounds in each World Café that lasted for approximately 15 minutes each, after which the groups at different tables rotated. Before each round, the researcher repeated the question. As the conversationalists interacted, collective knowledge developed about the topic and was shared at the end of each session (Brown, 2010).

After the World Café sessions, a literature review was conducted to ensure the trustworthiness and consistency of the gathered data (Bowen, 2009). The researcher utilised this review to collect data from existing literature, in order to compare the findings collected from the World Café sessions.

Recording of data

Data management and recording is of the utmost importance in a qualitative study. This ensures high-quality data that is regularly accessible to only the researcher (De Vos et al., 2011). Two methods were used to record the data:

- A voice-recording device was placed on each table to ensure the conversations are recorded clearly; thereafter the data were downloaded onto the researcher's laptop.
- The researcher instructed the participants to write down their thoughts on paper during the World Café sessions and to create posters depicting their findings.

These forms of data were captured electronically after each session and converted into PDF documents. The files were outlined clearly through a file management system, which avoided miscoding, mislabelling, miss-linking and mislaid documents (Struwig & Stead, 2010). The data were stored on the researcher's personal external hard drive and shared online with the supervisor. The external hard drive was kept in a locked drawer in the researchers' office at all times with the online storage space requiring unique login details and passwords, which ensures its safety.

Data analyses

Qualitative research generates vast amounts of data, which often requires extensive time to transcribe the interviews (Robson, 1993). In the present study, after listening to all the recordings once, the researcher transcribed it verbatim. Then the data were analysed independently by two coders. Thereafter, the themes were integrated by a third researcher. This process is called a thematic analysis, which entails the process of identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following six steps were followed during the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

- Familiarisation with the data;
- Coding,

- Searching for themes,
- Reviewing themes,
- Defining and naming themes, and
- Writing up the different themes and including supporting statements from participants for each theme.

The data were coded/grouped into understandable terms, which provided the necessary insight for report and feedback (Charmaz, 2006).

Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) explain that, when dealing with subjective information inherent to qualitative research, researchers often are confronted with their own subjectivity and personal convictions. In this regard, personal values, beliefs and attitudes often influence the interpretation of the data (Prosser, 2007). This was indeed the case in the present study, where the researcher often experienced an intrinsic connection to the stories told by the participants. The researcher therefore took precautions to counteract the inherent subjectivity involved in this type of research (Berg & Lune, 2004). When interpreting the data, the researcher kept a clear and peaceful mind by focusing on the voices of the participants only, avoiding interference of other conversations in the thought process. Factors such as reflexivity (Prosser, 2007), validity (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006), generalisability (Berg & Lune 2004), reliability (Prosser, 2007), and objectivity (De Vos et al., 2011), was also taken in to consideration in order to provide quality data.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity makes clear what the study aims to produce and discover (Prosser, 2007). This means that the researcher should be transparent about the purpose of the study and be fully aware of the content that the data are yielding. To ensure reflexivity took place, the researcher utilised visual aids during the phase of data collection and analysis, to confirm the purpose and aims of the study. Furthermore, the researcher on a regular basis discussed these latter mentioned aspects with the supervisor and other researchers.

Validity (or credibility of the researcher)

Validity implies the researcher's ability to produce quality data in instances where discrepancies were explored and developed, as the need arose (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The researcher thus beforehand acquired a thorough understanding of qualitative research methods, skills to conduct group processes and knowledge how to analyse qualitative data effectively. For these resources, the researcher attended a qualitative workshop, observed World Café sessions and had discussions with experienced researchers. This also meant getting familiarised with Atlas.ti's user manual and online.

Generalisability

Generalisability concerns to the type of data that is collected from the participants. This data should be such that it could be represented by other samples as well (Berg & Lune 2004). In the present study, the carefully chosen participants and finely crafted research question helped generalise the data. The reason is that these participants represent carefully selected groups who are familiar with students of diverse cultures, languages, demographic areas, ages, races, and genders (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Each of the participants were chosen because they provide support to first-year students on a regular basis and formed part of a formal university structure. Since a qualitative study is focused on a specific context, researchers should be careful when generalising the findings to other environments.

Reliability

In a qualitative study, reliability points to the dependability of the data that are collected (Prosser, 2007). Putting it simpler, the reader should be able to trust the findings and accept that this is what actually occurred. In the present study, the researcher gave a clear explication of personal thoughts and feelings about the research topic. This was accompanied by trust that the reader would find a sense of genuineness and openness from the attempt to report the findings in the way it occurred in reality.

In addition, the participants were selected to fit the context of the present study and the mentioned research question was tested in a pilot study to ensure the correct information was gathered. After the World Café sessions, the data were compared to existing literature on the topic. The aim was to confirm possible similarities between the existing data and report unique qualities that emerged. Methods were also employed to collect and analyse high-quality data and thus ensure the researcher reported on authentic reality. Finally, data were analysed by objective coders and a co-

coder making sure that no information was missed, misinterpreted, or contaminated by the researchers' own opinion (Prosser, 2007).

Objectivity/confirmability

Objectivity/confirmability of the data allow sufficient confidence that the findings of the study indeed provide a true reflection of the participants' experience. This requirement was aided by the type of data analyses employed in the present study (De Vos et al., 2011). For this purpose, the researcher included graphical representations of the posters made by the participants as well as verbatim quotes from voice recordings.

Reporting

Reporting on data takes on a scientific nature, where results are explained in a systematic and formal manner. Even though the researcher applied a typical qualitative format, this was separated clearly from the views of the participants as recorded during the Wold Café sessions. This means that a realistic view could be represented of the participants' experiences by reporting their own words, thoughts, and feelings, instead of assumptions made by the researcher (Michie, Fixsen, Grimshaw & Eccles, 2009). The descriptive nature of the present study, therefore, focuses on the views of the participants in a non-biased or intrusive manner. In other words, the researcher only reports on facts and not assumptions (Knapp & Daly, 2002). To ensure the researcher only reported the facts provided by the participants, own field notes were taken and a reflective diary kept to record the truest possible form of data (Henning, 2004).

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in a qualitative study focus on the sensitive nature of the topic, namely collecting data from participants, which may be considered as private information. Thus, the present study adhered to the guidelines for conducting ethical research, as discussed in more detail below. The researcher also paid attention to the various rights of the participants on privacy and anonymity, and gave preference to participants' protection. The following ethical directives were considered while conducting this study:

- *Accountability and competency*: These refer to researchers' responsibility to keep the proceedings ethically sound, including the safekeeping of data. Firstly, the researcher

confirmed her competence to conduct a research in the field of behavioural sciences. Secondly, clearance for conducting the study was obtained from the Ethical Board at North-West University. Thirdly, the gathered data were treated with the utmost confidentiality and were stored in a secure and/or password-protected location.

- *Voluntary participation*: Participants were allowed to partake in the study of their own volition and was offered the opportunity to withdraw whenever the need arose (Struwig & Stead, 2010).
- *Confidentiality*: Participants were assured that information they shared with the researcher would be treated fully confidentially and that data would only be published to advance the study and for no other reason (Struwig & Stead, 2010).
- *Anonymity*: Data gathered were labelled anonymously, which further ensured personal information was kept safe and confidential (Pienaar, 2014).
- *Informed consent*: Before gathering any information, the researcher obtained permission, known as “informed consent”, from the participants, whilst providing them with necessary information on the nature of the study (Pienaar, 2014).
- *Avoidance from harm*: In concluding the induction, the researcher gave the voluntary participants the assurance that they would be protected from harm, albeit physically or emotionally (De Vos, et al., 2011). Furthermore, the researcher provided the opportunity for debriefing, as well as a list of professionals to whom participants can consult as precaution against emotional harm, if necessary.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This mini-dissertation comprises three chapters, which are laid out as follows:

- *Chapter 1*: presents the introduction, problem statement and research method.
- *Chapter 2*: provides the research article, which entails the research objectives and discussions of the results.
- *Chapter 3*: focuses on the conclusions, addresses limitations of the study, and makes recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 presented the problem statement, research objective, data collection method and research method of the present study. This was concluded by an overview of the chapters of this mini-dissertation.

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CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring first-year students' resources from the perspectives of student support structures: A World café study

Orientation: The first year of university could be extremely demanding for students. It is, therefore, important to explore which resources they need to cope with these demands in order to be successful and well. **Research purpose:** The purpose of the present study was to explore, through the perspectives of student support structures, the specific resources first-year students would need to deal with demands and promote wellbeing and success at a higher education institution (HEI).

Motivation for the study: High levels of first-year student drop-out are a cause for concern, not only from a personal perspective, but also from an organisational and economic side as well. Poor success rates may have a detrimental effect on all stakeholders, where a substantial misappropriation of public and private funds impacts the organisation and ultimately, the economy. The individual is also affected, where harm incurred on a psychological level can become evident physically. Students do not only function in isolation, but interacts with a wide range of external stimuli. It is therefore important to understand the interrelation between first-year students and their environment, in this case the resources that are available to them.

Research design, approach and method: A qualitative research approach was followed. Data was collected by means of the World café method where participants ($N = 36$) were: Dean of Students, the Student Representative Council, Centre for Student Guidance and Development, House Committee members and hostel parents.

Main findings: From the data that was collected and coded, three major themes emerged: 1) resources that are available to students; 2) resources that students need; and 3) limitations in existing resources and suggestions on how to improve the use of resources. For each theme, different sub-themes were extracted.

Practical/managerial implications: The present study provided information on the resources available to first-year students. Such information could be valuable and effective in managing the resources proactively. This could help students deal better with their transition and be successful in their entry year at a HEI.

Contribution/value-add: Student support structures provide a holistic overview of first-year student resources from their experience with diverse student groups on a regular basis. The present study was also conducted to apply the Job Demands-Resources model within the student context, with a focus on the resources component. The results of this study can help elucidate the resources that should be measured within the student context and may have a positive impact on students' engagement, wellbeing and success.

Keywords: First-year students, student resources, student support structures, Higher Education Institution

INTRODUCTION

The transition from secondary to tertiary education is often highly stressful and demanding for first-year university students. These students are confronted with several challenges, such as changing homes and lifestyle status, and forming new relationships with family and friends (Wickens & Forbes, 2005). Academic performance, financial capacity, and access to a Higher Education Institution (hereafter abbreviated as HEI) are some of the most important aspects first-year students have to contend with (Africa News Agency, 2015). In addition, student selectivity, academic background and preparedness, are some of the major contributors to the performance and retention of students (Nandeshwar, Menzies & Nelson, 2011; Zytow & Zembowicz, 1993). Further debilitating factors is students' inability to adapt to the new challenges, expectations and standards on an academic level. These factors also contribute significantly to poor performance and stress at tertiary level (McGhie, 2012). This could be one of the reasons why high dropout rates are this prevalent in South African HEIs (HESA, 2014).

First-year students need assistance in their transition from secondary to tertiary education and to cope with the various demands and challenges during this phase. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that relevant and timely resources are provided to them. However, it is also necessary to not only make resources available to students, but to ensure that the availability and purpose thereof is communicated to the students (Tinto, 1999). When the students do not know about, or understand the benefit which they can get from utilising what is available to them, they won't be able to use it. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) conceptualise resources within an organisational setting as those physical, psychological, environmental, and social aspects that help individuals achieve goals, reduce demands and stimulate personal growth and development. Resources are important since it help individuals cope with demands, and improve their psychological state (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2001; Lazarus, 2001).

The promotion of a positive state also strengthens resilience, relationships, wellbeing, and increases satisfaction (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek & Finkel, 2008). Resources help motivate individuals, thereby leading to positive wellbeing and improved performance (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2009a). Therefore, timely and relevant resources are necessary enablers helping students learn more actively and cope with the various demands (Hakanen, Schaufeli & Ahola, 2008). However, for various reasons students do not make use of resources for various reasons, and can include, amongst others, limited access to resources, lack of knowledge

that resources exist, and intra-personal objections (Givens & Tjia, 2002; Kember, 2004; Tinto, 1999). Therefore, merely providing resources are not always sufficient. Ensuring access to and usage of these resources is just as important (Kember, 2004; Rothmann & Welsh, 2013).

The typical resources that tertiary institutions provide to first-year students include orientation and academic support programmes, and improved educational methods (Kember, 2004; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1995). These resources lead to students' increased engagement with the HEI environment (Kimani & Mutweledi, 2012). Peer support and social support was also found to have a positive effect on how the students adapt to tertiary education overall (Astin, 1993; Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006; Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009). On a personal level, certain students thrive more than others within a tertiary environment due to unique characteristics. The following personal characteristics are associated with successful students: resilience (Finn & Rock, 1997; Borman, & Rachuba, 2001), self-reliance (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001) and feeling financially secure (Tinto, 2012a). Such resources help students cope with demands and lead to positive outcomes (Hobfoll, 2001).

Resources and demands are evident in an individual's life (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli & Schreurs, 2003; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, Hobfoll (1989) argues that facilitators and the institution should provide additional support and resources when students are confronted with constant challenges. Recent studies confirm the findings of Van der Merwe (2003) that students in South Africa experience constant challenges (Mokgele, 2014). In addition, when students are provided with and utilise available resources, their experience of positive outcomes increase (Ouweneel, Le Blanc & Schaufeli, 2011).

Currently, the most widely-used model to investigate the effects an organisation's climate (measured in terms of job demands and job resources) has on employee's wellbeing and organisational outcomes, is the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This model is well-researched and proved to be highly effective in bringing about wellbeing, increased performance, and to predict important and foreseeable organisational outcomes (Bakker & Bal, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Recently, studies have also begun applying the JD-R model to student contexts (Robins, Roberts & Sarris, 2015; Salmela-Aro & Upadaya, 2014; Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez & Bresó, 2010; Wolff, Brand, Baumgarten, Losel & Ziegler, 2014), also in the South African context (Mokgele & Rothmann, 2014).

The above-mentioned results show promise regarding the use of the JD-R model to predict important outcomes for students (i.e. wellbeing, engagement and burnout, academic performance). However, most studies mention a major limitation: the questionnaires that were utilised to measure demands and resources, were adapted from perspectives within an employee environment. In contrast, researchers have pointed to the fact that students experience different demands and resources than those of working individuals (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Furthermore, it was found that adapted questionnaires present limitations and issues with generalisability (Qiao & Schaufeli, 2011).

An overview of various international and national webpages of HEIs and studies on the importance of student-related resources indicated that such resources can lower dropout rates and improve academic performance significantly (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Reyes, 2007). However, most of these studies were conducted in varying geographical environments, within different fields of interest, and among diverse population groups. Extensive research has been done in South Africa to explore factors that could influence the success, drop-out, or transition of students. However, there is a gap in South African literature, namely the lack of a systematic investigation of the resources students need to cope with demands or challenges. Nicholson (2011) points out that it is especially important that HEIs become aware of the various resources that students use to reach desirable outcomes.

A further gap found in the literature is that studies exploring the resources which students need, are often focused on the perceptions of the students themselves. Although this approach is beneficial and important, certain limitations are also apparent. Students have knowledge about their own personal situations, but not necessarily of the wider context of the HEI. This presents two major concerns. Firstly, there is a risk that students lack the necessary insight to understand what they need to deal effectively with demands. Secondly, studies do not capture the lack of knowledge about the influences which the wider context of the HEI has on students. The support structures deal daily with numerous students from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and situations. These structures are also more exposed to the intricacies of the HEI and have a more diverse and objective overview of the student's environment. This implies a birds-eye view of the interaction of the students and the environment in which they operate.

The present study forms part of a larger project intended to develop a risk-identification instrument that could facilitate specific interventions and optimise student outcomes. The purpose of the

present study was to explore, by investigating the perspectives of student support structures, which resources first-year students need to deal with demands as well as to promote wellbeing and success at a HEI.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focuses on two fundamental models of resources, namely the JD-R model and the Conservation of Resources (hereafter: COR) theory. In this section, emphasis is placed on the assumptions about resources, with specific reference to its application on the student context. Thereafter, prominent student resources that are found in the literature are discussed briefly.

The Job Demand-Resources Model

Individuals tend to experience higher levels of stress if they encounter a lack of resources when dealing with difficult situations; however, the mere perception of having further support available decreases stress levels (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The JD-R model emerged from research on ways that individuals react to stress in the work environment (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011).

The main assumption of the JD-R model is that the work environment presents various characteristics that can be classified into two major clusters, namely job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Job demands: are physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that requires sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills. Therefore, these demands are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Typical job demands entail: time pressure, task interruptions, high workload, and emotional demands unique to the work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Ultimately, demands in the workplace entail all those aspects of the work environment that is taxing to the individual and effects the person on a personal, emotional, social, and physical level.

Job resources: refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are either/or: (1) functional in achieving work goals; (2) reduce job demands and the associated

physiological and psychological costs; and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources may include the following: supportive relationships, role clarity, performance feedback, sound communication, physical tools, and opportunities for growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). The purpose of resources is ultimately to empower or motivate individuals to overcome demands (Jackson & Rothmann, 2005). Therefore, resources are all those aspects that helps a person to deal with the demands in his environment, enabling him or her to function optimally on a personal, emotional, social and physical level.

A second assumption of the JD-R model is that there are two underlying processes, namely the energetic or health impairment, and motivational one (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Health impairment: this process is defined by the relationship between demands and ill-health, which is mediated through the development of burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Burnout is characterised by feelings of exhaustion, negative attitudes, and mental fatigue (Bakker, Schaufeli, Demerouti & Euwema, 2007). When employees experience excessive demands, but have limited resources, then burnout could follow, and eventually physical and psychological ill-health.

Motivational: this process is explained by the relationship between resources and positive organisational outcomes (organisational commitment, performance, etc.) mediated through the process of engagement. Engagement can be characterised by feelings of vigour, dedication and absorption (Bakker, *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, if resources are provided, this increases employees' engagement and eventually produce positive organisational outcomes. Resources also buffer the effect of demands (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Bakker, 2015). When employees experience sufficient resources to deal with demands, positive organisational outcomes can follow.

Personal resources (individual qualities) also play a significant role in dealing with demands (Xanthopoulou, *et al.*, 2009b; Bakker, 2015). Personal resources can be defined as malleable lower-order, cognitive-affective personal aspects reflecting a positive belief in oneself or one's work (Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2010). Personal resources also may entail mental or emotional competence such as optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Van den Broeck, Van Ruysseveldt, Vanbelle & De Witte, 2013; Xanthopoulou, *et al.*, 2009a; Bakker, 2015). Personal resources can therefore be considered as those unique personal characteristic that a person has which helps them deal with difficult times. According to the JD-R model, personal

resources are modelled as moderators of job demands and job resources, by buffering the effect of job demands and encouraging the experience of job resources (Van den Broeck, Van Ruysseveldt, Vanbelle & De Witte, 2013).

It is, therefore, clear, based on the assumptions of the JD-R model, that resources play a crucial role in buffering the effect of demands on burnout, but also enhances engagement, thereby helping ensure positive outcomes for both the individual and the organisation (Bakker & Bal, 2011, Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2007).

The Job Demand-Resources Model in the Student Context

Extensive research has been undertaken on the JD-R model in the organisational context. Recently, a number of studies began utilising this model within the academic environment.

Salmela-Aro and Upadyaya, (2014) conducted a review of empirical research on the development of students' engagement in school and how it may contribute to future academic success and individual contexts. A model was presented that describes the components of engagement (vigour, absorption, and dedication), its outcomes (academic success and wellbeing) as well as the contextual factors that impact it. The contextual factors, similar to resources, were found to be: social context (family, peers, teachers, classroom quality, and school environment), personal characteristics (age, gender, and self-esteem), and stage-environment fit (development stages, need for autonomy, and educational transactions). It was concluded that higher levels of engagement are evident when contextual factors are in place. Furthermore, such engagement is associated positively with academic success, and negatively with symptoms of burnout. Therefore, the findings showed that, overall the students' engagement with school does lead to positive outcomes. These outcomes entail students' wellbeing, academic achievement, and future academic/vocational success. This occurs when their contextual factors (resources) are in place (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014).

Mokgele and Rothmann (2014) applied the framework of the JD-R model to a sample of South African students ($N = 936$). The goal of their study was to research the relationships between demands, resources, burnout, engagement, health and satisfaction of first-year students. Four study resources were included, namely growth, peer support, lecturer support and information accessibility, but was tested in the model as a single factor. The results showed that resources play

a significant role in predicting burnout, study engagement, psychological unwellbeing and satisfaction with life.

Robins, Roberts and Sarris (2015) studied the relationship between study demands, study resources and personal resources in an Australian sample ($N = 260$) within the framework of the JD-R model and COR model. Their main focus was contributing to the knowledge of burnout and engagement, with particular reference to personal resources' role in determining engagement. The scholars included the following resources in their study: psychological flexibility, mindfulness, positive reframing coping, and optimism. The results indicate similar patterns in students as in employees within a work context. The mentioned scholars found that mindfulness, psychological flexibility, and supportive university supervisors were particularly important resources that help preventing burnout in students from health professions. Robins *et al.* (2015) reiterate that it is not always possible to reduce study demands, however, resources seem important and effective to counter burnout in students when used accordingly.

Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez and Bresó, (2010) studied the mediating role that students' burnout and engagement play in predicting academic performance for a sample of university students ($N = 527$). The purpose of their study was to indicate that obstacles and facilitators have an indirect effect on future performance by influencing wellbeing. Facilitators (similar to resources in the JD-R model) was defined as those aspects of the academic environment that potentially enhance academic performance. These facilitators were identified as: motivating teachers, efficient library facilities and additional training. Facilitators were grouped into three categories, namely organisational, social, or personal. Results showed that the presence of obstacles and the absence of facilitators can be associated with burnout (although burnout did not predict future performances). In contrast, positive psychological states such as facilitators and engagement, played a significant motivating role in students' wellbeing.

Osedach (2013) used the JD-R model to investigate the impact of resources on academic outcomes, and the impact of need for cognition on engagement, within a sample of university students ($N = 345$). Resources were measured in terms of technology, faculty interaction, enrichment, academic advisement, career prep, and academic help. The results showed that the use of resources supports a state of engagement. Students, however, need to be made aware of the resources that are available to them in order to use them. Regarding the need for cognition, it was concluded that personal traits predispose individuals to experience a state of engagement. Students with a higher need to

engage in challenging tasks experienced this engagement, as opposed to those who indicated a lower need for cognition (Osedach, 2013).

Conservation of Resources Theory

In addition to the JD-R model, the COR (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2001; Lazarus, 2001) is one of the most influential theories to explain the significance of resources and support the motivational function of the JD-R model. Similar to the JD-R model, Hobfoll (2001) defines resources as those aspects that help individuals cope with demands, which are those stressors that drain resources. Resources included in the COR theory, are categorised into four groups: valued objects (i.e. housing, clothing), stress-mediating conditions (i.e. job security, social support, seniority), stress-aiding individual differences (i.e. self-efficacy, optimism, skills), and resource-generating energy (i.e. time, money, knowledge) (Hobfoll, 1989).

The COR theory is based on two main assumptions. Firstly, people act to obtain, conserve, and prevent the loss of resources (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001; Lazarus, 2001). Consequently, when people attempt to cope with demands, they work actively toward conserving and/or protecting the resources they have (Hobfoll, 2001). Secondly, people tend to accumulate and maintain resources continually, with the purpose of protecting existing resources (Hobfoll, 2001). COR theory also explains that demands deplete resources. However, people do not necessarily need to experience less demands, rather have sufficient resources available (Hobfoll, 2001). The problem is that once demands exceed resources, a negative impact on psychological wellbeing can be observed (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Therefore, as researchers such as Tinto (2012b) point out, students tend to make more use of supportive structures when faced with hindrances to their personal or academic capacity. As a result, the more these students' existing resources are threatened, the more they turn to additional resources. If this situation continues where demands exceed resources, this will eventually impact negatively on students' wellbeing. However, typical to human nature, people do not always utilise what is available to them effectively. Ignorance, poor marketing (knowledge of the resource), or a lack of knowledge about the available resources are some reasons why people will not seek or use the resource (Fidzani, 1998; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design presents and discusses the various elements of the present research, as expounded below.

Research approach

The present study followed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative nature of this approach seeks to provide an in-depth insight into the phenomena under investigation (Bitsch, 2005). Such a flexible approach helped the researcher in the present study make necessary changes to the design as the study progressed (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2011). As a result, the researcher applied the most appropriate methodologies in her study, enabling her to draw meaningful conclusions from the interaction with the participants (De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Matveev, 2002; Patton, 2005).

Research strategy

The researcher worked from a well-considered paradigm to ensure the design represented her own beliefs about reality. The chosen epistemological and ontological approach connected strongly to the beliefs of a constructivist-relativist approach. Constructivists believe that there is no single reality and that reality is constructed through social interaction. Relativists believe that reality is dynamic and individuals create their own environment (Doucet *et al.*, 2010; De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Henning, 2004). Therefore, the reality of the phenomena is constructed based on the assumption that each person is an expert in his/her own right, to create an own reality (Doucet *et al.*, 2010; Tsai, 2008). The researcher sought to understand the meaning that students' support structures create to construct their reality. This approach was based on the belief that support structures would have direct contact with students and, therefore, have a comprehensive understanding of which resources students require and utilise to deal with demands, promote wellbeing and strive for success at a HEI.

The assumptions for the present study was based on an emic-etic approach. The emic approach considers participants' personal experiences of the phenomena (Cheung, Van de Vijver & Leong, 2011). The etic approach focuses on participants who have no experience of the phenomena, which, therefore, implies an outsider's point of view. In this study the researcher decided on a

sample that would be capable of providing information on how first-year students experience resources from the participants' interaction with the first-year students on a daily basis. They would for this matter be able to contribute to this research study with their personal experiences with the phenomena, however from an outsider's point of view. Therefore, the literature review followed the observation of social interaction. By combining an emic-etic approach, the researcher was able to conclude the present study with the most suitable collection of data about resources that students need and utilise to deal with demands in a HEI in South Africa.

Research method

In discussing the method for the research, the various aspects are described which the researcher considered during the phases of collecting and analysing the data.

Research setting

The research was conducted at a HEI in South Africa. The following individuals participated: Dean of Students, Student Representative Council and Student Support Services, House Committee members and hostel parents. The researcher deemed World café sessions a unique and innovative way to collect data for this study, from which the research setting emerged. In order to use the World café method, the researcher obtained consent from the HEI where the research was conducted. Participants were approached to confirm their availability and, therefore, no individuals were inconvenienced (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009).

The researcher scheduled meetings through a formal invitation, to ensure the attendance of available participants. The data collection took place in a comfortable space where special attention was paid to ventilation, lighting, comfortable chairs, refreshments, and that the room is free from disturbances (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). A relaxed environment helped the participants speak freely and openly, which helped them represent their views of reality in the truest form (Ivey, 1988; Matveev, 2012).

Entrée and establishing research roles

Before the data-collection phase, the researcher first obtained permission from the HEI to collect the data. The Dean of Students was identified as the gatekeeper (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). The participants were recruited as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Number of participants according to each round (N = 36)

Participants	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
Office of the Dean of Students	2	1	
Student Representative Council	2	2	1
Student support services	3	3	
House Committee members	3	3	11
Hostel parents	2	3	
TOTAL	12	12	12

Once permission was obtained, the data collection commenced. In this regard, the researcher played the role of facilitator who explained the World café to the participants. Two observers were present who assisted with the flow of the process. The facilitator provided the participants with the research questions under investigation and processed the various proceedings through voice recorders. The participants also captured their thoughts visually on posters, which the researcher later analysed as an additional source of data.

Research participants and procedure (sampling)

A non-probability, purposive, and voluntary sample was selected to act as participants to the present study. However, for participants to partake in the study it was necessary that they had contact with first-year students on a regular basis, as well as knowledge of the resources that these students need and use daily to deal with the challenges they face. Furthermore, it was necessary for participants to form part of a formal structure that provides support on various levels to the first-year students. The sample size depended on the willingness and accessibility of the participants and until data saturation occurred (Ray, 2012).

Three World café sessions were conducted. In the end, 36 participants ($N = 36$, 12 for each World café) voluntarily participated in the study. The participants were informed that data would be collected as voice recordings. They were also assured of the safekeeping of the data and that only the researchers involved would have access to the records. Throughout the process, attention was given to the rights of the participants, concerning privacy, anonymity, fair treatment and protection from discomfort and harm, as stipulated by the Health Profession Counsel of South Africa (2011).

Data-collection method

The approach of a World café was used to collect the data. This method was chosen since it is an effective way to gather information and was considered to fit the context of the present study. This approach aims to create a café-like environment allowing the participants to talk freely about the phenomena as they would in reality (Fouché & Light, 2011; Schieffer, Isaacs & Gyllenpalm, 2004). The research explored the resources that first-year students have and need to deal with demands in an HEI, to develop a theoretical framework applicable to the context of South Africa. Three World café sessions were held. In these sessions, three to five groups (each consisting of three to five participants) were placed at tables, similar to the setting in a coffee shop (Fouché & Light, 2011). In each session, the tables rotated thrice to allow a thorough discussion of the research question, which lasted between 10 to 30 minutes each. At the end of each session, the researcher allowed a final opportunity for all the tables to explain their findings to the group and the researcher.

Literature review

A literature review followed data-collection to ensure the trustworthiness and consistency of the gathered data (Bowen, 2009). Available literature on the relevant topics was reviewed. These included concepts related to a student's context: such as success, wellbeing, adaption, persistence, retention, resources. These and similar concepts were included to extract relevant themes for the topic under investigation. The JD-R was chosen as main theoretical model for the present study, while the researcher also considered the assumptions of the COR theory.

The study focus was on identifying patterns of resources that first-year students utilise, as recorded in the literature, and determining how it may emerge within the South African context. Recent and relevant articles were consulted through the following databases: Academic Search Premier; PsycInfo, APA PsycArticles; EbscoHost; Emerald; Proquest; SACat; SAePublications; Science Direct; GoogleScholar; Google Books; Science Direct; ProQuest and Library services of the North-West University.

Recording of data

Two methods were employed to record data. Firstly, a voice-recording device was placed on each table to ensure that the conversations were captured clearly. Thereafter, the data were downloaded

onto the researcher's laptop. Secondly, the researcher requested the participants to write down their thoughts on paper during the World café sessions, after which they were to present their findings creatively on posters. The posters were captured electronically after each session and converted into PDF documents. The files were defined clearly through a file management system, which avoided miscoding, mislabelling, miss-linking and mislaid documents (Struwig & Stead, 2010). The data was stored on the researcher's personal external hard drive and shared with her supervisor on an online storage space. The external hard drive was kept in a locked drawer in the researchers' office at all times and the online storage space requires unique login details and passwords, which ensures its safety.

Data analyses

To analyse the data, the researcher first listened to all the recordings. Thereafter, she transcribed the discussions verbatim. A thematic analysis was done by involving two objective coders and a single co-coder. The following six steps were followed during the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

- Familiarisation with the data.
- Coding the data.
- Searching for themes.
- Reviewing the themes.
- Defining and naming themes.
- Writing up the different themes and inserting supporting statements from participants for each theme.

The data was coded/grouped into understandable units of meaning, which provided the necessary insight for reporting and feedback (Charmaz, 2006).

Strategies employed to ensure quality data

The researcher followed various methods to ensure objectivity throughout the process (Prosser, 2007), which can be outlined as follows:

- Reflexivity: The research should be transparent about the purpose of the study and be fully aware of findings the data is yielding (Prosser, 2007). For the present study, the researcher utilised visual aids to remind her of the purpose and aims of the study.
- Validity (or credibility of the researcher): Validity implies the researcher's ability to produce quality data, where discrepancies are explored and developed as the need arises (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). In this study, the researcher gained experience in group processes and dynamics before data collection took place.
- Generalisability: The researcher carefully selected participants to promote generalisability. This was done based on their familiarity, as supporting structures, with students of different culture, language, demographic areas, age, race, and gender (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Though House Committee members and Student Representative Council members were included in the sample, the researcher asked that participants explore their views from the role they have as a support structure regarding the research question.
- Reliability: In a qualitative study, reliability refers to the dependability of the gathered data (Prosser, 2007). Again, the participants were chosen carefully to fit the context of the present study. Furthermore, the research question was tested in a pilot study to ensure the correct information was gathered. After the World café sessions were conducted, the data were compared with existing literature. This was done to confirm possible similarities between existing data and to report on its unique qualities. To ensure the data was represented as truthfully as possible, the information was analysed by two objective coders and a co-coder. The aim was ensuring that no information was missed, misinterpreted, or contaminated by the researchers' own opinion (Prosser, 2007).
- Objectivity/confirmability: the reader should have enough confidence that the findings of the study indeed give a true reflection of the participants' experience, an outcome aided by the type of data analyses used in the present study (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). For this purpose, the researcher included graphical representations of the posters made by the participants as well as verbatim quotes from voice recordings.

Reporting

Reporting on data takes on a scientific nature, where results are explained in a systematic and formal manner. In the section on findings below, the researcher presents the data in the form of tables, which categorised the data in terms of themes, sub-themes, and examples of these elements.

Excerpts from the participants' responses are included below to provide evidence of the themes and sub-themes emerging from the data.

FINDINGS

The purpose of the present study was to explore the resources that first-year university students need and utilise, as viewed from the perspectives of student support structures at a university campus. From the data that was collected and coded, three major themes emerged:

- resources that are available to students;
- resources that students need; and
- limitations regarding existing resources and suggestions how resources can be utilised better.

For each theme, different sub-themes were captured. For Themes 1 and 2, the resources were broken down further into resources internal to the university; resources external to the university; and interpersonal resources. A summary of the themes and sub-themes are presented successively in Table 2 (Theme 1), Table 3 (Theme 2) and Table 4 (Theme 3).

Table 2

Theme 1: Available resources to students

SUB-THEMES						
	Academic resources	Physical resources	Emotional resources	Financial resources	Social resources	Spiritual resources
Internal	Technology	Healthcare/medical centrum	Student counselling and development	Financial support services	Formally organized events	None
	Facilities that support academics	Student counselling and development	Institute of Psychology and Welfare	Bursaries	On-going available opportunities	
	Support Services	Food services	Residence resources	Prim (Head of House) funds		
	Formal structures to support academics	Sports facilities		Student assistants		
		Protection/security services		Second-hand (used) book store		
External	None	First aid in sport	Interpersonal relationships	Bank loans	Recreation	Spiritual (religious) organisations
			Psychological (mental health) services	Edu loan		
				NSFAS		
Intra-personal			Self-discipline			
			Autonomy			
			Time			
			management			

Table 2 above presents the first theme identified from the data about resources available to students. This theme consisted of six sub-themes centred around resources, namely academic,

physical, resources, financial, social and spiritual – all of which can be internal or external to the university, or of an interpersonal nature.

Academic resources

Internal academic resources available to students, captured the following themes: technology, academic support facilities, support services, and formal structures to support academics. No external academic resources were reported.

Technology was identified as an important resource providing students with a sound infrastructure. As one participant explained: *“I think they (the students) have a reasonable infrastructure on campus to use technology.”* Technology as resource included the use of wireless networking (WiFi) and availability of computers. One participant particularly mentioned that WiFi was an important and available resource for students: *“There’s Internet wherever you go here; WiFi hotspots are everywhere. There are computer labs that they can use in the library. This means the technology is available.”* Another participant agreed: *“Yes, WiFi is available everywhere you go on campus. When I walk on campus over weekends, students are able to sit anywhere to use the WiFi.”*

Facilities that support academic activities are available on campus and entail the following: study and computer rooms, cost-effective alternatives to buying books, and reading-and-writing ability lessons. The library, which included study and computer rooms, serves as a facility that supports academic activities. One participant mentioned specifically: *“For academic purposes they have the library, the study rooms, 24/7 labs, and there are computer labs in the residence.”* However, participants reported that students do not always use all these available resources effectively throughout. Furthermore, students have a need for an alternative, cost-effective option to buying books, namely the second-hand book store. As two the participants pointed out: *“The second-hand bookshop can go under the academics theme. The second-hand bookshop provides a cheaper alternative to buy the textbooks.”* And: *“Well, I think there is a great need for the second-hand book shop, but they (the students) do not use it.”* It was also identified by participants that students’ reading and writing abilities need to be developed and that they have the resources to develop this skill (the Afrikaans reading and writing subjects are referred to as AGLA, and the English as AGLE): *“The reading lab and writing lab is there to address (especially) first-year student’s academic writing styles and abilities.”* However, participants also mentioned that students do not

make use of these resources: *“Yes, we know they have a need to develop it, but if they are not forced into something like AGLA/AGLE, they do not use it.”*

Support services included the following: facilitation services (tutoring), AGLA/AGLE and first-year orientation programmes. It was found that subject-specific facilitation is available to the students: *“Facilitation can also help students with all the hard work and uncertainty they have.”* And: *“Students have the facilitation services available.”* In addition to developing reading and writing ability, AGLA/AGLE assists with academic tasks: *“But did you know? The AGLA-people provide a service, that when students write an essay, they can take it to them for assessment before they submit it to the lecturer.”*

Participants also reported that the orientation programme has improved from previous years.-This finding is significant since an orientation programme typically aims to ensure all students are informed about the university, its activities and the available facilities where students can obtain information about the university.

Formal structures to support academics are important, seeing that first-year students utilise these structures such as academic advisors, senior students, and counsellors, to assist with their academic demands. Staff and senior students are approached to provide support on both an academic and personal level. However, students only use these formal structures when they have need for it. The Academic Support Services centre provides comprehensive information to students regarding their study courses: *“And they (the students) have the ASVs (academic support services).”* And: *“If the ASV was not there, they (the students) would not know where to go to.”* Senior students are also appointed to render advice to the first-year candidates: *“The academic-advice-giver system works well at our academy. It is a system where first-year students can turn to senior students for advice.”*

Furthermore, Faculty advisors are present to guide students on an academic and emotional level: *“There is at each faculty, faculty advisors. The advisors make use of a questionnaire before interviewing the students. The questionnaire is used to gather information about the student, which in turn helps the advisor build rapport with the student during the interview. For instance, the student will write on the questionnaire ‘my father died’. The advisor then immediately has enough information to tick whether they should refer the student or not.”*

The Student Counselling and Development centre renders support on a personal and psychological level, and provides information on the students' ability and interests regarding their studies: *"The career centre, or career planning centre can also be seen as a support service because it is greatly concerned with choosing the correct study course or subjects. We (the support service) help students to know what to do when they change their study course."* The career centre can assist students with career planning, CV-writing, and provides information about different occupations and job-opportunities. This centre also gives advice to students about choosing subjects suitable for a particular career: *"The career centre's exhibition helps very much. It informs students about the things they do (studying), so it gives them the security that they (the students) will make the right study choices."* And: *"The career centre shows the students how to compile a CV."* Another participant remarked: *"The career planning office is there to help them (the students) with choosing the correct subjects and correct courses. The career centre also provides various exhibitions, and helps them to prepare for the workplace – writing CVs and so on."*

Physical resources

Internal physical resources consist of the following: health centre (clinic), student counselling and development services, food services, sport facilities, protection services, accommodation, infrastructure, the international office, information, and the legal clinic. External physical resources included first aid at sport events.

The health centre was reported to be highly useful for students: *"Here one can add the health centre, it is VERY useful."* And: *"Amongst health, is the clinic."* Not only was it identified that the health centre was useful, but that physical activities such as residence sport activities, also contribute to the physical health of students: *"For instance, residences sports can also go under health, because sport comes down to health."*

The student counselling and development services provide assistance for various problems, including substance abuse: *"Substance abuse can fall under this theme (student counselling and development services)."* These services also cater for disabilities and life-threatening diseases such as HIV: *"Yes! I agree, I did not mention it before, but HIV and disability support."* And: *"I think the HIV office can go under this theme."*

Food services was indicated as an available resource for students on campus: *“There is healthy food available over lunch-time at the SS (student centrum).”* There are also formal initiatives where residences collect non-perishable food and clothes to support needy students: *“Residences have a day where they collect canned food, but it is internal.”* And: *“Residences collect clothes, but it is only used in the residence.”*

Sport facilities are available for students and include the athletic/rugby grounds, the gymnasium, and a swimming pool. These facilities support healthy and active lifestyles: *“You know there is the Fanie (sport terrain) and we have the Puk gym. We also have a pool. It feels to me like I see a lot of students who go to the gym.”*

The protection services on campus were identified to be a highly effective resource in the sense that they provide all-round support: *“Protection services is the most important! They know everything! They even take snakes out of the residences!”*

Accommodation is often a cause for concern amongst students. However, an on-campus property agency help students find suitable accommodation alternatively to residences: *“Pukki Accommodation is a resource. If you (the student) need a place to stay, you can walk into the agency on campus and they will help you find a suitable place to rent.”*

Infrastructure includes classrooms and the used-book store. A participant reported on facilities such as ablution and food facilities: *“There are toilets, there’s enough food.”* Participants expanded on this thought by pointing to facilities supporting academic activities: *“Then other facilities include classrooms.”* And: *“Under the academics theme you can add the second-hand bookshop, it is a cheaper way to get books.”*

Participants also mentioned a number of physical resources, however, did not elaborate on their functions. These include the international office, a cell phone application, and the legal clinic.

The International Office provides support for international students: *“International students make use of the international office for help, if they (the students) are struggling with, for example, permits and letters.”*

A cell phone application (an App) is available, which provides information typically observed on the universities' website: *"There is now a Puk-App with information. However, the university's website in itself is the most common information platform being used."*

The legal clinic on campus is available for students who require guidance in legal matters: *"There is support with legal-issues at the legal clinic."*

Finally, the participants also identified an external physical resource. **First-aid services at sport events** are available to students who sustain injuries during their sport activities: *"Or an external one can be emergency services at sport event."*

Emotional resources

Emotional resources were reported on three levels.

- Internal: consist of student counselling and development services, the Institute of Psychology and Welfare, and resources in the residence.
- External: entail interpersonal relationships and psychological services.
- Intra-personal: imply self-discipline, autonomy, and time management.

Internal

The participants' responses indicated the internal emotional resources as expounded below.

Student counselling and development services are available to students. It provides support on a psychological level. Participants reported on the importance of having an emotional support structure: *"They (the students) have Ingryp (the name of the student counselling and development services) for psychological support and student advisory services."* And: *"The students need some sort of support structure, um, on an emotional level! Your office is there to intervene (Ingryp), but also their parents, residence committees and members, or friends."*

The Institute of Psychology and Welfare is available to help enhance psychological wellbeing and provide support from professionals: *"Yes and there is the ISW (Institution for Psychological Wellness) where on-campus psychologists help the students with psychological wellbeing."*

External

The external emotional resources were indicated as discussed below.

Resources in the residences include the support of various groups. These groups provide support on an emotional level within the residences. The family-system is a set-up where senior students make-believe adopt junior students as their 'children'. This interaction imitates an actual mother-child relationship, where the mother figure will teach the child the skills necessary to go through university: *"In the hostels there is emotional support from the mother-child system."* Peer helpers (also called SOS helpers) and the members of the residence committee is available to junior students, rendering emotional support: *"Then peer helpers in the hostel is pretty much there for support, when you (the student) want to develop your own independence and confidence, you can ask them for guidance."* And: *"We have the SOS peer helpers, which are the senior students themselves. When they (the students) do not want to talk to a SRC (Student Representative Council) member or so, they can go and talk to one of the peer helpers."* Also: *"I was really serious when I said that a first-year resource is our residence committee (RC)."* House parents (residence parents) are available to provide support similar to that of a parent who are not available at that time: *"So you can pretty much say that a structure is a house parent, if you (the student) cannot go to your mother or father you can go to your house parent."*

Inter-personal relationships are available to help students cope with the demands of university. Participants pointed out especially that existing relationships contribute significantly to students' ability to cope with demands: *"What is it that makes the students cope? Perhaps it is your (the student's) parents and friends, or especially school friends."* And: *"It is the people you previously/already knew before you started to deal with new people at university."* Another participant concurred: *"So, resources are your friends. Your school friends ... especially school friends. They are your old friends who were there for you then, and who will be with you now to ensure you make it."* Relationships with parents and siblings, friends, and significant others also provide essential support on an emotional level: *"House parents, friends, the student's boyfriend/girlfriend is available for the students."* And: *"The students' parents and boyfriend. I actually think a boyfriend or girlfriend is a big thing. Being in a relationship with a guy or a girl can change you completely."* Another participant pointed out: *"If a student lives in an apartment with siblings or the like, it can help with the adjustment."*

Psychological services are available to students should they feel uncomfortable with the services provided on campus: *“Psychologists! If they (the students) are really at such a point that they miss their parents too much or at a point where they want to see a psychologist, however, not on campus, then they can go in to town to see one.”*

Intra-personal

Participants identified three intra-personal characteristics that are important for students to have. These are discussed briefly by excerpts of responses.

Self-discipline: *“Your self-discipline, does it fit under resources?”* And: *“Yes, self-discipline is necessary.”*

Autonomy: *“Students must be able to prioritise the new responsibilities they have by themselves; “students must be able to set priorities by themselves which is a challenge in their new field of study.”* And: *“Self-reliance is something that you must have now.”*

Time management: *“Time management is important because the students no longer have their mother to speak for them or decide for them.”*

Financial resources

From the findings, financial resources could be distinguished as internal and external resources:

- **Internal:** entail financial support services, bursaries, head-of-house funds (referred to as Prim-funds), student assistants, and the second-hand book store.
- **External:** include bank loans, Edu-loan, and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (hereon referred to as NSFAS).

Internal

The participants identified finances as a necessity to participate in academic activities: *“Without money, they cannot really study.”* **Financial support services**, including **bursaries** are available for students to obtain financial support: *“In terms of money, they have financial support services. The students can contact them as a resource.”* And: *“Scholarships and loans are also available.”*

Student assistant jobs are available for students to earn a small income: *“Many faculties make use of assistants and jobs that students can do”* And: *“Student assistant jobs are available.”* The **second-hand book store** is available for students who need to save money and require a more affordable option for buying textbooks: *“Under academics you can also include the second-hand book store; it is a cheaper way to buy textbooks.”* **Head-of-house funds** are made available for on-campus assistance to students who experience financial difficulty: *“The Prim-funds are available and can be used as a financial resource for members of the residence who need money for food or clothes.”*

External

Alternatively, students can apply for financial assistance at external entities, for example, **bank loans**: *“Banks, from loans are available.”* **Edu-loan** is a financial institute for educational purposes: *“They (the students) have Edu-loan.”* The students can also apply for funds at **NSFAS**: *“Because what NSFAS do is, they provide funds for the student’s studies, however, nothing extra. The poor student is able to pay his studies, but comes to university with money for nothing else.”*

Social resources

The findings distinguished internal from external social resources:

- Internal: consist of formally organised events and ongoing available opportunities.
- External: participants also identified various recreational activities.

These mentioned forms of resources were identified by the excerpts from responses below.

Formally organised events are available for students to socialise and build relationships with peers: *“All the functions that the SRC members arrange, and the social actions, the first-year concert, SER (singing contest), and the talent competition are activities for the first-year students. Actually, if you think of all of these resources that we mentioned today, the student should not really have any issues/problems.”*

On-going social opportunities such as restaurants or social events, or interaction with formal structures (i.e. academic advisors, peer helpers) were identified as resources: *“There are recreational opportunities. For example, The Drakenstein (also known as The Draak, a restaurant*

on campus) can be seen as a positive activity. The Draak helps students to relax. And what do they call it, the SS (student centrum) is also there.” And: “Then, resources are of course the people around you. In the hostel, it is your RC, academic advisor, roommate, peer helper, ASV, facilitators, ...residence parents.”

Recreational activities provided by the community also offer students social support: “Students can go to the movies, there were ten-pin bowling” And: “I think the activities that students can partake in are walking clubs or running clubs.”

Spiritual resources

The findings indicated mostly external spiritual resources.

Spiritual/religious organisations were identified as external spiritual resources. Students need a sense of belonging, or finding meaning in a reality that transcends themselves. These resources help students deal with the various demands: “Shall we call it churches or religious institutions? Spiritual support is important! Therefore, spiritual and/or religious institutions are available as a resource.” And: “A church can also be a resource. You (the student) feel at home in such a place, with similar people around them. They can feel comfortable to share their situations with people they encounter. So, it is also adding to that support base.”

Subsequently, the sub-themes of Theme 2 are reported in Table 3, after which these elements are discussed.

Table 3

Theme 2: Resources that students need

	SUB-THEMES		
	Academic resources	Physical resources	Emotional resources
Internal	Extended first-year induction programmes Residence libraries Early identification of students to provide support Follow-up system for risk students Improving the process of academic administration Closer links/communication between academic success monitoring and support services	Transportation (shuttle service) Second-hand shop 24/7 labs	Emotional empowerment
External	None	Recreation	None

Table 3 above presents the second theme identified from the data on the resources that students need. This theme consists of three sub-themes centred around resources, namely academic, physical, and emotional. All three sub-themes were categorised as internal to the university, while only recreation was also found to be external.

Academic resources

The findings revealed that internal academic resources consist of the following: extended orientation programmes, residence libraries, early identification of at-risk students, a follow-up system for at-risk students, improved process of academic administration, and closer links between academic and support services. No needed external academic resources were reported on.

An ***extended orientation programme*** (first-year orientation is also referred to as R&D) would be beneficial to scholars and first-year students from the beginning of their term. This would give them sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the university environment: “*R&D should be a longer process. It must start early! Let’s call it a lengthy process of enculturation from an early onset.*” Another participant added that the students are often overwhelmed with an overflow of information: “*Make it early and consistently. It’s too much for such a short time.*” Another participant concurred: “*We almost need a reversed process where the students are given less*

information over a longer timeframe. The focus would for instance first only be on hostels members, then SR members, etc.” Some participants were also of the opinion that an orientation programme should be compulsory for all first-year students: *“I think a fixed and structured program is necessary where the students are not even allowed to register if they are not or have not participated in this programme.”* A matter that was also mentioned, but not elaborated on, was that residences should have their own **residence libraries**: *“Residences should start creating their own libraries.”*

Participants furthermore pointed out the issue that students reach the support structures belatedly. It would be beneficial to **identify at-risk students at an early stage** in order to prevent the students from experiencing serious or prolonged issues: *“If the students arrive here (at university) with a problem from school, or his/her average is a little low, the student is put into the system and is followed as their studies progress.”* And: *“Early identification is important because the guys end up at us when it is actually already too late. You will actually notice that the problem escalated so much that you can’t really do anything about it. It is precisely now that time of the year when we get that kind of thing where the student’s issues got so bad that it is already too late.”* And: *“Early identification of at-risk students is what need to happen, identifying students who are at risk.”* Participants were of the opinion that it is possible to identify at-risk behaviour when there are abnormal variances in academic marks: *“In our office you see issues with their (the students’) education. That means that if we can identify that the student’s second or third class test is getting worse, he must be reported.”*

In addition, participants compared this campus with existing systems at other universities and agreed that there is a need for a tracking system that accounts for at-risk students: *“Other universities call their students ‘at risk’ and place them in the system. Staff is then notified and made aware of the students who have been identified as being at risk. The purpose is to catch the students before they drop-out of university.”* And: *“Another thing is to have a method of tracking the students so that if the guy (the student) is under the radar he can be followed.”*

Follow-up on at-risk students is linked to the identification of such students. Participants reiterated that academic behaviour could be a good indicator of whether students are at-risk, for example, if their marks deteriorate over time, it may indicate issues: *“From there on there is nobody who follows up, so if the student messes up their subjects, no one even knows or cares about it.”* And: *“After the first and second class test the lecturer must try to identify when their*

students are behind and help out.” Another participant pointed out: “Academic marks should be monitored because it is a very good identification of when something is wrong. There must surely be a reason for poor performance. If the student is not studying, we must find out what is wrong and what the reason is.”

It was identified that **academic administration processes** should be improved, thus allowing academic staff to monitor students more closely. A participant explained: *“We had one case with a girl who wasn’t registered. Nobody even picked it up as an issue when she did not re-register, it was just so. Therefore, that follow-up process is necessary. If a student does not re-register, somebody must follow-up on why they did not re-register! There must be a way we can follow-up, with a letter or a thing that is sent to the parents to inform them that their child has not registered again, otherwise, it is just accepted that the University simply does not care.”*

Participants also identified a need for closer links between academic staff and support services. The academic staff could play a significant role in successfully identifying at-risk students in a timely manner: *“The people who see the academic problems have closer ties with the psychological support systems, as well as the finances; and is, therefore, linked to each other; and when one of those departments see a red flag, the situation can be addressed.”*

Physical resources

From the findings, internal and external physical needed resources could be distinguished:

- Internal: include transportation (a shuttle service), a second-hand shop, and 24/7 labs.
- External: entail various recreational activities.

Participants identified several students who have difficulty travelling to and from the university, where a **shuttle service** would be beneficial. It is reasonable to expect that students should walk to campus, except when they live too far away. Therefore, it would be especially beneficial for students living in the outskirts of town and not only for those in the surrounding area of the university: *“The students need an off-campus shuttle service to stop in Ikageng, or Promosa (townships around Potchefstroom).”* Participants also identified that a shuttle service could be a solution the problems with parking space on the campus: *“Pukki commute was a good initiative. It started well and I still think it will be a solution to a large extent for parking on campus.”*

Participants mentioned the need for a **second-hand shop**, but did not elaborate on the matter. It was suggested that such a facility could be a resource for students: *“Hmmm, what else is there? Isn’t there a second-hand clothing shop somewhere?”*

Participants identified that there are students making use of **24/7 labs** when they are unable to return home at night. Therefore, there is a need amongst students for alternative and temporary overnight arrangements in case they could not return to their home: *“You will not believe this, but many students come to stay on campus in their cars because they have no other place to sleep for the night. This is a reality. There are students here who cannot go back to Ikageng at night, and then they sleep in the lab because it is nice and warm there.”* Positive **recreational activities** are necessary for students to help them relax, recover from their efforts, and cope with their daily demands in a healthy manner: *“There is a lack of positive recreational activities in this town.”*

Emotional resources

Participants identified a need for **emotional empowerment**. It was pointed out: When students feel confident enough to admit not only to themselves but to others that they require support, they will feel more at ease to ask for help: *“But personality development is also necessary. It is, therefore, important to have a programme that also develops the students on an emotional level. I am saying that if you teach the students to be for example, confident, they will be able to admit when they need assistance or support.”*

Finally, the sub-themes of Theme 3 are reported in Table 4, and discussed thereafter.

Table 4

Theme 3: Limitations and suggestions for the use of resources

Limitations	Suggestions
Ignorance of resources	Online information platform
Lack of interaction/communication between support services	Central information desk
Overloading students with information in R&D (orientation)	Marketing of services
Poor marketing of resources	
Fragmentation in resources	
Accessibility of resources	
Lack of self-improvement	
Interpersonal restrictions	

Table 4 above presents the third theme that was identified from the data. Two sub-themes were extracted, namely the limitations of, and suggestions for the use of resources.

Limitations

This sub-theme indicated the following aspects: ignorance of resources, the lack of interaction/communication between support services, overloading students with information during orientation, poor marketing of resources, fragmentation in resources, accessibility of resources, and interpersonal restrictions.

Ignorance of resources. It was identified that students, lecturers, and support structures are ignorant of the actual available resources. Participants assumed that if students knew about the resources available to them, they would utilise it more: *“They do not really know where to go, because they do not have a central point where they can get the information from. You know, for example, a central place to get help with a specific issue.”* Another participant agreed: *“If there is for example a hungry student, then I will say that the student is hungry because he did not know about Ingryp (student support). The main problem is that he does not know where to get food. Therefore, information and knowledge about resources are necessary.”*

Participants from the support structures, however, also realised that they themselves were not informed of certain available resources, and only became aware of it during the data-collection sessions: *“I do not even know who IFP (Institute for Psychology) is.”* And: *“It is very true because this is the first time that I hear about a walk-in-service.”* And: *“I find that they (the students) only find out much later about NSFAS (bursaries – financial support).”* Participants also pointed out that academic staff are uninformed of all of the available services: *“I think it’s important that staff*

has knowledge about the services.” And: “It is frightening to see how many lecturers do not know about all the support services that we have on campus.” Furthermore, participants identified that academic staff do not realise the important role they can play in providing support to students: “And they (academic staff) do not understand the different roles they can play - they can play such a big role in getting students to access services.”

Participants identified **poor communications between the various support structures** as an issue, but did not elaborate on the matter: *“The support structures that do not know of each other on campus is an issue.”*

The findings showed that students are **overloaded with information during orientation**. As a result, first-year students only remember part of the information communicated to them: *“We tell the students about the services. The information is even in the Puk-diary, on the website, and on Facebook. We use all these modern communication channels during orientation to communicate to them, but the students do not take note of it. However, on the day they experience a problem they cannot remember where to go to.”* And: *“The day that the student experiences the problem, they cannot remember where Ingryp is, or medical support, or the health care centrum, or bursaries on campus.”*

Poor marketing of resources was identified as a limitation preventing students from using the resources optimally: *“There is not enough emphasis on the facilities of the university that students can use. For example, several people do not know about the library service where they (the students) can sit in the library and use the Internet or computers.”* A number of participants mentioned that they only discovered the services available to students during the World café session: *“One of the other participants (referring to a fourth-year House Committee member who participated in this World café) only found out about Ingryp today who is available to support the students. She just found out about it today. She is a fourth-year student – a fourth year – and she only finds out about it now.”* Other participants also agreed that the marketing of the services is not sufficient, and as a result, students are not using it optimally: *“And marketing it is another challenge”* And: *“It makes me think about the way we market it (resources), because people do not know about the service. I did not even know about all of the services that are available.”*

It was found that the **fragmentation of resources** is also limiting the use of resources: *“The services are very fragmented.”* The resources are fragmented in the sense that students often need

to go to various places before their issue can be resolved; *“Many of the services available are so fragmented that they do not really know where to go. There is no central point where they can go to, to get help for a specific thing. They for instance, do not even know where to find information as simple as where they can renew study permits before they expire.”* Furthermore, participants pointed out that **access to some resources** can be limited: *“The resources are not always accessible yet.”* And: *“I think the accessibility of the residence committee is not always there.”*

The participants also discussed the issue of over-assisting the students. They explained that there is a fine line between providing support to students and causing students not to develop themselves, thereby creating a dependency. Ultimately, findings showed **a lack of self-improvement**: *“We believe there is a fine line between helping people (the students), and helping them too much. By helping them too much, we have the risk that they cannot help themselves anymore.”* Participants emphasised that students should be empowered to the extent that they have sufficient support, however, do not become dependent of the support provided: *“So, you have to empower them so that they can help themselves, instead of spoon feed them. The issue is that we are already experiencing this on school level.”*

Intra-personal restrictions limit the use of resources. Participants discussed the matter of pride (i.e. students are afraid that their self-image may be affected negatively) and shyness. At times, students allow their personal restrictions to limit the use of the resources available to them: *“If I (the student) did not have food to eat, however, feel too proud to ask for food, then I’m not going to use the resource.”* Another participant agreed that certain students are too proud to admit that they need support: *“We saw that pride, like for example, those who really do not have enough money for food, is sometimes too proud to ask for money for food.”* And: *“Even though only used in the residence, they do have initiatives to collect clothes (for example with can-food-day), however, they (the students) are not really using it because they are too shy.”* This sub-theme also relates to **a fear of being stigmatised**. Participants mentioned that resources are not used regularly because students fear the stigma attached to using it (e.g., only ‘the crazy’ need to see a psychologist). A participant explained: *“The reluctance to use resources is because there are stigmas attached to certain resources. They (the students) hesitate to use it because they are scared to be stigmatized.”*

Suggestions

Suggestions from participants for the use of resources, were: an online information platform, a central information desk, and marketing of services.

An **online information platform** was suggested by participants to bridge a communication gap between the university and students. It was explained as follows: *“We all make use of social media platforms. So, if you have a place to get your info, for example, explaining what the library is, it’s purpose, what Ingryp is and their purpose ... It would be good to include explanations of the services or have pictures of the staff. It can be uploaded to a Facebook site because everybody has Facebook. Youtube videos can be used to direct the students to where the offices are from a central point on campus.”*

Participants agreed that the majority of students do use their cell phones to communicate, thus it serve as an effective platform to receive information: *“I think the easiest way to let everybody know of the reading lab is on social media. You can have ‘Infograms’ (similar to Instagram which is a social media site that showcase pictures and short videos), that for instance show, ‘We have a library, this is what the library provides.’ Everybody uses it nowadays. The students don’t even read posters anymore.”*

A **central information desk** would help provide directions on where to get support for specific issues. Participants pointed out that there is sufficient support for students, however, that they would be able to use it more effectively if there is a central point where they could obtain information. A participant elaborated: *“It really is not necessary to have a more comprehensive support system for the students. The issue is that it is so fragmented. We have Ingryp, SVD (student advisory service), ISW (Institution for Psychological Wellbeing), and peer helpers, but there is no central place to walk in to ... It is currently expected for the Student Council to render this service, however, it is not their job to do it. So, there is not really, as they call it in other countries, ‘student services’. Their security services, healthcare centre, everything, falls under student services. They have facilitators and the facilitators help you find the right service. It includes everything – you can go with anything to him (the facilitator) that might affect the student. It serves as a one-stop-shop.”*

A number of participants suggested locating the support services close to each other: *“In America they have a place where you walk in to, then you are assigned a facilitator who points you in the right direction or gets you in touch with the right people. All of these people will fall within the large scope of student services, but they will facilitate you getting to them, so then it is like a triangle and you can get referred.”* A participant concurred: *“We then said that it would be nice if there was one place where you could go to for whatever you need, but currently it is too fragmented. We have Ingryp to go to, but then when you get there, you find out you need to walk to the Health Centre. At the end of the day, the student ends up at the Student Dean’s office, nothing is resolved yet. What if there was one place where they could walk in to and get all the help they need.”*

Some participants suggested alternative channels: *“The Student Dean’s office can act as an ‘information centre’ where you can go to and say, ‘This is my problem,’ and, ‘Please direct me to the right people’ ... They also said the university must have a place where students can go to and just get referred directly from there, like an info area.”* And: *“They must provide a pamphlet or a book. When you have problems, you just refer to it, you know, like the Yellow Pages. It could be a ‘how-to-study’ guide with all the information in it.”*

Participants also emphasised that knowledge about the resources is central to using it effectively: *“They need more information, more knowledge about the place (the university).”* And: *“So, it is important that they are informed about it (the services) too.”*

Finally, it was suggested that the **marketing of services** could improve its usage: *“They (the resources) should be marketed.”* It was agreed that when services are advertised better, students would be able to use it more effectively: *“Where we come from in terms of the marketing, students do not see all the services that support each other. It should look like in a circle or diagram so that they can see how it all fits together.”*

DISCUSSION

The general objective of the present study was to explore the perceptions of student support structures in a HEI on the resources that first-year students need and utilise to deal with demands, which will promote their wellbeing and success. In order to achieve this objective, a qualitative research design was used. The aim was contributing to the JD-R model, a theory that is well-

researched in occupational health psychology and has been applied recently to the educational context. More specifically, the aim was obtaining more information on these mentioned student resources, in order to expand this component of the JD-R model for South African first-year students in a HEI.

Although students' perspectives are important, these candidates often do not have a broader view of their own situation and which resources they really need to cope with demands. Therefore, the present study employed a World café approach to explore the perceptions of support structures of the participating university. These are the Dean of Student, members of the Student Representative Council, Student Support Services, House Committee members, hostel parents. The reason is that these entities have wide experience in dealing with first-year students, their problems, and what they need to cope during their first year.

Implications of the findings

Three main themes were identified from the data, namely resources available to students (Theme 1); resources that students need (Theme 2); and limitations of existing resources, and suggestions for improved usage (Theme 3). For each theme, different sub-themes were captured. For Theme 1 and Theme 2, the resources were broken down further into those internal and those external to the university, as well as interpersonal resources. The findings of the present study correlate with literature, and helps expand existing literature, by providing a holistic framework as viewed from the perspectives of the support structures.

Theme 1

Regarding the first theme mentioned above, the resources available to students were discussed in terms of the following categories:

- academic: technology, facilities that support academics, support services, and formal structures to support academics;
- physical: healthcare/medical centrum, student counselling and development, food services, sports facilities, protection/security services, accommodation, infrastructure, the international office, information, and the legal clinic;

- emotional: student counselling and development, institute of psychology and welfare, residence resources, interpersonal relationships, psychological or mental health services, self-discipline, autonomy, time management, and first aid in sport;
- financial: financial support services, bursaries, Prim (Head of House) funds, student assistant jobs, second-hand (used) bookstore, bank loans, Edu-loan, and NSFAS;
- social: formally organised events, on-going, available opportunities, and recreational activities; and
- spiritual: external spiritual/religious organisations.

Although resources are described in various ways and in different forms, findings of the present study are in line with those of previous studies on this topic. Broadly, the following resources can be outlined:

- Academic and emotional: Support from formal structures such as tutoring services or services that develop students on an emotional and academic level, and facilities giving access to internet and online materials (technology), promote students' success (Morosanu, Handley, & O'Donovan, 2010; Ramsburg, 2007).
- Physical and psychological: programmes such as pastoral care or counselling, healthy meals, medical care, recreational activities, cultural exposure, and formal support structures also promote student wellbeing (Soutter & Seider, 2013). It is also important for students to feel safe in their academic environment; when they feel unprotected and unsafe, their academic performance decreases (Tinto, 2007).
- Social: supportive peers or faculty, and social integration provide support to students and help them graduate successfully (Fraser & Killen, 2003; Axelson & Flick, 2010; Tinto, 2007).
- Financial: informal or formal structures, networks, orientation programmes, institutional facilities, and personal attributes, provide supportive functions to students and encourage student retention (Kaighin & Croft, 2013; Patton, 1990; Soutter & Seider, 2013).
- Religious: spiritual structures also help students cope with their academic demands (Kim & Seidlitz, 2002).

Themes that emerged from the present study not found in the literature were: the availability of a centre that provides support specifically to international students, and a legal department to give advice on legal matters. A Prim-fund, and second-hand bookshop was also reported as financial

support. Furthermore, it was shown that support structures sometimes perceived students as ignorant about the resources they actually need. For example, not all students know that they need to develop their reading and writing abilities. Therefore, they fail to utilise facilities that develop their skills and abilities as first-year students.

Theme 2

For the second theme, three main sub-themes were identified as resources that students need:

- academic resources: extended first-year induction programmes, residence libraries, early identification of students to provide support, a follow-up system for students at risk, improving the process of academic administration, and closer communication between services that monitor academic success or render support;
- physical resources: transportation/shuttle service, second-hand shop, and 24/7 labs; and
- emotional resources: emotional empowerment.

These resources that students require, as identified by participants, are in line with findings from the literature. Participants did, however, emphasise that some of the available resources should be improved or utilised better. The resources inferred from the findings can be expounded as follows:

- Orientation programmes: literature pointed out the necessity of specific induction programmes for new students (Kaighin & Croft, 2013), where the findings of the present study indicate that an on-going or extended programme would be beneficial.
- Library services: campus libraries support academic activities, however, residence libraries can also benefit students (Oltmanns & Schuh, 1985). According to Strothmann and Antell (2010). Especially through current technology where students have information readily available, residence libraries provide easy access and increases the use of library services to support academic activities.
- At-risk students: a preventative approach is needed to help identify students who require support (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). If support structures can aid students who are at risk, this could prevent negative outcomes such as poor academic performance and dropout. Following up on at-risk students is important to promote positive outcomes for the individual.

- Administration: sound institutional administration is important and supports the effective management of students (Astin, 1984).
- On-campus: The location of on-campus support structures was important to participants. When support structures are inaccessible, students find it difficult to utilise. This is in line with findings by Pedro (2001).
- Student skills: It is also necessary to teach students the necessary skills to deal with the demands of university and campus life (Aviles, Anderson, & Davila, 2006).
- Transport options: The literature indicated shuttle services as necessary for students with disabilities (Dutta, Kundu, & Schiro-Geist, 2009), whereas the present study also identified the need of students who reside far from campus, for additional support. This would help them attend more readily to academic activities.
- Second-hand shops: highlighted was the need for second-hand shops that could provide additional financial support to students.
- 24/7 labs: these facilities were identified as necessary, however, not only for academic purposes, but to assist students who are unable to go home after spending a late night on campus.

Theme 3

Finally, limitations of existing resources were also identified in the third theme, as well as suggestions to utilise these resources more effectively.

Limitations that were pointed out: ignorance of resources, lack of interaction or communication between support services, and overloading students with information in the induction and orientation programme. Further deficiencies that were found: poor marketing of resources, fragmentation in resources, inaccessibility of resources, and intra-personal restrictions.

The limitations above points out possible reasons why students are not using resources that are available to them. These findings are also supported in literature where access, awareness, and intra-personal objections were found to be reasons why students do not use the resources that are available to them (Givens & Tjia, 2002; Kember, 2004; Tinto, 1999).

Suggestions entailed: an online information platform, central information desk, and marketing of the services available to students.

Most of the limitations in the present study that were identified and the suggestions recorded on the use of resources, relate strongly to behavioural trends in social sciences. However, these topics do not necessarily appear in literature written on the context of the student or university. The problem is when individuals are unaware (or fail to acknowledge) that they require assistance, or do not understand possible gains from the available support, or is frightened by the stigma surrounding support (“I talk to a psychologist and therefore I am crazy”). In these cases, they will not seek or use the resources (Fidzani, 1998; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). Furthermore, an efficient communication structure is necessary between the various support structures on campus and a strategic marketing of services, to centralise the services which are available. Poor communications, resulting in ignorance, have been identified as one of the major issues on why students do not make use of services. When sufficient effort is spent on communicating and provide information to students they can be referred to the correct service.

When a person needs to process excessive information (especially new data), the usual response is to forget part of the information. Such an outcome can, however, be prevented when information is conveyed over an acceptable period to prevent students from receiving an overload (Bushby, 1994; Cooper, 2009).

Limitations and recommendations

Although the findings of the present study provided new information, as explained above, certain limitations need to be factored in.

Firstly, these findings are limited primarily to the experiences of the support structures of a specific (single) university and, more exclusively, a single campus of this university which is compared to other universities not considered as being geographically diversified. This means that the university, campus, and sample is not demographically representative of the institution being investigated or the HEI sector as a whole. Although it is expected that the support structures collectively would have a wide range of experiences, these findings do not account for the environments of other HEIs, which may experience other unique qualities. It is recommended that future studies include participants across different South African universities. Also, it must be acknowledged members of the Student Representative Council and House Committee members consisted of senior students. This means that these participants possibly discussed the research

question from the point of view of when they were first-year students instead of from a student support structure point of view and could have influenced the objectivity of their experience of the phenomena. Furthermore, even though student support structures provided valuable insight for the present study, it would be beneficial to explore first-year student resources from students themselves. It is recommended that future studies explore the resources that first-year students need, as viewed from their own perspective.

Secondly, the study focus was on first-year students. Although valuable insight has been gained about the resources such students need and utilise, and reasons why resources are not utilised, these findings cannot necessarily be generalised to senior students.

Thirdly, due to the qualitative nature of the present study and its focus on a specific context, it is not possible to generalise the findings to other contexts. It is recommended that future research also explore the resources of students from various academic and historic years to expand the findings of this study.

Fourthly, the findings also presented suggestions on ways to improve the use of resources. Future research on this topic should explore the practical application of these findings, in order to determine its correctness and effectiveness.

Finally, the exclusive focus on the qualitative approach of a World café model also entails a limitation because of the in-depth exploration that mainly focuses only on the perceptions of participants. It is thus recommended that the findings of the present study should be validated with quantitative research procedures. In this regard a mixed-method approach is recommended for richer data. An example would be rudimentary questionnaires (brief and simple) or an e-survey/mobi-survey to first-year students, from a mobile site targeting social media such as their cell phones or tablets.

Practically, the limitations and recommendations set in this section means that there would be a comprehensive and thoroughly research framework available to conceptualise to an extensive extent the resources that students use, need, and disregard when dealing with life's demands. In doing so theory can be used and applied by Industrial Psychologists to help universities deliver an optimal and well-balanced emerging workforce.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to explore, through the perspective of student support structures, which resources first-year students need to deal with demands and promote wellbeing and success at a HEI. This goal was reached, where participants provided extensive information on the resources that first-year students require, utilise, and do not utilise. During the data-collection sessions participants furthermore spontaneously discussed limitations and suggestions for the use of resources. This underlined the participants' ability to reflect critically on the situation.

The present study was also conducted to apply the JD-R model to the student context, focusing on the model's resources component. The results of this study can help elaborate on the resources that should be measured in the student context, and which could influence students' engagement, wellbeing and success in such a volatile and often uncertain environment for a first entry year.

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CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the conclusions for the present study are provided according to the general and specific objectives as set out in Chapter 1. Thereafter, the limitations of the study are pointed out and recommendations made for future research.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed to explore the resources available to first-year students and which they utilise to deal with demands in a Higher Education Institution (HEI), as viewed from the perspectives of student support structures. The World Café method was employed to collect data from participants who consented to take part in the discussions.

First objective

The first objective of the present study was to identify from the literature the resources that first-year students require and utilise to deal with demands and experience increased wellbeing and success.

To reach this objective, the researcher identified specific key words that provided an overview of the nature of resources available to students. Initially, broad search terms were used (i.e. ‘first-year university student’). However, from the onset it was clear that extensive research has already been conducted on various aspects of first-year university students. The search keys thus were narrowed down to topics surrounding students: resources, performance/success, retention, and drop-out. The library services of the university were also used to distinguish national from international studies. Furthermore, the researcher focused specifically on studies exploring the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model as it is applied to the context of the student and university environment. This was done to gain the necessary knowledge of existing literature on the topic. The purpose of the literature review was not to study each resource in-depth, but to define the concept of student resources and establish a broad overview based on topics from the literature.

The first major theme that was identified in the literature, is that a supportive environment is necessary for students. Such an environment implies that students have sufficient resources to deal with the demands they encounter (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Resources can be described as instruments that individuals use to deal with their environment, whereas HEIs often refer to “tools” that students use during their university career (North-West University, 2014). Bakker and Demerouti, (2007) furthermore conceptualise resources as those physical, psychological, social and organisational aspects that help individuals achieve goals, reduce demands and stimulate personal growth and development. Therefore, a resource can be described as the means to deal with life’s demands, entailing physical, psychological, psychosocial, and academic dimensions. It is, therefore, clearly of the utmost importance to provide students with the necessary support in these mentioned holistic dimensions. This will help compensate for shortcomings that affect students’ wellbeing and success in a HEI environment (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

The second purpose of the literature review was enabling the researcher to compare the findings of the present study meaningfully with existing information on the topic. In an attempt to organise the literature, various studies were summarised focusing on the context of the student and the university. Thereafter, the researcher summarised further studies conducted within the framework of the JD-R model, and how it can be applied to university students. The application was related to various levels, as expounded below.

Institutional level: an overview of national and international university webpages refers to its resources (or “tools”) as academic guidelines, career opportunities, financial support, social networks, recreational activities, housing, public services, health services, and safety precautions (Brown University, 2014; Kent State University, 2014; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014; University of Pretoria, 2014). Reyes (2007) also identifies social support, the home environment, academic support, and being study-fit, as important factors to reduce student drop-out. The following factors also seemingly have a significant impact on first-year students’ success: previous academic performance, integration, self-efficacy, and employment responsibilities (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001).

Personal level: factors found to increase the retention of students were: parents’ educational level and income, high-school performance, on-campus living, special or additional academic guidance, enrolling for less classes, and financial support for students from lower-income families (Nandeshwar, Menzies & Nelson, 2011). It was found that non-academic factors furthermore

impact significantly on first-year university students' perception of their own ability to cope with additional stressors. These factors are: personal adjustment, as well as financial and environmental considerations (Tinto, 2012). Both Simpson (2005) and Tinto (1999, 2004) is of the opinion that if universities optimise these areas of support, students could indeed improve their overall performance. Tinto (2012) emphasises, however, that both internal and external factors need to be utilised optimally in order to improve overall performance.

Institution or the individual: resources from either of these origins entail research amongst youth that identified an interesting tendency. According to Keeley and Fox (2009), students are identifying the relationship between personal and academic performance. These candidates are realising that in order to perform adequately, personal wellbeing has to be met (Keeley & Fox, 2009). The following personal characteristics were indicated as necessary for an improved performance: a sense of purpose, of resourcefulness, of academic preparedness and development, and a sense of connectedness and of social integration. Additional characteristics that were pointed out: invested time in studying, and fit into the academic environment (Adam, Hartigan & Brown, 2010, Torenbeek, Jansen & Hofman, 2010). Conley, Travers and Bryant (2013) agree that multiple factors within the HEI environment help promote wellbeing and success for a first-year university student. Tinto is renowned for his research on factors influencing academic success. This scholar argues that when universities can identify causes of early drop-out amongst students, it enables supporting structures to develop, promote, and provide adequate resources necessary to retain students more effectively (Tinto, 2012).

Framework of the JR-R model: studies applying this instrument include different resources. Salmela-Aro and Upadhyaya (2014), identify the following essential resources for students:

- social context: family, peers, teachers, classroom quality, and school environment;
- personal characteristics: age, gender, and self-esteem; and
- stage-environment fit: development stages, need for autonomy, and educational transactions.

Mokgele and Rothman (2014) highlight various resources important for students in a HEI environment: growth, peer support, lecturer support, and accessible information. In this regard, Robins, Roberts and Sarris (2015) confirm that the following factors increase positive student outcomes: psychological flexibility, mindfulness, coping through positive reframing, supportive

lecturers, and personal optimism. In their findings, Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez and Bresó (2010), group the resources as facilitators into categories of: organisational, social, or personal. These include: motivating teachers, efficient library facilities, and extra training. Osedach (2013) identifies the following student resources: technology, faculty interaction, enrichment, academic advisement, career preparation and academic assistance.

From another point of departure, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory focuses on stress-related aspects and the generation of energy. These resources include the following: valued objects (i.e. housing, clothing), stress-mediating conditions (i.e. job security, social support, seniority), stress-aiding individual differences (i.e. self-efficacy, optimism, skills), and resource-generating energy (i.e. time, money, knowledge) (Hobfoll, 1989).

Second objective

The second objective of the present study was to explore the resources that first-year students experience, as viewed from the perspective of student support structures in a HEI. The findings yielded three major themes. The first two themes address the second objective of this study whilst the third theme addressed the third objective and will be discussed accordingly:

- resources that are available to students;
- resources that students need; and
- limitations regarding existing resources and suggestions of how resources can be better utilised.

For each theme, different sub-themes were captured. For Themes 1 and 2, the resources were broken down further into resources *internal* and *external* to the university and *intra-personal* resources.

Theme 1: *resources available to students*, identified six sub-themes of resources:

- academic: technology, facilities that support academics, support services, and formal structures to support academics;
- physical: healthcare/medical centre, student counselling and development, food services, sports facilities, protection/security services, accommodation, infrastructure, the

international office, information, and the legal clinic;

- emotional: student counselling and development, Institute of Psychology and Wellness, residence resources, interpersonal relationships, psychological or mental health services, self-discipline, autonomy, time management, and first aid in sport;
- financial: support services, bursaries, Prim-funds (i.e. from Head of hostel), student assistant jobs, second-hand (used) book store, bank loans, Edu-loan, and NSFAS;
- social: formally organised events, on-going available opportunities, and recreational activities; and
- spiritual: religious and faith-based organisations.

Most of the resources identified under these sub-themes were in line with findings from the literature. Compared to existing literature, however, the present study placed more emphasis on these resources: an international-students support centre, a legal department advising to students on legal matters, Prim-funds, and a second-hand book shop. It was also noted by participants throughout data collection that even though students have resources available, they do not always make use of them. This information is discussed in Theme 3.

Theme 2: *resources needed by students*, three sub-themes were identified for resources:

- academic: extended first-year induction programmes, residence libraries, early identification of students to provide support, a follow-up system for students at risk, improving the process of academic administration, closer communication between monitoring of academic success and support services;
- physical: transportation/shuttle service, second-hand shop, and 24/7 labs; and
- emotional: inner empowerment.

Certain resources were identified under the first two themes as being available to students. However, participants also suggested that certain resources should be expanded or improved. These entailed: an extended orientation programme, residence libraries, an early identification system for students at risk of dropout and poor academic performance, a follow-up system to track these at-risk students, efficient institutional administrative processes, and centralisation of the various support structures. Specific resources that are needed were identified as: a shuttle service for students residing far from campus, second-hand shops, and 24/7 labs when students find it difficult to return home after spending a late night on campus

The resources identified in this theme is evident of a need amongst student to experience interaction with the institution on a more personal level. This might be because the first-year experience is usually perceived as an emotional and dramatic transition to tertiary education where most of the students leave their parent's home for the first time. These resources resemble typical support that students would get whilst still dependant on their parents. The researcher agree that it is necessary to provide a supportive environment to the students.

Third objective

The third objective of the present study was to explore why first-year students are not utilizing available resources, from the perspectives of support structures in a HEI. The third objective discussed the limitations and suggestions made by participants re the use of resources:

Theme 3: *limitations and suggestions to the use of resources* emerged from the discussions where participants identified shortcomings. The limitations that were pointed out: poor communication between support services, overflow of information to first-year students in a short time, as well as ineffective marketing, fragmentation and poor accessibility of the resources. Further shortcomings were found to be lack of self-improvement, and intrapersonal restrictions. Participants did, however, also suggest several initiatives to improve the use of resources. These entail the development of an online information platform, a central information desk, and improved marketing of services.

Fourth objective

The third and final objective of the present study was to make recommendation for future research. These will be discussed subsequently, after pointing out possible limitations of the study.

In conclusion, the present study supported existing knowledge and opened new insights into the literature dealing with first-year university students. This study was also conducted to inform the Job Demands-Resources model in the student context, with a focus on the resources component. The results of the study can help expand the resources that should be measured in the student context. These expanded resources could enhance students' experience of a HEI environment, if this model is used to predict certain outcomes such as student engagement, wellbeing and success.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The present study provided new information on resources that first-year students require and utilise to deal with the various demands of a HEI environment. However, in this regard, certain limitations must be pointed out.

Firstly, the study explored only the experiences of support structures from a specific university and only a single campus of the participating university. This implies that the dynamic interaction of the varying environments of other HEIs are not taken into consideration. Although it is expected that the support structures would collectively have a wide-ranging experience, this does not account for the environments of other HEIs, which may present other unique qualities and resources. This means that the university, campus, and sample is not demographically representative of the institution being investigated or the HEI sector as a whole. Furthermore, the inclusion of senior students in the sample could have influenced the objectivity of data collected. It is thus recommended that similar studies be conducted on different campuses and geographical locations amongst different samples. This would enable researchers to investigate the resources for first year-students in a wider range.

Secondly, even though student support structures provided valuable insights for this study, it would be beneficial to understand first-year student resources from students' own perspectives. The student support structures were identified as unique contributors to the field since they deal with students from varying cultures, backgrounds, age groups, genders, and other orientations on a regular basis. This would imply that they have insight into the situation from an *observant* point of view, in contrast to the *direct* experience of the students who are captivated by their own stories. However, it is also important to discuss the topic of first-year student resources with student themselves, in order to understand their world and experience. Such information would add richness to the findings of this study.

Thirdly, although valuable insight has been gained into the resources that first-year students need and utilise, these findings cannot necessarily be generalised to include senior students. In addition, due to the qualitative nature of the study and its focus on a specific context, the findings could not be generalised to other contexts or students. The present research also needs to be conducted in different situations, across universities, and with diverse students in order to improve on generalisability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that can be inferred from the findings, follow three trajectories as explicated below.

The findings of the present study provide valuable insight for individuals about resources available to them at university. Having access to this information would promote awareness amongst students. Being aware of the available resources means these students could actually utilise it. This will also empower students and help them deal better with the demands they encounter. Ultimately, when students are equipped to handle these demands effectively, they have higher prospects of reaching their personal goals. Furthermore, by creating awareness amongst the support structures, they are better equipped as well to reach out to students in a meaningful way. It is, therefore, recommended that the practical application of the findings should be investigated to determine the interventions that would promote the use of resources effectively.

The exploration of first-year student's resources, specifically in the HEI environment, presents a framework of resources that students can utilise. It also provides knowledge about possible limitations to address, and suggestions on how to utilise these resources more effectively. By being aware of such a framework, the HEI would be enabled to provide the appropriate resources to students. This will help the students deal better with the various demands, and thereby experience increased wellbeing. Furthermore, being knowledgeable about both the shortcomings and correctives in the use of resources helps the HEI manage the implementation better. This helps produce a tertiary candidate who is capable of dealing with life's demands.

The present research reviewed and explored the relevant resources for South African first-year students, as viewed from the perspective of student support structures in a HEI. Future research can build on these findings by investigating the resources, which these first-year students need and utilise, from different perspectives within a HEI such as students themselves, their external environments, and parents.

Future research can also expand on the range of resources by determining which resources are favoured and utilised by students of various academic and historic years. The expansion of such knowledge will not only enrich the educational fields with guidelines on managing students effectively. Such research will also contribute to the body of knowledge in Industrial Psychology,

helping equip the future workforce with skills necessary to deal with the various demands within a HEI environment. It is also recommended that these findings be used as the basis of future research to expand the applicability of the JD-R model, which can predict outcomes for HEIs by targeting the individual, groups, and the organisation (institutionally).

Practically, the limitations and recommendations set in this section means that there would be a comprehensive and thoroughly research framework available to conceptualise the resources that students use, need, and disregard when dealing with life's demands. In doing so theory can be used and reworked in to an operational model that identify at-risk students. Industrial Psychologists will then be enabled to act preventatively by intervening at university level in order to deliver, in line with the university's goals, optimal and well-balanced emerging workforce.

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